

Politics of Mingalato Theory:
Analyzing Its Impact and
Dynamics on the Zambian
Political Space.



Review Article

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Abstract

Introduction: This article critically examines Zambia’s evolving political landscape through both indigenous and established theoretical lenses. It focuses on the emergence of the “Mingalato Theory,” a contemporary strategic approach associated with the United Party for National Development (UPND), and situates it within Zambia’s broader historical and political context. The study revisits earlier ideological frameworks, including Kenneth Kaunda’s Zambian Humanism and the “Politics of Appeasement” (1972–1991), which contributed to centralized power and patronage systems.

Methods: The study adopts a diachronic analytical framework combined with a multi-strand mainstreaming model to synthesize existing scholarly literature and theoretical perspectives. This approach enables a longitudinal examination of Zambia’s political

evolution, linking historical and contemporary governance paradigms to broader socio-economic and institutional outcomes.

Results: Findings indicate that Zambia's political trajectory has been shaped by successive ideological frameworks. Zambian Humanism and appeasement politics entrenched patronage and centralized authority, while the subsequent "Politics of the Belly" (1991–2021) reinforced elite accumulation, corruption, and institutional weakening, often summarized by the proverb "Ubomba mwibala alya mwibala." The 2021 general election marked a critical turning point, reflecting public dissatisfaction with entrenched patronage systems and a growing demand for accountability and democratic governance.

Conclusion: The study finds that the emergent Mingalato Theory represents both an opportunity and a risk: it holds potential to advance inclusive development, human rights, and democratic consolidation, but may also reproduce subtle forms of political manipulation. By integrating indigenous concepts with established political theories, the article contributes to African political thought and offers insights into Zambia's ongoing challenges in governance, economic justice, and social equity.

Key Words: Mingalato Theory, Politics of the Belly, Ubomba Mwibala, Democratic Governance, Zambian Political

Background

Zambia, a nation that gained independence in 1964, has navigated a complex political landscape characterized by a dynamic interplay of indigenous philosophies and imported political ideologies. This intricate tapestry has given rise to several informal, yet profoundly influential, political theories that have shaped the

nation's trajectory (Phiri, 2006; Phiri et al., 2025). Understanding these theories is crucial for deciphering the nuances of Zambian governance, resource distribution, and the persistent challenges to human rights and democratic consolidation. This background section aims to lay the foundational understanding of these historical and contemporary political constructs, setting the stage for a

deeper analysis of the emergent “Mingalato Theory.”

Following independence, Zambia embarked on a path guided by President Kenneth Kaunda’s philosophy of Zambian Humanism. This ideology, rooted in African communal values, championed human dignity, social justice, and self-reliance (Kaumba, 2025). Kaunda envisioned a society free from exploitation, where the welfare of the individual was paramount, and national unity was fostered above tribal or regional divisions. However, the practical application of Humanism often intertwined with what has been termed the “Politics of Appeasement.” During the one-party rule of the United National Independence Party (UNIP) from 1972 to 1991, this theory became a dominant force.

It operated on the principle of maintaining political stability by strategically appeasing key political figures and regional interests through patronage and selective distribution of state resources (Phiri et al., 2025). Loyalty to the ruling party was often rewarded, while dissent was met with marginalization, effectively consolidating

power and managing the diverse interests within the nascent nation (Szeftel, 1982; Tordoff, 1974).

Szeftel (1982) meticulously documented how this system of political graft and a spoils system became deeply entrenched within the Zambian political fabric. State resources, rather than being allocated based on merit or public need, were often channeled to loyalists, fostering a culture of corruption and weakening nascent democratic institutions. This approach, while initially providing a semblance of stability, ultimately hindered economic growth and increased the state’s dependency on external aid (DiJohn, 2010). Socially, the “Politics of Appeasement” led to a pervasive political subservience, stifling genuine democratic participation and exacerbating inequalities, as access to opportunities became increasingly contingent on political connections rather than individual merit (Amnesty International, 2024; DiJohn, 2010). The economic stagnation, rampant corruption, and growing public discontent over restricted political freedoms ultimately rendered the one-party state unsustainable, culminating in its collapse in 1991 (Rakner, 2003).

The reintroduction of multiparty democracy in 1991, under the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) led by Frederick Chiluba, promised a new era of economic liberalisation and democratic reforms. This period, however, witnessed the rise and entrenchment of the “Politics of the Belly” (Bayart, 1993). Jean-François Bayart’s seminal theory posits that in many post-colonial African states, politics is fundamentally driven by the elite’s accumulation of wealth at public expense, fostering extensive patronage networks and systemic corruption. In Zambia, the MMD era vividly exemplified this phenomenon, with political actors frequently leveraging state resources for personal and factional gain (Rakner, 2003; Szeftel, 1982).

The Bemba proverb, “Ubomba mwibala alya mwibala, tabatila kulya nembuto kumo” (one who works in the garden eats from it, but is not expected to eat the seeds), became a widely recognised, albeit often misused, local reflection of this mentality (Kaaba, 2022). While the proverb carries a

nuanced meaning, implying a right to benefit from one’s labor, it was frequently invoked by political figures, such as former President Edgar Lungu (2018), to seemingly legitimise practices that bordered on, or overtly constituted, corruption (Kaaba, 2022). This interpretation, which often conveniently omitted the crucial caveat about not consuming the ‘seeds’ (i.e., preserving the source for future generations), allowed for unsustainable exploitation of public resources. This mentality had profound implications, politically undermining democratic institutions by prioritising loyalty over accountability, weakening essential checks and balances, and severely impeding anti-corruption efforts (Phiri et al., 2025). The widespread practice of “floor-crossing” by politicians, often motivated by the allure of state patronage, became a common feature of the political landscape (Bayart, 1993).

Economically, this led to severe resource misallocation, inefficient public services, and stunted national development due to diverted funds and rampant favoritism (DiJohn, 2010),

thereby exacerbating poverty and contributing to high living costs (World Bank, 2024). Socially, the normalisation of “Ubomba mwibala” eroded public trust, fostering deep cynicism and potential unrest, as the state increasingly appeared to serve the interests of a select few rather than the broader populace (Phiri et al., 2025). These dynamics underscore how deeply ingrained the “Politics of the Belly” became in Zambia’s political culture, posing significant challenges to democratic consolidation and sustainable development. This historical framework is indispensable for analysing newer political theories, such as “Mingalato,” to discern whether they represent a genuine paradigm shift or merely a continuation of these entrenched patterns.

Literature Review

Zambia’s political evolution, from independence to the present, has been shaped by indigenous and external theories influencing governance, power, and socio-economic development. This review examines the theoretical underpinnings of Zambian politics, from Humanism to the Mingalato Theory.

Kenneth Kaunda’s Humanism and the One-Party State (1964-1991)

Post-independence, President Kenneth Kaunda introduced Zambian Humanism, emphasizing human dignity, social justice, and self-reliance (Kaumba, 2025). This philosophy, promoting national unity, often intertwined with the “Politics of Appeasement” (Phiri et al., 2025). During UNIP’s one-party rule (1972-1991), this approach maintained stability by rewarding loyalty and suppressing dissent through patronage and selective resource distribution (Szeftel, 1982). While initially effective (Tordoff, 1974), it fostered political graft and weakened democratic institutions. Szeftel (1982) notes resource allocation based on political expediency, hindering economic growth and increasing state dependency (DiJohn, 2010). Socially, it led to political subservience, stifled democratic participation, and exacerbated inequalities, as opportunities relied on political connections (Amnesty International, 2024; DiJohn, 2010). Economic stagnation, corruption, and discontent ultimately rendered the one-party state unsustainable, leading to its 1991 collapse (Rakner, 2003). Kaumba

(2025) attributes the gap between Humanism's ideals and contemporary governance to neoliberal reforms, corruption, and clientelism.

The Rise of Multipartyism and the “Politics of the Belly” (1991-2021)

Scholarly debate surrounding Bayart's (1993) “Politics of the Belly” in the Zambian context centers on how deeply elite accumulation and patronage networks have permeated multiparty democracy. Researchers such as Rakner (2003) and Szeftel (1982) argue that the transition to multipartyism did not dismantle previous patronage structures but rather adapted them, allowing political actors to leverage state resources for personal and factional gain under the guise of economic liberalization. DiJohn (2010) further posits that privatization and structural reforms often served as conduits for illicit enrichment among elites, fundamentally undermining institutional accountability and creating a persistent socio-economic divide. This scholarly discourse highlights that the “Politics of the Belly” is not merely an anomaly of governance but a systemic feature that

has actively subverted democratic consolidation in Zambia.

The Bemba proverb, “Ubomba mwibala alya mwibala, tabatila kulya nembuto kumo” (one who works in the garden eats from it, but not the seeds), gained prominence, often invoked by figures like Edgar Lungu (2018) to legitimize corruption (Kaaba, 2022). This mentality subverted constitutionalism and accountability, prioritizing personal gain (Kaaba, 2022). Economic consequences included resource misallocation, increased national debt, and a widening socio-economic gap (DiJohn, 2010), hindering development and eroding public trust. Socially, the “Politics of the Belly” fostered public cynicism and distrust in political institutions, leading to declining civic engagement (Phiri et al., 2025). Patronage and elite accumulation persisted across administrations, including the PF, indicating a deeply entrenched political culture (Transparency International Zambia, 2023).

The 2021 Election and the Subversion of the “Politics of the Belly”

The 2021 Zambian general election marked a pivotal public rejection of the entrenched “Politics of the Belly.” Hakainde Hichilema and the UPND secured a decisive victory over the incumbent PF, interpreted as a clear mandate against pervasive corruption, economic mismanagement, and authoritarian tendencies (Cheeseman & Hinfelaar, 2010). The campaign was fueled by widespread discontent over rising living costs, unemployment, and corruption allegations against the PF. The proverb “Ubomba mwibala alya mwibala” symbolized public frustration, particularly among youth, who mobilized against elite interests (Kaaba, 2022). The UPND’s promises of economic recovery and anti-corruption resonated deeply.

Cheeseman and Sishuwa (2010) note the election defied conventional analyses; public dissatisfaction and high voter turnout led to a clear mandate against patronage. However, a complete “subversion” of the “Politics of the Belly” is complex. While the election

weakened incumbent elites, it doesn’t guarantee eradication of underlying dynamics. Bayart (1993) argues this political culture is deeply ingrained, posing a persistent challenge beyond individual administrations. The new UPND government, despite anti-corruption commitments, operates within a system where personal gain through state power remains potent. This context is crucial for evaluating Mingalato Theory: whether it signifies a genuine paradigm shift or a sophisticated continuation of entrenched patterns.

The Mingalato Theory: A New Epoch in Zambian Politics

The “Mingalato Theory,” coined by the UPND, signifies a contemporary strategic approach in Zambian politics. Derived from a Bemba word for “dribbling” or “maneuvering with foresight” (Phiri et al., 2025), it denotes shrewd political action impacting Zambia’s political, economic, and social landscapes. Politically, Mingalato is a UPND strategy for power consolidation and neutralizing opposition through alliances, legislative actions, and public relations (Phiri et al., 2025). While seen

as astute leadership, critics view it as a continuation of historical political manipulation, preemptively neutralizing opposition via reforms or appointments (Phiri et al., 2025). Historically, Zambian politics involved power consolidation and resource distribution, akin to the “Politics of Appeasement” and “Politics of the Belly” (Bayart, 1993; Phiri et al., 2025). Mingalato adapts these strategies to a multiparty system, emphasising strategic foresight over brute force or explicit patronage, thereby presenting a more subtle and arguably more dangerous form of political control if not properly checked.

However, Mingalato’s shrewdness raises significant democratic concerns. If political maneuvering becomes an end in itself, prioritising tactical victories over substantive policy and democratic principles, it risks undermining democratic competition, accountability, and transparency. Focusing on “dribbling” opponents might overshadow crucial policy debates, marginalising alternative voices, especially given Zambia’s historical challenges to freedom of expression and assembly

(Amnesty International, 2024; Phiri et al., 2025).

This could lead to a situation where the appearance of democracy is maintained, but its substantive elements are eroded, creating a form of ‘soft authoritarianism’. Economically, Mingalato’s impact depends critically on whether its “foresight” leads to sound economic policies benefiting the broader population and fostering sustainable development, or if it merely perpetuates corruption and inequality by favoring political allies and manipulating economic levers for partisan gain (Phiri et al., 2025). Transparency International Zambia (TIZ) reports highlight persistent patronage and corruption, underscoring the ongoing challenge of ensuring that political strategies translate into genuine public good rather than elite enrichment (Transparency International Zambia, 2023). Effective economic management demands a fundamental commitment to transparency, accountability, and inclusive growth.

Socially, Mingalato can shape public perception of governance. If seen as legitimate, it might foster stability; if

viewed as sophisticated manipulation, it could deepen cynicism and distrust in political institutions, alienating citizens from the democratic process (Phiri et al., 2025). Erosion of trust, linked to human rights concerns and selective law enforcement (Phiri et al., 2025), can harm social cohesion. Proponents must demonstrate Mingalato's strategic foresight genuinely aims for national development and the well-being of all Zambians, not just political dominance.

Methodology

Research Design

The research design is primarily descriptive and analytical, focusing on interpreting and explaining complex political dynamics rather than testing hypotheses through quantitative measures. A case study approach is adopted, with Zambia serving as the central case. This allows for an intensive examination of the country's unique political history, cultural nuances, and the specific ways in which political theories have been conceptualized, adopted, and adapted by various actors. The diachronic framework facilitates the tracing of these theories across different political eras from the one-party state

under UNIP, through the multiparty democracy of the MMD and PF, to the current UPND administration highlighting continuities, shifts, and transformations over time (Phiri et al., 2025). This longitudinal perspective is crucial for understanding the evolutionary nature of these political phenomena and their enduring influence.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study relies exclusively on secondary sources, ensuring a broad and robust evidence base. This includes a comprehensive review of academic literature, encompassing peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and reputable dissertations focusing on Zambian politics, governance, human rights, and political economy. Key authors and works that form the backbone of this review include Bayart (1993) on the "Politics of the Belly," Szeftel (1982) and Rakner (2003) on patronage and political transitions, Kaumba (2025) on Zambian Humanism and indigenous proverbs, and Phiri et al. (2025) on contemporary Zambian political theories, including Mingalato.

Additionally, reports from international organizations such as Amnesty International (2024), Transparency International Zambia (2023), and the World Bank (2024) are utilized to provide empirical data and contextual information on human rights, corruption, and economic indicators. These reports offer valuable insights into the practical implications of the political theories under examination, providing a multi-faceted perspective on their real-world effects.

Data Analysis

The data analysis employs a thematic analysis approach, combined with conceptual analysis. Thematic analysis involves systematically identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the collected textual data. This process helps in organizing and describing the data in rich detail, moving beyond mere description to interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Specifically, the analysis focuses on identifying recurring themes related to power consolidation, resource allocation, patronage, corruption, democratic participation, and human

rights across different political eras. Conceptual analysis is used to deconstruct and understand the core meanings and implications of key indigenous terms like “Mingalato” and “Ubomba mwibala alya mwibala,” as well as their interplay with established Western political theories. This involves examining how these concepts are defined, used, and interpreted by various political actors and scholars, and how their meanings have evolved over time (Phiri et al., 2025; Kaaba, 2022). This dual analytical approach ensures both a broad thematic understanding and a deep conceptual grasp of the political phenomena.

Furthermore, a multi-strand mainstreaming model is explicitly applied as the core methodological framework to categorize and analyze the impact of these political theories. This model is operationalized by systematically disaggregating the thematic findings into three distinct but interconnected strands: political, economic, and social. During the coding process, data related to governance structures, power consolidation, and

democratic processes were isolated into the political strand. Data concerning resource distribution, corruption, investment, and national debt were coded into the economic strand. Finally, data reflecting public trust, human rights, civic engagement, and social cohesion were categorized into the social strand. By explicitly mapping the literature onto these three dimensions, the model allows for a structured and holistic assessment of how each theory permeates every facet of Zambian society. The iterative process of reading, coding into these specific strands, and interpreting the secondary data ensures a rigorous and evidence-based analysis, leading to robust conclusions about the multifaceted nature and implications of the Mingalato Theory within Zambia's broader political context.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of the Mingalato theory and its historical antecedents through a multi-strand mainstreaming model reveals complex and often intertwined dynamics across political, economic, and social spheres in Zambia. This section synthesises findings from the comprehensive literature review and

conceptual analysis, merging the observed results with analytical discussion to demonstrate how these theories have profoundly shaped and continue to influence the nation.

Political Dynamics

Zambia's political theories, from Humanism to "Appeasement," "Belly Politics," and "Mingalato," reflect a continuous struggle for power and state control. The UNIP era's "Politics of Appeasement" fostered patronage, undermining democratic principles and contributing to the one-party state's collapse (Szeftel, 1982; Rakner, 2003). This historical period underscores a critical lesson: even well-intentioned ideologies, when confronted with the realities of power politics and the imperative of maintaining control, can be subverted, leading to outcomes contrary to their original aims and hindering long-term democratic consolidation. The legacy of this era continues to influence contemporary political behavior, particularly in the public's perception of state power and its potential for abuse.

Multiparty democracy under the MMD and PF saw the "Politics of the Belly" entrench, where political power

facilitated elite accumulation and enrichment (Bayart, 1993), eroding institutional checks and balances and concentrating executive power. The proverb “Ubomba mwibala alya mwibala” (one who works in the garden eats from it) justified corruption and resource appropriation (Kaaba, 2022), weakening accountability and fueling public disillusionment (Transparency International Zambia, 2023). This perception of political office as personal wealth led to low voter turnout and apathy, entrenching elite power and hindering reform. The political landscape became transactional, with loyalty often bought, leading to declining civic engagement. The normalization of this behavior created a deeply cynical political culture where accountability was elusive, democratic participation felt increasingly meaningless to the ordinary citizen, and the state became perceived as a site for personal accumulation rather than public service (Phiri et al., 2025).

However, the 2021 election, bringing the UPND to power, marked a decisive public rejection of “Belly Politics” and a

clear demand for accountable governance (Musonda, 2024). Youth mobilized against corruption and elite self-enrichment (Kaaba, 2022), expressing dissatisfaction with political leadership. Yet, the “Mingalato Theory” under the UPND suggests a tactical evolution. Emphasizing “dribbling” and “maneuvering with foresight,” Mingalato signifies a sophisticated strategic approach to maintaining dominance and neutralizing opposition (Phiri et al., 2025). Mingalato, in its essence, can be viewed as a more refined and adaptable form of political strategy, learning from the overt failures and public backlash against past appeasement and belly politics. Instead of brute force or blatant patronage, it suggests a nuanced approach to consolidate power through strategic alliances, legislative reforms, and sophisticated communication strategies. This sophistication, however, carries inherent risks. If Mingalato prioritizes tactical victories over substantive policy and democratic principles, it could inadvertently perpetuate a cycle of political manipulation, albeit in a less visible and more insidious form. The danger lies in

the potential for “dribbling” opponents to overshadow genuine policy debates, marginalize alternative voices through subtle means, and ultimately undermine democratic competition and accountability, leading to a form of ‘soft authoritarianism’ where democratic institutions exist but their functions are subtly subverted (Amnesty International, 2024; Phiri et al., 2025). Its long-term success depends on fostering institutional reform, prioritizing public service, and rebuilding trust, balancing strategic action with democratic values and accountability.

Economic Implications

The economic implications of Zambia’s dominant political theories have been largely detrimental to sustainable development and equitable resource distribution. The UNIP era’s “Politics of Appeasement,” characterized by patronage and political loyalty-based resource allocation, led to significant economic inefficiencies and capital misallocation (DiJohn, 2010). This fostered state dependency, discouraged private sector growth, and contributed to economic stagnation, especially with declining copper prices (Rakner, 2003).

Nationalisation policies, while ideologically driven, often resulted in poorly managed state-owned enterprises, exacerbating economic woes and increasing reliance on foreign aid. This period also saw a dual economy emerge, with a small formal sector alongside a large informal sector, challenging economic planning and revenue generation.

The subsequent “Politics of the Belly” under the MMD and PF administrations exacerbated these challenges, turning political office into a lucrative avenue for personal enrichment. Widespread corruption and elite enrichment, often justified by the distorted “Ubomba mwibala alya mwibala,” diverted massive public funds from essential services and development projects (Kaaba, 2022; Transparency International Zambia, 2023). The 1990s privatization program, intended for liberalization, became a conduit for illicit enrichment, with public assets transferred to politically connected individuals at undervalued prices, undermining state institutions and accountability (Rakner, 2003; DiJohn, 2010). This systemic corruption led to increased national debt, stunted

economic diversification, and a widening rich-poor gap (World Bank, 2024). Public services suffered chronic underfunding, impacting citizens' quality of life and perpetuating poverty. Reliance on copper without significant diversification left the economy vulnerable to global price fluctuations, destabilizing national finances and making long-term economic planning exceedingly difficult.

Moreover, the economic landscape under the "Politics of the Belly" lacked predictability and transparency, severely deterring both domestic and foreign investment. Investors were wary of an environment where political connections, not market forces, dictated outcomes, stifling entrepreneurship and hindering long-term growth. The informal economy, while a coping mechanism for many, lacked regulatory support, limiting its contribution to national development and reducing the government's tax base. This created a vicious cycle where limited state revenue constrained public spending, further weakening public services and

perpetuating economic hardship for the majority.

As the most recent strategic approach, the Mingalato Theory presents a critical juncture for Zambia's economic trajectory. Its impact depends on whether its "foresight" translates into sound economic policies prioritizing broad-based development, transparency, and accountability, or if it merely perpetuates corruption and inequality (Phiri et al., 2025). The historical record of resource misallocation, elite enrichment, and economic stagnation demands that the new approach fosters transparent economic management, merit-based policies, and robust anti-corruption measures (World Bank, 2024). Failure to do so risks Mingalato becoming another mechanism for perpetuating inequality and favoring political allies, thereby continuing the legacy of the "Politics of the Belly" under a new, more palatable guise. Effective economic management demands merit-based decision-making, robust anti-corruption measures, and transparent governance, not political expediency. Mingalato's

success will be measured by its ability to break resource misallocation cycles, foster an inclusive economic environment, and restore investor confidence, paving the way for sustainable development (World Bank, 2024). This requires a fundamental shift in political culture, moving towards a meritocratic and transparent economic system that supports long-term growth and poverty reduction.

Social Consequences and Human Rights

The social consequences of Zambia's political theories are deeply intertwined with human rights and social cohesion within the nation. The "Politics of Appeasement" and the one-party state significantly suppressed fundamental freedoms, stifling dissent, limiting political participation, and fostering a pervasive culture of fear (Amnesty International, 2024). This environment hindered the development of a vibrant civil society and curtailed individual liberties, as loyalty to the party often superseded the protection of human rights. The state's control over media and public discourse further limited avenues for expressing grievances,

leading to a build-up of social tension that eventually contributed to the demand for multiparty democracy. The suppression of independent media and civil society organizations during this period meant that alternative viewpoints were stifled, and public discourse was largely controlled by the state, leading to a less informed and less engaged citizenry.

The subsequent "Politics of the Belly" and the widespread acceptance of "Ubomba mwibala" further exacerbated these social challenges. The normalisation of corruption and elite self-enrichment led to a profound erosion of public trust in political institutions and leaders (Transparency International Zambia, 2023). This cynicism manifested in declining civic engagement, voter apathy, and a sense of powerlessness among ordinary citizens. The perception that political office was primarily a means for personal gain, rather than public service, fostered deep social divisions and resentment. Human rights, particularly those related to economic and social justice, were severely compromised as resources meant for public services were diverted (DiJohn,

2010). Access to quality education, healthcare, and other essential services became increasingly unequal, perpetuating cycles of poverty and marginalization for large segments of the population. Furthermore, the suppression of dissent and the use of state apparatus to silence critical voices continued, albeit in more subtle forms, during the multiparty era, further undermining fundamental freedoms (Amnesty International, 2024; Phiri et al., 2025).

The 2021 election, while signaling a public desire for change, also highlighted the deep social fractures and the lingering impact of these historical political theories. The Mingalato Theory, as the latest strategic approach, carries significant social and human rights implications. Mingalato must actively work to rebuild public trust by upholding human rights, promoting social justice, and ensuring inclusive participation. If its “dribbling” tactics are employed to marginalize political opposition or suppress legitimate dissent, it could further undermine democratic freedoms and shrink civic space (Phiri et al.,

2025). The strategic use of state institutions for political objectives, a potential hallmark of Mingalato, risks compromising their independence and impartiality, thereby weakening the very checks and balances designed to protect human rights and uphold the rule of law. This could manifest in politically motivated arrests, restrictions on public gatherings, or biased media coverage, all of which would erode democratic norms and civic participation. The challenge for the UPND government is to ensure that Mingalato is implemented in a manner that actively upholds human rights, promotes social justice, and fosters inclusive participation, rather than merely serving as a tool for political dominance. Phiri et al. (2025) explicitly link political corruption, often manifested through these indigenous theories, to a range of human rights violations, emphasizing the critical need for holistic governance that safeguards the rights and well-being of all citizens. The true test of Mingalato, therefore, lies not just in its political efficacy and economic outcomes but, crucially, in its capacity to foster a more equitable, just, and genuinely democratic Zambian society

where the rights and dignity of all citizens are respected and protected.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Zambia's political journey, from the idealism of Humanism to the pragmatism of appeasement, the self-serving nature of the "Politics of the Belly," and the strategic nuance of the emergent Mingalato Theory, presents a compelling narrative of a nation grappling with its post-colonial identity and democratic aspirations. This study has demonstrated that while each theory emerged in distinct historical contexts, a common thread of power consolidation, resource control, and varying impacts on governance and human rights runs through them. The Mingalato Theory, as the latest iteration, stands at a critical juncture, with the potential to either usher in genuine reform or perpetuate historical patterns of political manipulation. This concluding section synthesizes the key findings, offers actionable recommendations, and reflects on the broader implications for Zambia's democratic future.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis of Zambia's political theories and their impact, the following recommendations are put forth to foster more robust governance, economic equity, and respect for human rights:

Strengthening Democratic Institutions and Rule of Law is critical to counteract the historical tendencies of power consolidation and the subversion of democratic norms. There is an urgent need to reinforce the independence of key democratic institutions, including the judiciary, parliament, and oversight bodies. This involves providing adequate resources, ensuring security of tenure for officials, and shielding them from political interference. Furthermore, the selective application of the law, such as the politically motivated use of 'Nolle prosequi,' must be curtailed to restore public trust in the justice system (Amnesty International, 2024; Phiri et al., 2025).

Promoting Transparency and Accountability is necessary to combat the pervasive 'Politics of the Belly' and the cultural justification of 'Ubomba mwibala alya mwibala'. Comprehensive

reforms are required to enhance transparency and accountability in public resource management. This includes strengthening anti-corruption agencies, implementing stringent asset declaration laws for public officials, and ensuring public access to government information and procurement processes (Transparency International Zambia, 2023; World Bank, 2024). A culture of zero tolerance for corruption must be actively cultivated from the highest levels of government.

Fostering Economic Diversification and Inclusivity is essential to break the cycle of economic vulnerability and elite enrichment. Zambia must prioritise economic diversification beyond its historical reliance on copper. This involves investing in agriculture, manufacturing, and technology, and creating an enabling environment for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Policies must be designed to ensure that economic growth is inclusive, creating opportunities for all citizens and reducing the widening gap between the rich and the poor (World Bank, 2024). Equitable access to

education, healthcare, and credit facilities is paramount.

Upholding Human Rights and Civic Space is a fundamental requirement. The 'Mingalato Theory,' while potentially offering strategic governance, must not come at the expense of fundamental human rights. The government must actively protect freedoms of expression, assembly, and association, and ensure that civil society organizations and independent media can operate without fear of reprisal (Amnesty International, 2024). Dialogue and engagement with diverse voices, including critical ones, are essential for a healthy democracy and for building genuine public trust.

Reforming Political Culture is ultimately required for a sustainable shift. This involves moving away from patronage-based politics towards a meritocratic system that values public service, integrity, and accountability. Educational initiatives, ethical leadership training, and public awareness campaigns can contribute to fostering a citizenry that demands good governance and leaders who prioritise national interest over personal gain.

Conclusion

Zambia's political landscape is a dynamic interplay of historical legacies and emergent strategies. The Mingalato Theory, as the latest manifestation of political maneuvering, holds both promise and peril. While it signifies a more sophisticated approach to governance, its true impact will be determined by its adherence to democratic principles, its commitment to equitable economic development, and its respect for human rights. The challenge for Zambia is to harness the strategic foresight inherent in Mingalato for the benefit of all its citizens, ensuring that political acumen serves as a catalyst for genuine progress rather than a sophisticated tool for perpetuating historical inequalities and power imbalances. The nation's democratic future hinges on its ability to learn from its past, adapt to its present, and consciously steer towards a future where governance is truly for the people, by the people, and of the people.

Historically, the "Politics of Appeasement" and the "Politics of the Belly," encapsulated by the proverb

"Ubomba mwibala alya mwibala," fostered systemic corruption, resource misallocation, and a profound erosion of public trust (Kaaba, 2022; Rakner, 2003; Szeftel, 1982). These practices significantly hindered Zambia's economic development, exacerbated poverty and inequality, and undermined democratic institutions and human rights (DiJohn, 2010; Amnesty International, 2024). The 2021 election, which brought the UPND to power, unequivocally signaled a public desire for a decisive departure from these patterns, offering a renewed hope for more accountable, transparent, and inclusive governance (Cheeseman & Hinfelaar, 2010; Musonda, 2024).

The "Mingalato Theory," emphasizing strategic "dribbling" and "maneuvering with foresight," represents a sophisticated evolution in political strategy. While it can be interpreted as a pragmatic approach to navigate complex political terrain and consolidate power, its inherent shrewdness necessitates careful scrutiny. The risk lies in its potential to prioritize tactical victories over substantive policy, thereby marginalizing alternative voices and undermining democratic competition

and accountability (Phiri et al., 2025). For Mingalato to genuinely serve national development, it must transcend mere political gamesmanship and commit to fostering a truly democratic and equitable society.

In conclusion, the Mingalato Theory represents a new chapter in Zambia's political narrative. Its ultimate legacy will depend on whether it is wielded as a tool for genuine national transformation, characterized by inclusive development, robust democratic institutions, and unwavering respect for human rights, or if it merely becomes a more sophisticated means of perpetuating the historical patterns of elite self-enrichment and political dominance. The path forward demands a conscious and sustained effort to prioritize the welfare of all Zambians over partisan interests, ensuring that strategic foresight serves the greater good of the nation.

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