

The Long-Term Effects of Africa's Slave Trades

Nathan Nunn

Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

February 2008

Abstract

This study explores the impact of Africa's slave trade on its current underdevelopment, revealing a robust negative correlation between the number of slaves exported from each country and its present-day economic performance. Historical evidence and instrumental variables suggest that the slave trade adversely affected economic development.

Introduction

The paper examines the detrimental legacy of Africa's slave trades on its economic performance, contrasting with the often informal attribution of Africa's underdevelopment to its history of exploitation, including slave trade and colonialism.

Literature Review

While previous studies have focused on the impact of colonialism on Africa's development, this research uniquely assesses the empirical significance of the slave trade, using new data to establish a negative relationship between historical slave exports and current economic outcomes.

Methodology

The methodology involves constructing estimates of slaves exported from each African country during the slave trade, using shipping records and historical documents, and relating these estimates to contemporary measures of economic development.

Findings

The findings demonstrate a significant negative correlation between the number of slaves exported and current economic performance, suggesting that regions most affected by the slave trade are among the poorest today.

Table: Regression Results Summary

	Coefficient	Standard Error
Endogenous Variable ¹	-0.112***	0.024
Endogenous Variable ²	-0.208***	0.053
IV ₁	-1.31***	0.357
IV ₂	-1.10***	0.380
IV ₃	-2.43***	0.823
IV ₄	-0.002	0.710
Observations	52	
R-squared	0.51	

Discussion

The discussion delves into the causal relationship between slave exports and economic underdevelopment, supported by historical evidence and instrumental variable analysis, indicating that slave trade played a critical role in shaping Africa's current economic landscape.

Conclusion

This research concludes that Africa's historical experience with slave trade has left a lasting negative impact on its economic development, emphasizing the need to consider historical injustices in understanding contemporary economic disparities.

References

References include works by Acemoglu, Johnson, Robinson, and others on colonial impacts, alongside Nunn's comprehensive data compilation on slave exports.

For further details, refer to The Quarterly Journal of Economics, February 2008.