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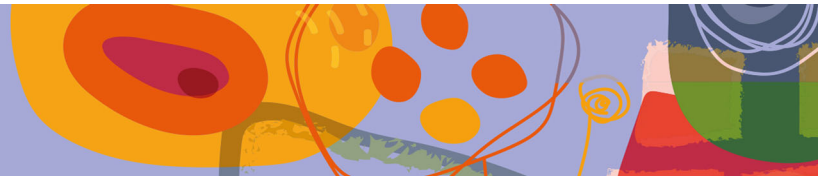
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OPEN

Knowledge production under hegemonic shadows: the spectrum of epistemic inequality, power dynamics, and marginalisation in African studies

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African Studies grapple with numerous structural issues, including epistemic inequalities, power dynamics, and marginalisation in knowledge production. This study aims to examine the root causes and dimensions of these imbalances by analysing bibliometric data from the journal *Africa Spectrum* between 2009 and 2023, using it as a case study to explore broader trends and challenges in African Studies. It highlights critical inequalities, such as the limited representation of Africa-centred perspectives, the low visibility of women authors, and the thematic focus of the literature on Western-centric topics. Data sourced from the Scopus database were analysed using tools like VOSviewer and Excel, focusing on author profiles, citation patterns, keywords, countries, institutions, and funding structures. The findings reveal that only 32% of the authors are African, women authors represent a mere 27%, and the literature predominantly revolves around Western-centric themes such as crisis, conflict, and governance. Additionally, the dominance of Western-based institutions and funding sources underscores the continued dependency of Africa-centred knowledge production on external factors. These results emphasise the historical reproduction of power imbalances within African Studies, constraining Africa's intellectual autonomy. By critically analysing the structural issues in African Studies, this study highlights the necessity for more inclusive and Africa-centred knowledge production processes.

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Introduction

In his farewell article published on April 12, 2024, Tim Glawion (2024), the previous editor-in-chief of *Africa Spectrum*, drew attention to the structural problems encountered in African Studies, noting that academic publishing and knowledge production processes are still plagued by deep unresolved problems. According to Glawion, knowledge production in African Studies is shaped not only by who writes, but also by who can read and access it. However, it is also true that the field is largely under Western hegemony, and the work of Africa-based scholars is often marginalised. He emphasises that academic publishing should not be limited to performing day-to-day tasks, but rather it is imperative to create a platform for Africa's own voice to be heard. This perspective aligns with the idea of 'endogenous knowledge' described by Hountondji (1997:17), who argues that such an approach is crucial for creating bridges and recreating the unity of knowledge or 'in simpler, deeper terms, the unity of the human being'. Without incorporating the African voice, there can be no true 'plurality' of knowledge. This call for inclusivity, while not excluding contributions from the Global North, seeks to ensure that the knowledge production process in African Studies reflects a broader and more equitable range of voices. In this context, the fundamental problems that persist in African Studies stand as serious obstacles to a more inclusive and equitable structure of this literature (Hountondji, 2009; Lonsdale, 2005; Olukoshi, 2006; Tijssen, 2007; Mouton, 2010; Miller, 2013; Arowosegbe, 2014, 2016; Briggs and Weathers, 2016; Spies and Seesemann, 2016; Pailey, 2016; Basedau, 2020; Clapham, 2020; Kessi et al., 2020; Iroulo and Ortiz, 2022; Ndlovu-Gatsheni et al., 2022; Serunkuma, 2024).

The most fundamental problem in African Studies is that Africa is still marginalised in knowledge production. Centuries of epistemic inequalities have resulted in the West seeing Africa as an object of knowledge and the exclusion of African perspectives from the knowledge production process. Africa's knowledge production systems are subordinated to Western norms, which undermines Africa's intellectual independence (Hountondji, 2009; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021; Ndlovu-Gatsheni et al., 2022). This structure leads to power imbalances in knowledge production and is an important obstacle that prevents Africa from participating effectively in the academic field (Zegeye and Vambe, 2006; Boshoff, 2009; Iroulo and Ortiz, 2022).

As a result of these power imbalances, academic neo-colonialism is highly problematic in African Studies. As Serunkuma points out, African-based scholars have limited access to global knowledge networks, which obliges them to adapt to Western-centred knowledge systems (Serunkuma, 2024). Boshoff's work on scholarly collaboration and neo-colonial knowledge structures in Central Africa also shows that Western-based collaborations marginalise African-based knowledge (Boshoff, 2009). These structures weaken local knowledge production processes in Africa and reinforce epistemic inequalities (Tijssen, 2007; Cirhuza, 2020; Iroulo and Ortiz, 2022; Serunkuma, 2024).

Another important problem in African Studies is the hegemony of Western-centred academic studies in this field. Basedau and Clapham argue that Africa is often defined in terms of 'lack' and 'crisis' and that such discourses make it difficult for Africa to develop its own knowledge production capacities (Basedau, 2020; Clapham, 2020). Drawing attention to this issue, Mama also challenges the marginalisation of African intellectuals in knowledge production processes and argues that these processes are limited by Western-centred paradigms (Mama, 2007). This hegemonic structure prevents local perspectives from coming to the fore in African Studies and limits the intellectual diversity of the field (Olukoshi, 2006; Zegeye and Vambe, 2006; Pailey, 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020).

As a reflection of Western-centred hegemony, structural inequalities in African-based knowledge production processes are also evident. Pailey emphasises that African academics' access to and acceptance rates in leading Western-based academic journals are severely restricted and their chances of publishing in these journals are low (Pailey 2016). Ondari-Okemwa's (2007) study shows a similar picture; the hierarchical structures that exist in academic publishing exclude the work of African-based researchers and hinder the development of local knowledge systems. These inequalities restrict the participation of African academics in global knowledge networks and prevent them from playing a more active role in knowledge production processes (Tijssen, 2007; Boshoff, 2009; Briggs and Weathers, 2016; Pailey, 2016).

The invisibility of Southern researchers in academic outputs is another important issue that should not be ignored in African Studies. Cirhuza (2020) states that although researchers from the Global South are involved in critical stages such as data collection, they are underrepresented in research outcomes, which can be described as 'invisible labour' (Cirhuza, 2020). This lack of representation constitutes another dimension of academic neo-colonialism, making it difficult for African-based researchers to achieve an independent position in knowledge production processes (Ingwersen and Jacobs, 2004; Hountondji, 2009). The contributions of Southern researchers are often marginalised, weakening the linkage of African Studies with local knowledge systems (Zezeza, 2002; Cirhuza, 2020).

The insufficiency of decolonisation efforts in African Studies is also a problem that is frequently criticised in the literature (Kessi et al., 2020). Ndlovu-Gatsheni emphasises that decolonisation should not only be an academic discourse, but structural changes should also be implemented (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020). However, as Arowosegbe, Zegeye, and Vambe point out, decolonisation efforts often remain at a symbolic level and do not lead to deep structural transformation (Zegeye and Vambe, 2006; Arowosegbe 2016). These inadequate efforts, which prevent Africa from achieving an independent position in knowledge production processes, make the need for structural change in African Studies even more urgent (Tijssen, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020; Duymuş, 2025).

The lack of linguistic diversity and the limited production of knowledge in local languages is also a major problem in African Studies. While Glawion (2024) emphasises the importance of multilingual publishing in this context, Sooryamoorthy and Shrum (2007) reveal that even the use of the internet by scholars in South Africa is insufficient to promote knowledge production in local languages, as it facilitates access to information but does not have the expected effect on knowledge production in local languages. As Mama (2007) and Pailey (2016) have argued, the dominance of Western languages such as English and French in academic publishing undermines local knowledge systems and distances African societies from their own knowledge production processes. Mouton (2010) critiques the limited growth in research output due to structural barriers in Africa, such as funding and infrastructure deficits, which hinder the development of a robust, locally-driven academic environment. These challenges further perpetuate the imbalance in global knowledge production, limiting African scholars' contributions to international academic discourse. Zegeye and Vambe (2006) also explore the challenges faced by African scholars, particularly the dominance of Western epistemologies and languages in academic publishing, which often marginalises local knowledge systems and Africa-centred research.

In addition, the underrepresentation of women researchers is an important reflection of gender inequalities in African Studies

(Ampofo et al., 2004). Studies by Briggs and Weathers (2016) show that women authors are less likely to appear in publications and that their work is less frequently cited. In African Studies, they argue that the dominance of Western academics (predominantly white men) reflects wider power imbalances and colonial legacies. As Mama (2007) has also shown in her ethics-based work, greater visibility of women researchers can lead to gender equality in the literature. Increasing the representation of women researchers is seen as a critical step towards achieving gender equality in African Studies. In her article, Pailey (2016) critiques how development discourses often marginalise African women, framing them as passive victims in need of Western intervention. She argues that these frameworks neglect African women's roles as active agents in knowledge production and community leadership. By centring the white gaze, such discourses overlook the wealth of indigenous knowledge and cultural practices that African women contribute to development. Pailey calls for a reimagining of development that values African women's experiences and perspectives, positioning them as key producers of knowledge rather than recipients of external solutions. This de-centring is crucial not only for empowering African women but also for creating more inclusive and contextually relevant frameworks for knowledge production and development (Nwoke and Cochrane, 2022).

The common denominator of these problems in African Studies is the inequality of power and control in knowledge production. Western academic institutions and publishers control knowledge production processes, making it difficult for African-based research to access global knowledge networks (Pouris 2005; Tijssen 2007). This leaves African knowledge production systems dependent on Western hegemony and weakens local knowledge systems (Hountondji, 2009; Serunkuma, 2024). Inequalities of power and control are part of a wider structural problem in African studies, and addressing these inequalities is essential for the field to become more independent and equitable (Olukoshi 2006; Hountondji 2009).

In this context, the aim of this study is to analyse the structural and epistemic imbalances and inequalities that are prominent in African Studies and to examine these problems by comparing them with the bibliographic data of *Africa Spectrum*. While similar studies have been conducted on leading journals such as *African Affairs*, *the Journal of Modern African Studies*, and *Africa Spectrum* (Briggs and Weathers, 2016; Basedau 2020), this study will expand upon previous analyses by offering a deeper examination of *Africa Spectrum's* 15-year bibliographic data. The decision to focus on *Africa Spectrum* in this study is a deliberate one. Its interdisciplinary scope, longstanding academic presence, consistent indexing in Scopus, and open-access policy make the journal not only accessible but also well-suited for bibliometric analysis. In particular, the availability of structured metadata—such as author affiliations, funding information, and keywords—ensures the transparency required for a robust quantitative assessment. Moreover, *Africa Spectrum* is widely regarded as a reputable and influential outlet within African Studies, with strong institutional and intellectual standing. For these reasons, the findings drawn from this journal are not seen as limited to a single publication, but rather as offering a meaningful lens through which broader structural patterns in the field can be observed. Before delving into this data, the journal, with the highest impact factor in its field, will be introduced, and its significance within African Studies will be highlighted.

A leading journal in African studies: *Africa Spectrum*

Upon the independence of most former African colonies in the 1960s, the African continent became a politically significant and

intellectually stimulating area of study, with new research centres and universities established there. It was in this context, in 1966, that *Africa Spectrum* (then, *Afrika Spectrum*) was launched, riding a wave of global growth in African Studies due to the rapid institutionalisation of area studies as an academic field. Building on this momentum, the journal was primarily a German enterprise, both in ownership and authorship, producing thematically focused German-language issues. However, as African Studies expanded globally, its language policy gradually shifted from the 1970s onwards, allowing for publications in both English and French (Eckert 2016). In 2009, the journal's official title was changed to English in the form of *Africa Spectrum*.

Africa Spectrum is supported by the Hamburg-based German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA). This institute promotes a "global approach" to research that relies on pluralistic methods, theories, and concepts (Grauvogel 2018, 2019). Since 2003, *Africa Spectrum* has also been closely collaborating with the German African Studies Association (Vereinigung von Afrikanisten in Deutschland or VAD).

Africa Spectrum is an internationally recognised multi-disciplinary peer-reviewed journal in contemporary African Studies that is published three times annually. The journal publishes original research articles, analytical reports, and book reviews, as well as special issues. Attracting scholars from a broad range of thematic perspectives, it covers social, economic, and political studies related to Africa. Due to its high academic standards, *Africa Spectrum* ranks among the most prestigious periodicals in the African Studies domain (<https://www.aegis-eu.org/african-studies-journals>).

The Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) began listing *Afrika Spectrum* in 2006. A significant milestone occurred a few years later, when the journal undertook a new publishing partnership with SAGE Publishing in 2009. This collaboration coincided with *Africa Spectrum* introducing new 'all-English' and 'Open Access' policies. By providing unrestricted access to its research, the journal aims to democratise academic knowledge production on Africa — a crucial step in addressing global asymmetries in knowledge production (Eckert 2016). Eckert (2016: 91) notes that Africa-based scholars highly value the open access model, as it reduces barriers to participation and helps counterbalance knowledge inequalities on a global scale. To create space for young African scholars, *Africa Spectrum*, in collaboration with the Centre for Gender and Africa Studies (formerly the Centre for Africa Studies) at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa, recently launched the Young African Scholar Award. This award is designed to amplify the voices of emerging African researchers in the international academic sphere. The journal places a strong emphasis on featuring important publications by young African scholars in each issue, which also enhances the journal's internationalisation.

Methodology

Africa Spectrum formed the central focus of this study, and the journal's data were meticulously extracted from Scopus, a leading repository of academic literature. A bibliometric analysis method was utilised to systematically evaluate publication trends, thematic structures, and scholarly impact, based on established guidelines for designing bibliometric research (Öztürk et al. 2024). Using the bibliometric analysis method, it is possible to conduct comprehensive evaluations of a single journal or comparatively analyse multiple journals, a specific field, or a particular concept (Taşkın and Akça 2016; Kabongo 2019; Özdemir et al. 2021; Yılmaz et al. 2024; Balıkcı et al. 2024).

On January 12, 2024, a targeted search was conducted within the database using the 'Source Title' parameter, specifically

focusing on *Africa Spectrum*. This search initially yielded 353 results, which were further refined to 277 entries by restricting the timeframe to between 2009 and 2023. The primary reason for determining this specific year range was that bibliometrically relevant data, suitable for analysis on both the journal's homepage and within the Scopus database, only became available starting in 2009. After excluding 10 editorial articles, the final dataset for in-depth analysis consisted of 267 documents.

To ensure data accuracy and consistency, a rigorous cross-referencing procedure was carried out. This involved a comprehensive comparison of all documented publications in the journal with the information available on the official *Africa Spectrum* website to address any potential discrepancies in the dataset. This methodological approach provided a robust foundation for the subsequent analyses and interpretations presented in this paper.

The dataset included critical details such as author names, article titles, publication languages, publication years, document types, and other relevant metadata. It was then exported from Scopus and imported into VOSviewer (version 1.6.20, January 2, 2024) for visualisation purposes (Van Eck and Waltman 2010). The visualisation process involved transcribing and tabulating the data, followed by creating visual representations using Microsoft Excel and Word Art to enhance clarity and accessibility.

Findings and discussion. The findings of the study, which examines the challenges of African Studies by analysing fifteen years of data from *Africa Spectrum*, one of the leading journals in the field, are presented comprehensively. This investigation first explores publication and citation patterns, including the identification of the 25 most frequently cited articles within the journal, the studies most often referenced by *Africa Spectrum* authors, and the network of scholars regularly cited by contributors. It then shifts focus to authorship, highlighting the top 10 contributors based on publication counts and delving into the complex citation relationships between authors within the journal's articles. Furthermore, the analysis addresses affiliations and countries, providing a global perspective on scholarly contributions by identifying the countries with the most prolific outputs, applying a minimum threshold of five publications, and listing the top 15 institutions that have made substantial contributions to the journal's scholarship. Finally, the study examines keywords, systematically categorising them into five clusters and four overarching categories to illuminate the diverse and multifaceted themes represented in *Africa Spectrum's* body of work.

Publication and citation analysis. Since 2009, *Africa Spectrum* has published 267 articles primarily focused on political science and international relations within the broader field of African Studies. Over the last 15 years, the journal has maintained a consistent commitment to scholarly dissemination, as evidenced by its annual publication counts (see Fig. 1). Analysing citation patterns, the journal's impact is evident in its steadily increasing citation counts. By 2023, *Africa Spectrum* reached a total of 535 citations, showcasing its growing recognition and influence within the academic community. The citation rates for 2022 and 2021, at 464 and 381, respectively, further underscore the journal's enduring relevance and impact (see Fig. 1).

The articles published in *Africa Spectrum* between 2009 and 2023 that received the highest number of citations reveal key trends and imbalances in African Studies, both in terms of author profiles and the themes addressed. According to Table 1, the most cited article is 'The Boko Haram Uprising and Islamic Revivalism in Northern Nigeria' (Adesoji 2010), with 156 citations. This study highlights how issues such as religious radicalisation and political instability in Africa are prioritised in academic discourse.

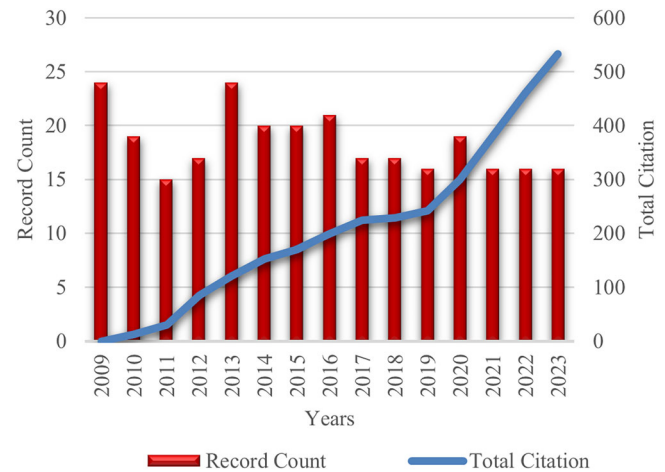


Fig. 1 The distribution of articles published in *Africa Spectrum* and the corresponding citation counts over the years.

The second most cited article, 'Blinded by Sight: Divining the Future of Anthropology in Africa' (Nyamnjoh 2012), critically examines knowledge production processes in Africa and has received 91 citations. The third most cited article, 'Property and Citizenship: Conceptually Connecting Land Rights and Belonging in Africa' (Lund 2011), which has 88 citations, addresses issues of belonging in the context of land ownership and citizenship in Africa. An analysis of the author profiles, titles, and overall thematic trends of the most cited articles in *Africa Spectrum* provides deeper insights into the structural challenges and representational imbalances within African Studies.

An analysis of the author profiles in the most cited articles reveals a dominance of Western authors. A significant portion of the 25 articles listed in Table 1 were either authored solely by Western scholars or produced through collaborations between Western and African academics. In contrast, contributions from African authors remain limited, confirming Iroulo and Ortiz's (2022) critique regarding the low visibility of African scholars in African Studies. Furthermore, when examining the gender profile of the authors, an overwhelming dominance of male academics is observed. The limited contributions of female authors, whether as sole authors or co-authors, align with Briggs and Weathers' (2016) findings on the marginalisation of women researchers in African Studies. This finding demonstrates the persistence of inequalities in both geographical and gender representation, even at the level of the most cited works.

An analysis of the article titles reveals that the most cited works in *Africa Spectrum* largely focus on crisis-driven themes such as conflict dynamics, post-colonial identity struggles, economic inequalities, and authoritarian regimes. For instance, articles like 'The Boko Haram Uprising and Islamic Revivalism in Northern Nigeria' and 'Power-Sharing, Conflict and Transition in Burundi' address issues of religious radicalisation, political instability, and power-sharing, illustrating how Africa is frequently examined through the lens of crisis. Similarly, works such as 'New Nationalism and Autochthony: Tales of Origin as Political Cleavage' and 'Becoming Zimbabwe or Becoming Zimbabwean?' discuss post-colonial identity and belonging within a framework shaped by Western norms. This trend aligns with Iroulo and Ortiz's (2022) and Serunkuma's (2024) critiques of the dominance of Western-centred knowledge production in African Studies. Even articles addressing the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are framed within narratives emphasising Africa's vulnerabilities and challenges. Overall, the scarcity of studies focusing on social progress or structural transformation

Table 1 The most frequently cited Africa Spectrum articles published between 2009 and 2023.

Rank	TC	Article Title	Author(s)	Year	Keywords
1	156	The Boko Haram Uprising and Islamic Revivalism in Nigeria	A. Adesoji	2010	Nigeria, uprisings/revolts, Islam, Islamic law
2	91	Blinded by Sight: Divining the Future of Anthropology in Africa	F. B. Nyamnjoh	2012	Africa, theory of science, anthropology, methods
3	88	Property and Citizenship: Conceptually Connecting Land Rights and Belonging in Africa	C. Lund	2011	Africa, land tenure, land law, social integration
4	82	Africa for Africans or Africa for Natives Only? New Nationalism and Nativism in Zimbabwe and South Africa	S. J. Ndlovu-Gatssheni	2009	Africa, South Africa, Zimbabwe, nationalism, nativism
5	80	Exploring the Socio-Economic Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Marketplaces in Urban Ghana	L. A. Asante and R. O. Mills	2020	Ghana, COVID-19 pandemic, market trading, social distancing, partial lockdown
6	75	Boko Haram: The Development of a Militant Religious Movement in Nigeria	R. Loimeier	2012	Nigeria, Boko Haram, religious movement, militant Islam
7	69	Racism, Ethnicity and the Media in Africa: Reflections Inspired by Studies of Xenophobia in Cameroon and South Africa	F. B. Nyamnjoh	2010	Cameroon, South Africa, Africa, mass media, xenophobia, ethnicity, racism
8	62	Power-Sharing, Conflict and Transition in Burundi: Twenty Years of Trial and Error	S. Vandeginste	2009	Burundi, power-sharing, consociationalism, government systems
9	56	Indigenous Knowledge and Public Education in Sub-Saharan Africa	M. Mawere	2015	Africa south of the Sahara, education, learning, cultural heritage, social values, language
10	53	The Ethiopian Second Republic and the Fragile Social Contract	J. Abbink	2009	Ethiopia, republicanism, democratisation, ethnicity, political culture, fragile states
11	51	Cows, Bandits, and Violent Conflicts: Understanding Cattle Rustling in Northern Nigeria	A. Olaniyan and A. Yahaya	2016	Nigeria, livestock farming, cattle, violent crimes, organised crime
12	45	ECOWAS and the Restoration of Democracy in the Gambia	C. Hartmann	2017	Gambia, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), elections/voting, democracy, military intervention, regionalism
13	41	Beyond Marikana: The Post-Apartheid South African State	V. Satgar	2012	South Africa, globalisation, neoliberalism, state, Marikana massacre
14	41	New Nationalism and Autochthony - Tales of Origin as Political Cleavage	M. Bøås,	2009	Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, access to land, nationality
15	39	Straining: Young Men Working Through Waithood in Freetown, Sierra Leone	B. Finn and S. Oldfield	2015	Sierra Leone, Freetown, young people, employment, informal sector
16	38	Becoming Zimbabwe or Becoming Zimbabwean: Identity, Nationalism and State-Building	A.S. Mlambo	2013	Zimbabwe, nation and state-building, society, national identity
17	37	The Institutionalisation of Power Revisited: Presidential Term Limits in Africa	D.M. Tull and C. Simons	2017	Africa, political systems, government systems, democracy, rule of law, changes of government
18	35	Work and Masculinity in Katanga's Artisanal Mines	J. Cuvelier	2014	Democratic Republic of the Congo, Katanga, artisanal mining, social change, gender roles, masculinity
19	34	Urban Languages in Africa	R.M. Beck	2010	African languages, evolution of language, cities
20	34	The Prevalence of Power-Sharing: Exploring the Patterns of Post-Election Peace	A.K. Jarstad	2009	Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Sierra Leone, armed conflict; power-sharing, peace terms, elections
21	31	Competing Claims and Contested Boundaries: Legitimising Land Rights in Isiolo District, Northern Kenya	S.R. Boye and R. Kaarhus	2011	Kenya, land tenure, land law, social conflicts, reforms

Table 1 (continued)

Rank	TC	Article Title	Author(s)	Year	Keywords
22	31	The Perils of Power-Sharing: Africa and Beyond	C.L. Sriram and M.-J. Zahar	2009	Sub-Saharan Africa, power-sharing, conflict resolution, peace-building, armed forces/military units
23	30	The Force of Action: Legitimizing the Coup in Bamako, Mali	B. Whitehouse	2012	Mali, coup d'état/military insurrection, political culture
24	30	Land Acquisitions, The Politics of Dispossession, and State-remaking in Gambella, Western Ethiopia	F. Gebresenbet	2016	Ethiopia, Gambella, development policy strategies, agriculture policy, distribution/redistribution of land, political power
25	30	Who to Blame and What's to Gain? Reflections on Space, State, and Violence in Kenya and South Africa	L.B. Landau and J.P. Misago	2009	Kenya, South Africa, violence, state, segregation

TC Total citation according to Scopus.

highlights how African Studies often examines Africa as a problem-oriented subject, shaped by external perspectives within the global academic context.

This analysis of the most cited articles in *Africa Spectrum* clearly demonstrates how the persistent inequalities and thematic trends in African Studies are also reflected in the journal's publications. The dominance of Western and male academics in author profiles highlights a structural issue that marginalises Africa-based and female scholars. Similarly, the focus of article titles on crises, conflicts, and problem-oriented themes underscores the limited epistemic diversity and inclusivity within African Studies. This analysis reaffirms the urgent need for African Studies to evolve into a more inclusive field that prioritises local perspectives and creates space for diverse voices.

An examination of the publications most frequently cited by *Africa Spectrum* authors provides valuable insights into the scholarly works that influence research within the journal. The most cited studies, as detailed in Table 2, reveal significant trends in the references shaping *Africa Spectrum's* academic discourse. Notably, books occupy a prominent position, with Mamdani's (1996) seminal work leading the citation rankings. This book, which examines the complexities of democratisation in post-independence Africa, has garnered substantial attention and is the most frequently cited non-journal reference among *Africa Spectrum* authors. The second most cited work is by Posner and Young (2007), which has received 11 citations during the target period. This article analyses the power dynamics of political institutions in Africa, offering pivotal insights that evidently resonate strongly with the journal's contributors. Another notable entry is the book by Chabal and Daloz (1999), which has been cited eight times over the research period. Their exploration of the roles of the state, civil society, and political elites in Africa highlights key themes that continue to shape the scholarly conversations within *Africa Spectrum*.

The most frequently cited works in *Africa Spectrum* generally focus on themes such as political instability, authoritarian regimes, post-colonial challenges, and social resistance within the African continent. This trend aligns directly with the structural issues highlighted by Tim Glawion (2024) in his farewell article. Glawion draws attention to the dominance of Western hegemony in knowledge production and the marginalisation of Africa-centred perspectives, a pattern that is also evident in the predominantly Western-oriented framing of these highly cited works. As Basedau (2020) critiques in his analysis of African Studies, the field remains heavily dominated by Western perspectives, which is reaffirmed by the themes explored in these works. A significant portion of the cited literature examines Africa's political and social structures through the lens of 'crisis' and 'chaos' (Mamdani, 1996; Chabal and Daloz, 1999), often overlooking positive developments or local success stories on the continent. However, certain studies (e.g., Nyamnjoh, 2012; Scott, 1985) address more unique themes such as resistance and identity. Nevertheless, even these works are not entirely free from the Western-centric narrative that portrays Africa as a 'bundle of problems' or a 'zone of despair' (Briggs and Weathers, 2016; Iroulo and Ortiz, 2022).

Studies on Africa's democratic experiences and state structures reveal a similar trend. For instance, works such as Posner and Young (2007) and Levitsky and Way (2010) predominantly emphasise the challenges Africa faces in adapting to democracy or portray this process as being fraught with difficulties. These assessments reinforce critiques by Hountondji (2009) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020), who argue that Africa-centred knowledge production has become overly dependent on Western norms. Furthermore, the tendency in African Studies to overlook long-term developments and positive dynamics of change on the

Table 2 The studies most cited by *Africa Spectrum* authors.

Rank	Title	Author(s)	TC	Year
1	Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism	M. Mamdani	13	1996
2	The Institutionalization of Political Power in Africa	D. N. Posner and D. J. Young	11	2007
3	Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument	P. Chabal and J. P. Daloz	8	1999
4	The Institutionalisation of Power Revisited: Presidential Term Limits in Africa	D. M. Tull and C. Simons	7	2017
5	Blinded by Sight: Divining the Future of Anthropology in Africa	F.B. Nyamnjoh	7	2012
6	Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance	J. C. Scott	7	1985
7	Legal Loopholes and the Politics of Executive Term Limits: Insights from Burundi	S. Vandeginste	7	2016
8	Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War	S. Levitsky and L. A. Way	6	2010
9	Capitalism and Autochthony: The Seesaw of Mobility and Belonging	P. Geschiere and F. Nyamnjoh	6	2000
10	Peace and Power Sharing in Africa: A Not-So-Obvious Relationship	A. Mehler	6	2009
11	Power-Sharing, Conflict and Transition in Burundi: Twenty Years of Trial and Error	S. Vandeginste	6	2009
12	Democracy and Elections in Africa	S. I. Lindberg	6	2006
13	Liberation Movements in Power: Party and State in Southern Africa	R. Southall	6	2013

TC Number of citations by AS authors.

continent aligns with Basedau’s (2020) critique that the field has moved away from capturing the ‘big picture’.

Overall, the most cited works tend to emphasise Africa’s structural problems and social contradictions, while insufficiently addressing the continent’s positive aspects and potential for change. This highlights the need for a more inclusive, Africa-centred, and comparative approach. The current knowledge production practices in African Studies, shaped under Western hegemonic dominance, hinder the expression of the continent’s perspectives in its own voice. Consequently, African Studies clearly highlight the necessity for a more equitable knowledge production process, both in terms of representation and content.

An analysis of the profiles of the most cited authors by *Africa Spectrum* contributors reveals that these works are predominantly authored by Western and male academics. Of the 13 works listed, a significant portion were either entirely written by Western scholars or produced through collaborations between Western authors and African academics. For instance, while works by Mamdani (1996) and Nyamnjoh (2012) highlight the representation of African scholars, the overall dominance of Western academics on the list is evident. This aligns with Iroulo and Ortiz’s (2022) observation that, in the context of African political studies, white academics receive three times more citations than their African counterparts.

The gender profile of the cited authors is also noteworthy; the list is predominantly composed of male scholars, with no citations observed for female academics. This pattern highlights the structural inequalities in African Studies, particularly the disparities in gender representation within knowledge production. The fact that most of the highly cited works in *Africa Spectrum* fall into the categories of ‘outsider research’ or ‘white research’ further supports Iroulo and Ortiz’s (2022) critiques. This trend demonstrates the continued dominance of Western male academics in the field of African Studies while illustrating the marginalisation of contributions from local African female scholars.

Author analysis. The analysis of author profiles in articles published in *Africa Spectrum* provides critical insights into the journal’s dynamics of academic production and representation. Based on the dataset drawn from the journal’s 15-year archive, a total of 267 articles have been published. Among these, 181 were single-authored, 61 were co-authored by two individuals, 22 involved three authors, two were authored by four contributors, and only one article was produced by a team of six authors. This distribution indicates that publications in the journal are

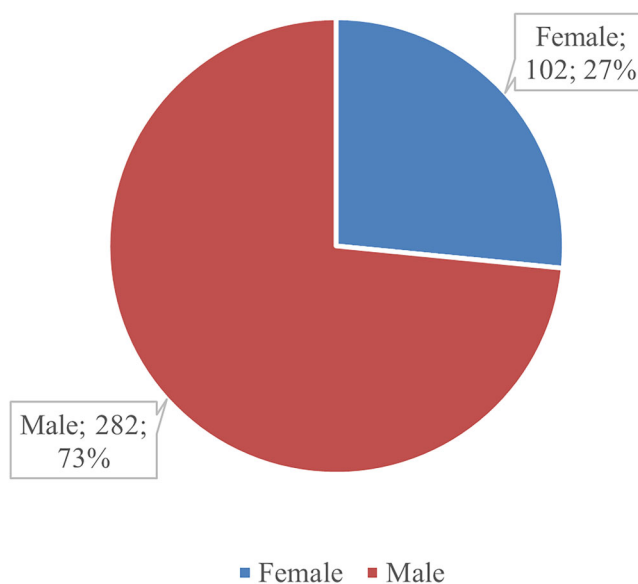


Fig. 2 Gender distribution in *Africa Spectrum*.

predominantly the product of individual efforts or small-scale collaborations.

In terms of gender distribution (see Fig. 2), male authors (282) significantly outnumber female authors (102), highlighting a notable gender disparity among contributors. To identify gender, we first examined the articles under study for gendered pronouns and self-descriptions, and then cross-checked additional publications by the same authors for corroborating references. In cases where no explicit self-identification could be found, gender was inferred through publicly available information such as names, photographs, and biographical profiles, which necessarily involves a degree of approximation (Briggs and Weathers, 2016).

Regarding the geographical origins of the authors, Western scholars (248) dominate the journal’s publications, while African authors (122) are represented at a relatively lower level, and Asian authors account for 2% of the total, representing 9 authors. Methodologically, this distinction is not intended to fix authors into rigid identity categories; rather, it serves as an indicative proxy to capture patterns of representation shaped by the racialized and institutionally uneven geographies of global knowledge production. Accordingly, authors’ positioning was inferred through manual profiling based on institutional affiliation, biographical notes, and publicly available academic profiles, which inevitably involves a degree of approximation. As shown in

Table 3 The most prolific contributors to *Africa Spectrum*.

Rank	Author	TP	TD	TC	H
1	Stef Vandeginste	6	32	390	11
2	Roger Jonathan Southall	4	103	1053	20
3	Bruce Whitehouse	4	25	379	8
4	Aghogho Akpome	3	19	56	5
5	Ulf Engel	3	55	569	9
6	Francis Beng Nyamnjoh	3	70	2358	25
7	Giulia Piccolino	3	20	231	8
8	Andrzej Polus	3	12	106	5

TP Total papers in AS, TD total documents, TC total citations, H = h-index (all data in the table represent numbers from the Scopus Database only).

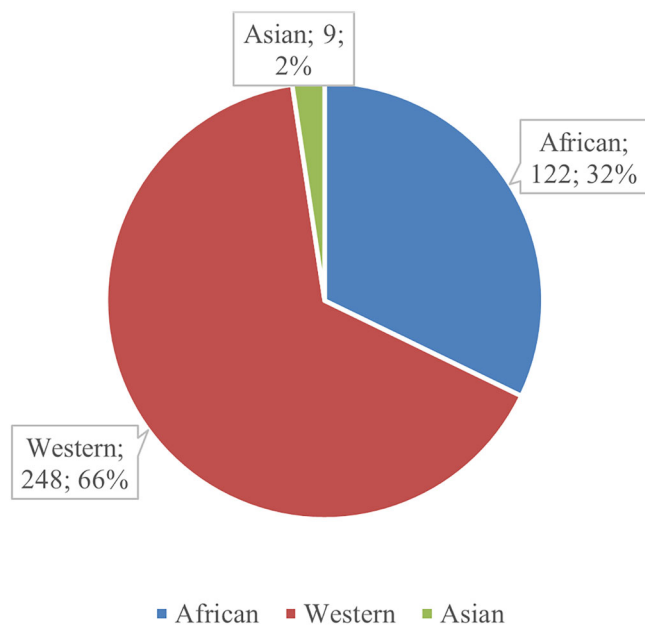


Fig. 3 Authors' origin of *Africa Spectrum*.

Table 3, the most prolific contributors to *Africa Spectrum* include Western academics such as Stef Vandeginste, Roger Jonathan Southall, and Bruce Whitehouse. Only two African scholars, Francis Beng Nyamnjoh and Aghogho Akpome, appear on this list, further illustrating the underrepresentation of African academics within the journal's most active contributors.

The practices of knowledge production and representation in African Studies are shaped by historical power dynamics and the enduring epistemic inequalities of the post-colonial era. As discussed in Serunkuma's (2024), the participation of African scholars in international journals and knowledge production processes, while seemingly a positive development, often creates a paradox that risks perpetuating historical power asymmetries in knowledge production. Serunkuma (2024) argues that opportunities such as publishing in international journals, teaching at prestigious Western universities, or gaining recognition in the global knowledge community can have adverse implications for anti-colonial projects. In this context, while *Africa Spectrum*'s initiatives to encourage African authors are significant, the journal's strong adherence to Western-centric knowledge production dynamics suggests a potential for these efforts to contribute to the reproduction of epistemic inequalities. The

analysis of gender, geographical origins, and the profiles of the most prolific contributors to the journal highlights these paradoxes and imbalances, shedding light on the structural challenges that continue to shape knowledge production in African Studies.

The analysis of author profiles in *Africa Spectrum* reveals an imbalance in gender representation. Between 2009 and 2023, only 27% of the articles were authored by women, highlighting the persistence of structural issues concerning gender representation in African Studies. This aligns with Briggs and Weathers' (2016) critique that female researchers are marginalised and less visible in academic production. This gender-based inequality reflects a broader historical issue of women's underrepresentation in academic literature, not limited to African Studies (Nwoke and Cochrane, 2022). The underrepresentation of female authors restricts the epistemic inclusivity of the literature, hindering the contribution of diverse perspectives to academic knowledge production, as Briggs and Weathers (2016) and Iroulo and Ortiz (2022) discussed.

The geographical distribution of authors in *Africa Spectrum* (see Fig. 3) clearly reflects the ongoing influence of Western-centric knowledge production practices in African Studies. With 66% of published articles authored by Western scholars, the dominance of what Iroulo and Ortiz (2022) term 'outsider research' or 'white research' in African Studies is reaffirmed. Conversely, the fact that only 32% of contributions come from African authors underscores the continued marginalisation of Africa in knowledge production processes. This imbalance also validates the observations of Briggs and Weathers (2016) and Pailey (2016) regarding the low acceptance rates of African authors in international academic publishing, as evidenced by *Africa Spectrum*'s current author profile.

The list of the most prolific authors in *Africa Spectrum*, presented in Table 3, reaffirms the dominance of Western academics in the journal's knowledge production dynamics. Western male scholars such as Stef Vandeginste, Roger Jonathan Southall, and Bruce Whitehouse stand out as the most frequent contributors. In contrast, only two African scholars, Francis Beng Nyamnjoh and Aghogho Akpome, appear on the list. This reflects the structural inequalities in African Studies and the persistent marginalisation of Africa-based academics in knowledge production processes. The dominance of Western academics aligns with Iroulo and Ortiz's (2022) critique of the greater visibility and citation frequency of Western-centred authors. Furthermore, this pattern resonates with Serunkuma's (2024) warnings about how Western hegemony continues to be reproduced in the knowledge production processes within African Studies.

This analysis of *Africa Spectrum*'s author profiles clearly illustrates how the persistent inequalities in African Studies are reflected in the journal's knowledge production practices, both in terms of gender and geographical representation. The underrepresentation of female authors highlights the continuation of gender-based academic disparities, while the limited contributions of Africa-based authors underscore the dominance of Western-centred knowledge production in African Studies. The prominence of Western male academics among the most prolific contributors, as seen in Table 3, further exemplifies these trends. These findings align with Serunkuma's (2024) and Iroulo and Ortiz's (2022) critiques of the epistemic power dynamics within African Studies. Ultimately, addressing these inequalities requires strengthening Africa-centred knowledge production, encouraging the participation of women scholars, and fostering a more inclusive structure within African Studies.

Affiliations and countries. Figure 4 illustrates the geographical distribution of authors contributing to *Africa Spectrum* by

country. Germany emerges as the leading contributor with 76 authors, a dominance largely attributed to the journal’s publication by GIGA (German Institute for Global and Area Studies) and the strong institutional infrastructure supporting African Studies in Germany. South Africa follows with 45 authors, and the United States ranks third with 30 contributors. The United Kingdom, with 27 authors, occupies fourth place, and these four countries collectively play a dominant role in contributions to the journal. While there are also contributions from countries such as Sweden, the Netherlands, and Belgium in Europe, as well as Nigeria and Ghana in Africa, the number of authors from these regions is significantly lower compared to Germany and South Africa. Notably, the total contributions from Nigeria and Ghana are limited to just 20 authors, underlining the marginal position of African countries in terms of contributions to the journal. Other contributing countries, such as Switzerland, France, Tanzania, Italy, and Canada, are represented at even lower levels.

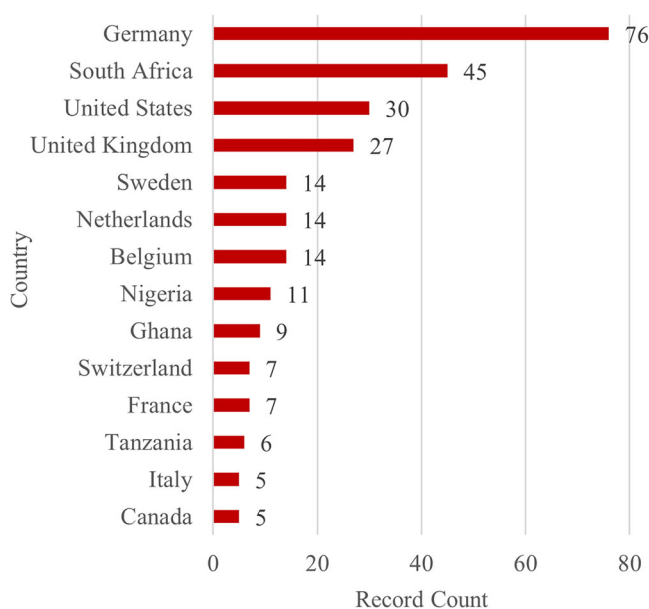


Fig. 4 The most prolific countries in terms of the number of publications in *Africa Spectrum*.

These data reveal a geographical distribution where Western Europe and North America dominate, while contributions from African countries remain relatively limited. This pattern reinforces critiques that knowledge production in African Studies continues to be shaped predominantly by Western academics, with Africa-centred perspectives remaining marginalised in the field.

The limited contributions from African countries highlight the weak representation of local knowledge production in African Studies. The near-total invisibility of African countries beyond South Africa, Nigeria, and Ghana reinforces critiques regarding the marginalisation of Africa-based researchers in international academic spaces (Iroulo and Ortiz, 2022). This pattern reflects the uneven distribution of knowledge production capacity across the continent, revealing the profound impact of inadequate academic infrastructure and restricted access to resources in many regions. In this context, critiques of Western-centric academic systems, which are said to complicate the participation of African researchers in international publishing processes, gain significant relevance (Hountondji, 2009; Ndlovu-Gatshehi, 2020).

On the other hand, South Africa’s significant lead over other African countries highlights the depth of intra-continental epistemic inequalities. With its strong universities, substantial research funding, and extensive international collaborations, South Africa plays a dominant role in African Studies. However, this dominance contributes to the marginalisation of knowledge production in other regions of the continent, hindering broader representation in African Studies. As Basedau (2020) points out, the insufficient visibility of academics from other parts of Africa not only points to power imbalances between Africa and the Global North but also entrenches disparities within the continent itself.

Figure 5, which highlights the institutions contributing most frequently to *Africa Spectrum*, provides valuable insight into the research networks shaping the journal’s academic output. The University of Cape Town and the Leibniz Institute for Global and Regional Studies each stand out as the leading contributors, with 11 articles apiece, followed by Universiteit Antwerpen with 9 articles. Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, Universität Bayreuth, and the University of the Witwatersrand (Johannesburg) are also notable, each contributing 8 articles. Additionally, institutions such as the Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala Universitet, Universiteit Leiden, Stellenbosch University, Universität Leipzig,

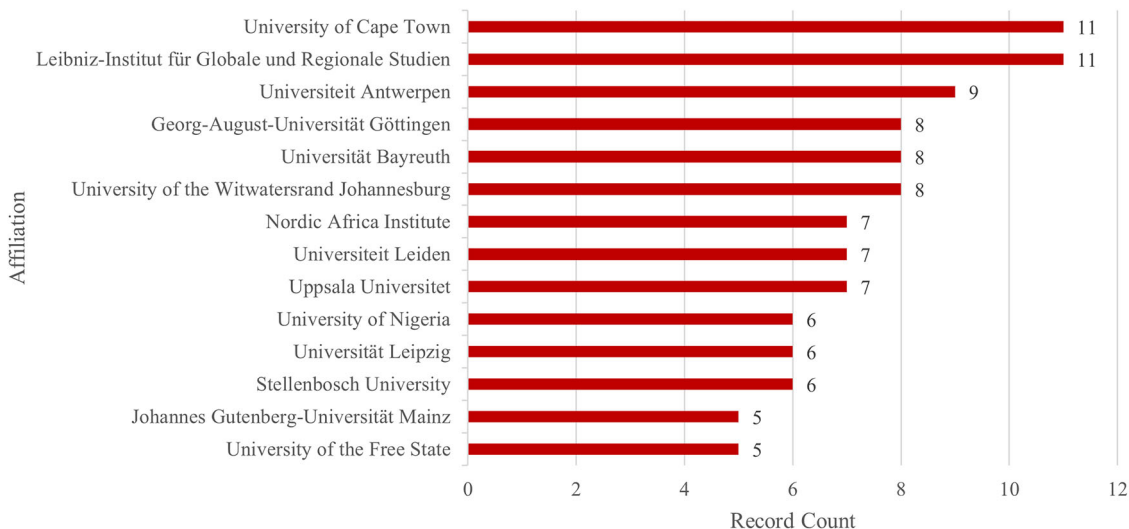


Fig. 5 The most prolific institutions.

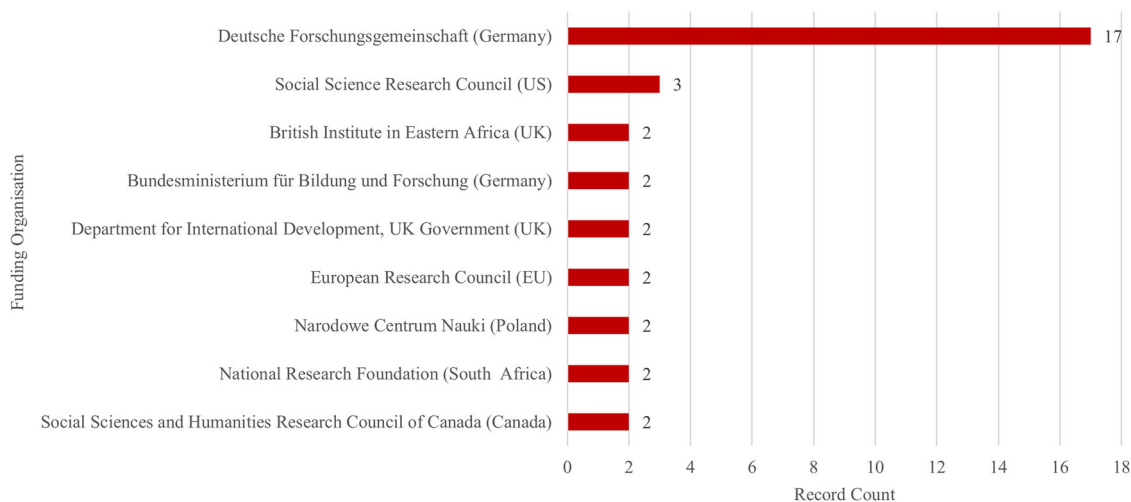


Fig. 6 Funding organisations.

University of Nigeria, and the University of the Free State have made meaningful contributions to the journal.

The institutional-level analysis reveals that the majority of the institutions contributing to the journal are predominantly Western-based. While the prominence of the University of Cape Town as an Africa-centred institution in Fig. 5 appears to be a positive development, the equal standing of the Germany-based Leibniz Institute for Global and Regional Studies underscores the continued influence of Western academia on African Studies (Glawion 2024). Similarly, the significant academic output on Africa from institutions such as Universität Göttingen, Universität Bayreuth, and Universiteit Antwerpen further confirms that African Studies is largely shaped by Western institutions (Hountondji 2009; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2020).

The prominent positions of Africa-based universities such as the University of Cape Town and the University of the Witwatersrand Johannesburg in the graph highlight the potential to enhance the visibility of local perspectives in African Studies (Nyamnjoh 2012). However, these contributions fall short of addressing the broader imbalances in knowledge production across the continent. The dominance of a few South Africa-based institutions reinforces the marginalisation and inadequacy of academic structures in other regions of Africa. As Mama (2007) and Serunkuma (2024) argue, the control of African Studies by Western-centric structures continues to limit the continent's intellectual independence. Moreover, the concentration of contributing institutions in favour of Western universities restricts Africa's ability to address its issues from its own perspectives, further entrenching these systemic imbalances.

Finally, the imbalance between Western institutions and Africa-based universities highlights structural issues such as the limited infrastructure and inadequate funding for knowledge production within the continent. The focus of Western institutions (e.g., Universiteit Leiden, Uppsala Universitet, Nordic Africa Institute) on African Studies contrasts sharply with the limited contributions from Africa-based institutions. This underscores the urgent need to support more Africa-centred universities and increase their visibility in this field. As Basedau (2020) and Mama (2007) emphasise, such measures would enhance Africa's capacity to address its own issues from its own perspective and contribute to achieving a more balanced representation in African Studies.

Figure 6 illustrates the distribution of funding organisations supporting research published in *Africa Spectrum*. The data reveal the dominant role of Germany-based institutions, particularly the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG), which supported 17 studies, making it the leading funding contributor. The Social

Science Research Council (SSRC) ranks second, supporting three studies. Other notable contributors include the National Research Foundation (South Africa), Narodowe Centrum Nauki (Poland), the European Research Council, the Department for International Development (United Kingdom), Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (Germany), and the British Institute in Eastern Africa. This distribution highlights the significant influence of certain countries and institutions in funding research published in *Africa Spectrum*, while contributions from Africa-based funding sources remain relatively limited. The data obtained from *Africa Spectrum* reveal that a significant portion of the articles published in the journal have been supported by Western-based funding agencies. Although limited in scope, this data offers valuable insights into how research funding may shape processes of knowledge production. Patterns such as the prominence of certain themes and the visibility of institutions suggest the potential influence of funding structures on scholarly agendas. Nonetheless, it is important to note that this study is confined to *Africa Spectrum*, and broader generalisations would require comparative analyses across multiple journals and publication platforms.

The list of funding organisations supporting African Studies reveals that resources in this field are predominantly Western-centric. The dominant role of Germany-based institutions aligns with critiques by Glawion (2024) and Hountondji (2009) regarding Western-centric funding structures. It underscores the persistence of structural issues that limit the epistemic independence of Africa-centred research. Contributions from U.S., the U.K., and other Europe-based organisations further reflect, as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020) argues, how knowledge production in Africa is largely shaped by Western financial priorities. In contrast, the limited contributions from local African funding sources, such as the National Research Foundation, highlight the urgent need for local funding mechanisms, as emphasised by Mama (2007). Spies and Seesemann (2016) also stress that creating more equitable research partnerships and balanced funding mechanisms is a shared responsibility, not only for academics but also for funding institutions. Such a transformation is a critical step toward fostering a knowledge production process that reflects Africa's own needs and priorities, enabling a more authentic and independent epistemic framework.

Keyword analysis. Figures 7–9 collectively highlight the thematic and geographical concentrations within *Africa Spectrum*, providing insights into how African Studies is shaped and exposing

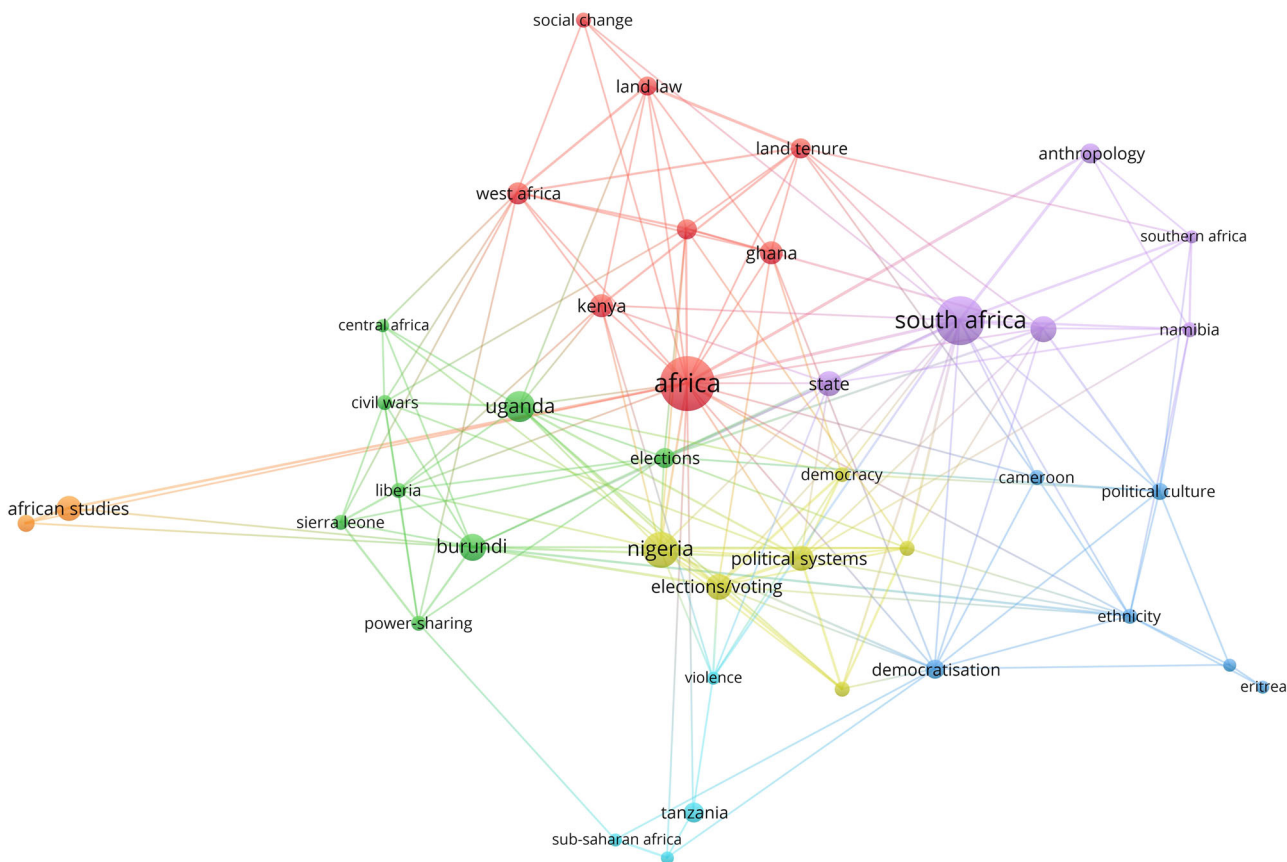


Fig. 7 Keyword network of Africa Spectrum authors.

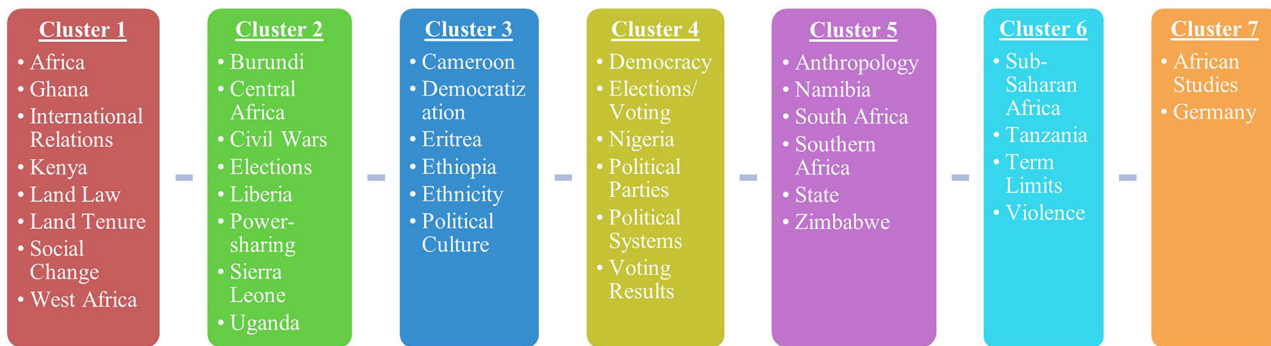


Fig. 8 Keyword clusters from Fig. 8.

persistent structural issues. These visuals reveal the centrality of terms like ‘Africa’, ‘Democracy’, and ‘Elections’, reflecting a Western-centric epistemological framework that prioritises certain themes while marginalising Africa-centred knowledge production. As discussed by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020) and Serunkuma (2024), such a framework not only reinforces epistemic inequalities and hegemony but also limits the representation of diverse and multidimensional perspectives, ultimately constraining Africa’s intellectual autonomy and its potential for inclusive knowledge generation.

Figure 8, through seven distinct thematic clusters, reflects the core trends and limitations of the literature. Cluster 1, with keywords such as ‘Land Tenure’, ‘Social Change’, and ‘West Africa’, highlights a focus on development and property arrangements in West Africa. However, this emphasis aligns with Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s (2020) critique of the marginalisation of

local knowledge systems. While economic themes such as development are frequently prioritised, the cultural and social richness of the region is often neglected, reinforcing the critique discussed in the introduction (Hountondji 2009) that Africa is frequently perceived merely as an ‘object of knowledge’.

Cluster 2, with terms such as ‘Civil Wars’, ‘Power-sharing’, and ‘Elections’, demonstrates how Africa is frequently framed within the context of crisis and conflict. As Serunkuma (2024) emphasises, Africa-centred scholars and local perspectives are often subsumed under these crisis-oriented, Western-centric knowledge systems. This cluster further explains why the continent’s positive and innovative dimensions remain under-represented in the literature.

Similarly, Cluster 3, with terms such as ‘Democratization’, ‘Political Culture’, and ‘Ethnicity’, reflects an approach to Africa’s political processes framed within the normative boundaries of

African Studies. A significant portion of contributions to *Africa Spectrum* originates from Germany, the United States, and the United Kingdom, highlighting the persistence of Western epistemic control. For example, the Leibniz Institute for Global and Regional Studies, one of the most prolific contributors, demonstrates the significant influence of Western academic structures, while the limited contributions from Africa-based universities remain striking. Similarly, the dominance of Western funding bodies such as the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) proves the lack of local funding sources within Africa, further reinforcing the continent's dependence on external resources.

Beyond demographics, the findings illuminate thematic patterns in the literature. Keyword analyses reveal that African Studies is predominantly framed around crisis, conflict, and Western democratic norms. Terms such as 'Democracy', 'Elections', and 'South Africa' frequently appear, reflecting a thematic narrowness that often overlooks Africa's multifaceted social, economic, and cultural dynamics. This thematic concentration perpetuates the portrayal of Africa as a 'continent of crisis', overshadowing positive developments and reinforcing the need for broader perspectives within the field.

This study is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged to contextualise its findings. First, the analysis is based on a single journal, *Africa Spectrum*. Although the journal is a leading and influential outlet within African Studies, its editorial practices and institutional positioning cannot be taken as fully representative of the field as a whole. The findings should therefore be interpreted as indicative of broader structural tendencies rather than as comprehensive generalisations. Comparative analyses across multiple journals, including Africa-based and non-Scopus-indexed publications, would be necessary to capture a fuller picture of knowledge production in African Studies.

Second, the reliance on Scopus-indexed bibliometric data introduces an inherent structural bias. Scopus privileges English-language journals and Western publishing infrastructures, which contributes to the underrepresentation of locally circulated, multilingual, and Africa-based scholarship. This limitation reflects the very epistemic inequalities examined in the study and means that the analysis captures dominant knowledge circuits rather than the entirety of African intellectual production.

Third, the timeframe of 2009–2023, while determined by data availability, excludes earlier historical phases of the journal as well as very recent developments whose impact may not yet be visible in citation data. Fourth, the predominantly quantitative bibliometric approach prioritises measurable indicators and cannot fully account for the epistemic orientation, political intent, or contextual depth of individual articles. Qualitative analyses would be required to explore these dimensions in greater detail.

Finally, analyses of gender, affiliation, and funding are constrained by available metadata. Gender identification is inferred rather than self-reported, institutional affiliation reflects location at the time of publication, and funding data do not allow for causal claims regarding research agendas. These limitations define the analytical scope of the study, which is intended as a critical case-based intervention that highlights structural patterns while inviting further comparative and qualitative research.

The findings of this study not only offer an academic assessment but also bring attention to several practical steps that could address structural inequalities in knowledge production. First and foremost, the support and increased funding of Africa-based academic journals is essential. Equally important is the inclusion of African researchers in the decision-making processes of funding bodies, along with the redesign of evaluation criteria to better reflect local knowledge priorities. In the realm of academic publishing, strengthening regional representation on editorial

boards and ensuring greater geographic diversity in peer review processes could contribute to a more balanced epistemic landscape. Such structural reforms are among the key steps needed to foster a more equitable and pluralistic knowledge ecosystem within African Studies (Kahn, 2011; Confraria and Godinho, 2015; Mouton and Blanckenberg, 2018; Glawion, 2024).

In conclusion, this study makes significant methodological and theoretical contributions to the field of African Studies. By exposing epistemic inequalities and power imbalances within the literature through concrete data, it emphasises the necessity of fostering more inclusive and equitable knowledge production processes. The research underscores the importance of building a more balanced, diverse, and Africa-centred approach in African Studies, offering meaningful insights for the future transformation of the field.

Data availability

The data supporting the findings of this study were retrieved from the Scopus database using the following query: SOURCE-ID (15060) AND PUBYEAR 2008 AND PUBYEAR 2024 AND (EXCLUDE (DOCTYPE, "ed")). The full raw dataset, screenshots of the search strategy, and the authors' manual coding files for gender and geographic origin are available as "Supplementary Materials" accompanying this article. Any further inquiries regarding the data processing steps can be provided by the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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The authors declare that they did not involve human participants in the study, and therefore, it was not necessary to obtain any consent about this kind of data.

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