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Governance and Economic Emergence in Africa: A Bibliometric Mapping and Thematic Analysis of the Scientific Landscape

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Abstract:

The relationship between governance quality and economic emergence has become a central concern in development research, particularly within African contexts where institutional effectiveness strongly shapes growth trajectories. Despite a rapidly expanding body of literature, studies remain dispersed across disciplines and theoretical traditions, limiting a consolidated understanding of the field's intellectual structure. This study addresses this gap through a bibliometric analysis of 1,255 documents indexed in Scopus between 2000 and 2025. Using performance indicators, collaboration networks, and science mapping techniques, the paper examines publication dynamics, influential authors and sources, geographic patterns of production, and thematic configurations. The findings reveal a fast-growing and interdisciplinary domain organized around a core governance–development nexus, complemented by emerging streams on sustainability, corporate governance, and local policy implementation. While research is concentrated in a few international hubs, several African countries remain underrepresented, indicating substantial opportunities for original contributions. The study provides a systematic overview of the field and outlines strategic directions for future research.

Keywords: Governance; Economic development: Economic emergence; Africa

Introduction

Over the last three decades, governance has progressively shifted from a peripheral institutional concern to a central explanatory variable in development economics and public policy research. Early growth models primarily emphasized capital accumulation, trade openness, and macroeconomic stability. However, subsequent theoretical and empirical advances have demonstrated that economic performance cannot be fully understood without considering the quality of institutions, regulatory frameworks, and state capacity. In this perspective, governance is no longer treated as a contextual factor but as a structural determinant of development trajectories (North, 1990; Acemoglu, Johnson, & Robinson, 2001; Rodrik, Subramanian, & Trebbi, 2004).

This institutional turn has been particularly salient in the African context. Persistent development gaps, uneven growth patterns, and recurrent policy failures have encouraged scholars and international organizations to investigate the role of public administration, accountability mechanisms, and policy effectiveness in shaping economic outcomes. As emphasized by Mkandawire (2015) and Grindle (2012), the debate has gradually evolved from a narrow focus on "good governance" norms toward more nuanced analyses of how institutional configurations interact with local political economies. Consequently, research on governance and economic emergence in Africa has expanded significantly, spanning multiple disciplines including economics, management, political science, and development studies.

Yet, despite this growing volume of scholarship, the literature remains fragmented. Studies differ in their conceptualizations of governance, their empirical strategies, and their units of analysis. Some emphasize macro-institutional quality and cross-country comparisons (Kaufmann, Kraay, & Mastruzzi, 2010), others focus on corporate and financial governance mechanisms (Claessens & Yurtoglu, 2013), while more recent contributions incorporate sustainability, environmental resilience, and territorial governance dimensions (Seto et al., 2011; Koop & Leeuwen, 2017). This thematic dispersion complicates the identification of dominant paradigms, emerging debates, and unexplored research areas. As a result, the cumulative structure of knowledge in this field remains insufficiently mapped.

In such settings, traditional narrative reviews provide only partial insights, as they are often constrained by subjective selection and limited coverage. Bibliometric analysis offers a complementary and more systematic alternative. By quantitatively examining publication trends, citation networks, collaboration patterns, and keyword co-occurrences, bibliometrics enables the reconstruction of the intellectual and social structure of a research domain (Donthu et al., 2021; Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Rather than focusing solely on what is said in the literature, it reveals how knowledge is produced, organized, and diffused across scholars, institutions, and countries.

Building on this methodological perspective, the present study conducts a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of research addressing governance and economic emergence in Africa. Using the Scopus database, we map the evolution of scientific production, identify the most influential authors and publications, analyze collaboration networks, and uncover the main thematic clusters structuring the field. Beyond descriptive statistics, the objective is to highlight areas of consolidation as well as zones of underrepresentation that signal opportunities for future inquiry. Particular attention is devoted to countries that remain marginal in the indexed

literature, as these contexts often provide fertile ground for original empirical and theoretical contributions.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. Section 2 details the methodological framework, including the choice of a bibliometric approach, data source selection, search strategy, inclusion criteria, and analytical tools. Section 3 presents the results, covering publication trends, author productivity, citation impact, geographic distribution, collaboration structures, and thematic mapping. Section 4 discusses the main findings and interprets the intellectual configuration of the field. Finally, Section 5 concludes by outlining limitations and proposing directions for future research.

1. Research methodology

1.1 Choice of a bibliometric analysis

Research on governance and economic emergence in Africa has expanded considerably over the last two decades. However, this body of work remains theoretically dispersed and empirically fragmented across several disciplines, including development economics, public administration, management studies, and political science. Concepts such as governance quality, institutional performance, and economic transformation are frequently mobilized with different analytical lenses, which complicates the identification of cumulative knowledge and structured research streams.

Under these conditions, a traditional narrative review would risk partial coverage and subjective interpretation. A bibliometric approach was therefore selected as a more rigorous and transparent alternative. Bibliometric analysis enables the systematic exploration of large scientific corpora through quantitative indicators, allowing the mapping of publication dynamics, influential contributions, collaboration networks, and thematic structures. Beyond descriptive statistics, this method helps uncover the intellectual architecture of the field, detect emerging topics, and identify research gaps. Consequently, it is particularly suited for synthesizing interdisciplinary domains characterized by conceptual heterogeneity, such as governance and development studies in the African context.

1.2 Data source: Scopus database

The dataset was extracted exclusively from the Scopus database. This choice is motivated by several methodological and practical considerations.

First, Scopus provides one of the broadest coverages of peer-reviewed publications in the social sciences, economics, and management, which constitute the core disciplinary foundations of this study. Second, it offers standardized bibliographic metadata, including author affiliations, abstracts, keywords, citations, and references, which are essential for conducting advanced bibliometric analyses such as co-authorship, co-citation, and keyword co-occurrence mapping. Third, Scopus ensures high data reliability through rigorous indexing criteria, thereby reducing the inclusion of non-academic or low-quality sources.

Relying on a single database also enhances replicability, as the search strategy can be reproduced precisely by other researchers.

1.3 Research strategy

To ensure both conceptual breadth and thematic precision, a structured Boolean search query was designed around three core dimensions: governance, economic emergence or development,

and the African geographical context. The search was conducted within titles, abstracts, and keywords in order to capture documents in which these themes are central rather than marginal. The final query implemented in Scopus was:

TITLE-ABS-KEY (("governance" OR "public governance" OR "economic governance" OR "corporate governance") AND ("economic emergence" OR "emerging economy" OR "emerging economies" OR "economic development" OR "economic growth") AND ("Africa" OR "african economies")) AND PUBYEAR > 1999 AND PUBYEAR < 2026 AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar") OR LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ch") OR LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "re")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "ECON") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "BUSI") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "SOCI")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "English"))

This strategy generated an initial corpus of 1,794 documents. The relatively large volume confirms the growing academic interest in the intersection between governance mechanisms and economic development processes across African economies.

2.4 Selection process and inclusion criteria

A multi-stage filtering process was applied to ensure both relevance and analytical coherence of the dataset.

First, a temporal boundary was introduced, restricting publications to the period 2000–2025. This timeframe captures contemporary governance debates and modern development trajectories while excluding earlier literature that may reflect outdated institutional or economic contexts. Second, disciplinary filters were applied to retain publications located within Social Sciences, Economics, Econometrics and Finance, and Business, Management and Accounting. These subject areas correspond directly to the theoretical foundations of governance and economic performance studies. Third, document types were restricted to articles, review papers, and book chapters. Editorials, notes, conference abstracts, and non-scholarly outputs were excluded in order to focus on substantial scientific contributions. Fourth, only documents written in English were retained to ensure linguistic consistency and comparability during text mining and keyword analyses.

Table 1. Documents' selection criteria

Category	Inclusion criteria	Number of documents
Initial number of documents		1794
Time Line	From 2000 to 2025	
Subject area	-Social Sciences -Economics, Econometrics and Finance -Business, Management and Accounting	
Academic Databases	-Scopus;	
Documents types	-Articles -Review -Chapters	
Language	English	
Final number of documents		**1255**

Finally, a manual screening of titles and abstracts was conducted to remove peripheral publications in which Africa or governance appeared only incidentally.

After applying these inclusion criteria, the final sample comprised 1,255 documents, which constitutes the analytical corpus for the bibliometric investigation.

2.5 Bibliometric tools and analytical procedures

Two complementary tools were employed to conduct the bibliometric analysis: VOSviewer 1.6 20 and Bibliometrix.5.0

VOSviewer was used primarily for network visualization and mapping. It enables the construction of graphical representations of bibliometric relationships, including co-authorship networks, country collaborations, keyword co-occurrence maps, and co-citation structures. Its clustering algorithms facilitate the identification of thematic groupings and intellectual communities within the dataset.

Bibliometrix, implemented through the R environment, was used for descriptive and performance analyses. This package provides advanced statistical indicators such as publication trends, most productive authors and institutions, citation impact measures, and thematic evolution over time. It also supports reproducible workflows and offers greater flexibility for customized analyses.

The combined use of these tools allows both exploratory visualization and rigorous quantitative assessment, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the structure, dynamics, and thematic configuration of research on governance and economic emergence in Africa.

2. Results analysis

3.1 Overview of documents

The final dataset comprises 1,255 publications indexed in Scopus over the period 2000–2025, distributed across 701 distinct sources. This dispersion across journals and outlets already suggests that research on governance and economic emergence in Africa is not concentrated within a single disciplinary core but rather evolves at the intersection of development economics, public policy, management, and broader social sciences. In other words, the field exhibits a structurally interdisciplinary configuration rather than a consolidated academic niche.

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From a temporal perspective, the annual growth rate of 17.59 percent indicates a sustained and accelerating expansion of scientific output. Such a rate is relatively high for social science domains and signals that governance-related development issues in Africa have progressively gained prominence within the global research agenda. This dynamic likely reflects both the growing policy relevance of institutional reforms across African economies and the increasing availability of governance indicators and macroeconomic datasets, which facilitate empirical investigations.

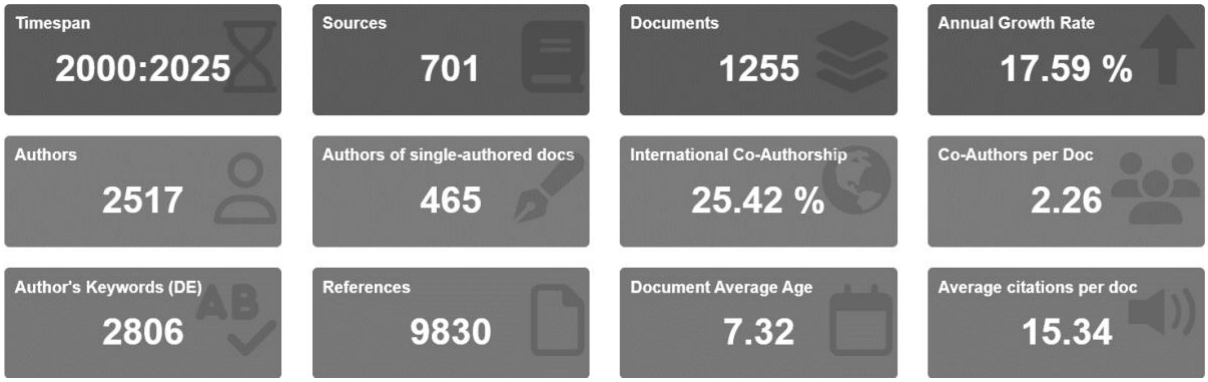


Figure 1. Documents' overview

The authorship structure further illustrates the vitality of the field. A total of 2,517 authors contributed to the corpus, revealing a broad and diversified research community. However, only 465 documents were single-authored, suggesting that the production of knowledge in this area is predominantly collaborative. This pattern is confirmed by an average of 2.26 co-authors per document, which aligns with contemporary trends in applied social sciences where empirical and comparative studies often require interdisciplinary or cross-country collaboration.

International collaboration also appears to play a significant role. The share of internationally co-authored publications reaches 25.42 percent, indicating that roughly one quarter of the output involves cross-border partnerships. This feature is particularly relevant for research on African governance and development, as many studies rely on international research networks, donor-funded projects, or comparative institutional analyses that transcend national boundaries.

In terms of intellectual content, the corpus includes 2,806 author keywords, which points to a high level of thematic diversity. Such lexical richness suggests that the field encompasses multiple conceptual entry points, ranging from institutional quality and public sector reforms to growth dynamics, sustainability, and inclusive development. This diversity further justifies the use of bibliometric mapping techniques to identify coherent thematic clusters within the literature.

The citation profile provides additional insight into the maturity and influence of the field. With an average of 15.34 citations per document, the publications demonstrate a moderate yet consistent level of scholarly impact, indicating that the topic attracts sustained academic attention rather than isolated or short-lived debates. The average document age of 7.32 years suggests a balanced corpus that combines foundational contributions with more recent studies, allowing both historical depth and contemporary relevance.

Finally, the 9,830 references cited across the dataset reflect a dense and cumulative knowledge base. This extensive referencing behavior signals that the field increasingly builds upon established theoretical and empirical foundations rather than developing in isolation.

Taken together, these descriptive indicators portray a research domain that is expanding rapidly, methodologically collaborative, internationally connected, and intellectually heterogeneous. Such characteristics are typical of an emerging yet progressively structuring field, which justifies deeper bibliometric exploration of its thematic and relational architecture in the following sub-sections.

3.2 Annual scientific production

The temporal distribution of publications reveals a clear transformation of the field from a marginal research niche into a rapidly expanding domain of inquiry. The trajectory is neither linear nor uniform; rather, it reflects successive phases of emergence, consolidation, and acceleration.

During the early 2000s, scientific output remained limited, with only a handful of publications produced annually. This initial stage can be interpreted as an exploratory phase, where governance and economic development in Africa were addressed sporadically and often embedded within broader development studies rather than treated as a distinct analytical focus. The topic had not yet crystallized into a coherent research agenda.

A gradual expansion becomes visible from the late 2000s to the mid-2010s. Annual production stabilizes at moderate levels, oscillating between roughly 20 and 50 publications per year. This period suggests a process of conceptual consolidation. Governance indicators, institutional quality measures, and macroeconomic datasets became more widely available, enabling more systematic empirical investigations. At the same time, policy debates around state capacity, institutional reforms, and sustainable development increasingly positioned governance as a central explanatory variable for growth performance in African economies.

From approximately 2018 onwards, the curve exhibits a marked acceleration. Publication counts rise steadily and then sharply, culminating in a pronounced surge after 2022. The most recent years show an almost exponential increase, with output more than doubling within a short time span. This inflection point signals a transition toward a mature and highly visible research domain. Governance is no longer treated as a peripheral institutional variable but as a core determinant of economic emergence, resilience, and structural transformation.

Several factors may account for this recent intensification. First, the growing international attention to sustainable development goals, institutional reforms, and public sector performance has reinforced the relevance of governance-centered analyses. Second, comparative and cross-country datasets have facilitated large-scale quantitative studies, encouraging broader participation from international research teams. Third, contemporary challenges such as economic vulnerability, political transitions, and post-crisis recovery have further stimulated scholarly interest in governance effectiveness across African contexts.

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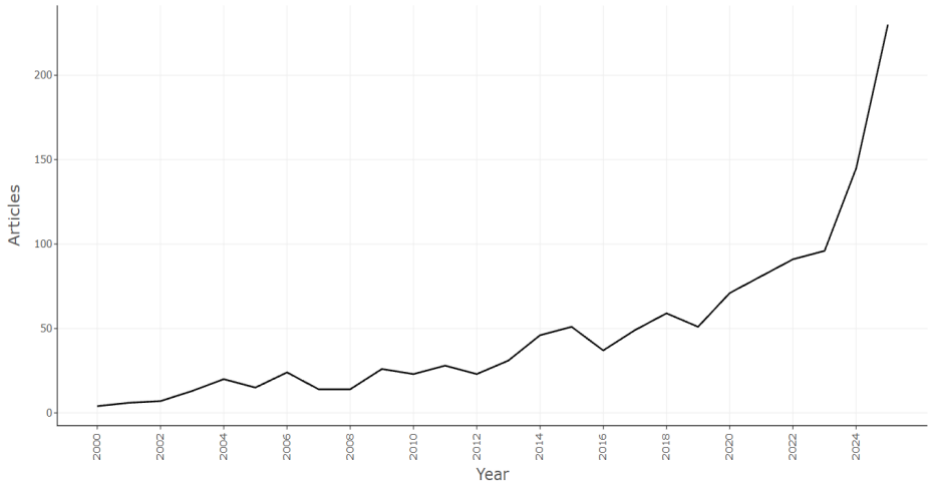


Figure 2. Evolution of the field

3.3 Authors' impact

The distribution of author productivity reveals a moderately concentrated yet still relatively dispersed research landscape. No single scholar overwhelmingly dominates the field, which suggests that governance and economic emergence in Africa remains a collective and evolving area rather than one structured around a small group of highly central contributors.

Among the most prolific researchers, Simplice S.A. stands out with 13 publications, positioning this author as a key contributor and likely an intellectual anchor within the domain. A second tier of active scholars follows, including Agyapong E.K. with 8 publications, and Abaidoo R. and Tanzala Kikasu E., each with 7 documents. Several others, such as Dorasamy N., Fosu A.K., Simplice S., and Taylor I., contribute 6 publications each, while Besada H. and Mhlanga D. complete the group with 5 publications.

This pattern indicates a structure characterized by multiple medium-level contributors rather than extreme concentration. Such a configuration is typical of interdisciplinary and policy-oriented research areas, where knowledge production emerges through distributed scholarly efforts and collaborative networks rather than through a single dominant school of thought.

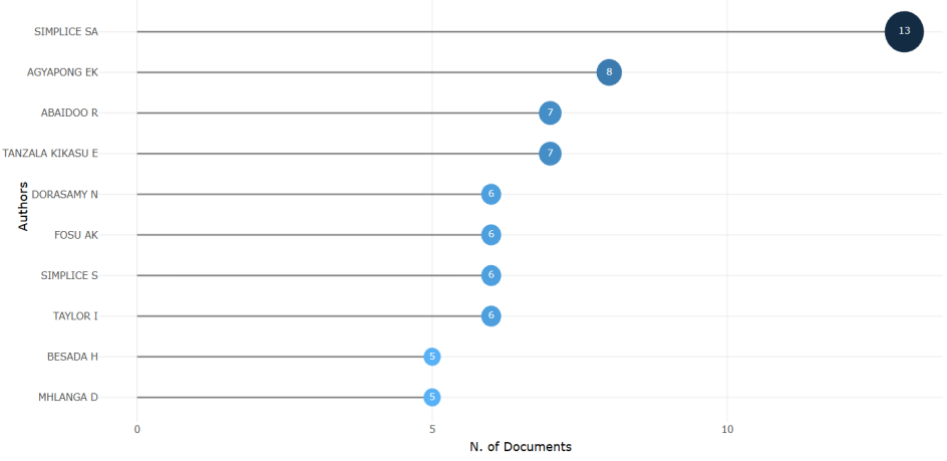


Figure 3. Top 10 cited authors

Overall, the field appears to rely on a small core of recurrent authors who ensure thematic continuity, surrounded by a broader periphery of occasional contributors. This combination

reflects both consolidation and openness, two characteristics often observed in research domains that are still expanding and diversifying.

Table 2. Authors' local impact

Author	h_index	g_index	m_index	TC	NP	PY_start
SIMPLICE S	6	6	0.545	103	6	2016
SIMPLICE SA	6	9	1.500	84	13	2013
FOSU AK	5	6	0.208	116	6	2003
AGYEMANG AO	4	4	2.000	84	4	2025
OGBUABOR JE	4	5	0.571	90	5	2020
SHITTU WO	4	4	0.571	95	4	2020
ABAIDOO R	3	7	0.600	109	7	2022
ACKAH I	3	3	0.250	25	3	2015
ADEOSUN OA	3	3	0.600	19	3	2022
AGU C	3	3	0.750	16	3	2023

The local impact indicators provide a more nuanced picture than simple productivity counts, as they capture not only the volume of publications but also their citation influence within the corpus. Two distinct profiles emerge. First, Simplice S.A. combines both productivity and influence. With 13 publications, an h-index of 6, and the highest g-index (9), this author appears as the most structurally central contributor, indicating a consistent production of well-cited work over time. The relatively high m-index (1.500) further suggests a sustained and rapid accumulation of impact since entering the field in 2013. By contrast, Simplice S., while equally strong in h-index terms (6), displays a lower growth rate, pointing to a more gradual consolidation of influence. A second profile corresponds to historically established scholars whose impact derives from longevity. Fosu A.K. illustrates this trajectory. Although the number of publications is moderate (6), the total citations (116) are the highest in the group. This pattern suggests foundational or widely referenced contributions that continue to shape the literature, even if recent productivity is less intense.

Conversely, several authors exhibit rapid recent influence. Agyemang A.O., Abaidoo R., and Ogbuabor J.E. show relatively high m-index values combined with recent starting years, indicating accelerated visibility and emerging prominence. These scholars likely represent the new generation structuring the contemporary phase of the field.

Overall, the impact structure reflects a balanced ecosystem composed of foundational authors providing intellectual continuity and younger researchers driving recent dynamism. This coexistence of established influence and emerging leadership is characteristic of a domain undergoing consolidation while still expanding.

3.4 Documents impact

The citation profile of the most influential documents highlights both the intellectual foundations and the thematic breadth of the field. Rather than being dominated exclusively by narrowly defined governance studies, the most cited works span development economics,

political economy, environmental governance, and structural transformation, confirming the interdisciplinary nature of research on governance and economic emergence in Africa.

Several papers exhibit exceptionally high total citations and annual citation rates, indicating enduring and sustained influence. World Politics articles by Miguel (2004) and Mkandawire (2015) appear among the most impactful contributions, suggesting that political economy and state capacity debates constitute core theoretical anchors for the field. These works provide conceptual frameworks that continue to inform empirical analyses of institutional effectiveness and development trajectories.

Other highly cited studies, such as Koop & colleagues (2017) in Environmental Development and Sustainability and Danish (2019) in Structural Change and Economic Dynamics, display particularly high citations per year. This pattern signals more recent yet rapidly diffusing contributions, often associated with sustainability transitions, structural change, and long-term growth dynamics. Their strong annual impact indicates that contemporary research increasingly integrates environmental and structural dimensions into governance and development analyses. Similarly, works published in outlets such as Global Environmental Change, Marine Policy, and Development and Change illustrate the expansion of governance debates toward resource management, urbanization, and climate-related vulnerabilities. This suggests that the concept of governance is progressively applied beyond institutional reform alone to broader socio-ecological and policy challenges.

Table 3. Top 10 cited documents

Paper	DOI	TC	TC per year
KOOP SHA, 2017, ENVIRON DEV SUSTAINABILITY	10.1007/s10668-016-9760-4	376	37.60
MIGUEL E, 2004, WORLD POLIT	10.1017/s0043887100004330	371	16.13
DANISH D, 2019, STRUCT CHANGE ECON DYN	10.1016/j.strueco.2019.08.007	317	39.36
ODENDAAL N, 2003, COMPUT ENVIRON URBAN SYST	10.1016/S0198-9715(03)00016-4	267	11.13
JAMBECK J, 2018, MAR POLICY	10.1016/j.marpol.2017.10.041	264	29.08
MKANDAWIRE T, 2015, WORLD POLIT	10.1017/S004388711500009X	227	18.92
ZAFAR A, 2007, WORLD BANK RES OBS	10.1093/wbro/lkm001	225	11.08
SETO KC, 2011, GLOBAL ENVIRON CHANGE	10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2011.08.005	188	11.23
TAN-MULLINS M, 2010, DEV CHANGE	10.1111/j.1467-7660.2010.01662.x	184	10.82
BAUDOIN M-A, 2017, INT J DISASTER RISK REDUCT	10.1016/j.ijdrr.2017.05.005	182	18.02

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In all, the most cited documents reveal two complementary dynamics. On the one hand, foundational political economy studies provide theoretical continuity and conceptual grounding. On the other hand, newer contributions focused on sustainability and structural transformation demonstrate the field's evolution toward more integrative and policy-relevant perspectives. This dual structure confirms that research on governance and economic emergence in Africa is both cumulative and adaptive, building on established theories while continuously incorporating new developmental challenges.

3.5 Countries scientific production

The geographical mapping of publications highlights a markedly uneven distribution of scientific output across countries, reflecting both disparities in research capacity and differences in institutional integration into global academic networks. The production structure appears strongly polarized between a small group of highly productive countries and a broader set of nations with moderate or emerging contributions.

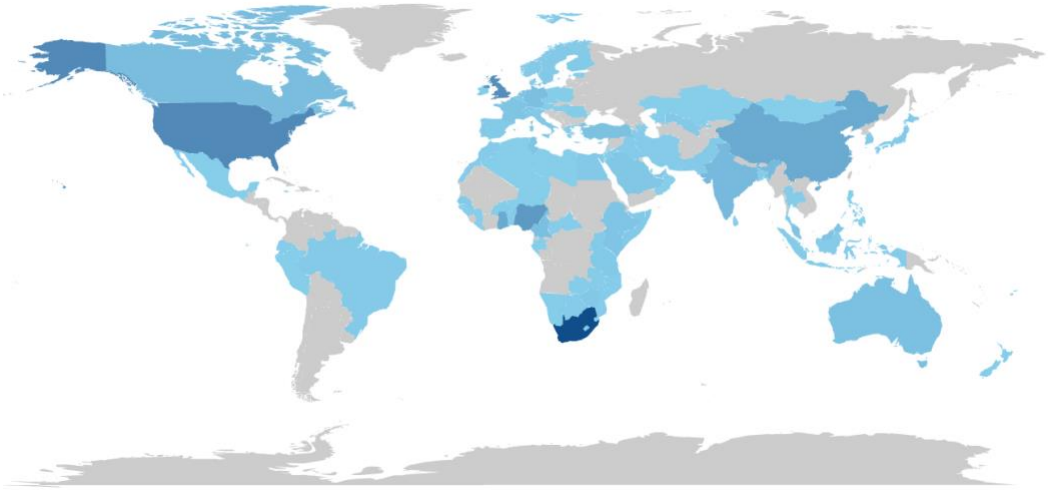


Figure 4. Countries production

The United States clearly occupies a central position, displaying the highest volume of publications. This dominance is consistent with its structural role in global knowledge production, particularly in development economics, political economy, and governance studies. Several European countries, including the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and the Nordic countries, also demonstrate substantial activity, confirming that a significant share of research on African governance is conducted from institutions located outside the continent. This pattern reflects long-standing traditions of international development research and established funding mechanisms oriented toward African public policy and institutional reforms.

Within Africa itself, production is more concentrated. South Africa emerges as the most visible continental hub, with a noticeably higher publication intensity than other African countries. This prominence can be explained by its comparatively strong higher education infrastructure, established research universities, and integration into international academic collaborations. In many respects, South Africa functions as a regional knowledge platform, connecting African empirical contexts with global scholarly debates.

Other African countries contribute more modestly but remain present in the network, indicating a gradual diffusion of research capabilities. However, large parts of the continent remain

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underrepresented, suggesting persistent structural constraints related to funding, institutional capacity, and access to indexed publication channels.

Against this background, **Morocco**'s position is particularly noteworthy. With only six documents identified in the corpus, its quantitative contribution appears limited. Yet this low volume should not be interpreted as marginal relevance. On the contrary, it underscores the originality and strategic importance of focusing research on governance and economic emergence in the Moroccan context. The scarcity of indexed publications signals an underexplored empirical setting rather than a saturated field.

From a scientific standpoint, such underrepresentation creates a clear opportunity for high-impact contributions. When a topic or geographical context is weakly documented, each rigorous study has greater potential to shape the debate, introduce new evidence, and influence comparative analyses. In other words, Morocco represents a research frontier rather than a peripheral case. Its institutional reforms, economic diversification strategies, and positioning between African and Mediterranean dynamics offer distinctive governance configurations that are insufficiently theorized in the current literature.

Therefore, the limited Moroccan output strengthens the academic justification for further investigation. It highlights both a gap in the literature and the potential for novel insights capable of enriching broader discussions on governance and development trajectories in emerging African economies.

On the other hand, the three-field plot below provides an integrated perspective on the structural architecture of the literature by simultaneously linking countries, leading authors, and dominant keywords. Rather than examining these dimensions separately, this visualization reveals how geographic origins of research connect to specific scholars and, in turn, to particular thematic orientations.

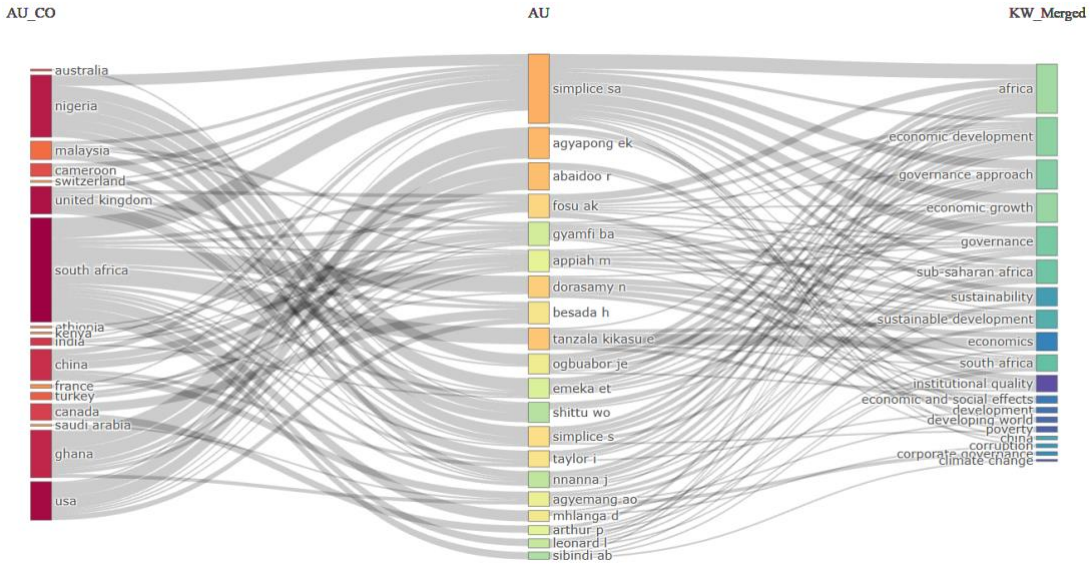


Figure 5. Three field plots

At the country level, production is strongly anchored in a limited number of hubs. South Africa, the United States, the United Kingdom, Nigeria, and several Asian and European countries (such as China, Malaysia, and Switzerland) appear as the most active contributors. This confirms that the study of governance and economic emergence in Africa is not confined to the

continent itself but is shaped by transnational research networks. A significant portion of knowledge about African development is therefore produced through international collaborations and external academic systems, illustrating the globalized nature of development research.

At the author level, a relatively small core group plays an intermediary role between countries and themes. Scholars such as Simplice S.A., Agyapong E.K., Abaidoo R., Fosu A.K., and related collaborators appear repeatedly as central nodes. Their position suggests that they function as intellectual brokers, connecting multiple national contexts with recurrent research topics. This reinforces earlier findings indicating that the field is structured around a core of medium-to-high productivity researchers rather than a single dominant authority.

The keyword structure further clarifies the thematic orientation of the field. The most frequent terms cluster around broad and foundational concepts, including Africa, economic development, governance, economic growth, and institutional quality. These terms indicate that the literature remains primarily concerned with macro-institutional explanations of development performance. At the same time, the presence of keywords such as sustainability, climate change, and poverty reduction suggests a gradual broadening of the agenda toward environmental and social dimensions of governance. The field therefore appears to be evolving from purely institutional analyses toward more integrated development frameworks.

Importantly, the flows between the three dimensions reveal that certain countries and authors are systematically associated with particular thematic emphases. For instance, African-based scholars often engage directly with governance reforms and development policy, while collaborations with researchers from Europe or North America frequently extend the analysis to sustainability, institutional theory, or comparative perspectives. This division of thematic labor reflects differences in research priorities, data access, and funding structures.

In this configuration, **Morocco's** limited representation remains notable. Its weak connectivity within the network signals not only low publication volume but also limited integration into dominant collaborative circuits. However, from an analytical standpoint, this peripheral position constitutes a significant research opportunity. By entering a space that is still structurally underexplored, Moroccan-focused studies can contribute original empirical evidence and potentially reshape thematic linkages within the network. In emerging bibliometric fields, peripheral contexts often become sources of theoretical innovation rather than mere replication.

3.6 Bibliographic coupling

The co-authorship map reveals a relatively fragmented collaboration structure, characterized by several small clusters rather than one dense, highly interconnected network. Most authors appear grouped in localized teams with limited cross-cluster connections, indicating that research on governance and economic emergence in Africa is still organized around independent or semi-autonomous research groups rather than a fully integrated global community.

A few recurrent scholars, such as Simplice, Agyapong, Abaidoo, Fosu, Tanzala Kikasu, and Dorasamy, form identifiable collaboration cores. These authors tend to co-publish within stable partnerships, suggesting the existence of enduring research teams or institutional affiliations

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that structure knowledge production. However, the absence of strong bridges between clusters implies relatively weak inter-group diffusion of ideas.

This configuration is typical of an emerging or multidisciplinary field, where collaborations often remain national or project-based rather than systemic. While international co-authorship exists, it does not yet translate into a cohesive global network.

From an analytical perspective, such fragmentation also signals opportunity. Fields with limited structural centralization are more permeable to new entrants. For underrepresented contexts, including Morocco, integrating into these networks or initiating new collaborative ties could rapidly enhance visibility and influence. In this sense, the current co-authorship pattern reflects both the developmental stage of the field and its openness to future expansion.



Figure 6. Co-authorship

The keyword co-occurrence network reveals a dense and highly interconnected thematic architecture organized around a central core and several peripheral yet coherent clusters. The spatial proximity of terms and the thickness of links indicate that the literature is structured less as isolated topics and more as overlapping intellectual communities. At the center of the map, the concepts “Africa”, “governance approach”, and “economic development” form the gravitational core of the field. Their size and connectivity confirm that most studies articulate governance as a primary explanatory mechanism for development performance, institutional effectiveness, and long-term growth trajectories.

A first cluster, strongly connected to this central core, corresponds to political and institutional governance. It groups terms such as good governance, accountability, public policy, international aid, civil society, democratization, and development aid. This configuration reflects the political economy tradition, where institutional quality, state capacity, and policy reforms are treated as the fundamental determinants of development outcomes. The prominence of these keywords suggests that a significant portion of the literature remains anchored in macro-institutional analysis and reform-oriented frameworks.

A second cluster is oriented toward corporate and market governance. It revolves around corporate governance, financial development, banking, ESG, BRICS, inflation, and macroeconomic stability. Here, governance is conceptualized not only as a state function but

also as a mechanism regulating firms, financial markets, and investment flows. This stream links governance structures with private sector performance, capital allocation, and competitiveness. The presence of emerging economies and BRICS indicates a comparative perspective that situates African economies within broader global transformations.

A third cluster emphasizes sustainability and environmental governance. Terms such as sustainable development, climate change, environmental economics, green finance, and energy policy dominate this area. This thematic block illustrates the progressive integration of ecological constraints into development debates. Governance is increasingly framed as the coordination of environmental transitions, resource management, and climate resilience. The rise of these keywords suggests that the field has moved beyond purely economic growth narratives toward multidimensional development concerns.

A fourth cluster exhibits a territorial and urban orientation, with keywords including South Africa, urban planning, local government, cities, service delivery, vulnerability, and participation. This stream reflects place-based and subnational analyses that examine governance practices at the municipal or regional level. The strong presence of South Africa indicates that it serves as a major empirical laboratory for governance research on the continent. Studies in this cluster tend to focus on implementation issues, local capacity, and citizen engagement rather than national macro-structures.

Finally, a methodological and econometric cluster is visible around terms such as panel data, institutional quality, foreign direct investment, human capital, growth models, and empirical analysis. This group represents the quantitative backbone of the field. It signals the dominance of statistical and econometric approaches aimed at testing causal relationships between governance indicators and development outcomes. The methodological consolidation of this cluster suggests increasing analytical rigor and data-driven inquiry.

Taken together, these clusters reveal a field that is both diversified and progressively integrated. Governance operates as the conceptual bridge connecting political institutions, corporate systems, environmental sustainability, local implementation, and empirical modeling. Thematic evolution appears to follow a trajectory from early institutional and macroeconomic concerns toward more complex, multidimensional, and context-sensitive analyses. This diversification indicates intellectual maturation rather than fragmentation.

Notably, the relative absence of country-specific keywords related to Morocco reinforces the earlier observation of underrepresentation. Within such a structured yet open thematic landscape, introducing empirical work focused on Morocco would not simply add another case study; it could connect multiple clusters simultaneously, linking institutional reforms, regional governance, sustainability strategies, and development performance. In this sense, thematic gaps correspond directly to opportunities for original scientific contribution.

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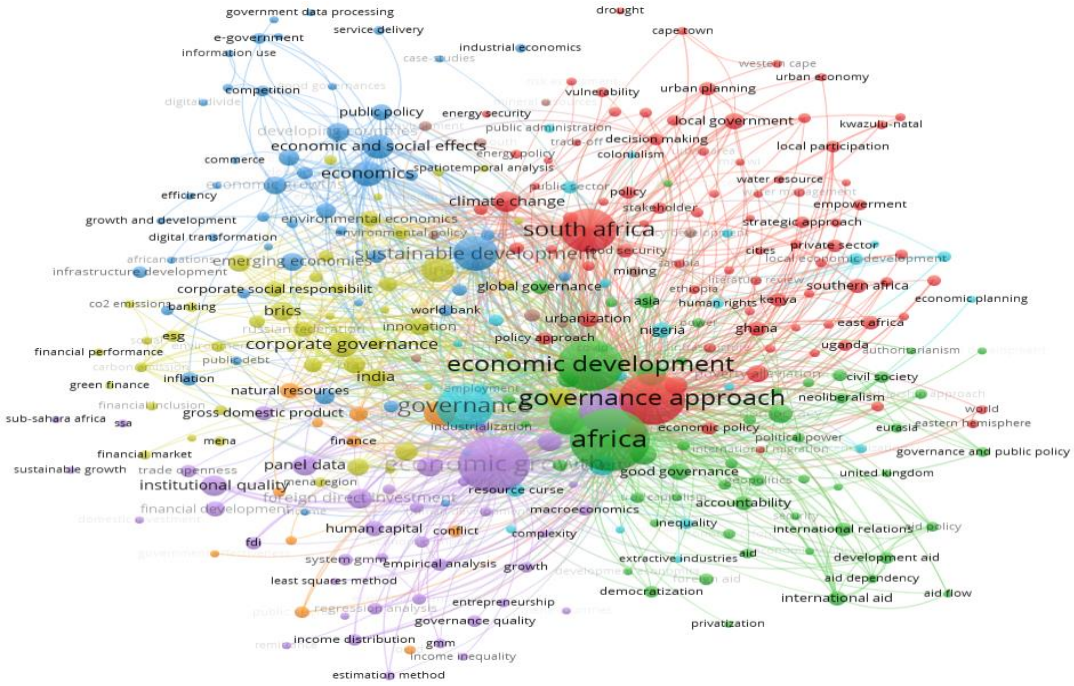


Figure 7. Thematic evolution of the field

3. Discussion

The bibliometric evidence provides a coherent picture of a research domain that has moved from dispersion to progressive consolidation. Taken together, the descriptive indicators, collaboration patterns, and thematic structures suggest that scholarship on governance and economic emergence in Africa is no longer peripheral within development studies but has evolved into a structured and expanding field with identifiable intellectual cores, active communities, and emerging frontiers.

First, the growth dynamics confirm a clear process of maturation. The sustained annual growth rate and the sharp increase in publications during the most recent years indicate that the topic has gained strategic relevance within the global academic agenda. Such acceleration is rarely observed in saturated fields. Instead, it typically characterizes domains where policy urgency, data availability, and theoretical renewal converge. In this case, the increasing emphasis on institutional reforms, sustainable development goals, and state capacity across African economies appears to have stimulated both empirical and conceptual production. The field therefore exhibits not stagnation but cumulative expansion.

Second, the authorship and collaboration patterns reveal a semi-structured intellectual community. The presence of a small group of recurrent and influential scholars provides thematic continuity and theoretical anchoring, while the broader base of contributors ensures diversity of perspectives. At the same time, the co-authorship network remains relatively fragmented, with several small clusters rather than one dense global structure. This configuration suggests that the field is still developing integrative collaborations. From a scientific standpoint, such fragmentation does not necessarily indicate weakness. On the contrary, it reflects openness. New entrants, institutions, or countries can integrate the network without facing strong structural barriers. This is particularly relevant for underrepresented contexts such as Morocco, where targeted collaborations could rapidly enhance visibility and influence.

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Third, the geographic distribution highlights a persistent asymmetry in knowledge production. Research on African governance is largely driven by institutions located in North America and Europe, with South Africa acting as the primary continental hub. While this structure ensures international visibility, it also implies that empirical narratives may be shaped externally. The limited Moroccan presence, evidenced by only a handful of documents, should therefore be interpreted not as marginality but as a clear scientific gap. In bibliometric terms, low-density zones often correspond to high-opportunity research spaces. Empirical studies in such contexts have greater potential to introduce novel evidence, challenge established assumptions, and generate theoretical contributions rather than incremental replication.

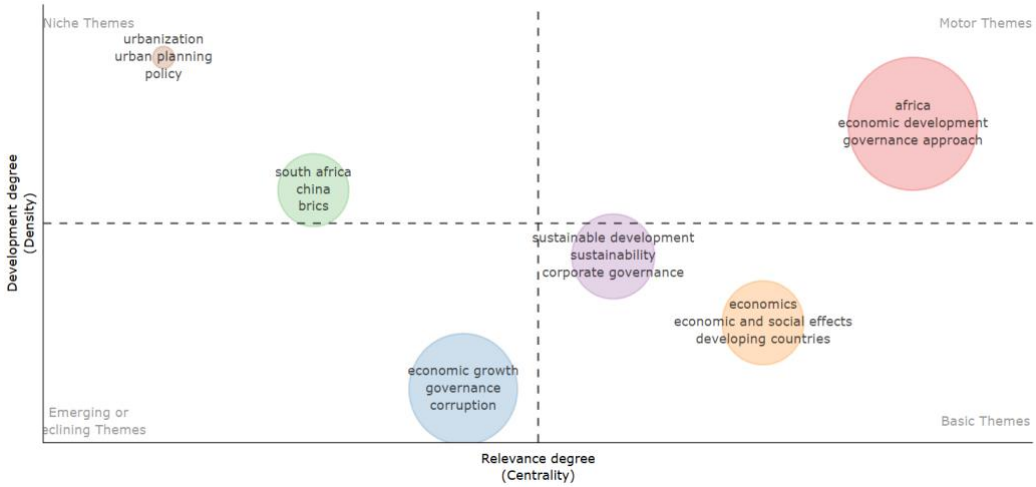


Figure 8. Thematic map

The thematic analyses further clarify the intellectual organization of the field. The keyword network demonstrates that governance operates as a central integrative concept linking political institutions, corporate systems, sustainability concerns, and quantitative development modeling. Rather than a single theoretical stream, the field is composed of interconnected subdomains that collectively explain economic performance. This multidimensional character reflects the complexity of development processes themselves, where institutional, environmental, financial, and social factors interact.

These structural observations are reinforced by the thematic map presented in the figure below. The distribution of themes according to centrality and density provides additional insight into the relative maturity and strategic position of each research stream. The large bubble located in the upper right quadrant, labeled “Africa”, “economic development”, and “governance approach”, clearly represents the motor theme of the field. Its high centrality and density indicate both conceptual importance and internal cohesion. This cluster drives the overall research agenda and constitutes the theoretical backbone of the literature.

In contrast, themes such as “economics”, “economic and social effects”, and “developing countries”, located in the lower right quadrant, function as basic themes. Their strong centrality shows that they are widely connected to other topics, yet their lower density suggests that they remain broad and foundational rather than specialized. These themes provide the general analytical framework within which more focused studies operate.

The cluster combining “sustainable development”, “sustainability”, and “corporate governance”, positioned near the center, appears as a bridging theme. Its intermediate density

and centrality suggest an evolving area that increasingly links environmental concerns with governance and development debates. This location reflects a transition toward more integrative and policy-relevant perspectives, indicating that sustainability considerations are progressively becoming embedded within mainstream governance research rather than remaining peripheral.

Conversely, the upper left quadrant, which includes "urbanization", "urban planning", and "policy", corresponds to niche themes. These topics display strong internal development but limited connections to the broader field. They represent specialized subdomains with high conceptual sophistication yet restricted diffusion. While important, they have not yet fully integrated into the core governance-development discourse.

Finally, the lower left quadrant, containing terms such as "economic growth", "governance", and "corruption", reflects emerging or declining themes. Given their historical importance in development economics, it is more plausible to interpret this position as transitional rather than declining. These topics may be undergoing conceptual reframing, being absorbed into broader governance and sustainability frameworks rather than disappearing.

Overall, the thematic map confirms that the field is both structured and dynamic. A stable core coexists with expanding peripheral and transitional areas, indicating intellectual diversification rather than fragmentation. Importantly, the absence of **Morocco-specific themes** across all quadrants highlights a clear empirical and conceptual gap. Integrating Moroccan case studies could potentially connect several clusters simultaneously, from governance reforms and sustainability transitions to regional development strategies. In this sense, Morocco represents not only an underexplored context but also a promising locus for theoretical innovation.

In sum, the results portray a research domain characterized by rapid growth, moderate consolidation, and significant opportunities for new contributions. The combination of expanding production, distributed collaboration, and evolving thematic structures suggests that governance and economic emergence in Africa remains an open and fertile area for scholarly advancement rather than a mature or saturated field.

4. Conclusion and future research directions

This study set out to provide a systematic and quantitative overview of the scientific landscape at the intersection of governance and economic emergence in Africa. By mobilizing a bibliometric approach applied to a structured Scopus dataset, the analysis moved beyond a traditional narrative synthesis and instead mapped the field's architecture through production trends, collaboration structures, citation impact, and thematic configurations. This strategy allowed the identification of both consolidated knowledge areas and underexplored spaces, offering a comprehensive understanding of how the literature has evolved and where it is heading.

Overall, the results portray a domain in clear expansion. The steady increase in publications, combined with a high annual growth rate, indicates that governance-related development issues have progressively gained prominence within the international research agenda. What was once a fragmented set of discussions has gradually consolidated into a recognizable field organized around a stable conceptual core linking governance quality, institutional effectiveness, and economic performance. The growing volume of contributions suggests that this topic is not

episodic or policy-driven in the short term, but rather structurally embedded in contemporary development debates.

At the same time, the field exhibits characteristics of intellectual diversification. The thematic analyses reveal that governance is no longer treated solely as a macro-institutional variable. It increasingly intersects with corporate governance, sustainability transitions, environmental constraints, urban management, and quantitative policy evaluation. This evolution reflects a shift from narrow institutional explanations toward more systemic and multidimensional interpretations of development processes. Such diversification signals theoretical maturation and indicates that the field is becoming more integrative and analytically sophisticated.

The collaboration patterns further reinforce this interpretation. Although a small core of influential authors provides continuity and direction, the co-authorship network remains only partially integrated, with several localized clusters. Rather than suggesting weakness, this configuration indicates permeability. Emerging scholars and institutions can still enter the conversation and shape it. In other words, the field has not yet crystallized into a closed or highly hierarchical structure. It remains open to new empirical settings, alternative theoretical lenses, and fresh methodological approaches.

The geographical distribution of scientific production highlights a critical structural imbalance. A substantial share of research on African governance continues to be produced from institutions located outside the continent, with only a few African countries, notably South Africa, acting as strong regional hubs. Many national contexts remain weakly represented. Among them, Morocco stands out for its limited presence in the indexed literature. Far from being a limitation, this underrepresentation should be interpreted as a significant research opportunity. In bibliometric terms, low-density areas often correspond to high potential for originality. Investigating such contexts enables scholars to introduce new empirical evidence, challenge dominant generalizations, and contribute novel theoretical insights. Research focusing on Moroccan governance reforms, institutional transformations, and development strategies could therefore play a disproportionate role in enriching the broader debate.

Building on these findings, several ***future research directions*** emerge.

First, more context-sensitive and country-level studies are needed. Much of the existing literature relies on cross-country panel data and aggregate indicators. While such approaches are valuable for identifying general patterns, they often overlook institutional specificities and policy implementation processes. In-depth case studies, mixed methods, and comparative institutional analyses could complement macro-quantitative models and provide richer explanations of how governance mechanisms operate in practice.

Second, greater attention should be devoted to subnational and territorial governance. The presence of urbanization, local government, and service delivery themes suggests growing interest in decentralized dynamics, yet these remain peripheral to the core literature. Exploring governance at municipal or regional levels could reveal important mechanisms linking institutions to everyday economic outcomes.

Third, sustainability and environmental governance represent a promising frontier. The increasing integration of climate change, resource management, and green finance within the thematic structure indicates that development and ecological resilience are becoming

inseparable. Future research would benefit from explicitly connecting governance quality with environmental performance, particularly in African contexts facing high climate vulnerability. Fourth, the field would gain from stronger intra-African and South–South collaborations. The current dependence on external academic hubs risks limiting the diversity of perspectives and locally grounded knowledge. Strengthening regional research networks could enhance both relevance and methodological pluralism.

Finally, underexplored countries, including Morocco, offer fertile terrain for original contributions. Empirical investigations in these contexts can simultaneously address institutional reforms, economic diversification, sustainability strategies, and regional integration, thereby connecting multiple thematic clusters identified in the bibliometric mapping. Such research has the potential not merely to add cases, but to reshape theoretical debates.

In conclusion, the literature on governance and economic emergence in Africa has reached a stage of consolidation without saturation. It combines a stable conceptual core with expanding thematic and geographic frontiers. This duality creates favorable conditions for innovative and impactful research. By targeting underrepresented contexts, adopting multidimensional perspectives, and fostering collaborative networks, future studies can significantly advance both theoretical understanding and policy relevance in this domain.

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