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# Influence of political regulatory environment on the liberalization of the air transport industry in East Africa

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## Abstract

This paper explored the influence of the political regulatory environment on the liberalization of Air transport industry in East Africa. Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The results confirmed that there was high cost of tariffs which limit the number of passengers, the bilateral agreement was discouraging liberalization, political will, and regional integration success was found to be among the key areas that can help improve liberalization of air transport. The regression results showed that the political regulatory environment affects positively the change in air transport. It was recommended that higher-level authorities in EAC keep improving collaboration among nations, easy movement of people between counties. Having a high-quality infrastructure and affordable tariffs can significantly affect the liberalization of the air transport industry.

**Keywords:** *political regulatory environment, liberalization, air transport industry*

## 1.1 Introduction

Throughout the world, regulatory framework is generally the major process that industries employ to interact with human capital that eventually translates to desirable regulation of the entities (Mhlanga & Steyn, 2018). The regulatory process is comprised of structured and formatted interventions that are aimed at establishment and maintenance to desirable standards of the entities facing regulation. In the fields of air transport, the regulatory framework may comprise of enhancement of legal framework comprising of licenses and organizational agreements. It may further focus on areas such as environmental, economic, political and infrastructural environments (Al-Fadhat, 2017). Additionally, regulatory process may focus on regulations of air transport at the national level. This is state-based regulations within the territorial or sovereignty and airspace of a nation. The regulations cover the national regulatory

framework comprising of domestic and international air services of the national and international air carriers. Both the national and international air services should be aware of the international obligations of the state that are classified under bilateral and multilateral orientations and agreements (Mhlanga and Steyn, 2018).

The concept of liberalization is usually complemented by other concepts of privatization and deregulation. Concerning specifically the air transport industry, privatization entails the transfer of ownership of the air industry from the public sector or government to the private sector, while liberalization conceptualizes the relaxation of previous government restrictions in the industry also known as deregulation (Peter-Berries, 2012). Holloway (1998) asserts that deregulation and liberalization are used interchangeably to refer to a deliberate policy of reducing state control over airline operations and allowing market forces to shape the airline industry. According to Yean and Heng (2013) privatization must be accompanied by deregulation for there to be a maximum effect in the aviation sector.

Air transport worldwide is still among the most regulated sector. Entry, exit, and pricing rules are subject to government control. In the last decade, there has been a trend towards the liberalization of air transport services as states recognized the benefits of allowing market forces to determine the development of air transport services (Lohmann & Duval, 2011). Whereas several African States have relaxed restrictions on market access, they still place foreign ownership and control restrictions on their airlines by specifying the maximum percentage of airline shares that can be owned by foreign nationals. This has severely limited the ability of airlines to consolidate across borders and raise the needed capital (OECD, 1997).

In East Africa, the Bilateral Air Services Agreements (BASAs) have certain restrictions on market access especially on the grant of fifth freedom traffic rights that have rendered the industry inefficient (Al-Fadhat, 2017). This is because the restrictions suppress competition via routes, size. Thus, designated airlines cannot operate additional services beyond those specified in the BASAs. Some of the BASAs also require designated airlines to be substantively owned and effectively controlled by both parties (Tyler, 2016). This tends to restrict foreign firms from establishing airlines in bilateral partner countries. The local ownership of airlines has negative effects on the domestic capital market in East Africa since the capital market is too small to provide sufficient equity for the development of capital-intensive airline industry. Furthermore, foreign airlines are not allowed cabotage rights, thereby limiting competition in domestic markets to locally owned airlines (Munene & Ikiara, 2012). These restrictions have had a profound effect on the way the industry has grown and evolved.

The driving force for the regulation of air transport in East Africa has been the desire to ensure the protection of national flag carriers whose origin in East Africa can be traced to the breakup of the former regional airline, the East African Airways Corporation (EAAC) in 1977 following the collapse of the East African Community (Al-Fadhat, 2017). Their creation was to integrate national territory, promote tourism and trade through international links, and provide high wages and high skill jobs. These airlines were also integral elements in state foreign policies and defense (Tyler, 2016). Since the majority of airlines were oligopolists, there was a need to prevent them from colliding, and to prevent price wars. Therefore, state regulation was indispensable (Peter-Berries, 2012). The collapse of the East African Community (EAC) left the administration and regulation of civil aviation services to individual member countries.

The air transport industry in East Africa is characterized by escalating fares, high operating costs, high taxes, and a big number of underserved areas, all of which have created a situation where few people use air as a mode of transport. Since the air transport industry has survived and continued to expand despite the persistent state of extremely poor profitability and regulatory constraints, it might be asked, how does the political regulatory environment influence the liberalization of the air transport industry in East Africa? In this context, a null hypothesis was constituted that there is no influence on the political regulatory environment on the liberalization of the air transport industry in East Africa.

### **2.1 Liberalization of air transport**

The concept of liberalization is usually complemented by other concepts of privatization and deregulation. Regarding specifically the air transport industry, privatization refers to the transfer of ownership of the air industry from the public sector or government to the private sector, while liberalization focuses on the relaxation of previous government restrictions in the industry also known as deregulation. Holloway (1998) asserts that deregulation and liberalization are used interchangeably to refer to a deliberate policy of reducing state control over airline operations and allowing market forces to shape the airline industry. According to Irandu (2008), privatization must be accompanied by deregulation for there to be a maximum effect in the aviation sector. A liberalized air transport industry is characterized by relaxation of restrictions in the Airspace, Airlines provide services over designated markets, Airlines determine the volume of traffic, frequency of service and/or aircraft types, Fares need not be approved before they are applied, Relax restrictions on Airlines serving the market between two countries and on specific routes, non-interferences from states in pricing and tariff decision freedom, removal of operational, ownership and control restrictions and infrastructure networks are easily developed (Lykotrafiti, 2011).

### **2.2 Political regulatory environment**

Accessibility to Air transport services, ease of restrictions in the Airspace, reduction of Air transport fares, removal of operational, ownership and control restrictions, greater commercial freedom for Airlines, optimal safety and security standards and traffic flow patterns (Lohmann & Duval, 2011). Further when the general political situation of the country is stable, such that there is no insecurity and government policies are geared towards developing and strengthening the private sector and empowering private investment in the Air transport industry, effective liberalization will be realized and the reverse will be true (Lykotrafiti, 2011).

The effective liberalization of the air transport industry is also seen to have been influenced by political factors. The control of markets in air transport began with the Paris Convention of 1919 which gave every state the right to control the use of air space above a particular state's territory (Dempsey, 2017). Recognizing that every nation has sovereignty over the airspace above its territory meant that no aircraft could fly in the air space or above the territory of any other state without official approval. The Convention is the paramount multilateral agreement for the international air transport that set forth the fundamental policy which underlies air transport negotiations today (Sinha, 2019).

The driving force for the regulation of air transport in East Africa has been the desire to ensure the protection of national flag carriers whose origin in East Africa can be traced to the breakup of the former regional airline, the East African Airways Corporation (EAAC) in 1977 following the

collapse of the East African Community (Al-Fadhat, 2017). Their creation was to integrate national territory, promote tourism and trade through international links, and provide high wages and high skill jobs. These airlines were also integral elements in state foreign policies and defense since the majority of airlines were oligopolists, there was need to prevent them from colliding, and to prevent price wars. Therefore, state regulation was indispensable (Sinha, 2019). However, the absence of strong home-based airlines together with the elusive ambition to develop International Airports into regional hubs by the East African States has returned to haunt policymakers in East Africa of desperate attempts to promote tourism in their countries (Mhlanga & Steyn, 2018).

The quest for economic nationalism is the overriding factor in the case of starting a National Airlines. This comes in the wake of recognition that air transport is a critical vehicle for economic, social and political development for a landlocked state like Uganda and Rwanda and that it also has significant multiplier effects across all sectors of the economy for instance: creating employment in the country; promoting domestic and international, tourism; providing revenue to Government in form of taxes; and exporting perishable products (Munene & Ikiara, 2012). With this in mind, the expected benefits from a national airline are worth the expected risks bearing in mind the fact that, indeed, foreign-owned carriers can actually provide services but highly doubtful that they would be attracted to situations and areas where there is little or no commercial returns. Yet the need for air transport services quite often goes beyond the commercial boundaries to include emergencies, community services, and other urgent national requirements (Lykotrafiti, 2011).

### **3.1 Research methodology**

The participants in the study consisted of management of Civil Aviation Authorities, Airline companies, and Airports authorities in four East African countries; Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. The target population was managements of four (4) Civil Aviation Authorities, three (3) Airports Authorities and three (3) Airline Companies who included the Board of Directors, Executive Committees, senior managers and middle managers. The study used a mixed-method design comprising of both descriptive quantitative and qualitative survey study approaches. Yamane (1967) formula was used to compute the sample size. The sample size was 230 participants.

## **4.0 Research findings and discussions**

### **4.1 Descriptive analysis results**

#### **4.1.1 Political environment**

This study assessed the influence of the political regulatory environment on the liberalization of the air transport industry in East Africa. Table 1 shows the influence of the political environment on the air transport sector.



**Table 1: Influence of Political environment on the liberalization of the air transport sector**

Political Environment (PE)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Not sure (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Mean	Std. Deviation
PE1	0	10.1	2.9	82.6	4.3	3.812	0.670
PE2	0	2.9	11.6	78.3	7.2	3.899	0.546
PE3	0	4.3	5.8	15.9	73.9	4.594	0.792
PE4	0	14.5	4.3	29.0	52.2	4.188	1.061
PE8	0	2.9	7.2	26.1	63.8	4.507	0.760
PE9	0	8.7	15.9	72.5	2.9	3.696	0.671
PE10	1.4	0	7.2	87.0	4.3	3.928	0.495

The results in Table 1 show that the majority (82.6%) of respondents agreed and 4.3% strongly agreed to the first statement confirming that their political will to drive the liberalization. This implied that there is a political will and thus liberalization can be easily achieved. Thus, the majority of respondents (86.9%) agreed and strongly agreed to the statement that current environment initiatives by the East African countries influence the liberalization of air transport. Further, 78.3% and 7.2% of respondents agreed and strongly agreed that security and safety facilitate the liberalization. Besides, the majority (87%) supported that the designation of air transport operators to operate regional and international flights is influenced by politicians in East African countries while only 1.4% strongly disagreed with the statement. Finally, 72.5% agreed that corruption in air transport projects slower the liberalization of air transport in east African countries. The results were in line with research by Lohmann and Duval (2011) which revealed that politics has a significant role in the liberalization process.

#### 4.1.2 Regional cooperation and international agreement

The study sought to examine the effect of the country's commitment to signing the regional and international agreement and its implementation and the results are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Country commitment to regional economic integration and trade**

Political Environment (PE)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Not sure (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Mean	Std. Deviation
PE5	0	2.9	5.8	52.2	39.1	4.275	0.705
PE6	0	0.0	5.8	50.7	43.5	4.377	0.597
PE7	0	1.4	24.6	15.9	58.0	4.304	0.896

Based on the results presented in Table 2, majority (91.3%) agreed and strongly agreed with the statement that regional integration can serve as the impetus to achieve liberalization while 5.8% were not sure and 2.9% disagreed. Besides, 58% strongly agreed, 15.9% agreed and 24.6% were not sure if signing free trade agreement (TFTA) and African continental freed trade agreement accelerates liberalization. Besides, 93.5% of respondents agreed and strongly agreed that the EAC treaty and protocols are very clear and provide a clear roadmap for achieving air transport liberalization in EAC. Generally, the results implied that accelerating economic integration, and following common air transport policies can facilitate liberalization

### 4.1.3 Liberalization of air transport in East Africa

The results of Table 3 indicate the perceptions of respondents about air transport liberalization in East Africa.

**Table 3: Descriptions of air transport liberalization in the East African’s region (EAC states)**

Liberalization (LB)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Not sure (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Mean	Std. Deviation
LB1	10.1	76.8	7.2	5.8	0.0	2.087	0.636
LB2	20.3	62.3	11.6	2.9	2.9	2.058	0.838
LB3	27.5	60.9	7.2	4.3	0.0	1.884	0.718
LB4	18.8	76.8	4.3	0.0	0.0	1.855	0.463

As per the results presented in Table 3, 76.8% of respondents disagreed, 10.1% strongly disagreed with the statement that air transport services are easily accessible by the citizens of East Africa. However, only 5.8% of respondents agreed with the statement. Further, 62.3% disagreed and 20.3% strongly disagreed with the statement that air transport is not commonly used because of the lack of airlines in most areas in the region and high transport fares. This confirms that the infrastructure facilities (mainly airports) are not yet enough to promote and derive to full liberalization. Additionally, 62.3% disagreed and 20.3% strongly disagreed with the statement that air transport is not commonly used because of the lack of airlines in most areas in the region. This confirmed that the infrastructure facilities (mainly airports) are not yet enough to promote and derive to the full liberalization. The availability of airports and affordable fares are very important to increase accessibility by many citizens and increases the traffic volumes so that liberalization can be achieved. Moreover, 76.8% of respondents disagreed while 18.8% strongly disagreed that the national airlines/carriers in the East African countries enjoy commercial freedoms within each other's territories and beyond. This shows that even though there is a commitment on the political side, sound policies and international regulations are set, a lot of need to be done so that liberalization is successful.

## 4.2 Regression analysis

### 4.2.1 Assumptions of Ordinary Least Squares (OLS)

Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) was used to analyze the effect of political factors on the liberalization of air transport in East Africa countries. To verify the OLS assumptions, the study checked for outliers through skewness and kurtosis, normality assumption, multicollinearity, and Heteroscedasticity tests.

#### 4.2.2.1 Normality assumption

The assumption of normality needs to be checked for many statistical procedures, namely parametric tests because their validity depends on it. As suggested by Cunningham (2008), an absolute value of 2.0 for skewness and 7.0 for absolute value is determined as the least violation of the assumption of normality. The results for normality test are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4: Normality test**

Variables		Statistic	Std. Error
Political environment	Mean	4.1580	.05105
	Median	4.4000	
	Std. Deviation	.42406	
	Skewness	-.779	.289
	Kurtosis	-.594	.570
Liberalization	Mean	1.9928	.05929
	Median	2.0000	
	Std. Deviation	.49254	
	Skewness	2.192	.289
	Kurtosis	6.530	.570

The results shown in Table 4 indicate the results of the normality test for the study variables. The values of skewness for most of the variables were between -1 and +1 while others range between -1.6 and +2.2 and less than 7 for kurtosis. This implied that the study variables are moderately satisfied with the normality assumption.

#### 4.2.2 Multicollinearity test

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was used to check for multicollinearity between the independent variables. According to Kennedy (1992), a VIF greater than 10 indicates harmful collinearity. The results of multicollinearity test are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5: Multicollinearity testing**

Model	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
Political environment	0.739	1.354

a. Dependent Variable: Liberalization

The results from Table 5 show the absence of multicollinearity because all tolerance values are greater than 0.1 and all VIF values are less than 10. Thus there is no multicollinearity among predictor variables and hence all variables were used in multiple regression models.

#### 4.2.3 Heteroscedasticity

Heteroscedasticity is a situation where the variability of a variable is unequal across the range of values of a second variable that predicts it (Vinod, 2008). In this study Heteroscedasticity was tested by performing the Breusch-pagan/cook-Weisberg test. Breusch-Pagan/Cook-Weisberg test the null hypothesis that the error variances are all equal versus the alternative that the error variances are a multiplicative function of one or more variables (Vinod, 2008). The heteroscedasticity tests is presented in Table 6



**Table 6: Heteroscedasticity test**

Ho	Variables	Chi2(3)	Prob > Chi2
Constant Variance	Independent variable	1.057	0.304

Table 6 shows that the constant variance (Chi-square= 1.057) is insignificant ( $p = 0.304$ ). Thus, the study failed to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that the error variance is equal thus heteroscedasticity was not a problem in the data.

### 4.3 Correlation of variables

A correlation indicates that as one variable changes in value, the other variable tends to change in a specific direction. Correlation analysis results are presented in Table 7.

**Table 7: Correlation analysis**

		Liberalization	Political environment
Liberalization	Pearson Correlation	1	.492**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	138	138
Political environment	Pearson Correlation	.492**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	138	138

Table 7 shows the presence of a strong correlation coefficient ( $r=0.492$ ) between the political environment and air transport liberalization. Moreover, the p values show that this correlation has a statistical significance considering that the p-value is less than a 5% level of significance. This implied that a sound political environment directly influences the positive change in achieving air transport liberalization.

### 4.4 Simple linear regression for the independent variable

#### Model summary

The simple regression analysis was performed to examine the individual effect of the political environment on the liberalization of air transport to assess if the improvement in air liberalization is explained by the change in the political environment. The model summary of regression of political environment on air liberalization is depicted in Table 8

**Table 8: Model summary of regression of political environment on air liberalization**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.492 <sup>a</sup>	.242	.237	.34636

Table 8 shows the coefficient of determination (R Square) of 0.242 which indicated that only a 24.2% change in air liberalization in East Africa can be explained by the change in the political environment.

### Analysis of variance

Table 9 presents the ANOVA

**Table 9: ANOVA**

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5.216	1	5.216	43.477	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	16.315	136	.120		
	Total	21.531	137			

The ANOVA test in Table 9 indicates that the political environment has no significant influence on the liberalization of air transport in East Africa. The *p*-value is less than a 5% level of significance (*p*-value>5%) therefore, it is concluded that the political environment has a significant effect on the liberalization of air transport in East Africa. Therefore, the study rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that the political environment affects air liberalization.

### Interpretation of the coefficient of regression

The results of the regression coefficients are presented in Table 10.

**Table 10: Regression coefficients**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.090	.149		20.732	.000
	Political environment	.286	.043	.492	6.594	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Liberalization

The results in Table 10 show that the political environment has a positive and significant effect on the liberalization of ( $\beta=0.286$ ,  $t=6.594$ ,  $p<.05$ ). The regression equation obtained from this output is: Liberalization = 3.090 + 0.286 political environment. The regression coefficient for the political environment is 0.286. This indicates that a unit increase in the political environment results in a 28.6% increase in liberalization.

### 4.5 Multiple regression analysis

The survey data used for multiple regression models have the independent variable as the political environment and the dependent variable is the liberalization of air transport. The multiple regressions were conducted to determine if there a statistically significant effect of independent variables on the liberalization of air transport in East Africa to predict air liberalization. The results of the overall model summary is presented in Table 11

**Table 11: Overall model summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.661 <sup>a</sup>	.437	.420	.30180

The results in Table 11 show that the regression model has a large coefficient of determination of 43.7% of the change independent variables that can be explained by the change in the predictor variables used in the model. This implied that 43.7% of the liberalization of air transport can be explained by the change in the political environment.

### Analysis of variance

Table 12 presents the analysis of variance.

**Table 12: ANOVA Table for the overall model**

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	9.417	4	2.354	25.847	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	12.114	133	.091		
	Total	21.531	137			

a. Dependent Variable: Liberalization

b. Predictors: (Constant), Political environment

The results of ANOVA tests in Table 12 show that the regression model was significant at 5% level of significance. Besides, the regression coefficients were individually tested to check whether the independent variable had a significant effect on the dependent variable.

Moreover, Table 13 presents the fitted model with all independent variables

**Table 13: The fitted model with all independent variables**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1	(Constant)	3.682	.232		15.858	.000
	Political environment	.302	.043	.519	7.085	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Liberalization

The Regression equation was as follows:

$$Y=3.682+0.302X_1$$

With Y: Liberalization of air transport

X<sub>1</sub>: Political environment

The model in Table 13 shows that the independent variable (political environment) has a coefficient which is different from zero and a positive relationship with the liberalization of air transport. The positive coefficient suggests that there is a positive relationship between the political environment and the liberalization of air transport. This means that improvement in the political environment would also lead to a positive change to the liberalization of air transport. The analysis of *t*-test and *p* values for the significance of regression coefficients for the political environment was statistically significant (*p*-value was less than 5%).

## **5.1 Conclusions**

Through the use of descriptive statistics, exploration, and understanding of the influence of the political regulatory environment toward air transport in the East Africa region were conceptualized. Moreover, the multiple regressions were very useful in examining how the political regulatory environment influences the changes in the development of air transport. Consequently, the political regulatory environment was found to be significantly affecting the change in the liberalization of air transport. The study further revealed that the political environment had a significant effect on the liberalization of air transport. Therefore, the conclusion was made that there is a significant relationship between the political environment and the liberalization of air transport. The study thus rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that there was a significant relationship between the political environment and liberalization of air transport in East Africa.

## **6.1 Recommendations**

The recommendations were made regarding the influence of the political environment on the liberalization of the air transport industry. The study established that the political situation in East Africa countries has a significant effect on the liberalization of air transport and the development of the air transport sector. Therefore, the recommendation was made that sound political among East Africa countries is viable for enhancing and facilitating the liberalization process. Maintenance of peace and stability in the region is very necessary to ensure the security and safety of passengers for the eventual achievement of the liberalization process.

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