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### **Extractive Institutions, Conflict, and Socioeconomic Underdevelopment in the Democratic Republic of Congo: A Neo-Institutionalist Analysis**

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#### **1. Introduction**

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) represents one of the most prominent contemporary examples of persistent socioeconomic underdevelopment, despite possessing substantial economic potential. Although the country is among the world's richest in terms of natural resources, including cobalt, copper, oil, industrial and precious diamonds, as well as significant hydroelectric potential, it continues to exhibit extremely poor socioeconomic outcomes (Ministry of Foreign Affairs n.d). The DRC is classified as a low-income country (World Bank n.d.b) and, in 2023, recorded a Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.522, placing it in the category of low human development and ranking 171st out of 193 countries and territories (UNDP 2023). Consequently, the country is characterized by low levels of human capital, weak public service provision, limited institutional capacity, and pronounced political instability (World Bank n.d.a; UNDP 2023).

Within the academic literature, the Democratic Republic of Congo is frequently cited as an emblematic example of a *"failed state"*. Explanations for this condition vary; however, many scholars emphasize that throughout its history the territory has often been treated primarily as a source of extractable resources, rather than as a state to be institutionally developed. This logic of extraction was evident during both the colonial and post-independence periods and has profoundly shaped the country's institutional structure, the relationship between the state and society, and the government's capacity to provide essential public goods (Wakenge 2021, 47). Although weak institutionalization is common across many authoritarian regimes in Africa, the Congolese case can be understood as an extreme manifestation of this phenomenon, where

recurring internal conflicts and competition for resource control reflect governance structures based on exploitation, patronage networks, and fragmented state authority (Englebert and Tull 2008, 120).

Existing research increasingly suggests that purely economic or cultural explanations are insufficient to account for persistent underdevelopment in countries such as the DRC. Instead, a substantial body of scholarship within the political economy of development highlights the central role played by political and economic institutions in shaping incentives, power distribution, and access to resources within society (North 1990, 3-4; Acemoglu and Robinson 2012, 64-89). From this perspective, institutional quality becomes a key explanatory factor for differences in development outcomes across states. Building on this theoretical foundation, the present study adopts a neo-institutionalist perspective and argues that the persistence of extractive institutions, reinforced by a historical trajectory characterized by institutional path dependence and shaped by colonial rule and prolonged armed conflict, represents a central factor in explaining the DRC's weak development outcomes (Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson 2001, 1369-1373).

Against this background, the Democratic Republic of Congo provides a particularly relevant case study for examining the relationship between extractive institutions, armed conflict, and socioeconomic underdevelopment. The Congolese state is marked by fragile political institutions, systemic corruption, limited elite accountability, and a reduced capacity to deliver basic public services. These institutional weaknesses are further exacerbated by recurrent armed conflicts and fragmented territorial control, which undermine state authority and hinder the implementation of coherent public policies (Brydges 2013, 19-20).

Based on these observations, the paper examines the extent to which the quality of political and economic institutions helps explain the country's low level of socioeconomic development. The analysis focuses on two key dimensions of development, public health and education, both

widely recognized in the neo-institutionalist literature as crucial indicators of state capacity and institutional performance. Indicators such as infant and maternal mortality rates, low life expectancy at birth, low levels of public health expenditure, and poor performance in the education sector, manifested through low literacy rates and school enrolment rates, as well as gender and urban-rural disparities in education, are used to assess the state's ability to provide essential public goods. The structure of the paper follows this analytical approach, combining the neo-institutionalist theoretical framework with an examination of the historical and institutional context of the DRC and an empirical assessment of the health and education sectors.

## **2. Theoretical Framework: Neo-institutionalism**

Neo-institutionalist literature places institutions at the centre of explanations regarding differences in economic development among states. Douglass North defines institutions as the *"rules of the game in a society"*, including both formal constraints, such as laws and constitutions, and informal constraints, such as social norms, conventions, and codes of conduct. According to him, institutions structure human interaction and shape societies through behavioural incentives, reducing uncertainty and directly influencing long-term economic performance (North 1990, 3-6; North 1991, 97).

In North's view, development cannot be understood exclusively through capital accumulation or technological progress, but must be analysed through the way institutions create incentives for economic behaviour. Institutions that protect property rights, enforce contracts, and limit discretionary state behaviour tend to encourage investment and economic growth, whereas weak or arbitrary institutions generate uncertainty and discourage productive activity (North 1990, 49-53).

A central element of this approach is the idea of institutional path dependence. North argues that institutions tend to persist over time because changing them involves high costs, and actors who benefit from

existing arrangements have a strong interest in maintaining the status quo, even when economic outcomes are inefficient (North 1990, 95-100). Consequently, institutional change is a slow and gradual process, often blocked by the interests of actors who benefit from existing arrangements. This perspective provides a useful analytical framework for understanding the persistence of underdevelopment in states with unstable institutions.

Moreover, this approach is particularly relevant for post-colonial states, where formal institutions introduced after independence developed alongside informal practices and power structures inherited from the colonial period. In the context of African post-colonial states, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, institutional path dependence manifests itself through the persistence of institutions oriented toward resource extraction, control, and the maximization of elite power, despite formal political changes after independence. Institutions created to serve colonial purposes were often adapted rather than replaced by new political elites, contributing to the weakening of state capacity and the exclusion of the majority of the population from economic benefits (Englebort 2000, 7-36).

### **2.1. Inclusive and Extractive Institutions**

Building on these theoretical foundations, Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson (2012) develop an analytical distinction between inclusive political and economic institutions and extractive institutions. According to their institutional perspective, economic institutions are the result of collective choices made within society, influenced by the distribution of political power among social groups. Because groups and individuals within a society have divergent economic interests, the conflict between them determines the type of economic institutions adopted, while the relative political power of each group plays a decisive role in shaping economic institutions (Acemoglu and Robinson 2008, 3-7).

In this sense, inclusive political institutions are characterized by the broad distribution of political power, political pluralism, and constraints

on the arbitrary exercise of authority (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012, 94–96). These institutions tend to generate inclusive economic institutions, which protect property rights and create incentives for investment, innovation, and productivity. Consequently, they allow the participation of as many citizens as possible in economic activities within society. Furthermore, markets function freely, and public services are real and operational. Private property is guaranteed, individuals are not subjected to arbitrary and abusive expropriation by the state, and the legal system is impartial. One of the most significant effects of inclusive institutions is the promotion of technological progress and education (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012, 88–91). Therefore, inclusive economic institutions facilitate a more equitable distribution of resources and strengthen inclusive political structures, reducing the ability of elites to use power for their own benefit. These institutions reinforce each other and counteract extractive mechanisms, encouraging sustainable economic and social development (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012, 96–97).

In contrast, extractive institutions concentrate political power in the hands of a narrow elite and are designed to extract economic resources from the majority of the population for the benefit of that elite. In such contexts, access to economic opportunities is limited, the accumulation of human capital is discouraged, market functioning is distorted, and investment in public goods remains minimal. Unlike inclusive institutions, extractive ones do not generate increased productivity or prosperity, but instead constitute a major cause of social conflict (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012, 90–96).

The authors argue that extractive political institutions allow elites to create and maintain extractive economic institutions, which in turn generate financial resources that strengthen the political dominance of the same elites. This relationship creates a negative feedback loop, in which political power and economic advantages reproduce themselves over time. Moreover, even in situations where existing elites are replaced, new actors who come to power within an extractive institutional

framework face the same limited constraints and similar incentives to maintain existing institutions. Thus, changes in leadership do not necessarily produce deep institutional transformations, and the extractive structure persists (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012, 95–97).

## **2.2. Institutions, Conflict, and the Provision of Public Goods**

Neo-institutionalist literature emphasizes that extractive institutions are associated with both diminished economic performance and an increased risk of conflict and political instability. The lack of accountability mechanisms, competition for resource control, and the exclusion of the majority of the population from economic benefits create incentives for violence and political contestation (Collier 2007 apud O'Brien 2019).

In such contexts, the state faces major difficulties in providing fundamental public goods such as health and education. Political elites have limited interest in investments with broadly distributed benefits, preferring instead to allocate resources to patronage networks or to maintaining coercive control. As a result, health and education indicators tend to be weak, reflecting the institutional incapacity of the state to sustain the well-being of the population.

This theoretical perspective provides the analytical framework necessary to understand how extractive institutions in the Democratic Republic of Congo have contributed to the perpetuation of armed conflict, the instability of the state, and poor performance in the fields of public health and education.

## **3. The Historical-Institutional Context of the Democratic Republic of Congo**

In order to understand the persistence of fragile institutions in the Democratic Republic of Congo, it is essential to analyse the historical formation of the state and its institutional trajectory. Neo-institutionalist literature emphasizes that institutions do not emerge in a vacuum but are

the result of specific historical processes marked by power relations and economic interests (North 1990, 95–100).

### **3.1. Colonial Legacy and Extractive Institutions**

Neo-institutionalist literature highlights the central role of colonialism in shaping postcolonial institutions (Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson 2001, 1370–1376). In extractive colonies, such as the Belgian Congo, institutions were designed to facilitate resource extraction and labour control, rather than to promote local economic development or the provision of public goods. Initially administered as the private property of King Leopold II (1885–1908), and later as a Belgian colony beginning in 1908, Congo was governed through coercion, violence, and an administrative apparatus oriented exclusively toward maximizing rents from natural resources (Wakenge 2021, 45).

This type of institutional organization corresponds to the model of extractive institutions described by Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson (2001), who argue that in regions where European colonization was associated with high health risks, colonial powers avoided establishing inclusive institutions and instead focused on rapid resource exploitation. The legacy of these institutional arrangements persisted beyond the colonial period, influencing the structure of the post-independence state (Wakenge 2021, 45).

### **3.2. Independence and the Congo Crisis (1960–1966)**

The achievement of independence in 1960 was not followed by a profound institutional transformation. On the contrary, the absence of consolidated political institutions and the competition for resource control quickly generated instability and fuelled conflicts in the region. The Congo Crisis was marked by secessionist attempts in resource-rich provinces, particularly Katanga, supported by external actors interested in protecting mining investments (Brydges 2013, 23–24; Wakenge 2021, 45).

The assassination of Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba and external interventions undermined state consolidation and created a dangerous precedent: access to resources became a central means of obtaining and

maintaining political power. This period represented a critical moment in which extractive institutions were not only inherited, but also adapted to new political realities, highlighting the link between resource abundance and political instability (Brydges 2013, 23–24; Wakenge 2021, 45).

### **3.3. The Mobutu Regime: Patronage, Corruption, and Institutional Decline (1966–1997)**

Under the leadership of Mobutu Sese Seko, Congo (renamed Zaire) was characterized by systemic corruption and political clientelism, as well as inefficient economic policies that led to a significant decline in state capacity. Beginning in the 1970s, the main industries were placed under direct state control, which resulted in a sharp recession in the mining sector. The expropriation of foreign assets and the expulsion of skilled workers led to a dramatic drop in production, while high levels of corruption and excessive customs duties stimulated the informal economy and smuggling. During this period, investment in health, education, and infrastructure was largely marginalized. Although the DRC possessed significant revenues from natural resources, these were not directed toward development, but instead fuelled the consolidation of an authoritarian regime. Therefore, underdevelopment was not the result of a lack of resources, but rather of the way in which these resources were managed within an extractive institutional framework (Brydges 2013, 24–26; Wakenge 2021, 45–46).

### **3.4. The Congo Wars and the Conflict Economy (1996–2003)**

The collapse of the Mobutu regime was followed by a new phase of major instability. The Congo wars of 1996–1997 and 1998–2003 involved multiple states and armed groups, transforming the DRC into the centre of regional conflicts. Particularly in the eastern part of the country, which is rich in various minerals, control over resources became a central stake in the conflict. During this period, natural resources were directly exploited by rebel groups and foreign armies in order to finance military operations, reinforcing what the literature describes as a “*conflict economy*”. The absence of state control and the fragmentation of authority contributed to

the emergence of alternative power structures operating in parallel with formal institutions (Brydges 2013, 26–27; Wakenge 2021, 45–46). In this context, religious organizations played an essential role in maintaining basic public services, such as education and healthcare. This aspect was particularly visible in the case of the Catholic Church, which became a central actor in the provision of social services (Englebert and Tull 2008, 127).

### **3.5. The Post-Conflict Period and the Persistence of Extractive Institutions**

Although peace agreements officially ended the major conflicts, instability persisted, particularly in eastern DRC. The continued presence of armed groups, uncontrolled artisanal mining, and resource smuggling perpetuated an informal system of governance, often described as a “*parallel state*” (Brydges 2013, 27–30; Brown 2012, 26). In this context, the provision of public goods remains deeply deficient, and the state is unable to exercise its authority across the entire territory.

The historical evolution of the DRC cannot be understood as the result of recent policy failures, but rather as the product of a long-term institutional trajectory characterized by incremental adaptation and the reproduction of extractive institutions. In accordance with Douglass North’s theory of institutional path dependence (1990), institutions created in a particular historical context tend to persist and adapt to new realities, even when they generate inefficient socioeconomic outcomes.

Prolonged conflict and political instability have contributed to the erosion of state capacity across multiple sectors, encouraging the development of a logic of informal redistribution of public resources, particularly those originating from the extractive sector. This dynamic has weakened formal state structures and led to the emergence of a “*parallel state*” operating both outside and alongside formal authority (Wakenge 2021, 47).

In this regard, the relationship between public authority and tax collection reflects the extremely limited administrative capacity of the

state to generate revenue. Informal taxation, practiced by state agents, military forces, or traditional authorities, has become widespread, particularly in the mining sector. In resource-rich provinces such as Katanga or North Kivu, mineral extraction and trade often occur outside the legal framework, with official taxes applied only at later stages of the distribution chain, frequently negotiable and rarely returned to the public budget. As a result, informal economic activities have become intertwined with formal ones, while the distribution of resources and economic control have remained concentrated in the hands of a narrow elite. This institutional structure severely limits the state's ability to provide essential public goods and reinforces a vicious cycle of underdevelopment characterized by corruption, political instability, and increased dependence on natural resources (Wakenge 2021, 47–48).

In this sense, the history of the Democratic Republic of Congo suggests that persistent underdevelopment and instability derive from the perpetuation of extractive institutions, dependence on natural resources, external interventions, and the continuous weakening of state functions. Current poor performance in the fields of health and education must therefore be understood as manifestations of this historical institutional structure, rather than as simple administrative dysfunctions or failures of public policy.

#### **4. Research Methodology and Data**

The paper uses a case study approach, focusing on the Democratic Republic of Congo in order to analyse the relationship between governance failure and socioeconomic performance. The choice of the DRC is justified by its theoretical and empirical relevance, as it is frequently cited in the literature as an example of a state characterized by extractive institutions, political instability, and persistent underdevelopment, despite considerable economic potential. The analysis is based on a qualitative approach, complemented by the examination of descriptive statistical data. The objective of the analysis is

not to test strict causal relationships, but rather to identify coherent patterns of association between institutional structures and the state's capacity to provide essential public goods.

In this regard, institutional weakness is analysed through its impact on two central dimensions of socioeconomic development: public health and education. The selection of these domains is based on neo-institutionalist literature, which considers the provision of public goods a key indicator of state capacity and of the inclusive or extractive nature of institutions. For the public health sector, the research analyses the following indicators: public health expenditure (% of GDP); infant mortality rate; maternal mortality rate; and life expectancy at birth. These indicators are commonly used in development literature to evaluate population well-being and the state's ability to provide basic public services (World Bank 2024; UNDP 2023). For the education sector, the indicators include: literacy rate; primary and secondary school enrolment rates; and urban-rural and gender disparities in access to education. According to neo-institutionalist theory, education represents a central element in the accumulation of human capital, and low levels of these indicators reflect the existence of extractive political and economic institutions (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012).

The data used in the analysis come from various sources, including the World Bank, UNDP, UNESCO Institute for Statistics, the International Monetary Fund, and reports from other relevant international organizations. These sources provide a solid basis for analysing the socioeconomic performance of the DRC.

## **5. Applied Analysis: Extractive Institutions and the Provision of Public Goods in the DRC**

In the context of the Democratic Republic of Congo, characterized by extractive institutions, recurrent armed conflicts, and limited administrative capacity, underperformance in the public health and education sectors can be interpreted as concrete manifestations of a

persistent historical institutional structure rather than simple administrative dysfunctions (Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson 2001). Thus, the analysis aims to explain why public policies in these areas fail to produce sustainable results.

### **5.1. Public Health as a Dimension of Socioeconomic Development in the DRC**

From a neo-institutionalist perspective, the performance of the health system represents an essential indicator of the state's capacity to provide public goods and, implicitly, of the quality of political and economic institutions. In the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo, available data consistently indicate extremely low levels of investment and outcomes in the public health sector, reflecting the extractive nature of existing institutions.

Public health expenditure as a percentage of GDP represents a central indicator of the institutional capacity of the state. In the DRC, financing for the health sector is limited and heavily dependent on external sources, highlighting the presence of extractive political institutions that do not prioritize investment in human capital. According to the most recent data provided by the World Bank (2022a), only 0.7% of GDP is allocated to health expenditure in the DRC. Consequently, public health spending is insufficient, and medical infrastructure remains poorly developed, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas. Access to medical services is often conditioned by direct payments, which limits access to essential care for poor populations. Within an extractive institutional framework, resources are allocated unevenly, and public health does not represent a strategic priority for the state. This situation is further aggravated by political instability and prolonged conflict, which further undermine administrative capacity.

The consequences of this underfunding are reflected in health indicators. The infant mortality rate and maternal mortality rate remain high, while life expectancy at birth remains low compared to regional averages. The infant mortality rate stands at 47.4 deaths per 1,000 live

births (Worldometer 2026), while the maternal mortality rate is 427 deaths per 100,000 births (World Bank 2023). The average of life expectancy at birth in the Democratic Republic of Congo is 62.4 years for both sexes, respectively 64.6 for women, and 60.2 for men (Worldometer 2026), which is below the regional average. These figures illustrate how minimal state investment in public health services leads to higher mortality rates and lower life expectancy.

The impact of conflict is particularly visible in the eastern regions of the country, where medical infrastructure has been severely damaged or destroyed. According to Brown (2012, 34), in the areas most affected by violence the health system is almost non-existent, and the population's access to medical services is extremely limited. Available data indicate that in 2019 only 32% of health centres had access to electricity, and the number of hospital beds per 1,000 inhabitants fell below 1, reflecting the continuous degradation of health infrastructure. The COVID-19 pandemic further amplified these problems by affecting investment and the development of healthcare networks (International Monetary Fund, Fiscal Affairs Department 2023).

These deficiencies are further exacerbated by the unequal distribution of medical personnel. At the provincial level, access to both specialist and general physicians is highly constrained, increasing territorial disparities and the vulnerability of rural communities. Only 40% of provincial health divisions had at least one specialist doctor, and 47% had a general practitioner. This situation reflects both institutional weakness and the persistence of a parallel state in which public services are delivered incompletely or through non-state actors, such as the Catholic Church (International Monetary Fund 2023; Englebert and Tull 2008, 127).

From this perspective, the inefficiency and inadequacy of the health system in the DRC cannot be explained solely by temporary factors, but must be understood as the result of an extractive institutional structure in which political elites lack incentives to invest in public goods

that generate broadly distributed benefits (Acemoglu and Robinson 2008). Furthermore, as the literature suggests, improvements in health indicators are more likely in contexts where dominant groups have a direct interest in the provision of public services, which is characteristic of inclusive political institutions. In extractive regimes, where power is concentrated and elites can access private healthcare, public investment remains limited, while negative consequences are disproportionately borne by vulnerable populations (Besley and Kudamatsu 2006, 313–314). As a result, fragile institutional frameworks directly affect the trajectory of the country's socioeconomic development.

## **5.2. Education as a Dimension of Socioeconomic Development in the DRC**

Education represents a second central dimension for evaluating the impact of systemic inefficiency on socioeconomic progress, as it is a key factor in the accumulation of human capital and long-term productivity growth. In the DRC, developments in the education sector reflect the same institutional logic observed in the health sector, being characterized by underfunding, structural inequalities, and limited administrative capacity.

At the declarative level, the Congolese state has adopted policies aimed at expanding access to education, the most important being the introduction of free primary education starting 2019 (Latif and Adelman 2021). This measure can be interpreted as a formal step toward more inclusive institutions. However, neo-institutionalist theory suggests that extractive institutions may permit the adoption of formally inclusive policies without providing the necessary investment or effective mechanisms for their implementation (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012).

Prior to the introduction of free education, the Congolese education system relied largely on household financing, following the state's gradual withdrawal from education funding beginning in the 1980s. Although this model allowed the maintenance of relatively high primary school enrolment, it intensified social and territorial inequalities, with

school fees representing the main barrier to both access to and retention in the education system. Approximately 80% of public primary schools are administered by religious networks under formal agreements with the state, reflecting the state's inability to directly provide this essential public good. This institutional structure partially explains why the DRC managed to reach a net primary enrolment rate of 78% despite extremely high levels of poverty (Latif and Adelman 2021).

However, the education system faces severe underfunding and major quality problems. Total expenditure per primary school student was estimated at only 50 USD in 2014, four times lower than the average in Sub-Saharan Africa. Before the introduction of free primary education, tens of thousands of teachers were not officially recognized and were not included on the government payroll. The quality of educational services remains reduced, reflected in poor infrastructure, lack of teaching materials, and limited teacher training (Latif and Adelman 2021).

Dependence on household financing has also increased regional and social inequalities. School enrolment rates are significantly higher in urban areas, especially in the capital, than in central and rural provinces. Only 24% of rural girls reach the 12th grade, compared to 69% of boys in urban areas. Governance weaknesses have allowed school fees to function as an extractive mechanism, with part of the funds diverted to administrative structures with limited benefits for students (Latif and Adelman 2021).

Although some progress has been made in recent years, such as the growth in the number of secondary school teachers to approximately 4.2 per 1,000 inhabitants in 2019, overall levels of literacy and schooling remain low, and urban-rural disparities persist (International Monetary Fund 2023). The introduction of free primary education was accompanied by a rise in the education budget from 11.6% in 2017 to 21.8% in 2021, as well as an increase in primary school enrolment of more than 3 million children (Latif and Adelman 2021). However, public expenditure on education represented only 2.8% of GDP in 2022, an insufficient level to support

infrastructure development, adequate teacher salaries, and improvements in educational quality (World Bank 2022b).

Educational indicators confirm these structural constraints. In 2020, the adult literacy rate (15+) was 66%, while the literacy rate among youth aged 15–24 reached 84% (World Bank 2018; 2020). According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics data, the primary school completion rate in 2021 was 79% for girls and 86% for boys. However, lower secondary completion rates show a significant decline, with only 51.4% of girls and 63.5% of boys finalizing this level of education. Secondary school enrolment rates also reveal a gender gap: 44% of girls are enrolled compared to 70% of boys. The low level of education among girls is partially explained by high rates of early marriage and early motherhood (UIS data, n.d apud UNESCO 2024).

Although the introduction of free primary education significantly increased enrolment rates, the measure has not been sufficient to eliminate the structural deficiencies of the system. Persistent underfunding, weak governance, and dependence on external financing indicate that education in the DRC continues to be shaped by deep institutional constraints, typical of a framework dominated by extractive institutions. From a neo-institutionalist perspective, these results confirm the argument that extractive institutions limit long-term investment in human capital and contribute to the persistence of socioeconomic underdevelopment.

## **6. Conclusions, Limitations, and Future Research Directions**

The selected case study analysed socioeconomic development in the Democratic Republic of Congo from a neo-institutionalist perspective, with the main objective of evaluating the role of political and economic institutions in explaining weak performance in key areas of social welfare. Drawing on the theoretical contributions of Douglass North and Acemoglu and Robinson, the paper highlights that the persistence of extractive

**institutions represents a key determinant of long-term underdevelopment.**

**The analysis of the historical and institutional context showed that institutions created during the colonial period, primarily oriented toward extraction and control, generated an institutional trajectory characterized by path dependence. This trajectory was not interrupted after independence, but was adapted by postcolonial elites, contributing to the weakening of state capacity and the erosion of institutional legitimacy (North 1990; Acemoglu and Robinson 2012).**

**The empirical analysis shows that institutional weakness has direct and observable consequences for the provision of public services. The poor outcomes observed in the Democratic Republic of Congo's health and education sectors cannot be explained solely by low-income levels or external economic constraints; rather, they reflect distorted institutional incentives and limited administrative capacity. In both sectors examined, public policies exist primarily at a formal or declarative level. However, their effectiveness is constrained by insufficient long-term investment and a strong dependence on external financing. As a result, the persistence of extractive political and economic institutions reinforces a cycle of underdevelopment characterized by limited access to essential public goods and inadequate human capital accumulation.**

**Despite the relevance of these findings, the study has several limitations. Firstly, the use of a case study design limits the generalization of conclusions to other national contexts. Secondly, the limited availability of data for certain periods and regions reduces the complexity of the empirical analysis, particularly in the context of territorial fragmentation and armed conflict. Moreover, the relationship between institutions and socioeconomic development is complex and bidirectional, and other factors, such as geopolitical dynamics or external interventions, were not analysed in detail.**

**Future research could expand the analysis through comparative studies between the Democratic Republic of Congo and other states with**

similar levels of development, or by examining the role of institutional reforms and international interventions in facilitating transitions from extractive institutions toward more inclusive ones.

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