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## **The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and its Implications on Member States' Compliance to US Policy Goals: A process-tracing analysis**

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The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and its Implications on Member States  
Compliance to US Policy Goals  
– a process-tracing analysis



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The Netherlands

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*Abstract:* This thesis investigates the political effect of the United States' *African Growth and Opportunity Act*, a non-reciprocal trade agreement granting eligible Sub-Saharan African states tariff free access to the US-American market. In both the scholarly literature and real-world politics, the threat of AGOA suspension seems to spook African leaders. The exclusion mechanism is highly exploitable and political compliance therefore important to stay included in the agreement. The economic impact of AGOA is however highly limited. This thesis tackles the puzzle of why an agreement with no major economic impact leads to political compliance to the US by its member states. My argument is the limitation of AGOA's utilization to a capacity-abundant elite, which can afford to overcome the utilization barriers (high transportation costs, permits, etc.) and earn the agreements benefits. Following the elite theory, this benefitting elite is then able to influence its government to comply with US policies, in order for AGOA benefits to retain.

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<b>1) Introduction</b>	<b>p. 4</b>
<b>2) Literature Review</b>	<b>p. 8</b>
2.1 Theoretical Foundations	
2.2 AGOA	
2.2.1 AGOA and its economic effect	
2.2.2 AGOA, the barriers to its utilization and which industries overcome them	
2.2.3 AGOA and its vulnerability for political exploitation	
2.3 Summary of the relevant literature	
<b>3 Theoretical Framework</b>	<b>p. 14</b>
3.1 Conceptualization	
3.1.1 Economic dependence	
3.1.2 Political compliance	
3.1.3 Capacities	
3.2 Theories and modifications	
<b>4 Methodology</b>	<b>p. 19</b>
4.1 Analysis of descriptive statistics	
4.2 Multi-case process tracing	
<b>5 Analysis</b>	<b>p. 24</b>
5.1 Analysis of descriptive statistics	
5.2 Multi-case process tracing	
5.2.1 General utilization of AGOA	
5.2.2 Kenya	
5.2.3 Tanzania	
5.2.4 Zimbabwe	
5.2.5 Generalizability and deviations	
<b>6 Discussion and Conclusion</b>	<b>p. 34</b>
6.1 Summary	
6.2 Implications	
6.3 Limitations and future research	
<b>7 Bibliography and Appendix</b>	<b>p. 38</b>

## 1. Introduction

The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) is a non-reciprocal trade agreement between the United States of America (US) and eligible Sub-Saharan African (SSA) states, granting them tariff-free exports of over 1,800 products to the US market. It was signed into US law on May 18<sup>th</sup> 2000. Since then, it has been renewed several times and survived five US administrations. An impressive accomplishment given the protectionist ambitions of some of them (Bello, 2005; Irwin, 2017; Kleinman et al., 2023). The Act is non-reciprocal, the United States does not gain access to African markets in return to its own market opening. Given the high transportation costs and other barriers, the influx of African products also has not accounted to a relevant reduction of prices of these goods for the American public (Shapouri & Trueblood, 2003; Signé, 2023). Trump's *America First* or Biden's inflation reduction act, protectionist policies are domestically popular in an impressively large part of an otherwise divided society (Patterson, 2020; Ehrlich & Gahagan, 2023). If the United States does not gain economically from AGOA, what exactly is it that makes such diverse presidential administrations stick to a domestically hard-to-sell, anti-protectionist agreement?

A number of incidents suggest political motivations. Rwanda, in the wake of its proliferating national confidence, decided to ban the import of second-hand clothing. In an instant, the United States partially suspended the East-African state from AGOA (Golupski, 2018). Just recently, Uganda has been excluded from AGOA as a result of sustained anti-homosexuality politics. AGOA is set up in a way that admits and bans states not by objective criteria. A non-binding, vague list of criteria is part of the Act's statutes, but the decision whether a state fulfills the lists content is solely at the president's discretion (Curtice & Reinhardt, 2024). African states are therefore subject to potentially arbitrary determinations of the US government. If an African state's political decision does not sit well with Washington, they can easily be expelled, like Rwanda in 2018 or Uganda in 2023. One then wonders; could the

Act be nothing more than a tool to influence African states' compliance to American foreign policy goals? Unfortunately, other examples of such obvious instances of banned states are rare, so this papers' analysis will have to investigate the potential effects of AGOA on a more abstract level.

Another central issue in determining a potential political use of AGOA, is finding the reason for African governments to be susceptible to the threat of AGOA suspension. A classic economic dependence being created through AGOA is questioned by the literature, as non-tariff barriers and a capacity scarcity in most industries have kept the utilization of AGOA limited. This thesis' hypothesis therefore argues that not the entire economy, but rather just a few (elite) industries are dependent on AGOA. The few industries with the capacities to utilize and benefit from AGOA, are argued to also have the capacities to influence politics. On the basis of the *elite theory* and the *political trade dependence theory*, I will investigate the research question: *How does AGOA membership of Sub-Saharan African states' influence their adherence to American foreign policy goals?* Both the rapprochement of AGOA members to American policy goals and the potential mechanism behind this development, will be explored. My hypothesis is that elites benefiting from AGOA influence their governments to comply with US policy goals, in order for AGOA benefits to be retained.

The literature review first investigates overarching theories of political effects of trade agreements. AGOA will be applied to this theoretical foundation and its effect on both the American and African markets will be discussed. The reviewed literature reveals a gap in understanding American motivation for their commitment to AGOA and hints towards political influence as its primary aim. It also reveals a gap in understanding SSA governments' susceptibility to the threat of exclusion, given the disputed economic benefit of the agreement.

Descriptive statistics and qualitative process tracing will investigate the links between AGOA membership and a potential political rapprochement effect. The general validity of the assumption of AGOA's influence on political alliance with the US will be tested by descriptively analyzing a data set containing United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) voting behavior. The compliance with US foreign policy goals of the cases studied, and AGOA members in general, will be tracked and compared to both non-AGOA African, and worldwide compliance. A multi-case process tracing analysis will reveal the limited economic benefit of AGOA, carve out the few industries that do profit, and investigate how these industries are connected to political decision making. The arbitrariness of AGOA's inclusion process will shortly be analyzed to explain the necessity of adherence to US policy goals to retain the elite's AGOA benefits. Through qualitative process tracing this thesis will therefore substantiate the political effect of AGOA, reveal the Acts beneficiaries, and expose how these actors influence political decision making.

The objective of this analysis is to both reveal the US' intention behind AGOA, as well as describe the effect for policy making in AGOA states. If an effect is found, AGOA would be contributing to political decisions not made for the good of the public, but rather for the good of the United States and a highly concentrated African elite. The research will not only contribute to a better understanding of this societal issue but also add to the scholarly work on (non-reciprocal) trade agreements and their political consequences.

### *Introductory remarks*

This thesis is explicitly not normatively assessing whether a potential American influencing through AGOA is good or bad. Generally, the sovereignty and independence of states, especially states with colonial histories, is obviously to be respected. Arguments can also be made for value in protecting for example sexual minorities globally through diverse instruments. This is a complicated and highly relevant discussion but not to be subject of this

thesis. It is merely testing the potential use of AGOA for political influencing, not normatively judging it in any way.

This thesis will talk of developing and developed countries. This is not to imply a modernization theory (Inglehart, 2020) type of singularity in possible (or “good”) political and economic systems, but rather a description of the economic strength and weaknesses of countries in question.

Additionally, a certain ignorance of the diversity in SSA might be suspected by the generalization of a potential effect on the entire area. This is not the case and differences in economic structures, as well as resulting diversity in AGOA’s effect, are understood. The singular effect is derived from the singular nature of the agreement, and the common partner of all SSA countries in it – the United States. America’s policy aims are investigated, and the potential effect-mechanism is broadly applicable, an extensive differentiation between different member states is therefore not imminent.



## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Theoretical foundations

Reciprocal preferential trade agreements (PTA) have been researched for their political effects. Ethier (1998) is one of the early influential works arguing for a political, reform-stimulating effect of such agreements. Fernandez & Portes (1998) suggest PTA's to be a signal for the commitment to certain liberal economic policies. Baccini & Ureplainen (2014) test the relationship between PTA's and reform empirically and find strong support for an effect on economic legislation. Effects on non-economic legislation have been found by Pevehouse et al. (2002), Limao (2005), and Poast and Ureplainen (2015). These scholars however primarily understand these political effects as an unintended, secondary consequence. Hafner-Burton (2013) tests intentional policy influencing by investigating the effect of human rights provisions in trade agreements. She finds an empirical effect but interestingly suggests these provisions to just be a domestic political bargaining tool.

This thesis is however exploring the potential political effects of a non-reciprocal preferential trade agreement. The political effects of non-reciprocal trade agreements (NRTA) are rarely explored. Economic dependence, which could force countries to comply politically too, has been suggested by Coil (2021), who describes countries in NRTA's as "trapped in trade" (p. 111), arguing industrialization is inhibited while reliance on trade is created.

Manger and Shadlen (2014) have developed the concept of political trade dependence (PTD). They distinguish PTD from other trade dependencies by focusing on the asymmetry of relations and the granted benefits' "sensitivity and vulnerability to [...] manipulation" (p. 84). PTD is common when benefits of a trade agreement can be withdrawn one-sidedly, without compensation. Manger and Shadlen argue that vulnerabilities arise as the utilization of trade benefits granted, require costly compliance procedures and other "relation-specific investments" (p. 84). Governments and industries therefore "lock-in" their choice to utilize

the benefits in question and under PTD are then subject to the exploitable, one-sided withholding-mechanism of those benefits.

## 2.2 AGOA

The African Growth and Opportunity Act, the specific case this theoretical link between (non-reciprocal) trade agreements and their political consequences is to be tested on, is widely discussed in the literature. AGOA is a non-reciprocal trade agreement between the United States of America and eligible Sub-Saharan African states (Williams, 2015). AGOA allows duty- and quota-free access of select products to the US' market. It goes beyond the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) (another non-reciprocal trade agreement granting easier access to the American market), both in the range of eligible products and in the strictness in its membership criteria.

Guseh and Oritsejafor (2009) give an extensive overview of the Act, its history, and its impact on US-SSA trade. The Act was unveiled by the Clinton administration in 1997 and officially sought to “promote a stable, economically dynamic, and democratic Africa” (p. 125). It was then signed into law as Title 1 of the US Trade and Development Act of 2000, on May 18<sup>th</sup> of that year. Trade barriers from SSA to the US market were to be eliminated and foreign direct investment (FDI) to be increased. The objectives of AGOA have officially been stated as the following:

1. Strengthen and expand the private sector in sub-Saharan Africa, especially women owned businesses;
2. Encourage increased trade and investment between the United States and sub-Saharan Africa;
3. Reduce tariff and non-tariff barriers, as well as other obstacles to trade;
4. Expand United States assistance to sub-Saharan Africa's regional integration efforts;
5. Establish a United States and sub-Saharan Africa Trade and Investment Partnership;
6. Focus on countries committed to accountable government, economic reform, and the eradication of poverty;
7. Establish a United States-sub

Saharan Economic Cooperation Forum; and 8. Support development assistance for those countries in sub-Saharan Africa attempting to build civil societies (p. 126)

AGOA allows for the export of 1,800 products in addition to GSP products (Fuhr & Klughaupt, 2004). Eligible products range widely but focus on the lower end of the value chain. Agricultural products or folklore articles would be examples. An additional chapter of the Act allows preferences for apparel exports. Oil and other natural resources also fall under AGOA. 40 countries are currently deemed eligible for general AGOA benefits (US Trade Representative, 2024) as also projected in Figure 1.



Figure 1: African Growth and Opportunity Act Eligibility Report 2023, p. 1

### 2.2.1 AGOA and its economic effect

The economic effect of AGOA is controversially discussed. Didia et al. (2015) find a significant effect of AGOA on imports from Africa to the United States. They interpret this as a sign of AGOA spurring entrepreneurship and creating “meaningful economic growth” in the region (p. 1130). They however have to acknowledge that the increase in US imports from

Africa is largely due to an increase in a few energy-intensive industries exports and not a general upspring in economic empowerment, entrepreneurship or production (p. 1149).

Frazer and Van Biesebrock (2010) confirm a small influence of AGOA on exports through their robust triple difference-in-difference estimation, their analysis however also sees the apparel and oil industries as vital for the significance of the effect. Tadesse and Fayissa (2008) and Seyoum (2007) have come up with even more discouraging findings. Both works see no empirical evidence of increased trade through AGOA. Seyoum (2007) acknowledges the lack of possibly necessary time for adjustment for economies to take advantage of AGOA benefits. Together with Didia et al.'s (2015) comprehensive study it can however be summarized that an economic benefit beyond that of a narrow group of industries is doubted.

### *2.2.2 AGOA, the barriers to its utilization and which industries overcome them*

The reviewed literature clearly doubts an economic impact of AGOA, limiting its utilization to a couple of industries. So, why are the AGOA benefits not utilized more broadly? Shapouri and Trueblood (2003) find AGOA's provisions to not match the export infrastructures of most eligible states. They theorized that this might potentially limit membership and participation. Distance and transportation costs limit utilization of AGOA to industries with the capacities to overcome these barriers (p. 10). These capacity-rich industries are relatively easy to identify. Except South Africa, all countries export more or less exclusively apparel, oil, or metals (Williams, 2015, p. 13; Didia et al., 2015, US Trade Representative, 2023).

The industries that do overcome the barriers of utilization, are however adapting to the agreement. A widely acknowledged article by Gibbon (2003) investigates the early effects of AGOA on the commodity chain of clothing. It finds a radical response of African exporters to specificities of the American clothing market (p. 1823). Mahabir et al. (2020) also discuss the looser standards of apparel exports under AGOA than given for exports to other markets like the EU. Adapting to these looser standards impacts (potential) exports to alternatives markets.

Effects like this one potentially lead to a dependence on the continued openness of the market which the industries infrastructure adjusted to. A closure of such a market, for example due to AGOA suspension as a result of political non-compliance, would lead to a substantial short-term loss for the industries in question.

### *2.2.3 AGOA and its vulnerability for political exploitation*

AGOA's official eligibility criteria states:

The President is authorized to designate a sub-Saharan African country as an eligible sub-Saharan African country if the President determines that the country— (1) has established, or is making continual progress toward establishing— [market liberalization] (2) does not engage in activities that undermine United States national security or foreign policy interests; and (3) does not engage in gross violations of internationally recognized human rights or provide support for acts of international terrorism and cooperates in international efforts to eliminate human rights violations and terrorist activities. [...] If the President determines that an eligible sub-Saharan African country is not making continual progress in meeting the requirements [...] the President shall terminate the designation of the country. (US Trade and Development Act, 2000)

Curtice and Reinhardt (2024) is a central piece for this analysis' literary groundwork. It scientifically finds that the official standard for AGOA expulsion or inclusion, the human rights record of countries and their standard of democracy, does indeed not decide whether a country is included in AGOA or not. Some members are deemed "too big to fail" (p. 245) and get away with serious human rights violations, while smaller economies can be excluded for very minor violations. This effect is grave enough for the authors to deem human rights records to have absolutely no effect on eligibility to AGOA. They suggest profitability of trade with the partner in question to be the potentially deciding criteria instead (p. 244). This

however lays at odds with the previous section of this literature review, which found AGOA to be basically irrelevant to the American economy and its stakeholders. Therefore, alternative criteria for AGOA inclusion, like political compliance with the US foreign policy, need to be tested.

The arbitrariness suggested by Curtice and Reinhardt (2024) is also openly visible and institutionalized in AGOA's formal suspension process. Fuhr and Klughaupt (2004) compare the conditionalities attached to both IMF and AGOA beneficiaries. While they criticize aspects of both versions of conditionalities, it is clear that the IMF is free of AGOA's arbitrariness through the presence of certain objective thresholds (pp. 133-136). AGOA's vague eligibility criteria additionally suffers from a provision regarding a country's non-interference to US national security interests at the sole discretion of the president's evaluation (pp. 136-138). This vagueness in the eligibility determination process, which is repeated on a yearly basis, leaves countries critically vulnerable to political dependence as disobedience to US policy goals can easily be punished by AGOA suspension.

### *2.3 Summary of relevant literature*

To summarize the relevant findings of the academic literature on the African Growth and Opportunity Act and its consequences, it can be said that a general economic dependence resulting from it has to be doubted. African states do not seem to have significantly adjusted their exports to the American markets. Specific industries with the necessary capacities to overcome the utilization barriers, are described to have adapted to, and invested in the specificities of the American market. The losses emerging from an end to these increased and specified exports would be highly problematic for these industries. Combined with the omnipresent Damocles sword of arbitrary expulsion, a fragile dependence on AGOA is scholarly suggested for certain capacity-rich industries. This thesis will test the political effect of this dependence.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

#### *3.1 Conceptualization*

##### *3.1.1 Economic dependence*

It can be hard to distinguish dependence from a mere asymmetrical beneficiality of a relationship. If one party can end the relationship and thereby the benefits of it for the other party, without suffering any consequences for themselves, that leaves the relying partner vulnerable. Its economy is however not automatically existentially threatened by an end of the economic relationship, and therefore not automatically dependent. If a states' economy would be existentially threatened by the end of a single bilateral relationship, an economic dependence would be clearly given. There is however a large grey area around that clear-cut definition of dependence. If for example a significant portion of exports go to a country, the blow to the economy of a sudden end of these exports could, if not existentially threaten, deeply hurt an economy. When dependence is reached is hard to define, I am working with a prominent conceptualization of Chase-Dunn (1975) who states: “[...] economic dependence results from a nation's location in a restricted position in the world trade network or its specialization in a marginal role [...]” (p. 721).

##### *3.1.2 Political compliance*

Economic dependence can lead to political dependence, as the economically dependent state is being forced to comply with US policy directions to uphold the positive relationship, which is economically vital.

I instead use the concept of mere political compliance. The differentiation is important as it limits my research on the mechanism that leads to the increased political compliance and its cause. An assessment of how existentially threatening non-compliance would be to governments is an interesting question but goes beyond the scope of this thesis. I therefore use

the term “political compliance”, as prominently proposed by Armstrong (1981), which carries less implications than “dependence” and clarifies the potential result of the tested effect.

Political rapprochement is used to describe the development towards political compliance, political adherence is used synonymously to political compliance.

### *3.1.3 Capacities*

This thesis theory sees industries able to overcome barriers to AGOA utilization and to influence political decision-making if they possess the necessary capacities. Capacities can be either financial or structural in nature. While financial capacities simply mean money, structural capacities mean the ability of industries to navigate the business and political environment through personal relationships or experiences. Both types of capacities can be useful to tackle both challenges in my theory. Industries can for example use financial resources to overcome the barrier of transportation costs of US exports, and also use these resources to influence policy-makers through bribery. Structural capacities could allow for a quicker achievement of the necessary permits to export under AGOA, but also to influence politicians through existing personal ties. A vast number of additional avenues for the usage of both types of capacities are thinkable.

### *3.2 Theories and modifications*

The reviewed literature suggests a political effect of trade agreements. The *political trade dependence* theory specifies this, applies it to non-reciprocal trade agreements, and bases it on the cost of specialization to an agreement and a resulting economic dependence on it. The unilateral power of the benefit-granting party, to terminate the agreement without consequences, leaves dependent economies with a necessity to comply with political goals.

This thesis tests a possible application of AGOA to this theory. Threat of AGOA exclusion has been feared publicly by African leaders (Masuabi, 2023; Walsh, 2023). Political



compliance to the US by AGOA members therefore is plausible. But an economic dependence or even a significant benefit arising from the agreement for the member states, is doubted in the scholarly literature. If my descriptive assessment of AGOA countries' economies confirms this absence of an economic dependence, a modification of the theory explaining the political rapprochement effect of AGOA membership needs to be done.

The literature suggests the utilization of AGOA by a small minority of industries which can overcome the capacity barriers (Shapouri & Trueblood, 2003; Signé, 2023). My theory suspects these capacities to also reflect the industries' capacity to influence political decision making; strong industries benefit from AGOA, and strong industries can influence political decision-making. AGOA members' governments under this theory, comply with US policy goals, to suit the interest of the AGOA-benefitting elites. This is an application of the established elite theory, which Mariotti (2022) summarizes: "Elite theory envisions society as divided between the mass of people and a ruling minority, where the political power— the power to take and impose decisions valid to the whole society— always belongs to the latter."

Applied to AGOA, the theory suggests that the impact AGOA has on a small elite, will through this elites capacities to influence policy-makers, also affect the political decision-making of the country as a whole. If one combines the PDT theory with the elite theory, Figure 2 provides a possible explanation of AGOA's influence on the political compliance of its member states.

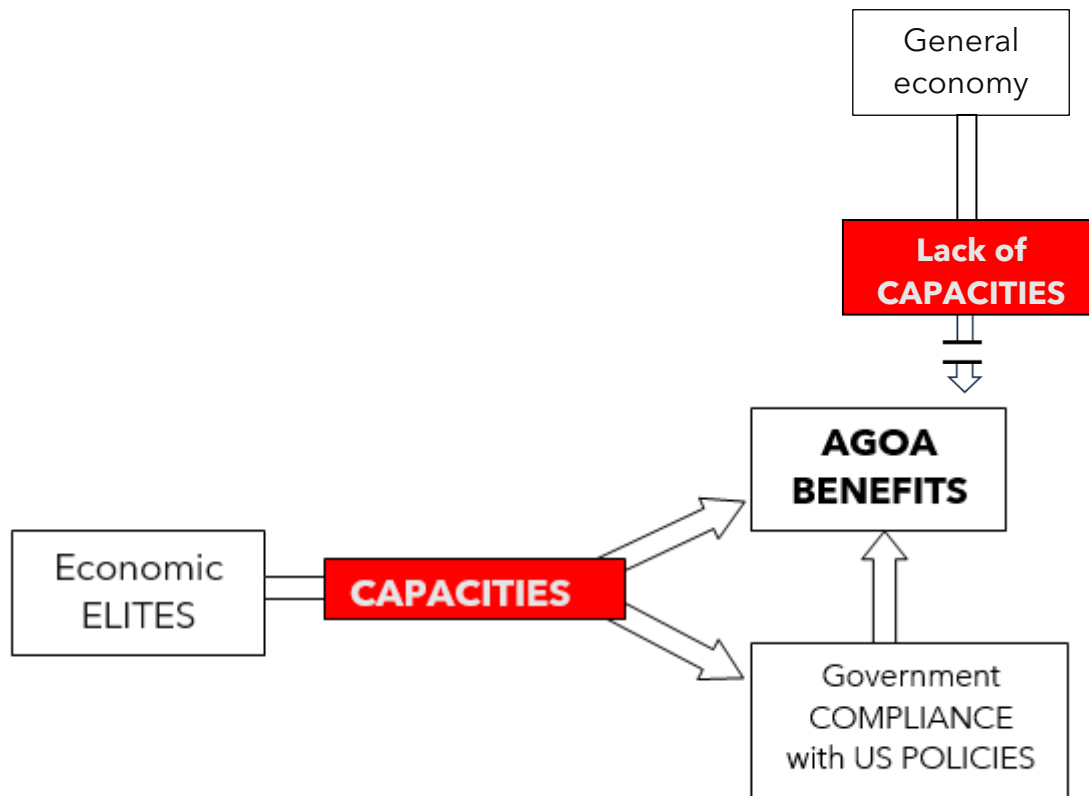


Figure 2

Economic elites have the capacities to utilize AGOA benefits, and profit from them. The economic effect of AGOA on these industries is also theorized as initiating economic specialization to AGOA provisions. Exports may be focused on the USA, products adjusted to American standards and requirements, and US-specific investments made. The stakes for the benefiting elites to retain their access to the American market are therefore high. AGOA however fulfills Manger and Shadlen's (2014) criteria of exploitability, as the suspension of the benefits can be declared unilaterally at all times. For the continued utilization of the granted benefits, the elites are therefore reliant on the governments compliance with US policy goals. And as the benefiting elites command the capacities to utilize AGOA benefits, they can, under the elite theory, also be presumed to have the capacities to influence the governments compliance with US policy goals. Resultingly, even though there is no general

economic impact of AGOA on its members economies, the few industries that do profit, through their capacities, extend their economic dependence on the agreement to their governments, leaving it politically compliant.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Analysis of descriptive statistics

I test this theory through qualitative process tracing and the application of descriptive statistics. The first part of my analysis utilizes a dataset containing voting behavior in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). The UNGA is suitable as a unit of analysis, because it is the only platform in which both the American and African governments regularly clearly state their stance on an issue.

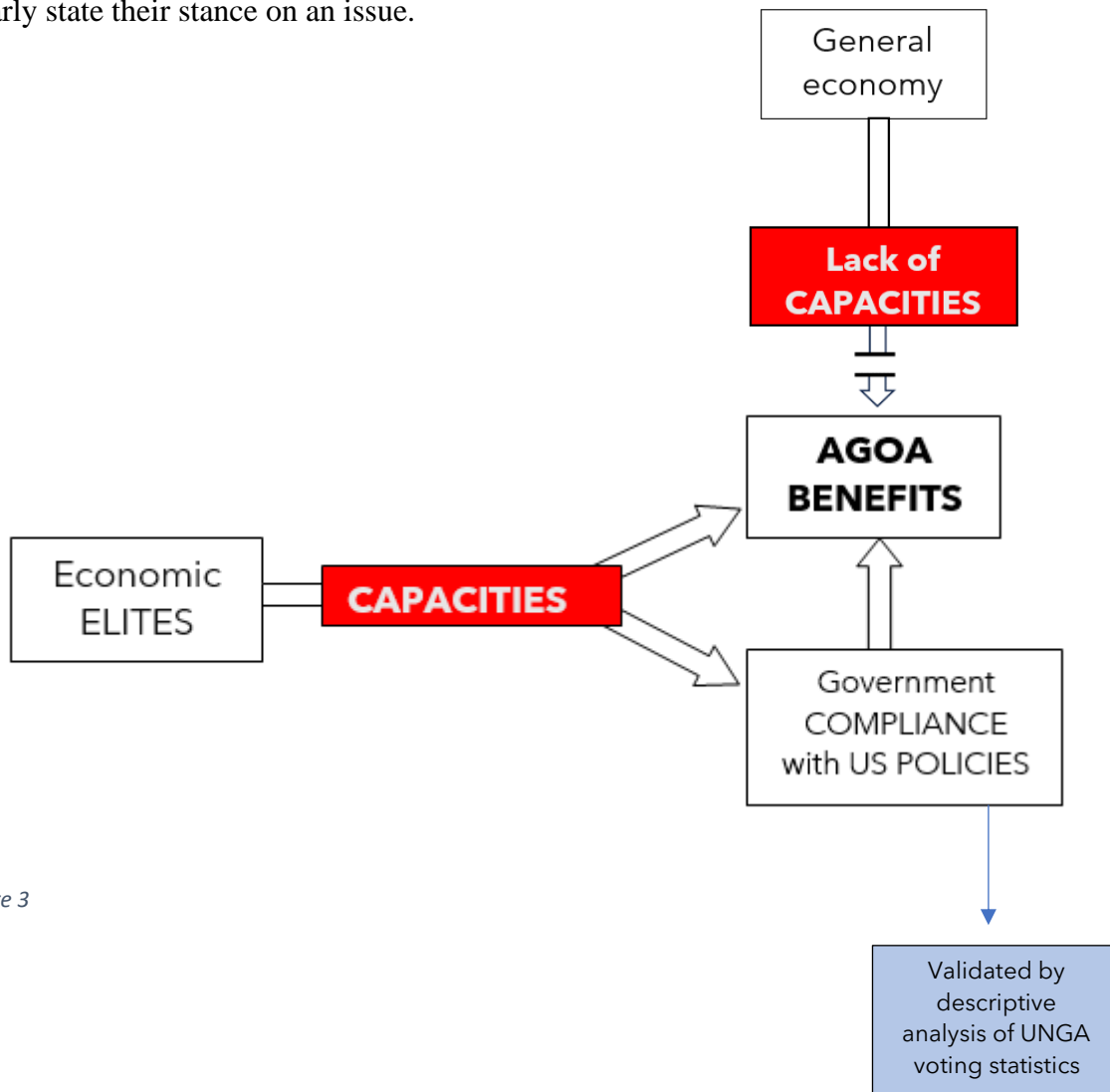


Figure 3

The descriptive analysis of these statistics tests the existence of a political effect of AGOA membership, which could then be investigated for its cause (Figure 3). The data set starts with the organizations initiation and ends in 2022. I go on to create two new data sets containing the votes from two time periods, one precluding AGOA implementation (P1) and one following it (P2). An overlap variable is created, displaying whether a country voted with or against the United States in each voting instance. Then the frequency of overlap is calculated for each country in both periods. A simple comparison between overlap in P1 and P2 reveals the development of political compliance after AGOA implementation. This serves as a test for the general validity of my hypothesis, solidifying a rapprochement of political stances of AGOA states to American positions.

Period 1 is set as the years from the end of the Cold War (dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1992) onwards to the year 2000, the year of AGOA implementation, and Period 2 for all years following AGOA's implementation. The general claim of my argument, an increased political adherence of AGOA members to US foreign policy goals, can thereby be tested for its general reflection in reality. To be able to better assess the development of votes, the development of overlap of AGOA states will be compared to the development of overlap of both states worldwide and non-AGOA African states. If the change in overlap is significantly different in size or even goes in different directions, AGOA membership can confidently be understood as potentially related to overlap with US positions.

While this analysis of descriptive statistics does not constitute a proper statistical analysis, it will suffice as a solidifying link for my process tracing analysis, supporting the underlying trend suggested by my hypothesis.

A difficult question in this research design is the question of inclusion of cases. AGOA membership has not always been continuing. Countries lose eligibility once they reach "high-income" status as determined by the World Bank (World Bank, 2022) and coup d'états

have resulted in the cessation of all relations between the country in question and the United States. These cases have been removed from my analysis to avoid setting an arbitrary minimum time of AGOA membership. Cases excluded for political reasons have also been excluded if the exclusion has been final. Countries that were readmitted after a short while have however been included, as the political effect under investigation is presumed to continue after exclusion, so that AGOA benefits can be regained.

4.2 Multi-case process tracing

After the preliminary analysis of descriptive statistics, I go on to analyze the causes of this political effect. Multi-case qualitative process tracing is employed to investigate the link between AGOA membership and political rapprochement to US positions. Firstly, a short descriptive analysis of trade statistics of AGOA states will confirm the literature’s finding of a very limited economic impact of AGOA (Figure 4).

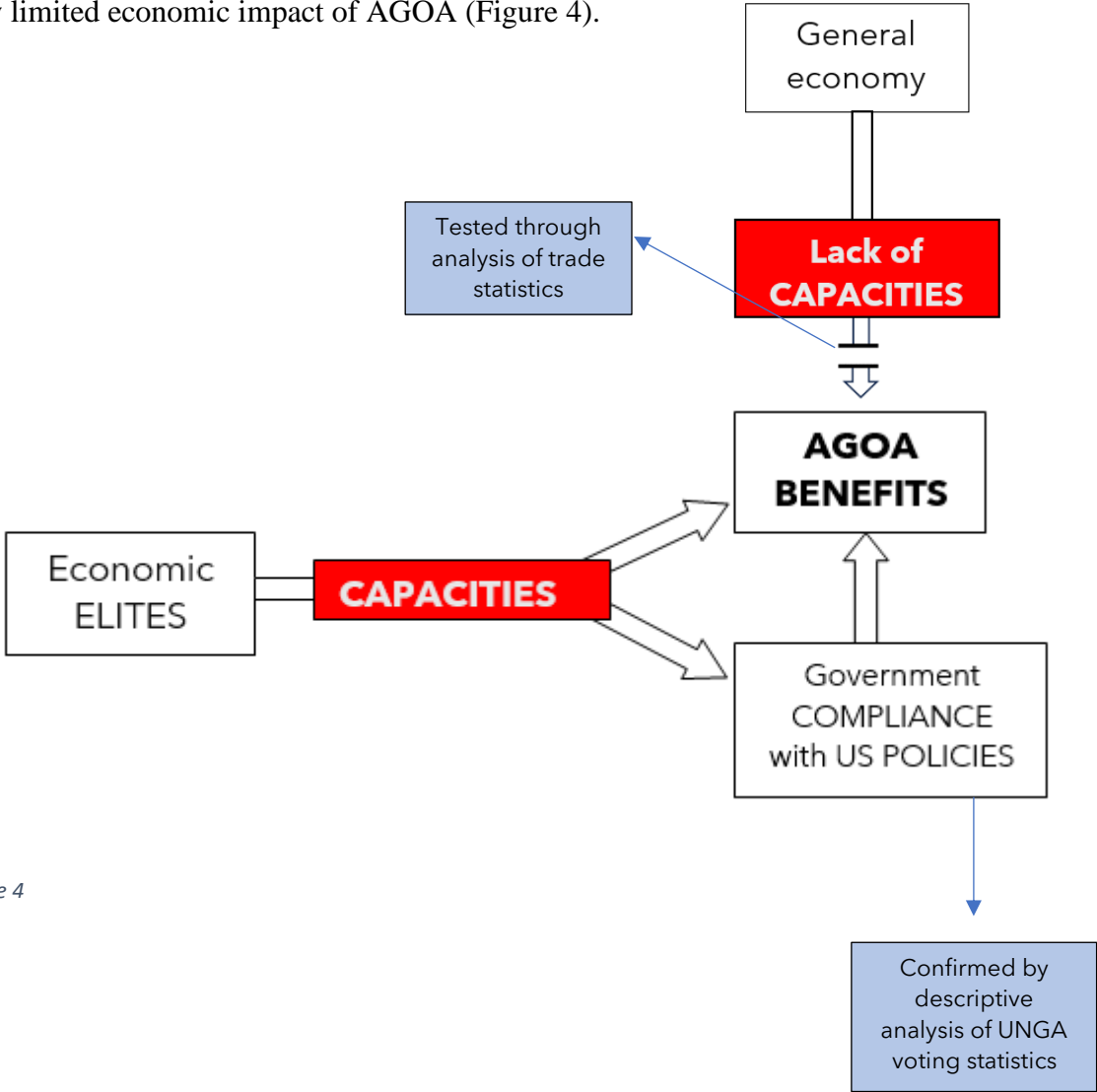


Figure 4

An analysis of several case studies then explores the proposed alternative cause of political rapprochement. The industries which manage to utilize the granted AGOA benefits are specified and their influence on political decision-making is assessed (Figure 5).

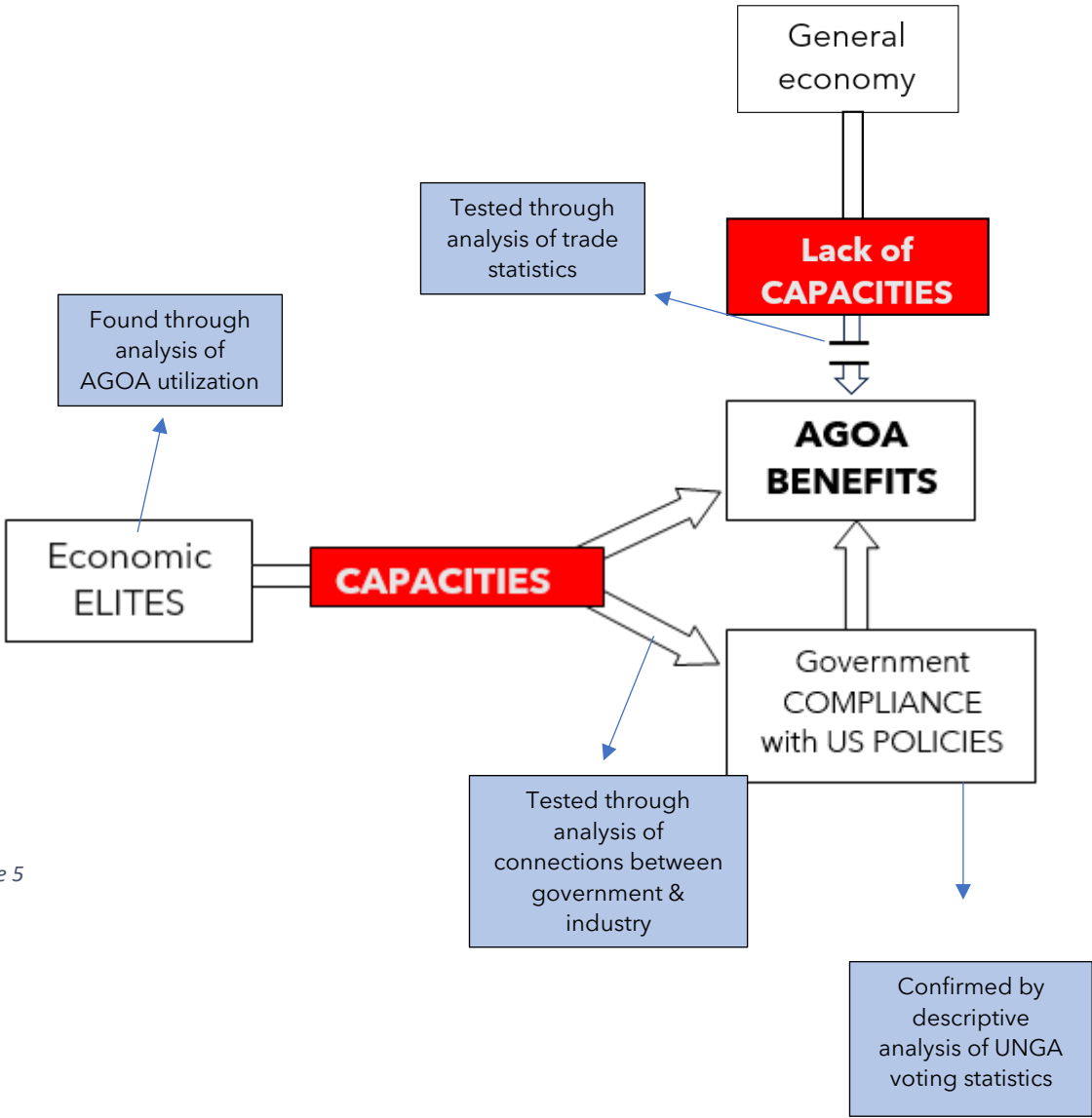


Figure 5

I have selected Kenya and Tanzania for this analysis. Kenya and Tanzania show the third and fourth highest values of rapprochement to US positions in the descriptive statistical analysis as shown later. Sao Tomé, the state with the highest increase in voting overlap, has been sorted out due to the irregularities its tiny economy and island state nature bring (Seibert, 2016). Non-representatively, in Ghana crude petroleum is the main US-export product (OEC, 2024), which leaves Kenya and Tanzania as the representative cases with the strongest political rapprochement. This would imply the elite mechanism to be strongly pronounced in these countries and a potential mechanism can be traced most clearly when it is strong. Kenya and Tanzania are geographically close, but their trade relations with the United States, as well as the nature of the capacities used for political influencing, differ. They are therefore two cases projecting the (limited) diversity of my effect. Both countries have also not experienced any major changes in their governance (Yakubu et al., 2020; Ramadhan et al., 2016), excluding regime change as a possible alternate explanation for the rapprochement to the US. Zimbabwe, a non-AGOA state, will be investigated to further isolate AGOA's effect on its members' economies. An alternative trajectory, independent of AGOA, will be revealed, pinning the political effects found in the previous case studies firmly on AGOA membership. Lastly, the mechanism found in the two AGOA case studies and visualized in Figure 5, is analyzed for its generalizability. Deviations from the political effect are assessed to support the analysis' robustness.



## 5. Analysis

### 5.1 Descriptive statistics

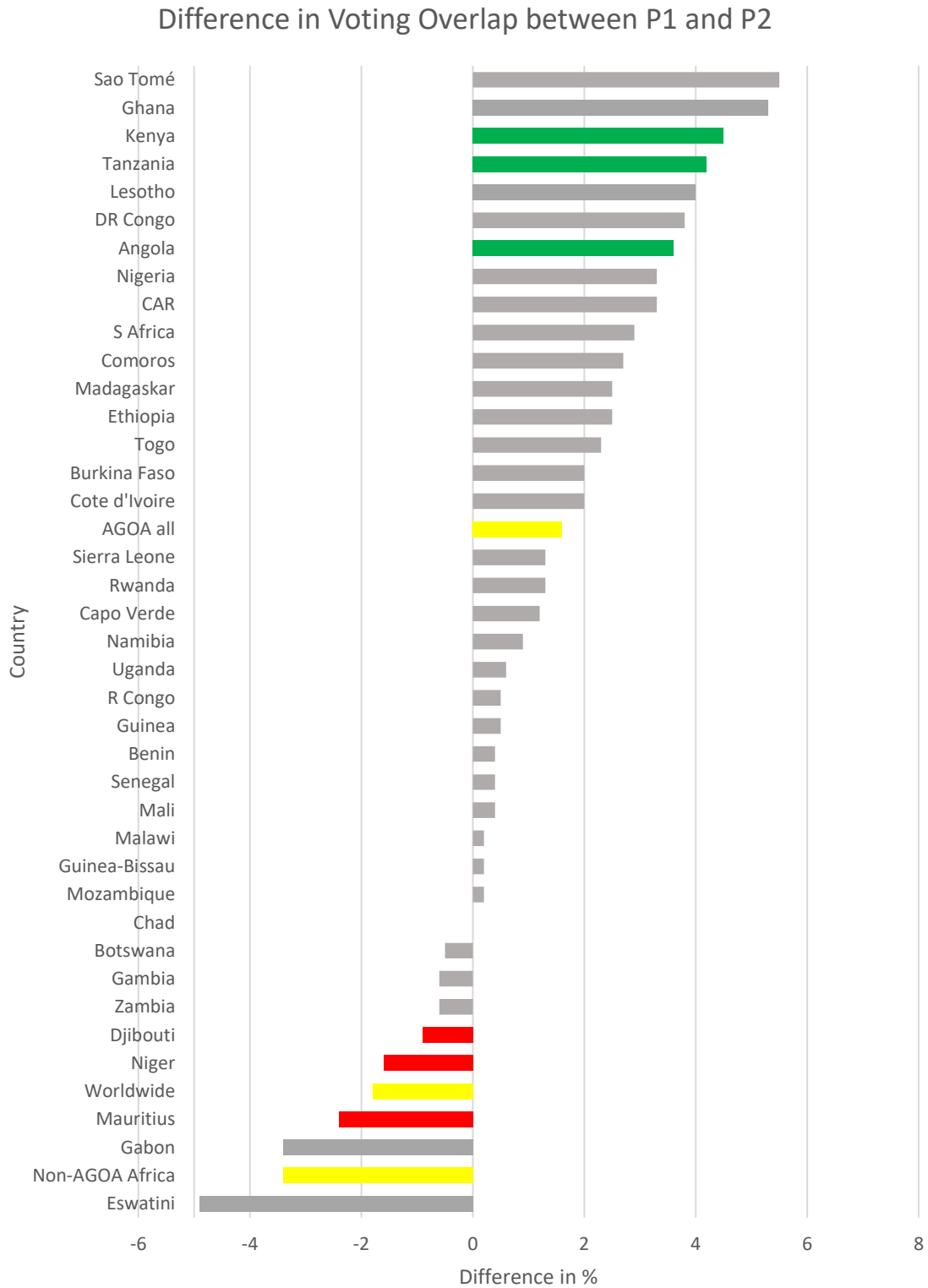


Table 1

■ = Deviating cases discussed 
 ■ = Confirming case studies 
 ■ = Notable cases

Table 1 is the visualized outcome of the descriptive analysis of statistics drawn from a data set on voting behavior in the United Nations General Assembly. It shows, in percent, the change in overlap with the voting behavior of the United States. The two periods compared between are P1 (1991-1999) and P2 (2000-now). The raw output summary can be found in the Appendix. I am focusing only on the difference in allegiance between the pre-AGOA and AGOA periods, as predated, underlying, historical bilateral relations and sympathies are to be eliminated. The focus thereby lays solely on the change in allegiance following AGOA implementation.

The first notable effect is the global trend. Agreement with US positions has declined substantially over time. Oppositely, the average increase of overlap of AGOA countries' positions with US positions is clearly positive, however rather small. The non-AGOA African overlap declined by almost 4%, showing a discrepancy between AGOA members and African non-members. The statistics therefore reveal AGOA members defiance of a global trend of political estrangement from the United States, suggesting the validity of a political effect of the agreement.

## *5.2 Multi-case study process tracing*

### *5.2.1 General utilization of AGOA*

Due to space constraints, I cannot extensively test the economic impact of AGOA on its member economies. The literature has however portrayed reasonable doubt for substantial increase in exports. A short comparison of this finding to key states' recent export statistics will substantiate this finding (OEC, 2024).

Country	Export Percentage to US, 1999	Export Percentage to US, 2022 (Difference in percentage points)
<i>Sao Tomé</i>	17.50%	2.92 % (-14.68)
<i>Ghana</i>	10.80%	14.20% (+3.40)
<i>Kenya</i>	4.07%	9.83% (+5.76)
<i>Tanzania</i>	4.58%	1.55% (-3.03)
<i>DR Congo</i>	20.50%	0.63% (-19.87)
<i>Angola</i>	55.80%	2.50% (-53.30)
<i>Nigeria</i>	31.80%	6.84% (-24.96)
<i>CAR</i>	1.15%	0.38% (-0.77)
<i>South Africa</i>	10.70%	7.40% (-3.30)
<i>Lesotho</i>	80.30%	28.10% (-52.20)

Table 1 – Percentage of Exports going to the United States, Comparison 1999 vs 2022.

Of the ten countries with the biggest rapprochement to US voting, eight have a lower percentage of export going to the United States since AGOA implementation (Table 2). Only Ghana and the obvious outlier Lesotho send more than ten percent of their exports to the United States. Chase-Dunn’s (1975) “restricted position in the world trade network” and a “specialization to a marginal role” (p. 721), can therefore not be found for the majority of these, politically most exceptional, cases. It is therefore clear that the political effect of AGOA, cannot be derived from an increased economic dependence on the US and AGOA. With the scholarly suggested very limited economic effect of AGOA, which now has been confirmed by a descriptive analysis of recent trade statistics, the political effect of AGOA shown by the analysis of UNGA voting behavior, needs to be explained differently. The application of the elite theory to this puzzle, suggests a benefitting elite seeking to retain their profits, acting as drivers for political adherence to the US.

### 5.2.2 Case Study Kenya

Kenya’s high value of political rapprochement after AGOA implementation suggests a strong effect in this case. To test this effect of a small, profiting elite influencing political decision-making, this elite firstly needs to be found. Who exports under AGOA in Kenya? 88% of

exports to the US fall under AGOA provisions (Signé, 2023). The Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC) (2024) shows that at around 57%, the textile and apparel industry makes up by far the largest share of these exports (Figure 7). Of the manufactured textile exports, 87.1% go to the US (Figure 8).

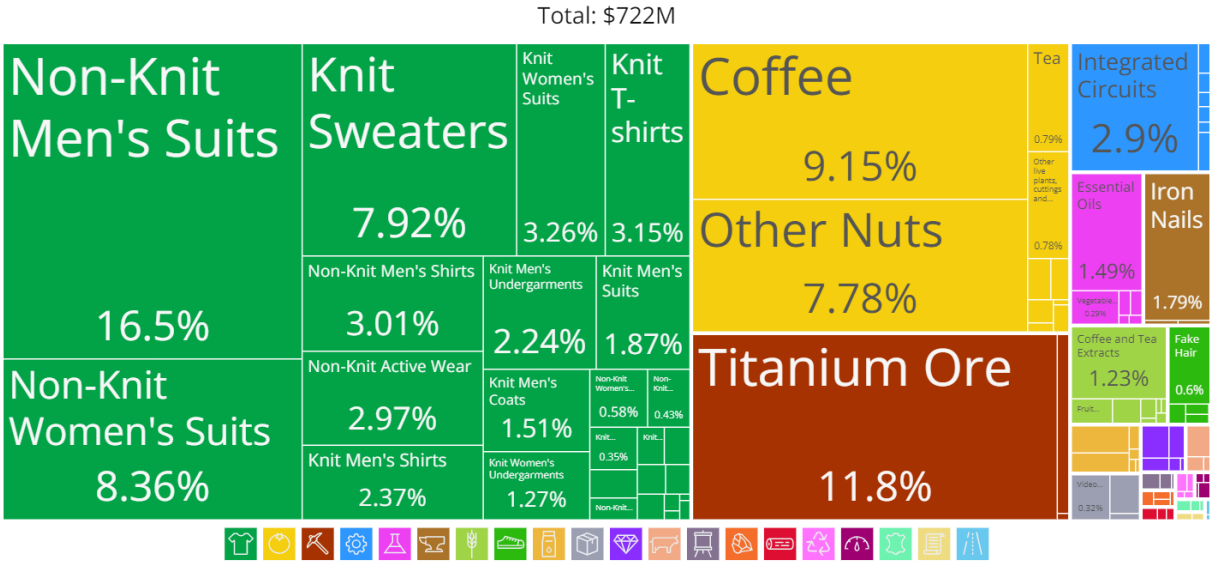


Figure 7 – Exports of Kenya to the United States in 2022, Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC) Kenya Report, 2022

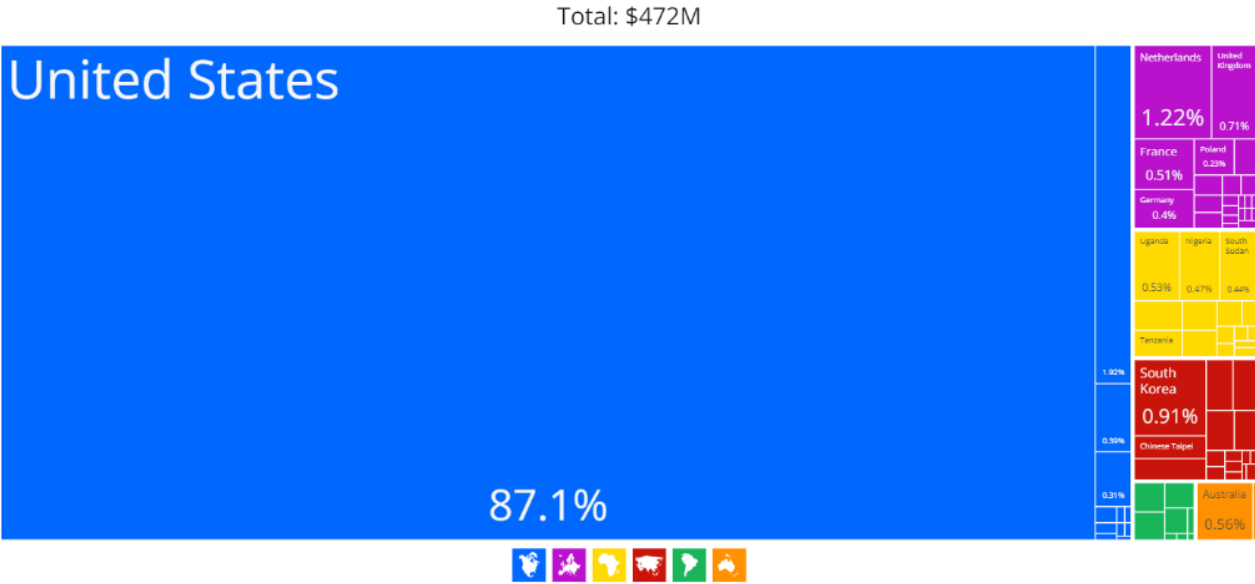


Figure 8 – Percentage of Kenyan Apparel Exports by country in 2022, OEC Kenya Report, 2022

The textile industry therefore clearly utilizes AGOA and benefits from the tariff-free access to the American market the agreement grants. With 87.1% of exports going to the US, the benefits the industry gains from AGOA can also be described as significant, maybe even

existential. The textile industry therefore can be presumed to have a clear interest in AGOA continuation. As the industry can clearly overcome the barriers of infrastructure, transportation cost, and adherence to product standards (Shapouri & Trueblood, 2003), it can also be presumed as capacity-abundant.

This capacity-abundance under elite theory suggests an influence on political decision-making. The combination of reliance on AGOA for profit and the government's decision-making for the continuance of these profits, makes the Kenyan textile industry a prime example to test the mechanism through which elite's industries potential potentially influence political decision-making.

Kenya's textile industry has organized itself in the *Kenya Association of Manufacturers* (KAM). The organization describes itself as a "respected business association that unites industrialists" (KAM, 2024). The groups interest is to advance the interest of its members and its links to the Kenyan government lie in plain sight. The KAM's board chairmen, Mucai Kunyiha, is also a member of the government's *Vision 2030* executive board (KAM, 2024; Vision 2030, 2024). The board is the government's agency to implement the goals stated in the *Vision 2030* strategy. The textile lobbyist influence on the board is showing. It is openly working for the improvement of the conditions for the textile industry in Kenya, classifying it as one of four key industries. The government's subsequent plan foresees the "enactment of necessary legislations", the "strengthening of key institutions", and the "establishment of dedicated economic zones" (KenInvest, 2023).

Another member of the KAM's board, Pankay Bedi, has been one of the most prominent advocates for the lowering of power cost in Kenya. He specifically named the textile industry's global and regional competitiveness as a reason for his campaign (Nation, 2018). The Kenyan government has been seen to have replied to campaigns by Mr. Bedi. In 2019, the "Vision 2030" delivery board, with Mr. Bedi's colleague Mr. Kunyiha as one of its

members, has announced a reduced preferential power tariff for the textile industry (KenInvest, 2023).

Another powerful organizational link between the Kenyan textile industry and the political decision-making center of the government, is Betty Maina. Currently, she is serving as the Cabinet Secretary (equivalent to a Minister) for Industrialization, Trade, and Enterprise. Previously, she had served as the chair of the board of the KAM for over ten years (Nation, 2020a).

During the Covid-19 crisis the enormous influence of elite industries lobbying efforts also became visible. In a controversial move, just six days after its publication, then president Kenyatta adopted the complete recommendation paper by the Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA) (Nation, 2020b).

The connections of Kenya's textile industry to the political decision-making organs of the state are visibly strong, and their recommendations and concerns are heard and acted upon. The case primarily displays how influence on political decision-making is done through structural capacities. Tanzania's textile industry displays how financial capacities can be employed.

### *5.2.3 Case study Tanzania*

Overall, Tanzania is utilizing AGOA even less than Kenya. Just 1.55% of all exports are sent to the US (OEC Tanzania Report, 2022). The AGOA exports that are sent are consisting of mostly apparel. Around 42% of exports to the US are textiles (Figure 9), and 72.7% of manufactured textile exports went to the United States under AGOA provisions in 2022 (Figure 10).

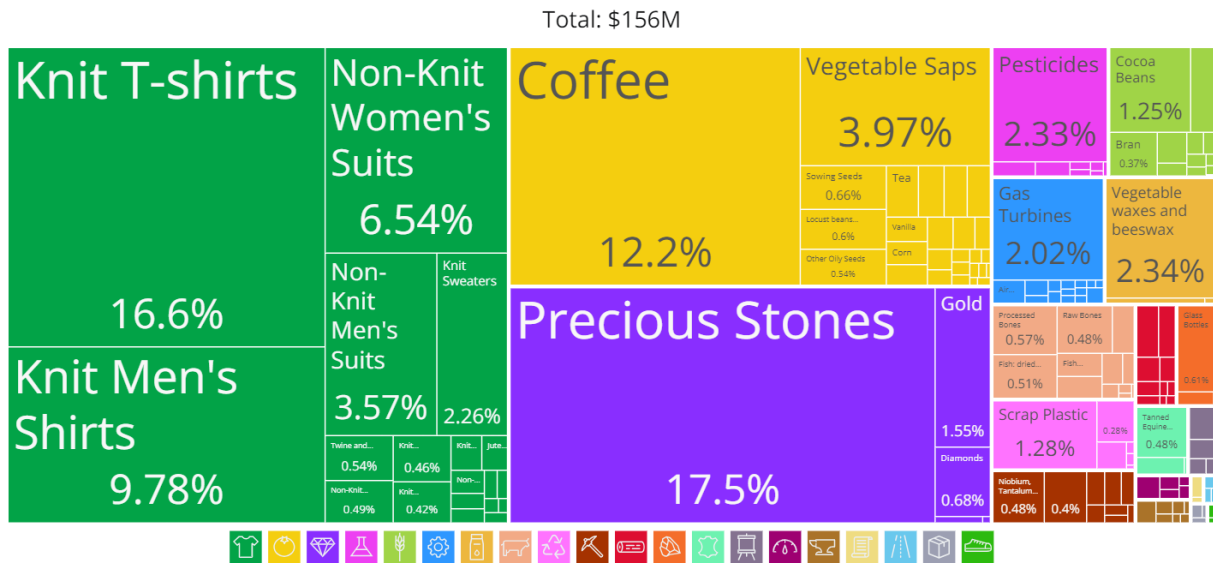


Figure 9 – Exports of Tanzania to the United States in 2022, OEC Tanzania Report, 2022

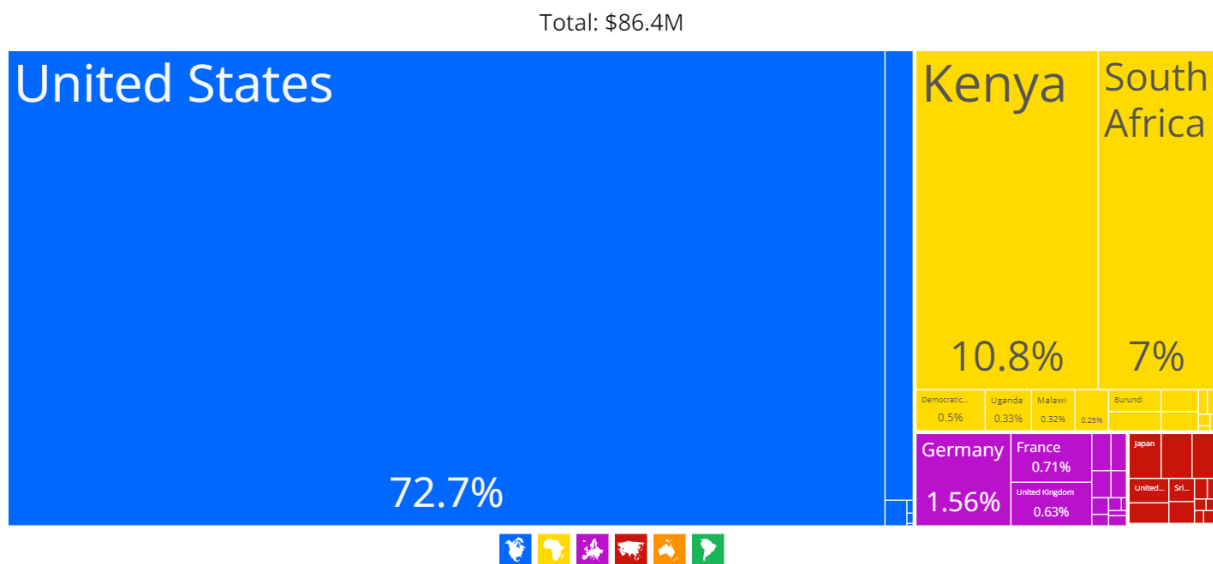


Figure 10 – Percentage of Tanzanian Apparel Exports by country in 2022, OEC Kenya Report, 2022

The industry therefore has the same strong reliance on AGOA, and therefore on its governments compliance with US policy goals. It however uses different capacities to influence policymaking.

Rostam Aziz, another important stakeholder in the textile industry, exemplifies the avenue financial capacities can take in influencing political decision-making. While he was also a

long-time member of parliament (MP) and a close confidante of former president Kikwete, he has stood out for reports of bribing other policymakers to steer Tanzania's legislation to more favorable terms for his business endeavors (Reuters, 2011; Citizen, 2021). And he is just an example for a persistent problem in Tanzania, Africa, and the world. Corruption enables elites with financial capacities to influence politics to their liking.

Structural capacities being put to use can also be found in Tanzania. Mohammed Dewji is the CEO of Tanzania's largest textile firm, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Textiles. He has also been an MP for the country's continuously ruling party *Chama Cha Mapinduzi* for ten years. He publicly talks about his remaining close ties to the party (Telos, 2016).

Another large utilizer of AGOA benefits is the mining industry which exports precious stones from Tanzania to the US. The mechanisms behind these companies strategy to retain AGOA benefits can however be expected to be of a different nature, as they are largely not led by a Tanzanian elite, but rather by international corporations (Maliganya & Bengesi, 2018).

Muhammad (2017) however suggests: "Western countries, are extracting (mineral wealth) far more than they send back. Meanwhile, they are pushing economic models that fuel poverty and inequality, often in alliance with African elites". An alliance of international private companies and African elites can therefore be expected to push for a continuation of AGOA benefits for Tanzania by pressuring lawmakers. This international dimension of AGOA's political effect could be interesting for future research.

#### 5.2.4 Case study Zimbabwe

To solidify AGOA as the cause for these processes Zimbabwe serves as a case of a SSA state not member to AGOA. Both under former Robert Mugabe and current president Emmerson Mnangagwa, Zimbabwe has not been deemed eligible for AGOA membership. A controversial land reform campaign coincided with the kickoff of AGOA, and subsequent progress towards economic liberalism has not been found sufficient by the US government



(Periscope, 2016). It however does not differ greatly from SSA states in its economic or political make up (Mlambo, 2014). The *Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front* (ZANU-PF) has ruled the country since its independence, such a rule however is not unusual among AGOA members (Tanzania, Uganda, Cameroon,...). Economically, the country relies on similar products as neighboring states, namely metals, agricultural products, and limited amounts of manufactured goods such as apparel (OEC, 2022).

The mechanism of an elite working towards good relations with the United States is however not given in this case. The product most exported to the United States is ferroalloys. Even in this group the US makes up just 10.5% of exports (OEC, 2022). The tariff on ferroalloys is set at an enormous 35%. Elites therefore have no incentive to retain good relations with the United States and the effect shows. The UNGA statistics reveal that in just 13% of UNGA votes an overlap with the US vote occurred. A potential incentive for elites to pressure their governments to compliance with US policy to eventually reach a stage of AGOA eligibility is therefore unlikely, but could be explored.

#### *5.2.5 Generalizability and Deviations*

While the ties between the elites and the government don't necessarily have to be as clear as in the cases shown, the necessity for a certain abundance of financial and structural capacities needs to be given for a beneficial utilization of AGOA across all member states (Shapouri & Trueblood, 2003). The political rapprochement effect is also given for almost all AGOA members, while simultaneously the limited utilization and a resultingly absent significant economic effect are also seen across parties to the agreement (Williams, 2015). A similar use of the resultingly given capacities industries possess in all countries to benefit from AGOA, to influence political decision-making, is therefore very possible.

Especially the use of financial capacities, through most explicitly corruption, is additionally well proven in SSA as a whole. Transparency International (2023) reports a discouraging

average Corruption Perception Index (CPI) score of 32 out of 100 in SSA. 44 out of 49 countries score below 50, marking the region as extremely vulnerable to political influencing of elites.

The deviations of some states from the political effect of AGOA also does not have to limit the effect's robustness. It simply shows the need to embed the political effect's cause in the broader social, economic, and political context. Niger (until this year) and Djibouti for example, can be assumed to assure their continued inclusion in AGOA through their military cooperation with the United States. Djibouti hosts the American primary base for operations in Africa (US Navy, 2024), Niger served as the turnstile of US military engagement in the Sahel Zone (Conversation, 2024). Their governments, and the elites profiting from AGOA, can therefore expect the US government to overlook political disobedience for the sake of military interests. Mauritius status as a tax haven (Tax Justice Network, 2023 )might, according to another application of the elite theory, move American elites to push their government for a continued positive relationship with the country, even in the wake of political disagreement.

The few deviations to the political effect of AGOA therefore do not have to challenge the validity of the investigated mechanism, they simply highlight the necessity to consider it in the complex environment of bilateral relations.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusion

### 6.1 Summary

The analysis aimed to answer the following research question: *How does AGOA membership of Sub-Saharan African states' influence their adherence to American foreign policy goals?*

The multi-case process tracing analysis has altogether shown support for my hypothesis of elite's interest as the reason for a political effect of AGOA membership. That this political effect exists has been shown by the descriptive analysis of UNGA voting statistics, and that economic dependence is not the reason for this effect has been substantiated by existing scholarly work and an analysis of recent export statistics of the most politically influenced AGOA members. Instead, a small elite, which possesses the capacities to utilize AGOA, is the sole beneficiary of the agreement. As the literature has found AGOA's suspension procedure to be highly exploitable, the stake-holding elites are reliant on their governments to comply with US policy goals in order to retain their profits. The case studies Kenya and Tanzania reveal the mechanisms through which the benefitting elites use their structural and financial capacities to influence political decision-makers. There is also reasonable ground to believe in the generalizability of this mechanism. My research question can therefore be answered in accordance with my hypothesis; a political rapprochement effect of AGOA, caused by pressure exerted from benefitting elites on their governments, is plausible.

### 6.2 Implications

The implications of the research are broad. For AGOA member states the political freedom lost, could be regained through the negotiations of more stable trade agreements. Manger and Shadlen (2014) find reciprocity of agreements to be acceptable if the suspension of granted benefits is less arbitrary in return. This would however implicate a necessity for African states to open up their own markets for American goods, which could result in a further expansion of the already existing trade deficit of most SSA countries (Yeboah et al., 2021). Infant

industries would be hard to protect and a long-term dependency on imports from the US or other developed states might be the consequence.

Another solution to the necessity of continued political approval of the United States could be to gain some kind of importance to the US, as seen in the cases of Djibouti or Niger. Military cooperation could be a possibility, especially with the recent expulsion of American troops from Niger a possibility to emerge as a new partner is given. A non-economic partnership might allow more political freedom without the threat of AGOA expulsion.

Alternatively, the reliance of the elites on AGOA could be circumvented by finding new markets to export to. More reliant agreements could be closed with European states, China, or other powers. The stability of the agreement even in instances of political dissonance would however have to be assured, as new reliances would otherwise be created. European states have to be assumed to not be willing to forgo political conditionalities (Borchert et al., 2021).

On another layer, African governments could also try to liberate themselves from the influence of elites. The deep interconnections between the governing elites and the economic elites are however hard to overcome, especially as both sides benefit from these connections.

The implications for the United States are less pessimistic. AGOA is not costly economically and has a positive political effect. Only the normative goal of empowering the general population and limiting the elites influence on political decision-making in African states could serve as a reason to reconsider the nature of AGOA. On the other hand, the political adherence enforced by the elites, could also be seen as positive for the general populations in AGOA states. The normative evaluation of the policies abided to by AGOA members is however beyond this thesis' scope.

Lastly, there is geopolitical consequences to this thesis' findings. Other players looking for influence on the African continent, namely China and Russia, could take the found political

influence exercised by the US through AGOA as a reason to offer alternatives to the member states. A potential “race to the top” of global powers out-offering each other, could be highly beneficial for African economies.

### *6.3 Limitations and further research*

Additional to the analysis’ mere descriptive nature, the small political effect of AGOA could be seen as a limitation. The clear contradiction to both global and non-AGOA African trends does however validate the findings. The small overall voting overlap could also be seen as a limitation, but can be explained by the limited number of decisions important enough for the US to “care” about voting behavior.

Each of the links in the process tracing analysis also could be explored in more detail to both substantiate the findings in the case studies themselves, and to generalize the mechanisms found further. The limited space for this thesis is a constraining factor here. Future research could tackle these issues by testing the political effects of AGOA with a proper statistical regression. The case studies could be expanded both in their depth and in the cases of application.

Another limitation is the lack of exploration of alternative explanations to AGOA’s political effect. Yeboah et al. (2021) and Fernandez and Portez (1998) propose AGOA membership as a signal of economic liberalism and political stability of the signatory. Foreign direct investment (FDI) is possibly easier to attract if AGOA as the “seal of approval” is granted. Future research could explore this signal as a potential cause of the political compliance of member states.

The viability of the findings could also be tested for (non-reciprocal) trade agreements beyond AGOA. These types of agreements have been common between developed and developing nations but have recently started to become more controversial. A more symmetrical

relationship is often called for, an argument perhaps supported by this thesis' findings of political compliance resulting from AGOA membership.

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## Appendix

Raw output results:

<b>Country</b>	<b>Difference</b>
Eswatini	-4,9
Zimbabwe	-3,5
Non-AGOA	
Africa	-3,4
Gabon	-3,4
Mauritius	-2,4
Worldwide	-1,8
Niger	-1,6
Djibouti	-0,9
Zambia	-0,6
Gambia	-0,6
Botswana	-0,5
Chad	0
Mozambique	0,2
Guinea-Bissau	0,2
Malawi	0,2
Mali	0,4
Senegal	0,4
Benin	0,4
Guinea	0,5
R Congo	0,5
Uganda	0,6
Namibia	0,9
Capo Verde	1,2
Rwanda	1,3
Sierra Leone	1,3
AGOA all	1,6
Cote d'Ivoire	2
Burkina Faso	2
Togo	2,3
Ethiopia	2,5
Madagaskar	2,5
Comoros	2,7
S Africa	2,9
CAR	3,3
Nigeria	3,3
Angola	3,6
DR Congo	3,8
Lesotho	4
Tanzania	4,2
Kenya	4,5
Ghana	5,3
Sao Tomé	5,5

Example of SPSS output, on request available for all cases:

*Zimbabwe*

P1

<b>Overlap</b>					
		Häufigkeit	Prozent	Gültige Prozente	Kumulierte Prozente
Gültig	1,00	119	16,5	100,0	100,0
Fehlend	System	604	83,5		
Gesamt		723	100,0		

P2

<b>Overlap</b>					
		Häufigkeit	Prozent	Gültige Prozente	Kumulierte Prozente
Gültig	1,00	244	13,0	100,0	100,0
Fehlend	System	1638	87,0		
Gesamt		1882	100,0		