

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Understanding Political and Bureaucratic Corruption in South African Politics: A Case Study of President Zuma's First Term

Mxolisi Bongumusa Cebekhulu
Mthandeni Patric Mbatha

Mxolisi Bongumusa Cebekhulu
University of Zululand, South Africa

Mthandeni Patric Mbatha
University of Zululand, South Africa
(Corresponding author)
mbathamthandeni@gmail.com

Submitted: 25 September 2024
Accepted: 10 February 2025

<https://doi.org/10.70139/rolacc.2025.1.3>

© 2025 Cebekhulu and Mbatha, licensee LU Press. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution license CC BY 4.0, which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Cite this article as: Cebekhulu, M. B., and Mbatha, M. P. Understanding Political and Bureaucratic Corruption in South African Politics: A Case Study of President Zuma's First Term, *Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption Center Journal*, 2025:1, <https://doi.org/10.70139/rolacc.2025.1.3>

ABSTRACT

The topic of corruption is at the centre of the South African political debate at the current moment. It is an ever-green subject that has received much attention from South African scholars. Many researchers make a number of suggestions when evaluating the issue of corruption in South Africa, the principal suggestion is that the government of the dominant party encourage corruption. The constitutional measures to constrain corruption in South Africa have now and again been under scrutiny. It may be the case because since the regaining of political independence corruption has been increasing. Therefore, what motivates this study is the desire to assess whether corruption levels have changed under President Zuma's first term. Using a qualitative perspective to the research which, among other things, involves examining, analysing, and interpreting various secondary data, this study focuses on analysing the causes of corruption and evaluating its consequences under Zuma's administration. To achieve these objectives, this paper investigates cases of political corruption in South Africa under President Zuma's administration to establish the damaging effects of political corruption as well as the effectiveness of government measures to deal with such cases.

Keywords: Corruption; state capture; Zuma administration; Zondo commission

1. INTRODUCTION

Studies that seek to evaluate political and bureaucratic corruption are ever green in international scholarship. In recent years, the subject of corruption has been receiving an ever-increasing interest from researchers. The need to evaluate corruption may be positioned in light of the fact that it is detrimental to the development and economy. Corruption is a cancer that is harmful to the development of a country, particularly underdeveloped countries. Corruption has resulted in stagnant economies, exploitative elites, and unrest in politics. Since government institutions have been restructured, corruption is more prevalent in emerging democracies. Leaders of liberation movements often lack the necessary training for the everyday management of the state. While corruption is a worldwide issue, the Sub-Saharan Africa ranks as the most affected region in terms of corruption. The statistics support the notion that Africa is the leading continent in the world in political corruption. Corruption is regarded as one of the greatest challenges facing Africa today. South Africa is no exception to political corruption; in fact, it ranks among the top African nations affected. Corruption has become more prevalent in all levels of South African government in recent years. This paper is motivated by an ongoing public outcry concerning political corruption and the Zondo Commission of Enquiry which was established to probe corruption cases during President Zuma's tenure.

Political corruption has garnered comparable attention globally because of instances of corruption within the international economy. In the quest to combat political corruption, countries joined hands with international organisations that are responsible for monitoring corruption globally. This idea compelled governments to initiate programmes to investigate the extent of corruption within their respective countries. Understanding corruption, the concept and the factors that contribute to it is a crucial part of this study. Grasping corruption as a phenomenon is essential for advancing literature on the subject. It also aids in fostering a shared understanding and in creating effective strategies to enhance efforts against corruption. There are two ways in which corruption can be explained intensively in South Africa it is either through Corruption Perception Index or African Peer Mechanism. What raises the interest of the researchers in this study is the manner in which cases of political corruption in South Africa are managed. Moreover, there is very little academic research available on the political and bureaucratic corruption that was observed in South Africa between 2009 and 2014.

Political and bureaucratic corruption has been present since the inception of politics and is not a recent occurrence. It has a malignant influence that gradually weakens the fundamental pillars of culture, politics, and economy in developing nations. Corruption in Africa

significantly hindered democratic initiatives and was the primary obstacle to economic growth, ultimately weakening the democratic fabric of society. The results of corruption detriment mostly poor people who relied on the government to elevate them to a better life. The most troubling situation arises when taxpayer funds are not directed towards advancing the nation and supporting the underprivileged with essential services but rather are utilized to benefit politicians and public officials financially. Political corruption is evidence in South Africa, a number of political leaders enter the public offices to enrich themselves not for the benefit of the citizens of the country. This kind of corruption affects not only poor people but the prospects of economic development, stagnant economic growth affects all other levels of development. The results of political corruption are more harmful to the socioeconomic development of a country. It is crucial to establish systems for overseeing corruption in order to combat it effectively, especially in less developed nations. Following the establishment of democracy, South Africa was predicted to experience a boost in transparency and accountability among public officials, a significant improvement from the apartheid regime.

In an ideal scenario, the democratic South Africa was designed, among other objectives, to combat political corruption and create an independent judiciary and media system. Under apartheid, the white government exploited the media and judiciary to worsen political corruption. Despite the presence of various anti-corruption measures in South Africa during the democratic era, there were several corruption scandals during President Jacob Zuma's initial term. One instance can be observed in the late Jackie Selebi alongside Julius Malema, the former leader of the African National Congress Youth League. Selebi held the position of South Africa's representative at the United Nations, among other roles. Selebi went to court on October 5, 2009, and he was accused of receiving a bribe which amounts to 1.2 million rands from Glen Agliotti. Julius Malema was accused of accumulating almost 4 million rands from corrupt activities.

Opposition parties have raised concerns about political corruption in South Africa. The general populace also believes that the government has failed to mitigate the increasing rate of corruption. This may have been due to the fact that politicians benefit from corruption or that the strategies in place are ineffective. Since the regain of political independence, South Africa politics had been defined by issues of corruption in public discourse. Under Jacob Zuma, in particular, the ruling party was marred by allegations of political corruption.

2. CORRUPTION THEORIES AND LITERATURE REVIEW

There is no single definition that can cover the scope of corruption in totality. Scholars have tried to define corruption;

however, it is clear that corruption has no one definition. Myint defines corruption as the use of government positions for individual advantage.¹ It can also be understood as the misuse of an official position, rank, or status for individual advantage. Based on these definitions, examples of corruption include nepotism, bribery, using public assets and property for private use, cronyism, embezzlement, fraud, extortion, and influence peddling. Amundsen noted that the prominent function of the government was evident in many interpretations of corruption.² He goes on to clarify that corruption represents a specific relationship between the state and society.

2.1. Corruption theories

Numerous theoretical models exist for explaining corruption, however, for this paper, the redistributive and extractive theories were found to be the most appropriate. These theories recognize that government is consistently implicated in corruption. They are premised on the notion that corruption represents a specific relationship between the state and society.³ According to Oosterbroek, the interaction between the state and society is based on a reciprocal arrangement where both entities receive direct and individual benefits. He points out that this relationship is marked by an imbalance.⁴ When evaluating the overall distribution of resources, Oosterbroek notes that corrupt practices can result in resources being diverted either from society to the state—termed extractive corruption or corruption from above—or from the state to society, which is known as retributive corruption or corruption from below.⁵ This paper utilised both extractive and redistributive theories of corruption to frame the discussions surrounding political and administrative corruption within the context of South African politics.

2.2. Conceptualisation of political corruption

As indicated earlier there are many attempts towards understanding corruption by different scholars internationally. The study of corruption is always on the international agenda. This study recognizes various contributions from different scholars; however, there remains a need for ongoing and vigorous discussions about the concept of corruption. Kalombo points out that one reason corruption is difficult to comprehend

is that it is not a fixed concept.⁶ Instead, “like most activities, it is distinctly shaped by the social, economic, and political systems as well as the historical experiences of the country.” What is seen as corruption in South Africa might be considered acceptable in other parts of the world. Kalombo notes that the word “corruption” comes from the Latin term “corruptus”, the past participle of “corrumpere”, which means to spoil, and “rumpere”, which translates to break.⁷ Words related to corruption include venality, fraud, dishonesty, and sleaze. This exploration of the term indicates that corruption carries a negative connotation and is linked to dishonest behavior.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, corruption is not a contemporary issue; it has long existed alongside politics. Warren points out that, even with the considerable worries regarding the misuse of public power, there was no recognized or politically viable understanding of political corruption before the early modern era.⁸ The initial scholars who examined corruption mainly perceived it as a moral concern and assessed it through the disparity between the societal character as a whole and the ethical norms of every day. The early research on corruption focused on human actions and religious convictions. Philosophers like Rousseau regarded corruption as a sign of moral decline. Gardiner characterizes corruption among public officials as actions that stray from the standard responsibilities associated with a public role due to motivations for personal financial or status benefits.⁹ Cloete describes corruption as actions that exploit a public position or assets for personal gain.¹⁰ Neild explains that public corruption refers to the conduct of government officials that typically involves interactions with private individuals.¹¹ He notes that elevated levels of public corruption often correspond with considerable private corruption. Furthermore, he identifies modern public corruption as encompassing bribery, favoritism, the sale of positions, and improper appointments of officials. He adds that corruption includes violations by politicians and public officials in various areas such as tax collection, contract awarding, financial benefits, and dishonest practices related to elections that benefit specific individuals or their political parties.

Additionally, Rose-Ackerman refers to corruption as a state-society relation. Corruption occurs when civil servants, officials, and politicians exploit the public power entrusted to them for their own benefit.¹² Corruption involves

1 U Myint, *Corruption: Causes, Consequences and Cures*, 7 ASIA-PAC. DEV. J. 33 (2000).

2 Inge Amundsen, *Extractive and power-preserving political corruption*, in *Political Corruption in Africa* (Inge Amundsen ed., 2019).

3 JAN-WILLEM OOSTERBROEK, *Curtailing Corruption in the European Union: An Asian Approach to Combat Corruption in the European Union* (2007).

4 *Id.*

5 OOSTERBROEK, *supra* note 3.

6 GASTON KALOMBO, *Understanding Political Corruption in Post-Apartheid South Africa: The Gauteng Experience* (2005).

7 *Id.*

8 Mark Warren, *What Does Corruption Mean in a Modern Democracy*, 48 AM. J. POL. SCI. 328 (2004).

9 John A. Gardiner, *Defining Corruption*, in *Political Corruption: Concepts and Contexts* (Arnold Heidenheimer & Michael Johnston eds., 2002).

10 EMMANUEL PRINGLE CLOETE, *A Critical Analysis of the Relationship Between Political Transformation and Corruption* (2013).

11 ROBERT NEILD, *Public Corruption: The Dark Side of Social Evolution* (2002).

12 Susan Rose-Ackerman, *Corruption: Greed, Culture and the State*, 120 YALE L.J. 125 (2010).

misusing one's role for individual benefit.¹³ It can include taking advantage of significant policy tools or essential processes. Obura defines corruption as actions that deviate from the official duties of a public office, driven by monetary or status-driven incentives stemming from personal, family, or close relationships, or actions that contravene regulations against certain types of private influence.¹⁴ The above explanations by different scholars acknowledge the state involvement to corruption, public officials use powers (given to them by general populace through votes) to hold public offices to further their interest it may be in a form of enriching themselves, family or their political organization. These definitions align with Rose-Ackerman, who argues that corruption involves both governmental and societal elements.¹⁵ The previously discussed definitions of corruption provide a framework for this paper to investigate the scope of corruption in South Africa between 2009 and 2013.

On the one hand, it is essential to differentiate between political corruption (often referred to as grand corruption) and bureaucratic corruption (known as petty corruption), as they can frequently be mistaken for each other. Bussell points out that this distinction is often unclear, as it depends on separating politics from administrative functions.¹⁶ Furthermore, bureaucratic corruption pertains to corrupt activities within public administration, especially concerning the execution of political decisions. On the other hand, it is argued that political corruption arises when elected officials and government representatives, who are entrusted with the responsibility of formulating and implementing laws for the citizens, engage in unethical practices. This includes the misuse of their political power to maintain their influence, rank, and financial resources.¹⁷ A distinction can be made between bureaucratic and political corruption. Bureaucratic corruption is defined as actions taken by public servants aimed at personal financial gain through illicit means, whereas political corruption refers to the use of political alliances to gain control over governmental structures or to maintain a hold on power.¹⁸

In South Africa, the Prevention of Corruption Act of 1992 (Act 94 of 1992) defines corruption as the abuse of (public) authority for unauthorized or illegal profit.¹⁹ This legislation outlines specific conditions that must be met for

an act to be classified as corrupt. These conditions include the existence of a benefit being offered and/or accepted, that the benefit is not legally owed, that it is directed toward an individual in a position of authority, and that the purpose behind the offer and/or acceptance of the benefit is to influence that person in the performance of their official responsibilities, either to act or to refrain from acting.

This definition has been revised as it is primarily based on the idea of inducement and appears to overlook the inherent conflict between public and private interests. As Thornhill explains, the advantages gained from corrupt conduct by a public official do not have to be monetary; they may also involve an improper promotion of the official, their family members, or friends.²⁰

It is essential to differentiate between grand political corruption and petty bureaucratic corruption, as these concepts can sometimes intersect. The distinction is often unclear.²¹ It depends on the line drawn between political leadership and public administration. He elaborates that governmental corruption takes place within public administration. While political corruption involves politicians and state officials who are entrusted with the creation and enforcement of laws on behalf of the public. This type of corruption occurs when political figures misuse their authority to safeguard their wealth, influence, and power. Similarly, Amundsen distinguishes these two types by highlighting that bureaucratic corruption entails public officials seeking illegal financial gain, whereas political corruption is employed by political factions to dominate state apparatus or secure their grip on power.²²

This definition has been revised because it primarily focuses on the concept of inducement while overlooking the essential conflict between public and private interests.²³ The gains derived from corrupt practices by a public official do not necessarily have to be monetary; they can also encompass improper benefits for the individual, their relatives, or associates. Considering this limitation, a new piece of legislation was enacted: the Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act No. 12 of 2004, which offers a clearer definition of corruption. According to this act, any public official is considered guilty of corrupt behavior if they receive or offer any form of gratification from another person, either directly or indirectly, for their benefit or that of another

13 José G. Vargas-Hernández et al., Enhancing Leadership Integrity Effectiveness Strategy Through the Institutionalization of an Organizational Management Integrity Capacity Systems, in *Contemporary Legal and Economic Issues* (Ivana Barković Bojanić & Mira Lulić eds., 2013).

14 Ken Obura, Unmasking the Phenomenon of Corruption: Perspectives from Legal Theory, 28 *SPECULUM JURIS* 124 (2014).

15 Rose-Ackerman, *supra* note 12.

16 Jennifer Bussell, Typologies of Corruption: A Pragmatic Approach, in *Greed, Corruption, and the Modern State* (Susan Rose-Ackerman & Paul Lagunes eds., 2015).

17 Idean Salehyan, David Siroky & Reed M. Wood, External Rebel Sponsorship and Civilian Abuse: A Principal-Agent Analysis of Wartime Atrocities, 68 *INT'L ORG.* 633 (2014).

18 Carl Dahlström, Victor Lapuente & Jan Teorell, The Merit of Meritocratization: Politics, Bureaucracy, and the Institutional Deterrents of Corruption, 65 *POL. RES. Q.* 656 (2012).

19 Geraldine J. Fraser-Moleketi & Rob Boone, Country Corruption Assessment Report: South Africa, U.N. OFF. ON DRUGS & CRIME, REG'L OFF. FOR S. AFR. & DEPT OF PUB. SERV. & ADMIN., Pretoria (2003), <https://www.info.gov.za/otherdocs/2003/corruption.pdf>

20 Chris Thornhill, Improving Local Government Transformation in South Africa, 20 *ADMIN. PUB.* 128 (2012).

21 Behzad Mashali, Analyzing the Relationship Between Perceived Grand Corruption and Petty Corruption in Developing Countries: Case Study of Iran, 78 *INT'L REV. ADMIN. SCI.* 775 (2012).

22 Amundsen, *supra* note 2.

23 KALOMBO, *supra* note 6.

individual. Similarly, this pertains to anyone who offers or consents to offer any type of incentive to a public official to influence their conduct—whether directly or by swaying others—leading to the unlawful, dishonest, unauthorized, or improper utilization of information or the misuse of authority. This includes any unapproved encouragement to either perform or avoid certain actions.²⁴

2.3. Causes and solutions to corruption

Corruption in South Africa is not just about individual misconduct but also about weak systems. Some scholars blame poor political leadership and weak enforcement of anti-corruption laws.²⁵ Others point to high unemployment and economic inequality, which push people into corrupt activities.²⁶ The close ties between the African National Congress (ANC) and the state have led to conflicts of interest and lack of accountability.²⁷ Daniels notes that weak whistleblower protections and media suppression during Zuma's rule allowed corruption to grow.²⁸ Solutions to corruption include institutional reforms, public accountability, and stronger civil society action. Scholars suggest removing political influence from the judiciary and strengthening anti-corruption agencies like the Special Investigating Unit (SIU) and the NPA.²⁹

3. METHODOLOGY

This paper seeks to highlight the instances of political and administrative corruption that took place in President Zuma's first term in office. To achieve this objective, the researchers used a qualitative approach to this study, which among other things involved the systematic collection of information from secondary sources. The researchers employed document analysis as their main approach. This approach is described as an efficient process for examining or assessing both printed and electronic documents. Bowen elaborates that document analysis involves reviewing, reading, and interpretation.³⁰ This methodology enabled the researchers to focus on examining previous studies, survey data, press statements, and pertinent official documents. Consequently, this approach established a strong historical backdrop and basis for the research, relying primarily on journal articles, surveys, official documents, and newspaper articles published from 2009 to 2014 as the main focus of the study.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Since 2009, when President Zuma took office, there have been number of assumptions that underpin Jacob Zuma as the reason that increased level of political corruption in south Africa. These assumptions were coupled with several political corruption cases involving high profile officials and politicians, which were heard in courtrooms and reported in the media. Public interest was notably piqued by the controversy involving the upgrades to President Jacob Zuma's personal home in Nkandla, as well as the arms acquisition agreement. During this period, corruption became a significant issue in public discussions across South Africa, largely attributed to the President's participation. Senior research professor Gobodo-Madikizela remarked that from the beginning of Zuma's administration, there was an inevitable risk of damaging the country's morale. She supported her claim by highlighting that the incidents that occurred during his trial and after his exoneration are firmly ingrained in our collective consciousness.³¹

Additionally, Andrew England, a journalist with the *Financial Times*, noted that President Zuma found himself engulfed in controversies, with an increasing belief that corruption, favoritism, and nepotism within the government and the ANC had escalated since his inauguration in 2009.³² It was widely held that corruption had worsened since Zuma assumed the presidency in 2009.

Numerous justifications existed for this perception of political corruption in the country. One justification is that the ANC being the dominant party in South African politics they enjoyed long stayed in power which was coupled with cadre deployment. In this perspective, they present themselves as unbeatable. For example, statements like "the ANC will rule until Jesus returns" illustrate a conviction that they do not foresee any defeat. Many scholars and commentators have classified the ANC as a dominant party in the country. A dominant party as one that has consistently achieved electoral victories and whose defeat seems unlikely or unimaginable in the near future.

Throughout President Jacob Zuma's first term of administration, the African National Congress remained the leading political party in South Africa. However, several prominent members opted to leave and form a new party known as the Congress of the People (COPE). Meanwhile, the Democratic Alliance (DA) consistently worked to uphold its status as the official opposition party throughout these years. These waves of destruction were insufficient

²⁴ KALOMBO, *supra* note 6.

²⁵ Vinothan Naidoo, The Politics of Anti-Corruption Enforcement in South Africa, 31 J. CONTEMP. AFR. STUD. 523 (2013).

²⁶ Egunjobi T. Adenike, Poverty, Unemployment and Insecurity Challenges in Nigeria, 11 TANZ. ECON. REV. 1 (2021).

²⁷ Roger Southall, Democracy at Risk? Politics and Governance Under the ANC, 652 ANNALS AM. ACAD. POL. & SOC. SCI. 48 (2014).

²⁸ Glenda Daniels, The State of Press Freedom in South Africa, in *Transnational Media: Concepts and Cases* 57 (2019).

²⁹ Bernard Khotso Lekubu, *A Critique of South African Anti-Corruption Strategies and Structures: A Comparative Analysis* (2019).

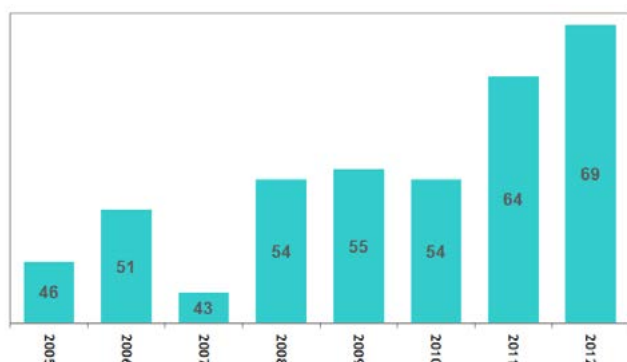
³⁰ Glenn A. Bowen, Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method, 9 QUAL. RES. J. 27 (2009).

³¹ Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, Zuma Has Corrupted the Soul of SA, MAIL & GUARDIAN, May 24, 2013.

³² Andrew England, Report Claims Jacob Zuma Spent Public Funds on His Homestead, FIN. TIMES, Nov. 29, 2013.

to dismantle the ANC, on the contrary it motivated ANC members to be united particularly in KwaZulu-Natal. This shows that opposition parties had little effect on the ANC. The fact that opposition parties lack capabilities to prevent the increasing dominance of the ANC amounted to the increase of political corruption in all spheres of government. The ANC's dominant role in South African politics has been identified as a contributing factor to several democratic challenges in the country.

Pempel (2019) observed that when a single party possesses substantial power and is unlikely to encounter electoral loss, it raises worries regarding decreased government responsiveness to public sentiment, lowered accountability, and a possible decline in democratic principles, which may result in increasingly authoritarian governance practices.³³ Where there is a lack of capable opposition, on numerous occasions the government do as they see fit without being questioned or held responsible. This misuse of power clouds the dominant party to believe that they can do corruption and get away with it or protect their corrupt party members. Although the ANC's ability to maintain power might have contributed to instances of corruption, the internal divisions and factionalism within the organization have also significantly contributed to the rise of political corruption.



Global Corruption Perception Index: South Africa's International Rankings, 2012³⁴

Figure 1: Global Corruption Perception Index: South Africa's International Rankings

Figure 1 indicates that the awareness of corruption began to increase in 2008. The assumption is that the ANC held its 52nd Conference in Polokwane on 16th to 20th December 2007. During this conference Jacob Zuma defeated Thabo Mbeki to become the president of the

ANC.³⁵ Post this conference the situation between these two factions was intensified within the ANC as the dominant party. In all spheres of government, members who were associated with Mbeki camp were questioning their future in the organization. Amid political insecurities, corruption emerged as the ideal means for incumbent politicians to maintain their lifestyles, functioning as a strategy for wealth accumulation. Furthermore, the increased awareness of corruption in 2008 was probably linked to the political turmoil between the two factions within the ANC at that time.

Table 1: Index of Corruption Perception: South Africa between 2008 and 2013

Year	Score
2008	In 2008, the score was 4.9, with a rank of 54 among 180 countries.
2009	The score decreased to 4.7 in 2009, resulting in a rank of 55, with the number of countries remaining the same.
2010	By 2010, the score dropped to 4.5, maintaining the same rank of 54, but with a slight decrease in the number of countries to 178.
2011	The score continued to decline in 2011 to 4.1, leading to a rank of 64 with 183 countries participating.
2012	In 2012, the score was recorded at 4.3, ranking at 69 among 176 countries.
2013	Finally, in 2013, the score further decreased to 4.2, with a rank of 72 and 177 countries.

Source: International Transparency Index 2013³⁶

The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) assesses how corruption is perceived in South Africa. According to Transparency International, the CPI operates as a composite measure which collects data from various evaluations conducted by experts and business professionals.³⁷ Their findings indicate that while some countries score well, none have achieved a perfect score. Figure 1 illustrates that under Thabo Mbeki's leadership, South Africa's corruption ranking changed from 46 in 2005 to 51 in 2006, then 43 in 2007, and dropped to 54 in 2008, according to the World Corruption Perception Index. According to Figure 1 and Table 1, it is noticeable that even though South Africa was already facing corruption during Mbeki's presidency, but it was not perceived unmanageable. It demonstrates that the South African ranking fluctuated. The data indicates that

³³ John T. Pempel ed., *Uncommon Democracies: The One-Party Dominant Regimes* (2019).

³⁴ Transparency Int'l: The Global Coalition Against Corruption, Global Corruption Perception Index: South Africa's International Rankings (2012), <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/south-africa>

³⁵ Tatenda G. Mukwedey, The Enemy Within: Factionalism in ANC Local Structures—The Case of Buffalo City (East London), 87 TRANSFORMATION: CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON S. AFR. 117 (2015).

³⁶ Transparency Int'l: The Global Coalition Against Corruption, International Transparency Index (2013), <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2013>

³⁷ *Id.*

when President Zuma assumed office, South Africa's ranking dropped from 55 in 2009 to 54 in 2010, then further declined to 64 in 2011 and 69 in 2012.³⁸ Significant improvements in the rankings were especially evident in 2011 and 2012. This pattern suggests that during President Zuma's tenure, there was an increasing belief that corruption had escalated into a major and uncontrollable problem.

5. THE EXACERBATION OF CORRUPTION DURING ZUMA'S TENURE

There were several reasons that contributed to corruption during Zuma's first tenure, among which was the complete dominance of the ANC in all spheres of government. In cases where a single political party is dominant in governing the country, financial mismanagement often appears to be the trend. As noted by David (2012), extractive corruption occurs when a ruling elect transforms into a formidable governing class that exercises control over state authority.³⁹ In South Africa, the African National Congress rose to prominence as the dominant political party that secured a majority in Parliament and wielded comprehensive authority over the government. This concentration of power led to several cases of corruption among different ANC and government officials.

The concept of extractive political corruption highlights the famous adage that power tends to corrupt, and that unchecked power leads to total corruption.⁴⁰ The ANC had absolute power to make decisions that favoured them as the ruling party. For example, there was a concern from other political parties that the ANC used media platforms to campaign for elections.

Member of Parliament of South Africa Lance Greyling emphasized the necessity of prohibiting government advertisements, arguing that the ANC misused state resources for campaign purposes, which he deemed unacceptable.⁴¹ This concern was echoed by others, not just Greyling from the Independent Democrats, who pointed out that the ANC's use of state resources for election campaigning through media coverage had become a common practice. The media coverage tended to favor the ruling parties while often portraying opposition parties in a negative light. Furthermore, the ANC had been dominating media coverage related to elections even before the official start of the political campaigning period.

In the Nkandla Project, which sparked numerous investigations into Jacob Zuma's presidency, Advocate Thuli Madonsela, the former Public Protector, uncovered that Zuma and his family gained indirect advantages from the initiative. In her findings, she indicated that numerous projects, such as the building of multiple structures and installations by the Department of Public Works at the President's private home exceeded what was required for his safety.⁴² The report highlighted that the creation of features such as a Visitors' Centre, a lavish cattle kraal with a culvert, a chicken run, a swimming pool, an amphitheatre, a marquee area, extensive paving, and the relocation of neighbors from the original homestead resulted in considerable costs to the state and were unjustifiable. These improvements were categorised as extravagant upgrades instead of essential security provisions financed by the government.

In her March 2014 report, the Public Protector of South Africa highlighted that the government's spending on initiatives—like the building and installation of infrastructure carried out by the Department of Public Works, at the behest of the South African Police Service and the Department of Defense—was excessive and unjustified. She described this expenditure as unacceptable and highlighted that it improperly diverted public funds and went beyond what was necessary to ensure the President's security. Furthermore, she stated that the implementation of the Nkandla Project unfairly increased the worth of the President's private estate by a considerable amount. Despite President Zuma's assertion that his family financed the construction of his house without government assistance, investigations later revealed this claim to be false. A designated task force discovered that following concerns expressed in 2009, additional elements were added to the project, causing the original budget to increase from R65 million—previously criticized in 2009—to R215 million. According to Public Protector Report 25 from the 2013/14 period, the projected expenses for the remaining work were calculated at R36 million, which brought the anticipated overall cost to R246 million.⁴³

The Strategic Defence Procurement Package, often known as the arms deal case, garnered significant media scrutiny. This case generated controversy and challenged the integrity of the South African justice system. The Institute for Democratic Alternatives in South Africa (IDASA) viewed it

38 Transparency International: The global coalition against corruption, Global Corruption Perception Index: South Africa's International Rankings (2012), <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/south-africa>

39 IYANDA O. DAVID, Corruption: Definitions, Theories and Concepts, 2 ARAB J. BUS. & MGMT. REV. 37 (2012).

40 Amundsen, *supra* note 2.

41 Judith February, SA Elections: What Does the Electoral Code of Conduct Say About the Abuse of State Resources?, ISS TODAY, May 6, 2014, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/sa-elections-what-does-the-electoral-code-of-conduct-say-about-the-abuse-of-state-resources>

42 PUB. PROTECTOR OF S. AFR., *Secure in Comfort: Report into Allegations of Impropriety and Unethical Conduct Relating to the Installation and Implementation of Security Measures by the Department of Public Works at and in Respect of the Private Residence of President Jacob Zuma at Nkandla in the Kwa-Zulu Natal Province: Report No. 25 of 2013/14* (2014).

43 *Id.*

as a vital indicator of the country's dedication to democracy and effective governance.⁴⁴

The involvement of several senior ANC leaders made it a significant public concern, drawing close scrutiny from opposition parties while the ruling party largely tried to avoid it. The Standing Committee on Public Accounts, tasked with assessing and investigating the proper use of public funds, identified numerous irregularities in the armament's procurement process. A former deputy chair of Parliament's Audit Commission pointed out that the irregularities involved conflicts of interest among major decision-makers, drawing attention to Chippy Shaik, the Defence Force's Director of Procurement and the then Defence Minister Joe Modise. Allegations indicated that Shaik may have shown favoritism towards his brother, Schabir Shaik, while Modise could have benefitted financially from the arrangement. Schabir Shaik held a director position at African Defence Systems (ADS), a company competing for sub-contracts.

The Democratic Alliance (DA) and other political parties consistently applied pressure regarding the Strategic Defence Procurement Packages, leading to increased scrutiny from various institutions. In October 2011, a Commission of Inquiry was established, chaired by Judge Seriti from the Supreme Court of Appeal. The commission's objective was to investigate claims of fraud, corruption, wrongdoing, or any irregularities associated with the Strategic Defence Procurement Packages.⁴⁵ In a statement made by the then-Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development, Jeff Radebe, it was highlighted that these allegations emerged soon after the country transitioned to democracy. They related to the procurement of defense equipment worth several billion rand, intended to meet the needs outlined by the South African National Defence Force during the period from 1996 to 1998.⁴⁶ The Minister pointed out that this led to a Cabinet decision to invest R29 billion over 12 years to purchase aircraft, corvettes, and submarines.

Prominent figures within the ruling party who held influential roles in the organization directly benefited from this form of corruption. Feinstein noted that these funds were utilized to finance the 1999 elections.⁴⁷ He also emphasized that while South Africa dealt with conflicts that necessitated military resources, urgent social problems such as HIV/AIDS were inflicting significant pain and loss of life.

The funds diverted from the national budget for weapon procurement, which aimed to benefit specific individuals and aid the ANC's 1999 election campaign, could have been more effectively utilized to tackle the country's social issues. As a result, members of the ruling party gained advantages at the cost of the wider populace.

The state function was weakened by this, since there were many similar corruption cases involving members of the ruling elite including cabinet ministers, high-profile politicians, and young leaders. While the funds were intended to support social development through service delivery, they often ended up benefiting those responsible for implementing these services instead. According to Southall, the blending of the ANC with the structures of the state led to an increasing association of power with corruption and misconduct, a trend that intensified during Jacob Zuma's time as president.⁴⁸ This perspective is difficult to dispute given the aforementioned report. It is undeniable that significant corruption cases were prosecuted, but these actions typically followed substantial media exposure and were greatly influenced by the existing power dynamics within the ANC.

The connection between President Jacob Zuma and the Gupta family attracted significant scrutiny from the South African public. The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) has claimed that there were financial misconducts involving President Zuma and the Gupta family. Sdumo Dlamini, the then head of COSATU, raised concerns about the then interactions between influential business figures, including those linked to the Gupta family, and the government.⁴⁹ It was reported that Rajesh Gupta and Duduzane Zuma were hidden stakeholders in Westdown Investments, a subcontractor involved in the locomotive deal, secured even before the main tendering process had concluded.⁵⁰ Additionally, there were claims that state-owned companies had spent more than R100 million on advertising in the Gupta-owned New Age newspaper.⁵¹ The personal ties and financial interactions between the Guptas and the President's family certainly had a significant influence on government advertising in their publication. Southall succinctly captured the problem by explaining how private individuals and businesses are weakening official government functions.⁵² Sadly, some individuals profited from their close ties with the president and his family through these connections.

44 Paul Hoffman, The Importance of Getting It Right in the Arms Procurement Commission, INST. FOR ACCOUNTABILITY IN S. AFR. (2013), http://www.ifaisa.org/Importance_of_getting_it_right_in_the_APC.html

45 ARMS PROCUREMENT COMM'N, *The Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of Fraud, Corruption, Impropriety or Irregularity in the Strategic Defence Procurement Packages (SDPP)* (2016).

46 *Id.*

47 ANDREW FEINSTEIN, *After the Party: Corruption, the ANC and South Africa's Uncertain Future* (2010).

48 Roger Southall, Family and Favour at the Court of Jacob Zuma, 38 REV. AFR. POL. ECON. 617 (2011).

49 Grant Sieff & Claire Beswick, SAP SA and CAD House: Of Conduct and Commission (2023).

50 GODSLOVE ZAMA ASANDA ZINDELA, *Political and Bureaucratic Corruption During President Jacob Zuma's First Term in Office: Causes, Consequences and Measurements* (2015).

51 PIETER-LOUIS MYBURGH, *The Republic of Gupta: A Story of State Capture* (2017).

52 Southall, *supra* note 48.

6. CONCLUSION

It is clear that even though South Africa has strategies in place to combat corruption since the regain of political independence, corruption is far from ending. Having poor opposition parties is what exacerbates political corruption in South Africa, the ruling elite manoeuvres government revenue as they see fit, and in most cases, it is not for the benefit of the country but for self-enrichment and it is unchallenged. Cadre deployment also contributed to corruption in Zuma's first term as president. Nonetheless, there are positive implementations by President Zuma during his time at the office. Jacob Zuma was instrumental in enhancing South Africa's participation in the BRICS group (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa). This effort led to South Africa joining the BRICS New Development Bank (NDB), founded in 2014. The NDB was established to gather resources for infrastructure and sustainable development initiatives in BRICS nations and other developing economies, aiming to offer alternatives to Western-controlled financial institutions. In terms of domestic policy, Zuma's administration significantly expanded HIV/AIDS treatment in South Africa. Under Zuma, South Africa saw a more aggressive response to the HIV/AIDS treatment including the expansion of Antiretroviral (ARV) programmes and treatment availability which helped improve life expectancy and reduce the HIV-related death rate in the country.

While existing anti-corruption strategies have yielded some positive outcomes, more practical recommendations could be made to strengthen governance structures and enhance the implementation of anti-corruption measures based on the findings. First, there should be a more rigorous enforcement of accountability mechanisms to ensure that public officials are held responsible for corrupt activities. This can be achieved through the empowerment of institutions such as the Public Protector and the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) to act independently and without political interference. Second, reforms in public sector appointments should be implemented to reduce the practice of cadre deployment and promote a merit-based selection system. By ensuring that key government positions are occupied by competent professionals rather than political loyalists, efficiency and integrity within governance structures can be improved.

Additionally, public sector transparency should be enhanced by leveraging digital governance solutions to track government expenditures and procurement processes. The use of blockchain technology, for instance, can provide immutable and transparent records of transactions, reducing the risk of misappropriation of funds. Civil society organizations and the media should also be given more support to play a watchdog role in exposing corruption. This could be facilitated through stronger whistleblower protection laws and incentives that encourage the reporting

of corrupt activities. Lastly, fostering a culture of ethics and integrity through civic education and awareness campaigns can instill a sense of accountability among citizens and leaders alike, reinforcing the broader societal rejection of corruption.

Disclosure of interest

The authors have no competing interests to declare.