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Political Institutions

Domestic political institutions and conflict dynamics in Chinese-backed dam projects: Ghana and Sudan compared

Abdou Rahim Lema

September 2026

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protest and state response. Comparing the two projects, Lema examines how political institutions and state capacity shape the way governments deal with affected communities—and how those communities resist.



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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Domestic political institutions and conflict dynamics in Chinese-backed dam projects: Ghana and Sudan compared

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This article examines how domestic political institutions shape the conflict dynamics surrounding Chinese-backed infrastructure projects in Africa. Focusing on Bui Dam in Ghana and Merowe Dam in Sudan, it argues that similar development projects can generate markedly different trajectories of contention depending on how states mobilise and deploy state capacity. Drawing on scholarship on regime type, state capacity, and contentious politics, the article shows that democratic and authoritarian political contexts condition both the strategies states adopt towards affected communities and the forms of resistance that emerge in response.

The article develops a comparative qualitative analysis based on fieldwork, interviews, documentary sources, and process tracing. It demonstrates that in Ghana, relatively stronger administrative capacity and more open political institutions enabled more institutionalised and negotiated forms of contestation, even though significant tensions, exclusions, and grievances persisted throughout the project. In contrast, Sudan's military-autocratic political structure and reliance on coercive state capacity contributed to highly exclusionary forms of project implementation, violent repression, and more transgressive conflict dynamics.

By placing domestic political institutions at the centre of the analysis, the article contributes to debates on China-Africa relations and infrastructure-led development by showing that the political consequences of Chinese-backed projects are mediated through the institutional and political environments in which they are embedded. More broadly, the study highlights the disconnect between official development narratives surrounding mega-dam projects and the lived experiences of affected communities.

Cet article examine comment les institutions politiques africaines façonnent les dynamiques de conflit entourant les projets d'infrastructures financés par la Chine en Afrique. À partir d'une analyse comparative du barrage de Bui au Ghana et du barrage de Merowe au Soudan, il montre que des projets de développement similaires peuvent produire des trajectoires de

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Commander of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo with UAE President Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan

At the Edge of American Empire:

Understanding the Gulf's Role in Sudan's War

Author
Joshua Craze
Writer



AFRICAN WATCH AFRICA

The Horn and Middle Powers: Entanglement, Competition, and Perception

At the Edge of American Empire: Understanding the Gulf's Role in Sudan's War

Joshua Craze

September 2026

Gulf states' involvement in Sudan extends beyond their support for opposing sides in the current war. Craze argues that competition over resources and strategic routes has reinforced military power and weakened prospects for democratic rule. The essay places today's conflict within a longer history of Gulf investment and political influence in Sudan.

Climate and Drought

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(1981–2025)

Abdallahman Ahmed and Kornel Czimmer**August 2026**

Drought patterns across Darfur have shifted over four decades, but the changes differ between North, West and South Darfur. The study finds a long-term easing of drought conditions in parts of the region alongside substantial fluctuations and recurring severe episodes. Its historical perspective can help inform drought monitoring and climate adaptation without obscuring present risks.



Journal of Arid Environments

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jaridenv

Multi-decadal drought variability and regime dynamics in Darfur, Sudan (1981–2025)

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Drought
SPEI
BPACT
Index
Sudan
Climate variability

ABSTRACT

Understanding drought dynamics in arid and semi-arid regions is essential for climate adaptation and sustainable resource management. This study assessed multi-decadal drought variability in Darfur, western Sudan, from 1981 to 2025 using the Standardized Precipitation–Evapotranspiration Index as a 12-month timescale (SPEI-12). Monthly precipitation and temperature records from North, West, and South Darfur were analyzed using piecewise linear regression, Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC)-based breakpoint detection, and Breaks for Additive Seasonal and Trend (BPACT) analysis. A precipitation–temperature proxy was used for climatic water balance because potential evapotranspiration data were unavailable. Results revealed statistically significant positive SPEI-12 trends across all regions, indicating a gradual reduction in cumulative drought severity. West Darfur exhibited the strongest trend (0.0463 yr⁻¹; R² = 0.856), followed by South Darfur (0.0407 yr⁻¹; R² = 0.877), whereas North Darfur showed a weaker trend (0.0190 yr⁻¹; R² = 0.565) and greater interannual variability. Although piecewise regression detected no long-term structural breaks, BPACT identified episodic climatic transitions. Severe drought events persisted, particularly during the early 1990s and in recent years. Overall, drought evolution in Darfur is consistent with the broader post-1990s Sahelian hydroclimatic recovery while exhibiting pronounced spatial heterogeneity, providing a basis for drought monitoring and climate adaptation in arid environments.

1. Introduction

Drought is a complex hydroclimatic phenomenon characterized by prolonged deficits in water availability resulting from anomalies in precipitation and atmospheric conditions, including increased temperature and evaporative demand (Dai, 2011; Wilhite and Singh, 2019). Unlike sudden-onset hazards, droughts develop gradually, vary across spatial and temporal scales, and are often difficult to define in terms of their precise onset and termination (Liu et al., 2022; Verger et al., 2023). Its cumulative nature complicates impact assessment, particularly in arid and semi-arid environments where even small climatic deviations can produce substantial ecological and socio-economic consequences (Adger et al., 2021; Tsvetkov et al., 2019).

Globally, droughts are among the most economically damaging natural hazards, affecting agriculture, water resources, energy production, and ecosystem services (Abdassoum and Beldjoudj, 2022; Kechavarzi and Karami, 2016). In dryland regions, recurrent drought

constrains primary productivity, reduces rangeland carrying capacity, and intensifies land degradation processes (Cuthbert et al., 2020). Consequently, robust drought monitoring frameworks are essential for estimating the intensity, duration, spatial extent, and recurrence patterns of droughts.

A variety of drought indices have been developed to quantify meteorological and hydrological deficits. The Standardized Precipitation Index (SPI) (McKee et al., 1993) is widely used for precipitation-based drought assessments, whereas the Palmer Drought Severity Index (PDSI) (Palmer, 1965) incorporates soil moisture accounting. More recently, the Standardized Precipitation Evapotranspiration Index (SPEI) has gained prominence because it integrates both precipitation supply and atmospheric evaporative demand through a climatic water balance framework (Vicente-Serrano et al., 2010). By incorporating temperature-driven evapotranspiration, the SPEI is particularly suited for assessing drought under conditions of climate warming (Vicente-Serrano et al., 2013).

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaridenv.2026.108700>
Received 12 February 2026; Received in revised form 22 July 2026; Accepted 23 July 2026
Available online 29 July 2026
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Humanitarian Inclusion and Community Support



Inclusive Humanitarian Action Policy Brief – August 2026

Amplifying the Voices of Sudanese Persons with Disabilities: A Life Saving Call to Address Their Needs in the Humanitarian Crisis

The inclusion of persons with disabilities in emergency response is a core component of principled and effective humanitarian action. It ensures that vulnerable populations at risk of exclusion have equal access to humanitarian assistance and services essential for survival, protection, and recovery.

Persons with disabilities face compounded risks in emergencies, from inaccessible early-warning information to loss of assistive devices and inaccessible aid distributions. Yet most humanitarian actors still lack the technical capacity and skills to adapt life-saving services (food security, health, water, sanitation and hygiene–WASH, protection) accordingly. This gap heightens the vulnerability of populations already at risk of exclusion.

Quick facts

- According to the World Health Organization, 16% of the world population has a disability¹ including 93 million children, 13 million of those experiencing severe difficulties.
- Women with disabilities are 2–4 times more likely to experience intimate partner violence and 10 times more likely to experience sexual violence than women without disabilities².
- Women with disabilities are twice as likely, and girls with disabilities are up to 4 times more likely, to be affected by violence than their peers without disabilities³.

Disability-inclusive humanitarian action is grounded in International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law (IHRL), placing persons with disabilities as rights-holders at the center of response. The Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities set four “must-do actions” across the program cycle: disaggregate data, identify and remove barriers, promote meaningful participation, and support persons with disabilities to develop

¹ Available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/disability-and-health>

² We Decide and UN Women at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2016/04/women-and-girls-with-disabilities-facts-and-figures>

³ Addressing violence against women: a call to action. The Lancet, 2012.

Amplifying the Voices of Sudanese Persons with Disabilities: A Life Saving Call to Address Their Needs in the Humanitarian Crisis

Humanity & Inclusion

September 2026

Persons with disabilities face heightened risks during Sudan’s humanitarian crisis, while inaccessible services, information and assistance can prevent them from meeting essential needs. The policy brief calls for disability inclusion throughout the humanitarian response, including better data, consultation with persons with disabilities and assistance adapted to their needs.

Sudan Informal Social Protection

Prosper Global

August 2026

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support for households across Sudan. Prosper Global finds that these networks are under growing strain, while displaced people and households with weaker social connections rely more heavily on community initiatives. The findings show why monitoring informal support matters for identifying needs that conventional aid assessments may miss.



SUDAN INFORMAL SOCIAL PROTECTION MONITORING

Round 1



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