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The Dark Side of Governance in Developing Countries: Mapping Multidimensional Governance

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ABSTRACT

This study maps the intellectual landscape of research on the dark side of governance in developing countries by examining its evolution, thematic structure, and emerging research directions. A bibliometric analysis was conducted on 256 Scopus-indexed articles published between 2016 and 2026. Bibliographic data were analyzed using Bibliometrix through the Biblioshiny interface in R, covering publication trends, relevant sources, authorship and institutional productivity, geographical distribution, keyword co-occurrence, and thematic mapping. The findings reveal substantial growth in research on the dark side of governance, particularly in recent years, and identify four interconnected thematic clusters: governance, institutions, and development; corruption, accountability, and governance failure; digital governance and transparency reform; and socioeconomic consequences of governance dysfunction. Although corruption remains a prominent theme, its growing links to institutional quality, accountability, digital transformation, and development suggest a broader conceptualization of governance dysfunction. The study concludes that the dark side of governance is increasingly understood as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing institutional, political, technological, and socioeconomic dimensions. This perspective broadens the conventional good governance approach by highlighting institutional weaknesses, accountability failures, digital risks, and the interaction between formal and informal institutions, while providing a foundation for future research on governance dysfunction in developing countries.

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■ INTRODUCTION

Governance has become a central concept in public administration, political science, and development studies because it shapes how public policies are formulated, resources are managed, and relationships among the state, private sector, and society are established. In modern government, governance is no longer understood merely as an administrative activity but as a mechanism involving multiple actors to achieve institutional effectiveness, public accountability, and sustainable development goals (Alnajdawi et al., 2025; Demiroz, 2018; Howe, 2025; Johanson, 2014). Therefore, governance quality is considered a key factor in development success, particularly in developing countries that continue to face limitations in institutional capacity.

The development of governance studies subsequently gave rise to the good governance paradigm, which has become a major foundation for public sector reform and international development agendas. This paradigm emphasizes participation, transparency, accountability, effectiveness, responsiveness, and the rule of law as fundamental principles of government administration (Elahi, 2009; Stevens & Gnanaselvam, 1995). International organizations, such as the World Bank and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), have widely promoted these principles as foundations for institutional reform in various developing countries. The shift from traditional government approaches to good governance reflects a change in orientation from administrative control to governance that is more participatory, transparent, and focused on creating public value and achieving sustainable development (E. Y. Zhang, 2024).

Although the good governance paradigm

has been widely adopted, many developing countries still face complex governance problems. Corruption, political patronage, state capture, weak institutional capacity, low accountability, and policy implementation failures remain major challenges in government administration (M. H. Rahman et al., 2013; Tambaip et al., 2026). This gap shows a disconnect between the normative principles of good governance and the empirical realities observed in practice. In many cases, the implementation of good governance principles has not been able to optimally improve governance quality because it is influenced by political dynamics, the presence of informal institutions, and different social and economic characteristics across countries (Aminova & Jegers, 2011; Sarabiev, 2019).

These limitations have encouraged growing academic attention to various forms of governance dysfunction. Institutional Theory, as proposed by North (1990), provides a conceptual foundation for understanding how formal and informal institutions shape governance outcomes. From this perspective, governance reforms may produce limited outcomes when formal institutional arrangements are unable to constrain informal practices, political interests, and other institutional constraints. Thus, the institutional perspective provides a conceptual foundation for understanding why governance reforms often produce limited outcomes in many developing countries.

Based on this perspective, this study uses the term dark side of governance as an umbrella concept encompassing various forms of governance dysfunction, such as corruption, governance failure, institutional weaknesses, low transparency, and various distortions in government administration (Varraich, 2014). This concept does not view these problems as isolated phenomena, but rather as interconnected manifestations of governance failure. Therefore, the dark side of governance can be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon that provides a broader perspective than studies focusing solely on corruption or policy failure separately.

Although research on corruption, governance failure, institutional weaknesses, digital governance, transparency, and various forms of governance dysfunction continues to develop, most studies are still conducted separately and focus on specific issues (Fagbadebo & Dorasamy, 2021; Matlala, 2025). Consequently, relatively few studies have comprehensively mapped how these various themes shape the intellectual structure of research on the dark side of governance, particularly in developing countries. As a result, the development of research themes, relationships among concepts, influential actors, and the direction of research in this field remain insufficiently understood.

To address this gap, this study employs a bibliometric approach. This approach enables the systematic mapping of the development of a field through the analysis of publication trends, intellectual structures, collaboration patterns, keyword networks, the evolution of research themes, and the identification of future research agendas. Compared with conventional literature reviews, bibliometric analysis provides a more comprehensive overview of the development of a research field based on scientific publication data.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study aims to map the intellectual landscape of research on the dark side of governance in developing countries through a bibliometric analysis of publications indexed in Scopus during 2016–2026. This study's novelty lies in integrating various forms of governance dysfunction into a comprehensive analytical framework, providing an overview of the intellectual structure, thematic development, and future research directions in studies of the dark side of governance. Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How have scientific publications on the dark side of governance in developing countries evolved during 2016–2026?
RQ2: What intellectual and conceptual structures shape the literature on the dark side of governance in developing countries?
RQ3: What research themes dominate the literature, and how have these themes evolved in studies of the dark side of governance?
RQ4: What future research agendas can be developed in studies of the dark side of governance?

■ METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative bibliometric approach to map the development of research on the dark side of governance in developing countries. The bibliometric approach was selected because it enables the systematic analysis of scientific publication metadata, thereby identifying publication trends, intellectual structures, collaboration networks, and the evolution of research themes within a field of study. Unlike narrative literature reviews, bibliometric analysis enables a more objective, measurable evaluation of

literature development based on bibliographic data (Haddaway et al., 2022; Syahril & Nurmandi, 2026). The entire analytical process was conducted using the Bibliometrix package through the Biblioshiny interface in the R software environment, which supports visualizing various bibliometric indicators and mapping knowledge structures. The research followed four main stages: developing the search strategy, selecting articles, establishing inclusion and exclusion criteria, and conducting bibliometric analysis of articles that met the criteria.

Search Strategy

The research data were obtained from the Scopus database because it provides broad multidisciplinary literature coverage and comprehensive metadata for bibliometric analysis. The search was conducted in June 2026 using the TITLE–ABS–KEY field and combined three keyword groups representing the study's main concepts: the dark side of governance, the governance context, and developing countries. The keyword combinations were constructed using Boolean operators (AND and OR) to retrieve publications relevant to the research objectives. Subsequently, all retrieved metadata were exported in CSV format and prepared for the selection process and bibliometric analysis.

Table 1. Search strategy

Component	Description
Database	Scopus
Search field	TITLE–ABS–KEY
Publication period	2016–2026
Language	English
Document type	Article
Export format	CSV
Software	Bibliometrix (Biblioshiny-R)

The article selection process followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA)

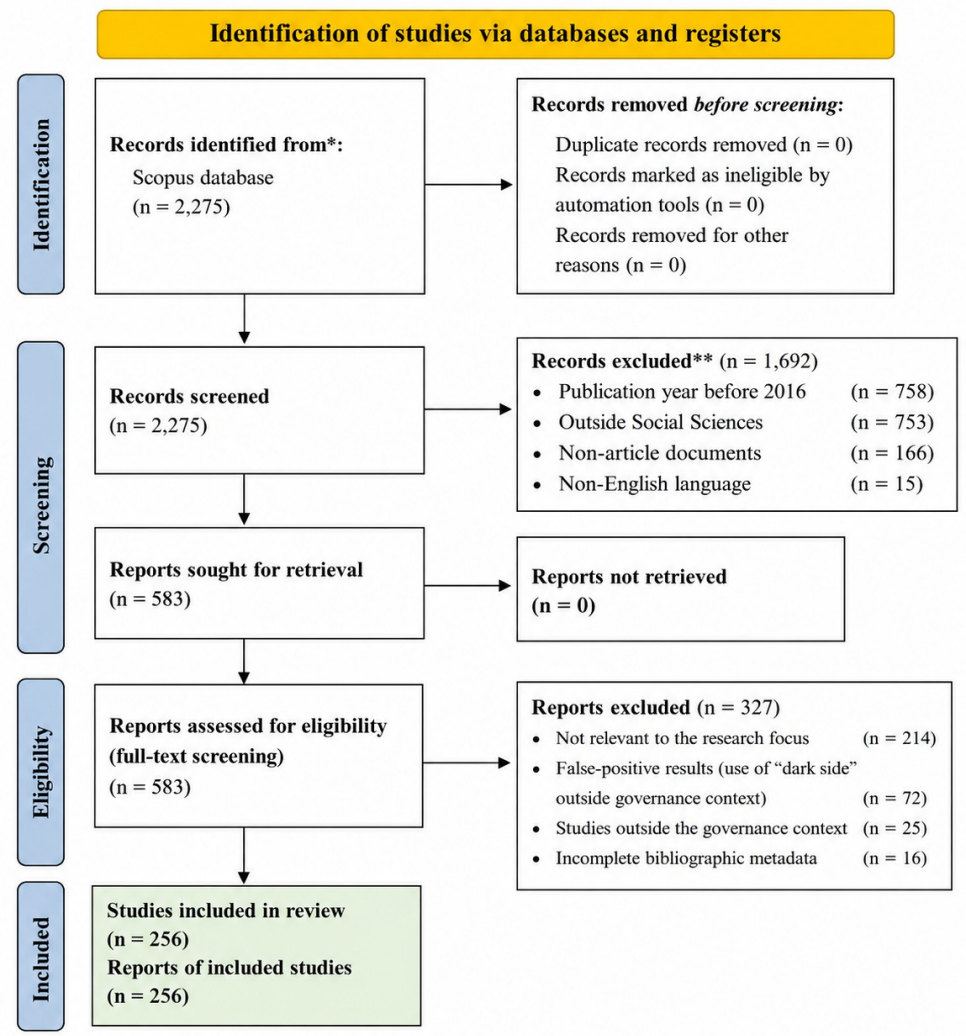


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram

guidelines to ensure that only relevant publications were included in the analysis. The initial search yielded 2,275 documents. After identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final selection, 256 articles were retained as the dataset for the bibliometric analysis. The complete article selection process is presented in Figure 1.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The article selection process was conducted in stages to ensure that all publications included in the analysis were aligned with the research objectives. Articles were included in the dataset if they met the established criteria, whereas publications that did not meet the requirements were excluded at each screening stage. The detailed inclusion and exclusion criteria applied in this study are presented in Table 2.

The screening process gradually reduced the number of documents, beginning with screening by publication year, subject area, document type, and language, followed by a final eligibility assessment based on relevance to the research topic. This process yielded 256 articles that met all criteria and were used as the final research dataset. Detailed information on the number of documents excluded at each screening stage is presented in the PRISMA diagram.

The final stage of the selection process involved checking metadata quality to ensure each article contained complete bibliographic information, including abstracts, author keywords, and the bibliographic metadata

Table 2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Screening Criteria	Inclusion Criteria	Reason	Scopus Query
Initial Search	Publications containing terms related to the *dark side of governance*, governance context, and developing countries.	To comprehensively identify literature relevant to the research topic.	TITLE-ABS-KEY(("dark side" OR "negative aspect" OR "malfeasance" OR "corruption" OR "illegitimacy" OR "abuse of power") AND ("governance" OR "government" OR "administration" OR "policy") AND ("developing country" OR "low-income country" OR "emerging economy" OR "Global South"))
Publication Year	Articles published between 2016 and 2026.	To capture recent developments and contemporary trends in governance research.	PUBYEAR > 2015 AND PUBYEAR < 2027
Subject Area	Publications classified under Social Sciences.	To ensure disciplinary relevance and consistency with the research scope.	LIMIT-TO(SUBJAREA,"SOCI")
Document Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles.	To ensure scientific rigor, methodological consistency, and comparability across publications.	LIMIT-TO(DOCTYPE,"ar")
Language	Publications written in English.	To ensure consistency in content analysis and facilitate international scholarly comparison.	LIMIT-TO(LANGUAGE,"English")
Eligibility Assessment	Studies directly related to the *dark side of governance* in developing countries with complete bibliographic metadata.	To eliminate false-positive results, exclude studies outside the governance context through title, abstract, and full-text screening, and retain only records with complete metadata suitable for bibliometric analysis.	Manual screening of titles, abstracts, and full texts, followed by metadata quality assessment.

Table 3. Data analysis procedures

Data Analysis	Unit of Analysis	Parameter	Output
Annual Scientific Production	Publication year	Scopus publication records by year	Publication trends
Most Relevant Sources	Sources/journals	Top 5 sources by publication count	Source productivity
Authors' Production	Authors	Top 10 authors by publication count; Biblioshiny	Author productivity
Affiliations' Production	Affiliations	Top 5 affiliations by publication count	Institutional productivity
Country Scientific Production	Countries	Top 5 countries by publication count	Geographical distribution
Keyword Co-occurrence	Author Keywords	50 nodes; Association normalization; Walktrap clustering; minimum 2 edges; isolated nodes removed	Co-occurrence network and clusters
Thematic Map	Author Keywords	Number of Words = 250; Min Cluster Frequency = 5 per thousand documents; Number of Labels = 3; Label Size = 0.3; Community Repulsion = 0; Clustering Algorithm = Walktrap	Motor, niche, basic, and emerging themes

required for bibliometric analysis. Only articles that met these requirements were retained as the final research dataset. The article selection flow diagram was developed using the PRISMA2020 package in R through the Shiny interface to systematically illustrate each stage of the selection process.

Data Analysis

Bibliometric analysis was conducted using Bibliometrix through the Biblioshiny interface in R to map the development of research on the dark side of governance in developing countries (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). The analysis covered publication development, scientific contributions, conceptual structure, and thematic development. The analytical procedures, units of analysis, parameters, and outputs are presented in Table 3.

■ RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Annual Scientific Production

The Annual Scientific Production analysis examined the development of publication productivity during the study period. This indicator provides an overview of publication growth dynamics and changes in academic attention to the issue under investigation over time.

In the early phase (2016–2017), the literature still focused on classic institutional issues, such as public sector reform, property rights, energy governance, institution building, and the impact of corruption on economic performance and sustainable development (Fischer & Tello-Gamarra, 2017; Sovacool, 2017; Yanguas & Bukenya, 2016). Entering 2018, academic attention began to shift to various consequences of governance dysfunction, such as corruption, tax non-compliance, forestry governance, the effectiveness of international aid, and poverty reduction (Na, Kang and Kim, 2018; Sarker et al., 2018). Furthermore, the 2019–2020 period showed a more complex expansion of research with the emergence of themes such as e-government, public trust, informal networks,

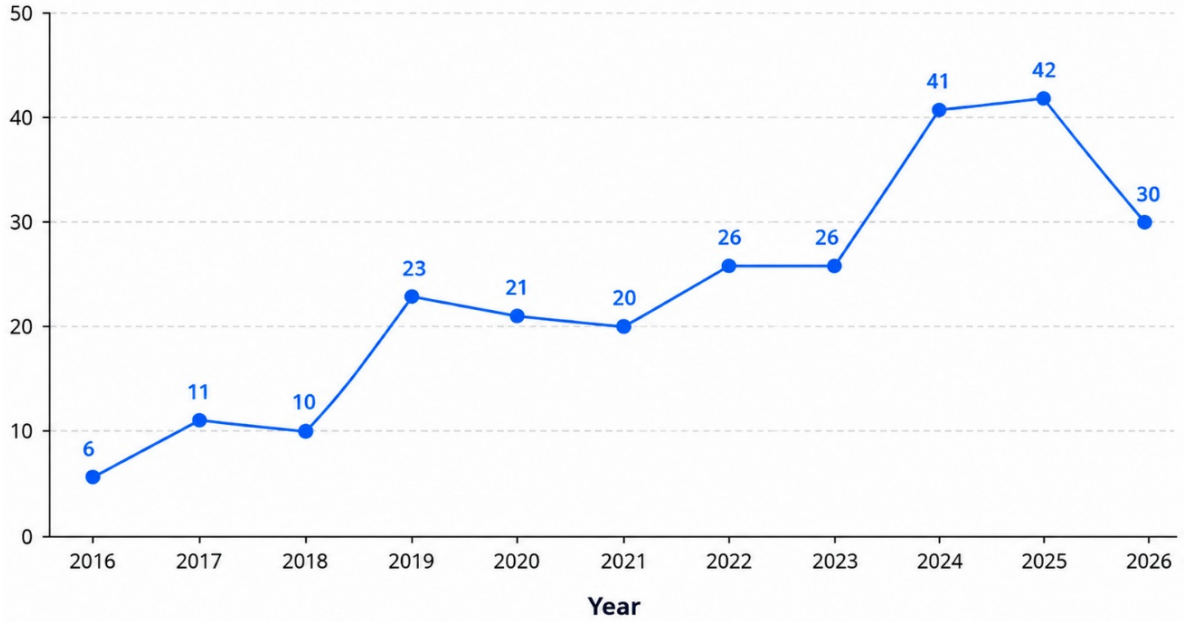


Figure 2. Trends in annual scientific production

public procurement, artificial intelligence governance (AI governance), systemic corruption in the health sector, and the relationship between governance and foreign investment (Ahmad et al., 2019; Huss, 2020; Jameel et al., 2019; Oyuga et al., 2025; Yassin et al., 2020). This pattern suggests that early research on the dark side of governance was not understood as an integrated domain, but evolved from fragmented studies on institutional quality, corruption, and development into a more multidimensional understanding of governance failures and distortions in developing countries.

Entering the 2021–2026 period, the research focus increasingly shifted toward more specific, contextual issues. 2021 saw increased attention to political legitimacy and the state's relationship with global economic actors (Azis, 2021), while 2022 highlighted the state's adaptive capacity (Baig et al., 2022), public trust, and policy acceptance (Muhammad et al., 2022). In 2023, studies began to focus on the pressures of collaborative governance (Z. Zhang et al., 2023), infrastructure investment (Chan et al., 2023), and inclusive development. Furthermore, the 2024 research agenda increasingly integrates with problematic issues through discussions of the green energy transition, economic digitalization, and the shadow economy (Y. Wang et al., 2024; Ziya et al., 2024). The year 2025 presents a more critical perspective on power relations through studies of grand corruption (Igbinedion & Osobase, 2025), the failure of anti-corruption reforms (Dávid-Barrett & Fazekas, 2020), and informal governance in the Global South (S. Ahmed et al., 2026). Meanwhile, publications in 2026 show growing attention to institutional friction, hybrid systems of authority (El Assadi et al., 2026), institutional resilience (Chowdhury et al., 2024), and the challenges of change and achieving the SDGs (Egba et al., 2026).

Most Relevant Sources

The Most Relevant Sources analysis aims to identify the publication sources that contribute most to shaping the literature. This indicator highlights the key journals that serve as primary publication outlets for research related to the topic based on the number of articles they have published.

The Most Relevant Sources analysis shows that research on the dark side of governance has developed across various disciplines that connect governance issues with development, economics, sustainability, and institutional capacity. Based on the bibliometric mapping results, Sustainability (Switzerland) is the most productive publication source, with 25 articles, followed by Economies with 15 articles, Sustainable Development with 5 articles, and World Development and Resources Policy, each with 4 articles. This distribution indicates that research on the negative aspects of governance is no longer limited to public administration issues but has evolved into an interdisciplinary field encompassing sustainable development, political economy, resource management, and digital transformation.

World Development's contributions show strong attention to the relationship between

institutional quality, governance reform, and development constraints in developing countries. Studies published in this journal frequently highlight how institutional weaknesses, corrupt practices, and limited state capacity can constrain the effectiveness of development interventions. These findings indicate that the success of governance reforms depends not only on the existence of formal policies but also on institutions' ability to establish mechanisms for oversight, accountability, and control over various forms of misconduct in government practices (Sarabiev, 2019). In developing countries, political dynamics, interest networks, and informal practices often contribute to limited outcomes of governance reforms.

Meanwhile, publications in Resources Policy show that governance issues are widely examined through the lenses of natural resource management and economic development. Themes such as resource governance, the resource curse, institutional quality, and transparency receive considerable attention because resource exploitation does not necessarily generate development benefits without effective governance mechanisms (Mugambwa et al., 2025; Xuan, 2025). The literature on resource governance shows that weak regulation, low transparency, and the dominance of particular interests can create various forms of distortion in the management of public resources (Asongu, 2019). Therefore, institutional capacity and the government's ability to ensure accountability and sustainability strongly influence the relationship between natural resources and development.

In sustainable development, research more often links governance issues to the sustainable development agenda. Articles in this source indicate that achieving the SDGs depends not only on formulating development policies but also on institutions' capacity to implement and sustain their effectiveness. Several studies show that policy instability, limited institutional capacity, and weak coordination mechanisms can hinder progress toward sustainable development goals (Al-Mulali et al., 2026). This perspective demonstrates that governance failure has broader consequences for social, economic, and environmental development.

In contrast to the previous journals, Economies places greater emphasis on governance issues from an institutional economics perspective. Publications in this journal demonstrate relationships among institutional quality, corruption, investment, economic growth, and public policy effectiveness. Corruption is understood not merely as an individual act but also as a consequence of weak transparency, low accountability, and limited control mechanisms within public organizations. This perspective aligns with principal-agent theory, which explains that abuse of authority can arise when information asymmetries and weak controls exist between those who delegate authority and those who exercise it (Habibov & Cheung, 2017; Wenzel, 2021). Thus, governance quality is a key factor in the effectiveness of economic development.

As the publication with the most articles, Sustainability (Switzerland) shows that research on the dark side of governance has expanded to more complex issues, including relationships among governance, digital technology, sustainability, and institutional quality. Studies in this journal indicate that technological innovations such as e-government and digital governance can improve government transparency and efficiency, but they can also create new challenges when not supported by adequate institutional capacity (Bosio et al., 2023; Truby, 2020). The digital divide, limited bureaucratic capacity, and issues of technological accountability can generate new forms of governance failure (Omotoye & Holtzhausen, 2025).

Overall, the publication patterns across these five leading sources indicate that research on the dark side of governance has evolved from discussions previously focused primarily on corruption and administrative weaknesses toward a more multidimensional understanding.

Most Productive Authors

The author productivity analysis examined patterns of academic contributions to the development of the research field. This visualization illustrates authors' involvement by publication period and the level of scientific contributions produced.

The pattern of author productivity in research on the dark side of governance in developing countries based on publication development over time. The analysis shows that research contributions come from various authors with different publication periods, indicating that this field has developed through a broad academic network and has not yet been dominated by a particular group of authors.

Based on the visualization, several authors show relatively consistent involvement in developing this research field. Brunton-Smith I. and McCarthy D. show publication activity in more recent periods, indicating growing academic attention to governance,

institutions, and various forms of misconduct in government administration (McCarthy et al., 2025; McCarthy & Brunton-Smith, 2024). Meanwhile, Magnda A. also shows sustained contributions over a certain period, reflecting continued attention to governance and development issues.

Digdowiseiso K. and Kentikelenis A. also appear in the author-production network, with contributions concentrated in earlier periods. The Scopus metadata identifies Digdowiseiso K. as Kumba Digdowiseiso, whose publications in the dataset address institutional quality, entrepreneurship, and fiscal decentralization in developing countries. Kentikelenis A. is associated with studies examining governance, corruption, and political-economic issues in developing countries (Digdowiseiso & Sugiyanto, 2021; Reinsberg et al., 2021). Their presence illustrates the diverse perspectives shaping research on governance dysfunction, ranging from institutional and development studies to political economy.

The size of the circles in the visualization indicates the level of academic attention each author's publications have received, based on the total citations per year (TC per year) indicator. Authors represented by larger circles have received relatively greater attention and have been more frequently cited in the related literature. However, the distribution of author contributions indicates that no single author dominates the field, highlighting the emerging and multidisciplinary nature of research on the dark side of governance.

Overall, the author productivity pattern shows that research on the dark side of governance has developed through contributions from scholars with diverse disciplinary backgrounds. To provide a more comprehensive picture of academic contribution patterns in this field, the author productivity analysis is further complemented by an authorship structure analysis that illustrates the characteristics of research collaboration. The following table presents several key indicators, including the number of documents, number of authors, average number of authors per article, and patterns of collaboration among authors.

Table 4. Authorship structure of dark side of governance research

Indicator	Value
Total documents	256
Total authors	718
Documents per author	0.36
Authors per document	2.80
Co-authors per document	2.86
Single-authored documents	50
International co-authorships (%)	36.33

Most Productive Affiliations

The affiliation analysis identifies the institutions with the highest publication contributions. This mapping provides an overview of centers of knowledge production and institutional involvement in developing this research field. The Affiliations' Production Over Time analysis illustrates how institutional contributions to research on the dark side of governance developed over the study period. The visualization shows that the five leading affiliations entered the research landscape at different times and subsequently demonstrated varying levels of publication productivity. The University of Professional Studies and University of Ghana began contributing to the literature in 2019, with the former recording 6 articles and the latter 6 articles by 2026. These contributions focus on corruption, tax compliance, political financing, and institutional development. For example, Amoh and Ali-Nakyea (2019) demonstrate a significant relationship between corrupt practices and tax evasion in Ghana, while more recent research examines the effects of perceived political corruption on tax compliance intentions (Agbanyo et al., 2024). Similarly, research affiliated with the University of Ghana has examined quality assurance in achieving development education goals and the regulation of political party financing as mechanisms related to institutional effectiveness, transparency, and accountability (Asamoah et al., 2025; Kyei-Poakwah et al., 2026).

Meanwhile, the Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences began contributing in 2022 and recorded 9 articles according to the visualization. Its contributions are closely linked to governance, development, food security, and sustainable economic growth. Research affiliated with this institution has examined the effects of corruption control on undernutrition in developing countries and the determinants of sustainable growth among SMEs in Ethiopia (Abdissa et al., 2022; Nugroho et al., 2022).

Universiti Sains Malaysia's contribution, which began in 2021 and has produced 11 articles, shows an expanding research focus on institutional quality, digitalization, sustainability, and socioeconomic development. Studies affiliated with the institution have examined government and institutional quality in relation to the Sustainable Development

Goals (Mun et al., 2023), determinants of digitalization in Asian and Pacific countries (Mia et al., 2024), and the role of institutional quality in energy access in developing countries (Shittu et al., 2024). In addition, research has examined digital communication and public accountability in distributing government assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic (Adamu et al., 2021).

More recently, Tashkent State University of Law entered the field in 2025 and recorded 7 articles in the visualization. Its contribution reflects the increasing connection between governance research and digital transformation, particularly through the digitization of legal systems in developing countries. Djuraev et al. (2025) show that digitization can improve legal infrastructure, access to justice, transparency, and judicial efficiency, while also generating challenges related to digital infrastructure, digital literacy, and cybersecurity.

Geographical Distribution of Scientific Production

The geographical distribution analysis examined scientific production by country of publication. This mapping helps identify regions with greater academic attention and patterns of research concentration.

Figure 3 shows the geographical distribution of research on the dark side of governance, based on the country context identified in the literature. The mapping results show that research on this phenomenon is widely conducted in developing countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Countries such as China, South Africa, Nigeria, Indonesia, and Brazil are the most frequently studied research contexts, followed by other developing countries such as Ghana, India, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Kenya, and Pakistan. This pattern shows that the dark side of governance is widely researched in institutional environments undergoing development dynamics, institutional change, and various challenges in building effective governance.

Beyond identifying countries as empirical research contexts, the geographical distribution also reveals patterns of scientific production by country of origin. In terms of knowledge production, the United Kingdom and the United States became the main contributors to the development of literature on the dark side of governance. The high contribution of publications from both countries does not show that governance problems occur more in both countries, but rather reflects their strategic role in producing studies on governance, institutions, and development. Articles affiliated with institutions in the United Kingdom discuss many forms of institutional dysfunction, especially those related to corruption, power networks, state relations and business actors, as well as weakness of accountability mechanisms. Studies on network structure in public procurement markets show that interactor relations and changes in government configuration can affect corruption patterns and power distribution in the public sector (Fazekas & Wachs, 2020). In addition, research on crony capitalism shows how informal relations between political and economic elites can weaken formal institutions and produce ineffective governance practices (Reinsberg et al., 2021). Other studies on criminal governance also show how patronage networks and informal actors can gain legitimacy and influence economic and social

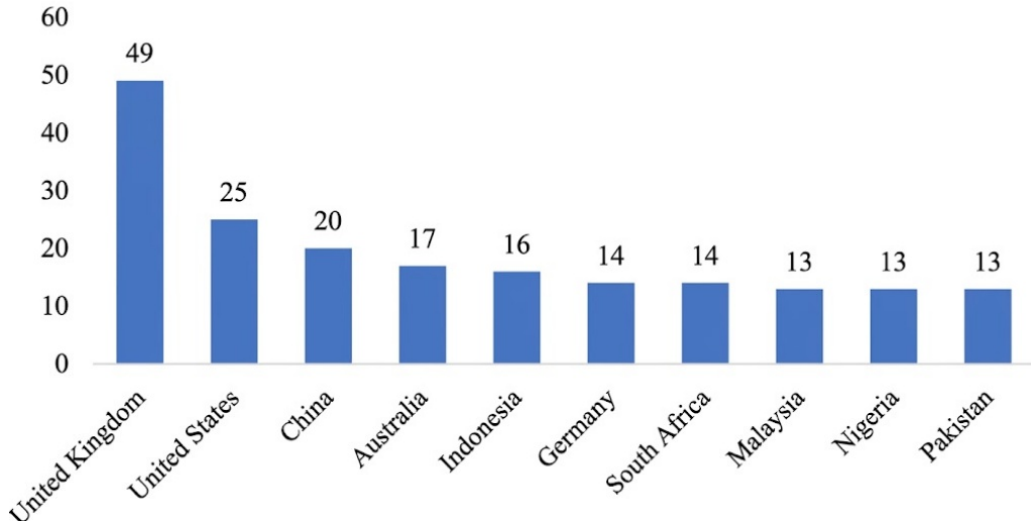


Figure 3. Geographical distribution of scientific production on the dark side of governance in developing countries

structures, as seen in the Bangladeshi garment industry (Ahmed et al., 2026).

Meanwhile, research in the United States shows strong attention to the relationship between institutional capacity, accountability mechanisms, and development outcomes. Studies affiliated with institutions in the country examine how institutional quality and regulatory enforcement mechanisms affect governance effectiveness. Research on government digitization in Benin shows that digital transformation can strengthen surveillance mechanisms and improve accountability in government implementation (Zumofen et al., 2022). In addition, the study of corruption and the impact of law enforcement in Malawi showed that the effectiveness of law enforcement agencies was a critical factor in limiting opportunistic behavior and strengthening the integrity of public institutions (Anders et al., 2020). Research on governance commitments in reducing maternal mortality and socioeconomic factors affecting access to basic services also shows that governance is closely linked to a country's capacity to achieve development goals (Gomez et al., 2019; Ruiz-Cantero et al., 2019).

In developing countries, research on the dark side of governance shows that various forms of governance dysfunction often arise from gaps between formal institutions and institutional practices. In Asia, research has discussed institutional changes, relations between countries and non-state actors, and challenges in building a transparent and accountable system of government.

In Indonesia, research on the dark side of governance has increasingly focused on institutional quality, governance reform, and the relationship between institutional capacity and sustainable development. Studies emphasize that government transformation requires strengthening formal rules, increased accountability, and the ability of public organizations to translate policies into effective practices (Harun et al., 2026; Kawuryan et al., 2022; Roziqin et al., 2026). Meanwhile, research on Malawi shows that the success of corruption eradication is strongly influenced by law enforcement agencies' ability to perform supervision functions and ensure compliance with formal rules (Anders et al., 2020).

In Malaysia, research on the dark side of governance examines the relationship between institutional quality, public trust, government accountability, and public policy effectiveness. One study on public trust in government during the implementation of carbon taxes in Malaysia shows that public policy acceptance is strongly influenced by trust in government institutions and public perceptions of policy legitimacy (Muhammad et al., 2022). In addition, some research involving Malaysian institutions also addresses governance issues in the context of economic development, digital transformation, and institutional environmental quality. Research on the determinants of digitalization in Asia and the Pacific shows that institutional capacity, technology readiness, and institutional conditions drive digital transformation (Mia et al., 2024). Other research on institutional environmental quality and e-commerce development confirms that regulatory effectiveness and governance quality are important factors in shaping countries' ability to adapt to changes in the digital economy (Zhanbozova et al., 2024).

Keyword Co-occurrence Network

The Keyword Co-occurrence Network analysis mapped relationships among keywords appearing in the articles. This approach helps identify the main thematic clusters and the conceptual relationships that shape the research structure.

Cluster 1. Governance, institutions, and development

The first cluster shows a conceptual relationship among governance, institutions, institutional quality, economic growth, and sustainable development. The connections among these themes indicate that research on the dark side of governance focuses not only on administrative failures but also on how institutional quality affects state capacity to achieve development goals (Adams, Adams, et al., 2019; Al-Mulali et al., 2026).

An institutional perspective explains the relationship between institutional quality and economic growth by positioning institutions as a key factor in shaping economic behavior and the effectiveness of public policies (Güney, 2017; Stoilova & Patonov, 2020). High-quality institutions provide more stable rules, reduce uncertainty, enhance trust among actors, and create an environment conducive to investment and economic activity (Gupta & Sharma, 2023; Yassin et al., 2020). Conversely, institutional weaknesses can constrain development through weak rule enforcement, higher transaction costs, and informal practices that undermine economic efficiency (Asongu, 2019; Myers et al., 2018).

In developing countries, the relationship between governance and development becomes increasingly complex because institutional capacity often confronts resource constraints, political instability, and the dominance of particular interests (Adams, Adams, et al.,

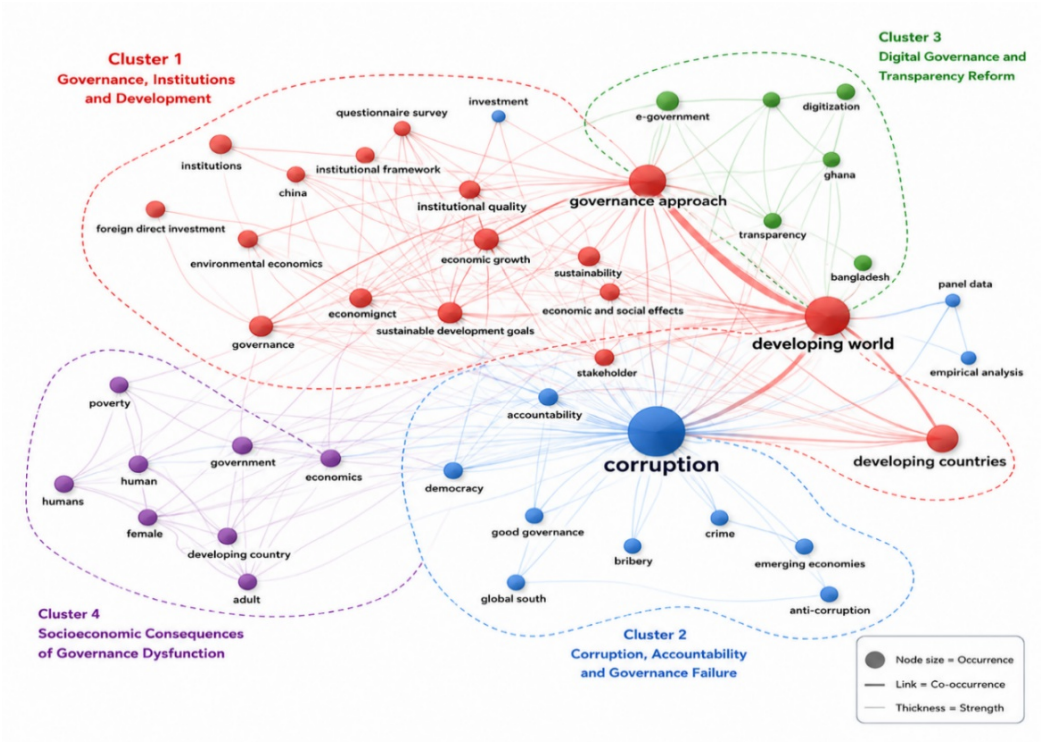


Figure 4. Keyword co-occurrence network of dark side of governance research in developing countries

2019; Giang et al., 2018). Therefore, the emergence of the themes of institutional quality and economic growth indicates that the dark side of governance literature seeks to explain how governance weaknesses can contribute to broader development constraints.

Cluster 2. Corruption, accountability, and governance failure

The second cluster shows that corruption is central to research on the dark side of governance. However, the relationships among corruption, accountability, anti-corruption, and good governance indicate that corruption is understood not merely as an individual act but also as a consequence of weaknesses in control and accountability systems within public institutions (Amoh & Ali-Nakyea, 2019; Dávid-Barrett & Fazekas, 2020).

Theoretically, corruption can develop when oversight, transparency, and accountability mechanisms cannot constrain public actors' exercise of authority (Fazekas & Wachs, 2020; Zhu, 2017). From a principal-agent perspective, corruption emerges when information asymmetries and weak control mechanisms exist between those who delegate authority (the principal) and those who exercise it (the agent) (Habibov & Cheung, 2017; Wenzel, 2021). Thus, the connection between corruption and accountability in the research network shows that studies of the dark side of governance increasingly view corruption as an institutional problem rather than merely a matter of morality or individual behavior (O. S. Ahmed et al., 2025; Hoinaru et al., 2020).

Cluster 3. Digital governance and transparency reform

Cluster 3 highlights digital transformation as an emerging mechanism for improving transparency, accountability, and institutional effectiveness in governance systems. This cluster demonstrates that digital governance has become an important dimension of governance reform by enabling greater access to information, strengthening monitoring mechanisms, and supporting more transparent public administration. The emergence of this theme indicates that governance studies have increasingly examined how technological innovation can contribute to institutional improvement while also creating new challenges related to digital capacity, inequality, and technological accountability.

The relationship between digital governance and transparency can be explained by the assumption that technology can improve access to information, reduce bureaucratic discretion, and strengthen public oversight mechanisms (Bosio et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2020). Digital systems such as e-government and blockchain implementation can increase information openness and improve public

service quality through more measurable processes (Amponsah et al., 2022; Sladić et al., 2021).

However, from a governance perspective, digital transformation does not automatically improve governance. Technology can also generate new challenges when it is not supported by adequate institutional capacity (Truby, 2020; Zumofen et al., 2022). The digital divide, limited bureaucratic capacity, and issues of technological accountability can create new forms of inequality and governance failure (Omotoye & Holtzhausen, 2025).

Cluster 4. Socioeconomic consequences of governance dysfunction

The fourth cluster expands research on the dark side of governance from institutional issues toward socioeconomic consequences. Relationships among themes such as poverty, human development, government, and developing countries indicate that governance dysfunction affects states' ability to meet societal needs and achieve inclusive development (Gomez et al., 2019; M. M. Rahman & Sultana, 2024).

Conceptually, governance quality affects the distribution of public resources, the effectiveness of social policies, and government capacity to provide basic services (Malla & Pathranarakul, 2022; Rosid et al., 2018). When public institutions are weak, certain groups within society may experience limited access to resources, services, and development opportunities (Bogin, 2022; Wang et al., 2024).

Thus, the relationship between governance dysfunction and socioeconomic consequences demonstrates that the effects of poor governance do not stop at the institutional level but can develop into broader human development challenges (Eriqat et al., 2025; Li et al., 2017).

Synthesis: The dark side of governance as a multidimensional phenomenon

Overall, the co-occurrence network demonstrates that the dark side of governance is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by interactions among institutional, political, technological, and socioeconomic factors. The mapping results show that corruption is indeed an important theme in the literature; however, it cannot be separated from institutional quality, accountability mechanisms, digitalization processes, and development outcomes (Adams, Ullah, et al., 2019; Hoinaru et al., 2020; Truby, 2020).

Accordingly, research on the dark side of governance provides a critical perspective on the good governance paradigm by demonstrating that governance success depends not only on the existence of normative principles but also on institutional capacity to prevent failure, control the abuse of power, and promote sustainable development.

Thematic Map

The thematic map analysis identified the position and development of themes based on their relevance and maturity in the literature. This mapping highlights the themes that

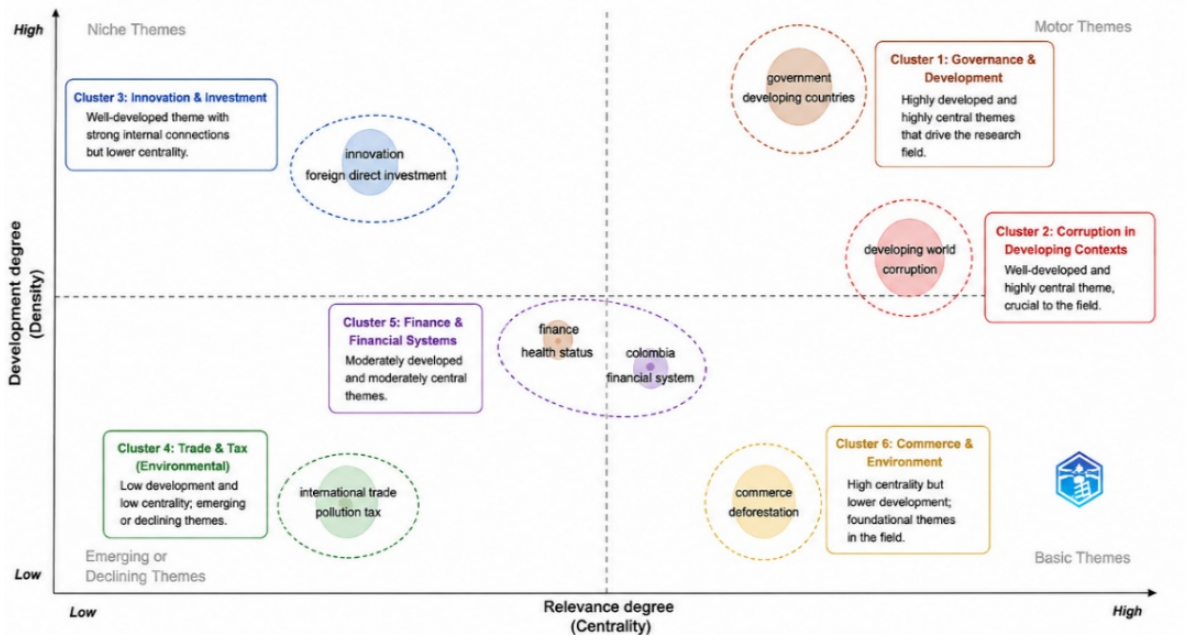


Figure 5. Thematic map of dark side of governance research

represent the main research focus, specialized themes, and emerging themes.

Figure 5 presents a thematic map of research on the dark side of governance in developing countries. The analysis reveals several thematic clusters across the four quadrants, reflecting varying degrees of centrality and development in this research field.

In the upper-right quadrant (motor themes), government, developing countries, the developing world, and corruption emerged as themes with high development and centrality (Qi & Nguyen, 2021; Saad Alshehry, 2020). This position shows that governance and corruption are core themes that dominate the intellectual structure of research on governance dysfunction in developing countries. These themes play a significant role in shaping the direction of research development in this field.

The upper-left quadrant (niche themes) includes innovation and foreign direct investment (Dragusha et al., 2026; Wu et al., 2020). These themes have developed substantially, but their linkages with other themes remain relatively limited. This suggests that the study of innovation and foreign direct investment is becoming a more specific research field and has not yet been fully integrated with the mainstream literature on the dark side of governance.

Furthermore, the bottom left quadrant (emerging or declining themes) includes international trade and pollution taxes (Dragusha et al., 2026; Khan et al., 2021). The low centrality and density of these themes suggest they may be emerging research areas or are receiving less academic attention.

In the bottom-right quadrant (basic themes), commerce and deforestation emerge as fundamental themes with high relevance to the field, yet their development remains relatively low (Marchand, 2016; Zhanbozova et al., 2024). Furthermore, finance, health status, the financial system, and Colombia are located around the center of the map, demonstrating their role as transversal themes that bridge various research streams in the study of governance dysfunction.

Implications for Governance Theory and the Future of Governance Research

Research on the dark side of governance has increased significantly over the past decade. Current literature no longer focuses solely on the prerequisites for successful governance. However, it has increasingly begun to critically explore various forms of dysfunction, including governance dysfunction, corruption, institutional weakness, accountability failure, and digital governance risks (Dangi et al., 2017; Haddad & Sakr, 2023; Volkova & Kulakova, 2021). The intellectual structure mapped in this study clearly demonstrates that this field has developed in a multidisciplinary manner, involving extensive collaboration networks across authors, institutions, and geographical regions.

This development offers an important critique of the good governance paradigm, which has long dominated public administration studies. This conventional paradigm generally focuses on normative conditions such as transparency, accountability, participation, and effectiveness (Bezzina et al., 2021; Hauser, 2022; Sandford, 2017). However, this approach has limitations because it does not always explain why various governance reform agendas ultimately fail. The normative paradigm tends to overlook informal institutions, conflicts of political interest, power relations, and other institutional constraints (Enjolras, 2026; Kakabadse & Zhang, 2026; Kim, 2026). In other words, the good governance approach explains how governance should operate but does not provide an adequate basis for understanding how governance can fail in government practice.

This study addresses this gap by demonstrating that the dark side of governance is not a single, standalone phenomenon. Governance dysfunction emerges from complex interactions among various dimensions, ranging from corruption, low institutional quality, and governance failure to new challenges arising from digital transformation (Hoinaru et al., 2020; Liu & Dong, 2020). These issues should therefore be understood as closely interconnected phenomena. Accordingly, this study integrates previously fragmented discussions of governance failure into a broader conceptual understanding.

Theoretically, these findings can be explained through the lens of Institutional Theory proposed by North (1990). This theory emphasizes that governance outcomes depend not only on the design of formal institutions, such as regulations, organizational structures, or oversight mechanisms. Rather, informal institutions, including patronage cultures, closed political networks, and deviant social norms, often exert much greater influence on governance practices. Governance failure occurs when formal institutions lack sufficient capacity to constrain or control informal practices and the power asymmetries that develop within them.

Unlike previous studies, which generally examine governance failure only partially, for

example, by focusing exclusively on corruption or evaluating public policy failures separately (Hoinaru et al., 2020; Matlala, 2025).

Future Research and Limitations of study

Future research directions

Based on the thematic map and co-occurrence network, several research themes show strong potential for future development. These themes remain relatively underexplored in the governance literature in developing countries, and further research should address issues that not only broaden the empirical scope but also deepen theoretical understanding of the various forms of governance failure. Table 5 presents potential research clusters, along with key topics and future research agendas, as a reference for future studies.

Theoretical and practical implications

Theoretically, this research contributes to Institutional Theory by showing that various forms of the dark side of governance, such as corruption, state capture, institutional weaknesses, and digital governance failures, result from interactions between formal and informal institutions. In addition, this study expands the governance literature by integrating various forms of governance dysfunction into a more comprehensive conceptual framework.

From a practical perspective, the findings confirm the importance of strengthening institutional capacity, increasing transparency, and strengthening accountability mechanisms to reduce governance dysfunction in developing countries. The results also show that governance reform cannot focus only on

Table 5. Potential research clusters, key topics and future research agendas

No	Recommended Authors to Study	Main Topics	Future Research Agenda
1	(Giang et al., 2018)	The influence of the investment climate on the productivity of manufacturing companies in Vietnam	Examines how digital governance quality, transparency, and anti-corruption moderate the relationship between investment climate and productivity in developing countries.
2	(Gupta & Sharma, 2023)	The role of institutional and governance factors in infrastructure investment through PPP schemes in developing countries	Examining the influence of institutional innovation, e-government, and sustainability on the success of PPP investment across developing countries.
3	(Yassin et al., 2020)	Institutional determinants in attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Egypt	Develop a cross-country comparative study of the relationship between institutional quality, political stability, and FDI flows in the context of the Global South.
4	(Muhammad et al., 2022)	Public trust in the government and carbon tax revenues in Malaysia	Explores how corruption, fiscal transparency, and public participation affect the legitimacy of environmental tax policies in developing countries.

5	(Al-Mulali et al., 2026)	The impact of policy shocks on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	Examine the relationship between governance quality, institutional resilience, and the achievement of the SDGs in global crisis situations.
6	(Al-Mulali et al., 2026)	The role of institutional capacity in the relationship between fiscal policy and income inequality	Develop a model that integrates institutional capacity, digital governance, and social protection to explain inequality dynamics in developing countries.

formal regulatory changes. Instead, it must consider the institutional context and the dynamics of informal institutions that develop in society.

Limitations of the study

Although this study provides a comprehensive mapping of the development of the literature on the dark side of governance, several limitations remain. First, this study uses only open-access articles indexed in the Scopus database as its primary data source. Using a single database enables consistent metadata collection and analysis; however, it may exclude relevant publications that are not indexed in Scopus or are not openly accessible (open access). Therefore, future research could expand the data sources by integrating other databases, such as Web of Science, Dimensions, or other academic databases, to obtain broader representation of the literature. Second, limited access to open-access publications may affect the coverage of the literature analyzed, particularly articles with restricted access that may nevertheless make important contributions to the development of the field. This may introduce selection bias in constructing the dataset. Third, as a bibliometric study, this analysis focuses on publication patterns, relationships among concepts, author productivity, publication sources, and thematic development based on bibliographic metadata. Although this approach provides an overview of a research field's structure and evolution, it does not offer an in-depth evaluation of each article's methodological quality, theoretical arguments, or empirical findings. Future research could complement the bibliometric approach with a systematic literature review or empirical studies to better understand the mechanisms underlying various forms of governance dysfunction. Fourth, this study's focus on developing countries provides context for governance challenges in environments with diverse levels of institutional capacity. However, the findings cannot be directly generalized to all governance contexts, particularly developed countries, which have different institutional, political, and economic characteristics. Overall, these limitations do not diminish this study's contribution to mapping the field's intellectual development and conceptual structure. Rather, they highlight opportunities for future research through more diverse data sources, broader literature coverage, and analytical approaches that combine bibliometric mapping with substantive analysis of research content.

■ CONCLUSION

This study maps the development of research on the dark side of governance in developing countries through a bibliometric analysis of 256 Scopus-indexed articles published between 2016 and 2026. The findings indicate that research in this field has grown significantly, particularly in recent years, reflecting increasing academic attention to governance dysfunction and institutional challenges. The analysis identifies four main thematic clusters: governance, institutions, and development; corruption, accountability, and governance failure; digital governance and transparency reform; and the socioeconomic consequences of governance dysfunction. These findings indicate that the dark side of governance is a multidimensional phenomenon involving institutional, political, technological, and social dimensions. Overall, this study shows that governance dysfunction cannot be understood through isolated issues such as corruption or administrative failure; rather, it requires a broader perspective that considers interactions among institutional weaknesses, accountability problems, digital challenges, and

development outcomes. Future research can further explore these dynamics through comparative and longitudinal approaches across different developing countries.

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