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Development prospects for the Horn of Africa countries to 2040

Governance and Security in the Horn

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Good governance and security are key to economic progress and poverty reduction. Greater security at the national level creates an enabling environment for investment, economic activity and social stability. It also creates conditions in which governments can pursue effective sustainable development strategies.

In the IFs system, governance is conceptualised along three dimensions—security, capacity and inclusion—reflecting the traditional sequencing of the state-formation process. The security dimension measures the probability of intra-state conflict and the general level of risk.

The second dimension, capacity, is related to government revenue, corruption, regulatory quality, economic freedom, and government effectiveness. The third dimension, inclusiveness, measures the level of democracy and gender empowerment. Chart 3 shows the position of each Horn country along these three dimensions.

Chart 3: Governance triangle of the Horn countries, 2020

Source: IFs version 7.63
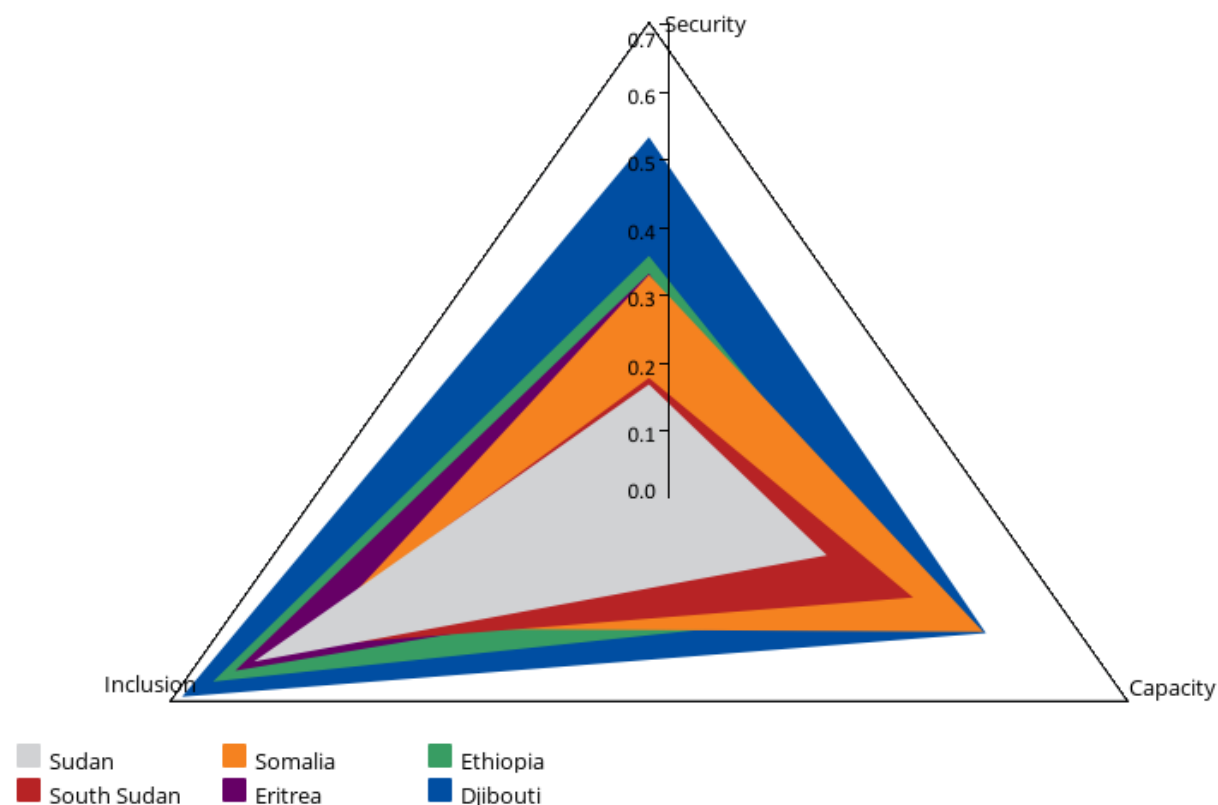
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What is evident from Chart 3 is that Djibouti does best in each dimension of governance compared to its peers. It is followed by Ethiopia in terms of security and governance capacity. Somalia is the most challenged country in the region in terms of security while Sudan performs worst in inclusion.

Despite significant progress, bad governance and an increasingly unstable security situation are characteristic of most

Horn of Africa countries. For many years the fragility and violence of South Sudan and Somalia coexisted alongside the apparent stability and rapid development of Ethiopia until that too descended into violence. Sudan is now on a rocky political transition while the isolationist approach of Eritrea continues.

According to the 2020 Ibrahim Index of African Governance, there is an overall decline in civic and democratic space and rights in the Horn of Africa that appears to have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 outbreak. Among other effects, Ethiopia postponed parliamentary elections that were supposed to take place in 2020 to June 2021.

At the country level, this index shows that Ethiopia is the only country to have improved in all 16 sub-categories of governance over the period 2010–2019, while Somalia remains bottom for the 10th consecutive year with a score of 19.2 out of 100.[1] Somalia, South Sudan and Eritrea have the worst governance in Africa.

Since the fall of the Siad Barre regime and the complete collapse of state institutions in 1991, Somalia has been without a viable functioning central government and represents one of the modern world's most protracted cases of statelessness.[2] Despite many domestic initiatives and the efforts of the international community, Somalia is still deeply affected by decades of internal conflict, which has largely destroyed the country's security and judiciary institutions. Since 2012, Somalia has had an internationally recognised government but with limited capacity to provide security throughout the country.

The federal government, which depends on 20 000 troops of the African Union Mission to Somalia and other international powers to provide law and order and exercise territorial control, faces numerous challenges both internally and externally. Al-Shabaab effectively controls many rural areas and the supply routes to many towns.

In a country dominated by the management of community affairs through clan and sub-clan arrangements, efforts by neighbours and the international community to introduce elections (and democracy) as a solution to its intractable lack of central authority have repeatedly been thwarted. Elections were originally to occur in November 2020, but Somali political leaders at federal and state level have struggled to agree on a timetable and the process and composition of the electoral body. This despite the fact that President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed's term expired in February 2021.

On 12 April 2021, the Somalia Lower House of Parliament declared a two-year extension—but the move was met by serious opposition from key regions of Somalia and the international community. Factional tensions and violence ensued before the president agreed, in April 2021, to return to a commitment made in September 2020 to initiate dialogue and begin preparations for elections without further delay.

The rampant corruption and the absence of the rule of law have weakened state authority in Somalia. The country is ranked as the world's most corrupt globally by Transparency International. Corruption, clan-based patronage, and misappropriation of public funds continue unabated and are particularly pronounced in government procurement.[3] Building inclusive political structure at the federal and state levels and addressing the security threat posed by al-Shabaab are essential for Somalia's progress towards political stability, good governance, economic progress and poverty alleviation. At the time of writing, presidential elections are scheduled for October 2021.

Born a decade ago after years of strife, South Sudan experienced a devastating civil war between 2013 and 2018. Thanks to a peace treaty negotiated in 2018, the war has subsided. The main protagonists, Salva Kiir Mayardit and Riek Machar, agreed to form a unity government, but the situation remains fragile as the pact could again crumble as it has previously.[4] Aside from a recent ceasefire, little else has been achieved, and mistrust among the various parties persists. The governance and security situation in South Sudan is not much different from its neighbour Somalia.

South Sudan has the second worst governance in Africa after Somalia, according to the Ibrahim Index of African

Governance, and rates similarly regarding corruption. For example, one year after independence in 2012, the ruling elites stole an estimated US$4 billion of public money.[5] The officials were never prosecuted, as legal and anti-corruption systems are weak.[6] A mix of political, economic and military dominance makes it difficult to investigate corruption and prosecute influential players.[7]

Insecurity is widespread as the South Sudanese state's monopoly over power is challenged with only a semblance of government control evident in small parts of the country. The country's political space is dominated by the military due to its long history of armed liberation struggle.[8] In addition to its limited capacity, the government is unable to protect the civilian population since its national police, security forces and other armed actors are themselves involved in infighting and large-scale abuses of human rights.

Overall, South Sudan's governance institutions are dysfunctional. The lack of consensus among the national and local elites (political and military), who prioritise their own interests instead of the needs of the population, continues to threaten the country's stability, security and development.

Eritrea lacks functional democratic institutions. It has not had a national election since it gained independence from neighbouring Ethiopia in 1991, and it is governed by an authoritarian regime that is frequently condemned by the United Nations (UN) for human rights violations. The country is considered a 'gulag' state where civil rights and freedom of expression and assembly are non-existent.

Human Rights Watch reports that: 'Eritreans are subject to arbitrary arrest and harsh treatment in detention. Eritrea has had no national elections, no legislature, no independent media and no independent non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Religious freedom remains severely curtailed.[9]

The ruling People's Front for Democracy and Justice is the only political party allowed to exist in the country, and the president and a small ruling elite appear to steer political and economic affairs according to their specific interests. These realities, including the mandatory military training and national service, have depopulated the country as young people seek to emigrate.

Eritrea has become the African country with the highest number of migrants. There is also no separation of powers or checks and balances as Eritrea has not implemented its constitution and its National Assembly does not meet in a country fully dominated by President Isaias Afwerki. This has led to massive corruption, especially in civil administration and the military.[10] The concentration of power around the president and his dominance of all aspects have weakened the country, as there is no certainty as to how the state will sustain itself in case of his eventual exit. In sum, the lack of democratic transformation and militarisation of Eritrean society constitute a significant hindrance to inclusive development.

Compared to its peers in the Horn of Africa, Djibouti, which hosts a multitude of foreign military bases, enjoys relative peace and stability and regularly goes through the motions of elections. Despite some latent clan-level grievances, there are no separatist or insurgent movements, and the authority of the government is established nationwide.

However, graft is widespread and public officials are rarely held accountable for their actions. The judiciary is inefficient and corrupt and lacks independence; only individuals deemed disloyal or acting against the president's political and economic interests are prosecuted for corruption.[11]

Although the separation of powers is enshrined in the constitution, the president has concentrated all the decision-making power in his hands. Recent calls from al-Shabaab for attacks on 'American and French interests' in Djibouti do, however, indicate that the country may not be insulated from trends elsewhere in the region. The last attack, in 2014, targeted a

restaurant frequented by foreigners.[12]

Under former president Omar al-Bashir, political and economic corruption as well as US sanctions prevented Sudan from optimally benefiting from its abundant oil resources. Graft undermined the government's capacity to maintain its strategic priorities and to implement its policies.[13] Poor governance, US sanctions, civil war and the loss of revenue from oil due to the independence of South Sudan led to economic woes such as galloping inflation and currency depreciation, among others. In reaction to the economic hardships, nationwide anti-government public protests led to the removal of al-Bashir in April 2019 and ushered in change.

The current transitional government is tasked mainly with improving governance by repealing laws restricting freedom, establishing the judiciary's independence and rule of law, reforming government structures to ensure its equity, combating corruption and achieving lasting peace with armed groups.[14] Since 2003, violence in Darfur, its most unstable region, has left at least 300 000 people dead and 2.5 million displaced, according to the UN.

Following the Juba Peace Agreement that was signed on 3 October 2020, the new government includes ministers from former rebel groups. This augurs well for security and stability as well as inclusive governance in Sudan, but the ravages of COVID-19 severely constrain progress. Sudan has subsequently also been removed from the US list of State Sponsors of Terrorism, leading to the lifting of sanctions on the country; and a new cabinet based on the peace agreement now includes most of the former armed movements. The Declaration of Principles calls for freedom of religion and cultural identity in Sudan, removing another source of exclusion.

Overall, the brief summary above explains why the Horn region scores lowest among African regions in terms of political participation, security and stability, and rights indicators. The poor management of diversity (political views, gender and identity) constitutes a major source of popular grievance and instability.

Improving governance and building an inclusive national political system that reflects the diversity in each country and effective management of the various intra-state conflicts is crucial for peace, stability and development, as are efforts to ensure that national conflicts do not engulf the region. These include the filling of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and the challenges that reduced downstream water flows in the Nile River present to Sudan and Egypt. They also include the regionalisation of Ethiopia's war in Tigray, clashes around al-Fashaga, between Sudan's eastern province of Al-Qadarif and Ethiopia's Amhara regional state, and unresolved border issues between Djibouti and Eritrea. The disagreement between Sudan and South Sudan on Abyei and the maritime boundary dispute in the Indian Ocean between Somalia and Kenya also feature.

Endnotes

1. Ibrahim Index of African Governance, Index Report, 2020

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4. International Crisis Group, Toward a Viable Future for South Sudan, Report No. 3, 2021

5. African Development Bank Group, The Political Economy of South Sudan, 2018.

6. Attempts to hold these individuals behind the stolen funds accountable are part of the reasons for the high levels of mistrust among the country's politicians, and eventually led to the outbreak of conflict in December 2013.

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About the authors

Dr Kouassi Yeboua is a senior researcher in African Futures and Innovation programme in Pretoria. He recently served as lead author on ISS studies on the long-term development prospects of the DR Congo, the Horn of Africa, Nigeria and Malawi. Kouassi has published on various issues relating to foreign direct investment in Africa and is interested in development economics, macroeconomics, international economics, and economic modelling. He has a PhD in Economics.

Dr Jakkie Cilliers is the ISS's founder and former executive director. He currently serves as chair of the ISS Board of Trustees and head of the African Futures and Innovation (AFI) programme at the Pretoria oce of the Institute. His 2017 best-seller Fate of the Nation addresses South Africa's futures from political, economic and social perspectives. His three most recent books, Africa First! Igniting a Growth Revolution (March 2020), The Future of Africa: Challenges and Opportunities (April 2021), and Africa Tomorrow: Pathways to Prosperity (June 2022) take a rigorous look at the continent as a whole.

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