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

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## Political Stability and the African Development

No matter how it is defined and measured, it is now widely accepted that political stability (or, its opposite, political instability) has tremendous impacts on the economic growth and the general wellbeing of the people in any country in the world. (Aisen and Veiga 2011; Alesina et al. 1996; and Roe and Siegel 2011) Given these tremendous impacts, any actor at any level (local, national, and international), involved in any aspect of development in Africa, is seeking political stability for the continent.

Thus, in the preamble of its Constitutive Charter, the African Union points out among the important motivations for the creation of the organization: “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 agend” (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 also a major concern since the end of the Cold War. Particularly, international organizations, such as the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme, convinced that Africa would not develop without political stability, have undertaken and supported countless research projects and publications on this issue. Some of the major research projects sponsored by the World Bank were 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). Specifically, the *World Development Report* for the year 2011 was devoted to “Conflict, Security, and Development.” (World Bank 2011)

Yet, as of the writing of this book, Africa is still the most unstable region of the world, and stability appears to be more elusive than ever on the continent.

## Political Stability: An Elusive Definition

What exactly is political stability (or instability)? The definition and measurement of the concept of political stability (and/or its opposite, instability) remain controversial despite the great efforts deployed by different scholars and international organizations on this issue over the years, and no one seems to be able to come up with a consensual definition and measurement yet. 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).

An early formal definition proposed by Claude Ake in the 1970s simply 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. Thus, 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 “conflicts” from the existing databases as the main indicators of “political instability” (See, for instance, Goldstone et al. 2010). Furthermore, other common measurements of political stability or instability are the frequencies of cabinet changes and regime duration (or regime change). The long list of authors who use this method include 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.” Still, 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)

More recently, however, the World Bank and different authors adopt the definition and measurement of “Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism (PV)” 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. (Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi 2011, 4) Most importantly, Kaufman et al.’s innovation in this 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)

It is also worth noting that “political stability” is considered by the authors 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)

After comparing Kaufmann et al.’s definition and measurement of political stability with those of other scholars, we also decide to adopt the former’s definition and measurement in this book for two main reasons. First, since the concept of stability is highly subjective, it makes sense to use the measurement technique based on intersubjectivity, which is commonly used in qualitative research methods.(Among many other references, see Hollway and Jefferson 2000; Charmaz 2006) Second, using these 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, that can be accessed through the World Bank’s databank website.(World Bank 2016)

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## Why Does Political Stability Matter?

Political scientists and policy makers’ concern with “political stability/instability,” also described as “political order/disorder,” started in the 1950s and 1960s, in the context of what Francis Fukuyama depicts as the “heydey of modernization theory” (Foreward in Huntington (1968), p. xi). However, it was the dramatic increase of conflicts at the end of Cold War that made “political stability/instablity” a major concern of many scholars, policy makers, and development agencies. By this time, the concept of “political stability/instability” was widely adopted and that of “political order/disorder” dropped. But soon, other concepts, such as “failed state” or “state failure”, and “weak state” were also used and competed for awhile with that of “political stability/instability.”

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)

In this sense, most of the early studies establish the negative consequences 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, with regard to the “channels of transmissions,” 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)

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). All of the authors who investigate the relationships between political stability and inflows of FDI agree 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)

Other recent studies also show the important role of political stability as an enabling factor that helps other economic factors to be more efficient. Thus, 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 important, because its absence is generally associated with a poor economic and social development in different countries.

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## Approach and Research Methods

* The Challenges in analyzing political stability

1. We need to analyze political stability, instability and crisis in terms of conflict, i.e. as different stages in the “curve of conflict” within a given society.
2. As a stage of conflict, and in application of what we have learned for the analysis of conflict (See my book, The Political Crisis of March 2009), the escalations and deescalations from political stability to instability and crisis depend on two factors:

* conditions (or contexts of the conflict),
* triggers (which include behaviors, tactics and strategies of the actors in the conflict)
* The need to use a “mixed methods research” as defined by John Creswell
* The design of the “mixed methods research”
* A quantitative research method to identify the major factors influencing political stability, instability and crisis
* A qualitative research method to identify the major triggers leading to the escalation (or deescalation) from political stability, instability and crisis
* Case study methods to illustrate how conditions and triggers contribute to the escalation (or deescalation) from political stability, instability and crisis in some countries

## The Argument of the Book

The main objective of this book is to identify the conditions or determinants of political instability, along with the actors behaviors that trigger or escalate conflicts, considered to be the main source of political instability.

In a nuttshell, the argument that will be developped throughout the book is that: - Political stability is elusive for most African countries, because of the existence of persistent conditions that are favorable for the emergence and escalation of conflicts in those countries. - In addition, instead of descalting conflicts the behaviors of most actors on these African countries contribute also to the emergence and escalation of conflicts.

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,

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## The Plan of the Book

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Part II - The Conditions of Political Stability, Instability and Crisis in Post-Cold War Africa

Chapter 3 - Governance and Political Instability and Crisis

Chapter 4 - Political Conditions of Political Instability and Crisis

Chapter 5 - Economic and Social Conditions of Political Instability and Crisis

Chapter 6 - Cultural, Religious, and Geographic Conditions Political Instability and Crisis

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Chapter 9 - Autocratization and Political Instability and Crisis

Part IV - Case Studies and Conclusion

Chapter 10 - Madagascar

Chapter 11 - Mali

Chapter 12 - Botswana

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