



African Economic History Network Newsletter

Issue #69 February 2026

The AEHN newsletter keeps you informed about the latest news and upcoming events in African economic history.

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If you would like to publicise your research, achievements, seminars, events or a panel for an upcoming conference, please send an email to leone.walters@uct.ac.za, and I will include your news in our quarterly round-up.

Leoné Walters
on behalf of the African Economic History Network

Network updates

AEHN 19TH ANNUAL MEETING CALL FOR PAPERS

University of Gothenburg

23-24 October 2026

The African Economic History Network (AEHN), in collaboration with the Unit for Economic History at the University of Gothenburg, invites submissions for its 19th Annual Meeting to be held at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, on 23-24 October 2026.

This year's conference will not be organized around a specific theme. We warmly welcome proposals on any aspect of African economic history, encompassing all regions of the continent and covering any historical period. Submissions that engage with diverse methodologies, sources, and interdisciplinary perspectives are especially encouraged.

Submit your abstract [here](#).

Deadline for submission: 31 March 2026

Notification for acceptance will be sent out April/May 2026.

The conference will take place at Viktoriagatan 13, School of Business, Economics and Law, Gothenburg.

Organising committee:

Klas Rönnbäck

Stefania Galli

Kondwani Happy Ngoma

Bezawit Abebe

Giulia Martini

For more information, please visit the 19th Annual Meeting of the African Economic History Network [page](#).



FRONTIERS IN AFRICAN ECONOMIC HISTORY BLOG

Frontiers in African Economic History – AEHN’s blog – diffuses research-based content and promotes discussion concerning the study of long-term African development.

Please contact the editors (Rebecca Simson, Jeanne Cilliers and Michael Chanda Chiseni) to discuss possible posts.

Theoretical Foundations of the Economics of Slavery: Enslaved People as Capital Investments in the Atlantic World

Igor Martins and Erik Green

Traditional theories explain slavery’s persistence through land-labor ratios and coercion-cost models. But these overlook a key function: the enslaved as capital. Drawing on evidence from the United States, the Cape Colony, and Brazil, we argue that slavery endured because it provided a viable alternative for capital scarcity in frontier economies.

Trade, Slavery, and State Coercion in 19th Century Egypt

Mohamed Saleh

How do trade booms affect labor in economies where multiple coercive labor systems coexist? Drawing on newly digitized census microdata from 1848 and 1868, this study shows that Egypt’s cotton boom during the U.S. Civil War increased both imported slavery and state coercion of local workers, with each system reinforcing the other. The abolition of slavery in 1877 raised wages but did not diminish state coercion.

AEHN WORKING PAPER SERIES

AEHN Working Papers in African Economic History are intended to disseminate research results to other scholars in order to encourage discussion and suggestions before journal publication. The papers have not undergone peer-review but published at the discretion of the Board of the AEHN. AEHN Working Papers are also available via RePEc/IDEAS.

Potential working papers should be directly submitted to one of the editors: Leigh Gardner (l.a.gardner@lse.ac.uk) and Felix Meier zu Selhausen (f.p.meierzuselhausen@uu.nl).

Corporations as the State: Concessions, Urbanization, and Long-Run Development in the Copperbelt

Jonathan Dries

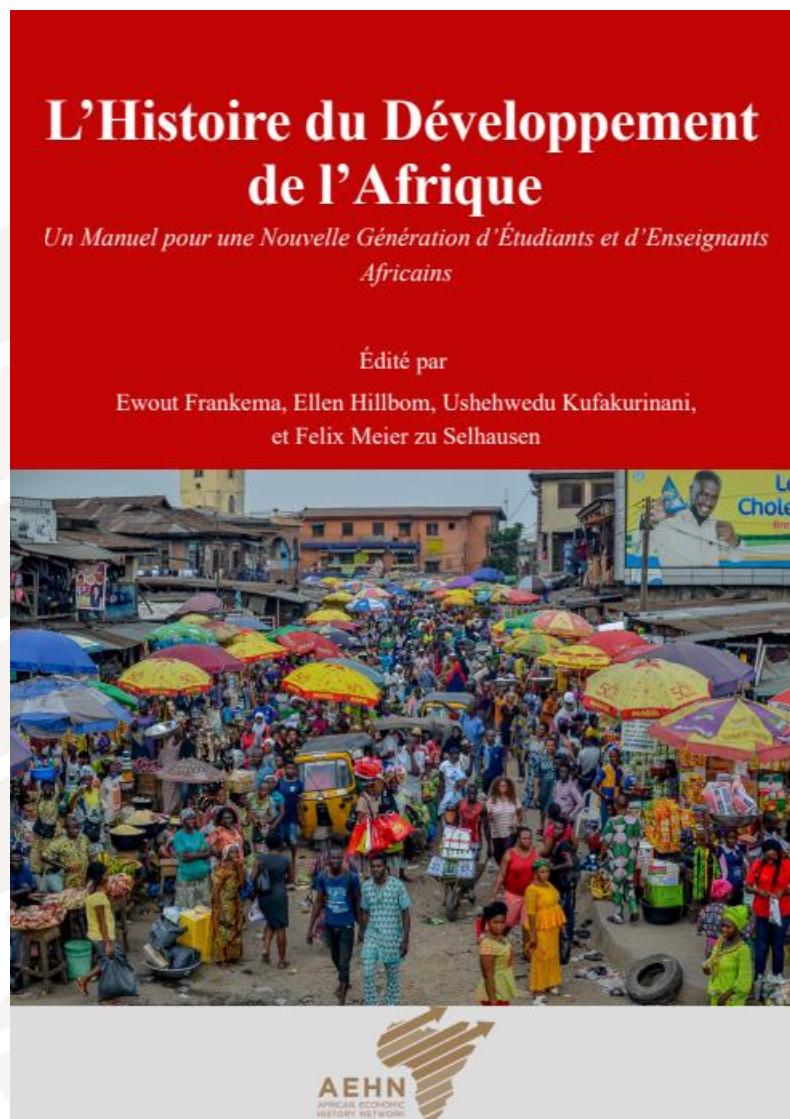
During the Scramble for Africa, European colonization relied on private concessionary companies that established distinctive institutional frameworks. This paper provides new empirical evidence suggesting that colonial corporate governance produced divergent long-run development trajectories. I examine two comparable corporations that exploited the Central African Copperbelt: the Union Minière du Haut-Katanga (UMHK) in the Belgian Congo and the Rhokana Corporation (RC) in Northern Rhodesia. The UMHK’s “Labour Stabilization Programs” incentivized permanent family resettlement, fostering community stability and urban agglomeration economies, policies absent at the RC. Using two spatial regression discontinuity designs, I show that the UMHK concession generated higher urbanization rates and persistent improvements in wealth, education, and health outcomes today, along with enduring positive effects on women’s empowerment and decision-making power over household spending. In contrast, I find no comparable evidence for the RC, and a spatial difference-in-discontinuities analysis indicates the developmental divergence is driven by UMHK’s labour policies.

THE HISTORY OF AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT TEXTBOOK

NOW AVAILABLE IN FRENCH

The History of African Development (in French) – published by the African Economic History Network (AEHN) – aims to draw experts in the field of African History, Economics and African Development Studies together around an open access textbook. The textbook is primarily intended for teachers/lecturers and undergraduate students, at African universities, but also for an interested public audience. The chapters describe and explain various aspects of historical African development trajectories in plain language. All chapters include a list of suggested readings, data sources and study questions to test students' comprehension. By offering this book in an open-source environment, the AEHN seeks to facilitate a wider diffusion of the knowledge that is generated within our academic network and support capacity building among a new generation of African historians and development practitioners worldwide.

Frankema, Ewout, Hillbom, Ellen, Kufakurinani, Ushehwedu and Meier zu Selhausen, Felix (Eds.) (2025). *L'Histoire du Développement de l'Afrique*. African Economic History Network.



News and announcements

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Political Economy of Natural Resources and Environmental Change in History Summer School

University of Tübingen
18–20 June 2026

The “Political Economy of Natural Resources and Environmental Change in History” summer school will take place at the University of Tübingen from 18 to 20 June 2026. It brings together scholars working on the historical relationships between natural resources, institutions, and socio-environmental change in an explicitly interdisciplinary setting.

From a Lockean perspective, natural resources possess value independent of human action and therefore have no natural owner. Rights over resources are thus often politically contested, and the workshop welcomes scholarly analysis of this process, particularly how governance, conflict, labour, and technological change have shaped the extraction, use, and transformation of natural resources across time and space. Recent scholarship has highlighted how political and institutional contexts shape access to and control over natural resources, from sea-floor minerals and forests to fossil fuels. At the same time, historians have emphasized the role of conflict and coercion in enabling extraction, particularly in colonial and wartime settings. Studies of energy transitions and common-pool resources further demonstrate the feedback between resource regimes and socio-environmental change. These historical processes continue to inform contemporary debates on environmental justice, inequality, and sustainability.

The program combines two and a half days of academic paper sessions and keynote lectures with two hands-on workshops. One workshop introduces participants to machine learning and natural language processing tools for analysing historical data on resource conflict and institutional change. The second focuses on communicating research to broader audiences, with a particular emphasis on Science Slams and public engagement. Together, these sessions aim to equip participants with both conceptual and practical tools for studying and communicating the political economy of natural resources over time.

The summer school welcomes contributions from economic and social historians, environmental historians, political economists, and scholars of institutions and development. While each of these perspectives has yielded important insights, none alone provides a complete picture. In the context of rapid environmental change, a fuller historical understanding of these dynamics is increasingly urgent. The event therefore seeks to bring together complementary approaches in an interdisciplinary forum.

Themes and Topics

We invite paper proposals that examine the political economy of natural resources across different periods and regions. Topics of interest include, but are not limited to:

- Governance, property rights, and institutions of resource management
- Conflict, coercion, and extraction
- Labour, technology, and resource regimes
- Colonialism, slavery, war, and natural resources
- Indigenous peoples' rights, sovereignty, and systems of resource governance

- Energy transitions and environmental change
- Common-pool resources and sustainability
- Historical perspectives on environmental justice and inequality

Contributions engaging with global and underrepresented geographies, alongside diverse sources and methodologies, are particularly encouraged.

Keynote Speakers

Ann Carlos (University of Colorado Boulder)
Stefania Galli (University of Gothenburg)

Submissions and Funding

We invite submissions from PhD students, early career and senior scholars. Approximately 20 participants will be selected.

Please submit a 500-word abstract and a two-page CV to ehtuebingen@gmail.com by the 23rd of February.

There are no registration fees. Lunch will be provided on all days, and one conference dinner is included. Limited funding for travel and accommodation is available. Funding will be reserved for PhD students and non-permanent academics who are within 6 years of receiving their PhD. If receipt of funding is essential for your participation, please note this when applying, along with a short justification.

Organising Committee

Thomas Benfey (University of Tübingen)
Sarah Ferber (FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg)
Louis Henderson (London School of Economics)
Moritz Kaiser (University of Tübingen)
Urvi Khaitan (Harvard University)

Workshop on Forced Migration and Economic Legacies

University of Gothenburg, Sweden
6 - 7 May 2025

About the workshop

Forced migrations are major economic shocks with enduring consequences for host and origin regions through labor markets, housing, public finance, human capital accumulation, and long-run development. This workshop brings together economists and economic historians working on the economic impact of forced migrations. Historical episodes – especially but not exclusively in Europe – provide rich quasi-experimental settings for studying adjustment dynamics and long-run persistence. The workshop aims to bring together scholars interested in different aspects of forced migrations and discuss implications for understanding the phenomenon in historical and contemporary settings.

Keynote speaker:

Andreas Ferrara (Associate Professor of Economics, University of Pittsburgh; Research Associate, National Bureau of Economic Research; Research Fellow, ROCKWOOL Foundation Berlin). Andreas Ferrara's research focuses on economic history, labor economics, political economy, migration, discrimination, and causal inference in long-run economic outcomes.

Topics

We invite submissions on all aspects of forced migration and displacement, including but not limited to:

- 1) Host- and origin-economy effects
 - Wage and employment impacts
 - Occupational and sectoral reallocation
 - Housing, land markets, and urban structure
 - Local public finance and provision of public goods
 - Firm dynamics, productivity, entrepreneurship
- 2) Outcomes for displaced populations
 - Earnings, education, and intergenerational mobility
 - Health, demographic behavior, and well-being
 - Integration, networks, segregation, discrimination
- 3) Institutions and political economy
 - Property rights, restitution, and land reform
 - Refugee settlement and integration policies
 - Social cohesion, conflict, political behavior, and state capacity
- 4) Data and methods
 - Use of historical microdata and administrative sources
 - Quasi-experimental designs
 - Linking historical shocks to contemporary outcomes

Papers may focus on any region or period; comparative and cross-country work is welcome.

Format

The workshop will be single-track with a limited number of presentations and substantial discussion time per paper (including formal discussants). Work in progress and early-stage research are welcome; the emphasis is on feedback and intellectual exchange.

Submission

Please submit either:

- a full paper, or
- an extended abstract (8000-1000 words).

Important dates

- **Submission deadline: 28 February 2026**
- Notification of acceptance by 15 March 2026.
- Workshop dates: 6–7 May 2025

Funding

We are able to offer accommodation for the nights of the 5 and 6 May to all participants as well as all meals. Limited funding for travel expenses for early scholars (PhD and postdoc) is available upon request.

Organizers & contact

Luka Miladinovic, University of Gothenburg – luka.miladinovic@gu.se

Anna Missiaia, University of Gothenburg – anna.missiaia@gu.se

Submission: Please send a paper or an extended abstract to luka.miladinovic@gu.se with subject: Forced Migration and Economic Legacies. Please indicate whether you require travel funding in order to participate to the workshop.

51st Annual Meeting of the Social Sciences History Association

Decentering Modernity

Hilton Hotel, Atlanta, Georgia
November 19th-22nd, 2026

Submission Deadline: March 1st, 2026

To read more or to submit a proposal see this link: <https://ssha.org/conference/>

Since the inception of social science disciplines in the nineteenth century, modernity has been viewed as a unique phenomenon originating in the West and radiating to the rest of the world. This understanding of modernity has served as the foundation of modern social sciences. It has also been embraced by both Western imperialists, who believed in their “civilizing mission,” and postcolonial nationalist elites striving to implement “modernizing programs” in their new nations.

Over the last three decades, social science history has witnessed a flourishing of works that challenge this Western-centric notion of world development. They demonstrate that modernizing processes that have long been assumed to be unique to early modern Europe – such as the rationalization and centralization of the state, marketization of the economy, the rise of new ideologies pursuing individual freedom and political representation, and the transition away from the demographic ancien régime – have been parallel processes across different civilizations in the post-Mongol world. Embedded in diverging cultural idioms and manifesting local variations, the multiple forms of early modernities interacted with one another in the integrated global economy from the sixteenth through the eighteenth century. As such, the rising domination of the Western form of modernity in the Age of Imperialism is far from a unidirectional imposition of Western institutions, but a constant process of power, resistance, hybridization, and negotiation.

In today's world, we see the center of gravity of capitalist development moving away from traditional Western countries with the emergence of new centers of capital accumulation in the Global East and Global South. While the ongoing democratic backsliding does not spare many traditional Western democratic nations, many young democracies in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe have shown striking resilience. Amidst the current reconfiguration of the global political and economic order, we need new historical perspectives that avoid both the assumption of the universality of the Western form of modernity and the Orientalist gaze that essentializes non-Western civilizations as unchanging traditions antithetical to modernity.

In this Social Science History annual meeting, we invite interdisciplinary papers and panels that address social, political, economic, and cultural processes from a historical perspective, broadly defined. In particular, we welcome works that examine the convergence, divergence, and connections between multiple forms of modernity across the world, spanning long, medium, or short historical timeframes. We also encourage submissions that connect historical analyses to contemporary issues.

Program Committee Co-Chairs: Sefika Kumral, Matthew Norton, Christy Thornton, He Wenkai

2026 SSHA President: Ho-fung Hung

WORLD ECONOMIC HISTORY CONGRESS 2028

Montevideo
24-28 July 2028

The International Economic History Association (IEHA) has opened the first Call for Sessions for the 2028 World Congress.

The theme of the Congress is World Powers and Conflicts, but submissions are welcome on the economic and social histories of all places and periods. We especially encourage sessions that adopt a comparative perspective across countries or regions.

Sessions may be proposed by any member of the international economic history community, whatever their institutional affiliation or status, as well as by scholars in related disciplines.

The submission deadline is September 14, 2026. The selected sessions will be announced on December 18, 2026.

For more details about the call for sessions, go to: <https://wehcmontevideo2028.org/call-for-sessions/>



SEMINAR SERIES



Stellenbosch
UNIVERSITY
IYUNIVESITHI
UNIVERSITEIT

LEAP

Laboratory for the
Economics of Africa's Past

LEAP SEMINAR SERIES 2026

04 Feb	Sudaraka Ariyaratne <i>Rice University</i>
11 Feb	Micah Villarreal <i>Northwestern University</i>
18 Feb	Oliver Bogdan Wach <i>Freie University Berlin</i>
25 Feb	Mathilde Col <i>Bordeaux School of Economics</i>
04 March	João Tampellini <i>Vanderbilt University</i>
11 March	Etienne le Rossignol <i>University of Namur</i>
18 March	Michele Magnani <i>University of Bologna</i>
25 March	Jens Oehlen <i>Stockholm University</i>
01 April	<i>No seminar</i>
08 April	Marcel Caesmann <i>University of Zurich</i>
15 April	Andrea Tugnoli <i>University of Geneva</i>
22 April	Haley Wilbert <i>University of Notre Dame</i>
29 April	Beau Bressler <i>University of California, Davis</i>
06 May	Pier Paolo Creanza <i>Princeton University</i>

Please email leap@sun.ac.za to register!

BECOME A MEMBER

Join the Economic History Society of Southern Africa (EHSSA)



ECONOMIC
HISTORY SOCIETY
OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

Promoting the study of and interest in
economic and social history of southern Africa

EHSSA membership benefits include -

- Joining a network of young and established scholars in the field
- Staying up to date with conferences and events
- Receiving online access* to the society's journal

The Economic History of Developing Regions
and special issues

* Published by Taylor & Francis, 3 issues per calendar year

Membership application:

Membership is open to any person who supports the objectives of the society and who is active in the field of economic history or an allied discipline or profession. There is no membership fee for joining the Society.

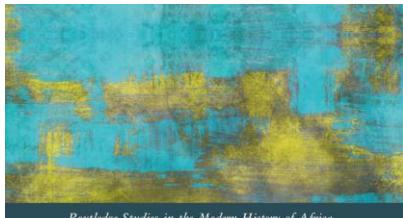
Please fill in the [membership form](#) and send it to EHSSA secretary, Leoné Walters, leone.walters@uct.ac.za by **20 February 2026**.

New research in African economic history

FOR YOUR BOOKSHELF

Commercial Banking in Kenya: A History from Colonisation to Digital Age

Christian Velasco



COMMERCIAL BANKING IN KENYA

A HISTORY FROM COLONISATION TO DIGITAL AGE

Christian Velasco



This book investigates the impact of commercial banks in Kenya right through from their origins, to their role during the colonial period, the process of adaptation following independence, and up to their responses to new challenges and economic policies in the twenty-first century. The British colonisation of East Africa required the development of diverse political, social and economic institutions to advance and exercise control over the territories and their populations. Multinational commercial banks were among the first institutions, with the National Bank of India, Standard Bank of South Africa and Barclays Bank DCO all setting up business in Kenya, whilst continuing to maintain close relationships with the UK and other colonial actors. This book assesses the impact of commercial banks during the last years of colonial domination and the tools they used to adapt in the first decades of independence. The book concludes by considering how the colonial banking system has influenced the development of modern financial institutions in Kenya in the twenty-first century. This book argues that commercial banks are fundamental to understanding African colonies, and the foundations over which the financial system of contemporary Africa

was constructed. It will be of interest to researchers of banking, economic history, the colonial period, and African studies.

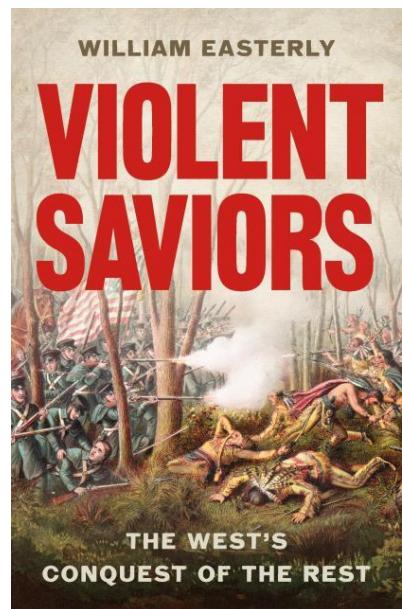
Violent Saviors: The West's Conquest of the Rest

William Easterly

Economic development is not really development unless everyone has the right to consent to their own progress.

For centuries, the developed Western world has exploited the less-developed "Rest" in the name of progress, conquering the Americas, driving the Atlantic slave trade, and colonizing Africa and Asia. Throughout, the West has justified this global conquest by the alleged material gains it brought to the conquered. But the colonial experiment unintentionally revealed how much of a demand there was for self-determination, and not just for relief from poverty.

In *Violent Saviors*, renowned economist William Easterly examines how the demand for agency has always been at the heart of debates on development. Spanning nearly four centuries of global history, Easterly argues that commerce, rather than conquest, could meet the need for equal rights as well as the need for prosperity. Looking to the liberal economic ideas of thinkers like Adam Smith, Milton Friedman, and Amartya Sen, Easterly shows how the surge in global trade has given agency to billions of people for the first time.



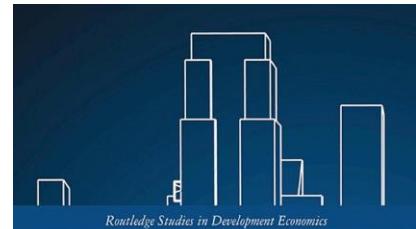
Narrating the long debate between conquest and commerce, Easterly offers a new and urgent perspective on global economics: the demands for agency, dignity, and respect must be at the center of the global fight against poverty.

African Economic Development: Myths, Models and Policies

Beryl Adongo Oranga and Robert Buckley

Myths have long plagued the understanding of Africa. Today, the myths continue but are very different and certainly are more sophisticated, taking the form of economic models of behavior or statistical analyses, sometimes based on faulty data or interpretations of it. It is not surprising, as a result, that they lead to very different policy conclusions.

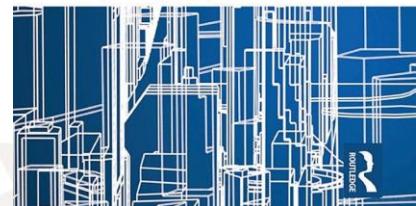
This book reviews the performance of low-income African countries and highlights the challenges posed by measurement and methodological problems. It also discusses some of the more significant myths that have arisen, as well as the way that economic models - which themselves are also myths - if carefully structured, can often be useful for understanding, if not carefully describing, the situation of many low-income African countries. Structured in three parts, the book first critiques historical and narrative-driven myths, then investigates model-based myths around convergence and growth; and the final section synthesizes eight dominant myths that continue to shape policy. The book addresses key themes such as poverty traps, economic growth, and urbanization, providing an examination of the complexities surrounding these issues in low-income African countries. It brings together current development issues in one place in a way that builds upon new and improved data sources. Insights from various fields are integrated into the book, providing a holistic understanding of the development landscape in low-income Africa.



AFRICAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

MYTHS, MODELS AND POLICIES

Beryl Adongo Oranga and Robert Buckley



Money, Value, and the State: Sovereignty and Citizenship in East Africa

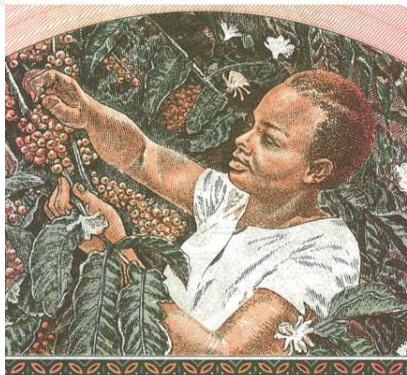
Kevin P. Donovan



MONEY, VALUE, AND THE STATE

Sovereignty and Citizenship
in East Africa

KEVIN P. DONOVAN



Decolonization in East Africa was more than a political event: it was a step towards economic self-determination. In this innovative book, historian and anthropologist Kevin Donovan analyses the contradictions of economic sovereignty and citizenship in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, placing money, credit, and smuggling at the center of the region's shifting fortunes. Using detailed archival and ethnographic research undertaken across the region, Donovan reframes twentieth century statecraft and argues that self-determination was, at most, partially fulfilled, with state monetary infrastructures doing as much to produce divisions and inequality as they did to produce nations. A range of dissident practices, including smuggling and counterfeiting, arose as people produced value on their own terms. Weaving together discussions of currency controls, bank nationalizations and coffee smuggling with wider conceptual interventions, Money, Value and the State traces the struggles between bankers, bureaucrats, farmers and smugglers that shaped East Africa's postcolonial political economy.

ARTICLES

Between settler colonialism, regionalisation and Africanisation: the making of the Nairobi Stock Exchange, 1954–1970

Mariusz Lukasiewicz

Journal of Eastern African Studies

This article investigates the genesis, organisation and operations of the Nairobi Stock Exchange (NSE) in the period 1954–1970. Using the NSE's institutional and organisational evolution as an analytical lens into the early history and politics of Kenya's capital market, the article provides new evidence on the participation of private capital during and after the Mau Mau rebellion for independence from British colonial rule. Established on 1 July 1954, the NSE grew out of the Kenyan Stock Brokers Association's initiative to facilitate improved access to long-term capital for settler-colonial industrial companies and the colonial state's growing need for development finance. The early growth of Nairobi's capital market reveals original insights into the challenges of popularising share trading in East Africa, with the NSE serving as a regional exchange for government and private financial products from Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. The analysis of the NSE's operations immediately after 'flag independence' in 1963 qualifies the economic effects of the government's Africanisation policies on the greater participation of African capital, individual investors and financial professionals. Here, the Kenyatta government's regulations and oversight of the capital market ultimately reflected the need to satisfy international capitalist interests in East Africa's ideologically diverging diplomatic arena.

Colonial Elites in The Eighteenth-Century Cape Colony

Leoné Walters, Johan Fourie and Robert Ross

Revista De Historia Industrial — Industrial History Review

We study eighteenth-century settler elites in the Stellenbosch–Drakenstein district. We examine income and wealth inequality from 1720 to 1810, which enabled the emergence of an economic elite. We then ask whether this group also held political office, and how that configuration evolved. Using annual tax censuses alongside lists of *heemraeden*, local officials serving on district civil administrative and judicial boards, we recover the distribution of resources within the free-settler population and set it against district office-holding. Three results stand out. First, within-settler inequality was high and persistent. Secondly, the sectoral bases of elite income shifted over time: wine and wheat dominated early in the century, while livestock gained importance later. Thirdly, wealth and office moved together: appointees were disproportionately drawn from the top of the distribution, signalling a tight alignment between market power and local authority. These results make visible the internal bargains that sustained Company rule, linking economic rank to political authority and, in turn, to the workings of colonial state capacity.

Cross-Cultural Trade and the Slave Ship the Bonne Société: Baskets of Goods, Diverse Sellers, and Time Pressure on the African Coast

Amanda Gregg and Anne Ruderman

The Journal of Economic History

The eighteenth-century French slave ship the *Bonne Société* traded bundles of goods in exchange for slaves in Loango. We present detailed evidence from the ship's trading log that decomposes the goods in the bundle and identifies the European and African merchants selling captives to the ship. Prices steadily increased throughout the captain's stay in port, and the captain increased the bundle's price by adding more goods and adding high-priced goods. Sellers participated both as one-shot traders and as repeat traders. These results add a nuanced picture of how this destructive trade worked in practice.

Catalan Capital in the Timber Trade of Spanish Guinea

Jordi Sant Gisbert and Eduard Gargallo
Revista De Historia Industrial — Industrial History Review

Recent scholarship has highlighted the importance of historical relations between Catalonia and Spanish Guinea, mostly with regard to the economy, and focusing on the production and export of cocoa. This paper wishes to show how Catalan companies and financial institutions were also basic in the expansion of another key economic sector: timber exploitation. Some Catalan companies were awarded large forestry concessions in Rio Muni, and they became, together with companies funded with Basque capital, the main exporters of colonial timber. These companies (and their subsidiaries) not only extracted timber from the colony but also expanded in the metropolis, where they established sawmills and timber-processing factories. The paper explores the evolution of the activities of these companies as well as their internal organization and their financial and business links.

La contrainte et les marchés: concilier les explications économiques et sociales de l'esclavage en Afrique de l'Ouest précoloniale, vers 1450-vers 1900

Gareth Austin
Revue d'histoire moderne & contemporaine

Enslavement and slave trading were the main source of labour recruitment, apart from marriage and child-rearing, in the economies of precolonial West Africa. As elsewhere, first-generation slaves in African societies were mostly foreigners. Unlike the slavery practised by Europeans, however, indigenous African slavery usually had an assimilative element: the descendants of slaves tended to be integrated into the society concerned on increasingly more equal terms over subsequent generations, with varying rates and degrees of completion. The conjunction of slave labour and partial assimilation has generated a long-running debate between 'economic' and 'social' interpretations of the institution in West Africa. This article reconciles and integrates these traditionally rival interpretations, and explores the economic implications. I argue that it was the interaction of economic and social (and cultural and political) dimensions of slavery that was central to the history of slavery in precolonial West Africa. The growth in slavery, and the specific uses to which slaves were put, cannot be explained without reference to the demand for slaves as labourers producing commodities. At the same time, without organized coercion, and the political and ideological conditions for applying it, there could have been no slavery and no slave trade. Indeed, it is argued here that, without such coercion, there would have been no labour market at all in the economic conditions that prevailed in most of West Africa during this era. In this sense, the Nieboer-Domar hypothesis applies in its strongest form. Moreover, the assimilative tendency in African slavery should be seen both as responding to the severe constraints on state formation and, ironically, as underpinning the continuation of the internal slave trade.

Predatory Peace: Fiscal Fragmentation and Coercive Statebuilding in South Sudan and Beyond

Matthew Sterling Benson
Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding

This article analyses how peace agreements have reconfigured, rather than dismantled, predatory fiscal rule in South Sudan. Drawing on 210 interviews, archival sources, and a peace agreements dataset, it shows how elite pacts redistribute rents in ways that stabilise ruling coalitions while legitimising coercion. I introduce the concept of predatory peace to capture how agreements entrench fiscal predation under the guise of statebuilding and strategic fiscal fragmentation to describe how opaque and overlapping revenue systems sustain authority and diffuse accountability. By foregrounding South Sudan's revenue complex, the article shows how peacebuilding frameworks embed coercion as durable rule across conflict-affected countries.

Economic costs of extreme heat on groundnut production in the Senegal Groundnut Basin

Maguette Sembene, Bradford Mills and Anubhab Gupta
Food Policy

Historical data show a rising trend in extreme heat in the past four decades in the Groundnut Basin of Senegal. We evaluate the economic costs of extreme heat on groundnut production in the region. Using temperature data from the ERA5 global climate reanalysis, we define extreme heat degree days (EHDDs) as the cumulative number of degree days above 35 °C during the groundnut growing season and estimate its effect on quasi-profits and yields at the person, household, and field levels utilizing a two-year panel data of 1,123 households. Our econometric estimations show that an additional EHDD reduces quasi-profits by 5,460 FCFA per hectare and significantly lowers yield by 2.5%. Further, rainfall interactions with EHDD generate compounding losses under high heat and rainfall. The findings highlight important and often unseen effects of increasing temperatures on agricultural practices in climate-vulnerable areas such as the Groundnut Basin and underscore the need for adaptation and mitigation strategies to cope with the impacts of climate change.

Who counts? Information capacity and the origins of education inequality in Morocco

Gabriel Koehler-Derrick
The Economic History Review

Education drives economic growth. However, many developing countries are characterized by high variation in local education outcomes. This article argues that the expansion of public education in former colonies was shaped by the relative inclusivity of civil registration under colonialism, which determined local information capacity of the state at independence. Where information was low, governments were less likely to build schools, and enforcing policies such as compulsory education was more difficult. These theoretical claims are tested in Morocco, a lower-middle-income country and former French colony characterized by stark variation in local education outcomes.

Living standards in Angola, 1760–19751

Hélder Carvalhal and Nuno Palma
Explorations in Economic History

We investigate the well-being of urban workers in Angola under colonialism. Using a newly compiled dataset derived from archival and secondary sources, we construct welfare ratios for both skilled and unskilled workers in the cities of Luanda and Benguela from 1760 to 1975. Our findings indicate that Angolan workers experienced lower economic prosperity compared to their counterparts in other parts of the world. Living standards declined during the 19th century, followed by a recovery emerging in the 20th century — particularly from the mid-1960s.

The Emergence of Social and Political Complexity in West Central Africa

John Thornton
The Journal of African History

Using new interpretations of oral traditions written in older documents, this article changes the origin of complex societies and larger kingdoms. Showing that the Kingdom of Kongo, presently believed to be the origin of large kingdoms actually achieved its status by conquering an existing kingdom, called Mpemba, the author reassesses both the date and origin point of kingdom level polities there. The author further points to new interpretations of documentary evidence to demonstrate that Mwene Muji and Kulembembe, located to the east and south of Kongo were also early large scale polities at a date as early as Kongo.

Culture, Kinship and Women's Labour Opportunities: Evidence from Malawi and Indonesia

Cecilia D'Agostini and Luca Tiberti
The Journal of Development Studies

Economic and anthropological research has shown that gender roles often originate from ancestral divisions of labor in subsistence activities. This paper examines the impact of ancestral matrilocality on women's employment status in Malawi and Indonesia, focusing on both employment quantity and quality. Using individual-level data from the Malawi Integrated Household Survey and the Indonesia Family Life Survey, combined with ethnic-level cultural data from Murdock's Ethnographic Atlas, we assess how matrilocality—where husbands relocate to their wives' families after marriage—affects women's likelihood of overall employment, wage employment and holding a formal job contract. We find that matrilocality significantly increases women's likelihood of wage employment, enhances the probability of formal contract work, and reduces overall employment. Mechanisms driving these effects include strengthened household bargaining power and reduced tolerance for gender-based violence among matrilocal women. These results highlight the persistence of ancestral norms in shaping gendered labor market outcomes and support culturally sensitive policy interventions to reduce gender disparities.

Controlling company subsidiaries in the Global South: A comparative study of itineraries to and from mining sites in Chile and Congo

Kristin Ranestad and Véronique Pouillard
Economic History of Developing Regions

This paper analyses mining operations by multinational mining companies in Chile and Congo (1910s–1960s), focusing on methods to establish control over subsidiaries. It examines Andes Copper Company and Chile Exploration Company (Anaconda) in Chile and Union Minière du Haut-Katanga and Société Minière du Bécéka in Congo, and compares the role of travel and communication in managing operations. It identifies striking similarities in their approaches, including international expertise for ore prospecting and technical knowledge transfer, as well as North–South travel for supervision and strategic discussions. Communication differences were influenced by company-culture variations, as well as unique historical, social, and political backgrounds of each host country. Anaconda relied on experienced expatriate staff, certain local initiatives in Chile, and frequent mail correspondence. Belgian companies in Congo faced challenges due to colonial anxieties and limited local expertise – needing closer supervision, more site visits, and increased reporting.

The United Kingdom, the Sterling Area operations, and reserve management in Nigeria: The politics of the Sterling Guarantee Agreement (1931–1979)

Abel Ezeoha, Emmanuel Onah and Chibuike Uche
Economic History of Developing Regions

From a historical perspective and using a country-specific case analysis, this paper examines the claim that, under a bilateral or multilateral arrangement, a country's monetary system unwittingly causes frustrations in the monetary management of other countries. It explores the dynamics of Nigeria's relationship with the UK throughout the Sterling Area regime and documents the diplomatic reactions of Nigeria to the variations in the role of the sterling as a reserve currency. The paper shows that attempts by Nigeria to optimize the benefits of her membership were scuttled by mutual suspicion, a lack of requisite central banking capacity, and fiscal recklessness. On the one hand, Nigeria benefited from the Sterling Area operations by gaining easier and cheaper access to British capital markets. On the other hand, despite the efforts of the Nigerian government to adjust to the changing sterling realities, the country's internal capacity constraints and sub-optimal choices ended up undermining her reserve management system, while also serving as a significant source of frustration to the British monetary authority.

Towards monetary autonomy in the French Union? The 1949 reform in French Somaliland and the façade of sovereignty

Moustapha Aman

Economic History of Developing Regions

This article examines the 1949 monetary reform in French Somaliland, when the French government replaced the colonial franc with a currency board pegged to the US dollar – breaking with the franc zone but without granting autonomy. Triggered by the collapse of the French franc and distrust of a colonial currency ill suited to regional trade, the reform imposed external stability through a top-down mechanism lacking legitimacy. Drawing on unpublished archives from the French Ministry of Finance (SAEF) and using the Mundell-Fleming trilemma as an analytical lens, the article shows how French authorities prioritized exchange rate stability and capital mobility over monetary autonomy. Far from a step towards sovereignty, the reform reaffirmed imperial interests under the façade of technical modernization. Three concerns motivated this decision: the discrediting of the colonial franc, Ethiopia's demand for settlement mechanisms, and France's strategic imperative to maintain a foothold in the Horn of Africa. The resulting arrangement created 'stability without sovereignty', a structured dependency that was monetary (via a rigid dollar peg), institutional (under French Treasury oversight), and commercial (through interdependence with Ethiopia). The 1949 reform thus exemplifies how a currency board transformed colonial dependence into a tool of economic and geopolitical engineering, prefiguring postcolonial monetary logics.

The history that moves us: Colonial duration, era of occupation, and migration

Edward Kosack and Kristina Sargent

Economic History of Developing Regions

Colonialism has important effects for former colonies, and despite the long colonial history between Europe and Africa, the nuances of the impacts of that history are relatively understudied. The current treatment of colonial ties as a binary relationship is incomplete and misleading because of this long and varied history. Using data for African migration from 1960 to 2000, we find that the longer the colonial relationship, the more likely a person will be to migrate to a European colonizer. This influence only appears once colonization length passes around 66 years. Additionally, the era of original colonization influences movement: places colonized during the 'Scramble for Africa' see less migration than those colonized before or after. Colonialism was much more complicated than existing work allows and warrants a more in-depth study of these relationships and their persistent impacts.

Ethnic Politics and Fiscal Dominance: Implications for Currency Union Formation in Sub-Saharan Africa

Benjamin D Keen and Christine O Strong

Journal of African Economies

Numerous currency unions have been proposed in Africa over the past 50 years, but none have succeeded. This paper asserts ethnic favouritism is a crucial yet often overlooked feature that strongly influences an African government's willingness to join a currency union. We use a Barro and Gordon (1983) style model that incorporates fiscal dominance, political business cycles and ethnic favouritism to assess the benefits and costs to African households and governments of joining a currency union. Our results show that ethnic alignment between the head of state and central bank governor amplifies fiscal dominance, which reduces an African government's desire to surrender monetary autonomy. A currency union is more beneficial to African households if the common central bank is free from political influence of its member countries and more beneficial to African governments if fiscal dominance persists. Both African households and governments will gain utility from joining a monetary union if the trade benefits are strong enough to overcome the costs of belonging to the union. Given the prevalence of fiscal dominance and modest trade among neighbouring countries, it is easy to understand why Africa has made little progress toward implementing currency unions in recent years.

Notes on the Difficulty of Studying State Archives in Egypt

Chihab El Khachab
Comparative Studies in Society and History

This article describes how Egyptian state documents are scattered between governmental institutions, private collections, and the second-hand book and paper market. This scattering raises a practical question about the conditions under which official documents become discardable and commodifiable by bureaucrats, their families, and second-hand dealers. This scattering also raises a theoretical question about the nature of a state which takes uneven care in keeping a record of its own institutional past. After outlining the difficulties of access one faces in official archives in Egypt, the article fleshes out the sociological profile of different custodians of state paperwork—including families of bureaucrats, peddlers, and dealers—and the conditions under which state documents become commodified to this day. The overarching objective is not just to show the well-known limitations of national archives as a source of historical material, but also to show how actually existing “state archives” go well beyond the remit of official institutions, with notable consequences over our conception of the state.

Transport Connectivity and Urban Development: The Case of Africa (1880–2020)

Bárbara Polo-Martín, Daniel Castillo-Hidalgo and César Ducruet
Geographical Analysis

This paper investigates the interplay between population dynamics and transport connectivity in African municipalities from 1880 to 2020. Using an original historical dataset spanning African countries, we examine how proximity to railways and ports has shaped population dynamics over time. Through the application of Granger causality and Vector Autoregression (VAR) models—accounting for structural breaks and regime changes—we demonstrate that transport infrastructure development has a statistically significant and directional influence on urban population growth. Our findings reveal that city size and growth are not randomly distributed across space; rather, they are systematically linked to historical patterns of transport connectivity. In particular, the largest and fastest-growing cities consistently correspond to strategic nodes at the intersection of railway and maritime networks. These results, reinforced by hierarchical clustering and regime analysis, highlight the enduring impact of colonial infrastructure and institutional path dependence. The study also points to broader implications for contemporary urban planning in the context of containerization and modern global trade flows.

Missionary Legacies of Gender Equality: Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa

Bastian Becker and Felix Meier zu Selhausen
European Review of Economic History

What is the long-term influence of Christian missions in colonial Africa on gender equality? Combining novel data on the locations and gender composition of European-run missions with contemporary social surveys on c. one million respondents in 28 African countries, we find that missionary presence is associated with greater present-day (i) educational gender equality, and (ii) women's household autonomy, but (iii) no decrease in gender disparities in labor market participation. Contrary to previous studies, these long-term effects are not driven by Protestant-Catholic differences or a greater presence of Western female Protestant missionaries, whose early influence on African girls' education dissipated after the colonial era. We argue that policies promoting universal education, along with the continued feminization of the teaching profession, disrupted the gender-specific legacy of colonial Africa's early centers of female education.

Echoes of colonial disruption: historicizing vulnerability, raiding, and violence in Northwestern Kenya

Mads Yding
World Development

- The British conquest of the Turkana in the 1910s devastated the pastoral economy.
- Colonial livestock theft and border enforcement made the Turkana vulnerable to environmental fluctuations.
- In the colonial era, ecological conditions became the primary driver of conflict between the Turkana and neighbouring groups.
- The droughts in 1928 and 1933 mark the beginning of new conflict dynamics in Turkana.
- The vulnerability and insecurity experienced in contemporary Turkana are legacies of colonial policies.

Connected national capital: Corporations in colonial and independent Egypt

Cihan Artunc and Mohamed Saleh
Journal of Development Economics

We use a newly assembled dataset covering all Egyptian corporations, their founders, and political officeholders, to demonstrate the differential impact of political connections on firm performance across two distinctive political and economic contexts. Before Egypt's independence in 1922, political connections reduced firm profitability, as connected firms were perceived to be aligned with the anti-colonial, nationalist movement, unsettling investors. After independence, connections improved firm outcomes by granting preferential access to incorporation and shielding connected companies from competition. These dynamics reflect the shift from a laissez-faire colonial regime to a nationalist industrial policy that selectively favored politically connected firms.

WORKING PAPERS

Africa as a Success Story: Political Organization in Pre-Colonial Africa

Soeren J. Henn and James A. Robinson

We provide an overview of the explanations for the relative lack of state formation historically in Africa. In doing so we systematically document for the first time the extent to which Africa was politically decentralized, calculating that in 1880 there were probably 45,000 independent polities which were rarely organized on ethnic lines. At most 2% of these could be classified as states. We advance a new argument for this extreme political decentralization positing that African societies were deliberately organized to stop centralization emerging. In this they were successful. We point out some key aspects of African societies that helped them to manage this equilibrium. We also emphasize how the organization of the economy was subservient to these political goals.

Racial Inequality and Redistribution in Post-Apartheid South Africa

Léo Czajka and Amory Gethin

We study post-Apartheid inequality dynamics in South Africa using a new microdatabase that combines survey, tax, national accounts, and budget data from 1993 to 2019. Until 2005, pretax inequality rose, racial disparities widened, and redistribution stagnated. Thereafter, pretax inequality fell back toward its 1993 level, while major expansions in tax-and-transfer progressivity sharply reduced posttax inequality. Rapid growth of top Black incomes contributed to halving the White-to-Black pretax income ratio and shifted 20% of taxes from Whites to top Black earners. Despite reaching its lowest point in history in 2019, the racial gap remains extreme by international standards, even after redistribution.

L'Afrique en perspective : histoire, territoires, cultures et enjeux géopolitiques et géoéconomique du développement

Mostafa Elkhanouchi, Malak Kasmi and Anouar Ammi

This article offers a comprehensive analysis of Africa through its historical trajectories, diverse territories, rich cultural heritage, and the contemporary dynamics shaping its development. It highlights the historical and colonial legacy, the continent's geographical and cultural plurality, and the geopolitical and geo-economic shifts redefining Africa's role in international relations. Adopting a multidimensional approach, the study examines Africa's strategic assets—natural resources, geographical position, and human capital—while identifying major challenges related to governance, inequalities, economic transitions, and geopolitical tensions. The article concludes with a reflection on the prospects for inclusive and sustainable development, considering the stakes of regional and international cooperation in a rapidly changing global context.

Revolution and confrontational state-building in Africa: Case of Thomas Sankara's revolution in Burkina Faso (1983–1987)

Souleymane Yameogo

This article re-examines Thomas Sankara's revolution in Burkina Faso (1983–1987) to explain why postcolonial revolutions in Africa, though morally compelling, rarely generate enduring institutions. Using process-tracing of speeches, policy documents, and secondary sources, it analyses the mechanisms that transformed a project of emancipation into political isolation and collapse. The study identifies two interlocking dynamics – ideological ambiguity and confrontational state-building – that shaped both the rise and the demise of the Sankarist regime. It argues that revolutionary governments in Africa operate within structural constraints that reward moral purity but penalise institutional compromise. Comparison with Ghana under Rawlings and Uganda under Museveni shows that revolutions endure when moral authority is translated into hybrid institutions able to negotiate legitimacy across social and cultural cleavages. By conceptualising African revolutions as state-building experiments under constraint, the article bridges debates on revolutionary politics, postcolonial governance, and indigenous legitimacy, offering a new theoretical lens for understanding the fragility of moral authority in African state formation.

Landmines and Spatial Development

Giorgio Chiovelli, Stelios Michalopoulos and Elias Papaioannou

Landmines affect the lives of millions in many conflict-ridden communities long after the end of hostilities. However, there is little research on the role of demining. We examine the economic consequences of landmine removal in Mozambique, the only country to transition from heavily contaminated in 1992 to mine-free in 2015. First, we present the self-assembled georeferenced catalog of areas suspected of contamination, along with a detailed record of demining operations. Second, the event-study analysis reveals a robust association between demining activities and subsequent local economic performance, reflected in luminosity. Economic activity does not pick up in the years leading up to clearance, nor does it increase when operators investigate areas mistakenly marked as contaminated in prior surveys. Third, recognizing that landmine removal reshapes transportation access, we use a market-access approach to explore direct and indirect effects. To advance on identification, we isolate changes in market access caused by removing landmines in previously considered safe areas, far from earlier nationwide surveys. Fourth, policy simulations reveal the substantial economywide dividends of clearance, but only when factoring in market-access effects, which dwarf direct productivity links. Additionally, policy counterfactuals uncover significant aggregate costs when demining does not prioritize the unblocking of transportation routes. These results offer insights into the design of demining programs in Ukraine and elsewhere, highlighting the need for centralized coordination and prioritization of areas facilitating commerce.

On a mission: planning an economy with mutable mobiles

Mary S. Morgan

When newly independent states in Africa set out to make their own economies in the 1960s, they did so under the label of “planning,” a generic term denoting economic policy-making to create the economic future. This planning was guided by international experts, sent “on missions” to help, or perhaps oversee, local economists in what was seen then as an expert, technocratic process. Nigeria offers an important example of this technocracy at work, under the guidance of its “missionary”: Wolfgang Stolper. His diary, and his writings of the day, reveal how local information and local values travelled around social, political and economic circles, to be then spliced together according to certain economic principles in making a “five-year plan” for the future of Nigeria.

Illuminating the Global South

Giorgio Chiovelli, Stelios Michalopoulos, Elias Papaioannou and Tanner Regan

Satellite images of nighttime lights are commonly used to proxy local economic conditions. Despite their popularity, there are concerns about how accurately they capture local development in different settings and scales. We compile an annual series of comparable nighttime lights globally from 1992 to 2023 by applying adjustments that consider key factors affecting accuracy and comparability over time: top coding, blooming, and variations in satellite systems (DMSP and VIIRS). Applied to various low-income settings, the adjusted luminosity series outperforms the unadjusted series as a predictor of local development, particularly over time and at higher spatial resolutions.

Does corruption trigger political violence? Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa (1970-2020)

Raul Caruso, Emma Galli and Giulia Tringali

This paper empirically investigates the relationship between corruption and political violence in 49 Sub-Saharan African countries over the period 1970-2020. Specifically, it examines whether corruption influences both the incidence and the brutality of political violence. To address this question, the study employs an articulated estimation strategy: first, we analyze the impact of corruption on political violence incidence and brutality by using count data models (Negbin and ZINB) and a LPM; then we also employ an IV estimation for the OLS model and a Two-stage Residual inclusion (2SRI) estimation. Across the different specifications, our findings highlight a strong and positive relation between political corruption and both the incidence and brutality of political violence. Control variables present the expected relations with the dependent variable and in particular, we also focus on climate change. By employing also interaction terms between SPEI and corruption, the results suggest that an increase in precipitations in corrupted countries leads to an increase of violence. In addition, our main results show that past corruption level has a great impact on today violence, while past extreme weather events do not.

Roads and child health in Sub-Saharan Africa

Luisito Bertinelli, Evie Graus, Jean-François Maystadt and Silvia Peracchi

This paper examines the causal impact of road access on child health in Sub-Saharan Africa between 1980 and 2012 by combining geolocated data on child anthropometric outcomes with spatial data on road networks. To address endogeneity, we employ an instrumental variable approach based on the inconsequential units framework, constructing hypothetical road networks that connect historical cities and active mines. Our results show that closer proximity to paved roads significantly improves child health. The main mechanisms operate through improved healthcare access and utilization, higher household wealth, early signs of structural transformation, and cropland expansion. We find no evidence that these gains are offset by adverse environmental or epidemiological effects of improved road access. Overall, the findings underscore the role of road infrastructure in fostering development across Sub-Saharan Africa.