



Governance

The state of governance in Africa

Jakkie Cilliers

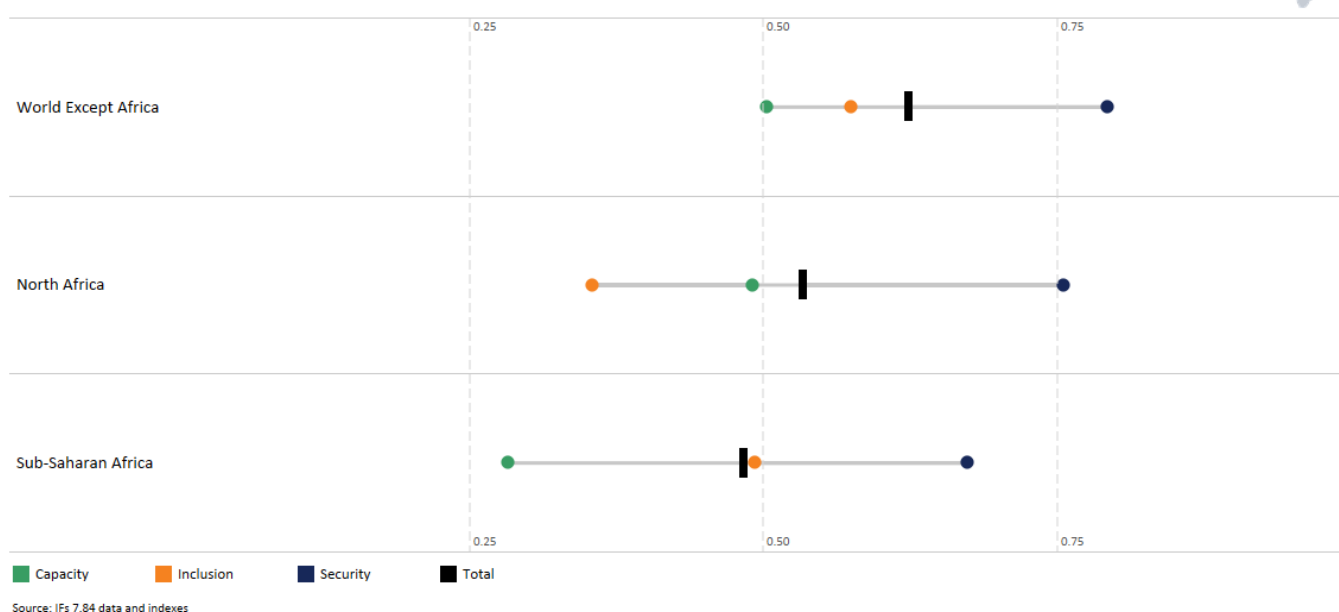
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The state of governance in Africa

If one now compares the average ‘thickness’ of governance (consisting of the average for security, capacity and inclusion) in Africa with the Rest of the World (RoW), Africa has about a quarter ‘less’ governance. Since the state is particularly important for the provision of basic services at early stages of development, providing law and order and basic services, the poor state of governance in much of Africa is an important explanation for slower than expected development.

Chart 15 compares the results for each of Africa’s geographic regions for the three dimensions with the average for the Rest of the World (or the World without Africa). It reflects the fact that African averages are lower in all instances, with Central Africa rating particularly poorly. North Africa does the best in capacity but does poorly in inclusion, as mentioned previously. It is because of its capacity constraints that foreign donors support Africa through development assistance, as discussed in the theme on financial flows.

Chart 15: International Futures dimensions of governance, 2019

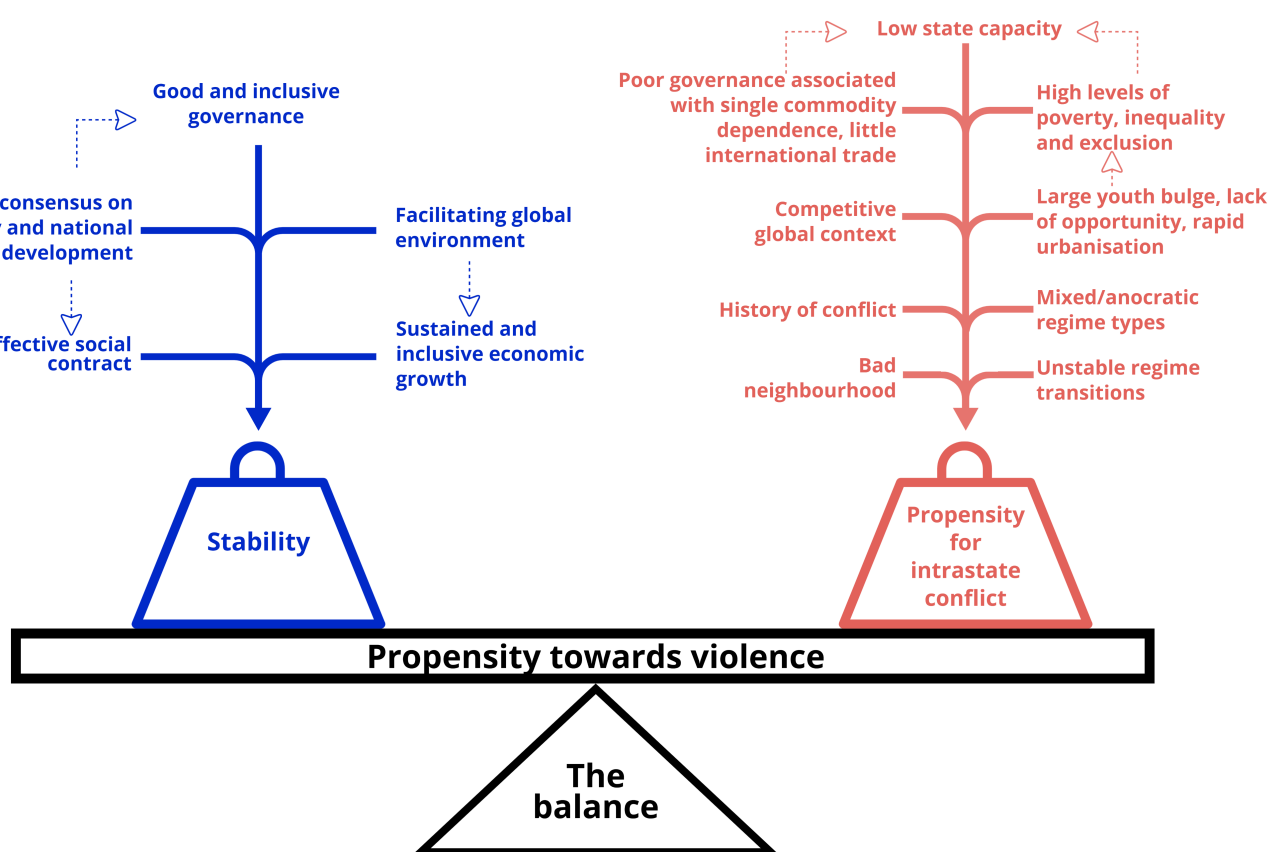


Seen from a social control perspective, the opportunity for violence/instability in Africa is because governments have not invested (or cannot invest) in appropriate means of early warning, police and military response, and the institutions that provide a means for institutionalising conflict mediation, management and resolution. Instability, therefore, reflects an incomplete security and capacity transition although the international context also plays a role. More inclusion or attempts to institute the trappings of substantive democracy typically translates into corruption rather than into accountability. Developing countries also have fewer resources to devote to either security or development. In that sense, Africa is trapped in a vicious circle: many countries are unstable because they are poor, and because they are poor, they are unstable.

Collectively, the absence of sufficient social control mechanisms provides an opportunity for violence and instability. Against this background, democracy and associated systems (part of the inclusive transition) play an important role as an effective shock absorber, evident in a country such as South Africa with its extraordinarily high levels of democracy, inequality and turbulence. By providing a sense of accountability, transparency and recourse, South Africa’s liberal constitution, separation of powers, free media and independent courts mediate and dampen the momentum towards the violent displacement of a corrupt and self-serving governing party.

The balance between accelerating and mediating factors is depicted graphically in Chart 16.

Chart 16: The stability balance



Rwanda and Ethiopia have made particularly rapid developmental progress. In both countries, a national trauma has driven the burning desire to develop — the genocide of the Red Terror in Ethiopia under Mengistu Haile Mariam, which lasted until 1978, and the Rwandan genocide of 1994.

In the wake of those traumas, governing elites in Ethiopia and Rwanda intervened decisively in the society and the economy in favour of national development and improved productivity, often exerting considerable short-term pain for the sake of achieving long-term gain — policy choices that are much easier to implement in an autocratic than in a democratic setting. Both have clear pro-growth policies and stick to them, united behind a visionary leader (originally Meles Zenawi in Ethiopia and still Paul Kagame in Rwanda) intent on escaping debilitating poverty and underdevelopment.

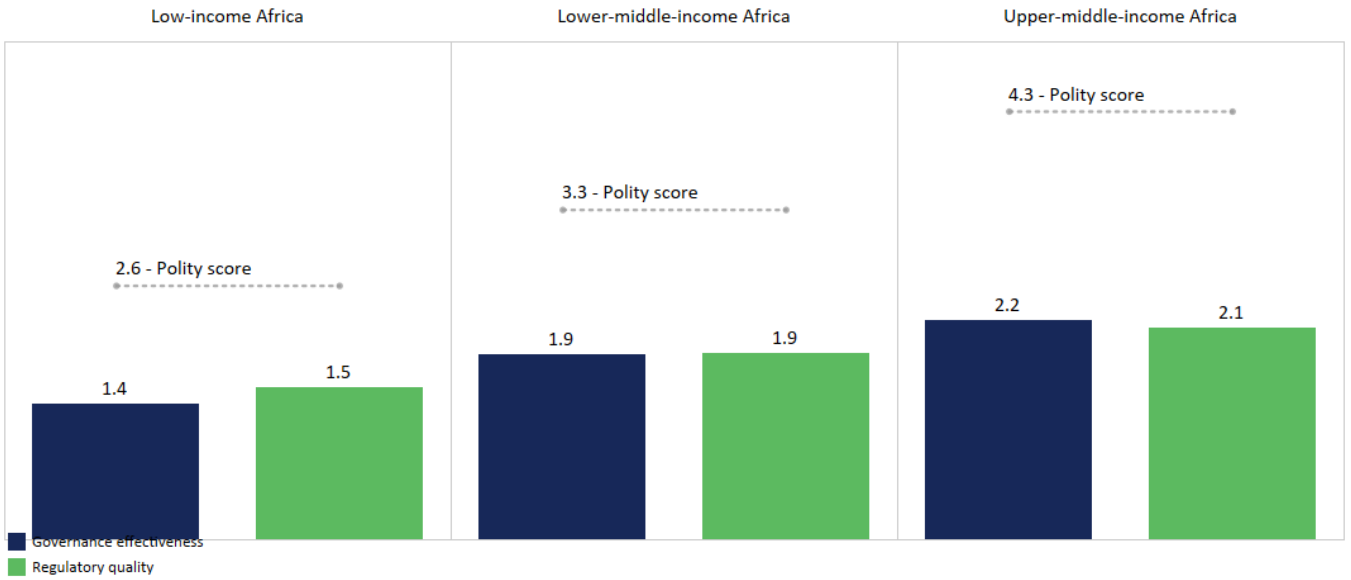
Dependence on a single key figure readily undoes progress once that leadership clings to power or is replaced by a flawed successor, as it has in Uganda, Angola, Zimbabwe, Egypt, Sudan, South Sudan, Equatorial Guinea, Libya, Algeria as well as in Ethiopia following the death of Zenawi. As a result, sustained growth in an autocracy is more brittle and volatile than in a democracy and it seems inevitable that, unless the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) invests substantively in succession planning, Rwanda will face challenges once Paul Kagame steps down, or unexpectedly vacates his position for whatever reason.

Other organisations such as the World Bank’s Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI)[1] and the Mo Ibrahim Foundation Index of African Governance (IIAG)[2] are among those that also measure changes in the quality of governance over time, and their conclusions appear to validate the analysis presented above.

For example, indices of the quality of governance inevitably correlate with levels of development which, in turn, largely accord with the extent of democracy. Chart 17 compares the two WGI subindices of government effectiveness and

regulatory quality with levels of democracy from the Polity IV dataset.[3] In low-income countries, government effectiveness and regulatory quality are poor and they have electoral democracy compared to middle-income countries. Government effectiveness and regulatory quality improve in tandem with higher levels of average income.

Chart 17: Governance effectiveness and regulatory quality in Africa by country income group, 2019



Source: World Governance Indicators and Polity V data

Endnotes

1. The reason for the slight divergence between the two indices is likely statistical. WGI ranks country scores annually and any improvements in trends in governance in Africa is outpaced by larger improvements in the rest of the world. As a result, the gap tends to increase. However, when dimensions of governance are measured year-on-year, independent of global trends (essentially what IIAG does), modest improvements are seen.
2. See: Ibrahim Index of African Governance, [About](#).
3. Center for Systematic Peace, [About Polity](#)

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Dr Jakkie Cilliers is the ISS's founder and former executive director of the ISS. He currently serves as chair of the ISS Board of Trustees and head of the African Futures and Innovation (AFI) programme at the Pretoria office of the ISS. 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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