

Navigating the crossroads: Challenges and opportunities for governance reform in Sudan

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Abstract

There is a critical need for comprehensive governance reform in Sudan, a nation navigating the turbulent shift from decades of authoritarian rule to a fragile post-conflict democracy. Through an in-depth analysis, the study examines Sudan's enduring governance challenges—corruption, ethnic tensions, and economic mismanagement—while highlighting the unique opportunities for structural reforms, such as constitutional reconfiguration, decentralization, anti-corruption initiatives, and strengthened regional collaboration. Drawing on secondary data from academic research, policy reports, and analyses by international organizations, the study underscores the transformative potential of Sudan's key stakeholders, including government institutions, civil society, international allies, and regional neighbors. Findings reveal that their collective involvement is vital to establishing a foundation for long-term peace and stability. This article concludes with actionable recommendations aimed at fostering a governance system that is transparent, inclusive, and accountable—an aspiration that hinges on the sustained engagement and collaboration of these pivotal actors in Sudan's journey toward a democratic future.

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1. Introduction

Sudan's political and governance landscape has been characterized by instability, conflicts, and repeated shifts between military intervention to rule the country as a coup system and civilian rule. Since its independence in 1956, the government has experienced protracted civil wars, economic crises, and authoritarian governance (Collins, 2008; Johnson, 2003). The complex political history is underscored by persistent regional, ethnic, and religious divisions, further exacerbated by struggles for power among various political factions (de Waal, 2007; Al-Affendi, 2009). Despite moments of hope, particularly after the 2019 ousting of long-time dictator Omar al-Bashir, Sudan's journey toward democratic governance remains fraught with obstacles. However, the article also highlights the potential for positive change, particularly in anti-corruption measures, regional cooperation, and constitutional reform. The ongoing dominance of the military, internal conflicts and a fragile economic system are key factors that continue to hinder efforts toward peace, security, and inclusive governance, but they are not insurmountable. These factors are challenges and severe impediments that need urgent attention and resolution.

Recent political developments in Sudan reflect both progress and setbacks. The 2019 revolution, led by a diverse coalition of civil society actors, youth, and women's groups, brought down Bashir and ignited hope for a new democratic era (International Crisis Group, 2019). The transitional government, comprising both civilian and military leaders, sought to pave the way toward democratic elections and governance reforms; however, the October 2021 military coup led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his deputy disrupted this fragile progress, returning Sudan to military rule (Human et al., 2021). The war that erupted in April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) plunged the country into a more profound crisis, resulting in significant loss of life, displacement, and a deteriorating humanitarian situation (Al Jazeera, 2023). Additionally, the ongoing economic crisis—driven by inflation, unemployment, and currency devaluation—has compounded these challenges, leaving millions of Sudanese in dire conditions (World Bank, 2023).

Governance reform is paramount for Sudan to emerge from its current challenges. At the heart of the country's instability is the absence of inclusive, transparent, and accountable governance structures. For decades, the concentration of power in the hands of military and political elites, alongside rampant corruption, has marginalized large segments of the

population, particularly in peripheral regions like Darfur, South Kordofan, and the Blue Nile. Efforts to resolve conflicts, foster peace, and promote sustainable development will likely succeed with meaningful governance reform. As Sudan faces the twin political instability and economic hardship crises, governance reform presents a pathway to addressing these entrenched problems while seizing opportunities for democratic transformation and financial recovery.

Sudan's transition to democracy and governance reform has also drawn significant international attention. The African Union (AU), the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), and neighboring countries have been actively engaged in mediating the political process and providing humanitarian assistance (International Crisis Group, 2023; United Nations, 2023). However, international efforts alone cannot guarantee long-term stability. Internal reforms, judicial and legal reforms, anti-corruption reforms, security sector reform (SSR), decentralization and regional autonomy, public administration and civil service reforms, economic and fiscal reforms, constitutional and electoral reforms, human rights and transitional justice driven by Sudanese actors, are necessary to rebuild state institutions, restore public trust, and create an environment conducive to peace and economic development.

The economic dimension of Sudan's crisis is equally pressing. Years of sanctions, mismanagement, and conflict have weakened the country's economy. The post-revolution transitional government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, implemented reforms aimed at stabilizing the economy, including currency devaluation, subsidy cuts, and negotiations with international financial institutions for debt relief. While these reforms were necessary, they were also deeply unpopular, leading to widespread protests as living conditions worsened. With the onset of renewed conflict, the prospects for economic recovery have diminished further, heightening the need for governance reforms that address both political and economic challenges in an integrated manner.

Sudan's political and governance landscape has been marked by challenges that hinder its transition towards democratic governance and sustainable development. Since gaining independence in 1956, Sudan has faced prolonged civil wars, authoritarian rule, economic instability, and internal power struggles. The persistent conflict, coupled with systemic corruption, weak state institutions, and deep ethnic, regional, and religious divisions, has created a fragile political environment. Despite the hopes raised by the 2019 revolution, which brought down the long-standing dictatorship of Omar al-Bashir, the country has faced setbacks,

including the October 2021 military coup and the devastating conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in 2023. These events have significantly impacted Sudan's ability to pursue effective governance reforms, exacerbating the economic and humanitarian crises.

Comprehensive governance reforms are urgently needed. To address Sudan's economic crisis and promote sustainable development, reforms that tackle the root causes of political instability and financial mismanagement must be implemented. Such reforms would include anti-corruption measures, strengthening the judiciary, decentralization, and promoting transparency in public administration.

This paper aims to evaluate Sudan's current political and governance landscape, focusing on the challenges and opportunities for reform. Similarly, this paper also aims to evaluate the significance of governance reform in addressing Sudan's economic crisis and promoting sustainable development and assess the role of internal and external actors, including civil society, regional organizations, and the international community, in facilitating governance reform in Sudan.

Sudan's transition to democracy and governance reform represents a critical juncture in the country's history. The coming years will determine whether Sudan can break free from the cycle of authoritarianism, conflict, and economic mismanagement or continue to struggle with instability. This paper argues that governance reform is the key to unlocking Sudan's potential and ensuring its people's peaceful, prosperous future.

2. Literature review

2.1. Governance in Sudan

Sudan's governance history is marked by dramatic shifts, oscillating between democratic aspirations and authoritarian rule. Since gaining independence from joint British-Egyptian rule in 1956, the country has struggled with civil wars, military coups, and economic crises, shaping its political trajectory. (El-Mahdi, 2010; Ali, 2015). Sudan's governance challenges today are deeply rooted in its colonial past, fragmented political landscape, and inability to establish a stable and inclusive political order. Understanding Sudan's governance challenges requires an examination of its history before and after independence, as well as the key issues that have hindered progress toward democratic governance.

Pre- and post-independence governance. Before independence, Sudan's governance was dominated by colonial authorities who ruled through indirect governance and limited political engagement with the Sudanese population. The Anglo-Egyptian Condominium, established in 1899, allowed British administrators to control much of Sudan's political and economic system while local elites managed regional and tribal affairs. This form of governance deepened ethnic and regional divisions, particularly between the Arab-Muslim north and the predominantly non-Arab, non-Muslim south, which would later become a central factor in Sudan's post-independence conflicts (Daly, 1991).

Military coups and civil wars have shaped Sudan's post-independence history. The first democratic government, established after independence in 1956, was short-lived, as General Ibrahim Abboud led the first military coup in 1958—this preceded military involvement in politics, defining much of Sudan's governance structure over the following decades. Sudan experienced intermittent periods of civilian rule in the 1960s and 1980s, but each was interrupted by military takeovers. The rise of Islamist authoritarianism under President Omar al-Bashir, who came to power through a coup in 1989, marked a particularly repressive era. Bashir's government ruled with an iron fist, systematically suppressing opposition, restricting civil liberties, and intensifying ethnic and regional conflicts, most notably in Darfur (Johnson, 2011).

After months of mass protests, the ousting of Bashir in 2019 heralded a new chapter for Sudan. Establishing a transitional government composed of civilian and military leaders raised hopes for democratic reforms. However, the military October 2021 coup, which disrupted the fragile transition, and the subsequent civil war between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in 2023 have plunged the country into renewed conflict and instability.

2.2. Critical Challenges to Governance in Sudan (Hassan, 2020; Khalil, 2022; Elhadi, 2023)

Authoritarianism. Sudan's history is marred by authoritarian rule, with the military and political elites monopolizing power for much of the country's modern history. This concentration of power has marginalized large segments of society, especially in peripheral regions, and has prevented the establishment of democratic governance. The repeated military interventions, coupled with long-standing authoritarian practices under leaders like Bashir,

have fostered a political culture where dissent is suppressed, civil liberties are restricted, and political opposition is often violently repressed. These authoritarian structures have persisted despite attempts at democratic transitions, such as the brief periods of civilian rule in the 1960s, 1980s, and after 2019 (Ahmed, 2019).

Corruption. Corruption is deeply entrenched in Sudan's political and economic systems. Under Bashir, corruption became institutionalized, with the ruling elites, military officers, and their allies controlling vast segments of the economy and siphoning off public resources for Personal gain. Conversely, the NCP is a political cover for Bashir's regime. It controls all the strategic sources and institutions in Sudan, which has deepened corruption everywhere in the state. Transparency International consistently ranks Sudan as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Corruption has undermined state institutions, weakened public trust, and perpetuated cycles of poverty and underdevelopment. Even after Bashir's fall, efforts to combat corruption have been hampered by the continued dominance of military and political elites with vested interests in maintaining the status quo (International Crisis Group, 2020).

Ethnic and regional tensions. Sudan's diverse ethnic and regional composition has been a significant source of conflict. The north-south divide, which culminated in the secession of South Sudan in 2011, is just one example of how ethnic and regional tensions have shaped Sudan's governance challenges. Conflicts in Darfur, South Kordofan, and the Blue Nile regions have persisted for decades, driven by marginalization, resource competition, and political exclusion (Pemunta et al., 2021). Successive governments in Khartoum have been accused of prioritizing the interests of the Arab-dominated center while neglecting the needs of peripheral regions. These tensions have led to repeated insurgencies and have complicated efforts to build a unified, inclusive national identity (De Waal, 2015).

Economic mismanagement. Economic mismanagement has been a constant in Sudan's governance history. Successive governments prioritized military spending and patronage networks over economic development, particularly under Bashir. Corruption and the loss of oil revenues after South Sudan's secession have left Sudan with a weakened economy characterized by high inflation, unemployment, and a devalued currency. Attempts at

economic reform, such as the transitional government removal of subsidies and currency devaluation, have been met with widespread resistance due to the worsening living conditions for ordinary Sudanese citizens. The ongoing war has further devastated the economy, with inflation spiraling and millions displaced, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis (World Bank, 2022).

2.3. Current Challenges and Obstacles

Sudan's current governance challenges are compounded by the ongoing war between the SAF and RSF, which has shattered hopes for a peaceful transition to democracy. The conflict has displaced millions, destroyed infrastructure, and worsened the already dire economic situation. Additionally, the military continued to hold on to power, combined with the proliferation of armed groups, making the prospects for governance reform extremely difficult. Furthermore, international sanctions, reduced foreign investment, and a lack of global consensus on supporting Sudan's transition have limited the options for recovery. Civil society, which played a vital role in the 2019 revolution, continues to push for democratic reforms, but its efforts are stifled by the militarized political environment and ongoing violence (Sudan Update, 2023).

Sudan's governance challenges are rooted in its history of authoritarian rule, ethnic and regional divisions, corruption, and economic mismanagement. Recent conflicts and political instability have exacerbated these issues, making governance reform urgent yet difficult. Addressing these structural challenges will likely help Sudan achieve lasting peace or sustainable development.

2.4. Theoretical Framework

Institutional theory provides a critical framework for understanding how Sudan's political institutions, shaped by decades of authoritarianism, may resist change. This theory posits that institutions are "sticky" — they preserve established norms, routines, and power structures that perpetuate authoritarianism, corruption, and economic mismanagement, often hindering reform efforts (March & Olsen, 1984). In Sudan, institutional inertia has sustained a legacy of centralized, autocratic governance marked by exclusionary policies and systems of patronage that concentrate power in the hands of a few.

For Sudan to overcome these entrenched institutional dynamics, comprehensive and strategic reform must be required to dismantle corruption and entrenched authority systems. This involves redefining the roles and functions of institutions across the executive, legislative, and judicial branches to ensure a balanced separation of powers and mitigate excessive centralization. Institutional reform must also address the norms facilitating authoritarianism and corruption, such as patron-client relationships and a lack of checks on executive power.

One of the most immediate needs for institutional reform in Sudan is revising the constitutional framework to create a transparent, accountable, and inclusive system that respects the rule of law and protects citizens' rights. Institutional theory suggests that, in post-conflict states, constitutional and legal reforms are essential to creating governance frameworks prioritizing democratic practices and inclusivity. By embedding these principles in Sudan's constitution, reformers can establish legal protections against abuses of power and ensure that marginalized groups — including women, ethnic minorities, and rural populations — have meaningful representation in government (Andrews, 2013).

Studies of other post-conflict contexts emphasize that institutional reforms are most effective when they promote inclusivity and public accountability, as these features help dismantle authoritarian legacies and prevent the re-emergence of autocratic tendencies (North et al., 2009). Sudan's transitional government, therefore, has the opportunity to redefine institutional roles by implementing reforms that foster transparency and civic engagement, which are vital for rebuilding public trust and creating a resilient democratic foundation.

The experience of countries such as South Africa and Tunisia illustrates that effective post-conflict institutional reform requires establishing independent institutions for monitoring and enforcing anti-corruption measures and transparent judicial and electoral processes. In Sudan, strengthening anti-corruption agencies and judicial independence would significantly contribute to eliminating the corruption networks and personalist rule that have destabilized governance for decades (North et al., 2009).

Institutional theory underscores the need for Sudan to adopt a governance model that actively dismantles the structures of authoritarianism and corruption. Only through deliberate, inclusive reforms that address Sudan's specific historical and political context can the country build institutions capable of fostering stability, accountability, and inclusive development

3. Methodology

This study adopts a secondary research approach, relying exclusively on established, reputable sources to investigate Sudan's governance challenges and reform requirements. The analysis draws from various academic articles addressing issues such as authoritarianism, civil conflict, and the influence of international actors on Sudan's political evolution. Reports from critical international organizations—namely the United Nations, African Union, European Union, and World Bank—form the cornerstone of the data collection. These reports provide in-depth policy recommendations, evaluations of governance reforms, and analyses of peacebuilding efforts that have shaped Sudan's current governance landscape. They also offer critical insights into the legislative frameworks guiding governance in Sudan, reflecting historical and contemporary influences.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Opportunities for Governance Reform in Sudan

Sudan's ongoing political and economic crisis presents profound challenges and critical opportunities for governance reform. In light of recent conflicts, constitutional breakdowns, and ongoing civil unrest, there are several areas where meaningful reforms could address long-standing governance issues and pave the way for a more stable, inclusive political system. Constitutional reforms, decentralization, anti-corruption initiatives, and regional and international cooperation are among the most promising opportunities (Khalil, 2022; Elhadi, 2023). These reforms are opportunities and essential imperatives for Sudan's future. The need for inclusive decision-making, which includes marginalized groups such as women and youth, is critical. Reforms must also consider local contexts and the diverse ethnic, cultural, and regional backgrounds of Sudan's population to ensure that all voices are heard in reconstructing a democratic governance system.

Constitutional reforms. Constitutional reforms also offer the opportunity to redefine the relationship between the central government and Sudan's diverse regions. In a country where ethnic, regional, and cultural divisions have historically been exploited for political gain, an inclusive constitutional framework that guarantees equal rights and representation for all Sudanese citizens could help address grievances, particularly in conflict-affected areas like Darfur and South Kordofan (De Waal, 2020). Moreover, a robust constitution can safeguard

against future authoritarianism by enshrining democratic norms and ensuring that no single entity monopolizes power.

Decentralization and local governance. Decentralization presents another crucial opportunity for reform. Sudan's history of highly centralized governance, where power and resources were concentrated in Khartoum, has contributed to political exclusion and regional marginalization, fueling conflicts in the country's peripheries. A decentralized governance model, where authority is devolved to local and regional governments, could empower marginalized regions to take control of their political and economic affairs. This model would allow local communities more significant input in decision-making processes, ensuring that governance structures reflect the needs and aspirations of Sudan's diverse population (Aalen, 2011).

Decentralization could also facilitate better service delivery at the local level, improving infrastructure, healthcare, and education in regions that the central government has historically neglected. By empowering local governments, Sudan can foster greater political inclusion, reduce regional disparities, and build trust between the state and its citizens. For this to succeed, however, decentralization can also give Sudanese a chance to manage diversity, which has been one of the main challenges in Sudan since independence because the central government did not recognize all these different cultures and different languages. Efforts must be accompanied by clear frameworks for resource allocation and fiscal autonomy for local governments (El-Battahani, 2019).

Anti-corruption initiatives. Corruption has long been Sudan's most significant obstacle to good governance. Under the Bashir regime, corruption became institutionalized, with political elites and military leaders controlling vast sectors of the economy. One of the critical opportunities for reform lies in implementing comprehensive anti-corruption initiatives. Following Bashir's removal, there was a brief opening where anti-corruption efforts gained momentum, with the transitional government establishing anti-corruption commissions and seeking to recover stolen assets (Transparency International, 2020).

Moving forward, a sustainable anti-corruption framework will require establishing independent, well-resourced oversight institutions. Such institutions should be empowered to investigate, prosecute, and penalize corrupt practices, regardless of the political affiliations of

the individuals involved. Transparency measures, such as public financial disclosures and open government data initiatives, can further enhance accountability. Anti-corruption reforms will not only reduce the misuse of public resources. Still, they will also help rebuild trust between the government and citizens, essential for political stability and long-term development (World Bank, 2022).

Regional and international cooperation. Regional and international cooperation allows Sudan to leverage external support for its governance reforms. Sudan is strategically located in the Horn of Africa, a historically unstable region, but also has the potential for cooperative development initiatives. By engaging with regional organizations such as the African Union (AU) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Sudan can participate in peacebuilding initiatives, conflict resolution mechanisms, and development programs that promote stability and regional integration (Mulugeta, 2017).

Internationally, organizations such as the United Nations and the World Bank have played a key role in supporting Sudan's transitional government, particularly in economic reforms and institution-building. The international community has provided technical assistance, financial aid, and diplomatic pressure to support governance reforms in Sudan. For example, global financial institutions have offered debt relief programs contingent upon Sudan implementing economic and governance reforms, incentivizing the country to pursue these changes (World Bank, 2022). By aligning with international norms and standards of good governance, Sudan can also attract foreign investment, which is critical for economic recovery and development.

Despite Sudan's current political and economic crises, several critical opportunities for governance reform could pave the way for a more inclusive, democratic, and accountable system. Constitutional reform, decentralization, anti-corruption initiatives, and regional and international cooperation offer pathways to address the country's entrenched governance challenges. Seizing these opportunities will require political will, strong institutions, and sustained efforts from Sudanese stakeholders and the international community.

4.2. Key Stakeholders and Their Roles in Sudan's Governance Reform

The governance reform process in Sudan involves multiple stakeholders, each playing a critical role in shaping the country's political future. These stakeholders include government

institutions, civil society organizations, international partners, and regional actors. Understanding each stakeholder's interests, capacities, and roles is essential for implementing effective governance reforms and ensuring the sustainability of democratic transitions.

Government institutions. Sudan's government institutions are central to the governance reform process, both as agents of reform and as obstacles. The transitional government, established after the ousting of Omar al-Bashir in 2019, attempted to lay the groundwork for democracy and institutional reform. However, the military role in the transitional process has been a significant challenge. The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have historically held considerable power in Sudan, and their interests often conflict with democratic reforms. These military institutions are reluctant to cede power, particularly regarding civilian oversight and accountability, which they view as threats to their economic and political dominance (El-Battahani, 2019).

In addition to the military, other government bodies play essential roles in the reform process. The judiciary, for example, is responsible for upholding the rule of law and ensuring that governance reforms are legally grounded. However, the judiciary has been criticized for lacking independence, particularly under Bashir's regime. Reforms to restore judicial independence and capacity are necessary to implement governance reforms successfully (De Waal, 2020). Moreover, administrative bodies such as the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning are critical to managing economic reforms that accompany political transitions. Strengthening these institutions to promote transparency, efficient resource allocation, and accountability is crucial for addressing Sudan's financial mismanagement and corruption (World Bank, 2022).

Government institutions can also be significant stakeholders in governance reform at the local level, especially as Sudan moves toward decentralization. Local governments need greater authority and resources to address the unique needs of their constituencies, particularly in historically marginalized regions like Darfur and South Kordofan. The success of decentralization efforts will depend on empowering these local institutions while ensuring they are accountable to the citizens they serve.

Civil society organizations. Civil society organizations (CSOs) have played a transformative role in Sudan's political landscape, particularly during the 2019 revolution that

led to the fall of Bashir's regime. CSOs, including youth groups, women's organizations, and human rights activists, have advocated for governance reforms, greater accountability, democratic principles, and the protection of human rights. For instance, the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), a coalition of trade unions, was a vital driver of the revolution, organizing mass protests that ultimately led to political change (Gallopín, 2020).

The role of CSOs in the governance reform process is multifaceted. They are essential in mobilizing public opinion, providing oversight of government actions, and advocating for the inclusion of marginalized groups in political processes. Women's organizations have been vocal about the need for gender-sensitive governance reforms, ensuring women's rights and political representation are prioritized in the transition process (Elsheikh, 2020). Furthermore, CSOs often serve as intermediaries between the government and the population, helping to build trust and legitimacy in the reform process. In many cases, they also provide vital services, such as education, health, and humanitarian aid, particularly in areas where the government is absent or ineffective.

Despite their significant role, civil society in Sudan faces numerous challenges. The repressive policies of the former regime and the subsequent instability have created a volatile environment for CSOs, limiting their ability to operate freely. Many organizations continue to face harassment, intimidation, and legal obstacles, particularly those that challenge the authority of the military or advocate for human rights. For governance reforms to succeed, the government must create a conducive environment for civil society by protecting their rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and association.

International partners. International partners, including the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN), have supported Sudan's transition to democracy and governance reform efforts. These international bodies play critical roles in mediation, peacekeeping, and providing technical and financial support for institutional reforms.

The African Union has been critical in mediating Sudan's political crises. Following the 2019 revolution, the AU helped facilitate negotiations between civilian and military leaders, leading to the establishment of the transitional government. The AU's principles of non-interference and African-led solutions have made it a significant mediator, promoting dialogue and conflict resolution in Sudan's complex political environment (Mulugeta, 2017). The AU Peace and Security Council has also played a role in monitoring the implementation

of ceasefires and peace agreements in conflict areas like Darfur, ensuring that regional stability is maintained while governance reforms are implemented.

Through its mission in Sudan (UNITAMS), the United Nations provides technical assistance, political support, and capacity-building for governance reform. UNITAMS works to promote human rights, strengthen democratic institutions, and assist in peacebuilding efforts. The UN has also been involved in economic reforms, working alongside international financial institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to provide debt relief and economic assistance contingent upon governance reforms (World Bank, 2022). The UN's peacekeeping operations have also been critical in protecting civilians in conflict-affected regions, contributing to a more stable environment where governance reforms can take root.

While international partners offer vital support, there are also concerns about the sustainability of reforms heavily reliant on external actors. For governance reforms to be effective, they must be driven by Sudanese stakeholders and reflect the aspirations of the Sudanese people. International partners must balance supporting and respecting Sudan's sovereignty and the need for locally-owned solutions.

Regional actors. There is an intricate web of regional dynamics shaping Sudan and its neighbors, particularly South Sudan. The current instability in Sudan, exacerbated by the war, has immediate repercussions for South Sudan, especially its economy, which is heavily reliant on the oil pipeline running through Sudan. The cutoff of this pipeline due to the conflict has crippled South Sudan's primary source of revenue, illustrating the profound interconnectedness of our nations. South Sudan's stability is not just a local issue; it is tied to the broader governance failures and conflicts in Sudan.

Sudan's governance reform process has far-reaching implications for its future and the entire region. Ethiopia and Egypt, two key neighbors, have vested interests in Sudan's stability, each shaped by their political realities and strategic concerns. Despite its internal strife, Ethiopia has historically played a critical mediating role, but tensions over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) and border disputes with Sudan strain this relationship. Similarly, Egypt's concerns over its share of the Nile waters align its interests with Sudan's military leaders, complicating broader governance reform efforts to establish civilian rule. The roles of other regional powers, such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, further underscore the geopolitical

stakes in Sudan's future. Their economic aid and political influence are driven by strategic interests, especially in the Red Sea, and emphasize the complex, competing interests surrounding Sudan's governance reform process.

Ultimately, the fate of Sudan's governance is inextricably linked with regional stability, and understanding the motivations and pressures from neighboring countries like Ethiopia, Egypt, and South Sudan is essential for crafting sustainable solutions. Sudan's challenges in reforming its governance structures—particularly the military and judiciary—are mirrored in the region's broader struggles with political instability, resource competition, and external influences. Only through a holistic, inclusive approach can Sudan and its neighbors hope to break the cycle of conflict and build a foundation for long-term peace and prosperity.

4.3. Recommendations for Governance Reform in Sudan

Immediate ceasefire and conflict resolution. A priority must be the immediate cessation of hostilities between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). International actors, such as the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN), should mediate a comprehensive ceasefire agreement to allow for humanitarian aid and facilitate peace talks (United Nations, 2023; African Union, 2023). Without an end to the ongoing conflict, any attempts at governance reform will be futile, as violence exacerbates existing governance challenges, displaces populations, and fuels instability (World Bank, 2023).

Constitutional and legal reforms. Implement constitutional reforms that enshrine democratic principles, human rights protections, and mechanisms for peaceful power transitions. This should include revising laws to ensure the inclusion of all ethnic, regional, and religious groups in the political process (Sudan Tribune, 2023; UNDP, 2022). Sudan's long history of authoritarianism and military control requires establishing a transparent and accountable legal framework. These reforms are necessary for political and economic stability to remain elusive (International Crisis Group, 2022).

Decentralization of power. Push for the decentralization of power to ensure that local governance structures are empowered to address the unique needs of Sudan's diverse regions.

This should be accompanied by reforms to devolve economic decision-making and resources to local governments (World Bank, 2022; UNDP, 2023). Sudan's regional and ethnic divisions can only be addressed by giving local leaders more control over decision-making processes, thus reducing the centralized control that has fueled grievances and conflict (International Crisis Group, 2021).

Anti-corruption measures. Establish robust anti-corruption frameworks and institutions, ensuring accountability measures are in place for military and civilian leaders. This includes establishing an independent anti-corruption commission and greater transparency in government spending (Transparency International, 2023; UNODC, 2023). Corruption has been a critical issue in Sudan's governance challenges. Addressing it is crucial for rebuilding the state's trust and securing domestic and international support (Transparency International, 2023).

Strengthen civil society engagement. Support the role of civil society in the democratic transition by ensuring freedom of expression and creating space for political participation. Civil society organizations, especially those representing marginalized groups such as women and youth, should be empowered to engage in governance and policy-making (Human et al., 2022; Sudan Tribune, 2023). Civil society played a pivotal role in the 2019 revolution, and its continued involvement is essential for achieving democratic reforms. However, it must be protected from military repression, which continues to hinder its efforts for reform (Human et al., 2022).

International support and sanctions reconsideration. While international sanctions have aimed to pressure the Sudanese military, they have also limited the country's access to economic recovery resources. A balanced approach should be adopted where sanctions are adjusted to incentivize democratic reform and transition while ensuring accountability for military and paramilitary actions (UN et al., 2023; International Crisis Group, 2022). International support, both financial and diplomatic, is necessary to foster long-term peace and stability in Sudan. A precise alignment of global support for Sudan's transition will provide the country with the resources needed for recovery and reform (World Bank, 2023).

Comprehensive humanitarian aid and economic recovery plans. Prioritizing the implementation of humanitarian relief programs to address immediate needs such as food, shelter, and healthcare while designing long-term economic recovery plans focusing on rebuilding infrastructure and promoting sustainable development (World Bank, 2023; OCHA, 2023). The ongoing humanitarian crisis, exacerbated by the conflict and economic mismanagement, requires immediate attention. Economic recovery ensures that reforms can take root and achieve lasting stability (OCHA, 2023).

5. Conclusion

Sudan is currently at a critical juncture in its political evolution, facing formidable challenges and significant opportunities. The urgency of governance reform is evident as the country confronts long-standing issues of authoritarian legacies, pervasive corruption, deep-seated ethnic divisions, and economic mismanagement. These factors have severely undermined Sudan's social fabric, stunted economic growth, and weakened institutional integrity. A coordinated approach involving government bodies, civil society organizations, and international allies is crucial for Sudan's successful transition. This united effort can foster the transparency, accountability, and inclusivity necessary for long-term stability.

Several foundational reforms are crucial for Sudan's future. Among these, constitutional reforms are of utmost importance. To prevent executive overreach, they must create a legal framework that ensures political freedoms, human rights, and a clear separation of powers. Strengthening anti-corruption mechanisms is vital to address systemic issues that have eroded public trust and drained national resources. Additionally, decentralization can be essential and critical in empowering marginalized regions and promoting equitable resource distribution. Moreover, enhancing regional cooperation—particularly in trade, security, and infrastructure—will contribute to peace and development in Sudan and the Horn of Africa.

As Sudan navigates this complex transition, these reforms present a promising path toward a more democratic, inclusive, and prosperous state. However, their success will depend on resilient institutions, political will, and the sustained engagement of Sudanese citizens and the international community. This moment represents a historic opportunity for Sudan to redefine its governance and secure a peaceful and equitable future for all its people.

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