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ARTICLE

Conditionality Breeds Contempt: Donor and Multilateral Myopia in Sudan

Muez Ali[1], Muzan Alneel[2] and Mayada Hassanain[3]

[1]University College London; [2]Centre for Innovation, Science and Technology for People Centered Development, Khartoum and [3]Institute for Economic Justice, Johannesburg
Corresponding author: Muez Ali; Email: m.a.ali@ucl.ac.uk

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Abstract

Sudan's political distortions under Bashir's regime between 1989 and 2018 resulted in multiple economic crises and civil wars. After assuming office in 2019, the Transitional Government implemented economic reforms aiming to stabilize the economy. It sought support from donors and international financial institutions, who conditioned support on stringent conditions. Civil society publicly decried the economic reforms and warned of the implications of discounting Sudan's political distortions. Ultimately, the military orchestrated a coup citing poor economic management. Sudan's experience highlights the importance of contextual policymaking during political transitions and the limitations of the approach employed by donors and multilateral organizations.

Résumé

Les distorsions politiques du Soudan sous le régime d'Omar el-Béchir entre 1989 et 2018 ont entraîné de multiples crises économiques et guerres civiles. Après son entrée en fonction en 2019, le gouvernement de transition a mis en œuvre des réformes économiques visant à stabiliser l'économie. Il a cherché à obtenir l'appui des donateurs et des institutions financières internationales, qui ont conditionné son soutien à des conditions strictes. La société civile a publiquement décrié les réformes économiques et mis en garde contre les implications de la minimisation des distorsions politiques du Soudan. En fin de compte, l'armée a orchestré un coup d'État en invoquant une mauvaise gestion économique. L'expérience du Soudan met en évidence l'importance de l'élaboration de politiques contextuelles pendant les transitions politiques et les limites de l'approche employée par les donateurs et les organisations multilatérales.

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Resumo

As turbulências políticas ocorridas no Sudão entre 1989 e 2018, sob o regime de Bashir, provocaram múltiplas crises económicas e guerras civis. A partir do momento em que assumiu funções, em 2019, o Governo de Transição implementou uma série de reformas económicas destinadas a estabilizar a economia. O Governo procurou apoio junto de doadores e de instituições financeiras internacionais, os quais impuseram condições rigorosas. A sociedade civil expressou publicamente a sua desaprovação dessas reformas económicas e alertou para as consequências negativas de se desvalorizar as turbulências políticas no Sudão. Por fim, os militares orquestraram um golpe de Estado, alegando a má gestão da economia. A experiência do Sudão evidencia a importância de, em situações de transição política, serem adotadas políticas que tenham em conta quer o contexto, quer as limitações da abordagem habitualmente utilizada pelos doadores e as organizações multilaterais.

Keywords: Sudan; political transitions; structural adjustment; social policy; donors; multilateral organizations

Introduction

> The overwhelming majority of the population will have nothing to lose by relying on themselves, as they have been doing so in the past anyway. Hence, the question remains, whether the economic, social and political elites can conduct themselves in a similar manner ... Perhaps the time has come for the governing minority to change its behavior and become self-reliant, for when crisis comes, it will be the only social class that will lose in the end, no matter how much wealth it has accumulated. (Ali 1990)

What does the conflict, which erupted on April 15, 2023, between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary group, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), tell us about policymaking during political transitions in developing countries? We address this question by considering the donor-sanctioned economic reform package of the Transitional Government of Sudan (TGS) and the socio-political context within which it was implemented.[1] We examine the conditions set by donors and multilateral organizations for financial support and provide examples of how donors and the government adopted an exclusionary policymaking process and ignored groups with alternative views. We contend that the revolution, which started in December 2018, and the structures that emerged from it clearly articulated the urgent need for radical reforms in the ways wealth was extracted and distributed. Yet, the economic reform plan put forth jointly by the government of Sudan and its donors was not appropriate to the needs of post-revolution Sudan. We argue that the economic reform plan prioritized short-term macroeconomic stability and deprioritized much-needed structural reforms, which ultimately fed into the cyclical nature of crises in Sudan.

The Transitional Government's reform program focused on fossil fuel subsidy removal and exchange rate liberalization. To mitigate the inflationary impacts of the reforms, the government initiated a cash transfer program targeted at the

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poorest households. The government hoped the reforms would satisfy the conditions for a Staff Monitored Program (SMP) with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and make Sudan eligible for debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, and for finance from the World Bank's International Development Agency (IDA). The cash transfer program was donor-funded and overseen by the World Bank through a Multi Donor Trust Fund. All forms of external finance were conditioned on economic reforms, some of which overlapped with the transitional government's own economic program.

Many of the policies implemented by the transitional government were similar to those implemented in earlier periods, including during al-Bashir's regime between 1989 and 2019, meaning there was certainly cautionary evidence of the political implications of harsh economic reforms.[2] Some civil society groups condemned the economic reform plan, arguing that it disregarded these historical experiences (see, for example, Alneel 2021a, 2021b). Ultimately, the Transitional Government embarked upon a set of disruptive economic reforms supported by donors and International Financial Institutions (IFIs). The Resistance Committees, neighborhood-level civil society groups that led organized resistance across the country, wanted the military out of the political process entirely. What the Committees recognized, and the international community and the transitional government's technocrats had not, was that Sudan suffered from political distortions that had negative impacts on the economy, not the other way round.[3]

In many ways, the root causes of Sudan's contemporary political struggles can be traced back to social and economic policies implemented by successive governments since Sudan's independence in 1956 (Young 2018), which resulted in uneven development along ethnic and regional lines (De Waal and Abdel Salah 2004). But certain decisions taken by the government, donor missions, and international organizations during the transitional period created favorable conditions for the military coup in October 2021, and were conducive to the political instability that ensued. This paper explores the policy choices of the Transitional Government, the conditions enforced by donors and multilateral organizations, and donor engagement with Sudan during the transitional period. More specifically, this paper sheds light on the contradictions in the reform program, which enforced a stringent set of economic policies (despite their limited success in the past) that devalued the urgent needs of political reform. Finally, the paper presents alternative approaches presented by civil society groups which were not considered.

On April 19, 2023, a news story broke about a Sudanese citizen, Mohammed Galy, with two brothers on either side of the conflict (BBC Arabic 2023). He took to Facebook to inform his brother in the SAF that their brother in the RSF was recently blessed with a newborn. In a TV interview, Mohammed gave a brief background on his siblings. Neither had completed formal education and both had limited prospects for formal, non-military employment. One joined the SAF and the other joined the RSF. Many young Sudanese men, especially at the margins, drop out of school to join the military or other armed groups. These constrained life choices are the issues that the Resistance Committees and other civil society groups are hoping to solve through institutional reform, wealth

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redistribution, and meaningful political representation. Structural marginalization has been characteristic of Sudan's economy since before independence and, surely, cannot be addressed purely by tweaking a narrow set of macroeconomic indicators.

The analysis in this article is based on historical literature, project documentation from the World Bank and IMF, and interviews with experts in government and academia. The analysis also draws on the experiences of the authors in their capacities as Sudanese citizens and as experts in different government departments at various times during the transitional period (2019–21). The authors acknowledge the limitations of the paper given its focus on one case study and the lack of a counterfactual. Yet Sudan's post-revolution experience with donor- and multilateral-sanctioned economic reforms is similar to other country experiences in sub-Saharan Africa and is certainly not unique in Sudan's modern history. This paper does not attempt to generalize the findings, but rather present Sudan's experience as evidence of the need for more inclusive and deliberative policymaking.

Background

In August 2019, Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok was sworn in under the watchful gaze of Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the head of the Transitional Military Council (TMC) and Commander-in-Chief of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF).[4] At the time, Sudan's transitional government had three branches: a Transitional Sovereignty Council, chaired by al-Burhan and made up of five civilian members representing the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) (a coalition of political parties), five members from the TMC, and one independent civilian member; a Ministerial Cabinet, headed by Hamdok and made up of fifteen Ministers; and a make-shift legislative body comprised of the twenty-seven members of the Sovereignty Council and Ministerial Cabinet. This temporary structure was to be replaced by a representative parliament within the first six months of the transitional period (Republic of Sudan 2019). However, the structure remained until the coup in October 2021.

Power-sharing was the result of contested negotiations following the revolution that started in December 2018.[5] Civilian members of the FFC asserted themselves as representatives of the Sudanese revolution, given their contribution in organizing the protests and civil disobedience that ousted Omar al-Bashir. When al-Bashir was deposed by the TMC on April 11, 2019, protesters had organized a fifty-three-day long sit-in outside the Military Headquarters and dismissed negotiations with the TMC as unacceptable (Hassan and Kadouda 2019). On June 3, in a joint military operation, members of different state security apparatuses raided the sit-in and killed over two hundred people (Sudan Tribune 2019). The TMC terminated negotiations with the FFC, cut off internet and mobile communication networks, and embarked on a month-long terror campaign in the capital city, Khartoum. They revived traditional patronage and clientelist networks to discredit the FFC and establish broader legitimacy. The Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), an umbrella association of trade unions and the

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main organizer of the protests leading to the coup, called for civil disobedience. Spurred on by support from regional powers, the TMC ignored calls from the broader international community to resume negotiations and by mid-June 2019, it was clear the TMC was no longer interested in power-sharing. On June 30, a "million-man march" organized by civil society through word-of-mouth opposed the TMC's security apparatus, clarifying their demands for radical reform, justice, and an end to impunity by the military faction. The protests demonstrated civil society's determination and proved critical in pressuring the military to resume negotiations with the FFC.

The two parties agreed to a thirty-nine-month transitional period, during which a military member would lead the Sovereignty Council for the first twenty-one months and a civilian member for the remainder of the period, with elections to follow (Republic of Sudan 2019). The power sharing agreements were detailed in the Constitutional Declaration, a temporary constitution to govern the transitional period. Supporters of the arrangement, including the FFC, argued that it was the only realistic path to achieve the demands of the revolution. Abdalla Hamdok was shortlisted for the position of transitional prime minister along with two other candidates. Hamdok holds a PhD in Development Studies from the University of Manchester and at the time was the Deputy Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa. Familiar with multilateral organizations, and international development and state-building rhetoric, he was seen as acceptable to both donors and the Sudanese public. Although considered for the role of Minister of Finance during al-Bashir's government, he had refused the position. Unaffiliated with any political party, he was viewed as a politically independent expert with the knowledge and networks to revive Sudan's economy.

After several weeks of talks with the FFC, the African Union and officials from the international community, Hamdok accepted the nomination and was welcomed back to Sudan by a jubilant crowd, full of hope for a better future. But his task was complicated. First, he had to accept this new power sharing structure. Despite the Constitutional Declaration affording Hamdok all executive powers and confining the Sovereignty Council's activities to only official, ceremonial, and diplomatic duties (Republic of Sudan 2019, ch. 8), the scales were tipped in the military's favor. The Sovereignty Council, headed by al-Burhan and his deputy, Mohamed Hamdan Daglo (Himedti), was the *de facto* head of state. Defense expenditure was more than 50 percent of the budget and the military had significant investments in all sectors of the economy.

Second, Hamdok was expected to reintegrate Sudan into the international community. Sudan had been under US sanctions since 1997. As a result, foreign direct investment was limited (except from China and countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council [GCC]), and Sudan had no access to international finance networks (Ebaidalla 2013). Sudan also had a tenuous relationship with IFIs due to missed debt servicing fees. To access debt relief, Hamdok had to mend relations with the IMF. Third, Hamdok had to address the conflicts in Darfur, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile state and initiate a peace process with numerous rebel groups.[6] These efforts eventually culminated in the Juba Peace Agreement (JPA),

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which was signed in October 2020 between the government of Sudan and the Sudanese Revolutionary Front.[7]

Through the JPA, leaders from the different rebel groups were allocated ministerial positions in the cabinet and seats in the Sovereignty Council (Republic of Sudan 2020). The JPA followed the same wealth-sharing logic of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA): the central government would transfer funds to provincial governments and allocate budgets for postconflict reconstruction.[8] On paper, the terms seemed reasonable to both sides, yet the actual process of implementation and how it would be financed was less clear. Moreover, the JPA had little to say about the vanguards themselves. For example, how would the RSF transfer or cede control over mining? Would resources in conflict areas be relinquished or transferred to government control? Ultimately, the JPA's only discernible achievement was to secure key government positions for senior members of the Sudanese Revolutionary Front; more pertinently, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning and the Ministry of Welfare and Social Support.

Finally, Hamdok had to live up to the expectations of the Sudanese population, who, since the beginning of the revolution, had articulated clear demands and expectations around expanding public provisioning and social protection. This was an early sign of potential rifts between popular demands and the government's reform agenda. For example, IFIs were unlikely to accept unconditional cancellation of debt accrued under a military dictatorship or provide financial support for universal health care.[9] Hamdok, therefore, had to choose between appeasing the IFIs or responding to the demands and aspirations of the Sudanese population. Siding with the revolution would have strengthened grassroots organizations—the main, and perhaps only, weapon of Sudanese civil society and the civilian faction in the transitional government against any threat of the military reneging on the power sharing agreement.[10]

While Hamdok enjoyed mass popular support—evidenced by the popularity of phrases like "Thank you, Hamdok!" on social media platforms—it was the idea that captured people's imagination. He was everything al-Bashir and his predecessors were not: an educated, apolitical technocrat who was now prime minister. Perhaps the Sudanese public's perception of their new leadership gave Hamdok the confidence to pass off the government's reform program as objectively better than any alternative. Ultimately, the transitional period ended in October 2021 following a military coup.

Economic reform but political continuity

Soon after assuming office, in October 2019, Hamdok and the new Minister of Finance of the Transitional Government visited the US, where Hamdok gave speeches at the World Bank and the United Nations on Sudan's fight for democracy. They briefed the World Bank, IMF, and the Atlantic Council about their economic program. The IMF meeting initiated the process for a Staff Monitored Program (SMP), which Hamdok and the Minister of Finance hoped would lead to debt relief.

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Although discussed in Washington, the government's plans for the 2020 budget were never shared publicly in Sudan. In December 2019, the budget was presented privately to the economic council of the FFC, donor missions, the Ministerial Cabinet and professional segments of society, such as some Sudanese-American professional associations and private sector trade organizations. These decisions were an early indication of which professional and social networks the government deemed relevant to its success and legitimacy.

The government's proposed reforms, articulated in the 2020 budget, were almost identical to those laid out by the IMF as conditions for an SMP six months later.[11] Acknowledging the inflationary effects and inevitable impacts on low-income households, the government proposed a quasi-universal cash transfer program as a mitigation measure.[12] The program would target six million households (almost thirty million people out of a population of forty-five million) with monthly cash payments for eighteen months. With a cost of over US$2 billion, the government presented it to donors as a solution to two major problems. First, it would help protect households from the price increases resulting from subsidy removal and exchange rate unification. Second, donor funds would provide the Central Bank with much-needed foreign currency. In the end, donors agreed. The World Bank was brought in to provide oversight and manage the funds through a Multi Donor Trust Fund, while the UN's World Food Program (WFP) would help with registration and cash disbursements.

The government hoped the program would reinforce the state's legitimacy by providing visible assistance and contributing to peacebuilding efforts in conflict areas. To be clear, the program was initiated by Sudanese policymakers but was publicly viewed as externally imposed (Ali and Mann 2023). Cash transfer programs have become a regular part of IMF and World Bank reform programming and are often used as "add on" social protection cushions alongside stabilization policies, which ironically have been shown to have destabilizing effects (see, for example, Ali and Mann 2023, for Sudan; Saalbrink and Archer 2023, for Zambia; and Biglaiser and McGauvran 2022, for the effects of IMF loan conditions on poverty). In Egypt, for example, these programs are called Takaful and Karama (World Bank 2015). In Sudan, the program also had a longer-term objective of targeting the poorest 20 percent with a permanent social safety net.

Implementation would prove challenging for several reasons: target populations were difficult to reach, the program lacked the capacity to register households and relied on noneligible households to self-exclude, and there were no alternatives. For those who were economically, socially, and politically vulnerable, it was either social protection through the program or nothing.[13] This lack of alternative partially explains the high enrollment rate.[14] Funds for the program were to be allocated in three phases. Donors committed US$400 million for the first six months (World Bank 2021a). Then, subject to availability, transfers would continue for another twelve months. This phased structure meant that subsequent phases were only possible if donors provided more funds, putting the program and its beneficiaries at the mercy of decisions beyond their control. For example, donor satisfaction with the first phase of implementation, or unexpected budget cuts due to the COVID-19 pandemic or geopolitical events, would impact the amount of committed funding. To garner public support, both

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donors and the government were keen to market it as a compassionate tool to mitigate against the impact of the economic reforms. Yet donors needed more guarantees. The new government had yet to prove itself fiscally and monetarily responsible. In response, donors turned to the IMF, which, at the time, was briskly drafting its conditions for an SMP.

At the Friends of Sudan conference in May 2020, donors reiterated their support for the civilian transitional government. They agreed to the Mutual Partnership Framework (MPF), which set out the guidelines for international assistance (Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs 2020). The chair of the conference, Remi Marechaux, the French Africa and Indian Ocean Director, asserted that "[the Mutual Partnership Framework] is a good base for close partnership [between the government and donors] ... [and will facilitate] the objectives of the Sudanese people and fulfill their legitimate aspirations to freedom, peace, justice and prosperity" (Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs 2020, 1). Despite these claims, donor commitments fell short of what the government deemed necessary to revive the economy. Marechaux stressed that the Friends were keen on the IMF's SMP and supporting a debt-relief process under the HIPC initiative. To be eligible, a "government must establish a track record of good performance under programs of the IMF and World Bank," (the SMP) and "successfully implement key reforms agreed to with the IMF and World Bank, and adopt and implement a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) for at least one year" (IMF n.d.).[15] The main objective of the PRSP prepared by the Sudanese government in 2021, as indicated in an IMF Joint Staff Advisory Note, was not, paradoxically, poverty reduction, but to "fulfill the Enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative's poverty reduction strategy requirements" (IMF 2021d, 1). During the conference, donors committed US $1.8 billion. A significant portion was to be allocated for the cash transfer program (UN 2020).

To qualify for an SMP, the government had to commit to reforms in three policy areas: exchange rate, monetary and financial sector policies; fiscal reforms; and business climate and governance reforms (IMF 2021a). Among the proposed measures, the adoption of a market-determined exchange rate and fossil fuel subsidy removal were the policies most likely to have immediate impacts. Understandably, these were the major talking points during the IMF's virtual mission to Sudan in June and July 2020. From the IMF's point of view, the negotiations were merely a data gathering exercise. On paper, the objectives of the meetings were to give IMF modelers an opportunity to raise concerns about data shared by different government departments, and to provide the government with an opportunity to negotiate the conditions of the SMP. But rebuttals to the IMF's proposed reforms were limited (Economist, University of Khartoum, interview, Cairo, Egypt, May 5, 2023). The government's own economic reform program was almost identical to the conditions set by the IMF for an SMP. By the end of the two-week mission, the government and IMF agreed on the necessary reforms and the IMF issued a press statement concluding the mission.

The IMF mission had been scheduled two months prior to the National Economic Conference in September 2020, which was organized by the Economic Council of the FFC with support from civil society. The conference was

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conceptualized to serve as a platform for alternative policy proposals and debates around the government's reform program. The government reluctantly agreed to participate following pushback on its 2020 budget. Yet, given the timing of the two events and the conclusion of the IMF mission in July 2020, to external observers, the outcomes of the conference were irrelevant as far as the government and IMF were concerned. The government promised the IMF that it would remove fossil fuel subsidies by July 2020 and unify the exchange rate shortly thereafter. The government lifted subsidies in September 2020, and the IMF approved the SMP in the same month (IMF 2020).

After the removal of subsidies, inflation jumped to 212 percent in September 2020 from 166 percent in August, a significant increase compared to 57 percent a year earlier (Central Bank of Sudan 2021). Inflation then increased by 254 percent in November 2020. On February 8, 2021, pursuant to the JPA, a new cabinet was sworn in. Gibril Ibrahim, the head of the Justice and Equality Movement, was appointed Minister of Finance and Economic Planning, and floated the Sudanese Pound a week into his new job. Inflation in February and March 2021 reached 300 percent and peaked in August at 422 percent, averaging 359 percent in 2021 (Central Bank of Sudan 2021).

During the launch of the cash transfer program in February 2021, the Prime Minister maintained that "[the program] will restore confidence by developing effective social protection policies and institutions that fulfill the demands and aspiration of the Sudanese people for a decent living" (World Bank 2021d). However, despite the Prime Minister's remarks, Sudanese people, poor and unfortunate as they are, might have used the transfers to address immediate needs but certainly did not aspire to receive monthly cash payments. Their demands and aspirations were broadly highlighted in the slogans of the revolution: freedom, peace and justice, and a civilian government representative of the population. It was unclear what US$5 per person per month could achieve. Under the program, a family of five would receive the equivalent of less than US$1 a day. While the transfer might cover basic expenses for some households, it was a stretch to assume it would provide a decent living. Having said that, the prime minister's remarks may be explained by the need for a political win and pressure to deliver. Donors, however, had the luxury of time and the resources to understand the demands of the revolution and the volatility of the political transition.

Further reforms were to come. In June 2021, the IMF issued a press release highlighting more policy prescriptions required under the Extended Credit Facility (ECF), and the government accordingly requested access to US$2.5 billion (IMF 2021c). The government had to go through two stages to qualify for debt relief under the HIPC initiative: a decision point (at which the country's eligibility was assessed) and a completion point (IMF 2021e).[16] The first required the government to adopt the reforms specified in the SMP (mainly exchange rate unification and fossil fuel subsidy removal), prepare a PRSP, meet with creditors, and pay off debt to multilateral institutions.[17] Only then could the government access IDA funds. In the second step, the government had to implement additional reforms as outlined in the ECF and adopt the prepared poverty strategy.

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This process was unknown to the public, most of whom heard about the ECF deliberations after the press release.

After reaching the decision point in June 2021—once the IMF and IDA were satisfied with the government's compliance—the Sudanese government committed to more stringent economic reforms. The most important included a reduction of the budget deficit within the limit of 1 percent of GDP, and more reforms in the energy sector (liberalizing electricity tariffs) through additional cuts to fossil fuels subsidies. Other reforms included establishing a national social registry for poor families, unification of the customs exchange rate with the market rate, removal of all forms of multiple currency practices, and reducing the role of the state in the economy. The purpose of these measures, the IMF stated, was to mitigate fiscal risk and improve the investment climate (IMF 2021b).

By late summer 2021, tensions were rising between the civilian and military members of the government. In August 2021, al-Burhan and Hamdok each made public statements accusing the other of sabotaging the transition. Al-Burhan claimed the civilians were mismanaging the economy, evidenced in price increases and reduced output and exports. Hamdok reiterated his claim that the military was refusing to hand over their private sector operations to the Ministry of Finance, claiming that the military was taking 80 percent of the revenues from state-owned enterprises (TRT World 2021). It is important to note here that the 2020 and 2021 budgets did not include any stipulations to incorporate SAF and RSF business revenues into the treasury, nor did taxation for security sector businesses factor heavily into the government's reform agenda (Lecturer, University of Khartoum, interview, Cairo, Egypt, May 5, 2023; Dabanga 2021). Both parties tried to appeal to the public; Hamdok more so than Burhan, who had the political and financial backing of the military.

A rival civilian faction, made up of remnants of the previous regime, splinter groups from the SPLM-North and individuals left out of the original power sharing agreement, seized the opportunity to claim a seat at the political table. Some had been refused membership in the FFC and were excluded from the political process during the transitional period. They formed the Forces of Freedom and Change—National Charter (FFC-NC) and aligned themselves with the military and the rebel groups brought in through the JPA. They argued the FFC and the civilian government did not represent the Sudanese population, and that the FFC was establishing a neopatrimonial system, distributing ministerial and senior government positions to its members. By then, inflation had peaked and the Sudanese pound had lost significant value, dropping from SDG250 to SDG450 against the US dollar between July 2020 and July 2021. In September 2021, the FFC-NC organized protests and staged a sit-in outside the Republican Palace, where members of the Sovereignty Council were based. They demanded involvement in the political process and a solution to the economic crisis. They were implicitly asking the military to overthrow their civilian partners. Members of the sit-in received daily food provisions. The regular distribution of food signaled a political move by anonymous patrons keen on a military takeover, or by political parties sidelined in the original power sharing agreement. The military soon answered their call.

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A few days after another war of words, in which a civilian member of the Sovereignty Council accused the military of incompetence, at 5:00 am on October 25, 2021, the military put the Prime Minister under house arrest and took control of the government. They detained the civilian members of the Sovereignty Council, several civilian ministers, and civilian members of the Committee for the Dismantling of the June 30 Regime.[18] In his address to the nation following the coup, al-Burhan used the same narrative voiced at the sit-in outside the palace: the civilian faction of the government was running the economy to the ground, and the FFC politicians did not represent the Sudanese population. Though expected, this move threatened what Hamdok promised was a feasible approach to democratization in Sudan.

After the coup, all IMF programs stopped. The IMF would no longer provide financing nor monitor the government's adherence to economic reforms. Nonetheless, the 2022 and 2023 government budgets—prepared by the JPA-appointed Minister of Finance and approved by a make-shift cabinet—were aligned with the IMF program (Lecturer, University of Khartoum, interview, Cairo, Egypt, May 5, 2023). Both used the ECF as a primary reference. This adherence was puzzling. Given that the IMF's program was suspended, there would be no benefit to implementing the reforms. Even more puzzling was al-Burhan's affirmation in one of his first post-coup speeches that he was committed to the pre-coup reform plans, despite simultaneously acknowledging that the economic crisis threatened the democratic transition (Al Jazeera English 2021). One possible explanation is that the post-coup government, now running a pariah state, hoped that by implementing the IMF's prescribed reforms it could garner favor with multilateral organizations. Perhaps it surmised that violating the transitional Constitutional Declaration did not preclude engagement with the IMF. Given the IMF's previous engagements in Sudan, this premise is not unfounded. Between 1997 and 2018, Sudan had fourteen SMPs, all under al-Bashir's government (IMF 2017).[19]

Donors and other multilateral organizations also stopped support for Sudan overnight. IDA grants for development projects were put on hold and the World Bank stopped all programs and disbursements in the country (World Bank 2021b, 2021c). Funding for the cash transfer program, specifically designed and implemented to mitigate the negative impacts of the reforms, was suspended despite the high inflation and cost of living crisis. By then, the program had been running for eight months, and the World Bank's claim that it had registered one million people meant that there were a significant number relying on or expecting government transfers. Now the Sudanese public had to weather the post-reform shock without the planned mitigation strategy, inappropriate as it was, and with no carrot in sight. The economic crisis may not have been detrimental for the leaders of the coup and the political groups who backed them. They would continue to operate their systems of extraction and violence under which they had flourished for so long. For the Sudanese population, the post-coup economy was disastrous. With all subsidies removed and no social protection programs in place, they faced ongoing hardships. And slow economic growth and poor business performance intensified the crisis.

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Donors sought to detach themselves from the government, which they now viewed as illegitimate, and shifted to private sector development. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs doubled down on the Challenge Fund for Youth Employment and support for entrepreneurship ecosystem development, the German Development Bank (KfW) funded the Sudan SME Catalytic Fund, and the UK's FCDO brought in London-based private equity firms to fund projects in Sudan (see, for example, Challenge Fund for Youth Employment [n.d.] and Tekno Consultancy 2022). Donors also sought to push a democratic narrative through individual-level efforts, such as International IDEA's democracy academy for women.[20] This individual and private sector-oriented approach implicitly assumes that progress can be made despite the state. It focuses on increasing youth employment through funding projects without addressing the underlying causes of unemployment and circumventing institutional barriers to private sector development by providing fast cash for SMEs. Such engagement with the private sector is an extension of donor support for the cash transfer program, which had essentially involved the delivery of social protection through non-state actors (Ali and Mann 2023).

On the political front, there were no discernible efforts from donors. One month before the start of the current conflict, in March 2023, the SAF, RSF, and Central Committee of the FFC signed the Political Framework Agreement. More specifically, a series of UNITAMS-sponsored workshops discussed the process of merging the RSF into the SAF. On paper the process seemed rigorous, but the tensions between the leaders of the RSF and SAF were palpable. Their respective public speeches showed strongly divergent views. One major point of contention was the timeframe for the merger of the RSF into the SAF: the SAF proposed two years, while the RSF preferred five to ten years. Like the JPA, the agreement made no mention of the RSF's business interests in gold, agriculture, and arms, and did not specify what proportion, if any, would be taken over by the state under the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning. Such questions were similarly circumvented by political parties during deliberations around the Constitutional Declaration signed in August 2019. The Framework Agreement also overlooked the involvement and interests of regional powers, colonial legacies in supply chains, the rent-oriented economy from which militia groups like the RSF benefited, and the historical exploitation of political instability by the central government and SAF. The international community repeatedly ignored the difficult questions in their support for the democratic transition.

Unpragmatic pursuit of democracy

In his first press conference as prime minister in August 2019, Hamdok claimed that the partnership between civilians and the military was an innovative solution to a common problem. He had praised its pragmatism and maintained that Sudan's example will be a model for other countries in the region. In contrast, the late political activist, Mohammed Kisha, who was killed during the raid on the sit-in on June 3, 2019, quipped, "It is no use negotiating with the military; no military will give us democracy (Hala96 2020)." Kisha was implying

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that organized resistance and pressure on the military was more likely to realize the initial aims of the revolution. Organized resistance had forced the military back to the negotiating table after the massacre on June 3. Organized resistance had gotten Hamdok out of house arrest after the coup in October 2021, and equally pressured Hamdok to resign from his new post-coup agreement with the military. While it may be complex, uncharted territory in the country's history, prioritizing organized resistance might have offered Sudan a chance to develop a transformative transitional agenda. This approach might have been more effective than forming a partnership with the entity being resisted.

Resistance Committees began organizing protests at the neighborhood level in February 2019 under the direction of the SPA. They first appeared in the neighborhoods of Burri, Umdurman, and al-Dem in Khartoum. Following their successes in countering security forces, Resistance Committees soon spread around Khartoum and to different states across Sudan. By the beginning of 2020, most areas in the capital city had organized themselves in a similar fashion. By October 2021, Resistance Committees in Khartoum State had an operational structure comprised of three levels: the Coordination of Resistance Committees of Khartoum State, a state-level coordination committee; individual coordination committees in each of the major areas that constitute the city of Khartoum —Umdurman, Khartoum North, Khartoum East, and Khartoum South; and, at the lowest level, neighborhood Resistance Committees.

They soon took over more responsibilities in their respective neighborhoods. During the COVID-19 lockdown, they organized vaccinations, and sought out new supply chains for cooking fuel canisters and bread during fuel and wheat shortages. But their *raison d'être* was organizing resistance. During the transitional period, their objective was to ensure the government did not stray from its promise of a democratic transformation. Resistance Committees showed interest in engaging in the policymaking process early on. Initially, it was the efforts of the Resistance Committees in neighborhoods and public sector institutions—primarily, the Resistance Committee of the Ministry of Finance—that brought the public's attention to the Transitional Government's 2020 budget and pushed for the National Economic Conference as a tool of public participation in defining economic priorities. These efforts, however, faced pushback from the government and the outputs of the conference were later ignored.

Throughout the transitional period, Resistance Committees and civil society emphasized their pursuit of "long-term, meaningful, sustainable change ... and economic prosperity" as much as political reform and accountability (Abbashar 2024, 2). Economic initiatives were proposed by civil society organizations focusing on certain sectors. For example, the Collective of Demand-based Groups, "*Tajamou' al-Ajsam al-Matlabia*" (TAM), organized the first mining conference—which had participants from state-level government departments, the private sector, and civil society organizations—where they proposed a new operational structure that emphasized cooperative relationships between the government and producers to increase state revenue from gold. The Collective also presented the Fair Mining Initiative, which included a proposal to increase fuel prices for the mining sector—already reliant on the black market—to subsidize fuel for other sectors (TAM, 2020). Similarly, the Economic Committee of the Umdurman

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Resistance Committee put forward an alternative subsidy reform plan that proposed gradual removal of subsidies over three to five years. These are a few examples of both the interest and willingness of grassroot organizations to engage in policymaking processes, a dynamic that continued throughout the transitional period and contributed to the evolution of civil society.

On the morning of October 25, 2021, a few hours after Hamdok was put under house arrest, Resistance Committees set up roadblocks and directed crowds on the street. By 7:00 am tires were burning on all major roads in the capital city. It was clear the Resistance Committees did not care for the reasons behind the coup, they wanted to maintain whatever little progress had been achieved. Their stated objective is simple: to end military rule. This objective is based on two central demands: military disengagement from politics and the private sector, and the dissolution of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Since the coup in October 2021 and until the onset of the recent conflict on April 15, 2023, Resistance Committees maintained a strict schedule of protests and their popularity swelled as a result, mostly at the expense of the FFC and SPA (Alneel 2021b). The Committees became the dominant civil society organizations. After the coup in October 2021, regular protests and international pressure forced the military to backtrack. Hamdok was released from house arrest and signed a new partnership with the military, one which significantly undermined his role and limited the involvement of the FFC in government positions. The military, which misjudged the popular sentiment (Beam Reports 2022), tried to sell the new agreement as a return to the pre-coup conditions. The Resistance Committees protested that narrative too. One protestor in December 2021 famously remarked that "if the military wants to return to the pre-coup reality, then we want our martyrs back from the dead."

The Resistance Committees viewed the coup as a betrayal of the partnership, which the Resistance Committees reluctantly tolerated after it had been aggressively promoted by the FFC. Like people's initial response to Hamdok's arrival in Khartoum in August 2019, the Committees viewed Hamdok's arrest as a threat to what he represented: a civilian government laying the foundations for a democratic transition. The Resistance Committees saw the new agreement with the military as a step backwards. The FFC and SPA—who by then had lost much of their popular support—tried to sell the agreement and push a pro-Hamdok narrative, but they were sidelined. The only narrative that now mattered was that of the Resistance Committees. This was most evident in a slogan repeated during protests following the prime minister's resignation from the post-coup government: "Whether he resigns or not, protests will proceed as scheduled." The position of the Resistance Committees in the political landscape after the coup, and the efficacy of their resistance against the military's usurpation of power, have been overlooked by Sudan experts (see, for example, de Waal 2021). Before the end of December, Hamdok resigned.

The Committees' position implicitly recognizes that Sudan suffers from political distortions that negatively impact the economy and have repeatedly led to political instability and extractive practices throughout Sudan's history. For example, the military's encroachment into the private sector—and its eventual dominance—compromised the efficiency of economic activity and

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deterred foreign direct investment. While the overarching goal for the Committees and the transitional government was the same, the means were different. The government's donor and IMF-sanctioned economic recovery program was partially aimed at private sector development, creating favorable conditions for foreign direct investment, and enabling exports, both sources of much-needed foreign currency. A larger, more efficient and taxable private sector would generate revenue for essential economic and social infrastructure. But while the Committees sought private sector development through institutional reform, the government preferred the standard IMF-sanctioned blueprint. The transitional government's approach overlooked foundational problems, such as the extractive practices on which the Sudanese economy was based (Thomas and El Gizouli 2021), violence and cheap labor at the margins, and political capture at the center (Mann 2014), all of which pose significant challenges to economic recovery and democratization.

Shortsightedness and closed-door policymaking

In November 2019, the Minister of Finance emphasized that Sudan needed up to US$5 billion in budget support to "avert an economic collapse" (Reuters 2019). Donors pledged US$1.8 billion, none as budget support. The Minister of Finance insisted that, along with direct cash transfers to vulnerable households, significant increases in public sector salaries were necessary to prepare for the reforms. Without budget support, it was virtually impossible to absorb these costs without monetizing debt, which the government was actively trying to avoid because it would violate the fiscal responsibility demands of the IMF. Instead, donors opted to support the cash transfer program. Even considering the fiscal implications of donor support, the funds which came in were insufficient. The fossil fuel subsidy bill for petrol and diesel alone was more than US $350 million a month, and so the funds allocated to the cash transfer program might not have had the anticipated impact. This inconsistency is characteristic of donor strategies towards Sudan and signals a more pessimistic outlook: that, despite their public pledges of support, donors did not trust the Transitional Government. It seemed donors were more comfortable providing funding for a program where external actors—the World Bank and WFP—were heavily involved rather than provide direct budget support to the government.

Moreover, the international community overlooked several clear, ominous signs of deeper political issues and a lack of commitment from the military partners. The initial negotiations between the FFC and the Transitional Military Council were marred with violence, including the massacre on the eighth day of Ramadan in 2019. This violent attack on the sit-in on June 3 was followed by a month-long campaign to discredit the civilian side of the negotiations. Even after Hamdok took office, violence against peaceful protestors continued. After the coup in October 2021, the ferocity of the security apparatus increased, as did the intensity of the protests. At least one protestor was killed every week (Reuters 2022a). Donors were aware of the violence and called for the authorities to allow protestors to exercise their right to peaceful protests (see, for example,

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Human Rights Watch 2020; Al Jazeera 2021; and FCDO 2022). While the FFC and the international community were committed to the partnership between the military and civilians, the Committees knew it did not make sense for the military and other armed groups, including the RSF, to support a democratic transition (Alhadath Alsudani 2022). The signs were everywhere, including the delayed disclosure of the findings of the Investigation Commission of the June 3 Massacre, whose offices were raided in March 2022 (Al Jazeera 2022a).

In contrast, the international community and Hamdok's government thought they were being pragmatic. Given the distribution of power in the country, they deemed a partnership between those who wanted to overturn the status quo and those who wanted to maintain it as the only solution. Of course, the military had all the resources and the ammunition, and the institutional flexibility to use them. During the transitional period, the military's commitment to the partnership would have been assessed by its relative abuse of power and its ability to support a transition to democracy. Their civilian counterparts, on the other hand, were judged on whether they could deliver on their promises—a stable economy, peace, and democratic elections—all of which required significant financial backing.

Historically, economic crises beget political instability, especially in a politically volatile context, and economic reforms of the IMF variety have seldom succeeded in bringing about their purported outcomes in the region, and in Sudan in particular. Despite history, donors wagered the success of the transition, and the country's future, on a conviction that short-term stability of macroeconomic indicators takes priority over everything else. A more sensitive analysis of the context would have furnished both donors and the government with a better understanding of the long-term risks of embarking on such reforms during a period of political volatility. And, more importantly, whether the consequences were worthwhile.

One possible reason for this problem was the narrow group of people who advised the donors and government, and their siloed approach to policymaking. Donor missions, their respective IFIs, and multilateral organizations operating in Sudan all draw from a small pool of Sudanese experts (see Ali and Mann 2023, for a more detailed discussion). These experts tend to have had careers in the same missions, institutions, and multilateral organizations, and consequently, tend to think within the same frameworks. Moreover, no efforts were made at the beginning of the transitional period, by donors or the government, to solicit expert opinion to examine the potential impacts on well-being or the political implications of the government's donor-sanctioned reforms.

Donors and the government, therefore, created policy echo chambers, isolated from rebuttal and alternative views. For example, despite fossil fuel subsidy reform capturing the headlines in the first three months of the transition, donors did not engage. The public debate on these particular reforms continued for ten months, between December 2019 and September 2020, across several media platforms. Yet, the government was not keen on engaging the public. In a seminar at the University of Khartoum in January 2020, the Minister of Finance presented his case for subsidy reform and was supported by similar arguments from academics and private sector entities. There was consistent messaging in

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support of the reform measures—now also explicitly supported by both economic and intellectual elites. The other side of the debate was absent. But there were alternative views loudly voiced on traditional media, online newspapers and magazines, and social media. Those opposing the reforms fell into two camps. The first camp, mainly made up of members of the FFC's economic committee, most of whom were affiliated with its constituent political parties, made a political argument, maintaining that the reforms would turn public opinion against the government and undo the progress achieved by the revolution. The second camp, mostly career economists, some of whom were active members of various civil society organizations, including Economic Committees of various Resistance Committees, made a more technical argument: that the reforms require favorable economic and political conditions, which Sudan lacked, and were best implemented gradually. Both arguments were ignored.

This behavior is consistent with donor engagement in African countries more generally (Greco, 2023). Jimi Adesina recounts his involvement in a roundtable in Brussels in 2013 in which donors sought to mobilize political support for cash transfer programs in African countries (Adesina 2020). Only a fifth of the attendees were African and the rest European. One of the strategies discussed was to convince politicians of the effectiveness of cash transfers as an election strategy. Adesina's contribution to the discussions of the day was simple: why did Europeans think externally induced policymaking was appropriate? Was it not hypocritical to effectively endorse clientelism, a practice which Europeans negatively associate with African countries, to further external policy agendas? And, finally, what would be the impact of this process on deliberative governance? This line of questioning made the organizers "upset" and the other participants "irritated" (Adesina 2020, 562). More pertinently, Adesina observed that some participants, particularly his fellow Africans, were eager to engage given the prospect of funding. This is the same conditionality manifesting at a different level. The eager participants needed funding for their respective activities, but such funding was conditional on engaging with the ideas presented to them, regardless of how inappropriate these ideas were to their country's contexts. In Sudan, donors conditioned funding on certain economic reforms. Sudanese government officials, like the participants in the workshop Adesina attended, were eager for the funding, but, unlike the participants, Sudanese officials had similar ideas to begin with due to their previous employment histories (see Ali and Mann 2023, for a more detailed discussion). Those with opposing views were not invited to the deliberation table.

Donors also overlooked the contributions of civil society groups to the democratization process, specifically trade unions and Resistance Committees. Despite the military's hegemony, in November 2021, a month after the coup, Resistance Committees circulated a draft political charter (Alneel 2021a). After three months of consultations and deliberation, two charters were released in February and March 2022: the Revolutionary Charter of People's Power (2022) and the Charter for the Establishment of the People's Authority (Khartoum State Resistance Committees 2022). The first focuses on democratization and wealth distribution, highlighting the importance of self-sufficiency for economic development. The second emphasizes the historical origins of Sudan's current crises.

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In August 2022, Sudanese journalists organized elections and formed the first independent union in three decades (Al Jazeera 2022b). Some Resistance Committees were keen to emulate the union's efforts. One Resistance Committee in Al Safia in Khartoum North conducted similarly transparent elections. These efforts, alas, received little attention.

Conclusion

The change in Sudan's political landscape following the protests that started in December 2018 is one of a revolutionary nature. New grassroots actors entered the political stage represented in the Resistance Committees and other civil society organizations. Conversely, the power sharing agreement between the FFC and TMC was counter revolutionary in that it cemented the contemporary and historical dominance of the military and the social, economic, and political elites. While the TMC relied on its military power and control over crucial sectors in the economy, the civilian members of the government were supported by the Sudanese public and the international community. The choice to lean on the latter may be partially explained by the ideological positions of the individuals and political entities that constituted the civilian body. Senior government positions were occupied by technocrats with professional affiliations in international organizations (Ali and Mann 2023) and the constituent parties of the FFC had a vested interest in the success of the transitional government in the way they had set it up (Bishai 2023). Neither benefit from a stronger civil society asking uncomfortable questions.

Both donors and the government supported a pragmatic approach in the pursuit of democracy, despite several warning signs of the military's unwillingness to cooperate. They implicitly conceded that political and institutional reform was going to take time. However, they were less pragmatic and less patient with macroeconomic reform. Donors refused to provide budget support and conditioned financial support on disruptive economic reforms, which the government was eager to implement. The donor's complacency and the transitional government's naivety are especially troubling, and perhaps inexcusable, given Sudan's recent history. In 1989, al-Bashir overthrew Sadig al-Mahdi's democratically elected government during an economic crisis on the back of similar economic reforms dictated by the IMF—reduction of the fiscal deficit, exchange rate unification, and austere monetary policy (Ali 1990). Like al-Burhan, al-Bashir justified the coup by blaming the democratically elected government's inability to manage the economy. Same conditions, same policies, same economic crisis, same political outcome.

The ideological biases—and perhaps lack of imagination—of the Transitional Government and donors meant they lacked frameworks that can accommodate the "bottom-up governance that radically re-envisions the Sudanese state" (Bishai 2023, 1484) proposed by Resistance Committees and civil society. This vision contradicts the "power from above" model championed by donors, political elites, and the military (Bishai 2023, 1484). Yet, the Committees' efficacy, often mentioned as an impediment to their integration in the political and

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policymaking processes, is evident in their organized resistance (Hassan, 2024), their willingness to engage in policymaking debates, and the two charters published in early 2022.

It should be noted that a significant proportion of Khartoum residents support the SAF amidst the conflict that started on April 15, 2023. Perhaps what they see is a national army that consistently engages in resource extraction, commits human rights violations in poor, marginal areas, and creates militias to support its extractive practices, but nonetheless protects the private property of the urban middle class. This option may seem better than a similarly extractive and violent RSF that engages in looting. Some experts also view an SAF victory as a better outcome (see, for example, Zaidan 2023). On the other hand, Resistance Committees, who protested the RSF's existence and the military's involvement in politics, are pushing for a ceasefire. Not because it furthers their objectives—in fact, it does the opposite: it gives the RSF legitimacy and increases the SAF's popularity—but because saving lives is now a priority. In response to the conflict, Resistance Committees have adapted their activities, and, along with other mutual aid groups, set up various emergency offices (Emergency Response Rooms) to provide services and address immediate needs in Khartoum and other states across Sudan (Al Jazeera 2023). At first glance, it may seem that the Sudanese popular resistance is now faced with only two choices: support the SAF or support the RSF, and, in both cases, accept military hegemony as part and parcel of Sudan's politics. But civil society is carving out an alternative path: they are pushing for a ceasefire to preserve life while developing new popular governance structures within their emergency offices.

The alternative approaches to addressing the root causes of Sudan's crisis proposed by civil society organizations were ignored by the Transitional Government, and donors were inflexible. Now, the Western media narrative portrays Sudan's conflict as a contest between two generals,[21] as if the underlying causes do not matter. There are well-documented reasons why the generals exist, and it is not because Sudan is an inherently violent country. Even as the military cemented its control over resources and state institutions, donors pushed for and supported an unbalanced civilian-military partnership and conditioned financial support on risky economic reforms with devastating political consequences. They neglected the people who might have had the solution, and as the conflict raged on, they desperately evacuated their citizens in disbelief. In donor countries, with the increasing wave of populism, Sudanese refugees may face the same contempt that has been lavished on refugees from other conflict-ridden regions of the world.[22]

Author Biographies. **Muez Ali** is an economist based in Qatar. He is an Honorary Research Fellow at the Bartlett School of Environment, Energy and Resources at University College London, UK. His research interests and activities include the political economy of climate change, knowledge production and social protection in sub-Saharan Africa.

Muzan Alneel is a writer and the cofounder of the Innovation, Science and Technology for People Centered Development Center in Sudan. She is a former Non-resident Fellow of the Tahrir Institute

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for Middle East Policy and a consultant on industrial policy for the Industrial Research and Consultancy Center in Sudan.

Mayada Hassanain is a Researcher at the Institute for Economic Justice. She is an economist specialized in poverty, inequality and feminist political economy.

Notes

1. Transitional Government of Sudan and "transitional government" refer to the government in Sudan under Abdalla Hamdok's prime ministership during the period from August 2019 to October 2021.
2. See, for example, Ali (1986) for essays on the impact of Structural Adjustment Programs on Sudan's economy between 1978 and 1984, Ali (1990) for the impact of exchange rate devaluation on economic performance and Hussain and Thirlwall (1984) for the impact of exchange rate devaluation on the profitability of export crops.
3. Canen and Wantchekon define political distoritions as "a situation in which a special interest group can direct economic development towards its own exclusive ends rather than towards increasing general welfare … [including] provisions of public goods and redistribution that are chosen due to narrow political interests rather than for the welfare of the larger public" (Canen and Wantchekon 2022, 109).
4. The TMC constituted a group of high-ranking military officers and Mohamed Hamdan Daglo (Himedti), leader of the paramilitary group the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), who collectively led the coup against Omar al-Bashir.
5. In this paper, we define the struggle for political change that started in December 2018 and continues even after the onset of the current conflict in April 2023 as a revolution as defined by Barany (2016) as a "bottom-up mass popular challenge to the established political regime and/or its ruler(s)," and by Kamrava (2013) as a struggle aimed at achieving "fundamental changes to three key aspects of politics: changes to the state, its leaders, its institutions, and their functions; changes to the nature and quality of state-society relations and the ways the two interact; and changes to the prevailing political culture, in the overall ways in which society conceives of politics, political institutions and leaders, and political principles." We also acknowledge that Sudan's struggle for political change has evolved over time, and what started as a spontaneous revolution in December 2018, morphed into a negotiated revolution between April 2019 until the signing of the Constitutional Declaration in August 2019 (as defined by Kamrava 2013) and eventually took up elements of a continuous and permanent revolution. For convenience, we use the term "revolution" throughout the paper.
6. This process made little sense given that all the rebel groups were specifically fighting al-Bashir's government, not whichever government is in Khartoum.
7. The Sudanese Revolutionary Front includes the Justice and Equality Movement headed by Gibril Ibrahim, the Sudan Liberation Movement (al-Nur) headed by Abdul Wahid al Nur, the Sudan Liberation Movement (Minnawi) headed by Minni Minnawi and Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-North).
8. The agreement stipulated that US$750 million be transferred to Darfur alone (Economic expert, Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, Cairo, Egypt, May 3, 2023).
9. While there is some evidence that IMF programs do not lead to cuts in social expenditure (Bird, Qayum, and Rowlands 2020), there is no evidence that IMF programs lead to increases in social expenditure in relative or absolute terms. In fact, in Sudan's case, and perhaps for many other developing countries, social expenditure is low to begin with, so IMF programs not leading to cuts in health and education spending is not saying much.
10. It could have done so through resource allocation to civil society organizations, transparent communication of government plans, and support for independent labor unions.
11. See Ali and Mann (2023) for a discussion on intellectual assimilation in Sudan and its impact on social policymaking during the transitional period.

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12. The transitional government's cash transfer program as a mitigation measure for their proposed policy prescriptions is identical to a mitigation program implemented after the secession of South Sudan in 2011. See Ali and Mann (2023) for a comparison of the two programs.
13. Some households eligible for the cash transfer program were also eligible for, and enrolled in, other programs initiated by the previous government, such as health insurance and the government-funded, World Bank-supported Social Safety Net Program (SSNP).
14. The World Bank claimed it had registered one million households by September 2021 (Ex-government advisor, interview, Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, Cairo, Egypt, May 2, 2023).
15. The SMP is an informal agreement between the IMF and local authorities. While the World Bank's role is hidden, through technical assistance, it ensures the government implements the programs and policies agreed to under the SMP.
16. The decision point is when the Executive Boards of the IMF and the World Bank's IDA decide that Sudan had taken the necessary measures—implemented the policies requested of them—to begin the process of debt relief under the HIPC initiative.
17. Mainly the African Development Bank, the World Bank, and the IMF.
18. This is in reference to al-Bashir's regime, which took power in a military coup on June 30, 1989.
19. Sudan had an SMP or an Article IV Consultation in 2000, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2016. Preparation was underway by the IMF and the Sudanese government in December 2017 for another SMP the following year.
20. This change in focus, in addition to the decision to shift to private sector development, is consistent with donors' movement towards the individualization of aid (Kabeer 2020) and framing development in terms of individual empowerment (Whitfield 2012).
21. See, for example, Copnall (2023), Mackintosh and Hansler (2023), Magdy (2023), Myre (2023), Ott (2023) and Bariyo (2024).
22. See Reuters (2016), Taylor (2021b), Al Jazeera (2022c), Reuters (2022b) and *The Guardian* (2023) for attacks on refugee shelters and accommodation around Europe; see Wallner (2022) for the connection between right-wing populism and anti-immigrant attacks in the UK; see Shukman (2021), Taylor (2021a) and Khan-Ruf (2022) for a pattern of violence against refugees in the UK and Wieder (2022) and van Brunnersum (2024) in Germany; see *The Guardian* (2018) for how Italy's new immigration policy removes protections for migrants, Human Rights Watch (2018) for Hungary's immigration bill that makes it illegal to help migrants, CBS News (2018) for how Denmark plans to send migrants to a remote island, DW (2017) for Austria's plans to deny accommodation and food for rejected asylum applicants, and *The Guardian* (2017) for Hungary's container camp for asylum seekers.

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