



# Political Instability and the Challenge of Democratization in Africa: A Conceptual Analysis

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# INTRODUCTION

**I**n the 1950s and 1960s, as a rash of military overthrows of governments hit Latin America and Africa, the analysis of political instability in the then so-called developing world became a major enterprise for academics and policy makers, particularly in the West. This interest was partly driven by a concern in the West about the emergence of Left-wing military governments in those countries, given the context of the Cold War with the Soviet Union and its allies. In the 1960s, Africa's decade of independence, within a time frame of 22 ten years, seventeen African countries experienced military coups d'état or one form of military intervention in government or another. In fact, in January 1966 alone, civilian governments in Central African Republic, Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso), and Nigeria fell in quick succession to military coups in what Ruth First has aptly described as “the contagion of the coup.”

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Many analysts of African coups d'état at the time saw them as only one manifestation of broader political instability and the challenge of creating political order in such societies. Thus, Samuel P. Huntington argues that what happens in such societies is the naked confrontation of social forces in which each employs means that reflect its capabilities “the wealthy bribe, students riot, workers strike, mobs demonstrate, and the military coup.” Since then, the forms of political instability in Africa have even further widened, including several civil wars, genocides, political assassinations, insurgencies, and terrorism. One of the most comprehensive global studies of political instability, spanning a period of almost fifty years and involving some of the better-known names in the field, shows that in the period between 1955 and 2003 “Sub-Saharan Africa generated the most instability episodes... with 49, or 34.8% of the global total.”

The end of the Cold War and the widespread transitions from military-authoritarian rule to civil-democratic governments in many countries of Africa in the 1980s and 1990s raised hopes that Africa's two decades of political instability were finally coming to an end. Everywhere across the continent,

Ruth First, *The Barrel of a Gun: Political Power in Africa and the Coup d'Etat* (London: Penguin African Library, 1972), 20.

Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 196.

Jack Goldstone et al., “A Global Model for Forecasting Political Instability,” *American Journal of Political Science* 54, no. 1 (2010): 192.

transition processes were established, elections were held, and new governments came into existence. Apartheid in South Africa ended with the election of the African National Congress (ANC) under Nelson Mandela as the ruling party in 1994; civil wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, and DRC, among others, were largely resolved, followed by more or less successful elections. However, in the past few years, there seems to be a throwback to political instability, in spite of the return to democratic rule. It thus seems that the underlying assumption that liberal democracy would provide a robust framework for resolving political instability has not been borne out.

If Africa of the 1960s and 1970s was a continent of coups d'état, today's Africa is a hotbed of insurgencies. Apart from a few countries such as Lesotho where the traditional coup or threat of it is still common, coups d'état are now far fetched in Africa. Indeed, Lesotho is an interesting exception. Since its first coup in 1986 led by the strongman Major General Justin Lekhanya, civil authority in Lesotho has essentially functioned with the military literally looking over its shoulder. On April 30, 1991, rebel junior officers ousted Lekhanya himself and a major mutiny by police officers in January 1997 was put down by the army. Twenty months later, in September 1998, junior army officers staged their own mutiny, which needed outside forces to be contained. As recently as August 2014, Prime Minister Thomas Thabane fled to South Africa alleging a coup, which the army in turn denied. However, the main source of instability in Africa today seems to be the rampage of insurgencies. As Table 2 shows, about half of all the countries in Africa are experiencing one form of military insurgency/rebellion or another. On the whole, there are 146 different groups in rebellion in twenty-four countries, an average of about six separate rebel groups per country, with DR Congo alone having thirty-six.

**“If Africa of the 1960s and 1970s was a continent of coups d'état, today's Africa is a hotbed of insurgencies”**

Table 1: "Contagion of the Coup"

	Date	Country	Remarks
1)	July 1952	United Arab Republic (Egypt)	Monarchy overthrown by Free Officers' Movement.
2)	Nov. 1958	Sudan	General Abboud seizes power, military junta rules till 1964. In May 1969, Free Officers' Movement seizes power for popular front government.
3)	Dec. 1960	Ethiopia	Abortive coup d'état against the Emperor by the Imperial Guard.
4)	Nov. 1965	Congo-Kinshasa (DRC)	General Mobutu seizes power temporarily in 1960, and again in Nov. 1965.
5)	Jan. 1963	Togo	President Olympio killed in coup, power handed to President Grunitzky.
6)	Aug. 1963	Congo-Brazzaville	Abbe Youlou overthrown, army oversees handing over of power to Massemba-Debat. In June 1966, abortive coup attempt and in Sept. 1968, Captain Raoul takes power, to be succeeded as president by Colonel Ngouabi.
7)	Dec. 1963	Dahomey (Benin Republic)	Colonel Soglo overthrows President Maga and rearranges the government. General Soglo intervenes again in Nov. and Dec. 1965. In December 1967, Soglo is himself deposed and a government headed by Colonel Alley is installed.
8)	Jan. 1964	Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda	Army mutinies put down with the help of British forces.
9)	Feb. 1964	Gabon	Coup d'état reversed by French intervention.
10)	June 1965	Algeria	Colonel Boumedienne deposes Ahmed Ben Bella. In December 1967, coup led by Colonel Zbiri is defeated.
11)	Oct. 1965	Burundi	Army officers overthrow monarchy. In Nov. 1966, Captain Micombero and a group of army officers take power.
12)	Jan. 1966	Central African Republic	Colonel Bokassa deposes President David Dacko
13)	Jan. 1966	Upper Volta (Burkina Faso)	Colonel Lamizana deposes President Yameogo.
14)	Jan. 1966	Nigeria	Coup d'état initiated by young officers taken control of by General Ironsi. On July 29, 1966, another coup wrests power from Ironsi and installs Gowon government.
15)	Feb. 1966	Ghana	General Ankrah and Police Commissioner Harley form a government after the deposition of Nkrumah. In Apr. 1967, an abortive coup led by Lieutenant Arthur takes place.
16)	Mar. 1967	Sierra Leone	Lieutenant-Colonel Juxon-Smith heads a government that takes power from Sir Albert Margai. In Apr. 1968, a coup from the ranks results in the return to civilian rule under Siaka Stevens.
17)	Nov. 1968	Mali	Young officers' coup headed by Lieutenant Moussa Traore removes the Modibo Keita government.
18)	Sept. 1969	Libya	Revolutionary Command Council, which includes two army officers, deposes the monarchy.
19)	Oct. 1969	Somalia	A group of Lieutenant Colonels and Colonels installs Revolutionary Council in place of the Somali Youth League government.
20)	Others	Until the end of the 1960s, other coups d'état and attempts occurred in Africa, including abortive attempts in Niger (Dec. 1963), in Senegal (1962), in the Ivory Coast (1963), the attempted overthrow of Colonel Ojukwu's government in Biafra, several attempts to unseat the government that in Mali, and a reported coup attempt in Congo-Brazzaville in Nov. 1969.	

This essay seeks to explain the seeming persistence of political instability in Africa, in spite of the rapid spread of liberal democracy in the 1980s and 1990s. It examines the causes of political instability, its impact on democracy, and the prospects of its containment in Africa. Finally, it points to where future research and policy should focus to ensure that democracy in Africa grows into a robust system capable of withstanding political instability.

Table 2: Insurgencies in Africa				
S/ N	Country	# of Grou ps	Active Insurgent Groups	Basis of Insurgency
1.	Algeria	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>al-Qaeda Organization in the Maghreb (AQIM) or al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) since 2005—known in the past as Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) since 2003</li> <li>Islamic Salvation Front (Fis)</li> <li>Jamat Tawhid Wal Jihad Fi Garbi Afriqqiya (Movement for Monotheism and Jihad in West Africa) group has broken away since December 2011</li> </ul>	Religious
2.	Angola	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda—Military Position (FLEC-PM) secessionist movement from 1975</li> <li>Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda—Armed Forces of Cabinda (Flec-Fac)</li> </ul>	Ethnic, communal, regional
3.	Central African Republic	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seleka (coalition of five Muslim rebel groups) overthrew government and seized power in March 2013: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace (CPJP)</li> <li>Patriotic Convention for Saving the Country (CPSK) or Convention of Patriots of Salvation and Kodro (CPSK)</li> <li>Union of Democratic Forces for Unity (UFDR)</li> <li>Democratic Front of the Central African People (FDPC) or Democratic Front for the People of the Central African Republic (FDPC) or Democratic Forces for the People of Central Africa (FDPC)</li> <li>Alliance for Revival and Rebuilding (A2R)</li> <li>Movement of Central African Liberators for Justice (MLCJ)</li> <li>Anti-balaka militias (Christians against Seleka)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Religious, ethnic, regional
4.	Chad	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Union of Resistance Forces (URF)</li> </ul>	
5.	Democratic Republic of the Congo	36	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>March 23 Movement (M23): Troops loyal to Bosco “Terminator” Ntaganda military leader (who has defected from the Congolese army) have created the armed group March 23 Movement (M23) comprised of former members of the rebel National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP) (announced cease-fire on November 3, 2013, announced end of rebellion and disarming on November 5, 2013. Peace agreement signed on December 12 2013).</li> <li>Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) or Forces démocratiques pour la libération du Rwanda (FDLR) or ex-FAR / Interahamwe <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Rwanda/Rassemblement Uni pour la Démocratie (FDLR/RUD) operate in South Lubero Territory</li> <li>Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Rwanda/FDLR/SOKI</li> <li>Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Rwanda/FDLR/FOCA</li> <li>Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Rwanda/FDLR Mandevu (split from FDLR/FOCA 2010)</li> <li>Mai Mai Hilair (Union pour la Réhabilitation de la Démocratie du Congo—URDC)</li> </ul> </li> <li>Mai Mai Raia Mutomboki or Rai Mutomboki has fought both FDLR (congolese army) and FARDC (rebels)</li> <li>Mai Mai Sheka or Mayi Mayi Sheka or Sheka (Nduma Defence of Congo—NDC)</li> <li>Mai Mai Kifuafula (North Kivu)</li> <li>Mai Mai Morgan (active in Mambasa and Bafwasende)</li> <li>Mai Mai Simba or Armée Populaire de Libération Nationale Congolaise-Lumumba—APLNC/Lumumb</li> <li>Mai Mai Yakutumba (Pro-government militia) (active in South Kivu) since 2007</li> <li>Mai Mai Gedeon allied to separatists in southern Katanga province</li> </ul>	Ethnic, regional



- Mai Mai Hume
  - Mai Mai Kata Katanga or Mai Mai Bakata Katanga or Katanga
  - Local Defence Forces Busumba (LDF)
  - Congo Defence Front (FDC) fought Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) and and FARDC early 2012
  - Union des Patriotes Congolais pour la Paix (UPCP/FPC)
  - Mouvement d'Action pour le Changement (MAC)
  - Mouvement Populaire d'Autodéfense (MPA) (ethnic Hutu)
  - Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)
  - ADF-Nalu (Ugandan-led islamists)
  - National Liberation Forces (FNL) or Forces nationales de libération (FNL) Burundian active in South Kivu since 2013
  - Nyatura (since 2010)
  - Forces des Défense des Intérêts du Peuple Congolais (FDIPC) since 2013
  - Alliance des Patriotes pour un Congo Libre et Souverain (APCLS) or Alliance des patriotes pour un Congo libre et démocratique or Patriotic Alliance for Free and Sovereign Congo (APCLS) operates in Masisi area west of Goma (Mai Mai group since 2008)
  - Coalition des Groupes Armés de l'Ituri (COGAI)/MRPC since May 2012
  - Patriotic Resistance Forces of Ituri (FRPI) or Forces de resistance patriotiques en Ituri (FRPI) (in Ituri region near Uganda border)
  - Forces de Défense Nationale (FDN)
  - M18 (new rebel faction in North Kivu, not linked with March 23 Movement)
  - M26 (since 26 October 2012 in North Kivu)
  - Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) born on 1987 against Congo and Uganda armed forces
  - Popular Front for Justice in Congo
  - Independent Liberation Movement of the Allies or Nzobo ya Lombo
- Patriotes résistants congolais (PARECO)

6.	Djibouti	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (FRUD)</b></li> </ul>	
7.	Egypt	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Takfir wal-Hijra or At-Takfir Wal-Hijra (jihadist salafist group)</li> <li>• Jund al Sharia or the Soldiers of Islamic Law (since 2012)</li> <li>• Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem (MSC) or Mujahideen Shura Council (MSC) or Mujahideen Shura Council (MSC) or Magles Shoura al-Mujahedeen or Magles Shoura al-Mujahadin or Mujahideen Shura Council of Jerusalem (active also in Sinai-Egypt and in Gaza Strip) since 2011</li> <li>• al-Qaeda in the Sinai Peninsula and its military wing Ansar al Jihad (since December 2011)</li> <li>• Ansar al-Shariah (since July 2013)</li> <li>• Ansar Beit Al-Maqdis (Supporters of Jerusalem) or Ansar Beit Al-Maqdis (Champions of Jerusalem) or Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (Supporters of Jerusalem) or Ansar Beit al Maqds (Supporters of Jerusalem) or Ansar Beit alMaqdess (Supporters of Jerusalem) or Ansar beyt el Makdes (linked to al-Qaeda)</li> <li>• Brigades of Lone Wolves (jihadist group) since January 2014</li> <li>• Ajnad Misr (Egypt's Soldiers) since February 2014 (to be verified)</li> </ul>	Religious
8	Eritrea	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Democratic Movement for the Liberation of the Eritrean Kunama (DMLEK)</li> <li>• Eritrean Salvation Front (ESF)</li> <li>• Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization (RSADO)</li> <li>• Continuing tensions of border with Ethiopia and Djibouti</li> </ul>	Ethnic, regional

9	Ethiopia	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) fights for independence of Ogaden from Ethiopia Government since 1984 (agreed to lay down arms in April 2010. On October 12, 2010 signed a peace deal with government. Since January 2012 fighting continued. On September 2012 started peace talks with government.)</b></li> <li>• <b>Ogaden National Liberation Army (ONLA) armed wing of ONLF</b></li> <li>• <b>Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) fights for independence of Oromo from Ethiopia government since 1973</b></li> <li>• <b>Jijirama Oromo Liberation Front (Jijirama-OLF) da Gennaio 2012</b></li> <li>• <b>United Western Somali Liberation Front (UWSLF) since 1970 (agreed to lay down arms in April 2010)</b></li> <li>• <b>Afar Revolutionary Democratic Unity Front or Afar Revolutionary Democratic Union Front (ARDUF)</b></li> <li>• <b>Ginbot 7 Movement for Justice Freedom and Democracy</b></li> <li>• <b>Gambella Nilotes United Movement/Army (GNUM/A)</b></li> </ul>	Ethnic, regional
10	Ivory Coast	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Republican Forces of newly elected president Alassane Ouattara (ended April 13, 2011)</b></li> </ul>	Ethnic
11	Kenya	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Muslim Youth Center (al-Qaeda-linked Somali militia in Kenya)</b></li> <li>• <b>Mombasa Republic Council (MRC) separatist group</b></li> </ul>	Religious
12	Libya	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>National Transitional Council, together with help of NATO, at the end of October 2011 won civil war against Gadhafi army</b></li> <li>• <b>Libyan Liberation Front (LLF) in Sahel</b></li> <li>• <b>Prisoner Omar Abdelrahman Group</b></li> <li>• <b>Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) or Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyyah al-Muqatilah bi-Libya, since 2011 changed its name in Libyan Islamic Movement (LIM) or al-Harakat al-Islamiya al-Libiya, linked to al-Qaeda</b></li> <li>• <b>Imprisoned Omar Abdul Rahman Brigades, linked to al-Qaeda</b></li> </ul>	Religious



13	Mali	11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Since January 12, 2013, the French and Malian armies (with help of those of other African countries) have been fighting radical Islamist groups that seized north of Mali.</li> <li>• Since October 2011, the National Movement for the Liberation of the Azawad (MNLA) or National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) or Azawad National Liberation Movement (MNLA) is a Tuareg Movement. Declared Azawad independent state on April 6, 2012. (Signed ceasefire agreement in June 2013.)</li> <li>• Arab Movement of the Azawad (MAA) or Arab Movement of Azawad (MAA)</li> <li>• High Council for the Unity of Azawad (HCUA)</li> <li>• Northern Mali Tuareg Movement (MTNM)</li> <li>• National Committee for the Reestablishment of Democracy and the Restoration of the State (CNRDR) (army with coup detat overthrew government on March 21, 2012).</li> <li>• Islamic movement Ansar Dine (Helpers of Religion or Defenders of the Faith) linked to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)</li> <li>• Islamic Movement for Azawad (IMA) (split from Ansar Dine in January 2013)</li> <li>• Al-Qaeda in West Africa (AQWA)</li> <li>• Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MOJWA or MUJAO) or Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) or Mouvement Unicité et Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest (MUJAO) or Movement for Unity and Jihad in the Islamic Maghreb (MUJWA) born by a split of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in the middle of 2011.</li> <li>• Patriots' Resistance Movement for the Liberation of Timbuktu since June 2012 (opposes the secession of northern Mali by MNLA and Ansar Dine).</li> <li>• Katibat Moulathamine or Masked Brigade or al-Mua'qi'oon Biddam (Those Who Sign with Blood Brigade) or Signatories in Blood or Khaled Abul Abbas Brigade led by Mokhtar Belmokhtar, who left al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in December 2012</li> </ul>	
14	Mauritania	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) or al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) since 2005—known in the past as Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) since 2003.</li> <li>• Ansar Allah group linked to al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).</li> </ul>	Religious
15.	Nigeria	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mend (Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta)</li> <li>• Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF).</li> <li>• Boko Haram (Islamic sect) since 2002 (signed a ceasefire with government in July 2013).</li> <li>• Ansaru or Vanguard for the Protection of Muslims in Black Africa (Islamism group since January 2012)</li> <li>• Ombatse sect.</li> <li>• Continuing ethnic and religious clashes between Muslims and Christians in Plateau state.</li> </ul>	Religious, ethnic, regional
16.	Puntland	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Galgala militia (rebel fighters loyal to sheikh Mohamed Said Atom).</li> </ul>	Regional, religious
17.	Rwanda	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rwanda Hutu militia.</li> </ul>	Ethnic
18.	Senegal	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC) or Casamance Movement of Democratic Forces (MFDC) or Movement for the Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC) (fighting since 1982 and now divided into three factions, declared unilateral ceasefire in April 2014).</li> </ul>	Regional

19	Somalia	11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Al-Shabaab somali islamist group (in December 2011 has changed its name in Imaarah Islamiya)</li> <li>• Hizbul Islam or Islamic Party Islamist group (begun February 4, 2009 by the union of four groups).</li> <li>• Hisb al-Islam.</li> <li>• Rahanweyn Resistance Army or Reewin Resistance Army (RRA) active in Somalia's State of Southwestern since 1995.</li> <li>• Al-Itihaad al-Islamiya (AIAI) or Al-Etihad Al-Islamiya.</li> <li>• Warlord Ali Khalif Galaydh and its loyal tribal militia</li> <li>• Ahmed Madobe's militia (leader of Interim Jubba Administration) against government.</li> </ul>	Clan, regional, religious
20	Somaliland	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sool, Sanag, Cayn (SSC).</li> <li>• Northern Somalia Unionist Movement (NSUM) and its army wing Sool Sanaag Cayn Army (SSCA) (splinter group of SSC).</li> <li>• Tribal militia loyal to Somalia's former Prime Minister, Ali Khalif Galayr (searching to create Khaatumo State or Khatumo State or Khatuumo State)</li> <li>• Other clashes with Puntland army.</li> </ul>	Clan, regional, religious
21.	Sudan	13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) since 2002</li> <li>• Popular Defence Forces (PDF) (pro-government paramilitary group).</li> <li>• Sudanese Revolutionary Front (SRF) or Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF)—alliance formed by five rebel groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) or Sudan People's Liberation Army-North (SPLA-N) or Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army North (SPLM/A-N) and its military wing Sudan People's Liberation Movement North (SPLM-N) or Sudan People Liberation Movement North (SPLM-N).</li> <li>• Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) since 2006 (had signed a ceasefire with government in February 2010. New peace talks in Doha in October 2012. Signed ceasefire agreement in February 2013).</li> <li>• Justice and Equality Movement-Military Council (JEM-MC) or JEM-Military Council (JEM-MC) faction (Peace talks in Doha in December 2012).</li> <li>• Sudan Liberation Movement Abdel Wahid (SLM-Nur) Abdul Wahid al Nur faction and its armed wing Sudan Liberation Army-Abdel Wahid (SLA-AW) or Sudan's Liberation Movement of Abdel Wahid Nur (SLM-AW) or Darfur Front for Injustice Rebuttal (signed peace deal on March 18 2013).</li> <li>• Sudan Liberation Movement Minni Minnawi (SLM-Minnawi) or Sudan Liberation Movement of Mani Arkoi Minnawi (SLM-MM) and its armed wing Sudan Liberation Army-Minni Minnawi (SLA-MM) active in Darfur.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Darfur 3: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sudan Liberation Movement—Revolutionary Forces (SLM-RF) since 2006.</li> <li>• National Redemption Front (NRF) since 2006</li> <li>• Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM) group, included ten smaller rebel groups since February 2010 (signed a ceasefire with Sudanese Government on July 14, 2011).</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM) faction led by Ali Karbino.</li> </ul> <p>** Government has been fighting Darfur population since 2003, including continuing clashes with rebels</p>	Ethnic, religious, regional

22	South Sudan	16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Transitional Council (NTC) (formed by four rebel groups: SSLA, SSDM, NDF and SSDF).</li> <li>• South Sudan Liberation Army (SSLA) militia of Peter Gadet Yak (peace agreement with government in April 2013).</li> <li>• South Sudan Democratic Movement (SSDM) or South Sudan Democratic Movement/Army (SSDM/A) and its military wing, South Sudan Democratic Army (SSDA) of George Athor Deng (peace agreement with government in April/May 2013).</li> <li>• National Democratic Front (NDF)</li> <li>• South Sudan Defence Forces (SSDF) (peace agreement with government in April/May 2013).</li> <li>• People's Liberation Movement North (SPLMN)—affiliate of Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M).</li> <li>• Philip Bepan militia (South Sudan)</li> <li>• The National Democratic Front (September 25, 2011)</li> <li>• Gatluak Gai militia (South Sudan)</li> <li>• Militia Gabriel Tang, also called Tang Ginye (South Sudan).</li> <li>• David Yau Yau forces (accepted ceasefire on January 7, 2014).</li> <li>• Johnson Oliny ethnic militia</li> <li>• Ultan Abdel Bagi Ayii Akol militia.</li> <li>• Peter Lorot militia.</li> <li>• South Sudan People's Liberation Movement and its military wing, South Sudan People Liberation Army (SSPLM/SSPLA), led by Major General Tong Lual Ayat (since December 2011).</li> <li>• Sudan People's Liberation Movement in Opposition (SPLM in Opposition) or Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army In Opposition (SPLM/Ain Opposition) led by Machar (peace agreement with government in January 2014, later May 2014).</li> </ul>	Ethnic, regional
23	Uganda	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) begun in 1987 against Uganda and Congo armed forces</li> <li>• Al-Shabaab somali islamist group</li> <li>• Allied Democratic Forces-National Liberation Army of Uganda (ADF/NALU) active in Democratic Republic of Congo in North Kivu, South Kivu, Maniema and Katanga provinces.</li> </ul>	Ethnic, regional, religious

24.	Western Sahara	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Polisario Front against Maroc occupation</li> </ul>	Regional
TOTAL		146		

Source: <http://www.warsintheworld.com/?page=static1258254223> accessed June 25, 2014.

# Explaining Political Instability in Africa

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In spite of its weaknesses, functionalist-modernization analysis has long dominated how most Anglo-American political scientists understand political instability generally and particularly in Africa<sup>4</sup>. Essentially viewed as a modernization problem, political stability is perceived as a challenge facing traditional societies as they move into modernity. In these countries, the functional prerequisites of the political system, namely, political socialization and recruitment, interest articulation, interest aggregation, political communication (input), rule-making, rule application, and rule adjudication (output), are not performed effectively by political structures. The political system then fails in its primary roles of integration and adaptation and, therefore, system maintenance is jeopardized<sup>5</sup>. Specifically, this dysfunctional style of political system (political instability) in new states is variously attributed to “cultural heterogeneity, low regime legitimacy, lack of coercive power, economic backwardness, and structural simplicity<sup>6</sup>.”

Indeed, many Western political scientists

perceive stability and orderly political change as being cardinal to political development<sup>7</sup>. The logic in this is that “any form of economic and social advancement does generally depend upon an environment in which uncertainty has been reduced and planning based on reasonable safe predications is possible.” Moreover, political development can be conceived as “depending upon a capacity either to control social change or to be controlled by it. And, of course, the starting point in controlling social forces is the capacity to maintain order<sup>8</sup>.”

Huntington perceives the problem of instability as one of creating “political order,” which has to do with the level of “institutionalization of political organizations and procedures,” a process by which they acquire “value and stability.” Institutionalization could be measured by the level of “adaptability, complexity, autonomy, and coherence” of these organizations and procedures, and political instability is a function of the decay of political institutions<sup>9</sup>. Thus, Huntington argues that “coups d'état and military interventions in politics are one index of

<sup>4</sup>See Gabriel Almond, “A Functional Approach to Comparative Politics,” in *The Politics of the Developing Areas*, ed.

<sup>5</sup>Gabriel A. Almond and James S. Coleman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), XX-XX.

<sup>6</sup>Claude Ake, “Explaining Political Instability in New States,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 11, no. 3 (1973): 347.

<sup>7</sup>Lucian W. Pye, “The Concept of Political Development,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 358 (1965): 9.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 10.

low levels of political institutionalization: they occur where political institutions lack autonomy and coherence<sup>10</sup>.”

Almond and Powell explore the crises that produce political development, which challenge the political system, and their resolution catalyzes political development. Political development occurs when the political system is unable to solve these crises without further differentiation of structure and secularization of culture. They identify four such crises: the crisis of state building, which deals with the problems of “penetration and integration”; the crisis of national building, which deals with issues surrounding the “loyalty and commitment” of the people to the political system; the crisis of participation, which has to do with “pressure from groups in the society for having a part in the decision making of the system”; and the crisis of distribution, referring to the challenge of “pressure from the domestic society to employ the coercive power of the political system to redistribute income, wealth, opportunity and honour<sup>11</sup>.”

In his explanation of political instability in “new states,” Claude Ake proposes that it is located not in the functioning of political structure and characteristics of the political system, but in the exchanges among political actors and whether they are regular or irregular. He then posits what might be described as a psychological/motivational explanation of instability, namely the high propensity of individual political actors to win and to keep political power. This modal personality emerged from colonialism's exclusionist environment, which meant that the colonized developed this competitive tendency, which carried over to the postcolonial period.

We can then summarize what the foregoing analyses and indeed dominant perspectives on political instability have in common:

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“Essentially viewed as a modernization problem, political stability is perceived as a challenge facing traditional societies as they move into modernity”

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Samuel P. Huntington, “Political Development and Political Decay,” *World Politics* 17, no. 3 (1965): 39394. Ibid., 407.

Gabriel Almond and G. Bingham Powell, *Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1965), 35.



a) Political instability is something that happens in political systems that are not developed (modern) “new states.”

b) Such political systems and their societies show certain characteristics that are conducive to political instability, including dysfunctional political structures, political organizations and procedures that are not institutionalized, structural simplicity, economic backwardness, and individuals with a high propensity to invest in power, etc.

c) As these characteristics diminish, that is to say, as these societies become more “developed,” more “Westernized,” more “modern” and older, political instability would end.

d) Implicit in all these is that the common political agency for achieving this transformation is liberal democracy as it is practiced in the “developed,” “modern,” and “old” political systems of the West.

There are several weaknesses discernible in the foregoing propositions about political instability in Africa the “new states” as Ake calls them. First, there is some confusion about the definition of political instability and its explanation. Take Huntington's argument about the lack of the institutionalization of political organizations and procedures. Sometimes political instability is the absence of this institutionalization, and at other times the lack of institutionalization is an explanation for political instability. In the end, it all sounds like a circular argument: there is political instability because political organizations and procedures are not institutionalized, and at other times

political organizations and procedures are not institutionalized because of political instability. More serious is that sometimes instability is used as a definition for itself. Consider this, political instability is the lack of the institutionalization of political organizations and procedures. At the same time, lack of institutionalization is expressed as the absence of “value and stability.” In other words, political instability is the absence of value and stability. In short, instability is the absence of stability (what a discovery!).

Another major characteristic of dominant perspectives on political instability is their strong orientation to the status quo. Thus, they privilege stability, order, and system maintenance. When they contemplate any change to the status quo, it has to be orderly or within the existing rules. Stability is presumed to be necessary for economic development and progress. History has, however, shown that massive human progress in nature (science), thought (philosophy), and society (socioeconomic progress) has been more consistent with challenges to the status quo than its maintenance. Related to this orientation to the status quo is an implicit assumption that political instability is inherently bad. Yet some of the events that are classifiable as instability have indeed catalyzed progress in many countries of Africa, while many system maintaining events have been conducive to corruption, oppression, and, therefore, to deep-seated political instability in the long run.

Much of these dominant Western analyses are ethnocentric, i.e., inferring that political instability only occurs in

developing countries, such as those in Africa, and that developed countries of the West are politically stable. However, this is not the case. Italy, for example, had sixty-one governments between 1946 and 1994, an average of four governments every three years, and clearly cannot be said to be particularly stable. Also, it was not until the death of General Franco that Spain began to overcome its legacy of authoritarian rule, although there was a coup attempt as late as October 27, 1982. The same could be said of Portugal, which had a long history of authoritarian and military rule before the Carnation Revolution, a peaceful Leftwing takeover of the government on April 25, 1974. Had the military coup against the post-Carnation Revolution on November 25, 1975 succeeded, Portugal would have returned to political instability and authoritarianism. By contrast, many precolonial African states experienced decades of political stability with little or no problem with political transitions, and political exchanges were extremely regular and stable.

Furthermore, extant Western analyses tend to privilege how institutions work, with little attention on how they emerge. Yet, the latter could be as important, if not more, as the former. For one thing, the context in which the political institutions were created could write instability into their genetic codes. Rules and procedures are not neutral of political interests and their fairness cannot be taken for granted. In fact, in many cases it is the struggle to write the rules of the game and create new organizations and procedures that manifests as instability. In other words, the application of rules is an important question, but the social relations and struggles attendant to their creation are

also important. Revolutionary politics is legitimate politics, not political instability. Finally, the underlying assumption that liberal democracy supports stability is not borne out by evidence. Indeed, all liberal democracies are constantly tweaking the rules to contain political instability. This could take the form of amendments to the constitution, new electoral laws, the creation of new institutions, etc. In fact, when the theories of political development assert that political systems develop through structural differentiation, it is evidence that stability is not inherent in the system. Structural differentiation entails the creation of new organizations and procedures often as a result of the inability of existing structures to cope with the “crises of development.”

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instability. Finally, the underlying assumption that liberal democracy supports stability is not borne out by evidence. Indeed, all liberal democracies are constantly tweaking the rules to contain political instability. This could take the form of amendments to the constitution, new electoral laws, the creation of new institutions, etc. In fact, when the theories of political development assert that political systems develop through structural differentiation, it is evidence that stability is not inherent in the system. Structural differentiation entails the creation of new organizations and procedures often as a result of the inability of existing structures to cope with the “crises of development.” More recent studies of political instability, particularly civil wars, have been divided between economic and political explanations. One of the widely cited explanations in the first genre is the “greed and grievance” thesis that is widely associated with Paul Collier's work at the World Bank<sup>13</sup>. For Africa, this means essentially that grievance is not sufficient for the onset of civil war. Instead, the existence of opportunities to profit from war (greed), rather than grievance per se, explains civil wars. In other words, “opportunity is much more important as a cause of conflict than is objective grievance<sup>14</sup>.”

<sup>13</sup> Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “On the Incidence of Civil War in Africa,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46, no. 1 (2002): 1328; Paul Collier and Nicholas Sambanis, “Understanding Civil War: A New Agenda,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46, no. 1 (2002): 312.

<sup>14</sup> Collier and Sambanis, 5.

In addition, Africa is particularly prone to civil war because of its overall poor economic performance and the prominence of primary commodities. In short, “civil war is overwhelmingly a phenomenon of low income countries<sup>15</sup>.” Collier's greed and grievance thesis became as attractive to some analysts as it was condemned by others. For example, it has been criticized by David Keen for “the way proxies for 'greed' and 'grievance' have been used; the lack of attention to links between 'greed' and 'grievance'; and the lack of attention to 'greed' among elements associated with counter-insurgencies<sup>16</sup>.” James D. Fearon, on the other hand, questions the nexus between primary commodity dependence and the onset of civil war, using practically the same data as Collier and Anke Hoeffler<sup>17</sup>.

Apart from these criticisms, in essence what Collier has done is to restate a well-known historical fact, namely that insofar as class rule leaves increasing numbers of people exploited, desolate, and without social safety nets, in due course their objective class conditions (grievance) will connect with the aspirations (not necessarily greed) of a fraction(s) of the petty bourgeoisie to create revolutionary pressures. Whether such pressures finally lead to an attack on the state, either to seize it or merely to change the occupants of its apparatuses, is not necessarily informed by calculations of financial benefits therefrom, but rather on the prospects of

victory based on Lenin's concept of the “weakest link.” As Louis Althusser puts it, “Lenin gave this metaphor above all a practical meaning. A chain is as strong as its weakest link. In general, anyone who wants to control a given situation will look out for a weak point, in case it should render the whole system vulnerable. On the other hand, any one who wants to attack it, even if the odds are apparently against him, need only discover this one weakness to make all its power precarious<sup>18</sup>.”

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<sup>15</sup> Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “On Economic Causes of Civil War,” *Oxford Economic Papers* 50 (1998): 568.

<sup>16</sup> David Keen, “Greed and Grievance in Civil War,” *International Affairs* 88 no. 4 (2012): 757.

<sup>17</sup> James D. Fearon, “Primary Commodity Exports and Civil War,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49, no. 4 (2005): 483-507.

<sup>18</sup> Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London: Verso Press, 2005), 94.

Perhaps the most ambitious recent study of political instability worldwide is that authored by Jack Goldstone, Robert H. Bates, David L. Epstein, Ted Robert Gurr, Michael B. Lustik, Monty G. Marshall, Jay Ulfelder, and Mark Woodward. Using data from 1955 to 2003, they sought to predict the onset of political instability based on three categories: “civil wars,” “adverse regime changes,” and “genocides and politicides.” They conclude that “political institutions properly specified, and not economic conditions, demography, or geography, are the most important predictors of the onset of political instability<sup>19</sup>.”

In my opinion, a major problem with these more recent studies is the dependability of cross-national data and the fragility of the correlations they establish using such data. While they may be useful for exploratory purposes, they cannot become substitutes for nuanced understanding of the specific historical experiences of African

nations. These experiences are complex and are not reducible to motivations of individuals in rebel groups, in particular. That said, what we do learn from the history of large-scale political struggles in Africa, such as anticolonial movements or civil wars, whether violent or non-violent, is that they arise when popular consciousness of exploitation and oppression connect with the aspirations for privilege by sections of the petty bourgeoisie. Thus, the explanation of political instability in Africa in all its ramifications is not to be found in the subjective motivations, calculations, and greed of individual warlords. Such an explanation is too voluntaristic to be fundamental. Instead, it must be sought in the character and organization of class rule, which in Africa's present moment is the rule of the new petty bourgeoisie.

# Political Instability In Africa: The Failure of the Petty Bourgeoisie State Making

In my opinion, radical African political science has been rather too hasty in abandoning what is probably its strongest theoretical expose of the capitalist state in Africa, the link to the class character and interests of the petty bourgeoisie. In the 1970s and 1980s, many African political scientists located the character of the African state within the expansion of global capital, in general, and in the class interests of the petty bourgeoisie, in particular, or, for some, in the more theoretically loose concept of “bureaucratic bourgeoisie”<sup>20</sup>. I think that the petty bourgeoisie is still very relevant in understanding the African state and its instabilities. In fact, my proposition is that political instability in Africa is consistent with the class character of the petty bourgeoisie and the state it has constructed since colonial rule.

In my view, political instability is the level of incapacity of a ruling class to maintain class rule within the existing political order. It measures the degree of challenges, both from within and outside the ruling class, to the existing political order maintained by the state vis-à-vis its capacity to contain them without further

deployment of force. Thus, the more intense the challenges and the levels of force needed by the state to contain them, the higher the level of political instability. In essence, political instability expresses an inverse relationship between force and ideology in containing order-threatening challenges in the polity.

Political science, whether radical or liberal, Marxian or Weberian, has for a long time seen the maintenance of order as a major function of the state, which is maintained both by force and through ideology. But that order does not preclude irregularities in political exchanges. However, it is the responsibility of the state, and by extension the ruling class, to ensure that irregularities either do not occur or when they do that they do not threaten the existing order, namely the dominant socioeconomic interests of the ruling class. Consequently, contrary to Ake's position, it is not the irregularity of political exchanges per se that constitutes political instability, but instead whether they threaten the dominance (force) and hegemony (ideology) of the ruling class.

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<sup>20</sup>See, for instance, Jacques Depelchin, “The Transformations of the Petty Bourgeoisie and the State in Post-Colonial Zaire,” *Review of African Political Economy* 8, no. 22 (1981): 2041.

**Fig. 1: Political Instability Compass**

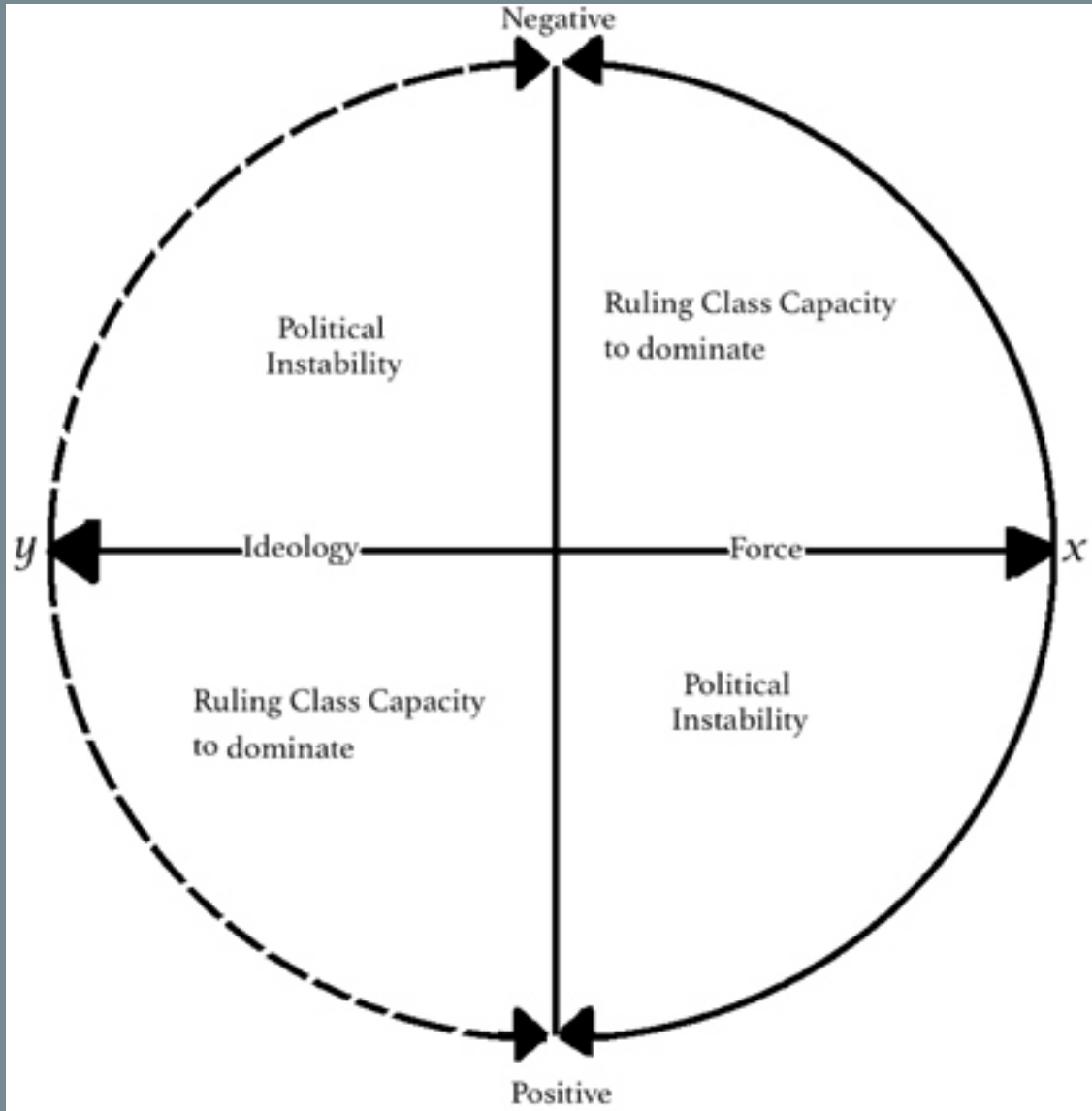


Fig. 1 conceptualizes political instability in terms of a compass with two counterbalancing arrows—force and ideology. The movement of the arrows is driven by the character of class rule and expresses the rhythms of social, economic, and political conditions. As the force arrow moves positively (i.e., clockwise) from origin x, ideology moves in the opposite direction from y, which indicates that as force increases by the state to maintain class dominance, ideology

decreases and vice versa. If force increases, i.e., when the arrow moves clockwise, the spaces designated “political instability” expand while the areas labeled “ruling class’s capacity to dominate” contract. In other words, the more force that the state has to deploy to maintain dominant class rule in the face of order-threatening events, the more politically unstable the system becomes. This furthermore lessens the



capacity of the ruling class to maintain its dominance. The converse of this dynamic is also true.

Viewed in this way, it becomes possible to compare states or groups of states in terms of general and specific sources of threat to class rule, as well as the balance between ideology and force in containing them. This, in addition, allows for the depiction of these challenges to an existing order (class rule) as neither inherently and morally right or wrong, but provides a space for them to be evaluated on the extent to which they represent progress, or its equivalent, whether they contribute to the liberation of a majority of members of a society from oppression and alienation of their labor. I propose that the failure of petty bourgeoisie state making is at the root of debilitating challenges to its rule, and its character as a class makes it increasingly incapable of containing those challenges. The result is therefore worsening political instability.

It is important to understand the nature of the petty bourgeoisie, its class rule, and the state it dominates in Africa. As a class, it is no longer simply an auxiliary group that manages its own projects, but is politically pertinent. In contemporary capitalist societies, particularly those usually classified as developing, the petty bourgeoisie, although not the dominant class, is oftentimes the determinant class. In such a situation, the intrinsic characteristics of the petty bourgeoisie come to the fore and become pervasive, particularly at the political and ideological levels of structure, which are

its principal sites of functioning and reproduction. These characteristics, according to Nicos Poulantzas, include petty-bourgeois individualism, attraction to the status quo and fear of revolution, the myth of “social advancement” and aspiration to bourgeoisie status, belief in the “neutral state” above classes, political instability and a tendency to support “strong states” and Bonapartist regimes, as well as revolts taking the form of “petty-bourgeois” jacqueries<sup>21</sup>.

From this can be inferred the following class instincts of the petty bourgeoisie and their effects on rule:

1. State-centrism: The petty bourgeoisie is both a state-oriented class and oriented to strong states. Given that it is an unproductive class, at best petty commodity producers but mainly salaried workers on the margins of capitalism, the petty bourgeoisie supports state redistribution of income, which puts its members at an advantage over the working class.
2. Bonapartism derives from the petty bourgeoisie's state-centric character. A Bonapartist-technocratic state guarantees relative autonomy of state institutions from the bourgeoisie, enabling the state-based petty bourgeoisie to pursue its interests.
3. Status quo orientation: While they dread proletarianization, members of the petty bourgeoisie at the same time

<sup>21</sup>Nicos Poulantzas, “On Social Classes,” *New Left Review* 78 (1973): 37-38.

have a morbid fear of a revolutionary transformation of society. Therefore, they prefer the status quo, in which the state dispenses patronages.

4. Aspiration to bourgeois The petty bourgeoisie has a strong tendency to use state resources to build an economic base, mainly transforming into a comprador bourgeoisie (contractors, service providers, import-export traders, foreign exchange dealers, etc.).

5. Petty bourgeois individualism reflects the class's excessive pursuit of narrow (individual, sectional) interests.

6. Politically unstable: In terms of political action (praxis), the petty bourgeoisie is a "swing class," moving easily between the bourgeoisie and the working class. Of particular note in this regard is the intellectual petty bourgeoisie, which is permanently divided between intellectuals of the bourgeoisie or intellectuals of the working class. Moreover, it is a class given to revolts, including those against its own class rule. Poulantzas correctly notes its tendency toward "jacqueries."

It is not surprising that these characteristics are amply reflected in the African state, which the petty bourgeoisie inherited from colonialism at independence and which it has carefully tweaked for its purposes since then. To be

sure, the underlying features of the present-day African state were set out under colonialism. However, the African petty bourgeoisie found most of those features beneficial and has systematically used them to further its purposes. Generally, the colonial and postcolonial construction of the African state entailed a number of binary relations, principally vertical and horizontal.

Vertical relations concern the processes of establishing the domination of British colonial power and includes two dimensions: domination and aggregation. The first refers the imposition of domination by the colonizing power. According to Ake, domination signifies the imposition of power over independent social formations through their unification into one polity controlled by the centralizing colonial authority<sup>22</sup>. These relations include the following: the imposition of a chain of command, the extraction of political allegiance and social surplus, making and enforcing laws, the transformation of subordinated social formations into a coherent economy and polity, and the elimination of resistance to subject formations to the hegemonic-centralizing power<sup>23</sup>.

Aggregation, on the other hand, refers to the joining and organizing of colonized formations and peoples by colonialists for optimum domination and exploitation. This finds expression in all or some of the following: the creation of a new system of social stratification; the formation or maintenance of some

<sup>22</sup>Claude Ake, *Why Humanitarian Emergencies Occur: Insights From the Interface of State, Democracy and Civil Society* (Tokyo: United Nations University WIDER, 1997).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.



existing social groupings, including the construction of new ones and the annihilation of others; the invention of new authority structures among colonized peoples; the preservation and/or destruction of cultural practices of the colonized peoples; and the assimilation and/or exclusion of certain segments of the colonized society. Horizontal relations, however, include struggles for domination and subordination among constituent social forces in the emergent African state, primarily the nature of competition and cooperation among various social forces ethnic, racial, religious, etc. created or nurtured by colonialism as part of aggregation. Horizontal relations find expression in: the renewal of primordial identities and solidarities; communal competition among subject communities for access to central power, especially among those that were antagonistic prior to their common subjugation; strategies for evading the state's demands and coercion vis-à-vis other groups; alliances and projects for collective class empowerment; the cultivation by groups of new exclusivist identities and solidarities; and maneuvers for forms of exclusivity by which the elite and/or entire communities attempt to disable potential competitors<sup>24</sup>.

It is clear that any state that emerges from these processes, particularly one that includes adversarial relations among primordial identities, will be unstable. In Africa, the strongest manifestations of these primordial identities and solidarity are ethnic, racial, and religious groups.

The problem with them is that they have a tendency toward exclusivism, totalitarianism, and authoritarianism. They invariably define people as “in-group” and “out-group” and seek the total control of the lives of their members. They become even more exclusivist and totalitarian as they are assailed by a new capitalist solidarity of the market, which tends to threaten their exclusiveness and contest their control. This was worsened by the divide and rule strategy of colonialism, which sought to keep the various communal ensembles apart in order to control them, which the petty bourgeoisie has also adopted since. Above all, the massive power of the state, which in many cases has been used to threaten the liberty and well-being of “out-groups,” only serves to heighten anxiety and drive people deeper into the embrace of communalism. Paradoxically, the oppressed's anxiety is dialectical. On the one hand, it is marked by a proclivity to “avoid” the Leviathan petty bourgeois state, while, on the other hand, it is marked by a predilection to fetishize its power and nurse a deep desire to inherit it on behalf of sectional, pristine interests.

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

As part of the history of the constitution of African colonies as a specific moment of global capital, the colonial state, which was inherited by the petty bourgeoisie, generally did not exist as an objective force standing above society and holding its antagonisms in balance. This is quite unlike the state that emerged in post-Westphalia Europe<sup>25</sup>. Historically, the constitution of capitalism is generally an authoritarian project, as clearly illustrated by the “enclosures” in Europe, the “conquistadors” in Latin America, and the colonial pacification of Asia and Africa. In each case, force, brutality, and repression, rather than dialogue, negotiation, and bargaining, were the initial driving forces behind the constitution of the rule of capital. However, once constituted by an initial act of force, economic domination becomes increasingly routinized and autotomized through the market. At the political level, the emergent “community of commodity bearers will necessarily evolve executive power as an independent public force administered in strict conformity to the rule of law<sup>26</sup>.” In this way, a “civil society” emerges and political domination becomes institutionalized and legitimized.

By contrast, in the colonial setting, colonized peoples were neither seen as equal commodity bearers with Europeans

nor integrated into the colonial market. Instead, they were perceived as occasional petty commodity producers and consumers of European finished products. At the political level, only the white settler population, initially, and much later a few indigenous urban dwellers, were part of civil society and therefore subject to the rule of law. Consequently, according to Mahmood Mamdani, the vast majority of the indigenous peoples of the colony remained outside “civil society.” This gave the colonial state a dual character. One part, a smaller one, was for the citizen and was autotomized and functioned according to the rule of law. The larger part was organized under the rubric of Native Authority, existed for the colonial subjects, who were organized into communal groups, and functioned principally to conquer and keep them under control<sup>27</sup>. In the latter part of the colonial state, state violence reigned supreme. Unfortunately, between late colonialism and independence it was Native Authority, rather than civil authority, that survived and was inherited by the petty bourgeoisie. Because it was never really accepted by most as the guarantor of security, its constitution and functioning remains widely contested, which is expressed both vertically in the tense relation between the state and

<sup>25</sup>In 1648, the treaty of Westphalia ended the Thirty Years War in Europe (1618-48) and established the principles of an international system based on the nation-state. This is expressed by an organized political authority that has subdued and acquired the allegiance of populations living within a territory and can act authoritatively on their behalf.

<sup>26</sup>Claude Ake, “The Future of the State in Africa,” *International Political Science Review* 6, no. 1 (1985): 2. Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1996).

constituent groups, principally communal ones, and horizontally in the conflicts among communal groups. Resulting from its history, there was no question of evolving, routinizing, and institutionalizing principles for the non-arbitrary use of the Native Authority of the colonial state. And when in late colonialism it passed into the hands of the petty bourgeoisie, it became even more lethal and destructive. Indeed, it then became a powerful instrument for acquiring private wealth and a monstrous tool for violently pursuing sectional welfare to the exclusion of others, principally in the form of controlling natural resources like petroleum, diamonds, and timber. The internal

turmoil in African countries since 1990 is not state failure as much as attempts by people to transcend the anti-democratic Native Authority state. Of course, in the absence of strong democratic structures, people resort to armed conflicts. Attempting to contain the threat posed by these revolts has led to the misuse of Africa's military over the last two decades.

# Consequences of Petty Bourgeoisie State Making for Democracy

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How then has the foregoing construction of the state in Africa impacted democratization? There are several fundamental consequences of petty bourgeoisie state making in Africa for democracy. First, because the dominant consciousness of the petty bourgeoisie is focused on the state, production is neglected and the economy remains weak. At the same time, control of the state provides a veritable instrument for cornering its economic resources, thus further weakening the economy. Yet, a contemporary liberal democracy requires a strong market to be successful, not just because the market ethic is what underlines it, but also because a state requires substantial resources to operate. Indeed, you cannot have a strong liberal democracy without a strong market, and you cannot have a strong market without a strong liberal democracy.

Above all, as democracy in Africa becomes more and more expensive in the face of underperforming and highly skewed economies, poverty increases, as does the gap between rich politicians, their families, and associates, on the one hand, and the people, on the other. This fundamentally shakes the confidence of citizens in the democratic process. Clearly, under the prevailing democracy in Africa, members of the so-called political elite, a social category of the petty bourgeoisie, simply help themselves to the enormous resources controlled by

the state. If there is anything that democracy has failed to stem in Africa, it is corruption. In Nigeria, huge sums of money, which some estimates put at upwards of \$20 billion from crude oil sales, are known to have been unaccounted for by authorities in the last four years. The Joint Venture between Nigeria and Sao Tome to explore for crude oil in the Gulf of Guinea became mired in accusations of corruption, leading to the resignation of several officials on the Sao Tome side. Recent information from Ghana, which has been widely celebrated for demonstrating that Africa can also have strong institutions and not just strongmen, suggests that the sleaze of the oil industry may be catching up with its nascent petroleum sector. Second, excessive fractionalization of the petty bourgeoisie, particularly along ethnic, religious, and other primordial lines, leaves citizens constantly divided. Ethno-religious and regional political parties have become the hallmark of democracy in Africa. This is conducive to violence, particularly during elections. The deep fractionalization of the petty bourgeoisie supports political instability and is a major threat to democracy in Africa. A counter argument that is common in the literature in the mid-1990s is the assumption that democracy is an instrument of ethnic conflict resolution because it provides an institutional

structure for the expression of different group interests, including ethnic ones<sup>28</sup>. However, Zeric Kay Smith's empirical test using data from sub-Saharan Africa between 1988 and 1997 found that “democratization does not have the hypothesized effect” of reducing ethnic conflicts. Smith's conclusion is that “political liberalization and democratic institutions, while providing some measure of relief, are by no means silver bullets for the difficult challenges posed by ethnic conflict in Africa<sup>29</sup>.”

Third, the weakness of democratic institutions in Africa means that they are not in any case robust enough to reduce political instability. One interpretation of this is that because democracy is still young in Africa, these institutions would mature with time. This is consistent with a distinction in the literature between “new” and “mature” democracies, the latter being “those that respect core democratic principles<sup>30</sup>.” I do not agree that respect for core democratic principles necessarily comes with chronological maturity. In fact, in some democracies in Africa, the opposite appears to be occurring because it is in the character of the petty bourgeoisie not to respect rules, even the ones it makes.

1) Finally, there are ten common manifestations of petty bourgeoisie (mis)rule, which have far reaching consequences for instability and democracy in Africa. They include the following: mismanaged elections, tenure

elongation of elected officials and a sit-tight mentality, one party dominance, altering the constitution, negative communalism, poor civil-military relations, privatization of public institutions and disrespect for governmental rules, political impunity, corruption, and economic mismanagement.

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“The deep fractionalization of the petty bourgeoisie supports political instability and is a major threat to democracy in Africa”

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<sup>28</sup> See, for instance, Harvey Glickman, ed., *Ethnic Conflict and Democratization in Africa* (Atlanta: African Studies Association Press, 1995).

<sup>29</sup> Zeric Kay Smith, “The Impact of Political Liberalisation and Democratisation on Ethnic Conflict in Africa: An Empirical Test of Common Assumptions,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 38, no. 1 (2000): 21

<sup>30</sup> Charles Guy-Uriel, “Can Mature Democracies Be Perfected?” *Duke Law Scholarship Repository*, 2010 [http://scholarship.law.duke.edu/faculty\\_scholarship/2433/](http://scholarship.law.duke.edu/faculty_scholarship/2433/).



# Epilogue

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**W**here should future research and policy go from here? Perhaps the greatest challenge yet confronting the African petty bourgeoisie is how to reconcile its class instincts and the liberal character of the democratic project that it purports to pursue. In other words, how to balance its tendency toward political instability, on the one hand, and continued democratization, on the other. How this challenge is handled will determine the future of democracy in specific African countries. Essentially, this challenge involves the impact of petty bourgeoisie class rule on the quality of the following: citizenship, institutions and rules, participation and representation in the government, and accountability and redress.

## **Quality of Citizenship**

What does being a citizen of in an African democracy guarantee you in reality? Does it mean good health, potable water, freedom to practice your religion, gender equity, or adequate security? Or does it deliver state violence, poverty, oppression, and exclusion because you are a settler where you live and not an indigene? The common experience in Africa is that rights and freedoms of citizenship are observed more in the breach. In many cases, these rights are civil and political rights, as well as economic, social, and cultural rights are mere legalistic statements in the

constitution. They hardly become lived, realized conditions. To compound this, sub-layers of identity have been used to emasculate the rights of citizenship. Of particular note here is the distinction between indigenes/autochthons and settlers. Because the petty bourgeoisie has been very good at state building and weak at nation building, these sub-identities have been constantly used to exclude, thereby ignoring the collective interests of the people-nation. The petty bourgeoisie's powers are thus used for fostering sectional interests and to denude national citizenship, which is a recipe for instability.

## **Quality of Institutions and Rules**

Under the watch of the petty bourgeoisie, governance institutions, particularly democratic ones, have experienced a steady denudation in Africa. That institutions are weak in Africa is well known, as is the way in which those in power undermine them. But the connection that is not often made is how this is so deeply rooted in the class instincts of the petty bourgeoisie. Given the role it plays in production, it scarcely has the discipline and dedication necessary to construct rule-based class domination. Everywhere institutions of the state are privatized and rules of law are broken. The future of democracy in Africa will depend to a large extent on the capacity

of citizens and international organizations to compel the petty bourgeoisie to respect the law and grow institutions, particularly those that have direct bearing on democracy, such as election management bodies, the judiciary, and political parties.

### **Quality of Participation and Representation**

Participation and representation are significant elements of the democratic system, with the people's ability to choose their governmental representatives being at the very heart of democratic theory. Consequently, how people are treated is crucial to the future of democracy in Africa and central to this is fair elections. The quality of elections conducted by the petty bourgeoisie across Africa remains a major cause for concern. In the first place, they are essentially zero sum, winner-take-all in nature, prompting a do or die mindset among factions of the petty bourgeoisie, which is very conducive to political instability. Second, electoral fraud persists as part of this mentality. This primitive accumulation of votes means that losers repeatedly challenge the outcomes further causing mistrust in the electoral system. Third, the existence of non-ideological, non-programmatic elite political parties means that elections are incapable of providing voters a variety of options from which to choose. Consequently, in elections, although people choose, there is really no choice. The lack of respect for the rules of law and for institutions is strongly expressed in persistent conflicts even within political parties. The absence of internal party democracy reflects the disrespect for the rules they even make for themselves.

All this means that there is really no value attached to the voting process because electoral promises are not delivered and people often do not feel that their participation makes any difference. Finally, too much attention is paid to national elections and national governance, with almost a complete neglect of local elections and local government. Yet, it is at the local level that people can truly participate in the democratic process and control the quality of their representation. Going forward, improving the quality of democracy in Africa will depend on reforming local government and making it truly democratic, offering citizens a real opportunity to participate and determine their own representation. However, lingering questions remain: How involved are citizens, as individuals and communities, in the selection of their leaders? How involved are they in the day-to-day governance of their communities, localities, and the country? Beyond elections, what other engagement is available to enable citizens participate in governance? Who are their representatives and how satisfied are citizens with them? Finally, how often do representatives meet with their constituents to discuss their needs?

### **Quality of Accountability and Redress**

How accountable are political officeholders and leaders to the people? Do citizens feel they can hold their leaders accountable? How strong are mechanisms that limit political power and how effective are they? How does law enforcement deal with infractions by political leaders? Do citizens have adequate paths of redress, particularly against "powerful people" and political office holders? How accessible justice and how capable is the judicial system of



**delivering it? How confident are citizens in taking legal recourse when aggrieved?** These are some of the critical questions related to the quality of accountability and redress.

Accountability requires that those who act on behalf of the public must be responsive and responsible, that office holders be reactive to the wishes and directives of the public. Redress necessitates that politicians follow clear rules and operate within institutional frameworks.

To conclude, political instability is not unique to Africa and therefore the image of a Hobbesian Africa where political life is solitary, nasty, brutish, and short is wrong. Properly locating political instability in petty bourgeoisie class rule and identifying its specific consequences for democracy offers a basis for

advocating for change. Paradoxically, the silver lining lies in the fact that under certain historical conditions the petty bourgeoisie also has had a tendency to side with popular forces. It is essential to find those pro-change factions of the petty bourgeoisie and connect them with popular organizations and movements. In doing this, international solidarity would be key to put pressure on those in control of African states. I believe that an alliance between the progressive petty bourgeoisie, popular forces, and international entities is the best prospect of arresting political instability and democratic reversals in Africa.

