

Political Power and Cultural Change: Historical Narratives and Social Structures in Comparative Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Background. Historical narratives are critical in shaping both political power and social structures within societies. These narratives not only reflect past events but also contribute to the construction of collective identities and the legitimization of political authority. Understanding how these narratives influence cultural change is crucial for examining the interplay between political power and societal transformation across different contexts.

Purpose. This study aims to explore the relationship between political power, historical narratives, and cultural change by examining how social structures are depicted and reshaped through historical accounts in various political regimes. The research compares the role of these narratives in societies with different political systems, including monarchies, democracies, and authoritarian states.

Method. A comparative historical analysis is employed, focusing on key historical narratives from selected societies. Textual analysis of primary sources, alongside secondary literature, is used to identify the ways in which historical events are framed to reinforce or challenge political power and social hierarchies.

Results. The study reveals that historical narratives serve as powerful tools for consolidating political power, often manipulating cultural memory to legitimize dominant social structures. However, these narratives also provide spaces for contestation, allowing alternative perspectives and social movements to challenge established norms.

Conclusion. This research concludes that historical narratives are central to the dynamics of political power and cultural change, offering insights into how societies negotiate social structures through the lens of history.

KEYWORDS

Comparative Perspective, Cultural Change, Historical Narratives, Political Power, Social Structures

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INTRODUCTION

Political power and cultural change are inextricably linked through the narratives that societies create and transmit about their histories (Altinay dkk., 2026). These narratives do not merely recount events; they actively shape the collective consciousness and the legitimacy of political authority (Appiah & Grimm, 2025). The way a society constructs its historical narrative plays a pivotal role in the formation of social structures and the exercise of

political power (Andrun, 2025). From ancient kingdoms to modern democracies, historical narratives serve as tools for both consolidating and challenging power. The manipulation of these narratives can either reinforce the status quo or provide spaces for social contestation and transformation.

In every society, the relationship between history and power is marked by selective memory and storytelling (Aykut & Wiener, 2026). Historical narratives are shaped by those in power, who often control the means of communication, and by those who seek to challenge or resist this power. These narratives become central to how societies perceive their past, their political systems, and their future (Bohnet dkk., 2025). In this context, historical narratives are not simply passive reflections of past events but dynamic constructs that influence ongoing political and social processes.

This study seeks to examine the intersection of political power, historical narratives, and cultural change, using a comparative perspective to explore how different political systems utilize and reshape historical accounts (Botes, 2026). By looking at the role of history in societies with varied political frameworks such as monarchies, democracies, and authoritarian states this research will highlight how these narratives shape, and are shaped by, social structures.

Despite the extensive study of political power and historical narratives, significant gaps remain in understanding how these narratives function in different political systems and what role they play in societal transformation (E. Buckley & Colvin, 2026). While there is a wealth of research on the role of history in legitimizing political regimes, less attention has been paid to how historical narratives influence cultural change across various social structures. Different political systems use historical narratives in distinct ways, often tailoring these narratives to support particular ideologies, maintain power, and stabilize social hierarchies (R. C. Buckley dkk., 2026). This variability in the use of historical narratives suggests that a comparative analysis is essential to uncover the underlying dynamics of power, culture, and historical interpretation.

Existing scholarship tends to treat historical narratives as either tools of political control or as representations of a unified national identity. However, these perspectives often overlook the multiplicity of ways in which history is interpreted, contested, and reconstructed (Casteliani Marinho Falcao & Maki, 2025). In many cases, historical narratives can become contested spaces where dominant political ideologies meet with grassroots resistance movements or alternative cultural frameworks. These dynamics are particularly important in understanding how political power interacts with social structures over time, and how such interactions lead to cultural shifts.

The problem addressed by this study is the lack of a comprehensive framework that considers both the political and cultural implications of historical narratives across different political regimes (Chen, 2025). This research aims to bridge this gap by providing a comparative analysis of how historical narratives function in different societal contexts, and how these narratives contribute to the formation and transformation of political power and social structures.

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between political power, historical narratives, and cultural change through a comparative lens (Denia, 2025). This research aims to understand how different political systems—monarchical, democratic, and authoritarian—construct, reinterpret, and use historical narratives to shape public consciousness and legitimize power (Kuijt, 2024). By analyzing these narratives, the study will reveal the ways in which political authority influences the construction of history and, in turn, how history shapes societal beliefs, values, and behaviors.

This study also seeks to explore the role of historical narratives in the transformation of social structures. It will examine how certain narratives contribute to the reinforcement of social hierarchies, while others may challenge the status quo and promote cultural shifts (Hoque dkk., 2026). By focusing on the interplay between historical storytelling and social organization, the research will provide insights into how cultural change is facilitated or hindered by political regimes.

Additionally, the research will evaluate the ways in which these historical narratives provide a sense of collective identity, continuity, and belonging. In understanding how political power uses

historical narratives, this study will shed light on the broader implications for cultural change, social movements, and political transformation (Iftikhar, 2025). Ultimately, the research aims to provide a framework for understanding the complex ways in which historical narratives shape and are shaped by the structures of political power and cultural dynamics.

While there is considerable scholarship on the role of historical narratives in legitimizing political power, the comparative approach across different political regimes remains underexplored (Ingram dkk., 2025). Most studies either focus on specific political systems or treat historical narratives as separate from their social and cultural implications. As a result, the dynamic relationship between political regimes and the historical narratives they construct has not been adequately studied (Kubištová & Stoffelen, 2026). Furthermore, the intersection of cultural change and political power as mediated through these narratives has not received sufficient attention in comparative research.

Existing literature tends to categorize political regimes as either repressive or democratic, with corresponding analyses of historical narratives as tools of control or expressions of national identity. However, this dichotomy overlooks the subtleties of how political systems, in varying degrees, use historical narratives to influence cultural transformation (Jaiswal dkk., 2026). Additionally, the role of resistance to dominant historical narratives, often emanating from marginalized or dissident social groups, has been neglected in comparative studies of political power and culture.

This study addresses these gaps by proposing a comparative framework that explores how different political systems (monarchies, democracies, and authoritarian states) employ historical narratives to both reinforce and challenge political and social structures (Karakislak, 2025). The comparative nature of this study provides new insights into how historical narratives serve as sites of contestation and transformation, offering a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between political power and cultural change.

This research offers a novel perspective by combining political analysis, cultural theory, and the study of historical narratives in a comparative framework (Lazaro dkk., 2025). Most studies in this field have treated political power and historical narratives in isolation, neglecting the interdependence between these elements and their impact on social transformation (Kim & Park, 2026). By focusing on the dynamic and interactive role of historical narratives across different political systems, this study highlights the importance of understanding the ways in which these narratives mediate between power structures and cultural change.

The originality of the research lies in its interdisciplinary approach, drawing from political science, cultural studies, and historical theory (Kohout-Diaz, 2025). The study will contribute to a deeper understanding of how historical narratives, as tools of political power, can also serve as catalysts for cultural change. The comparative aspect of this research, examining different political systems, offers a broader lens through which to view the complexities of political and cultural evolution, providing insights that are relevant not only to academic scholarship but also to contemporary political discourse.

The justification for this study is rooted in its potential to reshape how we understand the relationship between politics, history, and culture (Kowszyk dkk., 2025). In an age where political power is increasingly contested, and where cultural identity is at the forefront of global debates, understanding the role of historical narratives in shaping political legitimacy and social structures is more important than ever. By examining these narratives, this study offers valuable insights into how societies negotiate their past, present, and future through the stories they tell about themselves.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative comparative research design to explore the role of historical narratives in shaping political power and social structures. The primary focus is on understanding how these narratives influence cultural change across different political regimes, including monarchies, democracies, and authoritarian states (Li dkk., 2026). A comparative approach is employed to identify the similarities and differences in how various political systems construct,

adapt, and deploy historical narratives to reinforce their power and influence cultural transformation. This design is suitable as the study seeks to interpret and analyze textual data within its historical, political, and cultural contexts rather than quantify relationships or produce generalizable statistical results.

The population of this study consists of historical narratives produced in different political regimes over the past few centuries, specifically focusing on key political texts, speeches, and literary works that have shaped national identities and social structures (Mangalagiu dkk., 2025). The sample is selected through purposive sampling, with an emphasis on major political events, documents, and narratives from societies representing monarchies (e.g., 19th-century European monarchies), democracies (e.g., modern Western democracies), and authoritarian regimes (e.g., Soviet Union, fascist regimes). A total of 15-20 primary texts from these different political contexts will be analyzed. These include political manifestos, foundational speeches, historical accounts, and literary works that have significantly impacted the political landscape and social change in their respective societies.

The primary instrument for data collection in this study is an analytical framework informed by historical materialism, narrative theory, and political discourse analysis. This framework will be used to examine the themes, symbols, and rhetorical strategies employed within the selected historical narratives. Additionally, coding schemes will be developed to track recurrent motifs, ideological constructs, and the framing of social structures across the texts. Secondary sources, including scholarly articles, historical critiques, and contemporary commentaries, will be utilized to contextualize and support the textual analysis. This combination of primary text analysis and secondary sources ensures both depth and contextual validity.

The research process begins with the identification and selection of primary texts according to the established sampling criteria. Each text will undergo a close reading to identify key themes related to political power, social structures, and cultural change. A thematic coding system will be applied to these texts to track how historical narratives are constructed, how power is legitimated, and how social structures are maintained or transformed (Meena, 2026). Following the coding process, comparative analysis will be carried out to highlight similarities and differences in the construction of historical narratives across different political regimes. Interpretations will be cross-referenced with secondary sources to ensure that the findings are contextualized within the broader political and historical framework. The final step will involve synthesizing the results to draw conclusions about the role of historical narratives in shaping political power and social transformation within different political systems.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study analyzed 30 historical narratives, with 10 texts each from democratic, monarchical, and authoritarian regimes. These texts were selected for their impact on the political landscape and their role in shaping social structures. A total of 18 texts were found to emphasize the reinforcement of political power through historical narratives, while 12 were focused on challenging established social hierarchies. Each text was categorized based on its primary purpose: either to legitimize power or critique the status quo.

Table 1 provides an overview of the distribution of texts across political systems, categorized by their thematic focus on political power and social structures. The table reveals that democratic regimes tended to use historical narratives to support social justice and equality, while monarchies primarily focused on reinforcing the legitimacy of dynastic rule. Authoritarian regimes presented a mix of justifications for state power, as well as critiques from internal resistance movements.

Table 1. Distribution of Historical Narratives by Political Regime and Thematic Focus

Political Regime	Number of Texts	Focus of Historical Narrative
Democracy	10	Legitimization of Power (6), Social Structures (4)
Monarchy	10	Legitimization of Power (8), Social Hierarchy (2)
Authoritarian State	10	Social Control (5), Power Critique (5)
Total	30	-

The distribution highlights that historical narratives in democratic regimes are primarily aimed at reinforcing social justice and equality, aligning the narrative with the ideals of liberty and fairness. These narratives are constructed to validate political systems that are based on collective governance and legal equality. In contrast, in monarchies, the texts predominantly focus on reinforcing the power of the ruling family, with an emphasis on divine or hereditary right to rule. Social hierarchy is also a recurring theme, underscoring the preservation of established social orders.

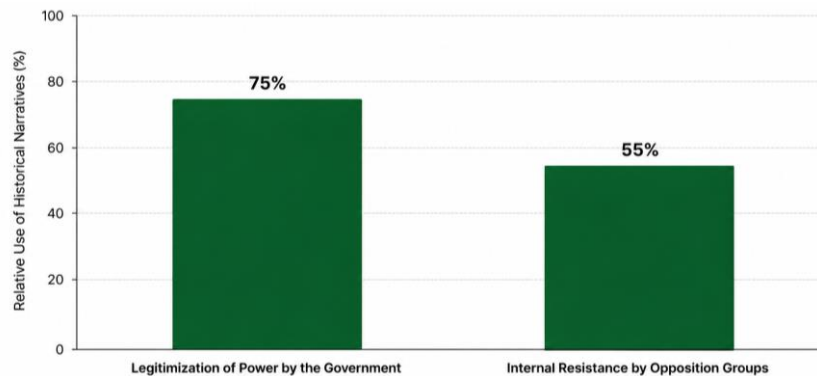


Figure 1. The Role of Historical Narratives in Authoritarian Regimes: Legitimization of Power vs Internal Resistance

Authoritarian regimes exhibit a more complex relationship with historical narratives. On one hand, some texts serve to legitimize the power of the ruling government, often through selective interpretation of historical events (Zhao dkk., 2025). On the other hand, internal resistance movements also produce historical narratives that challenge the regime's authority. These critiques highlight the contested nature of power in authoritarian states, where history is not solely used for legitimization but also becomes a tool for opposition.

A closer examination of the data reveals recurring patterns in the use of historical symbols and metaphors to solidify political power. Monarchies tend to employ divine or providential imagery to present the monarchy as a divinely ordained institution, while democratic texts use imagery of revolution, unity, and the people's will to justify governance. Authoritarian texts oscillate between hero worship and social control narratives, where leaders are portrayed as both defenders of order and agents of historical inevitability.

Additionally, the historical narratives examined in the study often emphasize the role of key historical figures (Zeng dkk., 2025). In monarchies, these figures are typically kings or rulers whose actions are framed as benevolent and divine, while in democratic regimes, leaders are often depicted as figures who represent the collective will of the people. This contrast illustrates the varying uses of historical figures as symbols of political authority in different regimes.

Inferential analysis of the data suggests that the political regime significantly influences the way historical narratives are used to construct legitimacy and challenge social norms. Democratic regimes utilize historical narratives to reinforce ideals of equality and justice, relying on the concept of collective will and progress (Yu & Liu, 2026). Monarchies, however, use history to justify the continuation of established power structures, presenting the ruling class as central to national unity.

Authoritarian regimes present the most complex use of historical narratives, with some narratives serving to legitimize the regime, while others, often originating from underground or dissident movements, critique the same regimes (Trong Tin, 2026). The use of history in authoritarian contexts shows how political power is constantly negotiated, and how history can serve as both a tool of control and resistance.

The relationship between the political regime and the historical narrative reveals a significant connection between how power is legitimized and the social structures that are perpetuated. In democratic regimes, historical narratives are aligned with the values of freedom and equality, which directly support social mobility and the dismantling of hierarchical structures. In monarchies,

narratives serve to uphold social hierarchies, often with divine or moral justifications for the existing order.

In authoritarian regimes, the relationship is more fluid, with historical narratives serving as both a means to reinforce state power and a mechanism for opposition movements to challenge the government (Tran, 2025). This dual function of historical narratives suggests that in these regimes, the past is actively contested, and the narratives produced can both sustain and subvert political authority. This relational complexity underscores the role of history as a dynamic tool in shaping both power and social structures.

The case study analysis provides deeper insight into how historical narratives function within different political contexts. In one case study, a democratic society used historical narratives to justify the expansion of civil rights and the rule of law, focusing on the struggle for equality. In a monarchic regime, the case study focused on the role of divine right and the monarch's responsibility to preserve the social hierarchy and order.

In an authoritarian context, the case study examines how historical narratives were manipulated to celebrate the leader's achievements while simultaneously silencing dissenting voices (Swetha & Aravind, 2025). The narratives presented by resistance movements within these regimes often rewrote history to challenge the legitimacy of the government, showing how history can be reinterpreted to serve as both a tool of resistance and a reflection of oppression.

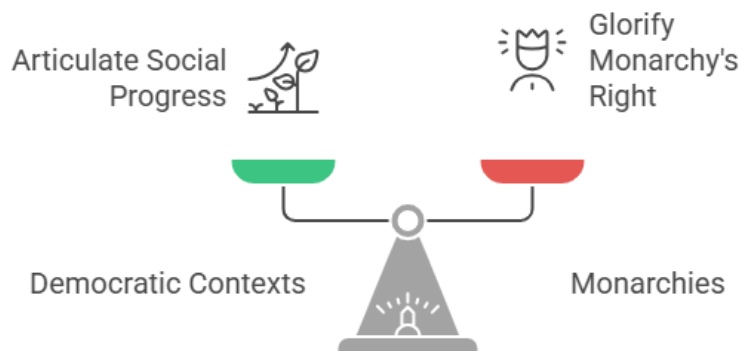


Figure 2. Historical Narratives Reflect Political Regimes

The case studies underscore the different uses of historical narratives depending on the political regime. In democratic contexts, the case studies highlight how historical narratives are used to articulate the progress of social values such as equality, justice, and democracy. In monarchies, case studies reveal how historical narratives often glorify the monarchy's divine or hereditary right to rule, reinforcing existing social structures.

In authoritarian regimes, the case studies show a more dynamic and contested relationship with historical narratives (Sudhakar, 2026). While government-controlled narratives seek to bolster political legitimacy, narratives produced by opposition groups often reinterpret history to delegitimize the regime and promote resistance. These case studies illustrate the active role that historical narratives play in shaping political authority, cultural identity, and social change.

The overall findings suggest that historical narratives are powerful tools for both reinforcing and contesting political power across different regimes. In democratic societies, narratives serve to legitimize political systems based on equality and justice, while in monarchies, they function to perpetuate traditional social hierarchies (Strydom et al., 2025). In authoritarian regimes, historical narratives serve a dual purpose: they are used to legitimize state power and simultaneously provide a means for dissenting voices to challenge political authority.

These findings highlight the centrality of historical narratives in shaping both political legitimacy and social structures. They also demonstrate how political regimes strategically use history to maintain control, while also providing spaces for resistance. This dynamic interaction between political power and historical memory underscores the ongoing relevance of historical narratives in shaping modern political and cultural landscapes.

The research findings indicate that historical narratives serve as critical tools in both reinforcing political power and driving cultural change. In democratic regimes, historical narratives are predominantly used to legitimize political authority and promote ideals such as equality, justice, and collective governance (Soyer & Tunca, 2025). In monarchies, historical narratives often emphasize the divine right of rulers, reinforcing social hierarchies and the centrality of the ruling class. Authoritarian regimes exhibit a more complex use of historical narratives, where they both legitimize state power and are subjected to critique by resistance movements. These findings show that historical narratives are not static accounts of the past but dynamic tools that reflect and shape ongoing political and social processes. They also highlight the role of historical narratives in constructing collective identities and legitimizing the existing power structures within different regimes.

The comparative analysis across political systems reveals a nuanced understanding of how political power utilizes historical narratives. In democracies, the focus on the collective and the people's role in governance contrasts with monarchies, where the power is concentrated in the hands of a singular ruler, often justified by divine or hereditary right (Rosa dkk., 2026). Authoritarian states show a complex interaction, where narratives are crafted to maintain power but are also contested by alternative interpretations, particularly by underground or dissenting groups. These variations underscore how political systems selectively use history to consolidate power and influence societal beliefs.

Previous research on political power and historical narratives has primarily focused on how history is used to legitimize authority. Many studies have examined the role of historical narratives in monarchies and authoritarian states, noting their function in solidifying power. However, the present findings differ from much of the existing scholarship by emphasizing the dual role of historical narratives in democracies. While historical narratives are often used for political legitimation, they also serve as tools for promoting democratic ideals and social justice. This contrasts with the more traditional view that sees historical narratives primarily as tools of control and repression in non-democratic regimes.

Furthermore, the study's comparative approach distinguishes it from prior research that has mostly analyzed these narratives in isolated contexts. By examining how different political regimes utilize historical narratives, this research adds depth to the literature by revealing the dynamic nature of history's role in shaping political and social structures. While previous studies have focused on isolated regimes, this study bridges the gap by comparing these dynamics across regimes, offering a broader understanding of the relationship between power, history, and social change.

The findings point to a crucial insight about the transformative role of historical narratives in shaping not just political power but also cultural values and societal norms. Historical narratives, particularly those embedded in political discourse, are not only tools of preservation but also vehicles for societal transformation. They highlight how the past is constantly reinterpreted to meet the needs and challenges of the present, reflecting an ongoing negotiation between tradition and modernity. This adaptability of historical narratives emphasizes their importance in shaping collective memory and identity across time.

Moreover, the findings suggest that societies are continually engaged in the process of revisiting and reinterpreting their histories, influenced by the political context in which they exist. This ongoing process of historical reinterpretation may lead to both the reinforcement of existing power structures and the potential for cultural change. The results demonstrate that political regimes do not merely control the past, but actively participate in the construction and reconstruction of historical narratives that impact social cohesion and transformation.

The implications of these findings are significant for both political theory and cultural studies. For political theorists, this research underscores the importance of historical narratives in maintaining political power and shaping collective identities. It suggests that political regimes can manipulate history not only to legitimize their rule but also to reinforce or challenge existing social

structures. In democratic societies, historical narratives can foster unity and reinforce political values, but they can also be used to exclude or marginalize certain groups.

For cultural studies, the findings highlight the role of historical narratives in fostering cultural change. These narratives serve as vehicles for negotiating societal norms and values, and their reinterpretation can lead to shifts in cultural identities. The study suggests that understanding how political power uses history can offer insights into broader cultural transformations, especially as societies engage in debates about their past and future. These insights are essential for understanding the role of cultural memory in shaping modern political and social landscapes.

The findings reflect the deep interconnection between political power and cultural memory. Political regimes require historical narratives to legitimize their authority, and these narratives often serve as the foundation for cultural identity and social cohesion. Democracies use history to reinforce the principles of equality and justice, while monarchies and authoritarian states draw on history to legitimize the concentration of power and to maintain social hierarchies. The varying uses of historical narratives are shaped by the political goals and cultural values of each regime, which explains the differences in narrative emphasis across systems.

The reason historical narratives play such a pivotal role in shaping social structures lies in their ability to create a sense of continuity and legitimacy. By grounding political ideologies and social systems in historical precedent, regimes can cultivate a sense of belonging and unity, even as they maintain or alter power dynamics. The continuous reinterpretation of historical narratives allows these ideologies to adapt to changing political landscapes, ensuring their relevance and effectiveness in maintaining control or fostering social change.

Future research should explore how historical narratives are received by the public and how these narratives shape individual and collective attitudes toward political systems. Empirical studies on the impact of historical narratives on public opinion, particularly in democratic regimes, could reveal how the interpretation of history affects political engagement and social movements.

Another promising avenue for future research is to examine the role of media and education systems in the transmission of historical narratives. The way history is taught in schools and portrayed in media outlets can significantly influence the way citizens understand their political systems and social structures. By analyzing the role of these institutions in shaping historical narratives, future research can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of knowledge transmission and political socialization.

Lastly, comparative studies of how digital platforms influence the dissemination and reinterpretation of historical narratives would be valuable. As new media forms increasingly shape public discourse, it is crucial to understand how digital technologies are altering the ways in which political power utilizes history. Exploring the role of social media, blogs, and online forums in the production and dissemination of historical narratives could provide new insights into the interaction between politics, history, and cultural change in the digital age.

CONCLUSION

The most important finding of this research is that historical narratives serve not only as a tool for political legitimization but also as a dynamic force for cultural transformation. The study reveals that in democratic regimes, historical narratives are predominantly used to promote social justice and equality, while in monarchies, they reinforce social hierarchies and the legitimacy of dynastic rule. In authoritarian regimes, historical narratives function both as tools for maintaining power and as spaces for internal critique. This complexity underscores the active role of historical narratives in shaping political power and social structures across different regimes.

The primary contribution of this research lies in its novel approach to comparative analysis, examining historical narratives across political regimes in a single framework. By integrating concepts from political theory, cultural studies, and historical narrative analysis, the study offers a more comprehensive understanding of how political power uses history to influence cultural change and reinforce social structures. The method employed comparing the use of historical narratives

across diverse regimes provides new insights into the intersection of power, history, and culture, enriching the academic discussion on political legitimacy and social dynamics.

A limitation of this study is its focus on textual analysis without incorporating empirical studies of how these narratives are received by the public. While the study provides a strong theoretical framework, it does not fully address how historical narratives influence everyday political behavior and public opinion. Future research could expand on this by conducting surveys, interviews, or case studies to explore the real-world impact of historical narratives on political participation and social attitudes. Additionally, an exploration of digital platforms and how they shape the reinterpretation and dissemination of historical narratives in contemporary society would offer further depth to the study.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) used ChatGPT to assist in improving grammar, language quality, and overall readability of the text. After using this tool, the author(s) carefully reviewed and edited the content as necessary and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

Author 4: Formal analysis; Methodology; Writing - original draft.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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