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Contact:
Dr. Hasrat Arjjumend
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M – 00547 | Analytical Article

Flyrock: The "Hits" Just Keep On Coming!

Tony Sevelka
International Valuation Consultants Inc., 18140 Cataract Road, Caledon, Ontario L7K 1P1 Canada.
E-mail: info@intval.com | ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2210-421X

ABSTRACT

Despite all claims to the contrary, flyrock debris is an inherent and unavoidable byproduct of blasting operations. Wherever blasting occurs, flyrock debris is sure to follow. It is influenced by numerous and unpredictable factors, including blast design limitations, uneven energy distribution, varying atmospheric conditions, human or operational errors, and the inherently dynamic nature of blasting, Additionally, geological inconsistencies, such as variations in rock density, fractures and fault lines, further amplify the unpredictability of flyrock incidents. Flyrock debris poses significant risks to safety, infrastructure, and nearby properties. While blasting has other adverse effects, flyrock is considered the most dangerous due to its potential to injure, permanently disable, or kill on contact. It is responsible for the majority of onsite and offsite injuries and fatalities in blasting operations, many of which could be prevented by enacting mandatory minimum onsite setbacks and mandatory minimum offsite separation distances from sensitive land uses and activities. In Ontario, flyrock remains undefined under the Aggregate Resources Act (ARA), effectively allowing the aggregate industry to avoid regulatory oversight. If flyrock incidents do not result in debris leaving the site or causing injury or death, they remain concealed from the public and unreported to regulating authorities. This lack of mandatory disclosure exacerbates the issue, leaving communities vulnerable to unaddressed hazards. The implementation of mandatory minimum setbacks and separation distances is essential to safeguarding the safety of workers and surrounding communities.

Keywords: Flyrock; Blasting; Aggregate extraction; Environmental impacts; Land use incompatibility

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since 2020, International Forensic and Litigation Appraisal Services Inc. (IFLAS) has been diligently researching and documenting the dangers of *Flyrock*, an unavoidable and unpredictable by-product of blasting rock. *Flyrock* represents the ultimate *adverse effect*,[1] and is broadly defined as follows:

> *Flyrock means any material (e.g., gravel, rocks, tree trunks, construction materials, mud, or even water) propelled by a blast that is actually or potentially hazardous to persons or property onsite or offsite.*

Blasting operations are expected to generate flyrock debris, and the distance launched can significantly impact the surrounding environment (Mishra & Rout, 2012). Flyrock debris comes in all shapes, sizes, and weights, and can launch or shower in multiple directions over a considerable distance, and at great speed, reaching up to 400 miles per hour. As of May 2025, the statistics reveal a total of 256 flyrock incidents onsite and offsite, 49 of which resulted in death. This translates to a staggering "kill" rate of 19.1% (49 ÷ 256), making blasting rock one of the most perilous industrial activities.

Concealment and underreporting of flyrock incidents by the aggregate industry are significant issues that have left the public uninformed and vulnerable. This deliberate lack of disclosure and transparency not only obscures the true extent of the risks associated with flyrock but also impedes regulators and municipalities from taking effective precautions to protect their residents. Proactively addressing this alarming problem is crucial to ensuring the health, safety, and well-being of those living, working, or playing near blasting operations. Mandatory minimum onsite setbacks coupled with mandatory minimum offsite separation distances of appropriate width or radius are the only effective measures to eliminate the risks of flyrock from blasting rock.

2. FACTORS INVOLVED IN THE UNDERREPORTING OF FLYROCK INCIDENTS

Despite the well-documented dangers associated with flyrock incidents, many cases go unreported for a variety of reasons. Underreporting not only skews industry statistics but also undermines efforts to improve safety protocols and mitigate risks in blasting operations. Several key factors contribute to this lack of accurate reporting, ranging from workplace culture and management pressure to regulatory shortcomings and environmental considerations. Understanding these influences is essential for addressing gaps in safety and ensuring a more transparent approach to flyrock incident documentation. Such factor are as under:

1. *Lack of Awareness:* Workers and site managers may not fully understand the risks associated with flyrock, leading to underreporting.
2. *Fear of Repercussions:* Employees might fear disciplinary action or job loss if they report a flyrock incident, especially if it was due to a mistake, incompetence, or negligence.
3. *Fear of Penalties:* Employees and site managers may fear financial penalties, legal actions, or other consequences if they report a flyrock incident. This may involve cleaning up or removing debris and damaged property before it can be reported.
4. *Intentional Concealment:* Workers or site managers may intentionally conceal flyrock incidents to avoid penalties, legal actions, or other repercussions.
5. *Pressure to Meet Production Targets:* High production demands can create pressure to avoid disruptions and investigations caused by reporting flyrock incidents.
6. *Pressure from Management:* Employees may be pressured by management to avoid reporting flyrock incidents to maintain a positive safety record and to avoid increases in insurance premiums due to the potential for property damage, injury, permanent disability, or death.
7. *Lack of Training and Awareness:* Employees may not fully understand the importance of reporting flyrock incidents or may lack proper training on how to do so.
8. *Inadequate Reporting Systems:* Some sites may lack proper reporting mechanisms or protocols, making it difficult for workers to report flyrock incidents accurately.

[1] CPR< September 18, 2023, PL-51-23, Correspondence from Tony Sevelka. https://www.caledon.ca/en/town-services/resources/Business-Planning--Development/Policy/Aggregates/Aggregate-Supplementary-Group/Sub-Group/Correspondence-from-Tony-Sevelka---City-of-Burlington-Flyrock-Presentation.pdf?form=MG0AV3&form=MG0AV3

9. *Regulatory Gaps:* In some regions, such as Ontario, Canada, there may be insufficient regulatory oversight or enforcement, leading to a lack of accurate data on flyrock incidents.
10. *Lack of Accountability:* In jurisdictions such as Ontario, Canada, where there is minimal oversight or accountability, there is a greater likelihood of flyrock incidents being concealed.
11. *Remote Locations:* Flyrock incidents in remote or less monitored areas (e.g., forests, tree stands, rivers, ponds, lakes, seasonal trailways) may go unnoticed for extended periods or never recognized as flyrock debris.
12. *Minimal Immediate Impact:* Some flyrock incidents may not cause immediate visible damage, leading to delayed recognition and reporting (e.g., intermittent use of farm equipment damaged by soil-covered flyrock debris).
13. *Environmental Impact:* Flyrock debris can cause damage to natural habitats, farmland, and infrastructure, which may not be immediately apparent.
14. *Flyrock Stays on Site:* If flyrock does not leave the site, it often goes unreported regardless of the distance travelled, as it may not be considered a significant incident in jurisdictions such as Ontario, Canada.

Addressing these factors requires a combination of better education, improved reporting systems, and stronger regulatory oversight and enforcement. Implementing comprehensive safety training programs and fostering a culture of transparency and accountability can also help reduce the incidence of flyrock and ensure that all incidents are properly documented, addressed, and publicly disclosed in sufficient detail and made readily available on the internet.

3. MNRF'S FAILURE TO PROTECT THE PUBLIC SAFETY FROM FLYROCK

Alarmingly, despite the severe and potentially lethal consequences of flyrock, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) has shown a blatant lack of interest or desire to effectively address the issue. There is a notable absence of accountability measures for explosives engineers conducting proponent-driven studies, which often either ignore or fail to fully disclose that flyrock is an unavoidable and unpredictable consequence of blasting rock. Shockingly, MNRF has never conducted a study of flyrock incidents, and the Aggregate Resources Act.[2] administered by MNRF is woefully inadequate in safeguarding the health and safety of the public and the environment. The following critical deficiencies highlight systemic issues that undermine public safety and environmental responsibility in the regulation of flyrock in Ontario:

- *No Definition of Fyrock:* The lack of a clear definition hinders the consistent reporting and regulation of incidents, making it difficult to enforce safety measures.
- *No Protocols to Prevent Flyrock from Leaving the Site:* This absence allows for unpredictable and dangerous occurrences, increasing the risk to surrounding communities and environments.
- *Recklessly Inadequate Permanent Onsite Setback (excavation limit):* ARA's 30-metre setback (excavation limit) is unsupported and does not reflect the true range of flyrock debris, as evidenced by the quantitative analysis of 147 flyrock incidents. This endangers both onsite workers and anyone offsite in the neighbouring communities.
- *No Onsite Blast Exclusion Zone:* Without designated exclusion zones, employees are left vulnerable to flyrock, which can cause severe injuries, permanent disabilities, or fatalities.
- *No Licensing Requirement for the Blaster-In-Charge:* The absence of a licensing requirement means there is no assurance that the individual responsible for handling and detonating explosives is competent and knowledgeable, increasing the risk of accidents.
- *No Mandatory Comprehensive Environmental Assessments:* Without thorough environmental assessments, the long-term impacts of flyrock on ecosystems and communities remain unaddressed, potentially causing irreversible damage.
- *No Obligation for Public Disclosure of Flyrock Incidents:* This lack of transparency prevents the public from being informed about the risks and occurrences of flyrock incidents, reducing public awareness and accountability.

[2] Aggregate Resources Act, R.S.O., 1990, c. A.8. https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90a08 Retrieved February 28, 2025.

- *No Advisories Warning the Public of the Dangers of Fyrock:* The absence of public advisories leaves communities uninformed and unprepared for the potential dangers, increasing the likelihood of harm in the event of an incident.
- *Inadequate Data Collection:* Without systematic data collection on flyrock incidents, it is impossible to analyze patterns and develop effective regulations.
- *Reliance on Self-Regulation of Aggregate Industry:* Over-reliance on self-regulation leads to conflicts of interest and insufficient oversight, allowing companies to prioritize production and profit over safety without facing significant consequences.

This lack of effective oversight and regulatory enforcement by the MNRF not only endangers the health and safety of the public and workers but also perpetuates a culture of negligence and underreporting within the aggregate industry.

4. MUNICIPAL LAND USE CONTROLS TO PROTECT RESIDENTS FROM FLYROCK

To overcome MNRF's gross negligence, municipalities must implement stringent land use controls focused on addressing land use incompatibility. This includes enacting permanent minimum onsite setbacks (excavation limits) and permanent minimum offsite separation distances from sensitive land uses and activities. From the beginning of 2020 to May 2025, Sevelka (2022, 2023) has meticulously recorded 256 (known) individual *flyrock* incidents from various sources, including news releases, published investigations, scholarly journals, and case law. These incidents have been thoroughly documented and summarized below.

4.1 Summary of Flyrock Incidents

- Previously, a total of approximately 195 flyrock incidents had been discovered and analyzed (Sevelka, 2022). Of the 195 flyrock incidents discovered, 33 resulted in death, indicating an overall kill rate of 16.9%, and 40 people were injured in the same 33 flyrock incidents.
- An additional 24 flyrock incidents were added to the "running list" of flyrock incidents, bringing the total to 219 (Sevelka, 2023). Of these additional 24 flyrock incidents, 10 people were injured, and 4 people were killed, indicating a kill rate of 16.7% (4 ÷ 24). Of the 219 flyrock incidents documented, 37 resulted in death from being struck by flyrock debris, reflecting a "kill" rate of 16.9% (37 ÷ 219), and 41 more people were injured in the same 37 flyrock incidents.
- An additional 21 flyrock incidents were added to the "running list," increasing the total of known flyrock incidents from 219 to 240 (Sevelka, 2024). Of the 8 of these 21 additional flyrock incidents documented, 12 people were killed and 8 people were injured. Of the 240 flyrock incidents, 45 resulted in death, indicating a "kill" rate of 18.8% (45 ÷ 240). In those same 45 flyrock incidents, 49 people were killed and an equal number were injured.
- An additional 16 flyrock incidents have been added to the "running list" of flyrock incidents, bringing the total to 256 as of May 2025. In those additional 16 flyrock incidents, 8 people were killed, and 62 were injured. In 4 of these 16 additional flyrock incidents, 8 people were killed and 46 people were injured. Of the 256 flyrock incidents, 49 resulted in death, indicating a "kill" rate of 19.1% (49 ÷ 256). Additionally, in those same 49 flyrock incidents, 103 people were injured.

The kill rate in flyrock incidents has shown a gradual increase over time rather than remaining completely consistent. Here is how it has changed:

4.2 Kill Rate Over Time

- 2022: 16.9% (33 deaths out of 195 incidents)
- 2023: 16.9% (37 deaths out of 219 incidents) → Stable
- 2024: 18.8% (45 deaths out of 240 incidents) → Increase
- 2025: 19.1% (49 deaths out of 256 incidents) → Slight increase

While the kill rate was consistent from 2022 to 2023, it increased in 2024 and 2025, suggesting worsening safety conditions or larger-scale blasts. The trend indicates that flyrock incidents are becoming deadlier, possibly due to urban expansion, stronger explosives, or insufficient safety measures.

4.3 "Running List" of Flyrock Incidents

Relevant details of the 16 most recent *flyrock incidents* uncovered are summarized as follows:

- *Flyrock 241:* On June 6, 2022, a blast at a construction site in Hendersonville, Tenn., launched *flyrock debris* that rained down on the neighbouring Stonecrest subdivision, striking at least three homes (Lamb, 2022).

  > *In the video, the rocks fly so fast that it's hard to spot them. But in one frame, a rock projectile is seen flying through the air, about to impale a garage door. As the dust clears in the video, neighbors try to figure out what's going on…. Even a day later, rocks from the blast were still visible in the neighborhood, lying on the ground.*
  >
  > *…[S]eismic readings showed the power of yesterday's blast was within legal limits and the same strength as other blasts that have been going on for two years.*

- *Flyrock 242:* On August 29, 2007, a blast at a quarry near Athens, Greece, launched *flyrock debris* resulting in damage to the Lambropoulou family home more than a kilometre (>1,000 metres) away as two large rocks landed on their house, causing damage to the roof, a wall and injuring one person.[3]

- *Flyrock 243:* On October 14, 2024, a blast at a construction site at Bududuram, Ghana, launched *flyrock debris* that showered a neighbouring community with catastrophic consequences, killing three individuals on the spot, including Thomas Kofi and two females (Frimpong, 2024) and injuring 45 others. Vehicles, homes, and businesses were also damaged by flyrock debris.[4]

  > *At St. Gregory Catholic Hospital in Budumburam, more than 45 victims were admitted on Monday, October 13, following the devastating blast. By the first day, 34 victims with minor injuries had been discharged, but 13 remain under close watch.*
  >
  > *Residents of Budumburam claim this isn't the first time rock blasting has endangered their lives. The blasts have often damaged homes, leaving behind holes in walls and fear in their hearts. This time, however, the rocks have taken more than property; they've taken lives.*

- *Flyrock 244:* On January 6, 2025, a blast at a quarry in Valillapuzha, India, launched *flyrock debris,* including a rock that penetrated a house and struck a pregnant woman, Farbeena, in the leg while she was sleeping. She was admitted to Areekode Taluk Hospital for treatment. Residents reported that a similar incident had occurred a month prior and criticized the authorities for failing to address safety concerns at the quarry despite repeated mishaps.[5]

- *Flyrock 245:* On September 19, 2016, a blast at the construction of a bypass in Aberdeen, Scotland, launched *flyrock debris* that smashed and caved in the roof of a 4 x 4 Toyota within a 600-foot (183 metres) exclusion zone (Beattle, 2016).

  > *Transport bosses launched an investigation after a boulder smashed through the roof of the 4×4 during the blast. The incident is understood to have taken place in the Rothnick area of the southern section of the £750 million bypass during blasting works, close to Netherley Road. Although a safety exclusion zone of more than 600ft [183 metres] was in place, the Toyota was parked too close and was struck by a flying rock, shattering the windshield and caving in the roof.*

- *Flyrock 246:* On May 14, 2004, a blast at a construction site in New Rochelle, N.Y., launched *flyrock debris* that damaged 40 cars at a Hyundai dealership and injured five people.[6]

  > *A dynamite explosion at an excavation site blasted hundreds of rocks as big as beach balls across a street, breaking windows and damaging new cars at a dealership. Five people sustained minor injuries.*
  >
  > *The explosion was ``like a gunshot of rocks across the street," Phil Saporito, plant manager at the Hyundai dealership, said, standing outside a showroom filled with cracked glass and dented cars. At least 40 cars were damaged.*

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[3] "Quarry rocks rain on home," *ekathimerine.com*, August 31, 2007, https://www.ekathimerini.com/news/51532/quarry-rocks-rain-on-home/.

[4] "How flying rocks killed 3 persons at Bududuram," *GH Environment*, October 16, 2024, https://ghenvironment.com/Environment_Sanitation/update-how-flying-rocks-killed-3-persons-at-bududuram1729059977.

[5] "Rock from quarry blast crashes into house in Kozhikode; pregnant woman injured." *Onmanorama,* January 6, 2025. https://www.onmanorama.com/news/kerala/2025/01/06/kozhikode-pregnant-woman-injured-quarry-blast.html

[6] "Blast Sends Rocks Flying, Dents New Cars," *Firehouse*, May 14, 2004. https://www.firehouse.com/home/news/10519394/blast-sends-rocks-flying-dents-new-cars

> *Main Street had been closed to traffic before the blast at a site being readied for stores. A heavy, rubber mat that was being used to contain the blast failed. ``One end of the mat lifted," Fire Chief Frank Strollo said. ``It wasn't enough coverage." Owner Ray Hayduk Jr. said the blast area wasn't solid rock. ``That's why it came out so fast. There was a natural seam in the rock, and we drilled right into it," he said.*

- *Flyrock 247:* On August 22, 2003, a blast at a construction site launched *flyrock debris* that struck three condos at Forrest Drive Manor B, Yellowknife (Collins, 2003).

  > *No one was injured in the explosion set by NWT Rock Services, but flying rock tore through the roof of one condo and the wall of another, breaking a door and a window. "The wall above my living room window is cracked," said Shirley McGrath, who lives on the first floor.*
  >
  > *Lance Gomolchuk, operations manager for NWT Rock Services, said there wasn't enough explosive in the first hole of an eight-hole shot. Since the first hole didn't blast enough rock, "it caused the number five hole to do twice as much work," Golumchuk said. The energy from the first blast went up and threw off the blasting mats, leaving the number five hole uncovered when it went off, Gomolchuk said. "It shot up and threw a rock," he said.*

- *Flyrock 248:* On September 28, 2024, a blast at a construction site launched *flyrock debris* that struck and killed 25-year-old Ajit Kumar Bhuskun Shah and injured Ram Pravesh and Rahul Ramprasad in Mangrul Village, India (Inamdar, 2024).

  > *A man died while two others were injured during a controlled blasting underway at a plot in Talegaon MIDC. According to the police, the complainant, injured and deceased, was working inside the Comos company premises when a flying stone from the blasting site owned by Arun Bhegade hit Shah's head, leading to a serious head injury and death instantaneously.*
  >
  > *"The plot owner did not inform the neighbours in advance, due to which the workers were unaware of such a major activity underway in their immediate neighbourhood. While the workers were busy in work, a huge stone that flew from the blasting site hit him, leading to a serious head injury and death. The others were injured when some small stones hit them on the body, including the head. We have lodged a case, and further investigation is underway," he said.*

- *Flyrock 249:* On October 4, 2024, a blast at a construction site in Halifax, Nova Scotia, launched *flyrock debris* that landed on the driveway of Thiago Andrade's home, barely missing his car and front steps (Macdonald, 2024).

  > *Residents in the Spryfield area of Halifax are speaking out about ongoing blasting from two construction sites off Herring Cove Road – with one neighbour saying a "close call" with a rock could have killed someone.*
  >
  > *Thiago Andrade, who lives across the street from the blasting at the Green Acres construction site, says he was working from home on Oct. 4 when he felt and heard a rumble. "I heard this huge shake. About 10 seconds after the shake, I heard this noise, as if something had hit the house," he recalled. It turned out that a large rock had flown onto his driveway, barely missing his car and front steps. He estimates the rock weighs a pound.*

- *Flyrock 250:* In May 2024, a blast at a road construction site in British Columbia ejected a single rock (about 1 cubic foot in size) that struck and damaged high-voltage power lines on one side of the highway.[7]

  > *Blast mats had been placed before the blasting began, and no workers or other persons were exposed to the ejected rock, as the blast hazard area, including the highway, had been closed to traffic, and the worksite had been secured.*

- *Flyrock 251:* On October 14, 2024, a blast at a quarry in Banteay Meas district, Cambodia, showered *flyrock debris* that damaged six houses 300 metres from the foot of the mountain and injured four people (Soreachny & Sreypich, 2024).

  > *Phnom Meas Lime and Powder Enterprise in Kampot province has temporarily suspended rock blasting activities after authorities found that they used improper techniques, which injured four people and damaged nearby homes. District police chief Nak Dim told*

[7] "Recent Work-Related Incidents Reported to Worksafe BC," *Council of Construction Associations*, June 11, 2024. https://cocabc.ca/recent-work-related-incidents-reported-to-worksafebc-47/

> *CamboJA News that the local authorities were working on the case. He confirmed the number of casualties, adding that six houses were affected.*
> *"The authorities have always advised the team and foremen at the site, but that day, they probably used the wrong techniques," Dim said.*
> *The company compensated the victims who received medical treatment and repaired the damaged houses after it was informed of the incident, he added.Regarding the incident, he said the company paid compensation to the victims. Those who were seriously injured went to Phnom Penh for treatment. The company will repair the houses that were damaged. …*
> *Resident Khieu Sarith of Chrak Khlai village, Touk Meas Khang Lech commune, told CamboJA News that four villagers were seriously injured and were being treated at a hospital. According to him, the company has not paid any compensation to the injured people as it is waiting for them to return home after receiving treatment.*

- *Flyrock 252:* On August 17, 2004, a blast at a quarry in Winsted, Connecticut, launched thousands of pieces of *flyrock debris*, some three times the size of softballs, that injured two people, one seriously, and damaged the Waste Management facility and several vehicles at 185 Torrington Road. The flyrock debris field covered an area extending 274 metres from the blast site (Klimanowski, 2004).

> *One Waste Management employee was hit in the leg with a rock but refused medical treatment. Another employee, Cecil Brewer, was in the front office at the time of the explosion and was hit with glass fragments after a rock came crashing through the office window.*
> *"When the blast came, it was too high powered," said Mr. Brewer, who has worked for Waste Management for the past five years and is accustomed to the frequent blasting. "When the rocks came through the window, I turned around and just prayed nothing would hit me."*
> *Afterward, a handful of vehicles sat in the parking lot with the windshields and other windows smashed. About a half-dozen holes were evident in the building's facade, and some of the rocks landed just inches away from employees on the floor inside.*
> *Just before the explosion, traffic on both sides of Torrington Road was at a halt for safety reasons, a practice that happens before each explosion. Mr. Beadle said for some reason, a massive amount of "fly rock" was emitted from Tuesday's blast. He estimated that thousands of pieces of rock could have landed as far as 300 yards [274 metres] away from the blast site….*
> *About 20 Waste Management employees were in or around their work site when the explosion occurred. As the rocks showered down from above, many of them dove for cover, ducking down in their vehicles, sliding under vehicles, or hiding behind equipment big enough to shelter them from falling rock.*

- *Flyrock 253:* On March 12, 2024, a blast at a construction site in Uttar Pradesh, India, launched *flyrock debris* that struck and killed three and injured seven labourers.[8]

> *At least three people died and seven labourers were injured in an explosion during rock blasting when a portion of a hill fell on them in Uttar Pradesh's Mahoba on Tuesday, the police said. The incident took place near Pahara village of Kabrai Police Station area of the district, they said.*
> *On receiving the information, the police reached the spot and launched a rescue operation to retrieve the injured. Three people were pulled out from the debris and taken to the hospital, where the doctor declared them dead. However, the injured brought to the hospital are undergoing treatment. The officials informed the family members of the workers.*
> *Mahoba District Magistrate Mridul Chaudhary said, "The workers were engaged with the government lease work when the accident suddenly happened. Three labourers working at the site died after being buried under the debris, while the condition of one remains*

[8] "Three Killed, Seven Injured in Explosion During Rock Blasting in Uttar Pradesh," *Etv Bharat*, March 12, 2024. https://www.etvbharat.com/en/!state/explosion-during-rock-blasting-in-uttar-pradesh-enn24031204375

> *critical. Seven other people buried under the debris have been rescued and admitted to a hospital for treatment." Top officials, including SP Aparna Gupta, reached the spot*

- *Flyrock 254:* On March 5, 2025, a miner was fatally injured at a limestone quarry in Jersey, Illinois, when *flyrock debris* from blasting operations struck him. The miner was assisting in detonating the explosives. According to the news release issued by the U.S. Mine Safety & Health Administration, this has been the tenth fatality reported in 2025.[9]
- *Flyrock 255:* On April 17, 2025, a blast at the town quarry in Westerly, Rhode Island, operated by Maine Drilling and Blasting, launched *flyrock debris* that showered the neighbourhood and damaged several homes 200 yards (183 metres) from the quarry. Rocks struck four houses[10] and penetrated the roofs of two houses on Asaway Road, barely missing the expensive roof solar panels of one (Perik, 2025). The flyrock debris is thought to have been caused by a geological anomaly.[11]

  > *Multiple homes in the town sustained damage after rocks flew from a nearby quarry during blasting. The debris just missed McColl's expensive solar panels. Just a few houses down, there was another home with another hole. "It's like a meteor fell from the sky. After the explosion, a rock came flying and landed in the middle of the road," resident Nate Harrington said. Some rocks were the size of a baseball; others were larger than a size-11 shoe. The debris nearly crashed into cars. If someone were outside, they would have gotten nailed. They would have gotten hurt," a resident said. Neighbors said the quarry is approximately 200 yards away from the houses that were impacted. The town says at least four similar incidents have been reported. In 2018, two Westerly Department of Public Works employees had to go to the hospital after being struck by granite during a scheduled blast. Now, some neighbors are demanding a change. "Rocks are flying into people's houses. It's just ridiculous. It's just not right, and the town, somebody has to stop it."*
- *Flyrock 256:* On August 20, 2024, a blast at the Roxborough surface coal mine in Muswellbrook, NSW, launched *flyrock debris* 100 metres from the blast site and struck and damaged an onsite dozer, excavator, and haul truck (NSW Government, 2024).

  > *A worker was operating a Caterpillar D11T dozer in the Roxburgh Pit at the mine about 7.30 am on Tuesday, 20 August 2024. The dozer was operating on a bench directly in front of and below a Liebherr R-996 excavator. The excavator was loading a 793D haul truck. The bench being excavated had been fired by a planned shot on 20 May 2024.*
  >
  > *While the dozer operator was pushing blast waste material on the lower bench, an unplanned initiation of explosives occurred. The explosion caused multiple pieces of flying rock and parts from the dozer blade to be projected about 100 m from the incident site. The location of the explosion left a crater measuring 1.8 m deep and about 3.5 m in width.*

5. QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF FLYROCK INCIDENTS

A non-theoretical *quantitative* study of actual distances that flyrock has been launched from a blast site was undertaken by Sevelka (2022) (May 2021) and included in that analysis are 92 incidents of flyrock. Since then, more incidents of flyrock have been documented, expanding the data set from 92 to 147 incidents of flyrock (May 2025). Where flyrock debris has been launched over a large area or in more than one direction, only the furthest distance of the flyrock from the blast site is recorded, summarized, and arrayed in the following bar chart.

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[9] https://www.msha.gov/sites/default/files/Data_Reports/Fatals/Enforcement/2025/March%205%2C%202025%20-%20Fatality%20Alert%20-%20Calhoun%20Quarry.pdf

[10] "Westerly residents say homes were damaged by flying rocks after scheduled blasting," *The Western Sun,* April 21, 2025. https://www.thewesterlysun.com/news/westerly/westerly-residents-say-homes-were-damaged-by-flying-rocks-after-scheduled-blasting/article_0655c2bb-9f26-4ccb-b16b-091ce26c181a.html

[11] Geological condition may have caused damage in Westerly quarry blast, says fire marshal. https://turnto10.com/news/local/geological-condition-may-have-caused-damage-in-westerly-quarry-blast-says-fire-marshal-rhode-island-ashaway-road-rocks-roofs-april-23-2025.

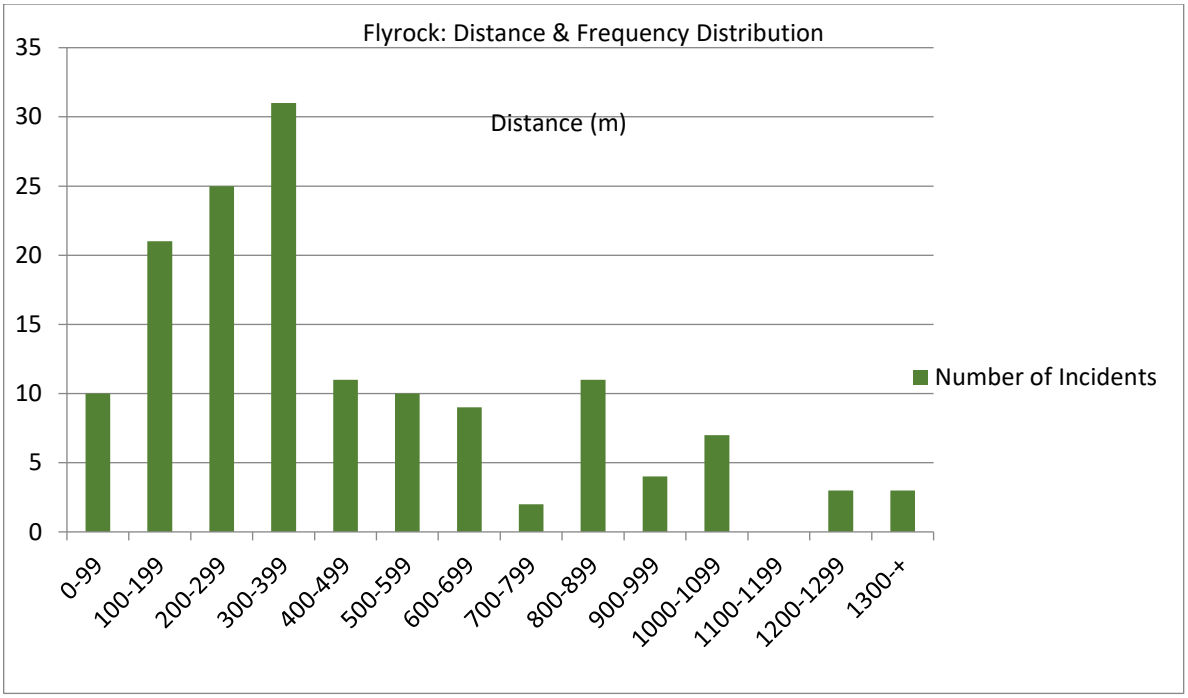

Figure 1: Analysis of Flyrock Travel Distances (May 2021 to May 2025)

- An analysis of 147 *flyrock* incidents, where the distance from the blast site is known, indicates that 96% (141) of the *flyrock* incidents occurred within 1,099 metres, and 98% (144) occurred within 1,299 metres. The number of *flyrock* incidents within each interval, starting at between 0-99 metres, and the average distance travelled within each interval are summarized as follows:

Table 1: Interval Distribution and Frequency of Flyrock Distances

Metres	*0-99*	*100-199*	*200-299*	*300-399*	*400-499*	*500-599*	*600-699*	*700-799*	*800-899*	*900-999*	*1000-1099*	*1100-1199*	*1200-1299*	*1300+*
Incidents	10	21	25	31	11	10	9	2	11	4	7	0	3	3
Cumulative	-	31	56	87	98	108	117	119	130	134	141	141	144	147
Average (m)	54	149	241	326	443	511	618	701	803	912	1013	-	1206	2307
% of Total	7%	14%	17%	21%	7%	7%	6%	1%	7%	3%	5%	0%	2%	2%
Cumulative %	-	21%	38%	59%	67%	73%	80%	81%	88%	91%	96%	96%	98%	100%

- At 91% of the 147 *flyrock* incidents, 134 *flyrock* incidents in ascending order reached a distance up to the 900 – 999 metre intervals, and, at 96%, which accounts for the first 141 *flyrock* incidents in ascending order, flyrock reached a distance up to the 1000 – 1099 metre interval.
- Based on this updated study of *flyrock* incidents (May 2025), the designated blast area (onsite safety zone) would have to be approximately 1,000 metres to effectively prevent 96% of *flyrock* incidents from leaving the boundaries of a blasting quarry site, equivalent to a 1,000-metre setback (excavation limit).

6. SETBACKS AND SEPARATION DISTANCES IN VARIOUS JURISDICTIONS

Setbacks and Separation distances for blasting quarries in the various jurisdictions listed below range from 500 metres to 3,219 metres (Tippecanoe, Indiana), and are in sharp contrast to the wilfully reckless and negligent 30-metre setback permitted in Ontario, Canada, under the ARA:

- 2 miles (3,219 metres) from any site with 100 or more residential homes, quarries are prohibited (Tippecanoe County, Indiana)[12]
- 3,000 metres from a residential, commercial, or industrial area (Nigeria)[13]
- 5,000 feet (1,524 metres) quarries, rock crushers, gravel pits, cryptocurrency mining, landfills, adult entertainment and methadone clinics not permitted within this distance of a residence, school, church and other uses that include various public facilities that serve the community's health, education, and public welfare needs (DeKalb County, Tennessee) (Page, 2024).
- 5,000 feet (1,524 metres) quarries, rock crushers, and gravel pits not permitted within this distance of sensitive land uses and protects the inhabitants from uses of property detrimental or likely to be detrimental to their *health, safety, and welfare* (Grundy County, Tennessee)[14]
- >1,000 metres from a residential or sensitive land use, boundary of a Settlement Area or Waterfront designation (Algonquin Highlands, Ontario, Canada)[15]
- 1,000 metres minimum buffer distance from existing or proposed residential development where blasting is involved (Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada)[16]
- 1,000 metres from the planned maximum extent of quarry operations to any sensitive use (Tasmania, Australia)[17]
- One-half mile (805 metres) from any residential zone (Palm Springs, California)[18]
- 800 metres separation between blasting and offsite structures (Nova Scotia, Canada)[19]
- 600 metres minimum from residential, commercial, and mixed-use (Quebec, Canada)[20]
- 600 metres from any drinking water supply well (New Brunswick, Canada)[21]
- 500 metres minimum separation distance from sensitive land use (Timmins, Ontario, Canada)[22]
- 500-metre radius from blast site treated as onsite danger zone (Dangers due to blasting projectiles) (India).

In Ontario, Canada, according to the ARA, flyrock is not to be launched beyond the boundaries of a quarry site. A licensee or permittee must take all "reasonable" measures to prevent flyrock from leaving the site during blasting if a "sensitive receptor" is located within 500 metres of the boundary of the site. ARA defines "sensitive receptor":

a) a school or childcare centre, or

b) any residence or facility at which at least one person sleeps, including a long-term care home, hospital, trailer park, or campground.

"Facility", another undefined term in the ARA, is a broad and all-encompassing term, as indicated by the following sources:

1. Merriam-Webster defines "facility" as something that makes an action, operation, or course of conduct easier, usually used in the plural. It can also refer to a building or area that is used for a particular activity or purpose.[23]

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12 *Rogers Group, Inc. v. Tippecanoe County*, 52 N.E. 3d 848 (2016), https://case-law.vlex.com/vid/rogers-grp-inc-v-887446794

13 https://www.nesrea.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Quarrying_and__Blasting_Operations.pdf?form=MG0AV3

14 *Tinsley Properties, LLC v. Grundy County*, No. M2022-01562-COA-R3-CV, Tenn: Court of Appeals, 2023, https://law.justia.com/cases/tennessee/court-of-appeals/2024/?page=2

15 https://www.algonquinhighlands.ca/municipal-services/planning/official-plan/

16 Department of Municipal and Provincial Affairs, 1996, *City Sand and Gravel Limited v. Newfoundland (Municipal and Provincial Affairs),* 2007 NLCA 51 (CanLII), <https://canlii.ca/t/1sfnv>, retrieved on 2025-01-06. Leave to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada denied. *City Sand and Gravel Limited and O.D. Holdings Limited v. Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Newfoundland, as represented by The Honourable Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs*, 2008 CanLII 1399 (SCC), <https://canlii.ca/t/1vgkt>, retrieved on 2025-01-06

17 Tasmania EPA Quarry Code of Practice, 3rd Ed Edition, *May, 2017*, p. 10. https://epa.tas.gov.au/Documents/Quarry%20Code%20of%20Practice%20May%202017%20-%20web.pdf

18 City of Palm Springs Zoning Code § 93.23.03 B. https://ecode360.com/43605872#43605868

19 The NSE Pit and Quarry Guidelines (1999) stipulated setbacks to prevent structural and environmental damage as well as the requirements for pre-blast surveys, blast monitoring, and blast designs. https://novascotia.ca/nse/issues/docs/Pit_and_Quarry_Guidelines.pdf

20 "11. The operating site of a new quarry must be located at a minimum distance of 600 m from any dwelling, unless the dwelling is owned or rented to the owner or operator of the quarry." 10. It is prohibited to establish a new…quarry, the operating site of which is located in a territory zoned by the municipal authorities for residential, commercial or mixed purposes (commercial residential0. It is also prohibited to establish a new quarry less than 600 m from such territory…". https://www.legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/document/cr/q-2,%20r.%207

21 Rock Quarry Siting Standards. Effective August 2012. https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/env/pdf/Air-Lair/RockQuarrySitingStandards.pdf

22 City of Timmins Zoning By-law 2011-7100, as amended. https://timmins.civicweb.net/filepro/documents/238/?preview=13810

23 https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/facility

2. Cambridge Dictionary: Defines "facility" as a place, especially including buildings, where a particular activity happens. It can also refer to the ability to do something easily or well.[24]
3. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary: Defines "facility" as buildings, services, equipment, etc., that are provided for a particular purpose. It can also refer to a place used for a particular activity or a special feature of a machine or service that makes it possible to do something extra.[25]

A *Residence* or *Facility,* where at least one person sleeps, includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- *Residential Homes:* Houses, apartments, and condos where individuals or families reside.
- *Hotels and Motels:* Lodging establishments offering rooms for short-term stays.
- *Inns:* Establishments providing overnight accommodations for travellers and guests, often with a more intimate and cozier atmosphere (e.g., The Liberty Inn, former Cataract Inn, Hamlet of Cataract, Caledon, Ontario).
- *Bed and Breakfasts (B&Bs):* Home-like establishments offering overnight accommodations and breakfasts
- *Hospitals and Healthcare Facilities*: Places where patients may stay overnight for medical treatment, including hospitals, clinics, and rehabilitation centers.
- *Nursing Homes and Elderly Care Facilities:* Long-term care facilities for the elderly or individuals with disabilities.
- *Childcare Centers and Boarding Schools:* Facilities where children and students may reside overnight, such as boarding schools and residential childcare centers.
- *Campgrounds and RV Parks:* Areas designated for camping, where individuals may sleep in tents, RVs, or cabins.
- *Shelters and Temporary Housing:* Facilities providing temporary accommodation for individuals experiencing homelessness or other emergencies.
- *Correctional Facilities:* Prisons, jails, and other detention centres where inmates reside.
- *Military Barracks:* Housing for military personnel.
- *Dormitories and Student Housing:* Accommodations for students, typically on or near college and university campuses.
- *Group Homes:* Residential facilities for individuals with special needs or disabilities.
- *Monasteries, Convents, and Religious Retreats:* Facilities where members of religious orders or individuals on retreat may reside.
- *Golf Resort with Lodging Facilities:* Golf courses that offer overnight accommodation for guests (e.g., TPC Toronto at Osprey, Caledon, Ontario).

As an example, in the Town of Caledon, Ontario, several zoning categories permit residential or accommodation-related uses:

- *A1 (Agricultural), A2 (Rural),* and *A3 (Small Agricultural Holdings)* permit an "Accessory Apartment," Bed and Breakfast Establishment," and "Detached Dwelling."[26]
- *A1 (Agricultural)* and *A2 (Rural)* permit an "Accessory Dwelling" and "Accessory Bunkhouse."
- *OS (Open Space)* permits an "Accessory Dwelling Unit."[27]
- *CV (Village Commercial)* permits "Accessory Dwelling" and "Accessory Dwelling Unit."[28]
- *Beacon Hall Lands (Part of Lots 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 & 21, Concession 3 WHS and Part of Lots 16, 17 & 18), Concession 4 WHS)*[29]
    - *OS (Open Space)* permits "Accessory House,"
    - *A1 (Agricultural)* permits "Apartment-in-House Unit," Bunkhouse," "Accessory House," and "One-Family House."

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[24] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/facility
[25] Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, s.v. "facility," accessed https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/facility.
[26] Caledon Zoning By-law – Section 10 Agricultural and Rural Zones. https://www.caledon.ca/en/town-services/resources/Documents/business-planning-development/zoning-by-law/2023/Nov-11-2024/Section-10-ACCESSIBLE.pdf
[27] https://www.caledon.ca/en/town-services/resources/Documents/business-planning-development/zoning-by-law/June-09-2022/Section-12
[28] https://www.caledon.ca/en/town-services/resources/Documents/business-planning-development/zoning-by-law/2023/Nov-11-2024/Section-7-ACCESSIBLE.pdf
[29] https://www.caledon.ca/en/town-services/resources/Documents/business-planning-development/zoning-by-law/March-24-2022/Section-13.2-ACCESSIBLE.pdf

The broad interpretation of "facility" highlights the critical need for stringent separation distances and safety measures to protect sensitive receptors, sensitive land uses, and activities from the risks associated with blasting operations. Additionally, it reinforces the need to carefully read land use documents (e.g., Zoning By-laws, Official Plans, Provincial Planning Statement, 2024,[30] MOECP D-6 Land Use Compatibility Guidelines[31]), as permitted uses often vary between municipalities, even when zones share similar labels, such as "Agricultural." Safeguarding the environment and protecting the health, safety, and welfare of the community from the potentially deadly consequences of flyrock debris is the critical obligation of local government. However, achieving this requires a comprehensive understanding of the risks posed by blasting operations — an understanding that is often absent in municipalities and among their planning staff. Bridging this awareness gap is essential to developing proactive and permanent land use compatibility measures that prioritize safety and environmental preservation.

7. CONCLUSION

These findings underscore the critical need for updated and more stringent safety regulations around blasting operations in Ontario and elsewhere, where land use incompatibility is an issue and the community is at risk. Here are some key insights that can be drawn from the analysis:

1. *Current Safety Measures are Insufficient:* The data indicates that flyrock can travel significant distances, often well beyond estimated safety setbacks. The fact that 96% of incidents occur within 1,099 metres of the blast site suggests that existing safety measures are inadequate to protect the public.
2. *Need for Extended Safety Zones:* To effectively contain flyrock within the boundaries of blasting sites, safety zones and permanent onsite setbacks (excavation limits) must be significantly expanded to a minimum of 500 metres.
3. *Permanent Offsite Separation Distances:* Protecting the environment and safeguarding sensitive land uses and activities requires a minimum separation distance of 1,000 metres, measured from the site boundaries, aligning with best practices adopted in other jurisdictions.
4. *Regulatory Oversight:* The current lack of definition and protocols for flyrock in the Ontario Aggregate Resources Act highlights a critical gap in regulatory oversight. Clear definitions and stringent safety protocols must be established to ensure public safety.
5. *Competency of Blasters:* The absence of licensing requirements for blasters in Ontario raises concerns about the competency and safety practices of those handling explosives. Mandatory certification and regular training are essential to minimize the risk of flyrock incidents.
6. *Transparency and Reporting:* The aggregate industry's underreporting of flyrock incidents needs to be addressed. Mandatory reporting and public disclosure of all incidents are crucial to understanding the full scope of the problem and implementing effective solutions.
7. *Community Involvement:* Municipalities and local communities must be actively involved in the decision-making process regarding land use compatibility and safety regulations. Public awareness campaigns and community engagement can help ensure that residents are informed and protected.

By implementing these insights, regulators and municipalities can better protect the environment and safeguard employees ' and residents' health, safety, and well-being near blasting operations. The findings underscore the urgent need to implement comprehensive reforms to address the dangers of flyrock effectively and permanently.

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[31] D-6 Compatibility between Industrial Facilities (A guide for land use planning authorities). https://www.ontario.ca/page/d-6-compatibility-between-industrial-facilities

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATIONS AND ESSENTIAL ETHICAL COMPLIANCES

Author's Contributions (in accordance with ICMJE criteria for authorship)
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Research involving human bodies or organs or tissues (Helsinki Declaration)
The author(s) solemnly declare(s) that this research has not involved any human subject (body or organs) for experimentation. It was not a clinical research. The contexts of human population/participation were only indirectly covered through literature review. Therefore, an Ethical Clearance (from a Committee or Authority) or ethical obligation of Helsinki Declaration does not apply in cases of this study or written work.

Research involving animals (ARRIVE Checklist)
The author(s) solemnly declare(s) that this research has not involved any animal subject (body or organs) for experimentation. The research was not based on laboratory experiment involving any kind of animal. Some contexts of animals are also indirectly covered through literature review. Therefore, an Ethical Clearance (from a Committee or Authority) does not apply in cases of this study or written work.

Research on Indigenous Peoples and/or Traditional Knowledge
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To see original copy of these declarations signed by Corresponding/First Author (on behalf of other co-authors too), please download associated zip folder [Ethical Declarations] from the published Abstract page accessible through and linked with the DOI: https://doi.org/10.33002/jpg050101.

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The Quest for Institutional Engineering in Post-Liberation South Sudan: Should it be Decentralization or Federalism?

Jacob Dut Chol Riak
Department of Political Science, University of Juba, South Sudan. Email: dutsenior@yahoo.com
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4017-8612

ABSTRACT

The quest for institutional engineering in post-liberation South Sudan has been a dream for institutional engineers in political science and, particularly, comparative politics for a very long time. While many South Sudanese view decentralization and federalism as the same, the empirical literature and fieldwork carried out look at decentralization as a system of governance where powers at the national government are delegated to the sub-national levels of the government. Besides, federalism is discussed as the surrendering of powers at the national level to the sub-national levels of governments. The powers that are delegated can be taken back by the national government, while the powers surrendered cannot be taken back by the national level, except for the concurrent powers. This study argues that federalism and, particularly, territorial type, are the best institutional engineering for South Sudan. This was demonstrated by 60% of 200 respondents who emphasized that South Sudan should immediately adopt territorial federalism. Although other South Sudanese and their leaders associated federalism with *Kokora,* a Bari word for 'division or divide', this has not been the case from the literature review and discussions of the results. The majority of the respondents indicated that federalism is not associated with *Kokora,* as it is a concept of surrendering powers to the sub-national levels of governments. Hence, there is no fear of *Kokora* coming back to target the non-Equatorians as it was done in the 1980s. While the study used process-tracing and a case study of South Sudan as its methodology, it also used a mixed research design that enhanced qualitative as well as quantitative approaches. Although the study deployed a sampling technique of random and cluster sampling, it determined a sample size of 200 respondents, which is sufficient for generalization. It is crucial to conclude that federalism with a territorial type is urgently required for the case of South Sudan. The government should carry out civic education on territorial federalism, and it should be adopted immediately to chart the path of South Sudan to prosperity. While adopting territorial federalism for South Sudan, quality leadership is critical for this type of federalism to yield positive results.

Keywords: Decentralization; Federalism; Institutional engineering; Kokora; Post-liberation

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1. INTRODUCTION

Institutional design or engineering is one of the essential topics within the subfield of comparative politics. To engineer institutions is to design them for a divided society so that they can consent and build peace amongst the elites. Indeed, divided societies refer to plural polities or communities that are polarized by conflicts, political, social, or economic strife, and civil wars, and their elites must be politically accommodated for stability to return (Lijphart, 1968). Political engineering provides a platform for resolving the conflicts and reuniting the plural societies/communities or polities. Arend Lijphart, the father of institutional engineering, has provided a seminal prescription for the divided plural societies as he argues:

> "My central message to the political leaders of plural societies is to encourage them to engage in a form of political engineering: if they wish to establish or strengthen democratic institutions and prosperity in their countries, they must become consociation engineers" (Lijphart, 1977).

However, Barry views consociationalism as part and parcel of political scientists' lives:

> "The 'consociation democracy' thesis can be seen as part of the movement among political scientists in recent years towards a reassertion of politics as the "master science" in reaction to the socio-economic reductionism implicit in the explanatory claims of political sociology and more importantly, designing political institutions through the prisms of decentralization or federalism" (Barry, 1975).

Nonetheless, a critical inquiry into institutional principles is cardinal:

> "Is the resolution of intense but conflict preferences in the plural society manageable in a democratic institutional framework without decentralization of federalism? We think not" (Rabushka & Shepsle, 1972).

This study provides critical nuances of institutional engineering in post-liberation South Sudan. It sets out the debates of rethinking South Sudan's institutional options for governance in order to allow power and resources distribution to the citizens at the grassroots. Decentralization and the federal systems of governance are exhaustively analyzed and discussed from the empirical literature and fieldwork perspectives to discern the best option for South Sudan. The article is organized as follows: the first section introduces the paper. Section two discusses the literature review. Section three discusses the paper's methodology. Section four discusses results and findings. Section five concludes, and section six gives pointers for further research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Decentralization in South Sudan

Decentralization as a system of governance was first introduced by then-President Jaafar Nimeiri in 1976 in Sudan. He divided all of the Sudan provinces into two: Northern and Southern provinces. Regionalism was then introduced in the north in 1980, when the old Northern provinces were reassembled as regions (Johnson, 2014). The powers of these northern regional governments were considerably less than the powers conferred on the Southern Region by the Addis Ababa Agreement of 1972. Upon the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, South Sudan established 10 states, 80 counties, 523 payams, and 2200 bomas and, thus, decentralized the service delivery (National Bureau of Statistics, 2009). On 2nd October 2015, President Kiir issued an executive order 36 (#EO 36) decreeing the dissolution of the 10 states and breaking them into 28 states and further into 32 states. Later on, President Kiir reversed EO 36 and decreed the country to 10 states and 3 administrative areas of Greater Pibor, Ruweng, and Abyei as provided for in the Transitional Constitution 2011 as amended. South Sudan has three levels of government: the National, the States, and the Local Governments. These levels have either failed or are failing to provide public services to the South Sudanese citizens, and therefore, critical research was vital to assess whether decentralization has done better or not in delivering services to the citizens of the nascent state, and whether federalism should be an option.

2.2. The Concept of Decentralization

Various scholars and policy practitioners have attempted to conceptualize the word "decentralization" to make sense and a case in this ever-changing world. Scholars such as Armin Von Bigdandy, Rudiger Wolfrum, and others have endeavored to make sense of decentralization. According

to the two scholars, the term decentralization is often used to describe legal and political structures that distribute power territorially within a state or beyond a state (Armin and Rudiger, 2024). This broad notion of decentralization encompasses confederations, federations, and decentralized unitary states, since all of those systems distribute governmental powers to at least two levels. Moreover, David De Dau, a policy practitioner, defines decentralization as the transfer of authority and responsibility for public functions from the central government to intermediate and local governments or quasi-independent government organizations, or the private sector (Dau, 2014).

Furthermore, Richard K. Mulla in his seminal piece entitled "*South Sudan: Federalism or Decentralization",* defines decentralization as the process by which functions of and decision-making authority are transferred from the national government to the sub-national governments or from one sub-national government to yet a lower one, depending on the tiers of the government established in a particular country (Mulla, 2014). While Mohammed Kerre argues that decentralization means increased efficiency, more equity, and greater participation and responsiveness of government to the demands of their citizens, it is, therefore, a political and administrative process that defines a shift in the locus of power (political and administrative) from traditional lines of command and control to popularly elected local level (Mulla, 2014). It involves the transfer of powers and functions from the center to the lowest political entities (Armin & Rudiger, 2024).

2.3. Dimensions of Decentralization

Decentralization has political, financial, and administrative dimensions. Political decentralization involves the transfer of authority to the local level through an elected local government (perhaps as part of democratic transition), electoral reform, political party reform, authorization of participatory processes, and other reforms (Armin & Rudiger, 2024). Financial or fiscal decentralization involves regulating intergovernmental transfer of resources and giving jurisdictions greater authority to raise revenue. Administrative decentralization transfers to the local level functional services such as health care services, the operation of schools, the management of service personnel, building and maintenance of roads, and garbage collection (Mulla, 2014).

Decentralization tends to be strongest when real political autonomy, significant administrative responsibility, and the financial resources to carry out primary functions have all been transferred to the local level. Parameters such as local autonomy and authority, local accountability, local resource availability, and effective local institutions can therefore be used to measure the effectiveness of decentralization (Armin & Rudiger, 2024).

In a unitary decentralized system, sovereignty lies exclusively with the central government. This does not mean, however, that unitary states are governed entirely by the center. Although final responsibility lies with the central government, many state functions are exercised on regional or local levels, closer to the people and their needs (Mulla, 2014). Regional or local authorities may exercise many administrative powers, but may design policies only insofar as the center allows them to. Traditionally, local governments focus on providing local public services and implementing national welfare policies (Hague & Harrop, 2010). Typical competences include economic development, local planning, social assistance, social housing, cemeteries, fire service, libraries, and primary education. However, sub-national authorities in unitary states fulfill these functions only within the limits of the powers assigned to them by the center (Armin & Rudiger, 2024). Therefore, a well-functioning decentralized system depends on the goodwill of the unitary central government, instead of relying on existing constitutional divisions of power.

2.4. South Sudan and the Continuation of the Decentralized System

Since its independence in 2011, South Sudanese have been questioning the suitability of the decentralization system of government in the delivery of services. While most citizens think that the conundrum does not lie in the system of governance in South Sudan, but on effective leadership, others argue that decentralization as a system of governance has concentrated the power at the center, in this case, the national government. Going by any of the arguments, the decentralization system is on the sacrificial altar of South Sudan institutional engineering. Decentralization is a good option because it is what the people of South Sudan want and have always yearned to get, as the best form of governance (Riek, 2015). However, the way it is expressed leaves a lot to be desired. For example, the system is lacking practicality and political will from the Government (Armin & Rudiger, 2024). It is commonly believed

that decentralization is closely linked to democracy as it empowers people to have a say in their affairs, particularly, how they would like to be governed (Armin & Rudiger, 2024). This way, they feel a sense of dignity and sense of self-worth (Mulla, 2014).

However, the periods of decentralization (1972-1983 and 2005-2024) can be considered as failed attempts (Armin & Rudiger, 2024). The main problem has been constant interference and undermining of lower-level governments by the respective Presidents (Mulla, 2014). Numeiri first did those actions in 1980, 1981, and 1983 when he dissolved the regional governments in South Sudan to achieve his objective of controlling and marginalizing the Southern Region (sic) (Riek, 2015). The Self-Government Act 1972 (the then Constitution for Southern Region) was abrogated, it broke down, and the South Sudan People Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/SPLA) war of 1983 started. However, given the independence of South Sudan, the trend concerning the decentralization system did not change. Richard K. Mulla argues that President Kiir has followed the same footsteps of President Nimeiri: he has never respected any constitution fully since he took power in 2005 (Mulla, 2014). He appointed the ministers, members of the national legislature, senior civil servants, senior officers of the organized forces, and the judges of the High Court, Court of Appeal, and Supreme Court, and also dismissed elected governors at his will amongst others (Mulla, 2014). Thus, President Kiir and his government ministers have insisted on having a decentralized government amidst widespread cries for federalism in Equatoria and Upper Nile states… (Riek, 2015). Though this has been the strategy, the real problem has, however, been the greed of those in power wishing to centralize more power to loot the country and marginalize the rest of the other communities (Mulla, 2014).

Besides, the administrative or financial decentralization has not achieved much in South Sudan. What is lacking is a system that checks the corruption or how funds are spent in the states and counties. In Uganda, for example, the government had introduced what they called 'public expenditure tracking', which ensures that funds released to districts are accounted for by the respective recipients, either in districts or counties (Mabor, 2015). This method, according to the Ugandan government, has ensured upward accountability and thus tries to minimize the misappropriation of the transferred funds. This could have been borrowed in South Sudan to advance rewarding administrative decentralization.

However, a resident South Sudanese journalist, Ngor Garang Arol, argues that South Sudan has been applying fiscal decentralization as the political system in dispensing services to the citizens without tangible improvement. He argues for the alternative: In South Sudan, we have tried fiscal decentralization, and the result is known to all of us. Much of the budget has always been spent in Juba, leaving little to the states, and explains why, up to today inter inter-state roads supposedly funded by the national authority are in a dilapidated state. So why not try another system and see how it will work instead of sticking to the same system we have tried in the past 10 years? (Garang, 2015).

Instead of working for a consensus system of governance, President Kiir, as argued elsewhere in this study, issued Executive Order Number 36 on 2nd October 2015, further decentralizing the existing country's 10 states into 28 states. He issued another order creating four more states, making a total of 32 states, plus Abyei, and later the President reversed the decision to 10 states and 3 administrative areas. The President's move has been challenged as it contravenes the Revitalized Agreement on Resolution of Conflicts in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) and the Transitional Constitution 2011 as amended. The Transitional Constitution 2011, though amended, initially stipulated 10 decentralized states of South Sudan plus the Abyei Area. Based on the Transitional Constitution, the country is governed on the basis of a decentralized democratic system and is an all-embracing homeland for its people. Confusion emerged on the notion of the SPLM policy of "taking towns to the rural areas" and the introduction of federalism. The Executive Order Number 36 came as a surprise to many as the Sudan People's Liberation Movement in Government (SPLM-IG) had previously opposed the Sudan People's Liberation Movement in Opposition (SPLM-IO)'s proposal of dividing South Sudan into states (Rens and Deng, 2015). Many viewed the default Executive Order 36 as causing trouble to the people in rural areas, not services, as the architect of the order said. Indeed, the division of the country into 28 and 32 states caused more harm than good, as communities who have never had physical confrontation in their lives fought amongst themselves. The vivid example is the Murle community in Greater Pibor.

2.5. The Concept of Federalism

Pertinent scholars and policy gurus have attempted to define federalism. According to Richard K. Mulla in his groundbreaking piece "*South Sudan: Federalism or Decentralization",* federalism is a system of governance whereby powers are divided in such a manner that the national government and the state government are each within a sphere of coordinate and independent (Mulla, 2014). To him, federalism is an equal to an ideology that combines shared rule with self-rule. Armin Von Bogdandy and Rudiger Wolfrum in their seminal work *"The Principles of Vertical Separation of Powers: A comparative Overview of Legal Concepts and Structures*", define federalism as a political system whereby powers are divided between central government and numerous regional governments in which central government cannot revoke these powers (Armin & Rudiger, 2024). In other words, federalism means 'coming together' of countries into one political system, mainly for the protection of their common interests and enhancement of their mutual benefits.

Federalism is defined as a form of government whereby the constitution provides that power is divided or shared between a central form of government and regional governments like states (Johnson, 2014). Through laws and officials, both governments act directly on the people, but also have to agree on any changes to the constitution. The division of power between the central government and its regional subdivisions may vary among different countries. In areas like defense and foreign policy, some regional governments may join the central government in making decisions. Some would say that federalism came about because too much power is concentrated in the central government, and many regional governments wanted to retain local power and pride (Armin & Rudiger, 2024). Others would say that the central government saw the need to provide services and public goods to the lower levels and thus surrender federalism to the regional governments. Whatever the case, this setup is particularly helpful in countries with large territories.

Besides, federalism is also seen as a possible solution to address differences among populations divided by cultural or ethnic backgrounds, but still seeking common law and order (Johnson, 2014). Moreover, William Riker argues that the essential institutions of federalism are a government of the federation and a set of governments for the member units, in which both kinds of governments rule over the same territory and people and each kind has the authority to make some decisions independently of the other (Riker, 1964). However, federalism could only be successful if there is strong, accountable leadership at all levels of the government.

2.6. Dimensions of Federalism

Federalism has various dimensions and types when dissecting its concept. Although the dimensions have been contested by the scholarly debates, political scientists and experts of government political systems have agreed on a few dimensions. For this study, some types of federalism are analyzed as follows, inter alia:

"Firstly, we begin with fiscal federalism that is associated with the allocation of resources to the sub-national levels of government, thus reducing centralization of resources at the national level. It has six building blocks such as expenditure assignment to refer to division of powers/responsibilities; revenue assignment takes care of country shared taxes, establishing the base, rate and tax collection and transfers of funds to be done in cognizance of vertical and horizontal imbalance involving different types of transfer depending on context and policy objectives (Houlihan, 2015).

Secondly, there is territorial federalism in which political power and resources are surrendered to the sub-national levels based on territory. Thirdly, there is ethnic federalism, where political power and resources are surrendered to the sub-national governments based on ethnic cleavages. Although it was not originally designed as an instrument of ethnic conflict management, ethnic federalism has become very popular today as a governance mechanism for 'holding together' multiple ethnic communities in a single, multi-level polity (Diamond, 1999). By combining self-rule for individual communities at the sub-federal levels with shared rule for all groups at the federal level, ethnic federalism seems to provide the perfect formula for democratically maintaining unity in diversity in deeply divided societies (Turton, 2006). Yet, this is not the case for all ethnic federated states. Ethiopian federalism in practice has been described as a means by which the ruling party has divided the opposition along ethnic lines, making it difficult for a united opposition to rise and challenge its power (Johnson, 2014). The problem with Ethiopian federalism is not that it is insufficiently ethnic, but that it is insufficiently federal, and its emphasis on ethnicity may be the source of that weakness (Turton, 2006).

Fourthly, there is symmetrical federalism whereby all sub-national levels of government have the same constitutionally embedded obligations and rights (Armin & Rudiger, 2024). For example, the USA, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Argentina, and Brazil practice symmetrical federalism. Fifthly, and what is more, there is asymmetrical federalism which refers to whereby special rights are provided to the distinct members in the federation. For example, Canada-French speaking Québec has a number of prerogatives in law, immigration, and education that French-English does not have. In addition, in India, special rights are given to the Kashmir and Jammu areas and also to the Muslim minority (Effendi & Fatima, 2021). This is the same as the Catalans of Spain, who enjoy special rights from the Madrid government.

2.7. The Origin of Federalism and the Demands of South Sudanese Citizens

The demand for federalism by South Sudanese goes back as early as 1947, known best as the Juba Conference. The Juba Conference was organized for southern Sudanese leaders to deliberate and demand federalism in the Sudan. The majority of the leaders who organized and agitated for the conference hailed from the Equatoria region, though the Upper Nile and Bahr el Ghazal regions were represented. Having failed to acquire it, Southern Sudanese demanded federalism again in 1954, and this intensified the debate as all the chiefs and traditional leaders strengthened their positions. For example, Necodemo Gore raised the pertinent question, 'In case we receive federation, where shall we get our people to run it? How shall we finance it?' But Diu responded with passion:

> "May I draw your attention, gentlemen, chiefs of all tribes, elders, and citizens present in this house? I should like to know whether you in this house want to be slaves or it will be better for you to be poor and free and happy (sic)? I would like to know whether you understand the meaning of 'Federation' as explained to you (sic). Federation does not mean separation, but internal law and order in the United Sudan, for you to be able to look after your affairs…. My honorable gentleman NECODEMO GORE brought the question of management and finance of the Federation now under debate by Southerners…. About the first part of your question, the present Government must be bound to manage the federation of South Africa for fear of separation. If they cannot, we can manage to separate the country. This, I am quite sure, the present regime has in mind. To conclude, my dearest friend Mr. NECODEMO GORE, we are here for freedom and not money (sic)[1].

However, Chief Abdalla of Torit–Katire in Equatoria Province then broadened the debate about federation to include people from northern provinces- the Fur of Darfur, Fung of Blue Nile, and Nuba of Kordofan (Johnson, 2014). He declared (original spelling), 'I and my people strongly request federation to save my fellow Blacks in the North.' Musa Beshir, a non-tribal delegate from Khartoum who announced; repeated this call:

> "I am a delegate of 25,000 southerners in the North. This includes Nuba, Fur, and Fung, who carry the same idea of Federation (sic). In this respect, I am not representing the tribe, but I would prefer to say colour since the three communities referred to again and again (sic). There are backward arrears in the North far more backward than the Southern Sudan (sic). Therefore, I am speaking here for the Blacks who favored your demands for Federation (sic). Federation must go ahead to meet our demands in all our backward arrears, namely Fur, Fung, and Nuba Mountains (Johnson, 2014).

Although the South Sudanese chiefs had differences on the demand for federation, southern Sudanese politicians have had even stronger differences at the Round Table Conference (its official title), convened in Khartoum in March 1965. Aggrey Jaden, William Deng's deputy, advocated for the principle of self-determination as the only means of solving the 'Southern Problem', and equating self-determination with independence (Johnson, 2014). Whereas William Deng supported the unity of Southern Sudanese with the North on the hope that Southern problems could be resolved within a given framework, so that both Arab and black Africans could live together.

Thus, separatist southerners would use any opportunity to advocate for the federation of the region. For instance, 1969-1983, popularly known as the Nimeiri period, was utilized by southerners to advocate further for federalism, which was craftily duped as 'autonomy'. However, differences arose between southerners and northerners. The first major disagreement between the two sides was over the

[1] Minutes of Juba Conference: 18-21, October 1954. NAFO 371/108326-No.193.

very use of the term 'federal' to describe the role of the future central government (Ibid). Khartoum's delegation argued that the people's local Government Act of 1971 provided all the decentralization needed for the proposed Southern Regional Government to run effectively (Rens & Deng, 2015). However, the 1972 Addis Ababa Peace Agreement was abrogated, and southern Sudanese citizens continued with their quest for federal governance.

2.8. Federalism in South Sudan

After the independence of South Sudan, the idea of federalism as the system of governance surfaced, appeared ubiquitous, and reached its apogee in 2013, particularly after the December 15th, 2013 crisis. Discussions on the federal system of governance have polarized South Sudanese citizens. The debate in the independent South Sudan is now complicated by the fact that the opposition in the current political crisis, precipitated by December 2013, adopted 'federalism' as a political platform, while the government equates talk of federalism with subversion and disloyalty (Johnson, 2014). But if we were to learn anything from the history of southern Sudanese political thought, it is that federalism means many things. As the SPLM/SPLA warned at Abuja in 1992, 'no system is federal merely because it claims to be federal' (Wawa, 1992); the term has been used to describe what we are, in practice, highly centralized systems of government, as well as more radical projects of devolution that remain untried (Johnson, 2014).

2.9. Federalism as Re-institutional Engineering in Post-Liberation South Sudan

The South Sudanese 15th December 2013 political crisis triggered the debate of whether the state should go for federalism or not. Various scholars and policy practitioners have continued to reflect on the best option of institutional engineering to pull South Sudan out of 'political mud'. Indeed, proponents of federalism argue that the South Sudan state should be re-engineered to surrender resources and power to the sub-national levels of the government. However, the opponents of federalism argue that the ongoing system, decentralization, in critical observation, is already federalism in practice, and thus, there is no need to talk about any federalism per se. Hence, various divergences of federalism as the system of governance in South Sudan are analyzed below.

2.9.1. Federalism as a Panacea to South Sudanese Debacles

Many academics and policy practitioners have had frenzied debates on whether federalism was a panacea to South Sudan's political and economic quagmires or not. Interesting debates stretched to the time, perception that federalism is Equatorians' demand, political hijack of the concept by the opposition group waging war against the government, the purported type of federalism, and institutional challenges of federalism. Author begins the analysis of the timing of federalism; many people believe that federalism is an overdue demand that has evolved from 1947 till now, and thus it is a timely concept that South Sudanese citizens and the government must adopt and implement. The Statistical Intervention from Dr. Jafaar K. Juma entitled *"Assessing Public Opinion Towards Federalism: What is the Proportion of South Sudanese in Favour of Federalism*" reinforces the idea of timing and argues that federalism in South Sudan is immemorial particularly in Greater Equatoria Region, and thus the feelings of South Sudanese towards federalism in the whole country are practical and encouraging; nevertheless, the topic is sensitive and controversial following the 15th December 2013 (Karim, 2014).

Moreover, the consultations done with the concerned Jieng/Dinka Community Elders in Juba seem to agree with the idea of federalism as an alternative political system to resolve the republic conundrums. It argues that there was no problem with the federal governance except the fact that the country was marginalized by Khartoum and left without development (Agok, 2014). Therefore, there was a need for the country to consolidate itself for a reasonable period to use available resources for equitable development until a suitable time to apply a federal system … to the state without much difficulty. But as things stand now, this step has to be skipped and the federal system be introduced because the demand for it is a wish of the majority (Karim, 2014).

Moreover, Santino Mabek, a Canadian-based jurist, views federalism as one of the solutions for South Sudan's predicaments:

> "I think federalism, though not surely the panacea for all the ills that have afflicted our nation, can significantly reduce the level of tensions and domination that have plagued our nation. Without federalism, violent conflict, as a result of domination, both at the state and federal levels, will continue to define our political life for at least the next 30 years. Federalism also has

> the potential to serve as an engine of economic growth for South Sudan. This is because it improves economic efficiency (e.g., tax collection and competition) and helps the grassroots to identify their development priorities. It is federalism, no other model of governance, is the best option we can have. I don't regret that I shared this idea with Riek, even though his motivations are entirely different" (Mabek, 2015).

However, President Kiir, in many recorded speeches, has been quite skeptical about the adoption of federalism as a political system of governance replacing decentralization. In his speech of 18th March 2015 at Dr. John Garang's Mausoleum while addressing thousands of SPLM-IG supporters, President Kiir wondered why the advocates want federalism and the ongoing decentralization is federal in a nuanced sense. He says, 'I wonder what our people want, especially those who are advocating for federalism, the system we currently have is federalism in itself if you look at it closely' (Karim, 2014). James Adiok Mayik in his piece "*Why Federalism Must Wait?*' jumped into the presidential bandwagon and argues that federalism at this time in South Sudan shall disintegrate the country into tribal units other than administrative units and thus Adiok elucidates that tribal units can be very dangerous tool for Somalization of South Sudan (Mayik, 2014).

Nonetheless, South Sudanese tribes agreed on principles for the adoption of federalism as the system of governance. In a conference dubbed *as National Peace of South Sudan Tribes under the theme 'Peace Now!'* South Sudan Tribes United Against War, conducted at Nyakuron Culture Centre from 17th to 18th February 2015, resolved that a federal system should be the system of governance in South Sudan, and it should be part of the peace dialogue (sic) and a common and permanent solution to the war (UNMISS, 2015).

As the South Sudanese continued to embrace the idea of federalism, the perception that it is the Equatorians' demand sends jittery feelings to the wider spectrum of South Sudanese society. The Equatorian conferences conducted over the last few years have often resolved federalism as one of the systems of government that should be adopted as quickly as possible. This demand from Equatorians is seen as a solution to their socio-economic and political problems that are bedeviling the Equatoria region today. One of the concerns for the Equatoria citizens has been the extravagance of other states, particularly the Greater Upper Nile and Bahr el Ghazal regions, in the optimization of resources for development. The other reason has been the tight centralization of power and resources by the central Government without clear-cut development visions and paradigms. Equatorians see themselves as better off on their own on the development agenda and resource management than being drowned with others in a sea of mismanagement of resources, coupled with a lack of strategic and transformative vision. Thus, in their quest for peace, Equatorians Governors signed a position paper on the IGAD Peace Talks in Addis Ababa and resolved that Equatoria accepts that during transitional period, the TGoNU shall complete the permanent constitutional making process in South Sudan, which shall determine the future structure of government and the full implementation of a federal system of governance (Nyamilepedia, 2015). Although the position paper stands for the Greater Equatoria region, citizens from this region have not been widely consulted. Nonetheless, the R-ARCSS noted federalism as a political as well as system of governance of institutional engineering that shall be left to South Sudanese citizens to reject or adopt in the constitutional making dispensation.

Another interesting strand for analysis is the perception that the rebels known best as SPLM in Opposition had hijacked the idea of federalism following the 15th December 2013 political skirmishes. The SPLM-IO has been calling for the restructuring of the state on a new basis using federalism. This state of affairs has been deepened by the SPLM-IO in their proposal of 21 states along the 1956 boundaries of the South's districts (Riak, 2021). SPLM-IO threatens to take the Ethiopian example to the extreme, creating weak states and unable to challenge or restrain whoever holds power in the federal government (Johnson, 2014). But is this going to restore stability in South Sudan when states are federalized on an ethnic basis? The answer is certainly no. We have homogenous states such as Lakes, Northern Bahr el Ghazal, and Warrap, but the inter-clan animosity, sectional conflicts, and violence have been intensifying during pre- and post-independence times. This is due to compounded factors: cattle rustling and raids, high-level poverty, weak governance structures, and lack of reconciliations and restitutions amongst the communities. Thus, viewing ethnic federalism as an iota of peace, development, and security is an assumed proposition that has been overlooked.

The focus of many South Sudanese has been on the creation of the federal states, rather than on the balance between federal and state governments (Riak, 2021). The creation of a federal government

goes hand in hand with the creation of federal states. The failure of past regional experiments in the Sudan was that this principle was not adopted: the construction of decentralized states and regions was done primarily to protect the powers of those in charge of the central government (Johnson, 2014).

That aside, the institutional challenges of federalism range from levels of literacy that manifest in ethnic based decisions. James Adiok Mayik asserts that South Sudan has recorded more than a 70% illiteracy rate, which he argues is not sufficient to help the masses understand the literal meaning of federalism (Mayik, 2014). With such a level of human underdevelopment, more than 70% illiteracy rate makes ethnicity become an impediment for a knowledge-based and creativity-based economic development, which, say federalism in South Sudan at this time, will create villageism and savage belligerence amongst tribes (Mulla, 2014). We cannot plant federalism where the spirit of ethnocentrism is active, so as not to allow federalism in view, into a formal split of the South Sudan nation into factional ethnocentrism governments; that will start with rejection of those we view as trouble in our midst (Martin, 2022).

Yet with federal institutional challenges, South Sudanese proponents of federalism argue that federalism is a desirable system of governance for South Sudan. It is plausible that while our tribal nationalism is likely to set us against others, federalism in its crudest form has never been meant to promote any of the currently existing strong sentiments (Ramba, 2023). These regional sentiments are often sought after as a means of facing up to other regional blocs. But federalism is the opposite of prevailing regional political polarizations and antagonisms (Riak, 2021). The survival of the country as a democratic nation-state would depend on its adopting federalism (Mulla, 2014). Although federalism can be an ideal for a post-conflict environment of building and accommodating diversity, managing conflicts of diversities can be achieved through a federal system of administration that can avoid Dinka/Nuer conflict as happened in December 2013 or Equatoria/Dinka conflict as was the case in 1983 during "Kokora" (Mulla, 2014).

2.9.2. Federalism and the Phenomenon of Kokora in South Sudan

South Sudanese scholars and citizens mask their faces with the myth that federalism is associated with Kokora, a local word in Bari referring to 'division or to divide'. Bari-speaking groups traditionally inhabit the Equatoria region and include Bari, Mundari, Nyangwara, Kuku, Kakwa, and Pojulu. The simplest translation of Kokora into English is 'to divide' or 'division' (Rens & Deng, 2015). This state of affairs has continued to instill the fear of what this system of governance brings to the social cohesion of the country. Jacob K. Lupai, in his seminal work "*Kokora: Often Misunderstood, Grossly Misinterpreted and Most Feared",* argues that the word is misunderstood and misrepresented (Lupai, 2013). If that is so, it is not only that because of the way some in the three Equatoria states are reviving anti-Dinka (or *anti-jieng*) propaganda in support of federalism, but also because of the tribalism way the advocates of the Kokora applied it at the beginning of the last civil war (Kopling, 2020).

Douglas Johnson argues that some of them who lived through Kokora-and were abruptly and brusquely told to leave their jobs and back to their home regions, have every reason to be suspicious of the advocates of the new Kokora, especially after reading the comment sections on articles posted on South Sudan News Agency and Sudan Tribune websites (Johnson, 2014). However, Douglas Johnson cautions South Sudanese on the myth of federalism:

> "Let us be clear: Kokora is not the same as federalism. It did not create a federal state in Equatoria or any other place in Southern Sudan. It weakened the powers of regions while leaving the power of the central government in Khartoum untouched, enhanced even those who want genuine federalism are best advised not to adopt Kokora as their model (Johnson, 2014).

President Kiir echoes the same in his speech:

> "Kokora 'will happen' if a federal system is introduced in the country. (...) The issue that people are raising now is the same issue that came in 1983, Kokora (sic). And Kokora should not again derail us from what we are doing" (Radio Tamazuj News, 2014).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

Methodology commences with research design, which is defined as the gateway to research implementation (Smith, 2023). Research design addresses research problem, research objectives, findings and postulates conclusions. The common research design types include qualitative and quantitative research methods. While qualitative research focuses on interviews, focus group discussions (FGD), case studies and observation with narrative analysis, quantitative research focuses on surveys, correlational and experimental designs with statistical analysis (Creswell and Creswell, 2022). This study used a mixed research design that brought out qualitative and quantitative gateways, which helped in the in-depth analysis and discussions of the findings. This research design has demonstrated the rigorousness of the study in determining the suitability of federalism for South Sudan.

3.2. Area of Study

The study was carried out in Juba, South Sudan. Juba was chosen because it is advanced and the largest city, and above all, the seat of the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (RTGoNU). It is also the centre of academic and research, with numerous universities located there and, particularly, the premier University of Juba. Thus, academic and research exchanges usually take place in Juba. Discussions over decentralization vis-a-vis federalism have been taking place in Juba.

3.3. Sources and Procedures of Data Collection

The study used both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary source of data was obtained through surveys and interviews. Besides, secondary sources of data were obtained through statistical analysis of data and via review of literature from various books and journal articles. The procedure of data collection commenced after a research permit was obtained from the University of Juba, as well as from the National Security Service.

3.4. Study Population

The study used a target population of 400 respondents with knowledge on the subject from Juba, South Sudan.

3.5. Sampling Types

The study used random and cluster sampling types. Random sampling type was chosen because of the necessity of acquiring respondents at random to provide their views on the option of governance in South Sudan between decentralization and federalism. These respondents were later clustered around places such as Altabara, Munuki, Kator, Jebel, Gumbo, and Gudele.

3.6. Determination of Sample Size

The sample size of this study was ascertained using a formula proposed by Taro Yamane (1967) with a 95% level of confidence, and when the size of the target population is known (Yamane, 1967). The size (n) is ascertained based on the formula below:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + (e)^2}$$

Where N= population size, e=level of precision (0.05), n= sample size

$$n = \frac{400}{1 + 400(0.05^{2)}}$$

$$n = \frac{400}{1 + 400(0.0025)}$$

400

$$n = \frac{}{1 + 1}$$

$$n = \frac{400}{2} = 200$$

Hence, the sample size of this study is 200 respondents with knowledge of institutional engineering in post-liberation South Sudan.

3.7. Data Collection and Instruments

The study put in place data collection instruments such as questionnaires and interview guides to collect the data on the quest for institutional engineering in post-liberation South Sudan: should it be decentralization or federalism? Questionnaires and interview guides were successfully administered with the following questions:

1. What do you know about the current system of governance in South Sudan? Is it a decentralized or federalized system? Kindly explain your answer in a few words
2. If your answer above was either decentralization or federalism. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the system that you have just chosen for South Sudan?
3. A lot of academic and policy debates have been going on about the best system of governance, particularly, after the December 15th 2013 and 8th July 2016 political crisis in South Sudan. Which system of governance between decentralization and federalism do you prefer and why?
4. If your choice above was federalism. What type of the following federal system would you prefer?
   a. Ethnic federalism ☐ b. Territorial federalism ☐ c. Fiscal federalism ☐
   d) Asymmetrical federalism ☐
5. Once you have chosen your favorite type of federalism; when do you think this can be implemented?
   a. Immediately after the resolution of South Sudan political crisis ☐
   b. At the end of two and half years transition period ☐
   c. In 2020 ☐ d. In 2025 ☐ e. Others (please specify)_____
6. Do you think federalism is synonymous with *Kokora* (A Bari word for division or to divide)?
   a) Strongly Agreed ☐ b) Agreed ☐ c. Strongly Disagreed ☐
   d) Disagreed ☐

3.8. Piloting of Research Instruments

Questionnaires and interview guides were piloted to ensure their correctness and compatibility. A 10% sample size (200), which consisted of 20 questionnaires and interview guides, was distributed to respondents. Piloting resulted in the immediate correction of poorly set questions, paving the way for successful data collection.

3.9. Quality/Error Control

The study prioritized quality and error control during data collection. Errors were subsequently avoided. Reliability and validity mechanisms of data collection were administered, and 200 sample size was collected without any problem.

3.10. Reliability

A Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficient (CARC) of 0.801 was obtained, which is above 0.7. Thus, the research instruments, such as questionnaires and interview guides, were found to be reliable. Cronbach's Alpha was deployed to ascertain the internal consistency and success of any study. Cronbach's Alpha is, therefore, calculated by correlating the score of each scale item with the total score for each determination (normally surveyed respondents or test takers) and then comparing that to the variance for all respondents' item scores.

3.11. Validity

The validity of research instruments was evaluated using expert judgments, such as professional views from academic peers. Three experts were contacted, and they critically assessed the validity of the instruments. The experts were asked to rate questions depending on their relevancy. The Content Validity Index (CVI) was established by dividing the number of items rated relevant by and total number of items. It is clear that CVI was 0.775, which was above 0.7, and thus, research instruments were considered valid.

3.12. Data Analysis

The study was analyzed using applications such as SPSS Statistics V. 21, charts, Excel, and, above all, descriptive analysis where data was interpreted and presented. Data cleaning was conducted, and analyses were presented and rigorously discussed appropriately.

3.13. Ethics in Research

The study was conducted under the highest ethical standards in any scientific research. For instance, ethics in scientific research, such as confidentiality, integrity, consent, anonymity, and benevolence, were used during the entire research process. All respondents who were randomly surveyed, clustered, and interviewed were considered and treated with confidentiality. There were no ethical problems encountered during this study.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Query on South Sudan as either a Decentralized or Federalized System

Many of the 200 surveyed respondents argued that the current system of governance in South Sudan is decentralized. However, they wondered about the reality of such decentralization. As they argued that a decentralized system is where the powers and resources are devolved to the next level of the government, but tightly controlled in the center. This is not the case in South Sudan. They cited that what they have been seeing in South Sudan is a semblance of unitary decentralization where powers and resources have been theoretically devolved to the sub-national levels of governments, but practically rigidly controlled at the national level. The game, according to the respondents, has shown dictatorial tendencies where the President rules with republican decrees to the extent of relieving the elected Governors of the states. Although R-ARCSS empowers the President to fire all constitutional post holders, including elected Governors, this has been periodically abused. This has then led to internecine zero-sum power struggles within the political and military elite. The Transitional Constitution of South Sudan 2011, as amended, grants the powers to President the power to relieve a governor of a state because the governor has failed beyond a reasonable doubt to prevent threats to national security and territorial integrity of that particular state. However, this has been selectively applied by the President to suit his political and security interests.

Besides, respondents argued that although states and local governments draw their constitutions from the national government, the crux of decentralization, which is the power and resources, has remained with the national government. The respondents emphasized that, as the practice, 80% of the national budget is allocated to the national government, with 20% transferred to the states as block funds.

On the other hand, few respondents believed that the current system of governance is federalism, citing the mantra of surrendering authority to the sub-national levels of government. However, they noted that the resources and power are not practically surrendered at the grassroots, and thus, the federal system of the government is lacking. Finally, the respondents questioned the current system of the government, citing it as a very confusing system for the reason that it is neither decentralized nor federalized in practice but with 10 states and 3 administrative areas.

4.2. Advantages and Disadvantages of Decentralization or Federalism

Given that the majority of the respondents acknowledged decentralization as the current system of governance for South Sudan, their responses on the advantages as well as the disadvantages of this system are important. One advantage of practical decentralization, respondents noted is that the system brings services closer to the grassroots, meaning it enhances job creation and empowerment of citizens at

the local level. Respondents added that the government decision-making process is brought closer to the citizens, hence decongesting the highly bureaucratic and complex central authority. Thus, this improves communication as the sub-national layers of the government can easily pass information from one area to the other. Respondents, moreover, felt that citizens, or rather communities, are motivated as they use the delegated power to manage the affairs of their states and local governments.

However, the respondents argued that although practical decentralization could be a good thing for South Sudan, it has several demerits. They noted that this system encourages clannism, sectionalism, regionalism, and sectarian tendencies as the citizens view themselves from their local vicinity. It creates tension between competing states and regions. Citizens would value their state, county, payam, or boma greatly than their country, and this kills the sense of national unity and patriotism. Moreover, respondents argued that decentralization multiplies corruption to the lower levels, and this always affects the levels of development as the local elites struggle to capture power and misappropriate resources (benefits) for selfish gains. Besides, respondents added that the system creates too many jobs, hence a burden on the economy. If not managed properly, as is the case today in South Sudan, the government could end up using the whole budget for salary payment with no attention to development due to over-bloated weight bills.

Further still, respondents lamented that this system, if not well-managed, can enhance perennial tribal conflicts over power and resources. Examples of these conflicts have been going on in Lakes, Warrap, Jonglei, and Upper Nile, to mention but a few. What is more, respondents acknowledged that a failure of the national government by sheer number of responsibilities is also a failure of all the other sub-national governments. Hence, decentralization of services continued to be linked to the national government.

Finally, respondents view that decentralization of services works well if it is not unitary, given that the latter has concentrated the power and resources at the national level, and it is the current practice in South Sudan. Having gauged the respondents' views on the advantages and disadvantages of decentralization as the current system in South Sudan, respondents were then asked to choose between their preferred system of governance between decentralization and federalism.

4.3. Preferred System of Governance in South Sudan: Decentralization vs. Federalism

200 surveyed respondents were asked about the preferred system of governance between decentralization and federalism in South Sudan, and their responses are shown in the table below.

Table 1: Preferred system of governance between decentralization and federalism

Categories	*Frequent*	*Percent*	*Cumulative Percent*
Decentralization	60	30%	30%
Federalism	120	60%	60%
No Idea	20	10%	10%
Total	200	100	100

Table 1 and Figure 1 sourced the views of respondents about the system of governance they prefer between decentralization and federalism in South Sudan. Of the 200 surveyed respondents, 120 respondents, representing 60%, preferred federalism as the preferred system of governance in South Sudan. They cited that federalism has been a popular demand of the people of South Sudan since 1947, and it is fitting that it is adopted as a new form of governance. They pointed out that decentralization as the reigning system of governance has failed, and thus, another system has to be tried out, thus federalism. They argued that federalism entails the surrendering of power and resources to the sub-national levels of governments, which cannot be unilaterally withdrawn by the central government. The withdrawal of such powers can be done through the amendment of the constitution. Moreover, the advocates for this system argued that there is more devolution of power in a federal system and further argued that it will be appropriate for South Sudan, as the sub-national levels of governments are currently being rigidly controlled at the center. Moreover, the respondents further argued that federalism provides autonomy, and this autonomy enhances freedom to chart the political and development path of the sub-national levels of governments. They noted, for example, that citizens of the sub-national levels of governance would have the power to elect and relieve their governors, commissioners, and administrators without interference from the national government. Although the respondents acknowledged that there are

powers and resources the national government can still control, such as national security, citizenship, currency, international relations, borders, mineral and petroleum resources, higher education, to mention but a few, federalism devolves more powers and resources to the sub-national governments than decentralization. Previous studies of Agok (2014) and Karim (2014) supported these respondents.

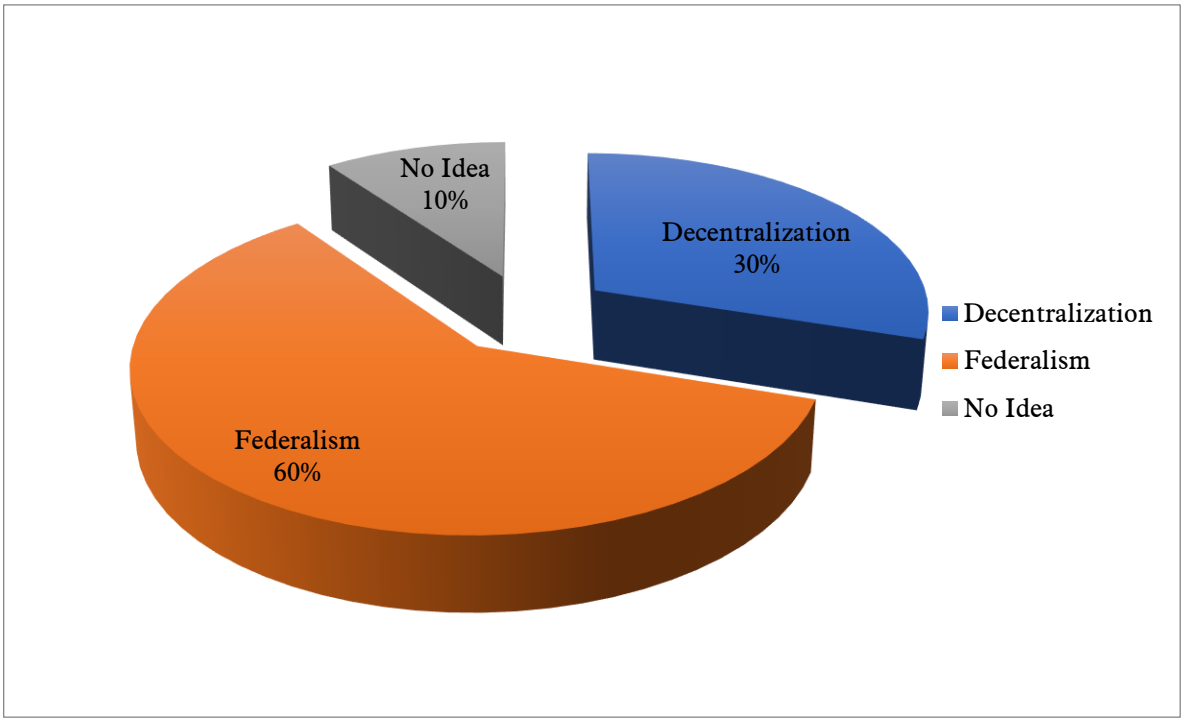

Figure 1: Preference for the system of governance between decentralization and federalism

On the other hand, 60 respondents representing 30% argue that the current system of decentralization should continue. They cited that decentralization is great as it enhances unity, national cohesion, and patriotism. They argued that for a highly divided society such as South Sudan, federalism, once implemented, could encourage secessions and irredentism of some regions, and this could sustain and prolong the culture of conflict and violence. The advocates of decentralization felt that the system may promote balanced development if well managed, given that the power and resources are controlled at the centre. They noted that the central government could plan for the whole country and thereafter delegate power and resources to the sub-national levels of governments, who should implement the developmental projects. Mulla (2014), Ramba (2013) and Mayik (2014) and others support these respondents, arguing that decentralization is the same as federalism and it must wait for some time. What is more, 20 respondents, representing 10%, had no idea about the preferred system of governance between decentralization and federalism. Finally, respondents consented that a referendum should be held countrywide to decide on the system of governance, including the type.

4.4. Preferred Type of Federal System for South Sudan

Table 2 and Figure 2 provide a critical analysis of the type of federalism citizens prefer in South Sudan. Asking their views on this matter, 27 respondents representing 13% wanted ethnic federalism, citing the need for particular ethnic groups to live alone so that they can chart their own socio-economic and political development. They argued that when ethnic groups are carved out to live alone, they could easily understand their predicaments, plan for redress, and implement their plans together. 65 respondents, representing 33%, argued that it is territorial federalism that is necessary for the people of South Sudan. These advocates cited the need for the maintenance of unity, social cohesion, and harmony as people who live in a certain territory, regardless of their ethnicities or sectarian affiliations, can federate and use their political power and resources to spur their socio-economic development. Of the 39 respondents, representing 20%, feel that the country requires fiscal federalism, referring to the devolution of more economic powers to the sub-national levels of the government. They argued that it is through

economic development, not political development, that South Sudan can avoid conflict and political violence. The advocates of this type of federalism underscored the need to empower local communities with poverty eradication programmes and management of natural resources within their vicinity for the prosperity of the communities.

Table 2: Preferred type of federal system for South Sudan

Categories		*Frequency*	*Percent*	*Valid Percent*	*Cumulative Percent*
Valid	No idea	53	26.5	26.5	26.5
	Ethnic federalism	27	13.5	13.5	40.0
	Territorial federalism	65	32.5	32.5	72.5
	Fiscal federalism	39	19.5	19.5	92.0
	Asymmetrical federalism	16	8.0	8.0	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

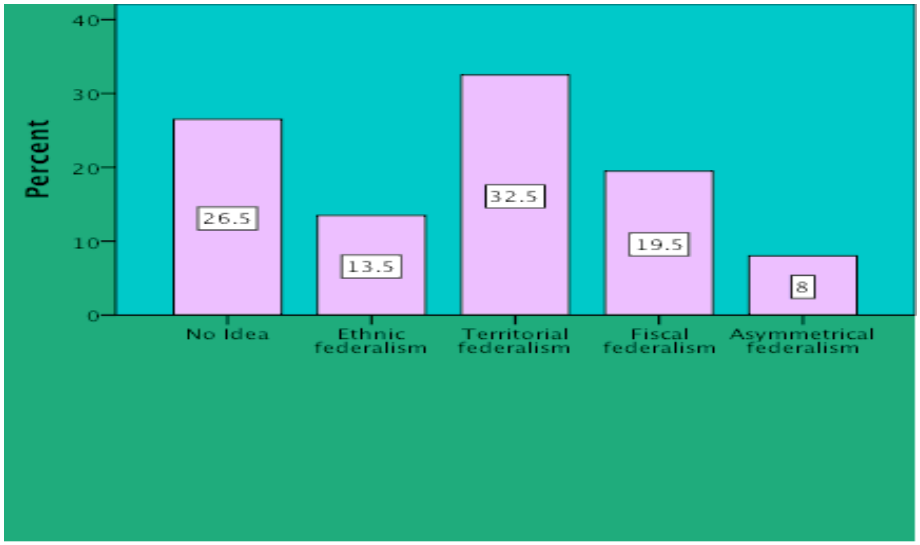

Figure 2: Preferred type of federal system

Moreover, 16 respondents, representing 8%, preferred asymmetrical federalism, citing the necessity of devolving more economic and political power to the disadvantaged or marginalized communities to balance development. The Indian government has done this to Kashmir, the Sudanese government to Darfur, and the Spanish government to the Catalonia region, to mention but a few. This type of federalism, the advocates emphasized, will promote peace and sustainable development at the sub-national levels of governments. Finally, 53 respondents, representing 26%, had no idea about the question asked and did not answer the purported question.

4.5. Time for Implementation of Federalism

This variable gauges the time appropriate for the implementation of federalism. Respondents were asked, and their views are captured in the table and figure below.

Table 3: Time for implementation of federalism

Categories		*Frequency*	*Percent*	*Valid Percent*	*Cumulative Percent*
Valid	Any time	45	22.5	22.5	22.5
	Immediately after the resolution of the South Sudanese (SS) crisis	73	36.5	36.5	59.0
	At the end of two and a half	52	26.0	26.0	85.0

Categories		*Frequency*	*Percent*	*Valid Percent*	*Cumulative Percent*
	years (yrs) transition period				
	In 2020	15	7.5	7.5	92.5
	In 2025	12	6.0	6.0	98.5
	No idea	3	1.5	1.5	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

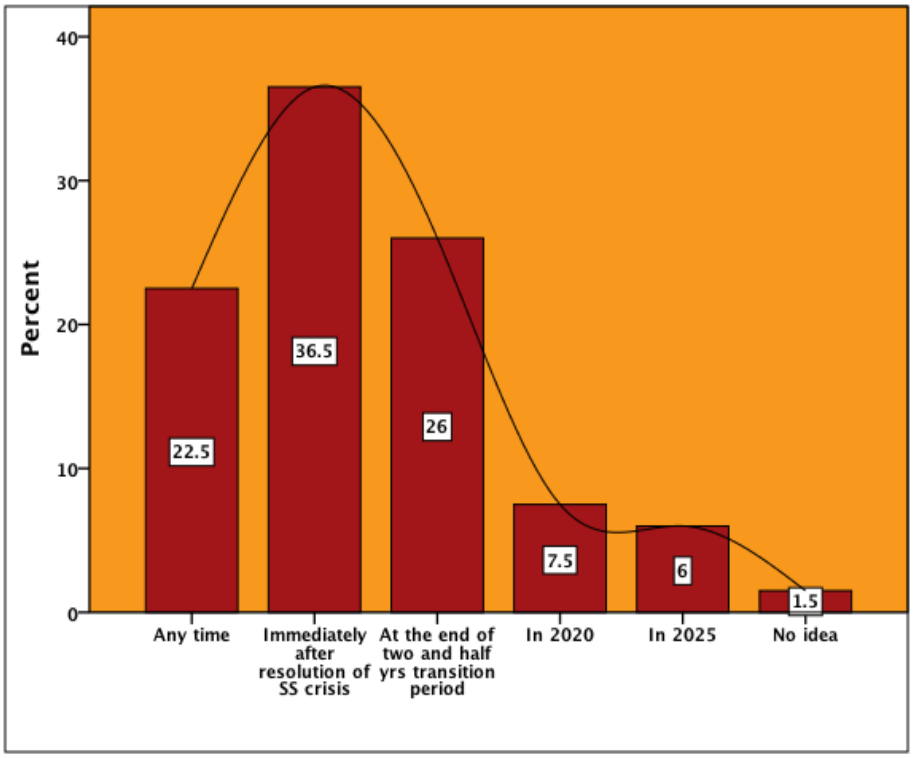

Figure 3: Time frame for implementation of federalism

Table 3 and Figure 3 above provide analysis on the timeline for the implementation of territorial federalism. Asked when exactly to implement this territorial federalism, 73 respondents, representing 37%, wanted this federalism to be implemented immediately after the resolution of the South Sudanese political crisis. They meant that after the full implementation of the Revitalized Agreement of the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS). The implementation of the peace should carry a long, detailed matrix of the implementation of territorial federalism. That is to say that territorial federalism should be inserted into the amended constitution. They cited this time as conducive, noting that it will allow all parties to the agreement to take advantage of the R-ARCSS provision of federalism. 52 respondents representing 26% wanted territorial federalism to be implemented at the end of the transition period, that is, in 2026, citing the impracticality of implementing it immediately given many priorities in the R-ARCSS and, more importantly, the unavailability of funds to federate South Sudan. 45 respondents, representing 22%, argued that this territorial federalism should be implemented at any time, meaning the parties in the R-TGoNU should decide when it is appropriate given that it is not a critical matter. The proponents continue to cite that the country needs first to pull itself out of economic tsunamis caused by the twelve-year senseless war.

Besides, 15 respondents, representing 8%, wanted this territorial federalism to be implemented in 2025, citing that the population needs to be prepared for this new concept and type of governance. Moreover, 12 respondents, representing 6%, argue that this territorial system of governance should be implemented at the end of 2026, citing that the time will allow subsequent governments to carry out civic education to educate the masses on the pros and cons before the implementation of territorial federalism. Finally, 3 respondents, representing 1%, had no idea when to implement the territorial federal system of governance.

4.6. Federalism and Kokora

200 surveyed respondents were asked about their thoughts on federalism and its frequent association with Kokora. Their views are provided in Table 4 and Figure 4 below.

Table 4: Federalism and Kokora

Categories		*Frequency*	*Percent*	*Valid Percent*	*Cumulative Percent*
Valid	No idea	30	15.0	15.0	15.0
	Strongly agreed	45	22.5	22.5	37.5
	Agreed	29	14.5	14.5	52.0
	Strongly disagreed	56	28.0	28.0	80.0
	Disagreed	40	20.0	20.0	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

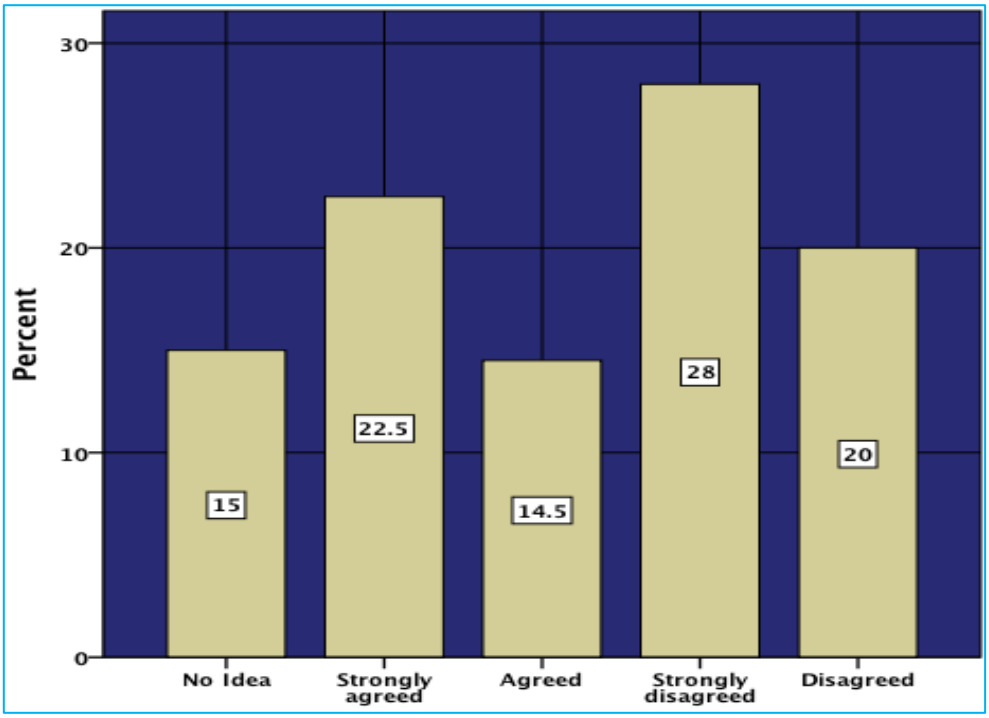

Figure 4: Federalism and Kokora

Table 4 and Figure 4 above put into perspective the views of respondents in regard to federalism and *Kokora.* Asked about whether federalism is synonymous with *Kokora* or not, 56 of 200-surveyed respondents, representing 28%, strongly disagreed on this assertion, arguing that *Kokora,* a word in Bari dialect meaning 'division or to divide', does not equate to federalism. They emphasized that federalism is a system of governance that has no association with the Bari ethnic group. The respondents clarified that local dialects should not be misinterpreted into national systems of governance. Besides, 45 respondents, representing 22%, strongly agreed, arguing that the 1982 *Kokora* on non-Bari, particularly, Dinka ethnic group, is associated with federalism. They argued that federalism was directly taken by the Bari ethnic group to mean dividing the country and sending away all foreigners from their lands. This, according to them, could repeat itself if the federal system of governance is introduced. The respondents further indicated that the architects of *Kokora* are still alive and could engineer it again if the federal system is implemented. 40 respondents, representing 20%, disagreed, citing that *Kokora* is a cultural way of division or to divide resources, power, or whatever is available and has nothing to do with the political system.

Besides, 29 respondents, representing 15%, agreed that there is still a fear of *Kokora* being associated with federalism by the local Bari people. They argued that if *Kokora* is not publicly discussed, then it is likely that it can repeat itself. The advocates emphasized that the etymology of *Kokora* and its

impacts on the communities during 1982 need to be publicly debated by the sundry of South Sudanese to erase fears of repeating itself when a federal system is introduced.

Finally, 30 respondents, representing 15%, had no idea on any perceived or real relationship between *Kokora* and federalism.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The quest for institutional engineering in South Sudan is necessary and timely to leapfrog the nascent state into prosperity. The empirical literature and fieldwork have probed the best option for institutional engineering between decentralization and federalism in South Sudan, as federalism and this federalism should be territorial type. Federalism surrenders the power to the sub-national levels of the government, and in this case, counties, payams, and bomas. Territorial federalism allows the citizens of South Sudan to enjoy the powers of the government wherever they are in South Sudan. This is important to enhance the unity of the South Sudanese. Unlike ethnic federalism that champions ethnic animosity and divisions amongst the people as seen in Ethiopia, territorial federalism promotes nationalism and guarantees developmental competitions. Although federalism is necessary to be instituted, the overall quality of leadership to ensure that this federal system works is highly desired in the context of South Sudan.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

While the study has robustly discussed the quest for institutional engineering in South Sudan and found territorial federalism to be the best option for South Sudan, further research is hereby recommended to governance scholars to discern the demerits of territorial federalism.

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This article is 100% contributed by the sole author. He conceived and designed the research or analysis, collected the data, contributed to data analysis & interpretation, wrote the article, performed critical revision of the article/paper, edited the article, and supervised and administered the field work.

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Research involving human bodies or organs or tissues (Helsinki Declaration)
The author(s) solemnly declare(s) that this research has not involved any human subject (body or organs) for experimentation. It was not a clinical research. The contexts of human population/participation were only indirectly covered through literature review. Therefore, an Ethical Clearance (from a Committee or Authority) or ethical obligation of Helsinki Declaration does not apply in cases of this study or written work.

Research involving animals (ARRIVE Checklist)
The author(s) solemnly declare(s) that this research has not involved any animal subject (body or organs) for experimentation. The research was not based on laboratory experiment involving any kind of animal. Some contexts of animals are also indirectly covered through literature review. Therefore, an Ethical Clearance (from a Committee or Authority) does not apply in cases of this study or written work.

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The author(s) solemnly declare(s) that this research has not involved Indigenous Peoples as participants or respondents, with the documentation of their Indigenous Knowledge. Some other contexts, if any, of Indigenous Peoples or Indigenous Knowledge are only indirectly covered through literature review. An Ethical Clearance 'to conduct research on indigenous peoples' Indigenous knowledge is also not relevant. Therefore, an Ethical Clearance (from a Committee or Authority) or prior informed consent (PIC) of the respondents or Self-Declaration in this regard does not apply in cases of this study or written work.

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The author(s) solemnly declare(s) that this research has not involved local community participants or respondents belonging to non-Indigenous peoples. This study did not involve any child in any form directly. The contexts of different humans, people, populations, men/women/children and ethnic people are also indirectly covered through literature review. Therefore, an Ethical Clearance (from a Committee or Authority) or prior informed consent (PIC) of the respondents or Self-Declaration in this regard does not apply in cases of this study or written work.

(Optional) PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses)
The author(s) has/have NOT complied with PRISMA standards. It is not relevant in case of this study or written work.

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Author(s) has/have no competing financial, professional, or personal interests from other parties or in publishing this manuscript. There is no conflict of interest with the publisher or the editorial team or the reviewers.

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During the preparation of this work, the author used no AI to assists the script translation and proof reading.

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To see original copy of these declarations signed by Corresponding/First Author (on behalf of other co-authors too), please download associated zip folder [Ethical Declarations] from the published Abstract page accessible through and linked with the DOI: https://doi.org/10.33002/jpg050102.

INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM FROM RESPONDENTS
(Non-Indigenous Respondents)
This form was translated into local language for the respondents

Title of the Research: The Quest for Institutional Engineering in Post-Liberation South Sudan: Should it be Decentralization or Federalism?

Principal Researcher:	Jacob Dut Chol Riak University of Juba. Atlabara. P.O.Box 182 Juba.
Research Supervisor:	Prof. Samson S. Wassara Gudele Area. Juba.

A) INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS

1. Objectives of the research
The objectives of this study were to examine the quest for institutional engineering in post-liberation South Sudan on either continuation of decentralization or introduction of federal system.

2. Participation in research
The researcher will ask you several pertinent questions. This interview will be recorded in written form and should last about 50-60 minutes. The location and timing of the interview will be determined by you, depending on your availability and convenience.

3. Risks and disadvantages
There is no particular risk involved in this project. You may, however, refuse to answer any question at any time or even terminate the interview.

4. Advantanges and benefits
You will receive intangible benefits even if you refuse to answer some questions or decide to terminate the interview. You will also contribute to the solution of desired political system in South Sudan between decentralization and federalism.

5. Confidentiality
Personal information you give us will be kept confidential. No information identifying you in any way will be published. In addition, each participant in the research will be assigned a code and only the researcher will know your identity.

6. Right of withdrawal
Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary and you can at any time withdraw from the research on simple verbal notice and without having to justify your decision, without consequence to you. If you decide to opt out of the research, please contact the researcher at the telephone number or email listed below. At your

request, all information concerning you can also be destroyed. However, after the outbreak of the publishing process, it is impossible to destroy the analyses and results on the data collected.

B) CONSENT

Declaration of the participant

- ⇨ I understand that I can take some time to think before agreeing or not to participate in the research.
- ⇨ I can ask the research team questions and ask for satisfactory answers.
- ⇨ I understand that by participating in this research project, I do not relinquish any of my rights, including my right to terminate the interview at any time.
- ⇨ I have read this information and consent form and agree to participate in the research project.
- ⇨ I agree that the interviews be recorded in written form by the researcher: Yes ( ) No ( )

Signature of the participant : _____ Date : _____

Surname : _____ First name : _____

Researcher engagement

I explained to the participant the conditions for participation in the research project. I answered to the best of my knowledge the questions asked and I made sure of the participant's understanding. I, along with the research team, agree to abide by what was agreed to in this information and consent form.

Signature of the researcher : Date : 15th June 2017

Surname: Riak First name: Jacob Dut Chol Riak

- ⇨ Should you have any questions regarding this study, or to withdraw from the research, please contact Jacob Dut Chol Riak by e-mail dutsenior@yahoo.com

- ⇨ If you have any concerns about your rights or about the responsibilities of researchers concerning your participation in this project, you can contact the principal researcher.

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Back to the Roots: Socio-Economic Policy Making and Re-integration of Kerala's Gulf-Return Migrants amidst the COVID-19

Pulickal Abdul Azeez Ansari*[1], Sameer BabuM [2]
[1]Collaborative Lab on Meaningful Learning in Multicultural Settings (CLMLMS), Department of Educational Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi - 110025, India.
Email: ansari@resultsco.org.uk | ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3274-1079
[2]Collaborative Lab on Meaningful Learning in Multicultural Settings (CLMLMS), Department of Educational Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi - 110025, India.
Email: msameer@jmi.ac.in | ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8168-8537
**Corresponding author*

ABSTRACT

Many gulf countries' migrants, particularly those from developing countries like India, have been deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Kerala, a state with high emigration rates, depends heavily on these migrant workers who form a significant part of its labour force. This research report examines how Kerala has responded to the COVID-19 crisis and highlights its distinct and notable approaches. However, most Gulf migrants work in the informal sector and are unaware of many things. These former key components of Kerala's economy return home to find themselves excluded, disorganised, and voiceless, as their rights or working environment cannot be fought for. Within the period of COVID-19, more than half a million returnees in Kerala faced numerous problems as well as socio-economic challenges. They were once breadwinners in families, but now face similar hardships within their states. This study examines the macroscopic aspects of the socioeconomic lives of marginalised migrants, as well as the social links that hinder their integration into society, both through state policies and community barriers. The article is based on a survey of 300 respondents from Malappuram and Ernakulam districts, aimed at understanding the intricacies of post-pandemic experiences.

Keywords: COVID-19; Kerala; Return migration; Re-integration; Policy research

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1. INTRODUCTION

COVID-19's global spread has resulted in a variety of measures, such as lockdowns and quarantine orders, being implemented by different countries. The healthcare, transportation, economy and finance, migration, and social dynamics have been heavily affected by this pandemic (Khan et al., 2021). In the wake of the pandemic, India has seen a notable fall in emigration to Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries due to its large number of migrant workers (Abella & Sasikumar, 2020a & 2020b; Rajan, 2020). Some newspaper reports reveal how keen these Indian migrant workers and leading Middle East employers are to return home.

According to the World Migration Report 2022, India has about 6% of the world's international migrants, including three point five million from Kerala (Ullah, 2022). Thus, many Gulf migrants returned home during lockdowns for non-essential industries. Some factors that increased COVID-19 infections in Kerala included those coming back from the Gulf and a high birth rate in 2019-20. In reaction to the pandemic, over 1,500,000 people working in the Gulf came back to Kerala, thereby disrupting the state's global migration system in the year 2020 (Isaac & Sadanandan, 2021).

This study aims to explore the migration and repatriation patterns of expatriates from Kerala who had been living in the Gulf, providing insights into their experiences.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The United Nations, in its 2022 Report, indicates that around 18 million international migrants are from India, making it the largest recipient of remittances from overseas workers since the mid-1990s (World Bank, 2022). Remittances from non-resident Indians (NRIs) are a vital source of development funds, particularly in Kerala (Connell & Brown, 1995; The Economic Times, 2022).

The Indian migrant workforce in the Gulf includes unskilled, semi-skilled, and skilled workers. Unskilled labourers often migrate due to poverty (Edumundo et al., 2011). The migration of semi-skilled workers from Kerala is influenced by factors such as unemployment after graduation, family pressure, aspirations for administrative roles, and dowry obligations (Rajendran, 2018; Wright, 2020; Zachariah et al., 2002). Recently, Kerala has seen an outflow of highly educated professionals, including doctors, engineers, and academics, to Gulf countries due to low wages, rising unemployment, shrinking productive lands, and economic pressures in India (Fazal, 2000; Rajendran, 2018). Moreover, expedited passport services have further facilitated the migration of Indian workers to the Gulf (Martin, 2012). Semi-skilled workers face challenges such as the marginalisation of women due to caste or income-based quotas, lack of family support, aspirations for independence, and reluctance to engage in menial jobs at home (Bijral, 2015; Mohan, 2017).

Highly skilled professionals migrate to GCC countries, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE due to fluency in English and Arabic, cultural adaptability, better living conditions, medical insurance, personal growth opportunities, job flexibility, and the fulfilment of unmet aspirations (Hiller and McCaig, 2007; Rasheed, 2017). Professionals are also driven by the desire to achieve career goals, support their families financially, gain social status, and enjoy a more comfortable lifestyle abroad (Nair, 2023).

Despite uncertainties, Gulf-Indians see the Gulf region as a second home. The UAE has been a preferred destination for Indian migrants for over two decades. Many Malayalees who initially arrived on temporary visas have decided to stay, viewing it as their home, especially those with professional employment or significant income growth (Iyer, 2017). NRIs often cite issues like infrastructure, power shortages, congestion, poor hygiene, and adherence to family customs as reasons for not returning to India (Gowricharn, 2020). However, the COVID-19 pandemic has altered circumstances and priorities. The global economic impact of the pandemic has weakened the UAE's economy, increasing risks for government-related enterprises (Mathew, 2020). A survey by the Dubai Chamber of Commerce estimated that 70% of businesses in the Emirates might close within six months due to lockdowns (Turak, 2020).

With 80% of the UAE's population being expatriates and over 150,000 Indians ready to leave, the COVID-19 crisis could surpass the impact of the 2008-2009 fiscal crisis, as acknowledged by the government. Abu Dhabi's real GDP growth is projected to drop to 0.6% in 2020 from an expected 3.0% in 2019 (Fitch Solutions, 2020; Badam, 2020). Companies in sectors like construction, vehicle repair, and cleaning have furloughed or terminated employees or put them on unpaid leave, forcing many low-wage workers to leave their homes. Indian community organisations have stepped in to support these displaced

workers (Rahman et al, 2023). The sudden job loss among Malayalees (People who speak Malayalam, belonging to the state of Kerala, are commonly called Malayalees) in professional sectors has also affected their mental well-being, with many prioritising reunifications with relatives in Kerala. For many expatriates who lost their jobs abroad, returning to India is seen as the best option. The lack of research on premature reverse migration during a pandemic highlights the importance of studying this issue (Mathew & Kumar, 2021).

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to explore the socio-economic challenges faced by Gulf return migrants in Kerala during the COVID-19 pandemic. By integrating quantitative and qualitative methods, the research provides a comprehensive understanding of these challenges and offers actionable insights for policymakers.

3.1. Research Design

The study utilises an exploratory-explanatory design to examine migration patterns, post-return challenges, and the adequacy of support systems. This approach enables an in-depth investigation of the socio-economic impacts of return migration while capturing the nuanced experiences of participants.

3.1.1. Data Collection

1. Primary Data:

Quantitative Data: A structured survey was conducted with 300 return migrants from Malappuram and Ernakulam districts. The survey included closed-ended questions covering demographic information, employment history, reasons for return, and post-return socio-economic challenges.

Qualitative Data: Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were carried out with 50 purposively selected participants. These interviews explored personal narratives, reintegration experiences, and perceptions of the adequacy of support systems provided by governmental and non-governmental organisations.

2. Secondary Data:

Secondary data were sourced from the research paper authored by Rajan and Manasi (2021), i.e., official government reports, and academic literature on migration and reintegration. These data sources provided contextual depth and supported the triangulation of findings.

3.1.2. Sampling Strategy

Purposive Sampling: Survey and interview participants were selected based on their experiences of socio-economic disruptions caused by the pandemic. This approach ensured a diverse representation of occupational, educational, and demographic characteristics.

Sample Characteristics: The sample included 75% male and 25% female participants aged between 25 and 60 years. Respondents represented skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled occupational categories, reflecting the varied migration demographics of Kerala.

3.1.3. Data Analysis

1. Quantitative Analysis:

Survey data were summarised using tables to highlight trends in employment, income, and post-return challenges. Tabular presentations provided a clear and accessible visual representation of the data. Frequency distributions were calculated to determine the prevalence of specific challenges, including financial instability, lack of support, and health-related issues.

2. Qualitative Analysis:

Thematic analysis was conducted to interpret narrative data from the semi-structured interviews, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework:

- Familiarisation: Repeated readings of interview transcripts to identify key ideas and patterns.
- Selection of Keywords: In this step, the researchers fixed the appropriate keywords from the basic analysis and identify them for later processes.
- Coding: NVivo software was employed to code text excerpts systematically, tagging segments related to financial instability, health challenges, and reintegration barriers.
- Theme Development: Coded data were grouped into broader themes to capture the essence of participants' experiences.
- Reviewing Themes: Themes were reviewed and refined to ensure alignment with the research objectives.
- Defining Themes: Each theme was defined clearly to articulate its relevance and connection to the study's focus.

3. Integration of Findings:

Quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated to provide a holistic understanding of the research questions. For instance, survey data on financial instability were contextualised with interview insights about its impacts on family dynamics and coping strategies. Triangulation with secondary data enhanced the reliability and depth of the analysis.

3.1.4. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical research standards. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring their voluntary participation. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study. Ethical approval was granted by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the host institution, ensuring compliance with research integrity guidelines.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Demographic Profile of Return Migrants

In the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, many people have returned to their home countries, significantly affecting Kerala's emigration, especially to Gulf countries. Kerala migrants make up 39% of the UAE's population and 23% in Saudi Arabia, with over 20% in Oman and Qatar. Most return migrants come from Saudi Arabia, followed by the UAE and Oman, influenced by changing labour policies (Sharma, 2023). This comprehensive analysis explores the migration trends and repatriation experiences of Gulf expatriates from Kerala, providing valuable insights into the socio-economic challenges and adaptations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1: Return Migration Patterns in Kerala by District

District	*Percent of Return Migrants*
Malappuram	19.1%
Kollam	11.3%
Kozhikode	7.6%
Ernakulam	7.9%
Kannur	11.8%
Aggregate Top 5 Districts	57.7%
Other 9 Districts*	42.3%
Total (Kerala)	100%

*Note: The remaining 9 districts in Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, Pathanamthitta, Alappuzha, Kottayam, Idukki, Thrissur, Palakkad, Wayanad, and Kasaragod, represent the combined percentage of return migrants in the remaining districts of Kerala. S*ource:* Centre for Development Studies (CDS) (2018)

Table 1 provides data on the return migration of expatriates to various districts in Kerala, focusing on the top five districts. Malappuram has the highest percentage of return migrants, followed by Kollam, Kozhikode, Ernakulam, and Kannur. The study primarily focuses on these districts. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the return of over 15 million Non-Resident Keralites (NRKs) to Kerala (Chathukulam & Tharamangalam, 2021). This mass return poses significant challenges to their financial

stability. For example, in Malappuram, nearly one-third of households have an NRK, contributing significantly to the state's revenue (Zachariah & Rajan, 2010, 2011). The return of migrants impacts both the expatriate families and those left behind, affecting Kerala's economy, which heavily relies on remittances (Oommen, 2020). Studies show that many returnees from the Gulf face financial hardships and have not seen improved socio-economic conditions (Rajan, 2020). The return also brings societal tensions, affecting children's education and the emotional well-being of migrant mothers (Osella & Osella, 2008). The economic slowdown during the 2008 crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic has particularly affected immigrant communities.

The characteristics of returnees vary in age, gender, marital status, and education. During the COVID-19 crisis, there has been an increase in female return migrants (Sulaiman et al., 2021). There are disparities in living standards between highly educated expatriates and those with lower education levels. Religious affiliations of the respondents include Muslims, Hindus, and Christians (Zachariah and Rajan 2015). This study aims to understand the economic and social challenges faced by returnees in Kerala, analyse the impact of COVID-19 on Gulf expatriates from the region, and propose measures to improve the well-being of repatriated migrants.

The study employed a mix of primary and secondary methodologies, including observation and interview schedules, collecting primary data through long-distance telephone interviews. Participant observation and semi-structured interviews were used to explore the impact of COVID-19 on return migrants. Purposive sampling selected a sample of 300 migrants affected by COVID-19, primarily from Ernakulam and Malappuram. The study examines the respondents' occupations before their return from the Gulf, considering the region's oil boom and its attraction for global migrants, particularly from India, including Kerala (Ansari and Rahman, 2021).

Table 2: Employment Sectors Chosen by Gulf Expatriates

Employment/Occupation	*Districts (Ernakulam)*	*Districts (Malappuram)*	*Total*	*Percentage (%)*
Accountant	12	8	20	6.7
Business (Small Shops/Small Business)	25	20	45	15.0
Driver	22	18	40	13.3
House Servant	15	10	25	8.3
Home Nurse/Nurse	10	7	17	5.7
Cook	20	25	45	15.
Electrician	18	12	30	10.
Construction	20	18	38	12.7
Supermarket/Sales	18	12	30	10.
Grand Total	160	140	300	100

A significant number of Gulf migrants did not plan adequately, resulting in only a few securing their desired jobs. Many accepted available jobs to sustain their lives, aiming for a better standard of living and stable income (Rahman et al., 2020). To meet basic needs, 15% of migrants started small businesses, despite the substantial initial investment. Among the respondents, 6.7% worked as accountants in private companies, appearing to have better job prospects, while 13.3% worked as drivers, often for long hours. Domestic servants (8.3%) took care of children and the elderly in the absence of their employers. Construction workers and supermarket employees made up 12.7 % and 10 % of the workforce, respectively, often working over 12 hours a day. This finding aligns with previous research by Rajan et al. (2020), Sulaiman et al. (2021), and Ansari and Rahman (2021).

4.2. Case Analysis 1: Economic Challenges Post-Return

This case highlights the experience of Anjali (name changed), a 37-year-old resident of Ernakulam, who faced significant economic hardships after returning from the Gulf due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the shutdown of her small business in Kuwait, in which she had invested Rs. 1 million, she was forced to return to Kerala in 2019. Seeking new opportunities, she invested Rs. 2millions in managing container trucks but encountered substantial losses of Rs. 0.9 million due to political interference and high maintenance expenses. In an attempt to recover, Anjali and her friends opened a grocery store in Kochi but

incurred additional losses of Rs. 1.1 million, wiping out her savings from Kuwait. She now relies on bank loans to sustain her family and meet daily expenses. Facing mounting debts, Anjali is contemplating emigrating again to repay her liabilities. This case underscores the economic vulnerabilities and financial struggles faced by return migrants navigating reintegration into their home state.

4.3. Return Migration and Its Causes

Interviews with Kerala expatriates in the Gulf revealed various reasons for leaving their homeland. These factors are directly or indirectly related to the reasons for migrant labour.

Table 3: Factors Influencing Return Migration

Factors Influencing Return Migration	*No of Respondents*	*Percentage (%)*
Impact of COVID-19 (Job Loss, Salary Reduction, etc.)	135	45
Insufficient Wages	30	10
Non-Renewal of Contract due to Covid-induced Economic Reasons	15	5
Nationalisation	45	15
Unsatisfactory Working Conditions	15	5
Personal Issues at Home	15	5
Employer's Inappropriate Behaviour	30	10
Poor Health	15	5
Other Factors	-	-
Total	300	100

The research shows that the primary reason for the return of Gulf migrants to Kerala was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over 45 % of respondents reported being directly affected by the pandemic, making it challenging to find employment upon their return. Additionally, more than 10 % reported lower incomes and inability to save due to reduced earnings during the pandemic. About 5 % mentioned that their contracts were not extended due to COVID-19 restrictions. Approximately 20 % attributed their return to Gulf nationalisation policies, while 10 % cited employer aggression.

4.4. Case Analysis 2: Employment Challenges Post-Migration | Case Study 2: Ramesh's Story

Ramesh, a 34-year-old man from Malappuram, worked as an HR manager with a monthly salary of Rs 85,000. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, he lost his job and now faces unemployment in Kerala. He has a housing loan with a monthly interest payment of Rs 60,000 for a loan amount of around Rs 3.2 millions. Repaying the loan has become difficult given his current financial situation. Even if he finds employment in Kerala, the potential salary would be limited to around Rs 30,000-35,000 per month, raising concerns about meeting his family's financial needs and healthcare expenses. Considering these challenges, he is contemplating returning to Abu Dhabi as an alternative solution.

4.5. Challenges Faced by Returning Migrants

Returning migrants face various challenges in their home countries. Lack of a stable income can lead to accumulating debts to cover ongoing expenses. Ventures into unfamiliar businesses and personal financial obligations such as weddings, private education for children, or unexpected medical expenses further increase the vulnerability of migrants upon their return.

Table 4: Challenges Faced by Return Gulf Migrants in Kerala

Challenges	*Number of Respondents*	*Percentage (%)*
COVID-19 Impact	150	50
Insufficient Earnings/Wages	45	15
Health Expenses/Surprises	45	15
Lack of Social Respect	23	7
Lack of Government Support	30	10
Other	7	2
Total	300	100

The challenges encountered by return migrants are varied. The most frequently cited issue is the impact of COVID-19, which affected 50 % of respondents, leading to the loss of livelihoods and well-being. Around 15 % of respondents expressed concerns about maintaining a better standard of living, and more than half worried about unforeseen health issues impacting their families. About 7.5 % mentioned a lack of social respect and support from the government upon their return. Additionally, 10 % of respondents felt a loss of social acceptance within their communities, having previously been high-earning members of their families. Return migrants often find that their previous status as "Pravasi" (Gulf migrants) afforded them respect and financial stability, which is challenging to regain once back in Kerala (Khan, 2014). They sometimes feel undervalued despite years of hard work abroad.

4.6. Case Analysis 3: Health and Financial Challenges Post-Return

This case illustrates the experience of Vijay (name changed), a 45-year-old returnee from Kerala, who faced severe health and financial challenges after contracting COVID-19 while working in Oman. Earning Rs. 75,000 per month before the pandemic, Vijay's situation drastically changed when he fell into a six-month coma in February 2020. His medical treatment at a government hospital cost over 2850 riyals, which was partially supported by his Egyptian sponsor and a charitable organisation.

Upon returning to Kerala, Vijay and his family have struggled financially, relying on Rs. 10,000 per month from friends and charitable organisations. The financial strain on these charities, due to the broader economic impact of COVID-19, has created uncertainty about the sustainability of this support. As the sole breadwinner, Vijay's wife has had to depend on family and friends for additional assistance. The family also raised Rs. 1 million for his medical expenses through charitable and religious organisations. Despite these efforts, they currently receive no government financial assistance. This analysis highlights the critical health-related vulnerabilities and the economic insecurity faced by Gulf returnees, underscoring the need for targeted government support and sustainable reintegration policies.

Table 5: Policies by Society and Policymakers to Support the Integration of Returning Migrants in Kerala

Integration Measures for Returnees in Kerala	*Malappuram*	*Ernakulam*	*Total*	*Percentage (%)*
Platform for COVID-19 Affected Return Migrants: Issue Discussion and Support	42	42	84	28.0%
Promoting Entrepreneurial Skills Development Program (ESDP) policies among Young Migrants	24	30	54	18.0%
Medical Support for Return Migrants: Free and Compulsory Basic Facilities	30	42	72	24.0%
Counselling for Vulnerable Return Migrants to Address Their Difficulties in Adapting	15	15	30	10.0%
Strong Government Policy and Civil Society Support	24	36	60	20.0%
Total	135	165	300	100.0%

A notable portion of respondents (28%) highlighted the necessity for a dedicated platform to address the challenges faced by return migrants, particularly those affected by COVID-19. This platform is deemed crucial for informing policy development related to returned migrants in the state. Additionally, 18% of participants believed that establishing new projects with government support specifically targeting Gulf return migrants would significantly enhance their economic stability and prospects. Encouraging young migrants to participate in the Entrepreneurial Skills Development Program (ESDP) was suggested by 18% of respondents. Moreover, 24% emphasised the importance of accessible and mandatory basic healthcare facilities for returned migrants, ensuring their ability to afford medical expenses without relying on family or charitable organisations. These goals can be achieved through collaboration with NORKA, non-governmental organisations, and immigrant rights advocacy groups. Additionally, 10% of respondents highlighted the need for counselling sessions targeting older return migrants who may face physiological and psychological challenges in adapting to the fast-paced demands of society. Over a quarter of expatriates expressed a desperate need for new forms of assistance from the government and civil society.

4.7. Post-Pandemic Implications for Gulf Returnees in Kerala

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted Gulf returnees in Kerala, highlighting the vulnerabilities of migrants compelled to return due to economic shutdowns in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Over 1.5 million individuals returned, placing significant strain on Kerala's socio-economic infrastructure, which is heavily dependent on remittances (Rajan, 2020). These returnees encountered considerable challenges as they reintegrated into an unprepared local economy, faced with new social and economic realities (Rajan and Pattath, 2023).

Entering 2024, a marked shift is occurring as Gulf countries reopen their policies and borders to migrants from Kerala, revitalizing traditional migration routes. This development reaffirms the Gulf as a key destination for many Malayalees in search of improved economic prospects, potentially stabilising Kerala's economy through enhanced remittance flows and job opportunities for returnees. Nevertheless, this revival also emphasises the critical need for robust migration policies that protect migrant welfare and address vulnerabilities highlighted by the pandemic (Vijayan et al., 2020). Strategic planning and international cooperation are vital to ensuring that economic recovery fosters sustainable growth for the diaspora (Rahman et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the post-pandemic landscape in Kerala illustrates a mix of opportunities and persistent challenges. The reopening of the Gulf enhances its appeal to migrants, although the residual effects of the pandemic underscore the necessity for strong local and international support systems. Migration appears to be a favourable option for COVID-19 returnees striving for a better livelihood for their families and to alleviate debts. Migration is a continuous journey for many Keralites, perpetually in search of better opportunities. The potential for significant remittance recovery exists, yet the socio-economic conditions of returnees demand structured support to reduce the risk of future disruptions. Robust legal frameworks and bilateral agreements are essential to safeguard workers' rights, ensuring that the resurgence in migration is advantageous for all involved parties. This balanced approach is critical for effectively navigating post-pandemic migration and maximising the contributions of the diaspora to Kerala's development.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Obstacles and Conclusions of the Study

The COVID-19 pandemic has left Gulf return migrants in Kerala economically vulnerable. This is evident from the 65% of respondents who identified job losses, pay cuts, and contract expirations as the primary reasons for their return (Table 3). Migrants like Ramesh, who earned Rs. 5,000 a month as an HR manager abroad, now face drastically reduced local earnings of Rs. 30,000- Rs. 35,000. This significant drop in income has made it nearly impossible for returnees to sustain loan repayments, mortgage obligations, or medical expenses (Case Study 2). The study also highlights the diverse occupational backgrounds of returnees, with 15% previously owning small businesses and 13.3% working as drivers (Table 2). While these professions offered stability abroad, opportunities in Kerala are limited, forcing returnees into financial and social vulnerabilities as they struggle to maintain their previous economic standing.

5.2. Socio-Economic Vulnerabilities

The most pressing issue for returnees is financial instability, as reported by 50% of respondents. Additionally, 15% identified health-related expenses as a significant challenge, while another 15% highlighted inadequate earnings (Table 4). The lack of well-paying local jobs forces many returnees to take up casual or low-paying work, making it difficult to support their families and repay debts. Social reintegration also remains a challenge, with 7.5% of respondents reporting a lack of social respect. This reflects the stigma faced by returnees who were once viewed as economic providers but are now perceived as financially burdened. The absence of sufficient government support exacerbates these challenges. Only 24% of respondents felt that adequate healthcare policies were in place to facilitate their transition, while 28% emphasised the need for targeted healthcare systems to address emerging challenges (Table 5). These findings underscore the urgent need for sustainable reintegration programmes to address the socio-economic vulnerabilities of returnees.

5.3. Policy Recommendations and the Way Forward

The study points to the necessity of skill development programmes and entrepreneurship initiatives, with 18% of respondents highlighting their importance. Free or subsidised healthcare services could also play a crucial role in easing the burden on returnees, enabling them to focus on rebuilding their lives without falling into debt. Establishing bilateral agreements with Gulf countries could provide more secure job opportunities and protections for future migrants, reducing their exposure to vulnerabilities during economic downturns. At the same time, fostering sustainable community-based employment and development initiatives within Kerala could reduce reliance on remittances while enhancing the region's economic resilience.

5.4. Broader Implications

Kerala's historical reliance on Gulf migration has underscored the need for economic diversification. The pandemic revealed the fragility of over-dependence on remittances, highlighting the importance of investing in reintegration strategies for returnees. Addressing key areas such as earnings, social respect, and government support could transform the challenges of return migration into opportunities for economic growth and sustainable development in Kerala.

6. CONCLUSION

Research on the impact of emigration and remittances primarily focuses on broad economic impacts, often overlooking the individual and local effects of migration. Notably, there is a considerable gap in understanding the experiences of Gulf return migrants to Kerala, especially against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. This study addresses this gap by examining the challenges and adjustments faced by these migrants, alongside evaluating the effectiveness of existing support networks. By concentrating on individual experiences, this research enhances our understanding of the pandemic's impact on the Kerala diaspora in the Gulf States, with a particular focus on the unique situations of low-income migrants.

The post-pandemic era has brought about significant shifts in migration patterns, with many returnees facing persistent socio-economic challenges. The reopening of borders and the resumption of economic activities in the Gulf present opportunities and risks, necessitating adaptive and forward-looking policy frameworks. The insights from this study are vital for shaping policy measures aimed at improving the welfare of Gulf returnees. Understanding their specific needs allows for the development of targeted support mechanisms that facilitate smoother reintegration into Kerala's social and economic life. Future research should persist in exploring these individual experiences to offer a detailed perspective on the challenges induced by COVID-19, as well as on the broader economic and social shifts affecting these migrants. By filling this research gap, we can develop informed policies that not only aid in effective reintegration but also contribute to the sustainable development of the community. This strategic approach is crucial for reinforcing Kerala's resilience and economic stability in the face of ongoing global changes.

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8. ANNEXURES

Annexure-1: Questionnaire

Consent

☐ I confirm that I have read and understood the purpose of this study and voluntarily agree to participate.
☐ I understand that my responses will be treated confidentially and anonymously, and that I can withdraw at any time.

Section A: Demographic Information

1. Gender:
   ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Other ☐ Prefer not to say
2. Age Group:
   ☐ 18–25 ☐ 26–35 ☐ 36–45 ☐ 46–60 ☐ 60+
3. District of Residence in Kerala: _____
4. Educational Qualification:
   ☐ No formal education ☐ Secondary school ☐ Undergraduate ☐ Postgraduate or higher
5. Religion:
   ☐ Hindu ☐ Muslim ☐ Christian ☐ Other (please specify): _____

Section B: Migration History

6. Which Gulf country did you return from?
   ☐ UAE ☐ Saudi Arabia ☐ Qatar ☐ Oman ☐ Kuwait ☐ Bahrain ☐ Other: _____
7. Total duration of stay abroad:
   ☐ Less than 1 year ☐ 1–3 years ☐ 3–5 years ☐ More than 5 years
8. Occupation before returning:
   ☐ Accountant ☐ Driver ☐ Shop/Business Owner ☐ Cook
   ☐ Home Nurse ☐ House Servant ☐ Supermarket/Sales ☐ Electrician ☐ Construction ☐ Other:_____
9. Were you able to save money while abroad?
   ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Partially
10. Reason for return (Tick all that apply):
    ☐ COVID-19 Job Loss ☐ Salary Cut ☐ End of Contract ☐ Nationalisation Policies
    ☐ Employer Behaviour ☐ Health Issues ☐ Personal or Family Reasons ☐ Poor Working Conditions

Section C: Socio-Economic Challenges

11. What challenges are you currently facing? (Select all that apply)
    ☐ Financial Instability ☐ Health Expenses ☐ Lack of Employment ☐ Loan Repayment
    ☐ Lack of Social Respect ☐ Lack of Government Support ☐ Mental Stress ☐ Other: _____
12. Do you currently have any form of employment?
    ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Part-time/Casual
13. Are you considering migrating again to a Gulf country?
    ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

Section D: Suggestions for Support and Reintegration

14. What kind of support do you believe would help returning migrants? (Select all that apply)
    ☐ Financial Assistance or Loans ☐ Medical Support ☐ Job/Skill Training
    ☐ Entrepreneurship Programmes (ESDP) ☐ Counselling Support ☐ Community Support Platform
15. Are you aware of any government or NGO initiatives supporting Gulf return migrants?
    ☐ Yes ☐ No

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your responses will help shape policy decisions and support frameworks for Gulf return migrants in Kerala.

Annexure-2: Interview Schedule

1. Gender:
☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Other ☐ Prefer not to say

2. Age Group:
☐ 18–25 ☐ 26–35 ☐ 36–45 ☐ 46–60 ☐ 60+

3. District of Residence in Kerala:

4. Educational Qualification:
☐ No formal education ☐ Secondary school
☐ Undergraduate ☐ Postgraduate or higher

5. Religion:
☐ Hindu ☐ Muslim ☐ Christian ☐ Other (please specify): _____

6. In which GCC country did you work?

7. In which sector did you work?

8. What were the main reasons that led to your return migration to Kerala?

9. How did COVID-19 affect you and your family?

10. Please describe your experience after returning from the Gulf:

11. What major differences have you observed in your life before and after returning?

12. What further actions or support would you recommend for better reintegration of Gulf returnees in Kerala?

13. Are you aware of any policies or schemes available for return migrants in Kerala? If yes, please specify:

14. What health and financial challenges have you or others faced as return migrants?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this interview schedule.
Your responses are valuable in shaping policies and support frameworks for Gulf return migrants in Kerala.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATIONS AND ESSENTIAL ETHICAL COMPLIANCES

Author's Contributions (in accordance with ICMJE criteria for authorship)

Contribution	*Author 1*	*Author 2*
Conceived and designed the research or analysis	Yes	Yes
Collected the data	Yes	No
Contributed to data analysis & interpretation	Yes	Yes
Wrote the article/paper	Yes	No
Critical revision of the article/paper	Yes	Yes
Editing of the article/paper	Yes	Yes
Supervision	Yes	No
Project Administration	Yes	No
Funding Acquisition	No	No
Overall Contribution Proportion (%)	70	30

Funding
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Research involving human bodies or organs or tissues (Helsinki Declaration)
The author(s) solemnly declare(s) that this research has not involved any human subject (body or organs) for experimentation. It was not a clinical research. The contexts of human population/participation were only indirectly covered through literature review. Therefore, an Ethical Clearance (from a Committee or Authority) or ethical obligation of Helsinki Declaration does not apply in cases of this study or written work.

Research involving animals (ARRIVE Checklist)
The author(s) solemnly declare(s) that this research has not involved any animal subject (body or organs) for experimentation. The research was not based on laboratory experiment involving any kind of animal. Some contexts of animals are also indirectly covered through literature review. Therefore, an Ethical Clearance (from a Committee or Authority) does not apply in cases of this study or written work.

Research on Indigenous Peoples and/or Traditional Knowledge
The author(s) solemnly declare(s) that this research has not involved Indigenous Peoples as participants or respondents, with the documentation of their Indigenous Knowledge. Some other contexts, if any, of Indigenous Peoples or Indigenous Knowledge are only indirectly covered through literature review. An Ethical Clearance 'to conduct research on indigenous peoples' Indigenous knowledge is also not relevant. Therefore, an Ethical Clearance (from a Committee or Authority) or prior informed consent (PIC) of the respondents or Self-Declaration in this regard does not apply in cases of this study or written work.

Research involving Plants
The author(s) solemnly declare(s) that this research has not involved the plants for experiment or field studies. The contexts of plants were only indirectly covered through literature review. Thus, during this research the author(s) obeyed the principles of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention on the Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

(Optional) Research Involving Local Community Participants (Non-Indigenous)
The author(s) solemnly declare(s) that this research has involved local community participants or respondents belonging to non-Indigenous peoples. This study did not involve any child in any form

directly. The contexts of different humans, people, populations, men/women/children and ethnic people are also indirectly covered through literature review. Therefore, an Ethical Clearance (from a Committee or Authority) and prior informed consent (PIC) of the respondents in this regard are appended.

(Optional) PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses)
The author(s) has/have NOT complied with PRISMA standards. It is not relevant in case of this study or written work.

Competing Interests/Conflict of Interest
Author(s) has/have no competing financial, professional, or personal interests from other parties or in publishing this manuscript. There is no conflict of interest with the publisher or the editorial team or the reviewers.

Attribution and Representation
All opinions and mistakes are the author(s)' own and cannot be attributed to the institutions they represent. The publisher is also not responsible either for such opinions and mistakes in the text or graphs or images.

Declaration of the Use of AI
During the preparation of this work, the authors used no AI to assists the script translation and proof reading.

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To see original copy of these declarations signed by Corresponding/First Author (on behalf of other co-authors too), please download associated zip folder [Ethical Declarations] from the published Abstract page accessible through and linked with the DOI: https://doi.org/10.33002/jpg050103.

INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM FROM RESPONDENTS
(Non-Indigenous Respondents)
This form was translated into local language for the respondents

Title of the Research: Back to the Roots: Socio-Economic Policy Making and Re-integration of Kerala's Gulf-Return Migrants Amidst the COVID-19

Principal Researcher:	Dr Ansari PA, Lecturer and Module Coordinator Results Consortium in partnership with Leeds Trinity University, United Kingdom, Email : ansari@resultsco.ac.uk, Mobile : +44 7543502832
Research Supervisor:	Dr Sameer Babu M, Associate Professor, DES, JMI, New Delhi-110025, India

A) INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS

1. Objectives of the research
The objectives of this study were to examine Socio-Economic Policy Making and Re-integration of Kerala's Gulf-Return Migrants Amidst the COVID-19

2. Participation in research
The researcher will ask you several pertinent questions. This interview will be recorded in written form and should last about 50-60 minutes. The location and timing of the interview will be determined by you, depending on your availability and convenience.

3. Risks and disadvantages
There is no particular risk involved in this project. You may, however, refuse to answer any question at any time or even terminate the interview.

4. Advantanges and benefits
You will receive intangible benefits even if you refuse to answer some questions or decide to terminate the interview. You will also contribute to a better understanding of the Socio-Economic Policy Making and Re-integration of Kerala's Gulf-Return Migrants Amidst the COVID-19

5. Confidentiality
Personal information you give us will be kept confidential. No information identifying you in any way will be published. In addition, each participant in the research will be assigned a code and only the researcher will know your identity.

6. Right of withdrawal
Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary and you can at any time withdraw from the research on simple verbal notice and without having to justify your decision, without consequence to you. If you decide to opt out of the research, please contact the researcher at the telephone number or email listed below. At your request, all information concerning you can also be destroyed. However, after the outbreak of the publishing process, it is impossible to destroy the analyses and results on the data collected.

B) CONSENT

Declaration of the participant

- ⇨ I understand that I can take some time to think before agreeing or not to participate in the research.
- ⇨ I can ask the research team questions and ask for satisfactory answers.
- ⇨ I understand that by participating in this research project, I do not relinquish any of my rights, including my right to terminate the interview at any time.
- ⇨ I have read this information and consent form and agree to participate in the research project.
- ⇨ I agree that the interviews be recorded in written form by the researcher: Yes ( ) No ( )

Signature of the participant : _____ Date : _____

Surname : _____ First name : _____

Researcher engagement

I explained to the participant the conditions for participation in the research project. I answered to the best of my knowledge the questions asked and I made sure of the participant's understanding. I, along with the research team, agree to abide by what was agreed to in this information and consent form.

Signature of the researcher : Ansari Date : 15-03-2025

Surname: PA First name: Ansari

- ⇨ Should you have any questions regarding this study, or to withdraw from the research, please contact Mr. Ansari PA by e-mail : ansaripa101@gmail.com
- ⇨ If you have any concerns about your rights or about the responsibilities of researchers concerning your participation in this project, you can contact Dr Sameer Babu M, Associate Professor, DES, JMI, New Delhi-110025 by email : msameer@jmi.ac.in

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

JAMIA MILLIA ISLAMIA, NEW DELHI

Jamia Nagar-PO, New Delhi,India. PIN – 110025

Dr Sameer Babu M

Lab Lead, CLMLMS &

Associate Professor of Education
Cell: +91 9447943244
Email: msameer@jmi.ac.in

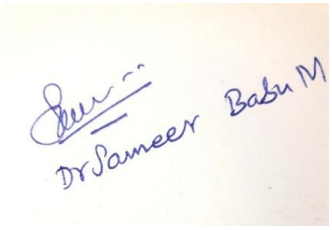
Date: 29/06/2024

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Greetings!

This is to certify that the Ethical board of the CLMLMS has arranged a meeting to discuss the ethical approval of the paper authored by Dr Ansari PA and Dr Sameer Babu M entitled "Back to the Roots: Socio-Economic Policy Making and Re-integration of Kerala's Gulf-Return Migrants amidst the COVID-19". Considering the submitted tools and basic proposal, the committee has decided to approve the paper to be carried out with a research component. The members suggested the authors to be very confidential while managing the interview response. Please feel free to reach out to the undersigned at msameer@jmi.ac.in for any further information or clarification.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Sameer Babu M

Aim & Scope

The journal will be comprehensively covering the subjects of policy and governance in interdisciplinary and multi disciplinary approach. Broadly, the conventional disciplines that can be covered may include:

- Public Administration
- Public Policy
- Political Sociology
- Political Science
- Political Geography and Anthropology
- Rural Studies/Development
- Regional Studies & Planning
- Legal and Juridical Sciences
- Urban Planning & Development
- Development Studies
- Gender Studies
- Environmental Studies
- Management Studies
- Economics and Social Work

The dimensions and manifestations of policy and governance can be organized into broader themes and sub-themes that can be divided into following major (applied) categories:

- Urban Areas & Communities
- Decision Making & Negotiation
- Democracy & Governance
- Development & Economic Growth
- Education, Training & Labour
- Environment & Energy
- Natural Resources Management
- Justice Delivery
- Gender, Race & Identity
- Globalization
- Health & Occupational Health
- Human Rights
- International Relations & Security
- Politics & Power
- Media and Communication
- Poverty, Inequality & Opportunity
- Public Finance
- Public Leadership & Management
- Science, Technology & Innovations
- Social Action & Philanthropy
- Social Policy
- Racism and Discrimination
- Regional Development and Transportation
- Institutions & Governance
- Culture, Art and Society
- Organizational and Information Technology
- Global and International Systems
- Military & Militarization
- Population, Migration, and Public Policy
- Economic Development
- Media and Social Media
- Military and Defence Policy

By bridging both academic and professional domains, the journal provides professionals, practitioners, researchers, students, and policymakers, and any other persons with information on developments in the field of policy and/or governance. - any other having practical significance and policy relevance.

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