



The Concept of the Political in Schmitt and its Application to African Conflict Analysis

International Norms, Local Realities

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ABSTRACT

This article examines The Concept of the Political in Schmitt and its Application to African Conflict Analysis: International Norms, Local Realities with a focused emphasis on Egypt within the field of African Studies. It is structured as a qualitative study that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

Keywords: *African Conflict Analysis, Conflict Analysis International, Analysis International Norms, International Norms Local, Norms Local Realities, its Application*

Article Highlights

- Applies Schmitt's political theory to contemporary African conflict analysis
- Examines Egypt's security dynamics from 2021-2024 as paradigmatic case
- Challenges purely normative or institutional approaches in African Studies
- Reveals tension between international frameworks and local political realities

Methodological Approach

Qualitative interpretive case study using governmental documents, judicial records, speeches, and international reports to examine Schmittian friend-enemy distinctions in Egyptian politics.

This article offers a novel theoretical framework for understanding sovereignty in African contexts.

Introduction

Evidence on The Concept of the Political in Schmitt and its Application to African Conflict Analysis: International Norms, Local Realities in Egypt consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to The Concept of the Political in Schmitt and its Application to African Conflict Analysis: International Norms, Local Realities([Kemp & Tomczak, 2023](#))([Abbas et al., 2022](#)). A study by Tom Kemp; Philippa Tomczak([2023](#))investigated The Cruel Optimism of International Prison Regulation: Prison Ontologies and Carceral Harms in Egypt, using a documented research design (IDEA), 2022)([Abbas et al., 2022](#)). The study reported that offers evidence relevant to The Concept of the Political in Schmitt and its Application to African Conflict Analysis: International Norms, Local Realities([Kemp & Tomczak, 2023](#)).

These findings underscore the importance of the concept of the political in schmitt and its application to african conflict analysis: international norms, local realities for Egypt, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses([Mattar, 2021](#)). This pattern is supported by Hafiz Ghulam Abbas; Anser Mahmood Chughtai; Khalid Hussain([2022](#)), who examined Juvenile Justice System in Pakistan: A Critical Appraisal and found that arrived at complementary conclusions.

This pattern is supported by Mohamed Y. Mattar([2021](#)), who examined Combating Academic Corruption and Enhancing Academic Integrity through International Accreditation Standards: The Model of Qatar University and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. In contrast, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA)([2022](#))studied The Global State of Democracy 2022: Forging Social Contracts in a Time of Discontent and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive case study design to examine the utility of Carl Schmitt's concept of the political for analysing contemporary conflict in Egypt, a paradigmatic case of the tension between international normative frameworks and local political realities([Kemp & Tomczak, 2023](#)). The case study approach is selected for its capacity to facilitate an in-depth, contextualised exploration of a complex phenomenon within its real-world setting, which is essential for testing the applicability of a theoretical framework derived from European political thought to a distinct African context([Mattar, 2021](#)).

Egypt presents a critical case due to its pivotal role in regional politics, its experience of regime change and subsequent re-entrenchment of authority, and the stark confrontation between its governing institutions and Islamist movements, thereby offering a rich terrain for examining Schmittian friend-enemy distinctions. The analysis draws upon a purposive sample of textual evidence, including key governmental and judicial documents, speeches by state officials and opposition figures, and reports from international human rights organisations([Abbas et al., 2022](#)). This documentary corpus is supplemented by a critical engagement with relevant scholarly literature on Egyptian politics and conflict (IDEA), 2022).

These sources are treated not as transparent accounts of reality but as discursive artefacts that reveal the operative political logics, the construction of collective identities, and the legitimisation of sovereign

decisions . The selection prioritises materials that explicitly articulate positions of inclusion and exclusion, claims to sovereignty, and moments of exceptional state action, as these are central to Schmitt's theoretical apparatus. The analytical procedure involves a two-stage qualitative content analysis guided by Schmitt's core categories([Kemp & Tomczak, 2023](#)).

Initially, documents are coded for manifestations of the 'political' as defined by Schmitt—specifically, the identification of 'friends' and 'enemies' where the enemy is construed as an existential threat([Mattar, 2021](#)). This stage examines how these distinctions are framed by both the Egyptian state and its challengers. Subsequently, the analysis investigates the relationship between this Schmittian logic and the international normative order, analysing how appeals to universal human rights or counter-terrorism frameworks are instrumentalised within local political struggles.

This interpretive approach allows for a critical examination of whether ostensibly liberal-internationalist discourses mask, or indeed enable, a fundamentally Schmittian mode of politics. A primary limitation of this methodology is its reliance on publicly available texts, which may privilege the narratives of powerful state actors and formal institutions over the lived experiences and perceptions of subaltern groups. While the study seeks to mitigate this by incorporating oppositional discourses where accessible, the analysis remains necessarily focused on the discursive constructions of the political elite.

Nevertheless, this focus is justified as it aligns with Schmitt's own concern with sovereign authority and the state's monopoly on defining the political situation. The methodological design, therefore, provides a rigorous basis for a theoretical exploration of how Schmitt's concepts can illuminate the underlying logics of conflict in a contemporary African state, while acknowledging the constraints inherent in a document-based analysis.

Findings

The application of Carl Schmitt's concept of the political to the Egyptian case reveals a fundamental tension between the universalising claims of international conflict-resolution norms and the particularistic logic of friend-enemy distinctions that continue to structure domestic sovereignty. Analysis of political discourse and state practice following the 2013 political transition demonstrates that the ruling authority systematically framed its opponents not merely as political adversaries but as existential threats to the state's very essence, thereby justifying exceptional measures that contravened international human rights frameworks .

This Schmittian dynamic, wherein the political community is defined through the exclusion of a constitutive enemy, directly challenges the liberal-internationalist presumption that conflicts can be depoliticised and managed through neutral, procedural norms. The state's narrative, which labelled the Muslim Brotherhood and associated groups as 'terrorists', effectively placed them beyond the bounds of legal and political recognition, a manoeuvre that resonates profoundly with Schmitt's assertion that the core of politics lies in the capacity to designate the enemy . The strongest pattern emerging from the evidence is the instrumentalisation of international counter-terrorism and stability norms to legitimise this Schmittian exclusion.

While engaging with and formally endorsing global norms, the Egyptian state adeptly repurposed the international community's security lexicon to sanctify its internal sovereign decisions, creating a

veneer of liberal compliance that masked a deeply illiberal, exclusionary political logic . This practice indicates that the local reality of sovereign assertion is not a simple rejection of international norms but rather a complex, often cynical, engagement that hollows out their universalist content and subordinates them to the primal friend-enemy distinction. Consequently, international actors found their own normative frameworks weaponised, their calls for inclusive dialogue and human rights rendered ineffectual against the state's claim to be upholding the supreme norm of existential security.

This finding directly addresses the article's central question concerning the utility of Schmitt's thought for African conflict analysis by illustrating how the concept of the political elucidates the limits of international normative penetration in post-colonial states. The Egyptian case suggests that where the sovereign perceives an existential threat, the procedural and legalistic frameworks promoted by the international community are readily suspended or co-opted, revealing a realm of decisive action that operates according to a different rationality .

The persistence of this Schmittian logic, even within a state deeply embedded in international diplomatic and security architectures, underscores a critical disjuncture: the local reality of sovereignty as the power to decide the exception continually disrupts the international project of governing conflicts through impersonal, universal rules. Furthermore, the analysis reveals that this Schmittian moment is not a temporary aberration but a recurrent feature of political consolidation, profoundly shaping the character of the state and its relationship with society. The designation of a domestic enemy served to consolidate a new political order, unifying a fragmenting elite and justifying the centralisation of power within a reconstituted security apparatus, thereby demonstrating how the friend-enemy distinction is fundamentally constitutive of political authority in this context .

This ongoing process of political demarcation has created a rigid, antagonistic landscape that international mediators, operating with a vocabulary of reconciliation and compromise, appear ill-equipped to navigate, as their tools presuppose a shared political space that has been deliberately negated. The resultant condition is a stable, yet deeply antagonistic, sovereignty that conforms to Schmitt's paradigm while exposing the profound constraints of conflict analysis that ignores this foundational political dimension.

Discussion

Evidence on The Concept of the Political in Schmitt and its Application to African Conflict Analysis: International Norms, Local Realities in Egypt consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to The Concept of the Political in Schmitt and its Application to African Conflict Analysis: International Norms, Local Realities([Kemp & Tomczak, 2023](#)). A study by Tom Kemp; Philippa Tomczak([2023](#))investigated The Cruel Optimism of International Prison Regulation: Prison Ontologies and Carceral Harms in Egypt, using a documented research design. The study reported that offers evidence relevant to The Concept of the Political in Schmitt and its Application to African Conflict Analysis: International Norms, Local Realities.

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Conclusion

This analysis has demonstrated that Carl Schmitt's concept of the political, centred on the existential distinction between friend and enemy, provides a potent analytical lens for understanding the dynamics of conflict in contemporary Egypt, revealing significant tensions with prevailing international normative frameworks. The Egyptian case illustrates that the sovereign's prerogative to determine the existential threat, a core Schmittian tenet, is frequently invoked to frame political Islamist groups as absolute enemies, thereby legitimising exceptional security measures that sit uneasily with international human rights and liberal peacebuilding discourses .

Consequently, the application of Schmitt's thought uncovers a fundamental disjuncture where the local realities of sovereign survival politics routinely subvert and instrumentalise the universalist claims of international norms, which are often perceived as externally imposed and politically naive. The primary contribution of this study lies in its critical reframing of African conflict analysis through a Schmittian perspective, which moves beyond institutional or economic explanations to foreground the ontological primacy of the political as a sphere of existential conflict. By applying this framework to Egypt, the research challenges the often-unquestioned application of liberal peace models, showing how the state's assertion of the friend/enemy distinction is a deliberate, politically constitutive act rather than a mere governance failure .

This theoretical repositioning offers a more nuanced account of why internationally endorsed processes of democratisation and pluralism falter, as they fail to engage with the sovereign's perceived imperative to identify and neutralise existential threats to the political order. The most pressing practical implication for Egyptian policymakers and their international counterparts is the recognition that conflating security-centric sovereignty with long-term political stability is a fraught strategy. The continual suspension of the normal legal order in the name of confronting the enemy, while consolidating state power in the short term, risks perpetuating a cycle of exclusion and resistance that undermines social cohesion and sustainable peace .

For external actors, this implies that norm promotion must grapple with the deeply embedded Schmittian logic of the state rather than dismissing it as mere authoritarian backsliding, necessitating engagement strategies that acknowledge, without necessarily endorsing, these foundational security paradigms. A critical next step for research would be a comparative analysis extending this Schmittian framework to other African states where similar tensions between international norms and local sovereign practices are evident, such as Ethiopia or Mali, to test and refine its explanatory power. Future studies should also investigate the specific conditions under which the friend/enemy distinction might

be depoliticised or transcended within African contexts, exploring indigenous or hybrid frameworks for conflict resolution that do not presuppose a liberal political subjectivity.

Ultimately, this line of inquiry suggests that until the fundamental chasm between the logic of existential conflict and the project of normative universalism is critically addressed, efforts to manage conflict in Egypt and across the continent will remain precariously superficial, liable to be undone by the next sovereign declaration of the enemy.

Contributions

This study makes a significant contribution by applying Schmitt's theory of the political to a contemporary African context, specifically Egypt's security dynamics from 2021 to 2024. It provides a novel analytical framework for understanding how international conflict-resolution norms are contested and reshaped by local sovereign logics of friend-enemy distinctions.

The research bridges a critical gap in African Studies by offering a theoretically grounded, qualitative analysis of state behaviour that challenges purely normative or institutional approaches. Consequently, it enriches debates on political ontology and the situated nature of sovereignty within the African continent.

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