Received: 18 August 2023 | Accepted: 22 August 2023
DOI: 10.1111/1758-5899.13283

SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

global POLICY

Sub-Saharan Africa: Towards better governance and sustainability?

Helmut K. Anheier[1,2] | **Christian Fröhlich**[3] | **Regina A. List**[4]

[1]UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs, Los Angeles, California, USA
[2]Hertie School, Berlin, Germany
[3]Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin, Germany
[4]Independent Researcher, Hamburg, Germany

Correspondence
Regina A. List, Hamburg, Germany.
Email: ralist@yahoo.com

Funding information
Berggruen Institute

Abstract
The countries of the Sub-Saharan region have, on average, made significant progress in governance performance, especially in terms of democratic accountability and public goods provision—findings that seem to contradict patterns of state fragility and economic underdevelopment common in the region. This article explores this seeming contradiction and presents in more detail findings from the Berggruen Governance Index regarding the governance performance of five countries, namely Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa. Lagging state capacity and growing sovereign debt emerge as critical factors, and the article suggests that they may be responsible for the inability of many countries in the region to consolidate gains in governance as well as economic performance.

1 | CONTRADICTORY PATTERNS

The Fragile States Index ranks countries by their ability to defend national borders, police their territory and provide public services and economic stability, among other criteria. Of the 31 countries that are classified with a very high, high and alert status of fragility in 2019, 22 are in Sub-Saharan Africa (Fund for Peace, 2019). Only three of the region's countries are ranked as stable (Mauritius) or more stable (Seychelles and Botswana). Africa appears to be ill-governed. Yet, in seeming contradiction, the Berggruen Governance Index (BGI)[1] shows for the period 2000–2019 that governance progress has been made in many African countries, a finding corroborated by the Ibrahim Index of African Governance (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2020). What is more, a recent report by the International Monetary Fund (Newiak et al., 2022) found numerous instances of improved governance performance across the region.

Africa is the world's poorest region, and home to some of the poorest countries worldwide. Yet for Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole, GDP per capita (constant 2015 US$)[2] increased from US$1238 in the year 2000 to $1652 by 2019. Real GDP growth rates averaged 3.5% for that period, lower than Southeast Asia (4.6%) but higher than Latin America's (1%) or Europe's (0.6%) (IMF, 2023).

So, how do these seemingly contradictory patterns of governance fragility and poverty, on one hand, and improved governance and economic growth, on the other, fit together? The answer is that the countries making up Sub-Saharan Africa are not only highly diverse in cultural, political and economic terms but also at a level of development that makes them vulnerable and volatile as well as malleable for improvements and opportunities. In this context, it is important to consider that the majority (26) of the region's countries are classified by the World Bank as low-income, based on an annual per capita income of less than US$1085, 17 are lower middle-income, six are upper middle-income and only one, Seychelles, is considered high-income.

Low per capita income makes African populations vulnerable and less resilient to changing conditions, be they natural such as famines and pandemics or economic downturns and political instability. As Acemoglu and Robinson (2019) argue, it is not that less developed countries suffer from extended periods of low growth or even decline. On the contrary, they can grow, as we have seen above, sometimes at high levels and even quickly. However, what holds them back is their frequent inability to withstand economic downturns and crises of many kinds such as to maintain previous improvements. Gains in economic and governance performance as well as political and social stability are at a greater risk of being lost. High-income countries especially, but already middle-income countries have more resilience, and, if suffering shocks or experiencing temporary decline, they are more likely to return to pre-crisis performance levels.

What are the origins of this pattern where gains are made and lost? Of course, many analysts have commented on this, and here is not the place for a full presentation of the various explanations and theories (see Zartman's seminal assessment (2008); and more recently, Lancaster & van de Walle, 2016; Olorungoba & Falola, 2020). Instead, we focus on governance, the role of the state and public administration. Governance systems in Africa have specific characteristics that set them apart from other parts of the Global South (Hyden, 2020; Tapscott, 2021; Vyas-Doorgapersad et al., 2019).

The first is that domestically, administrative systems were imposed by colonial powers that had little if any roots in the local population.[3] They were systems of control and rent extraction first and foremost, and much less about building up state capacities to provide public goods. With independence (mostly in the 1960s), path dependencies set in, as the previous colonial administration system remained largely intact. In addition, a persistent reliance on financial and expert support from former colonial powers and later multilateral agencies like the World Bank meant that

> the African state—the locus of public administration—is a foreign creation imposed on society without roots in the economy or society. This tends to make its governance capricious and shaped foremost by political battles over how rents and privileges are shared among groups that come together for reasons of consumption rather than production.
>
> (Hyden, 2020, p. 1)

The second characteristic is that, since independence and throughout the Cold War, African governance and public administration systems have been influenced by international powers and pressured to adopt strikingly different ideologies and approaches to accelerate economic development. From the import substitution doctrine and African socialism to structural adjustment programmes and neoliberalism to social democracy and indigenous growth policies—all left their mark on Africa's political systems, and by implication, their public administrations that, typically underfunded yet often overstaffed and lacking both stability and competence, became vulnerable to corruption and predatory elite. As a result, African countries have lacked a well-coordinated central policymaking and administrative machinery of government with the capacity to set objectives and ensure service delivery consistency (Nhema, 2016). In some countries like Nigeria, with its export-oriented oil economy, the weakness of public administration systems is amplified by the resource curse of the Dutch disease, as Zartman (2008) argues.[4]

A third characteristic shared by most countries in the region is political instability, as demonstrated by the Fragile States Index discussed above. While there are a few exceptions (e.g., Botswana and Mauritius), countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Zimbabwe, Tanzania and many others experienced frequent involuntary changes of government, particularly in the decades immediately following independence. Since 1950, there have been 210 coup attempts (Lawler, 2022). Even so, a third wave of democratisation seemed to take hold in the post-Cold War era, reducing instability into the 2000s, but the 2020s augur increasing volatility, as illustrated by a series of recent coups in the countries of the Sahel region.

Given the challenges of relatively low levels of economic development and fragile governments and public administrations, what can we say about the governance performance of Sub-Saharan African countries for the first two decades of the twenty-first century, when many countries in the region entered their sixth decade of independence?

2 | GOVERNANCE PERFORMANCE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

The BGI data, which covers 32 of the Sub-Saharan African countries, allows us to shed considerable light on general governance trends in the region, especially in comparison with other world regions.[5] Sub-Saharan African countries as a whole have improved their performance measurably on all three high-level indices—public goods provision, state capacity and democratic accountability—that make up the Governance Triangle, introduced in Anheier, Lang and Knudsen's article 'Introducing the Berggruen Governance Index: I. Conceptual and Methodological Framework' in this special issue.

As shown in Figure 1, Sub-Saharan Africa has made greater strides in improving the provision of public goods such as food security, healthcare and clean air than any other region, with its average score for public goods provision rising by 20 points from 24 in 2000 to 44 in 2019. Though some countries like Burkina Faso achieved larger gains (from 8 in 2000 to 35 in 2019) and some like Botswana more modest ones (47–52), none of the region's countries included in the BGI lost ground over the period. As we will see later, all five of the countries highlighted in this article improved their public goods provision over the period by more than 10 points. Despite this promising news, Figure 1 also shows that Sub-Saharan Africa continues to offer its

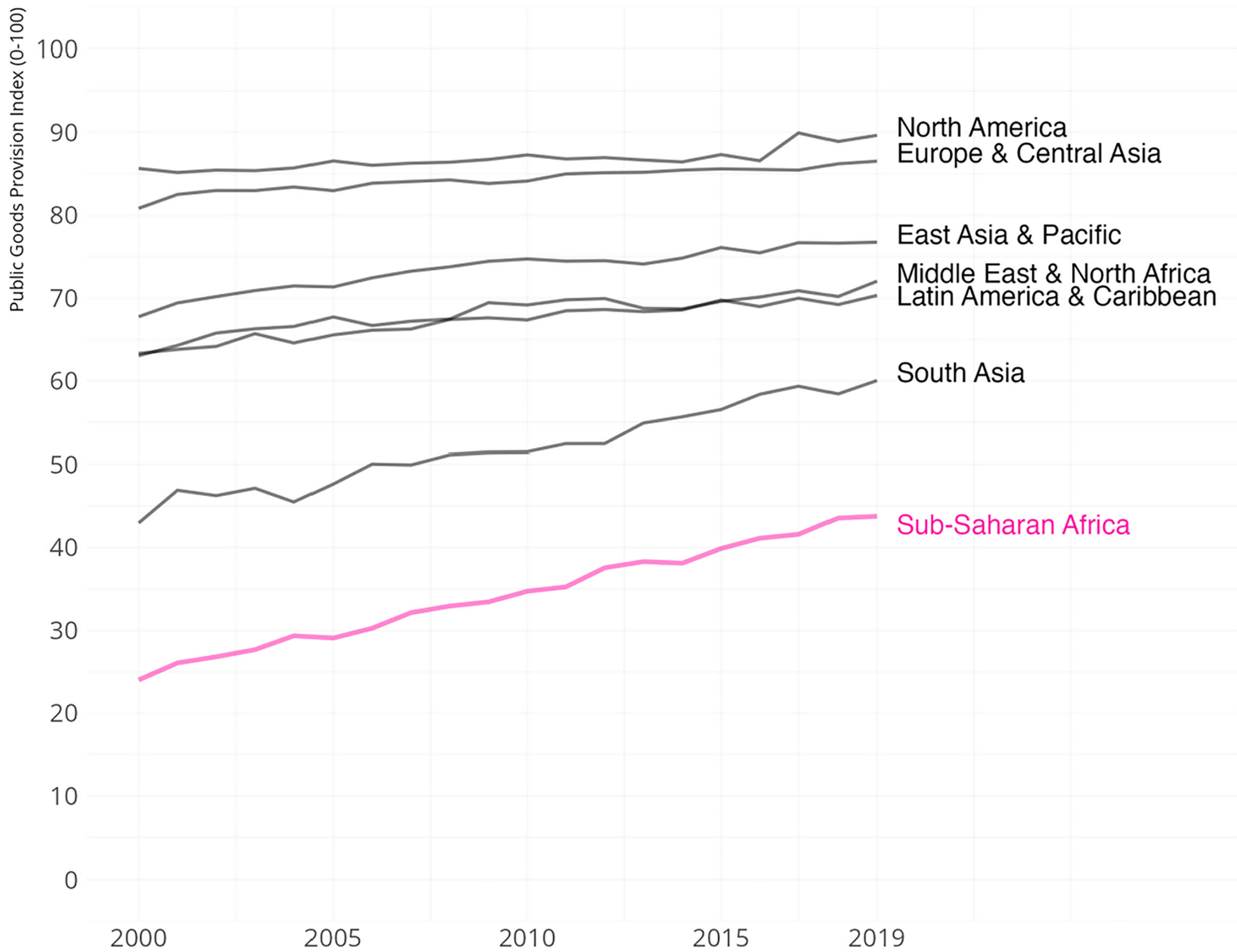

FIGURE 1 Public goods provision in Sub-Saharan Africa in international comparison. *Source*: Berggruen Governance Index 2022.

populace the lowest level of public goods, just reaching in 2019 the level South Asia had in 2000.

Improvement in the region's state capacity since 2000 was noticeable (34 vs. 38 in 2019), but neither remarkable nor uniform across countries. Unlike public goods provision, state capacity did not increase significantly in any world region, as shown in Figure 2. The Sub-Saharan African region's modest rise was led by countries such as Kenya (see below), Liberia and Gambia, which each made gains of at least 15 points over the 2 decades, but brought down by countries such as South Africa and Cameroon that lost 10 points or more. Many countries, including relatively high-capacity states such as Namibia and Senegal, began and ended the period at the same level. By 2019, the region's average for state capacity had just overtaken those of South Asia and Middle East/North Africa.

Democratic accountability increased in the Sub-Saharan Africa region slightly more than state capacity did, with the average score rising from 53 in 2000 to 58 in 2019. This rather positive regional trend runs counter to that occurring in most other world regions, as seen in Figure 3. Among the most improved countries are Gambia (from 36 in 2000 to 65 in 2019), Liberia (from 51 to 69) and Sierra Leone (50–69). While these were improving, several countries tended in the opposite direction, including Botswana (from 78 to 68), Cameroon (45–39) and Uganda (54–46). Especially during the 1990s, the ‘third wave’ of democratisation surged in the region. In 1990, only 3 Sub-Saharan African states (Botswana, The Gambia and Mauritius) were ‘free’ and more than 30 ‘not free’, as measured by Freedom House. A mere decade later, in 2000, nine were categorised as ‘free’, two dozen were ‘partly free’ and only 15 were not (including The Gambia which had fallen back into the ‘not free’ category). At the end of our observation period, 2019, there were still 9 ‘free’, but fewer were ‘partly free’ (21) and more ‘not free’ (19). As we will see later, there are signs that this ‘third wave’ of democratisation is running out of steam.

This generally positive pattern of improvement is consistent with the results of the Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG), which also detected a steady rise in overall governance performance in the broader African continent from 2010 to 2018, with a small drop in 2019 (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2020). And like the BGI, the

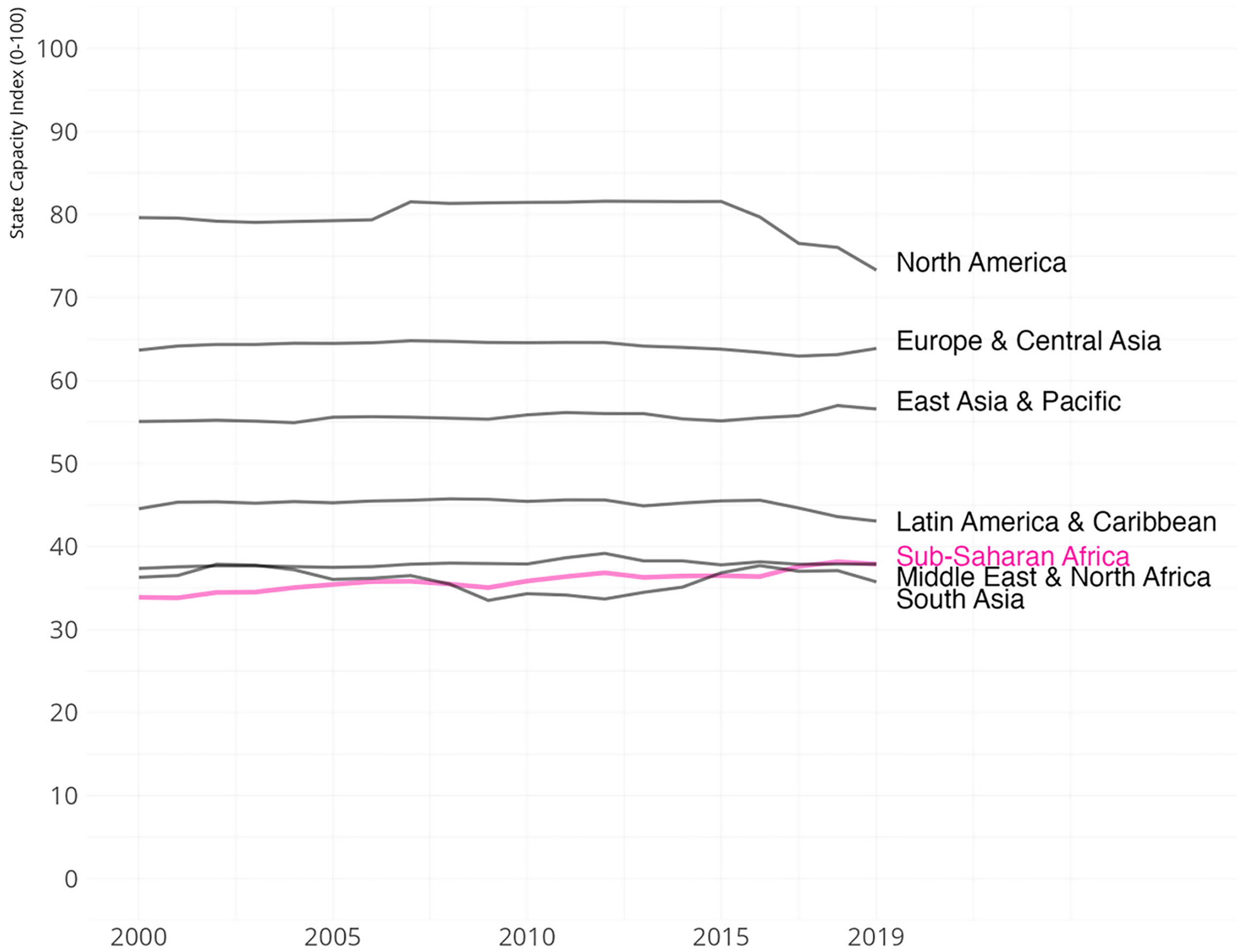

FIGURE 2 State capacity in Sub-Saharan Africa in international comparison. *Source*: Berggruen Governance Index 2022.

IIAG found that improvements in public goods-related indicators increased more than those relating to state capacity or democratic accountability. Yet, a fundamental conundrum remains: irrespective of higher per capita GDP, what made improvements in public goods provision possible without comparable increases in state capacity?

We will investigate this question in the context of the five countries presented below. While differences among the countries exist, the general pattern that prevails seems to indicate that increases in public goods provision as part of total government spending have been financed mostly by a combination of significantly higher government borrowing and somewhat higher tax revenues. Official development assistance played a role, though a minor one, only in Ghana, Kenya and Senegal. There are also indications that personal remittances from abroad, which have grown significantly in many Sub-Saharan countries since the beginning of the 2000s, may have led to a private substitution of public goods expenditure, thereby relieving fiscal pressures on governments to provide quality education or healthcare (see Desierto, 2018).

3 | A CLOSER LOOK AT FIVE COUNTRIES

Of course, behind the Sub-Saharan averages are significant variations in terms of country performance. Since we cannot do justice to the full variety in the space of this article, we offer here brief vignettes of a selection of countries—Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya, Ghana and Senegal—highlighting the BGI findings and the opportunities and challenges presented for each. Table 1 provides the 2000 and 2019 scores on the three high-level indices for all five countries, and Figure 4 shows trends over the two decades for each individual country.

3.1 | Nigeria

Since independence from Britain in 1960, Nigeria's administrative system has been plagued by organisational instability and corruption. While trending towards democracy, the country suffered from a brutal civil war (1967–70), several military coups and periods of dictatorship until 1999. Nigeria is not only by far the most

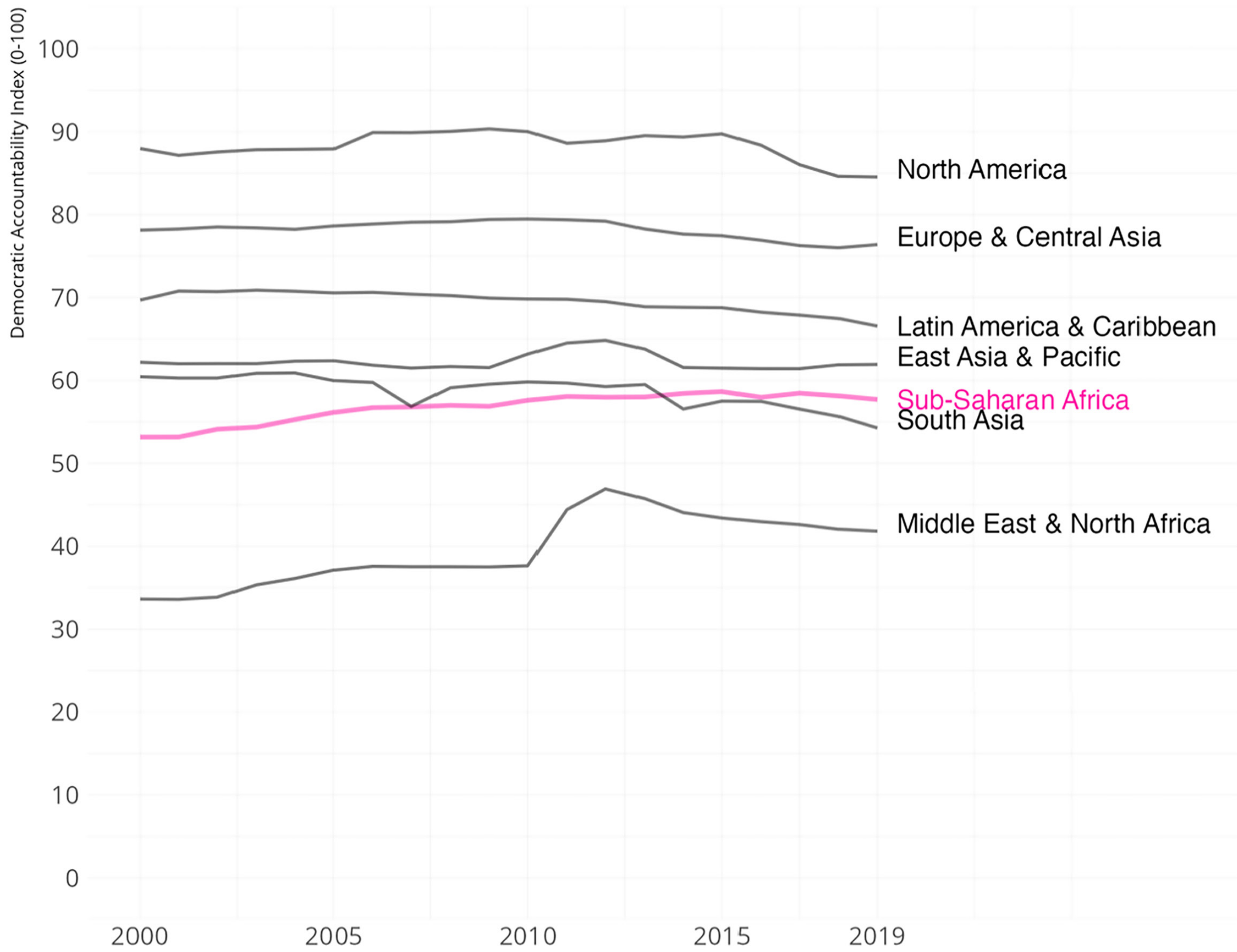

FIGURE 3 Democratic accountability in Sub-Saharan Africa in international comparison. *Source*: Berggruen Governance Index 2022.

TABLE 1 Public goods provision, state capacity and democratic accountability in five African countries, 2000 and 2019.

	Public goods provision			State capacity			Democratic accountability		
Country	**2000**	**2019**	**Change**	**2000**	**2019**	**Change**	**2000**	**2019**	**Change**
Ghana	35	57	+22	37	36	−1	81	77	−4
Kenya	25	53	+28	31	46	+15	56	64	+8
Nigeria	23	43	+20	20	27	+7	65	66	+1
Senegal	25	46	+21	51	53	+2	73	78	+5
South Africa	50	63	+13	53	43	−10	82	76	−6
Regional Average	24	44	+20	34	38	+4	53	58	+5

Source: Berggruen Governance Index 2022.

populous country in Africa[6] and one of the most ethnically diverse (with more than 200 ethnic groups) on the African continent, but also the largest economy in Sub-Saharan Africa. Rich natural resource commodities, mostly crude oil, supported a considerable increase of GDP per capita from US$1462 in 2000 to US$2505 by 2019,[7] although inflation has been higher than GDP growth for all but a few years over this 20-year span.[8]

In essence, for the average Nigerian, this has meant economic stagnation at best. In addition, long periods of internal conflict, especially in the country's northern and eastern regions, rampant corruption and mismanagement of its vast oil revenues have undermined Nigeria's governance as well as economic performance.

As Table 1 shows, Nigeria's BGI public goods provision scores follow the Sub-Saharan average closely

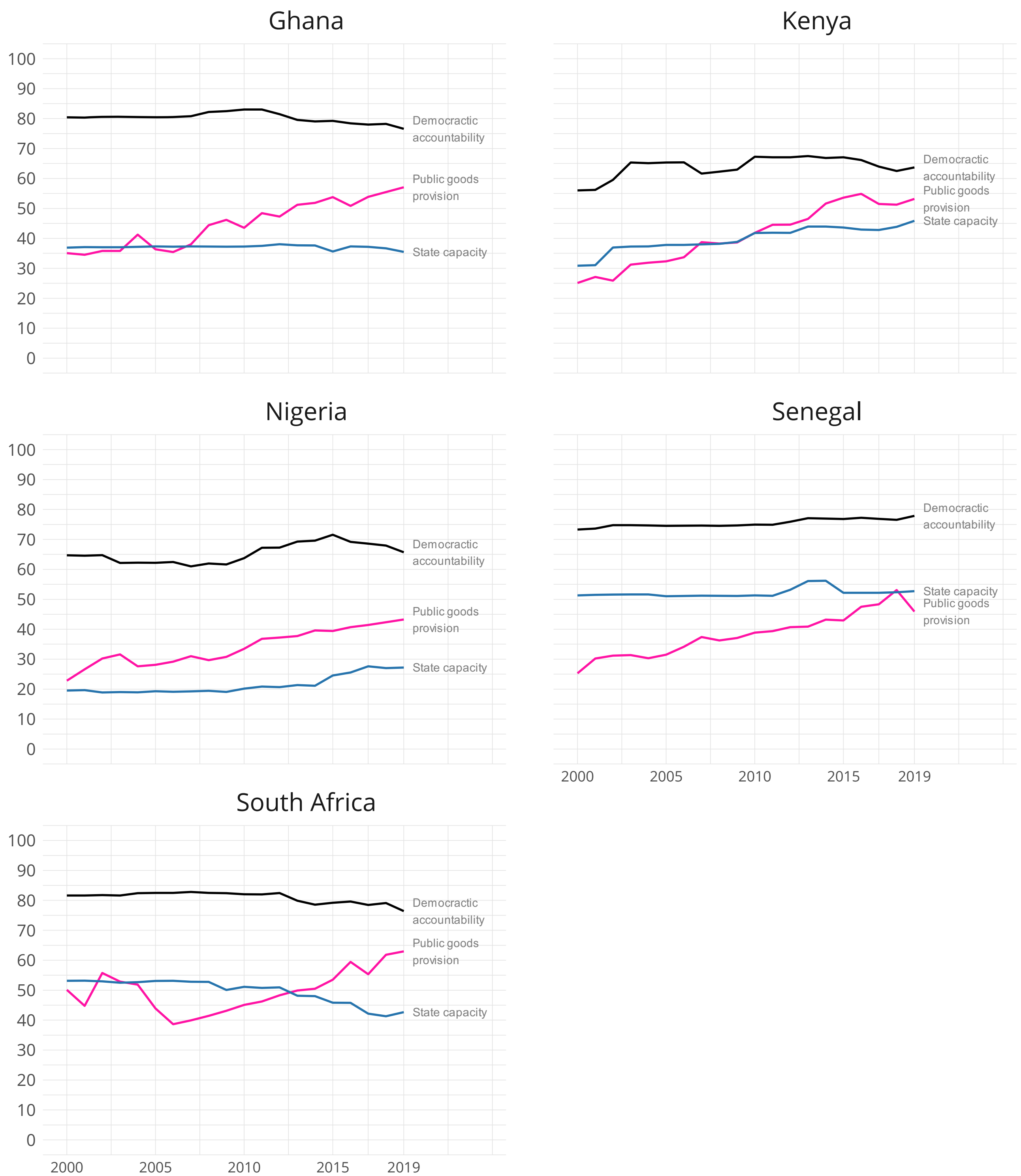

FIGURE 4 Democratic accountability, state capacity and public goods provision in five African countries, 2000–2019. *Source*: Berggruen Governance Index 2022.

and increase from 23 in 2000 to 43 in 2019. As seen in Figure 4, this significant improvement from a rather low starting point fluctuates in particular in the first decade of the twenty-first century, reflecting inconsistent policies resulting from contested government changes and profound ethnic and religious frictions. Though gains were made in life expectancy, which rose from 47 years in 2000 to a still-low 53 in 2019, and income inequality, which declined over the period,[9] both continue to be challenges. After the 2015 elections, public goods provision followed a more consistent positive development path, especially in terms of health and human development.

Overall, Nigeria's BGI scores for state capacity remained quite low at around 20 from 2000 to 2010, well below the Sub-Saharan average, but like public goods provision scores began to rise in the mid-2010s, reaching 27 by 2019. However, the increase in public goods provision was unlikely financed by tax revenue, which actually decreased from 9.2% of GDP in 2000[10] to 6% in 2019[11] and remains at the lower end of the average African range (OECD/ATAF/AUC, 2022). While government gross debt,[12] which declined from 57.6% of GDP in 2000 to 7.3% in 2008 in the wake of debt relief programmes to return to 29.2% by 2019, might have contributed, oil revenues were an important, but weakening foundation of government spending until 2011 (15.5% to 22% of GDP), after which rents fell and have remained in the single digits.[13] The Nigerian state also received strong back-up in public goods provision from diaspora remittances, which increased from US$1.06 billion in 2003 to US$14.64 billion in 2005 and continued to grow to US$23.81 billion in 2019.[14] This made Nigeria the sixth-largest remittance-receiving country among low- and middle-income countries (Ratha et al., 2020, p. 28). However, remittances fell sharply during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The weak state capacity scores reflect two major obstacles in the way of Nigeria's capacity to govern: the endemic corruption of a public administration system fueled by oil revenues, and internal security threats including kidnapping, terrorism and banditry, most notably the threats of Boko Haram and the so-called Fulani herdsmen in the northern parts of the country. Nigeria continues to suffer from two ills Hyden (2020) and Zartman (2008) identify: a fragile public administration easily captured by a predatory elite and a profound infection of Dutch disease.

However, irrespective of high corruption and internal violence, Nigeria has somehow managed to remain a democracy for the last two decades, with four election cycles since 1999. Indeed, Nigeria began and ended the period at the same overall level of democratic accountability, 65 in 2000 and 66 in 2019, with scores fluctuating between 61 points in 2007 and 72 in 2015. Though this is higher than the average for the Sub-Saharan region, the lack of significant improvement confirms accounts that see the country's democracy only slowly consolidating and remaining fragile (Fasakin, 2015). While recent elections were mostly peaceful, political participation is still strongly hindered. By the same token, a rather strong media and civil society activism bolster societal accountability.

3.2 | South Africa

South Africa's economy is the most diverse and technologically advanced in Sub-Saharan Africa, its size second only to Nigeria's. At the beginning of the new millennium, economic growth, employment and capital formation increased until the global financial crisis hit in 2008, after which growth rates barely recovered. During the first presidency of Jacob Zuma (2009–2014), the government turned increasingly to state-owned enterprises, which play a significant role in the economy. Even though it has the continent's largest industrial base and advanced infrastructure, state revenue still depends heavily on the extraction of natural resources, such as platinum, gold and chromium. Further economic diversification is held back by shortages of skilled labour in key sectors such as healthcare and technology. Per capita GDP remains among the highest on the whole continent and increased from US$4735 in 2000 to US$6189 in 2019.

Despite somewhat slower economic growth, South Africa managed to improve public goods provision considerably, bringing its BGI score from 50 in 2000 to 63 in 2019 (see Table 1). This trajectory is reflected in its Human Development Index (HDI) score which rose from 0.61 (2001) to 0.70 (2019), the highest in Sub-Saharan Africa.[15]

These changes are remarkable also in light of the manifold difficulties the country has been grappling with. HIV/AIDS, for example, was responsible for South Africa's average life expectancy plunging to less than 43 years by 2008. The first Zuma presidency was praised for its HIV/AIDS policy, which has been credited with increasing life expectancy, which rebounded to 65 years as of 2022.[16] Even with these efforts, in 2018 one in five South African adults (15–49 years) was living with HIV/AIDS.[17]

South Africa is also challenged by persistent high youth unemployment of 47%[18] by 2019, a poverty rate above 50% and income inequality at extreme heights, with a Gini coefficient of 63 in 2014, among the highest in the world.[19] However, South Africa has implemented one of the most extensive social welfare systems among developing countries (e.g., for child support, old-age pension, school nutrition, unemployment insurance, etc.) (Goldblatt, 2005; Oosthuizen, 2021), putting pressure on public budgets. So does South Africa's higher education system, the continent's most developed and internationally recognised, which relies heavily on governmental support.

While well above the Sub-Saharan average, South Africa's BGI score for state capacity decreased considerably from 53 in 2000 to 43 in 2019. At the same time, public debt increased from 37.9% of GDP in 2000 to 56.2% in 2019, with most of the rise happening after 2008. As seen in Figure 4, the loss of state capacity coincides with the second Zuma presidency (2014–2018), which was also marked by poor policy decisions, maladministration and corruption. Unsustainable government spending, collapsing state-owned enterprises and law enforcement unable to cope with a high crime rate are reasons why—in the eyes of some (e.g., Himbara, 2020)—South Africa has begun to deteriorate towards a 'sophisticated failed state'.

Having developed as a liberal democracy with a significant state presence in the economy since the end of Apartheid in the early 1990s, the country is one of the few in Africa never to have had a coup d'état, and regular elections are the rule (Lieberman, 2022). The BGI score for democratic accountability remained at a high level of 82 points until 2012. The second Zuma presidency coincided with a decline towards 76 points in 2019. Still, a self-confident civil society and vibrant media hold the government accountable and oppose attempts to weaken key institutions.[20]

3.3 | Kenya

Only few countries in the Sub-Saharan African region have been able to maintain a stable growth pattern above the African average, among them Kenya. Defying generally downward economic trends during the second decade of the twenty-first century, Kenya developed into one of the strongest economies in East Africa, as it established itself as a central logistics and transportation hub. With these developments, GDP per capita rose from US$1187 in 2000 to US$1653 in 2019, just above the Sub-Saharan African average.

While Kenya shows strong improvement overall, it increased in public goods provision more than the other four Sub-Saharan African countries covered in this article. As Table 1 shows, while it started out at a rather low level of 25 in 2000, similar to the regional average at that time, the provision of public goods more than doubled to 53 points by 2019, well above the average since 2010. Policies emphasising building infrastructure have underpinned this strong overall improvement (Wekesa et al., 2016), as have efforts to step up the provision of social and environmental public goods. Yet, as is the case in other countries, this expansion in public goods provision was to a considerable degree financed by growing public debt, which increased from 34.2% of GDP in 2007 to 59.1% in 2019. Personal remittances from abroad increased as well from US$685.76 million in 2010 to US$2.84 billion in 2019.

However, Kenya's state capacity, too, shows a remarkable increase of roughly 50% from a score of 31 in 2000 to 46 in 2019, the strongest improvement in this BGI dimension in the Sub-Saharan region, starting out below the African average, but exceeding it today. Although corruption and mismanagement remain major issues, the positive trend indicates the effects of improvements in public administration, notably also in the management of infrastructure.

The BGI score for democratic accountability in Kenya started slightly higher than the Sub-Saharan Africa average in 2000 and has increased in line with the rest of the region. The highly diverse country of over 70 distinct ethnic groups has kept pace with the trend towards somewhat greater democratic accountability in the region, but fluctuations reveal that Kenya is not yet a consolidated democracy (Hassan, 2013) and instead retains a politicised public administration and justice system. Moreover, elections have become more polarised, more divisive and more violent (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022). Nevertheless, BGI scores for democratic accountability improved considerably from 56 in 2000 to 68 in 2013 promoting Kenya along the way from a Freedom House designation of 'not free' to 'partly free'.

3.4 | Ghana

Hit hard by political instability in the 1970s and 1980s, and structural adjustment policies promoted by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in the mid- to late-1980s, Ghana's economic performance gradually began to improve slowly in the 1990s and continued so after its first transition of power by democratic means in 2000 (Konadu-Agyemang, 2000). The economy's growth rate has exceeded that of the Sub-Saharan Africa region for most of the first two decades of the twenty-first century, reaching a peak of 14% in 2011 after commercial production of oil began. However, the country's dependency on only a few export commodities such as gold, crude oil and cocoa, and the absence of a larger domestic industrial base have meant that growth rates have been hard to maintain, and the gains have not necessarily been equally distributed. Meanwhile, GDP per capita increased considerably from US$1020 in 2000 to US$1981 in 2019.

While Ghana's BGI scores for public goods provision stayed well above Sub-Saharan averages, they have varied over time—sometimes considerably—as governments changed. Though slight increases were seen between 2000 (35) and 2007 (38), public goods provision began to sustainably improve under the administrations of John Atta Mills (2008–2012) and John Mahama (2012–2017) from 44 in 2008 to 54 in 2017, and continued to rise to 57 in 2019. Though progress in addressing poverty, hunger and inequality reduction (economic public goods) has been modest and income inequalities between rural and urban areas remain high, health and human development measures (social public goods) improved considerably since 2008, with steps forward made particularly in gender equality and educational access and quality. Moreover, Ghana's delivery of environmental goods improved as well with a boost in the electricity access rate.

While public goods provision improved, Ghana's state capacity did not, remaining on a consistently rather low level (37 in 2000 and 36 in 2019) around the

Sub-Saharan average (see Table 1). This suggests that the improvement of public goods provision seems to have been made possible by a combination of government borrowing and, to a lesser degree, tax revenue increases: Government gross debt rose from 18.5% of GDP in 2006 to 58.3% in 2019, while tax revenue grew from 7% of GDP in 2000 to 12.5% in 2019. Moreover, Ghana's score on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index reached its peak in 2014 (43 of 100, with 100 being most clean), notably following the start of commercial oil production, but has since declined somewhat.[21] Diaspora remittances may have compensated somewhat for shortcomings in the state's ability to deliver public goods as remittances grew substantially from US$135.85 million in 2010 to US$4.05 billion in 2019.

Since the 1990s when decades of military rule ended, Ghana has consistently undertaken democratic reforms of its governance architecture and set an example for the institutionalisation of democratic rule on the continent (Abdulai & Crawford, 2010). Ghana has had one of the most robust democracies in the region and consequently, as seen in Figure 4, BGI scores for democratic accountability show steady performance on a rather high level between 2000 (81) and 2019 (77) and have exceeded the Sub-Saharan African average by a wide margin. Still, a continuous, modest decline from its peak in 2011 (83) may reflect weaknesses in civil society development.

3.5 | Senegal

While Senegal has enjoyed political stability and democracy since the 1980s, economic development has remained problematic since the 1990s due to resource dependency, heavy foreign debt and high energy and consumer prices. Unlike the four other countries considered by this article, Senegal is not considered an ‘African lion’ in economic terms. Still, GDP per capita rose from US$1077 in 2000 to US$1410 in 2019.

Senegal's overall performance in public goods provision follows the growth trend of the African average quite closely, outpacing it only from 2015 to 2018. Much of the increase of this BGI score from 25 in 2000 to 46 in 2019 (see Table 1) reflects policy reforms and structural development programmes enacted during Macky Sall's first presidency (2012–2019), including efforts to strengthen the social safety net by providing, among others, universal health coverage, an equal opportunities card, free healthcare for children under five and cash transfers programmes (Cissokho, 2018). These improvements have been financed largely by growing public debt and official development assistance (ODA). Government gross debt rose from 17.5% of GDP in 2006 to 63.6% in 2019, while ODA remained relatively stable at between 7.3% of GNI in 2000 and 6.3% in 2019.[22] During the same period, personal remittances from abroad rose from US$234.07 million in 2000 to US$2.43 billion in 2018.

As seen in Figure 4, Senegal's overall BGI score for state capacity remains steady at the same level of 51 points between 2000 and 2011 and slightly rises to 56 until 2014, only to return to 53 by 2019, which is generally still well above the Sub-Saharan average during the whole period and places the country among the top state capacity performers in the region. While fiscal and coordination capacity only slightly increase, delivery capacity jumps eight points between 2012 and 2015, reflecting positive, albeit short-term effects in fighting corruption and administrative malfunctioning.

Compared to the Sub-Saharan average, Senegal has retained a much stronger democratic accountability score thanks largely to its political leadership that has consistently supported democratisation and political participation since the 1980s and has transitioned power peacefully several times since then (Galvan, 2001). Tellingly, Freedom House set the country's status to ‘free’[23] in 2014, making the country a prime example of African democracy. Though Senegal's democratic accountability scores rose from 73 in 2000 to 78 in 2019, corruption scandals, increased centralisation of power in the executive and an inefficient justice system remain challenges into the future.

4 | COMMON CHALLENGES: STATE CAPACITY AND PUBLIC FINANCE

Concerns for African development bring to the fore the question of maintaining and improving state capacity to provide public goods. This question is particularly important for the Sub-Saharan Africa region with its sometimes fragile and exceptionally diverse economic and political environments. While Nigeria is the largest economy on the continent, it has been able to neither consolidate the rule of law and public administration nor improve the future prospects of a growing population. State capacity improved between 2000 and 2019, but remains at a low level even for the region. By contrast, Kenya's economy seems to defy economic downward trends and grows in a more stable pattern and above the African average. It is the only country among those presented here that showed a significant 15-point increase in state capacity during the period. Though Ghana and Senegal have different economic trajectories, both have remained relatively stable politically, yet neither country worsened or improved remarkably in terms of state capacity. By contrast, South Africa, a country with one of the highest HDI values and a record of relatively good governance in recent decades, has experienced a considerable drop in state capacity along with a more modest decline in democratic accountability.

In all five countries, state capacity seems key to maintaining the gains made in public goods provision, as well as avoiding (further) reversal of democracy. Like many other governments in Africa and elsewhere, they struggle to control corruption and to improve the broad-based legitimacy of their political systems in the eyes of the population at large, not only elites. Better governance in weak and fragile African states has been hindered by informal patron-client networks, often along ethnic and family lines, leading to corruption and mismanagement. However, some countries have made substantial progress in their institutional transformation towards more democracy and enhanced state capacity. Yet as the BGI scores in Table 1 show, this is a rare combination that applies most fully only to Kenya but also somewhat to Nigeria and Senegal.

The other key challenge is the growing indebtedness of four of the five countries, and, in the case of Nigeria, the heavy reliance on (falling) oil revenues. Put simply, while in Ghana, Kenya, Senegal and South Africa somewhat higher tax revenues may have contributed to improvement in public goods provision, it was ultimately significant government borrowing that made such improvement possible, especially during the period of low-interest borrowing after the global financial crisis. As a result, sovereign debt increased. Meanwhile, remittances, in Nigeria and Ghana particularly, seem to provide alternative access to public services such as education and healthcare.

State capacity, which is still relatively weak, and growing sovereign debt must be put in the context of contradictory political cultures on the African continent: while most Africans identify strongly with their countries, religious and regional identities also remain strong. At the same time as most Africans support democracy as a form of government, democratic values are often weakly implemented (e.g., low trust in people with other local or ethnic identities, but high trust in political leaders) (Nyenhuis & Mattes, 2021). Due to weak institutions, a lack of political pluralism, intolerance for diverse and critical voices, corruption and rights violations, democratic progress has been uneven, but some African countries show resilience of democratic governance. Social movements, in particular, mobilise and remain effective in many countries. In Nigeria, for example, the Not-Too-Young-To-Run movement, which was founded in 2016, demanded and in 2018 succeeded in pushing the government to amend legislation to reduce the minimum age for contesting elective positions in the country (International IDEA, 2019, p. 81). Furthermore, the judiciary, civil society and media in South Africa have opposed the government's attempts to weaken key institutions. Courts in Ghana and Kenya successfully stood against challenges to democratic principles in recent years' elections (Kasambala, 2022). South Africa shows the strongest BGI scores for democratic accountability, comparable to some post-Soviet European countries, although a slight declining trend towards 2019 is evident. Senegal and Ghana are also established democracies, but while Senegal keeps improving its democratic governance, Ghana shows a slight decline since 2012. Nigeria and Kenya have made progress in democratic accountability above the Sub-Saharan average, but their democracies remain volatile as indicated by BGI scores that fluctuate throughout the whole observation period. As Zartman (2008, p. 95) noted, 'Africa has made more progress on the road of democratization than on that of development'.

5 | CONCLUDING COMMENTS

With the help of the BGI, we could point to an improvement in governance performance in Sub-Saharan Africa achieved during the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Looking at five countries more closely, we could also point out differences in performance by examining the three dimensions of the Governance Triangle. Overall, we found that while improvements in public goods provision were substantial and scores remained at relatively high levels for democratic accountability (with only South Africa showing a slight decline), the record for state capacity was by comparison disappointing (with Kenya and, to a lesser degree, Nigeria being the exceptions).

Acemoglu and Robinson (2019) propose a developmental model of a narrow corridor that countries must navigate through countless compromises between the power and interests of elites, on one hand, and those of political challengers, on the other. Good governance means that countries advance along this corridor. For the five countries briefly reviewed here, uneven performance or imbalance in the Governance Triangle suggests serious challenges ahead. Four stand out.

First, the COVID-19 pandemic, which began after the period considered here, has impacted the economies of many countries in the region (Gern et al., 2021), which also created greater food insecurities due to rising prices, a trend compounded by climate change. Second, with the African continent showing the highest population growth rate globally (United Nations, n.d.), demographic changes will put significant pressure on governments' capacity to provide public goods to a larger number of people in need of education, health and economic opportunities. Adding to the first two challenges is Africa's mounting sovereign debt crisis that could see countries defaulting on their debt service, with austerity measures as one of many implications that could threaten what the previous two decades have achieved (Bayar et al., 2023; Kedir et al., 2023).

Finally, Sub-Saharan Africa has once again become the object of fierce geopolitical rivalries, this time between China, Russia and the West. A series of recent coups and the presence of competing external military forces in the Sahel region have created significant political, institutional and economic instability that threatens to spill over to neighbouring countries. Time will tell whether the affected African countries can avoid repeating the pattern of not being able to hold on to achievements in governance performance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to Ebenezer Obadare (Council of Foreign Relations), Anthony Apter (UCLA) and Olga Kononykhina for valuable feedback on an earlier version of this article. Open Access funding enabled and organized by Projekt DEAL.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There are no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available at https://governance.luskin.ucla.edu/datasets/.

ORCID

Helmut K. Anheier https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2443-659X
Christian Fröhlich https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3300-0889
Regina A. List https://orcid.org/0009-0001-5792-033X

ENDNOTES

[1] The Berggruen Governance Index is a collaborative project between the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs and the Berggruen Institute examining, as of 2022, the performance of 134 countries in key areas over a 20-year period to advance understanding of why some countries are governed more effectively and enjoy a higher quality of life than others. See the article 'Introducing the Berggruen Governance Index: I. Conceptual and Methodological Framework' by Anheier, Lang and Knudsen in this special issue.

[2] Source for all GDP per capita data is the World Bank. GDP per capita (constant 2015 US$) - Kenya, Ghana, Senegal, Nigeria, South Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.KD?end=2019&locations=KE-GH-SN-NG-ZA-ZG&start=2000

[3] Of course, there were differences, for example, between the British preference for indirect rule, which incorporated local elite and power structures, French direct rule, or the administrative system in settler colonies.

[4] Dutch disease is an economic phenomenon where the rapid development of, and macroeconomic reliance on, export-oriented extractive industries precipitates underdevelopment or decline in other sectors.

[5] For more details about results for all the countries and regions the BGI covers, see Anheier, Lang and Knudsen's article 'Introducing the Berggruen Governance Index, II. Initial Results 2000–2019', in this special issue. The dataset is available for download in various formats at https://governance.luskin.ucla.edu/datasets/.

[6] According to World Bank data, the country's population was about 218 million in 2022, making every fifth African a Nigerian https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=NG

[7] The World Bank: GDP per capita (constant 2015 US$).

[8] https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.DEFL.KD.ZG?locations=NG

[9] The Gini index fell from 40.1 in 2003 to 35.1 in 2018.

[10] For all data on tax revenue, see World Bank: https://dataviz.worldbank.org/views/TaxRevenueDashboard/TaxRevenueDashboard?%3AshowAppBanner=false&%3Adisplay_count=n&%3AshowVizHome=n&%3Aorigin=viz_share_link&%3Aembed=y&%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y

[11] World Bank data coverage for tax revenue in Nigeria is complemented by OECD data (OECD/ATAF/AUC, 2022).

[12] For all data on government gross debt, see IMF: https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/GGXWDG_NGDP@WEO/GHA/NGA/KEN/SEN/ZAF

[13] https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PETR.RT.ZS?end=2019&locations=NG&start=2000

[14] For all data on personal remittances, received (current US$), see World Bank: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.CD.DT?end=2019&locations=ZG-GH-KE-NG-SN-ZA&start=2000

[15] https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/ZAF

[16] https://data.who.int/countries/710

[17] https://www.unaids.org/en/regionscountries/countries/southafrica

[18] World Bank. Unemployment, youth total (% of total labor force ages 15–24) (modelled ILO estimate) - South Africa. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS?locations=ZA

[19] Latest WHO data puts South Africa's Gini index at 63.

[20] Since 1995, after Apartheid was dismantled, Freedom House's *Freedom in the World* report has listed South Africa consistently as 'free'. See https://freedomhouse.org/country/south-africa/freedom-world/2023

[21] https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/gha

[22] For all data on net official development assistance (ODA) as per cent of GNI, see: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/DT.ODA.ODAT.GN.ZS?end=2020&locations=GH-SN-NG-KE-ZA&start=2000

[23] https://freedomhouse.org/country/senegal

REFERENCES

Abdulai, A.-G. & Crawford, G. (2010) Consolidating democracy in Ghana: progress and prospects? *Democratization*, 17(1), 26–67.

Acemoglu, D. & Robinson, J.A. (2019) *The narrow corridor: states, societies and the fate of liberty*. New York: Penguin.

Bayar, K.D., To, A.T.Y. & Bale, O.D. (2023) *Slowing debt accumulation, growing risks: unveiling the complexities of Sub-Saharan Africa's debt burdens*. World Bank: International Debt Report Blogs. Available from: https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/slowing-debt-accumulation-growing-risks-unveiling-complexities-sub-saharan-africas-debt

Cissokho, N. (2018) *Meeting food needs in the Sahel through government cash transfers: the experience of Senegal*. Final Report. USAID and The Cash Learning Partnership.

Desierto, D.A. (2018) What resource curse? The null effect of remittances on public good provision. *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 30(4), 431–450.

Fasakin, A. (2015) State and democratization in Nigeria. *Democracy and Security*, 11(3), 298–317.

Fund for Peace. (2019) *Fragile States Index annual report 2019*. Washington, DC: Fund for Peace.

Galvan, D. (2001) Francophone Africa in flux: political turnover and social change in Senegal. *Journal of Democracy*, 12(3), 51–62.

Gern, K.-J., Lück, O. & Meuchelböck, S. (2021) *Covid-19 in Africa and its impact on the economy*. Kiel Policy Brief, No. 158. Kiel Institute for the World Economy.

Goldblatt, B. (2005) Gender and social assistance in the first decade of democracy: a case study of South Africa's child support grant. *Politikon*, 32(2), 239–257.

Hassan, M. (2013) Continuity despite change: Kenya's new constitution and executive power. *Democratization*, 22(4), 587–609.

Himbara, D. (2020) South Africa: a sophisticated failing state. *The Africa Report*. 29 July. Available from: https://www.theafricareport.com/35378/south-africa-a-sophisticated-failing-state/

Hyden, G. (2020) *African public administration*. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics: Oxford University Press. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.1429

IMF [International Monetary Fund]. (2023) *IMF world economic outlook*. Washington, DC: IMF. www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDP_RPCH@WEO/SSQ/SEQ/SMQ

International IDEA. (2019) *The global state of democracy 2019: addressing the ills, reviving the promise*. Stockholm: International IDEA.

Kasambala, T. (2022) *How African democracies can rise and thrive amid instability, militarization, and interference*. *Freedom House: Perspectives*. 1 September. Available from: https://freedomhouse.org/article/how-african-democracies-can-rise-and-thrive-amid-instability

Kedir, A., Ouma, D., Anguyo, F. & Mpuga, P. (2023) *Africa's Growing Sovereign Debt and Growth: Which Institutional Quality Indicator(s) Matter?* Working Paper Series N° 374, African Development Bank, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire.

Konadu-Agyemang, K. (2000) The best of times and the worst of times: structural adjustment programs and uneven development in Africa: the case of Ghana. *The Professional Geographer*, 52(3), 469–483.

Lancaster, C. & van de Walle, N. (Eds.). (2016) *The Oxford Handbook of the politics of development*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Lawler, D. (2022, January 30) Coups are making a comeback. Axios World. Available from: https://www.axios.com/2022/01/30/coup-attemps-countries-around-world

Lieberman, E. (2022) *Until we have won our liberty. South Africa after Apartheid*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Mo Ibrahim Foundation. (2020) *2020 Ibrahim Index of African Governance*. Index Report. London: Mo Ibrahim Foundation.

Newiak, M., Segura-Ubiergo, A. & Wane, A.A. (Eds.). (2022) *Good governance in Sub-Saharan Africa: opportunities and lessons*. Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund.

Nhema, A.G. (2016) Public administration and the development of Africa: a critical assessment. *Journal of Public Administration and Governance*, 6(1), 6–19. Available from: https://doi.org/10.5296/jpag.v6i1.8886

Nyenhuis, R. & Mattes, R. (2021) Political culture in Africa. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.1995

OECD/ATAF/AUC. (2022) *Revenue Statistics in Africa 2022*. Paris: OECD Publishing. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1787/ea66fbde-en-fr

Olorungoba, S.O. & Falola, T. (Eds.). (2020) *The Palgrave handbook of African political economy*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Oosthuizen, M. (2021) *South Africa: social assistance programs and systems review (English)*. Washington, DC: World Bank Group.

Ratha, D., De, S., Kim, E.J., Plaza, S., Seshan, G. & Yameogo, N.D. (2020) *Migration and development brief 32: COVID-19 crisis through a migration lens*. Washington, DC: KNOMAD-World Bank.

Stiftung, B. (2022) *BTI 2022 Country Report — Kenya*. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung.

Tapscott, C. (2021) Overcoming the past and shaping the future: the quest for relevance in teaching and researching public administration in Africa. *Global Public Policy and Governance*, 1, 468–484. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1007/s43508-021-00030-x

United Nations. (n.d.) Global issues: population. Available from: https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/population [accessed 17 August 2023].

Vyas-Doorgapersad, S., Lukamba-Muhiya, T. & Ababio, E.P. (Eds.). (2019) *Public administration in Africa: performance and challenges*. London: Routledge.

Wekesa, C.T., Wawire, N.H. & Kosimbei, G. (2016) Effects of infrastructure development on foreign direct investment in Kenya. *Journal of Infrastructure Development*, 8(2), 93–110.

Zartman, W.I. (2008) Sub-Saharan Africa: implosion or take-off? *Politique étrangère*, I(special issue), 93–108.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Helmut K. Anheier is a faculty member at UCLA's Luskin School of Public Affairs and a Professor of Sociology at the Hertie School in Berlin, Germany, where he served as President from 2009 to 2018. His research centres on governance, indicator systems, culture, civil society and non-profits.

Christian Fröhlich has a PhD in Sociology from the University of Leipzig and is currently a research associate at the Freie Universität Berlin. His research interests lie in the comparative study of civil society, citizenship and social inclusion in post-Soviet countries.

Regina A. List is an independent editor, researcher and writer, with proven experience in coordinating multi-country, multi-researcher projects and developing publications, mainly in the social sciences. She earned a Masters in International Development from American University (Washington, DC) and a Bachelors from University of Tennessee-Knoxville.

How to cite this article: Anheier, H.K., Fröhlich, C. & List, R.A. (2023) Sub-Saharan Africa: Towards better governance and sustainability? *Global Policy*, 14(Suppl. 4), 124–135. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.13283