Key Terms and Reflection

AiCE Africanism & Pan-African Studies — Bringing the lesson together

Key Terms and Concepts

Term	Definition
Good Governance	The combination of democratic accountability, rule of law, transparency, anti-corruption, human rights, inclusive participation, service delivery, and fiscal responsibility characterising well-functioning states.
Rule of Law	The principle that all persons and institutions — including the government — are accountable to laws publicly known, equally enforced, and independently adjudicated.
Big Man Politics	The governance pathology of concentrated personal power — leaders who hollow out institutions, accumulate unchecked authority, and extend tenure through manipulation or repression.
Term Limits	Constitutional provisions limiting the number of terms a leader may serve — manipulation of term limits is consistently associated with governance deterioration.
Gacaca Courts	Traditional Rwandan community justice institutions revived after the 1994 genocide to process over 1.9 million cases.
Indaba	The Zulu institution of inclusive communal deliberation — consensus built through patient dialogue, applied in South Africa's constitutional negotiations.
Civil Society	The sphere of organised citizen activity independent of the state and market — NGOs, professional associations, faith organisations — the essential infrastructure of accountability.
#EndSARS	The 2020 Nigerian youth movement demanding abolition of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad; ended in the Lekki massacre.

Term	Definition
Developmental Authoritarianism	A governance model combining effective service delivery with suppression of political competition — associated with Rwanda under Kagame.
State Capture	The process by which private interests gain control of state institutions for private benefit rather than public service — documented in post-Zuma South Africa.

Think It Through

These questions have no single correct answer. Argue from evidence, and write down your reasoning even if you have no one to discuss it with.

- This lesson series argues governance failure in Africa is structural — a consequence of colonial inheritance, Big Man politics, and ethnic politicisation — rather than cultural. Do you agree? What is the strongest evidence for the structural explanation? What evidence might challenge it?
- Rwanda is presented as a governance paradox — exceptional effectiveness with a serious democratic deficit. If you were a Rwandan citizen, how would you evaluate this trade-off? Is developmental authoritarianism a legitimate transitional model, or does the suppression of political freedom inevitably corrupt even effective governance?
- The coup wave of 2020-2024 was partly driven by public frustration with corrupt and ineffective civilian governments. Does this mean military coups are sometimes justified? What conditions would have to be present for a coup to be considered legitimate, if any?
- #EndSARS demonstrated that young Africans can organise massive civil society mobilisations using digital tools, but the movement did not achieve its stated objectives in the short term. What does this tell us about the limits of civil society mobilisation without institutional backing?
- This lesson series argues that building accountable governance requires a cultural change — a political culture in which citizens expect accountability as a right. How

do you change a political culture? What are the most effective levers for shifting it over time?

Go Deeper

- Governance Assessment: Using the Ibrahim Index of African Governance, compare governance scores of any three African countries across safety and rule of law, participation and human rights, sustainable economic opportunity, and human development.
- Coup Analysis: Choose one coup from the 2020-2024 wave and research it in depth. What governance failures created conditions for the coup? What happened in the following months?
- Constitutional Analysis: Obtain the constitution of any African country. Identify mechanisms for limiting executive power, ensuring judicial independence, protecting press freedom, and enabling citizen participation. Assess whether they are adequate and applied in practice.
- Civil Society Profile: Research any African civil society organisation working on governance accountability — such as amaBhungane, Transparency International Kenya, or Enough is Enough Nigeria.
- Indaba Design: Design an indaba process for addressing a specific governance challenge in your community. How would you adapt the traditional institution to a contemporary context?

Key Takeaways

Good governance is Africa's most urgent unfinished project. The independence generation won the flag. The governance generation — the one now in schools, universities, and early careers — must win the institutions: the courts, the constitutions, the accountability mechanisms, the democratic culture that make freedom real rather than merely formal.

African governance has struggled for identifiable structural reasons: the colonial inheritance of extractive states, Big Man politics that concentrated power without accountability, the politicisation of ethnicity in artificial states, and external support for

undemocratic leaders that prioritised stability over accountability. These causes explain governance failures without excusing them or making them inevitable — Botswana and Ghana demonstrate that different choices produce different outcomes.

The building of accountable African governance draws on both universal requirements and specific African resources: Ubuntu, indaba, Gacaca, and the rotating accountability mechanisms of pre-colonial political systems. The goal is not to import Western institutional forms but to build African expressions of universal governance principles. The generation coming of age now — digital, organised, impatient — is Africa's greatest governance asset. Their energy, properly channelled into institutional building, can complete what the independence generation began.

> *"The most radical act any African can perform today is to serve in public life with integrity. To be the judge who cannot be bought. The civil servant who cannot be bribed. The journalist who will not be silenced. The teacher who teaches the truth. These are the acts that build the Africa we need."*
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> **— Adesina Olagunju, Founder, AiCE**