Chapter 1 - Political Stability: What Is It and Why Does It Matter?

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## Political Stability and the African Development

Political stability (or, its opposite, political instability) can be defined and measured in many different ways by different authors. However, no matter how it is defined and measured, it is now generally accepted that political stability has tremendous impacts on the economy and the wellbeing of the population of any country in the world. (Aisen and Veiga 2011; Alesina et al. 1996; and Roe and Siegel 2011) Given these tremendous impacts, anyone involved in any aspect of development in Africa is looking for political stability for the continent.

In line with this, the African Union points out in the preamble of its Constitutive Charter “the fact that the scourge of conflicts in Africa constitutes a major impediment to the socio-economic development of the continent and of the need to promote peace, security and stability as a prerequisite for the implementation of our development and integration agenda” (African Union 2000, Preamble). Consequently, one of the main objectives of the African Union is “to promote peace, security, and stability on the continent” (African Union 2000, Article 3.f).

For the international donors, political stability in Africa has been a major concern since the end of the Cold War. Particularly, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have undertaken and supported countless research projects and publications on this issue. In this sense, the major research projects sponsored by the World Bank include those undertaken by Paul Collier and his associates on “Understanding Civil War” (Collier and Sambanis 2005) and “Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy” (Collier et al. 2003). More specifically, the *World Development Report* for the year 2011 was devoted to “Conflict, Security, and Development.” (World Bank 2011)

Nevertheless, despite all of these efforts undertaken by different actors, as we will see in this book, Africa is still the most unstable region of the world. Political stability appears to be more an elusive quest for many African countries.

## Political Stability: An Elusive Definition and Measurement

What exactly is political stability (or instability)? The definition and measurement of the concept of political stability (and/or its opposite, instability) remain controversial and elusive, despite the great efforts deployed by different scholars and international organizations over the years to come up with a consensual definition and measurement. This situation led some authors to believe that “stability cannot be quantified and that there are thus no degrees of stability” (Dowding and Kimber 1983). In fact, the definition and measurement of this concept have evolved over the years.

An early formal definition proposed by Claude Ake in the 1970s states that “political stability is the regularity of the flow of political exchanges” (Ake 1975, 273). Unfortunately, no one (including the author himself) was able to build a cross-national and longitudinal database on political stability based on this definition. Since then, several scholars simply identify political stability with lack of conflict or the ability of a political system to “prevent conflict” (Reynal-Querol 2002, 465), and use “conflict” from the existing databases as the main indicators of political instability (Goldstone et al. 2010). Furthermore, a fairly common measurement of political stability (or instability) is the frequency of cabinet change and regime change (or regime duration). The long list of authors who use this measurement includes Alesina et al. (1996) in their investigation of the impacts of political instability economic growth, Hegre et al. (2001) in their study on the association between regime type and national security, and Gates et al. (2006) in their examination of “how political institutional structures affect political instability.” Moreover, a closer look at the concept of political instability “using 25 political instability indicators in an Exploratory Factor Analysis,” allow Richard Jong-A-Pin to suggest four dimensions of political instability: “(1) politically motivated violence, (2) mass civil protest, (3) instability within the political regime, and (4) instability of the political regime.” (Jong-A-Pin 2009, 16)

In recent years, the World Bank and different authors adopt the definition and measurement of “Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism (PV)” proposed by Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi, as part of their work on the World Governance Indicators (WGI). (See World Bank 2016; and Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi 2011) “Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism (PV)” or simply “political stability” is here defined as “the likelihood that the government will be destabilized or overthrown by unconstitutional or violent means, including politically-motivated violence and terrorism. It is considered as one of the”six dimensions of governance," which include: “Voice and Accountability, Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism, Government Effectiveness, Regulatory Quality, Rule of Law, and Control of Corruption.” (Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi 2011, 4) More importantly, Kaufman et al.’s innovation in this research project is to “rely exclusively on perceptions-based governance data sources.” (Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi 2011, 5) As they explain, “Our data sources include surveys of firms and households, as well as the subjective assessments of a variety of commercial business information providers, non-governmental organizations, and a number of multilateral organizations and other public-sector bodies.” (Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi 2011, 5)

After comparing Kaufmann et al.’s definition and measurement of political stability with those of other authors, we decide to adopt theirs in this book for two reasons. First, since the concept of political stability is highly subjective, it would make more sense to use a measurement technique based on intersubjectivity, like the “Lickert Scale,” commonly used as a valid measurement technique in various social science disciplines.(**???**; see also Hollway and Jefferson 2000; Charmaz 2006) Second, based on their definition and measurement, Kaufmann et al. are able to build and maintain a consistent database on political stability for most countries in the world since 1996. This database is easily accessible through the World Bank’s databank website.(World Bank 2016)

## Why Does Political Stability Matter?

Political scientists and policy makers’ concerns with political stability (and/or political instability) started in the 1970s, but it was the dramatic increase of armed conflicts at the end of Cold War that made it a major focus of many scholars, policy makers, and development and security agencies. In the meantime, other concepts, such as “failed state,” “state failure”, “weak state,” and “fragile state,” were also used simulatneously with that of political stability (and/or political instability). Nevertheless, it appears that the latter concept is the most usefull to describe the political situation in most countries in the world. In fact, as Susan Woodward reports, “the State Failure Task Force funded by the CIA [since 1994] had changed its title to the Political Instability Task Force in 2003, and the National Intelligence Council (the policy think tank for the CIA) decided in 2005 to establish a semi-annual Political Instability Watch List.” (S. L. Woodward 2017, 48) Meanwhile, even though Fund for Peace is promoting since 2014 its “Fragile State Index” in replacement of the flawed “Failed State Index” (S. L. Woodward 2017, 22), this new index and the related database (The Fund For Peace 2017) are not as popular and useful as those of Kaufman et al.’s WGI (See World Bank 2016; and Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi 2011). This is also a reason why we stick with the concept of political stability and use Kaufman et al.’s measurement and database.

With a very few exceptions, every study on the relationship between political stability and economic performance finds a positive effect of the former on the latter. In other words, lack of political stability (or political instability, with its different forms and degrees, including political crisis and armed conflicts) is associated with poor economic and social development. The only exception we find in the literature so far is that of Campos and Nugent who assert that there is no evidence of a “causal and negative long-run relation between political instability and economic growth” (Campos and Nugent 2002, 157)

Most of the early studies also reveal the negative consequence of political instability on economic growth. According to Alesina et al.’s classical study, “political instability defined as a propensity for government change had a negative impact on growth.” (Alesina et al. 1996) In the same vein, Aisen and Veiga also find “higher degrees of political instability are associated with lower growth rates of GDP per capita.” (Aisen and Veiga 2011, 1) In addition, they specify that “political instability adversely affects growth by lowering the rates of productivity growth and, to a smaller degree, physical and human capital accumulation.” (Aisen and Veiga 2011, 1)

More recent studies expand the negative impacts of political instability on other economic and social indicators, such as foreign direct investment (FDI) (See, for instance, Brada, Kutan, and Yigit 2006; Phung 2017; and Geda and Yimer 2018), inflation (Aisen and Veiga 2006), food security (Deaton and Lipka 2015), social inequality and poverty (Roe and Siegel 2011). Everyone who investigates the relationships between political stability and inflows of FDI agrees with Brada et al. that while political stability “increase the volume of FDI inflows,” political instability reduce their inflows (Brada, Kutan, and Yigit 2006, 649). Furthermore, Aisen and Veiga find that “a higher degree of political instability is associated with higher inflation,” which in turn “generates inefficiencies that reduce society’s welfare and economic growth.” (Aisen and Veiga 2006, 1379)

Moreover, other recent studies also show the important role of political stability as an enabling factor that helps other economic factors to be more efficient. In connection with this, investigating the effects of foreign development assistance on African economies, Cai et al. find that “international aid can promote economic growth in Africa, but the effectiveness of aid depends on countries’ political stability.” (Cai et al. 2018, 239)

In sum, political stability is very crucial for the economic and social development of any country in the world. Its absence is generally associated with a poor economic and social development in different countries.

## Approach to Political Stability and Research Methodology

The main purpose of this study is to understand why most African countries are mired in political instability or, in other words, why the quest of political stability is elusive for many of them. Our previous work on the political crisis in March 2009 in Madagascar shows that a conflict approach is an appropriate way to understand the emergence of a political crisis, which is an escalation of conflict from the stage of political instability (Ratsimbaharison 2017). In line with this, we also want to use the same conflict approach to understand the emergence of political instability in defferent African countries since the end of the Cold War.

Following Micheal Lund’s “curve of conflict” (Lund 1996), political instability is considered as the result of the escalation of conflict from the stage of political stability to that of political crisis. Just as in our previous work on the political crisis in Madagascar, our approach to conflict analysis is also based on that of Levinger (2013), which specifically focuses on the “condition of instability” and “triggering events” (or triggers) in his analysis of conflict. In this sense, we agree with Levinger’s analogy, according to which “the condition of instability provides the tinder for conflict, which needs only a spark [or trigger] to burst into flame.” (Levinger 2013, 32) Furthoremore, Levinger states that: “The escalation from peace [or political stability] to instability, and ultimately to violent conflict and war, is never inevitable. Without a spark, or triggering event, an unstable situation may persist without erupting to violence – just as dry and hot conditions in a forest do not always result in a forest fire.”(Levinger 2013, 32–33)

In addition to the application of this conflict approach, we also intend to use a “mixed methods research” in this study. In line with Creswell agreement, the use of this particular research method is justfied in this case for the following reasons: “It is appropriate to use mixed methods when the use of quantitative research or qualitative research alone is insufficient for gaining an understanding of the problem.” (Creswell 2015, 14–15) Specifically, the quantitative research method will be used to determine the political, economic, social, and cultural conditions of conflict across the African continent. Existing quantitative data from different sources, particularly the World Bank, Freedom House, and the Center for Systemic Peace, will be collected and analyzed using various packages from the “R Project for Statistical Computing.” Next, existing qualitative data from different sources are also collected and analyzed using the same “R Project for Statistical Computing,” and particularly the RQDA package for qualitative data analysis.

## The Argument of the Book

As mentioned earlier, the main objective of this book is to identify the conditions (or determinants) of political instability, along with the actors’ behaviors that trigger the escalation of conflicts from the stage of political stability to that of political instability. In a nuttshell, the argument that will be developped throughout the book is that the existence of persistent conditions that are favorable for the emergence and escalation of conflicts makes political stability precarious in many African countries. In addition to these conditions, the behaviors of most actors on these African countries are also most likely to contribute to the emergence and escalation of conflicts in these countries.

The conditions of the emergence and escalation of conflicts include mixed or inconsistent regimes combining the features of democracy and autocracy, low level of development,…

The most common actors’ behaviors that create and escalate conflicts are the adoption of competitive conflict strategy,…

## The Plan of the Book

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Part IV - Case Studies

Chapter 10 - Two of the Most Stable Africa Countries: Botswana and Mauritius

Chapter 11 - Two of the Most Unstable African Countries: Somalia and South Sudan

Part V - Conclusion

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