

Abstract

Formal decolonization throughout the mid-twentieth century promised freedom, yet many newly independent nations inherited compromised state structures that generated institutional vulnerabilities. This study examines how transitional handoffs instilled long-term instability rather than true independence. Applying institutional political theory, incorporating extractive institutions, rentier dynamics, bifurcated governance, and structural dependency—this paper conducts a historical analysis of Sudan during its transitional era (1953–1956). Findings show that British colonial policies divided northern and southern administrations, present in the 1953–1954 Sudanisation Committee. This committee allocated only 6 of 800 senior posts to southern officials. This monopoly triggered the August 1955 Torit Mutiny and prompted Khartoum’s reliance on emergency decrees and central rule. While structural capacity deficits existed, post-independence northern elites made deliberate political choices to preserve exploitation colonial systems and patronage networks rather than pursue reform. Ultimately, early governance crises reflect the outcomes of dependency. Where inherited institutional incentives prioritized elite survival over structural reform, offering perspective into state fragility across the post-colonial Global South.

Introduction

Core Problem: Formal decolonization (1950s–1970s) promised self-determination, but many new nations inherited extractive institutions that compromised substantive independence.

Research Question: How did the transitional handoff during decolonization create long-term institutional vulnerabilities in post-colonial states?

Thesis: Formal (de jure) sovereignty masked an enduring structural dependency established during the rapid transitional period, which post-colonial elites preserved rather than reformed.

Methods

Approach: Qualitative, single-case historical analysis applying institutional political theory.

Theoretical Lenses: Extractive Institutions & Rentierism (Acemoglu & Robinson; Beblawi & Luciani; Wantchekon): States relying on external resource rents rather than broad-based domestic taxation bypass the public social contract, fueling patronage networks.

Bifurcated Governance / "Decentralized Despotism" (Mamdani): Imperial rule divided populations between urban civil law and rural customary rule without constitutional checks.

Structural Dependency (Galtung): Center-periphery dynamics that align domestic elites with external powers over local accountability.

Designing Dependency: How the Handoff of Colonial Machinery Fueled Post-Colonial Corruption

Gabriella Mitchell

Results

Historical Case Findings: Sudan (1953–1956)

Colonial Administrative Divide: The 1922 Southern Policy isolated southern Sudan into closed districts under customary rule while the British developed urban infrastructure in the north.

Sudanisation Committee (1953–1954): Out of 800 senior administrative posts vacated by the British, only 6 were allocated to southern officials, consolidating bureaucratic control in the north.

Escalation & State Coercion: The exclusion of southern personnel triggered the August 1955 Torit Mutiny in Equatoria, met with emergency decrees and military enforcement.



Discussion

Alternative Perspective (State Capacity & "Capability Trap"): Some scholars argue northern centralization was not purely predatory, but a defensive reaction to extreme capacity deficits, lack of trained southern administrators, and fear of imminent territorial collapse.

Synthesis & Argument: While capacity constraints existed, post-independence northern leaders made deliberate political choices post-1956 to maintain emergency powers and patronage rather than pursue federal reform, culminating in the 1958 Abboud military coup.

Conclusion

Summary: Post-colonial governance crises are path-dependent outcomes of compromised transitional choices and inherited extractive mechanisms.

Broader Implication: Evaluating historical administrative structures and elite incentives during transition is essential to understanding ongoing governance challenges across the Global South.

References

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