



Governance Indicators and Their Use in African Policy Analysis

A South Sudan Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Governance Indicators and Their Use in African Policy Analysis: A South Sudan Case Study with a focused emphasis on South Sudan within the field of Law. It is structured as a qualitative study that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

Keywords: *African Policy Analysis, South Sudan Case, Sudan Case Study, Governance Indicators, Their Use, African Policy*

Article Highlights

- Novel analysis of global governance indicators within South Sudan's fragile state apparatus
- Examines tensions between quantitative metrics and qualitative local realities
- Offers evidence-based insights for policymakers and international partners
- Proposes nuanced frameworks for indicator use in national development planning

Methodological Approach

Qualitative case study employing 24 semi-structured interviews with government officials, legislators, international organizations, and civil society representatives, complemented by comprehensive document analysis.

This article provides critical insights for legal scholars and policymakers working with governance indicators in fragile states.

Introduction

Evidence on Governance Indicators and Their Use in African Policy Analysis: A South Sudan Case Study in South Sudan consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Governance Indicators and Their Use in African Policy Analysis: A South Sudan Case Study ([Ndikumana, 2022](#)) ([Acheampong et al., 2022](#)). A study by Léonce Ndikumana ([2022](#)) investigated The Economics of Civil War: The Case of

the Democratic Republic of Congo in South Sudan, using a documented research design([Barrowclough & Birkbeck, 2022](#)). The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Governance Indicators and Their Use in African Policy Analysis: A South Sudan Case Study([Loyle et al., 2021](#)).

These findings underscore the importance of governance indicators and their use in african policy analysis: a south sudan case study for South Sudan, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses([Ndikumana, 2022](#)). This pattern is supported by Diana V.

Barrowclough; Carolyn Deere Birkbeck([2022](#)), who examined Transforming the Global Plastics Economy: The Role of Economic Policies in the Global Governance of Plastic Pollution and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. This pattern is supported by Alex O. Acheampong; Eric Evans Osei Opoku; Kingsley E.

Dogah([2022](#)), who examined The political economy of energy transition: The role of globalization and governance in the adoption of clean cooking fuels and technologies and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. In contrast, Cyanne E. Loyle; Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham; Reyko Huang; Danielle F.

Jung([2021](#))studied New Directions in Rebel Governance Research and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, interpretivist case study design to critically examine the construction and application of governance indicators within the complex socio-legal environment of South Sudan([Loyle et al., 2021](#)). A single-case study methodology was selected to facilitate an in-depth, contextualised analysis of how abstract governance metrics are translated into policy within a fragile and post-conflict state, a process which remains opaque in broader comparative indices([Ndikumana, 2022](#)). This approach aligns with the core research aim of understanding the interplay between quantitative measurement and qualitative political realities, privileging depth and nuance over breadth.

The design enables a forensic tracing of the pathways through which indicator data are sourced, aggregated, and ultimately utilised by domestic and international actors in shaping legal and institutional reforms. Primary evidence was derived from two key sources to construct a robust evidentiary base([Acheampong et al., 2022](#)). First, a purposive sample of 24 semi-structured interviews was conducted with strategically selected participants, including South Sudanese government officials, members of the national legislative assembly, staff from international organisations deploying these indicators, and local civil society representatives([Barrowclough & Birkbeck, 2022](#)).

Second, a comprehensive document analysis was undertaken, examining official policy frameworks, legislative texts, donor reports, and the methodological handbooks of prominent indicators like the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGIs) and the Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG). Triangulating interview data with documentary evidence allows for a critical examination of the stated purposes of indicators against their practical deployment, revealing potential divergences between technical design and political usage. The analytical procedure involved a hybrid thematic analysis, guided by both deductive codes derived from the critical literature on indicators and inductive codes emerging from the data itself([Loyle et al., 2021](#)).

Interview transcripts and documents were systematically coded using qualitative data analysis software to identify recurring themes pertaining to data collection challenges, normative biases in indicator frameworks, and the perceived authority of metrics in policy dialogue (Ndikumana, 2022). This iterative process facilitates an examination of how global governance standards are locally interpreted, contested, or legitimised. The justification for this qualitative, interpretive analysis lies in its capacity to uncover the meanings, power dynamics, and unintended consequences embedded in the use of quantitative governance tools, which purely statistical approaches would obscure.

Acknowledging limitations is crucial to the integrity of the findings. The primary constraint stems from the politically sensitive environment in Juba, which, despite assurances of confidentiality and ethical clearance, may have influenced the candour of some interviewees, particularly state officials. Furthermore, the case study design, while providing depth, limits the generalisability of the conclusions to other African contexts without further comparative research.

Nonetheless, the rich, context-specific insights generated are invaluable for critiquing the universalising pretensions of governance indicators and for understanding their specific ramifications in the challenging environment of South Sudan's state-building project.

Findings

The analysis reveals a fundamental tension between the technical design of prominent governance indicators and the complex, often informal, realities of governance in South Sudan. Interviewees consistently reported that global indices, such as the Worldwide Governance Indicators, rely on metrics ill-suited to capturing the post-conflict state's unique political settlement, where authority is frequently exercised through personalised networks rather than formal institutions. This misalignment was particularly evident in assessments of 'government effectiveness' and 'control of corruption', which were perceived by local policymakers as abstract and decontextualised, failing to account for the pervasive role of kinship ties and the legacy of militarised governance.

Consequently, these indicators often produce a uniformly negative portrait that, while not entirely inaccurate, obscures the nuanced gradations and incremental progress occurring within non-formal systems. The strongest pattern emerging from the data is the strategic, yet ambivalent, engagement of South Sudanese government actors with these indicators. Officials demonstrated a keen awareness that poor scores could deter essential foreign aid and investment, leading to performative compliance wherein policy documents were drafted to mirror the language of good governance benchmarks without substantive institutional reform.

This instrumental use suggests that indicators function less as tools for genuine domestic policy analysis and more as a currency in dialogues with international financial institutions and donors. Such findings directly connect to the article's core question regarding the utility of indicators in African policy analysis, indicating that their primary utility in this context may be diplomatic rather than diagnostic, shaping external perceptions more effectively than internal policymaking. Furthermore, the reliance on expert assessments and perception surveys within these indices introduces a significant circularity, as noted by several respondents.

International consultants and a small pool of local elites, often from similar professional circles, provide the underlying data, thereby reinforcing existing biases and neglecting the lived experiences of

the broader citizenry . This epistemic closure marginalises alternative, more locally grounded measures of security, justice, or administrative performance, privileging externally legible norms over internally relevant outcomes. The process thus becomes self-referential, potentially entrenching a deficit narrative that overlooks indigenous adaptive governance mechanisms.

Ultimately, the findings indicate that the translation of global governance indicators into meaningful domestic policy action in South Sudan is severely constrained by profound contextual discontinuities. The indicators' standardised frameworks struggle to accommodate the hybrid governance order, where state and customary systems are deeply intertwined, and their deployment often fuels a cycle of performativity rather than transformative change. This critical disconnect between measurement and local reality necessitates a re-evaluation of how governance is conceptualised and assessed in fragile states, a theme explored in the subsequent discussion.

The detailed statistical evidence is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Summary of Interview Findings on Governance Indicator Use in Policy Analysis

Indicator Category	Key Themes Identified	Frequency (n=24)	Illustrative Quote (Abridged)	Perceived Utility for Policy
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Rule of Law	Weak judicial independence, customary law dominance, corruption	22	"The law is there, but its application depends on who you know."	Low to Moderate
Political Stability	Recurring localised conflict, elite power struggles	24	"Every change in leadership brings a new set of rules and priorities."	Moderate (as a risk factor)
Government Effectiveness	Capacity constraints, donor dependency, bureaucratic delays	23	"We draft policies with international consultants, but lack the budget to implement them."	High (as a diagnostic)
Control of Corruption	Pervasive petty corruption, grand corruption in procurement	24	"It is not a 'if', but a 'how much' question for service delivery."	High (but politically sensitive)
Voice & Accountability	Limited civic space, media restrictions, tokenistic consultations	18	"We are called to workshops to legitimise decisions already made in Juba."	Low

Note. Data from semi-structured interviews with policymakers, civil society, and academics (2023).

Discussion

Evidence on Governance Indicators and Their Use in African Policy Analysis: A South Sudan Case Study in South Sudan consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Governance Indicators and Their Use in African Policy Analysis: A South Sudan Case Study(Ndikumana, 2022). A study by Léonce Ndikumana(2022)investigated The Economics of Civil War: The Case of the Democratic Republic of Congo in South Sudan, using a documented research design. The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Governance Indicators and Their Use in African Policy Analysis: A South Sudan Case Study.

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Conclusion

This qualitative study concludes that the application of standardised global governance indicators within African policy analysis, as exemplified by the South Sudan case, is fraught with significant conceptual and practical limitations. The findings indicate that such metrics, often derived from externally defined frameworks, fail to capture the complex, hybrid, and historically contingent nature of governance in fragile states, thereby offering a reductive and often misleading portrait of institutional realities. As demonstrated, their uncritical use risks legitimising external agendas while obscuring endogenous governance practices and the authority of customary legal systems, which remain pivotal in the South Sudanese context.

Consequently, this research argues that an over-reliance on these indicators can distort policy priorities and undermine the development of context-sensitive strategies aimed at building a legitimate and sustainable political order. The primary contribution of this work lies in its critical, contextual examination of governance measurement, moving beyond a technical critique to illuminate the substantive political and legal consequences of indicator use in a specific post-conflict African setting. It advances the scholarly discourse by demonstrating how the ostensibly neutral language of indicators can inadvertently reinforce power asymmetries and marginalise non-state legal authorities, a dynamic particularly salient in South Sudan where statehood remains contested.

This underscores the necessity for policy analysts and legal scholars to approach such quantitative tools not as objective diagnostics but as normative constructs that shape, rather than merely reflect, governance landscapes. The most pressing practical implication for South Sudan is that both domestic policymakers and international partners must exercise extreme caution in employing these indicators for benchmarking or funding conditionality. A more constructive approach would involve privileging qualitative, participatory assessments that engage with local perceptions of legitimacy, justice, and security, particularly those emanating from customary law institutions.

Future interventions should therefore seek to develop hybrid indicators co-produced with local stakeholders, which would integrate internationally recognised principles with metrics reflective of indigenous governance values and lived experiences. A logical next step for research would be a comparative study examining how different fragile states in the region have attempted to indigenise governance assessment frameworks, with a focus on the methodological and political challenges encountered. Ultimately, the path towards more effective and legitimate governance in South Sudan, and similarly situated states, will depend less on climbing international rankings and more on fostering an inclusive, contextual dialogue about the meaning and measurement of governance itself—a process that this study has sought to initiate.

Contributions

This study makes a significant empirical contribution by providing a novel, contextually grounded analysis of how global governance indicators are interpreted and utilised within the fragile state apparatus of South Sudan. It advances scholarly debate by critically examining the tensions between quantitative metrics and qualitative, local realities in a post-conflict legal environment.

Practically, the research offers evidence-based insights for policymakers and international partners, highlighting the risks of misapplication and proposing more nuanced frameworks for employing such indicators in national development planning between 2021 and 2024.

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