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LSE GROUPS takes place during the final fortnight of the LSE Spring Term. Undergraduate students are placed in small groups; these are cross-year, interdisciplinary, and group members do not know one another in advance. Each group must then devise its own research question and carry out every stage of a small-scale research project, in less than two weeks.

LSE GROUPS is part of the LSE commitment to students learning through enquiry and developing the skills needed for knowledge creation.

The overall theme of LSE GROUPS 2024 was *Power and Politics*.

This paper was submitted on the final Thursday afternoon of the project. Students then presented their work at a conference, on the closing Friday.

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Strings Attached: A Cross-National Analysis of Aid Conditionality and Regime Type in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Abstract

Donor countries have in recent decades attached conditions to foreign aid to facilitate domestic political reforms within recipient countries, believing that their dependence on aid can be used as leverage to promote democratisation. In this comparative case study of Sub-Saharan Africa, we examine the relationship between foreign aid conditionality and regime type within four countries. To explore this relationship, we determined three continuous measures to describe regimes; freedom and fairness of elections, extent of systemic corruption, and the rule of law. Within the literature, we identified three alternative determining factors as well as an academic consensus on this relationship that has led us to propose a hypothesis which states that there is no relationship between these two variables. Our findings revealed that there is a possibility of a relationship, however this remains inconclusive. Therefore, our work has implications for future research within the region, focusing on a more extensive range of variables.

Introduction

Due to the region's large aid inflow and diversity of political environments, the link between foreign aid conditionality and regime types in Sub-Saharan Africa is a topic of notable significance. This research examines whether placing conditions on foreign aid may lead to political changes like democratisation. Understanding this relationship is vital for both augmenting the efficacy of assistance initiatives and providing guidance for policy determinations.

Our research is motivated by the diverse results from decades of foreign aid that was contingent on political changes. While some governments have demonstrated notable advancements in democracy and governance, others have either resisted reform or have merely conformed on the surface. Our research question thus centers on a critical aspect of this debate: "Is there a relationship between the conditionality of foreign aid and regime types in Sub-Saharan Africa?" Our study reveals trends and variables that affect how assistance conditionality works to advance political changes.

Given the complexity of political changes and mixed data in the area, we hypothesise that there is no clear-cut association between aid conditionality and regime types. This theory casts doubt on the notion that conditional aid inevitably promotes democracy and sound governance, concluding that other variables may be of importance. To test this theory, we used three continuous measures of regime characteristics—the degree of systemic corruption, the freedom and fairness of elections, and the presence of the rule of law—in a comparative case study of four Sub-Saharan African countries.

Literature Review

<u>Defining Regime Types</u>

Skanning (2006) states that a political-institutional perspective is essential for the conceptualization of a coherent theoretical framework for defining regime types. This approach should include formal and informal institutions and address the connection between rules, behaviour, and attitudes. Regimes, based on this insight, can be defined by four key principles – the character of rulers, their access to power, vertical power limitations, and horizontal power limitations.

<u>Defining Alternative Explanations to Regime Types</u>

1. Colonial Past

The colonial legacy of Sub-Saharan African countries serves as significant determinant of their post-colonial regime types. Studies show that in its strong ethnic basis, indirect colonial rule, or local variations of colonial rule has implications for the post-colonial political and socioeconomic

development of African states (Müller-Crepon, 2020; Ndulu & O'Connell, 1999). British indirect rule, which allowed for some local autonomy, entrenched ethnic divisions and local power hierarchies, influencing ex-British colonies' political landscape (Mizuno & Okazawa, 2009; Ndulu & O'Connell, 1999). By reinforcing ethnic structures, indirect rule created a foundation that post-independence leaders exploited to consolidate their power (Müller-Crepon, 2020). In contrast, French direct rule established centralized administrative structures, creating a uniform and controlled governance system (Mizuno & Okazawa, 2009). While this approach often resulted in more stable administrative control, it reduced local autonomy. Consequently, many post-independence governments developed authoritarian governance that suppressed regional and ethnic diversities to maintain stability (Müller-Crepon, 2020).

2. Ethnic Fractionalization

The tribal and ethnic divisions in post-colonial Sub-Saharan African nations significantly influenced their regime types. Arbitrary colonial boundaries, designed by European powers to promote mutual recognition, grouped diverse ethnic communities into single political entities without considering historical, cultural, or social affiliations (Ndulu & O'Connell, 1999). This imposition often resulted in internal conflicts and fragmentation, and whilst the colonial authorities initially managed these conflicts, their departure exacerbated them. Following independence, internal conflicts emerged to violent effect in Ethiopia, Nigeria, Sudan, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, and later in Angola and Mozambique, all within a decade of independence (Ndulu & O'Connell, 1999). This gave rise to substantial political management problems that leaders sought to control. Africa's first generation of leaders contended that competitive national politics would undermine national stability by succumbing to ethnic, regional, religious, or class interests (Collier, 1982). As a result, leaders favoured centralized authority and often resorted to authoritarian governance to maintain control and prevent the fragmentation (Collier, 1982).

3. Resource Wealth

Resource abundance is a crucial determinant of Sub-Saharan African political regimes. Studies show that resource-dependent economies are more likely to be authoritarian, exhibit higher levels of government spending, and suffer from worse governance through several mechanisms (Jensen & Wantchekon, 2004). It can strengthen an already dominant regime's popularity and reinforce its hold on power, thereby hindering democratic transitions. Secondly, it can create incumbency advantages and political instability, giving the incumbent leverage to adopt repressive measures against opposition. Lastly, resource wealth can cause open and extraconstitutional conflicts, such as civil wars, potentially resulting in a dictatorship by either side. These factors collectively complicate the strength of democratic governance (Jensen & Wantchekon, 2004).

Conceptualising Conditional Foreign Aid

According to the OECD, official development assistance (ODA), or foreign aid, represents government support designed to advance the "economic development and welfare of developing countries" (Hynes & Scott, 2013, 14). These often take the form of "financial flows, technical assistance, and commodities" as well as the provision of subsidised loans and grants which take place in primarily bilateral, at times multilateral, capacity (Radelet, 2006, 4–5).

For the latter half of the twentieth century, aid had been provided to developing countries to encourage the strengthening of their economic and welfare systems. In the 1970s and 1980s donor countries began to apply conditions on aid, requiring recipient countries to comply before receiving support. Conditions initially focused on economic policy, attempting to encourage reforms towards a more 'free-market' economy, however, by the 1990s, donor nations moved towards placing political conditions on aid received by nations which were viewed as 'undemocratic' and actively violating human rights (Radelet, 2006, 14). These conditions consist of 'good governance', multi-party elections, human rights, and anti-corruption. To ensure compliance with conditions, donors used a series of mechanisms such as the threat of aid termination or the provision of specialised assistance (ODI, 1992).

Within this report, aid flows are measured as a percentage of GDP for a recipient country.

Relationship between Aid Conditionality and Regime Types

Aid conditions are imposed by donors to secure political reforms within a recipient country, and subsequently change within non-democratic regimes. With these countries relying on foreign aid to fund its development, donors intend to use this dependency to leverage this change (ODI, 1992). However, this theory is frequently disputed within the literature, as many scholars have argued that the 'carrot and stick' method (aid flow being the carrot, its withdrawal being the stick) of aid conditionality is ineffective in achieving these objectives (Kanbur, 2003, p. 22). There are three plausible reasons behind this assessment. Firstly, as developing nations grew their domestic economy, the influence of aid flows has increasingly diminished as they become less dependent on aid and therefore less willing to comply with political conditions for negligible aid (Kanbur, 2003, 22). Secondly, aid conditionality appears more likely to succeed the more democratic a state already is (Montinola, 2010, 10). Specifically, as democratic states require the support of more special interest groups to stay in power, they require much more resources than that of less democratic states who rely on smaller-sized 'winning coalitions' of special interests, such as regime elites (Montinola, 2010, 4). Thirdly, due to aid conditionality often lacking a coherent application across states, with geopolitical interests determining whether to uphold conditions, the rise of alternative donors, like China, reduced the effectiveness of this leverage as this alternative aid is often without political conditions (Guillaumont et al., 2023, 30).

Based on the literature's academic consensus, this report has produced the following hypothesis;

There is no relationship between the conditionality of aid and regime type.

Methodology

It was decided that a deductive, qualitative study with a small *n* sample size using the Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD) was the most appropriate method of analysis. Not only is this method best suited for small *n* system level analyses, but it also overcame most of the four hurdles of causality (Anckar, 2008; Whitten & Kellstedt, 2008):

1. Establishing a credible causal mechanism.
2. Demonstrating reasonable covariance.
3. Controlling for alternative explanations.
4. Discrediting reverse causality.

MSSD allows us to control alternative explanations, which poses the biggest challenge in our research. Highlighted by a country's colonial history, resource wealth, and ethnic fractionalisation as some of the alternative causes for regime types, controlling for them meant that our cases must equate these variables while differing only on the conditionality of foreign aid. These cases are Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda, and Zambia. All share a British colonial past (Figure 1), have similar ethnic fractionalisation (Figure 2), and enjoy similar total natural resource rents as a percentage of GDP (Figure 3).

To control for ethnic fractionalisation, we decided to use the Fearon Ethnic Fractionalization index, as it captures the probability that two randomly selected individuals from a given country belong to different ethnic groups. By incorporating this index, we measured the level of ethnic diversity and fragmentation within each nation, allowing us to account for the potential influence of ethnic divisions on regime types.

To control for the causal effect of resource wealth, we accounted for each case's total resource rents as a percentage of GDP. This approach allowed us to capture the absolute value of resources and their proportional impact on the overall economy of our case studies, allowing us to understand how the economic weight of dependency on resource rents influences regime types within each nation.
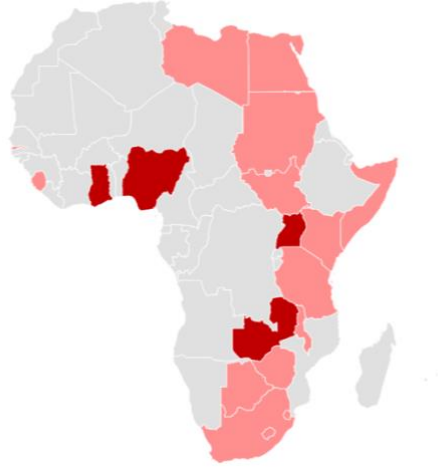
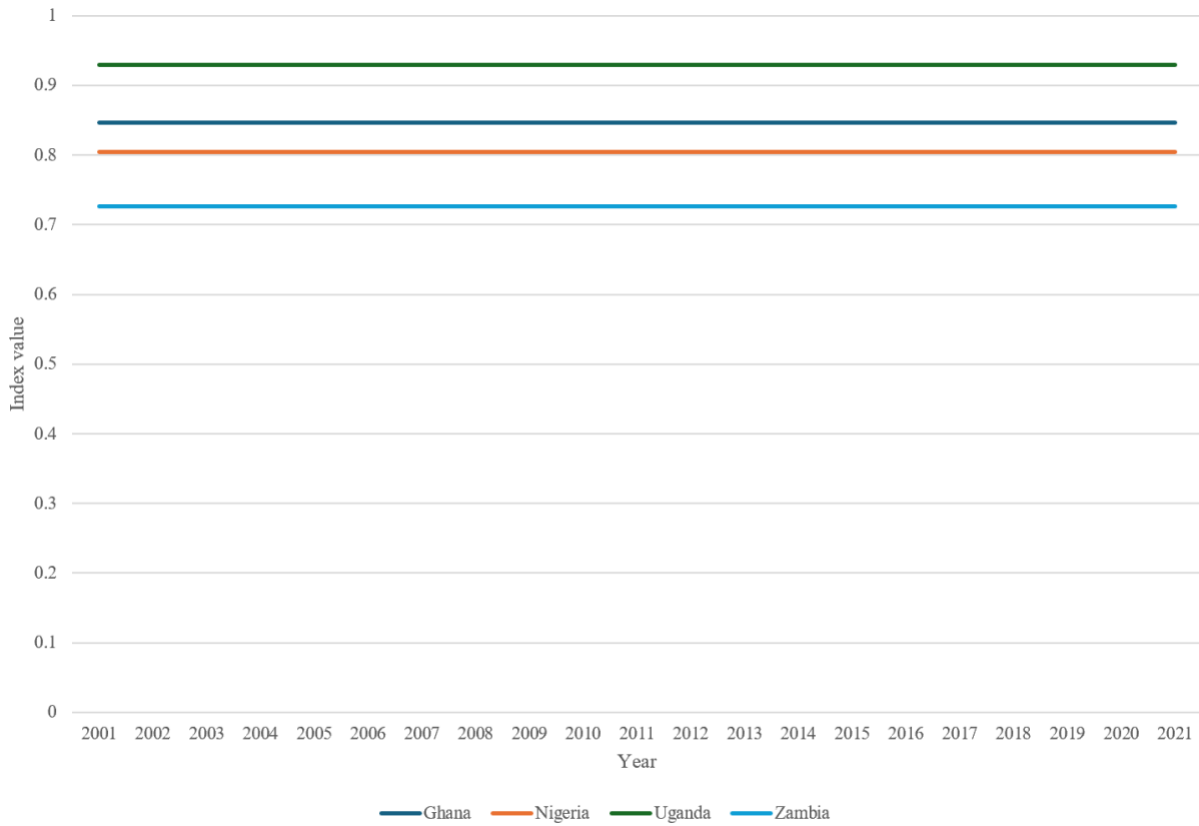Figure 1: Former British colonies in Africa (Bing, N.A.)

Figure 2: Ethnic fractionalization of select Sub-Saharan African countries 2001 – 2021
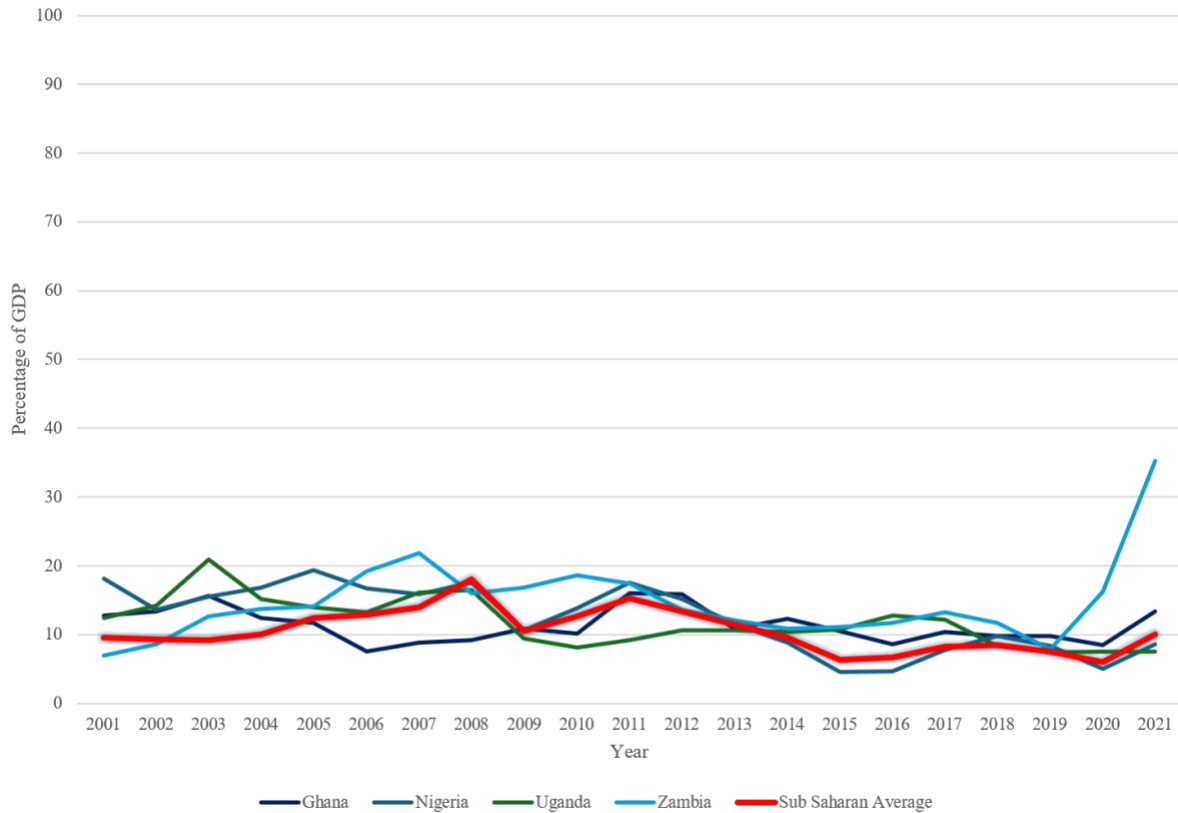(*Standard Dataset / University of Gothenburg*, 2024)

Figure 3: Total natural resources resource rents as % of GDP of select Sub-Saharan African countries 2001-2021 (*World Bank Open Data*, 2021)

To test the causal relationship between our dependent (DV) and independent (IV) variables, these must be operationalized. To define the IV - the conditionality of foreign aid - the total foreign aid received by a country was divided into two categories based on the aid source, Western donors and China; with China generally providing unconditional aid while Western sources frequently attach conditions to its aid (ODI, 1992; *World Bank Open Data,* 2021). The proportion of each of the two categories relative to the receiving country's GDP was then recorded as IV.

To measure our dependent variable, we determined that a categorical approach would hinder meaningful comparisons, so we opted for a continuous definition of regimes. We examined various datasets, including Freedom House (FH) and Polity, but found inconsistencies such as arbitrary weighting of variables and disputed coding criteria, particularly regarding political violence. These issues undermined their reliability for systemic classifications. We therefore chose to use V-Dem given its transparency, consistency, and ability to be used adeptly for comparison. We chose three measures as the basis of the conceptualisation of our DV: freedom and fairness of the elections, the extent to which the rule of law is respected and maintained, and the extent of systemic corruption in the selected countries. These measures were to be informed by two aggregate indexes produced by V-Dem: the Rule of Law and Clean Elections Indexes. Only two indexes were

required, as the Rule of Law index encompasses the low-level indices used by V-Dem to determine the level of corruption in a country (Gerring et al., 2024, p. 308).

It is notable that MSSD, while applicable to our circumstances and one which allows for high internal validity, suffers from low external validity due to being a study with a small and concentrated sample, resulting in non-generalisable results (Anckar, 2008).

Analysis

Ghana

Ghana's historic sources of foreign aid encompass the World Bank and the US (Sissoko & Sohrabji, 2018). With the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programs in 1983, Ghana received financial aid from Western donors under the requirements of adopting political reform (Dash, 2022). With the World Bank increasing conditionalities from 20 in 1983 to 40-50 in 1988-1989, pressures from the Western donors to democratise supervised Ghana's transition from a militaristic regime to a multi-party democratic system in the 1990s, with Ghana fearing potential foreign aid reductions undermining its ability to finance large debt obligations (Sissoko & Sohrabji, 2018; Dash, 2022). Hence, the conditionalities oversaw Western support for the Elector Commission of Ghana, funding for improvements in electoral polls and establishment of transparent media coverages, promoting free and fair elections while preventing potential corruption; underpinning the widely regarded credible elections in 2000 and 2008 (Gyimah-Boadi & Yakah, 2013).
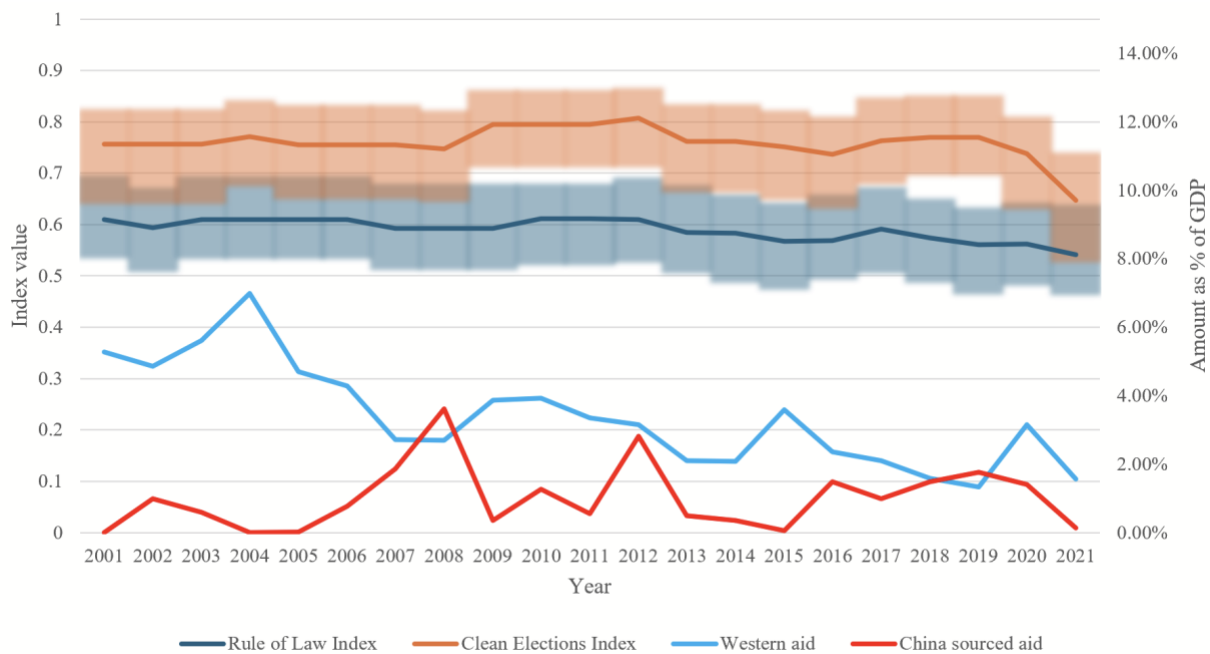

Figure 4: Regime description and foreign aid received by Ghana 2001 – 2021

It can be observed that a lack of trends or patterns between the Rule of Law and Clean Elections indexes with the spikes and downfalls of Western or China foreign aid does not coincide with the qualitative findings regarding the case of Ghana. While the historical context of Ghana's transition to a democratic state demonstrates the notable role of Western conditionalities in affecting regime types, these are not representative in the trajectories on Figure 4.

Nigeria

Nigeria is one of the countries that received the largest share of US foreign aid and financial assistance out of all African states (Otu et al., 2024). Democratisation of its politics began in the 1990s, with the US attaching conditionalities that dictated provision of financial aid conditional on democracy promotion, funding initiatives such as Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission and Civil Society Organizations (Luqman et al., 2015). Strengthening democratic processes through conditionalities consolidated Nigeria's transition from militaristic authoritarianism to democracy for its Fourth Republic in the 1999 general elections (Luqman et al., 2015). However, ineffectiveness persists where Western interest in Nigeria's oil reserves undermines the implementation of conditionalities, allowing Nigeria to bypass anti-corruption and accountability checks (Crawford, 2007). This case can be attributed to the 1995 execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and 8 Ogoni environmental activists where the abuses of democratic values led to only a partial freeze on developmental aid from the EU towards Nigeria (for multilateral and bilateral aid) (Crawford, 2007).
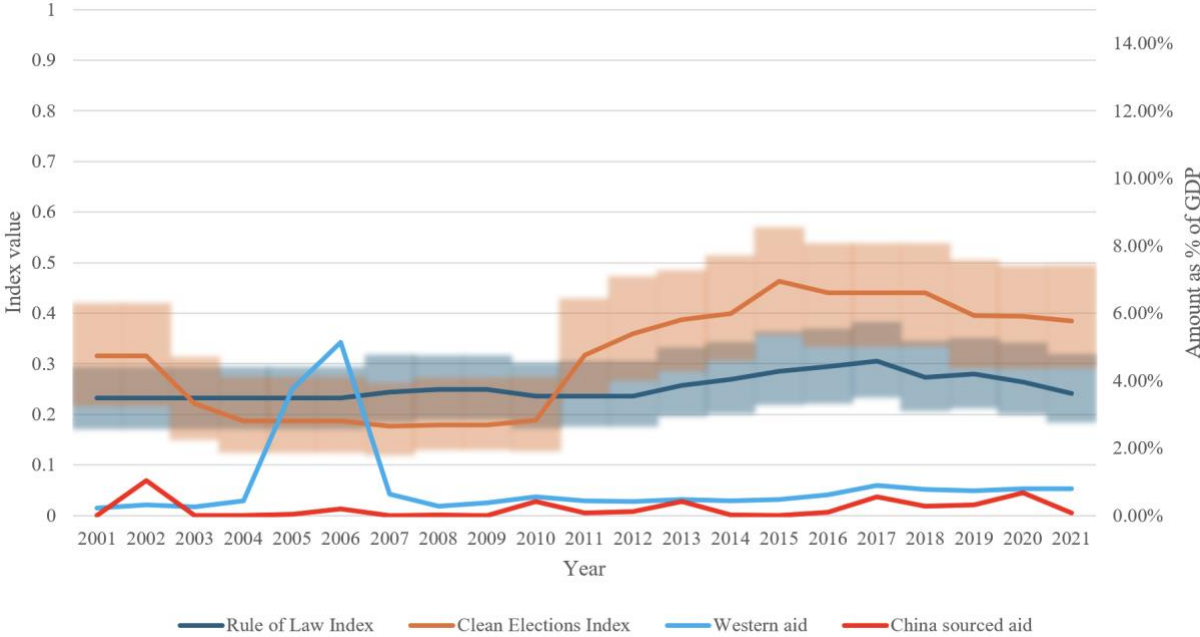

Figure 5: Regime description and foreign aid received by Nigeria 2001 - 2021

The qualitative findings show that Western conditionalities had a partial role in promoting democratic governance in Nigeria. Yet, Figure 5 demonstrated that between the years 2016 – 2021 Western foreign aid saw a slight steady increase despite a decline in Rule of Law and Clean Elections indexes. This trend highlights how foreign economic interests in natural resources, determined in qualitative research, undermines effectiveness of conditionalities in influencing regime type.

Uganda

Uganda has remained an 'electoral autocracy' for the past decades following the 1986 seizure of power by the NRM under President Museveni, overthrowing the government which previously overthrew the military government in 1979 (Atkinson, 2009, 6; Lundstedt et al., 2024, 61). Though technically elected, Museveni's NRM has remained in power for the past three elections (2011, 2016, 2021) with the government being accused of unfair electoral practices alongside concerns of violence against the opposition (Dahir, 2021). Donors have previously placed minimum conditions focusing on battling corruption in 2009, who threatened to cut aid if Uganda failed to comply (Biryabarema & Nyambura-Mwaura, 2009). For Uganda, aid serves as vital support for projects addressing areas like health, education and infrastructure. In 2020, it was reported that the total amount of aid for Uganda accounted for 5% of GDP (Joel, 2023). However, the government frequently ignores conditions, with one case seeing the government pass an anti-gay law in 2014 despite Western threats of aid cuts (Fallon & Bowcott, 2014).
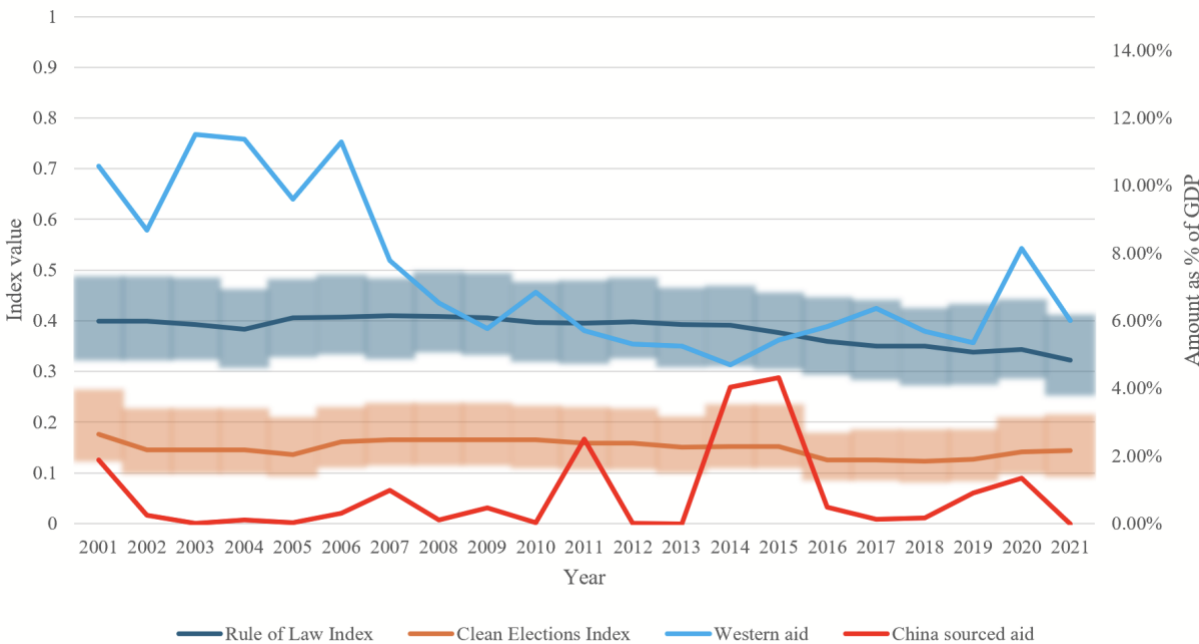

Figure 6: Regime description and foreign aid received by Uganda 2001 – 2021

Despite increases in Western foreign aid, between the years 2014-2017, Uganda has continuously failed to uphold conditionalities and faced little consequence for non-compliance. Consequently, fluctuations in Western and Chinese foreign aid do not correspond with the steady trends of the Rule of Law and Clean Elections indexes, indicating that aid conditionalities did not have an impact on Uganda's regime type.

Zambia

During the late 1990s, donor countries to Zambia began to emphasise the need for democratisation and respect of human rights within the country (UNU-WIDER, 2013). This saw some success, with the establishment of 'The Oasis Forum' to provide a means of pressuring the government to meet these conditions (UNU-WIDER, 2013). In 2001, donor pressure forced President Frederick Chiluba from amending the constitution to achieve a third term in office (McGreal, 2001). However, with aid primarily "channeled to the executive," the government's position was strengthened at the expense of civil society. By 2009, under President Rupiah Banda, the country had moved towards a more autocratic system (Lundstedt et al., 2024, 34) (Human Rights Watch, 2009). This would be continued in 2014 until the election of Hakainde Hichilema in 2021 when it would be restored to an electoral democracy (Lundstedt et al., 2024, 61).
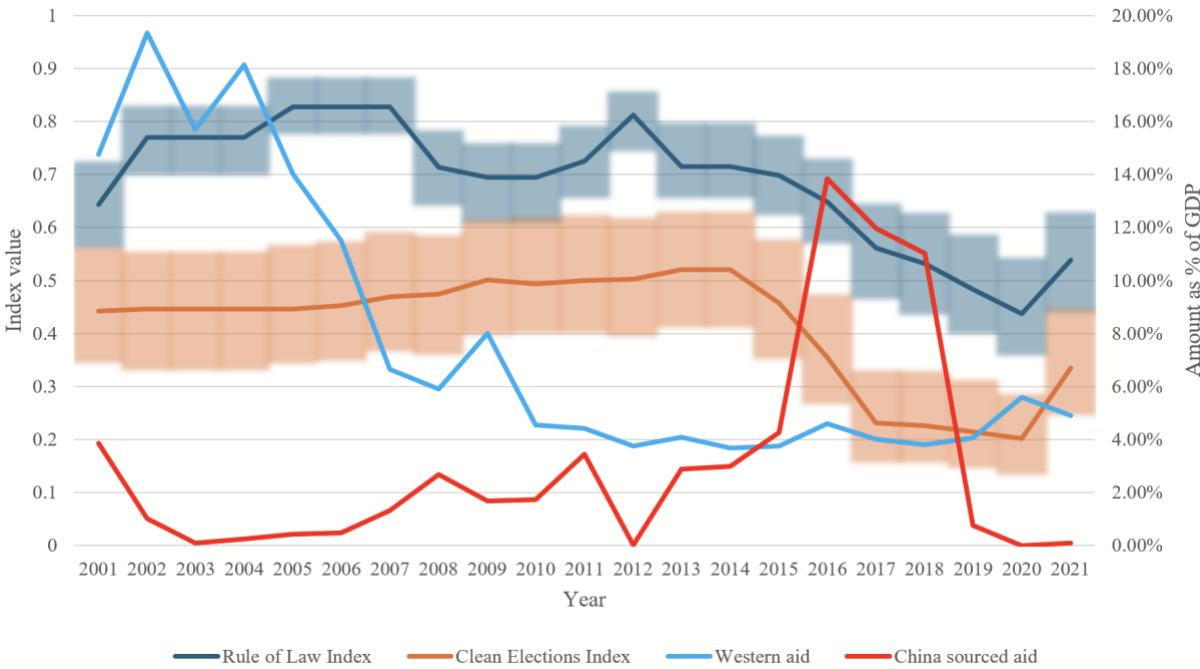

Figure 7: Regime description and foreign aid received by Zambia 2001 – 2021

Following Zambia's shift towards authoritarianism in 2009, a sharp decline in the Rule of Law and Clean Election indexes in 2014-2016 can be observed simultaneously with a spike in China's foreign aid. However, since no correlation in trends can be observed surrounding 2009, other factors could have influenced Zambia's regime type. Nevertheless, we can assume increased Chinese foreign aid has disincentivised compliance with conditional Western aid, which consolidated Zambia's authoritarianism.

<u>Further Reflection</u>

We can also reasonably reject the notion of reverse causality for these cases, where the states' regime types do not influence conditionality of foreign aid. This notion has been observed through the analysis of graphs, where the fluctuations in China and Western aid do not show consistent patterns in conjunction with the Rule of Law and the Clean Election indexes. Similarly, analysis of the qualitative findings has not indicated that shifts in regime types towards democracy or authoritarianism have impacted the aid conditionality in any of the states explored in this paper.

Therefore, mixed results have indicated that aid conditionality could be a factor affecting regime typologies. Due to difficulties in controlling a variety of variables impacting regimes within Sub-Saharan Africa, the results of our research remain inconclusive. We suggest that a larger case study should be conducted on other Sub-Saharan states to expand the scope of the study and increase the probability of a comprehensive conclusion. A deeper understanding of this relationship would have positive implications on foreign policy formation to promote stable governance in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Conclusion

Our analysis concluded that there is no clear relationship between the conditionality of aid and regime types in Sub-Saharan Africa. Mixed qualitative findings and quantitative data demonstrated a lack of consistency in establishing a common relationship between all four case studies. Consequently, we likewise cannot identify a certain casual mechanism between the aid conditionality and regime type. As a result, the inclusion of foreign aid conditionality has utility for future research, though such should include a more robust sample.

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