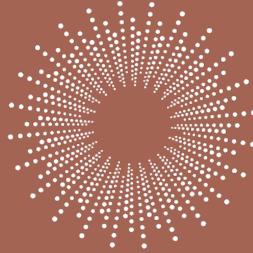


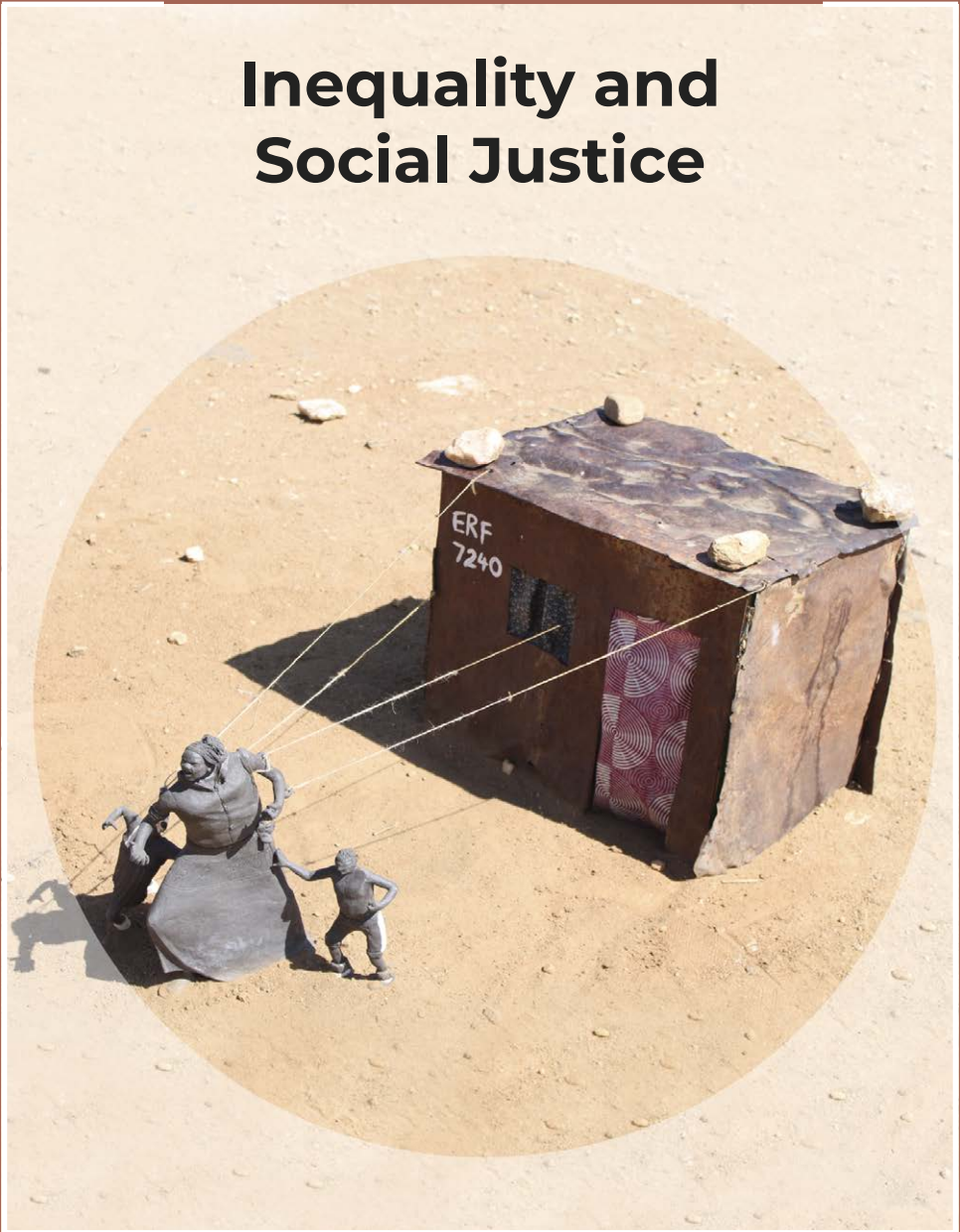
Volume 2

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Namibian  
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# Inequality and Social Justice



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## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	4
Acronyms and Initialisms .....	5
Editorial .....	7
Intersectionalities: The Effect of Educational Reform on Inequity Eradication and the Regional Economy in Namibia .....	26
<i>H. J. Sartorius von Bach and E. A. Nuppenau</i>	
COVID 19 and Inequalities: The Changing Landscape of Inequality and Poverty in Namibia and the Implications of the COVID19 Pandemic .....	52
<i>Blessing Chiripanhura</i>	
COVID-19 and inequality in Namibia: A vicious syndemic? .....	76
<i>Bruno Venditto, Ndumba J. Kamwanyah and Christian Nekare</i>	
Mining and Social Justice, Extractivism: Chrome Miners and Corporate Crocodiles: Illicit Financial Flows, Profit Shifting, and Samancor Chrome.....	97
<i>Jaco Oelofsen</i>	
Extractivism and Dispossession: The Case of Kavango Oil and Gas Exploration .....	113
<i>Rob Parker and Rinaani Musutua</i>	
Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Rights: A Feminist Critique of Institutional Racism and Gender Essentialism: In Defence of Christine Mboma and Beatrice Masilingi.....	118
<i>Ndeshi Namupala and Nashilongweshipwe Mushaandja</i>	
Gender-responsive Budgeting, Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.....	135
<i>Lucy Edwards-Jauch</i>	

Religion and Social Justice: Social Justice as Praxis: A Socioreligious and Ethical Analysis.....	161
<i>Basilus M. Kasera</i>	
The Church and Social Justice in Contemporary Namibia .....	176
<i>Emma N. Nangolo</i>	
Case Study:Land Inequality in Namibia: White Indifference, Elite Capture and Policy Inadequacies .....	197
<i>Ellison Tjirera</i>	
Case Study from the South: From Farm Workers to Farm Owners .....	204
<i>Ellen Albertz</i>	
The Tsumib Judgments and their Implications for Asserting Ancestral Land Rights in Namibia.....	210
<i>Willem Odendaal</i>	
Fighting Inequality through Basic Income Support: Lessons from India, Kenya, and Namibia .....	216
<i>Nkululeko Majozi</i>	
Case Study: Autocracy and Inequality in the Kingdom of Eswatini: .....	234
<i>Helen Vale</i>	
Opinion Piece: From Collective Bargaining to Collective Begging: Namibia’s Supreme Court Undermines the Right to Strike.....	241
<i>Nixon Marcus</i>	

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**FRIEDRICH  
EBERT**   
**STIFTUNG**  
Namibia Office

## Acronyms and Initialisms

AMCU	Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union
BEPS	base-erosion profit shifting
BIEN	Basic Income Earth Network
BIG	basic income grant
CCN	Council of Churches in Namibia
CEDAW	UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSOs	civil society organisations
DSD	Differences of Sexual Development
ELCN	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia
ELCRN	Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia
ESOP	Employee Share Ownership Plan
FMS	Finnish Missionary Society
GBV	gender-based violence
GDP	gross domestic product
GEWE	gender equality and women's empowerment
GRB	gender-responsive budgeting
GRN	Government of the Republic of Namibia
HDI	Human Development Index
HTA	Hai  om Traditional Authority
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICT	information and communication technology
IFFs	illicit financial flows
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMR	International Mineral Resources
IOC	International Olympic Committee

LMS	London Missionary Society
MAWLR	Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform
MGEPEWSW	Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare
MGEPEWSW	Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
MPUCT	Madhya Pradesh Unconditional Cash Transfer
MTEF	Medium-Term Expenditure Framework
NLF	Namibia Labour Force
NNSCH	Namibian Senior Secondary Certificate Higher-level
NPC	National Planning Commission
NSA	Namibia Statistics Agency
NSSCH	Namibian Senior Secondary Certificate Higher
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PDS	Public Distribution System
PIT	personal income tax
RMS	Rhenish Missionary Society
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SEM	structural equation modelling
SEWA	Self-Employed Women’s Association
TAA	Traditional Authorities Act (No. 25 of 2000)
TVUCT	Tribal Village Unconditional Cash Transfer
UCT	unconditional cash transfer
VAT	value added tax
WHO	World Health Organization
WMMS	Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society
WSWB	willing-seller-willing-buyer



# Autocracy and Inequality in the Kingdom of Eswatini

*Helen Vale*

## Introduction

This case study will look at the current political, economic, and social challenges in Eswatini and how recent ongoing political protests against the monarch have been gaining momentum over the past year. Eswatini, formerly known as Swaziland, is both the last absolute monarchy in Africa (Sherinda, 2021) and the most unequal country on the continent (Seery et al., 2019). The link between autocracy and inequality will be investigated to understand the ongoing political protests, heavy-handed security response and current impasse. Rather than ‘state capture’, a term that became popular in political discourse relating in particular to the actions of former President Jacob Zuma in South Africa, I would call what has been happening in the small landlocked south-east African country of Eswatini since Mswati III’s accession to the throne in 1986, as ‘kingdom capture’ – the abuse of power, weak governance, lack of political representation, human rights violations, and the looting of state resources, all conducted to benefit the king and his immediate family of 15 wives and 35 children to the

detriment of the 1.17 million citizens of the country, 70 per cent of whom rely on subsistence farming (World Food Programme Eswatini, 2021).

## Background

### *Population Dynamics*

The country is small both in area (6 641 sq. miles, or 17 364 sq. kms) and population (1.1786 million) and is very youthful, with 44 percent being under the age of 18 (O’Neill, 2022). This latter fact has had major implications for the current political protests. One Swazi academic has given one of the reasons for the current upheavals as “a pure ‘youthquake’ – a dramatic surge in youth participation in the fight for political change. The uprisings are organised on social media platforms by young people” (Dlamini, 2021).

Autocracy and a lack of democracy are part and parcel of the abuse of power and the anachronous existence of an absolute monarchy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There is a dual governance structure where the traditional

monarchical system exists alongside a parliamentary system that bans political parties. In addition, there are human rights violations, an absence of the rule of law, and state-sponsored violence perpetrated by the security forces against protesters.

### *Corruption and the elite capture*

In addition to his absolute power, the king has systematically inserted himself into every sector. He owns shares in strategic companies and crowds out local SMEs (Boksburg Declaration, 2021 p. 2). He and his wives and children flaunt their lavish lifestyles in the face of extreme economic deprivation experienced by ordinary citizens.

### *Poverty, Inequality and Unemployment*

Eswatini is classified as a lower-middle-income country. The proportion of people living in poverty remains very high: 58.9% of the rural population lives below the national poverty line (living on less than US\$1.90 a day) (World Food Programme, 2021). With 20% considered extremely poor, Eswatini had a Gini coefficient of 54.6 in 2016. The country has high levels of poverty and inequality and poor service delivery (particularly in health

and education) (World Bank, 2020). At 25%, the unemployment rate is high, while youth unemployment is even higher at 43% (World Bank, 2022).

Sixty-nine percent of the population live below the poverty line. The population of Eswatini is young (44% are under 18) and dependency ratios are high. In general, children and the elderly are particularly vulnerable to poverty, with 45% of children being orphaned or vulnerable (World Food Programme, 2021). The country also has the world's highest adult HIV prevalence rate of 27.2%. The number of poor people increased between 2001 and 2017 according to Eswatini Household and Expenditure Surveys for the period, which also show that rural poverty tends to be deeper and more severe (World Bank, 2020). The irony is that amidst the poverty, King Mswati III is a billionaire with an estimated net worth of 2.8 billion rand (Naidoo, 2022).

Throughout the past three-year period of political resistance, Eswatini has been grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic, which has severely strained the health infrastructure and negatively impacted the economy and people's livelihoods (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

## Resistance and Repression: Chronology of Events in 2021

The following chronology is based on Naidoo (2022).

### 2021

*8–9 May:* Mysterious death of young law student Thabani Nkomonye sparks a massive wave of protest that evokes a ruthless response from security forces on the instructions of the king.

*May–June:* Peaceful nationwide petition to various local constituencies (*tinkhundla*) calling for an end to police brutality. In June, schools are ordered to close.

*24 June:* Acting Prime Minister (Themba Masuku) bans all protests and petitions. This is followed by yet another heavy crackdown on dissent by the army and the police with the use of live ammunition, rubber bullets and teargas.

*29 June:* Authorities shut down the internet in an attempt to disrupt protests. According to the Boksburg Declaration (Mass Democratic Movement of Swaziland, 2021) the massacre of protesters continues.

*4 July:* Arrival of the Troika of SADC Organ for Politics, Defence and Security to facilitate broad-based dialogue involving all stakeholders.

*15–22 July:* Technical fact-finding mission from SADC to Eswatini.

*16 July:* *Sibaya* (traditional dialogue in cattle kraal) held at Ludzizini Royal Residence by King Mswati III where he announced the new Prime Minister, Cleopas Dlamini, and criticised protesters. No real dialogue was allowed.

*25 July:* Two Members of Parliament, Mduduzi Bacede Mabuza and Mthandeni Dube, are arrested and detained at Mbabane Police Station on trumped up charges, including under the Suppression of Terrorism Act.

*1 October:* Over 10 000 peaceful protesters march to the US Embassy to appeal for US support. One protestor is shot.

*15 October:* The internet is shut down.

*18 October:* Nationwide protests are met with disproportionate force and the death tolls rises to over 80.

*20 October:* Preliminary criminal trial in the High Court of Swazi MPs Mabuza and Dube. The trial is criticised for its violations of international standards on fair trials by attorneys of the Advancing Rights in Southern Africa.

*23 October:* Visit by SADC Troika special envoy of Cyril Ramaphosa,

Geoff Radebe, and delegation to Eswatini to meet with the king on a fact-finding mission. Letfu Sonkhe Institute of Strategic Thinking and Development issues a statement on this visit calling on SADC to intervene with an independent peace monitoring mechanism and calls for an interim government and interventions to stop the looting of public resources/the national treasury by the king.

*2 November:* South African President Cyril Ramaphosa visits King Mswati III to discuss the political and security developments in the country. They agreed that SADC Secretariat would work closely with the government of Eswatini over the next three months to draft terms of reference for a national dialogue forum.

*December:* Setting up of a Multi-Stakeholders Forum by a broad spectrum of political parties, labour movements, youths, students, women, LGBTQ activists and NGOs, meeting in Johannesburg; designed terms of reference for dialogue and negotiations to lead to a durable political solution (Naidoo, 2022).

*3–5 December:* Boksburg Declaration – a broad spectrum of participants of the Swaziland Mass Democratic Movement meet in South Africa under the auspices of the Political Party Assembly, Letfu Sonkhe Institute for

Strategic Thinking and Development, and the Multi-Stakeholders Forum to discuss the way forward and draft terms of reference to be presented to the SADC.

*16 December:* Support for multiparty democracy continues to grow according to Afrobarometer (2021).

*December–January:* The king in seclusion for the annual traditional *Incwala* ceremony in Lobamba.

2022

*3 January:* Burning of many new vehicles at the government garage in Mbabane in an arson attack; estimated damage of 500 million *Emalangeni* (pegged to the South African Rand).

*12 January:* House of Lords Debate in the British Houses of Parliament. Lord Jordan (Labour) further to the *ITUC Report Holding eSwatini to Account; assessing the country's compliance with the Commonwealth Charter*, published on 5 March 2021, asked Her Majesty's Government what plans they had to use their position as a member of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group to initiate an investigation into the potential breach of the charter by the Government of Eswatini.

*26 January:* the date of the postponed trial of Mabuza and Dube,

the two MPs arrested on July 25, 2020 and subsequently held unlawfully in Matsapha prison.

## Outcomes and Results

What started as a call for a petition to demand that Swazis elect their own Prime Minister led to a harsh crackdown by security forces. The cycle of protests, repression and more protests has not yet delivered the democracy Swazis want. They are no longer prepared to tolerate a self-serving, despotic monarchy, and their calls for political and human rights reform should be answered.

It is estimated that over 80 Swazis have been killed, while about 600 were injured and hundreds were arrested during the period of political uprisings. Even school children were arrested and held in prison (Letfu Sonke Institute, 2021).<sup>38</sup> The King continues to hold supreme executive power over parliament and the judiciary. Thus far, SADC interventions have not yielded the desired results. The success of the National Dialogue Forum depends on the role the SADC is willing to play to call the monarch to order and supervise free and democratic elections (Dlamini, 2021).

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<sup>38</sup> The Boksburg Declaration (2021, p. 2) refers to the massacre of 29 June and beyond with the murder of 96 Swazis, the injury of over 500 and the arrest of more than 1 000.

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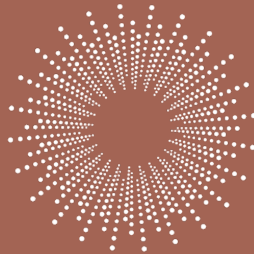
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