

Helpdesk Research Report: Political Trends in Sub-Saharan Africa

22.08.2011

Query: Provide data from the World Governance Indicators dataset, the Ibrahim Index, Freedom in the World, Afrobarometer and Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) between 2000/01 and 2010/11 to present an analysis of trends in sub-Saharan Africa over the last decade of i) the number of electoral democracies ii) the quality of electoral democracies iii) the nature of political space (meaning freedom, civil rights, political rights, accountability) and iv) the level of conflict (numbers of conflicts and number of people affected), and any interactions between these dimensions, in this region. Show data by number of countries and weighted by total population.

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1. Overview and analysis

This report uses data from the World Governance Indicators dataset, the Ibrahim Index, Freedom in the World, Afrobarometer and Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) to map political trends in Sub-Saharan Africa between 2000 and 2010. Where possible, indicators are presented both as the average value for all countries in the region and as the population-weighted average, calculated by multiplying the value of the indicator in each year by the country's population in that year. The population-weighted values are strongly influenced by the performance of Nigeria, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which together include 36% of the total population of the region. References are provided to a selection of the available literature discussing the relationships among democracy, rights and conflict.

This report only considers a very limited set of indicators and cannot make any statements regarding statistical significance; further research is recommended to investigate other variables and assess the strength of apparent relationships.

Based on the analysis conducted, the following trends can be seen during the period 2000-2010:

Several governance and conflict indicators improved in the first half of the decade and then declined in the second half

Civil liberties, political freedom, participation, the number of democracies, and the number of conflicts all showed improvements during the first half of the decade, but these gains were lost in the second half. These trends were most noticeable in the population-weighted values. Most other indicators showed no change over the course of the decade.

The literature on democracy emphasises the barriers facing newly democratic countries and the complexities of creating stable democratic regimes. LeBas (2010) argues that while many African countries have moved towards multi-party electoral regimes, these can often be characterised as 'hybrid regimes'. These countries have not managed to institutionalise democratic principles and vote buying and other violations of democratic norms are still prevalent. Alberts et al (2010) shows that "successful democratic transitions are a product of the balance of power between opposing groups and constitutional design choices that lower the costs of upholding the democratic bargain". Because of these challenges in consolidating democracy, many young democracies fall back to authoritarianism at some point in their democratic transition. However, Lynch and Crawford (2011) point out that democracy in the region must also be seen in the context of the extent to which multi-party elections are becoming accepted as the 'only game in town' by Africa's political elite. This can be seen in the case of African leaders' involvement in negotiation processes following disputed elections in Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Cote d'Ivoire.

Perceptions of democracy do not necessarily correlate with levels of political rights, civil liberties and participation

The peak in political rights, civil liberties and participation in the middle of the decade coincided with the lowest recorded perception of democracy. Towards the end of the decade, the proportion of the population living in what were considered to be electoral democracies dropped dramatically but people's stated perceptions in the Afrobarometer surveys changed very little.

Lynch and Crawford (2011) argue that while African citizens are disappointed with democratic performances so far their frustration is more linked to the absence of democracy and with local realities of poverty, inequality, insecurity, and violence. Thus the perception of democracy is closely linked to what it brings in terms of service delivery and improved well being. Booth (2011) points out that lower levels of transparency and accountability can still be considered acceptable in a democratic society by citizens under some circumstances, such as peace and the fair distribution of public goods.

A decrease in the number of conflicts in mid-decade correlates with increased political and civil rights but not with electoral democracy

The number of dyadic conflicts¹ decreased from 22 in 2000 to 7 in 2005, before increasing again. The decrease in the number of conflicts occurred at the same time as improvements in political rights and civil liberties, but does not correspond to increased democratisation.

The academic literature is divided on the relationship between democracy and conflict and violence. A number of quantitative studies have shown that increases in democracy can both reduce the risk of war and have no impact at all (Human Security Report 2009).

¹ A dyad is defined as 'two armed and opposing actors. In state-based conflicts a dyad is defined as two actors, with one or more being the government, that have a stated incompatibility. In a non-state conflict a dyad is constructed by at least two organised actors, of which none is the government of a state, that oppose each other with arms' (see <http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/definitions/#Dyad>).

With regards to the claim of reducing conflict, Przeworski (2011) argues that democratic institutions and elections foster an environment able to structure and limit conflict and thus contribute to peace. Cervellati and Sunde (2011) argue that permanent democratic transitions significantly reduce the incidence and onset of conflict. It is also important to look at the circumstances (peaceful or violent) surrounding democratic transition, as these have lasting impact on the development and deepening of democracy (Cervellati, M., Fortunato, P. and Sunde, U., 2011).

Additionally, the literature examines the link between elections and violence. Collier and Vicente (2010) hypothesise that electoral violence, vote-buying, and vote-miscounting are more likely when strong ethnic allegiances provide incentives for violent intimidation, and where term limits and natural resources determine the degree of incumbency advantage.

Finally, Lynch and Crawford (2011) point out that democracy does not automatically lead to greater material equality and increased participation of all groups. Social exclusion and inequality are still areas that will need to be addressed to reduce the risk of tensions arising in democratic societies.

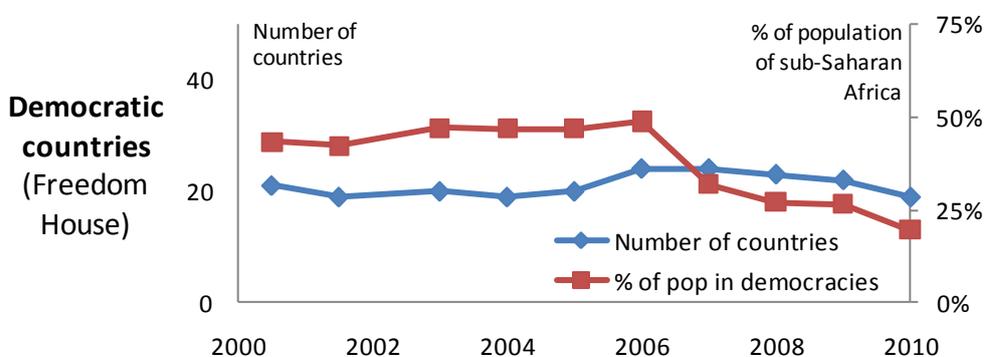
Countries with smaller populations performed better than larger countries

Population-weighted indicators generally showed worse performance (less free, participatory, and democratic) than unweighted averages by country. Indeed, for every indicator examined², “smaller” countries (those with populations less than half the regional average, or 18.3 million) performed better than “larger” countries.

The observation that smaller African states tend to have better governance than larger ones is supported in the literature: for example, Aiyar (2008: 455) confirms that “In Africa... small states score consistently better than large states in respect of voice and accountability, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and corruption” and that the risks of state failure, civil war, and economic crisis were all lower in smaller states (455-458).

2. Number of electoral democracies

Based on annual lists issued by Freedom House, the number of democracies in sub-Saharan Africa since the year 2000 has declining only slightly, from 21 in 2000 to 19 in 2010 (and down to 18 on the 2011 list, which is already available). However, several populous countries were declassified as electoral democracies in the second half of the decade: Nigeria in 2007, Kenya in 2008, and Madagascar, Mozambique, and Niger in 2010. As a result, the number of people considered to be living in electoral democracies fell by more than half during the decade.



² The Afrobarometer surveys were not considered because they are only available for a small selection of countries. Conflict and battle death indicators were not considered because the analysis was not feasible in the time available.

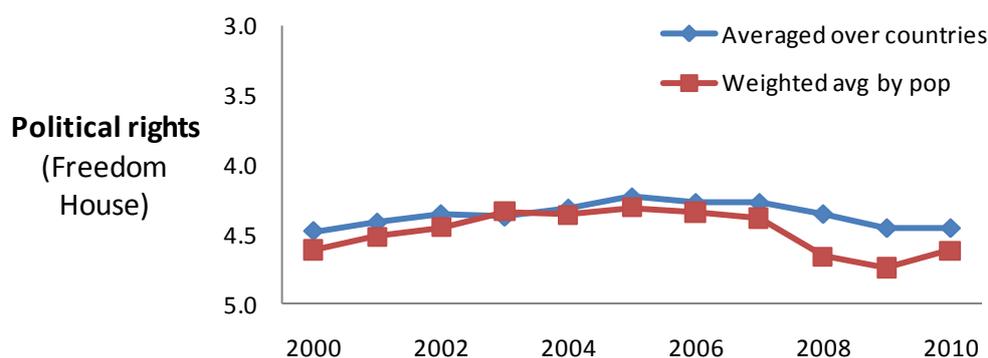
Remained democratic throughout the decade	Remained authoritarian throughout the decade	Switched from democratic to authoritarian	Switched from authoritarian to democratic
Benin Botswana Cape Verde Ghana Malawi Mali Mauritius Namibia Sao Tome and Principe Senegal Seychelles Sierra Leone South Africa	Angola Burkina Faso Cameroon Chad Congo (Republic) Congo (DRC) Equatorial Guinea Eritrea Ethiopia Gabon Gambia Guinea Mauritania Rwanda Somalia Sudan Swaziland Togo Uganda Zimbabwe	Central African Republic Djibouti Guinea-Bissau Madagascar Mozambique Niger Nigeria <i>(225 million people, based on 2010 population)</i>	Comoros Lesotho Tanzania Zambia <i>(61 million people, based on 2010 population)</i>
		Started and finished as authoritarian, with a period of democracy Burundi, Kenya	
		Started and finished as democratic, with a period of authoritarianism Liberia	

Source: Adapted from Freedom House, 2000-2011, 'Freedom in the World'.

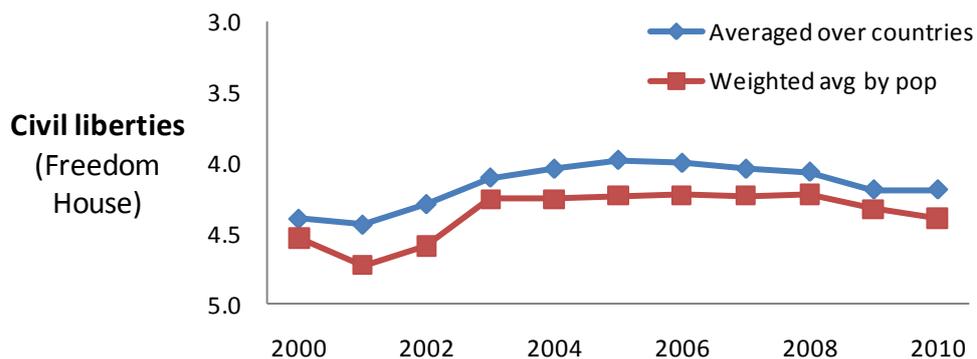
3. Political and civil rights

Political space can be characterised by a country's civil and political rights, among other factors. The *Freedom in the World* index measures these on a scale of 1-7, with one being the highest level of freedom and seven the lowest.

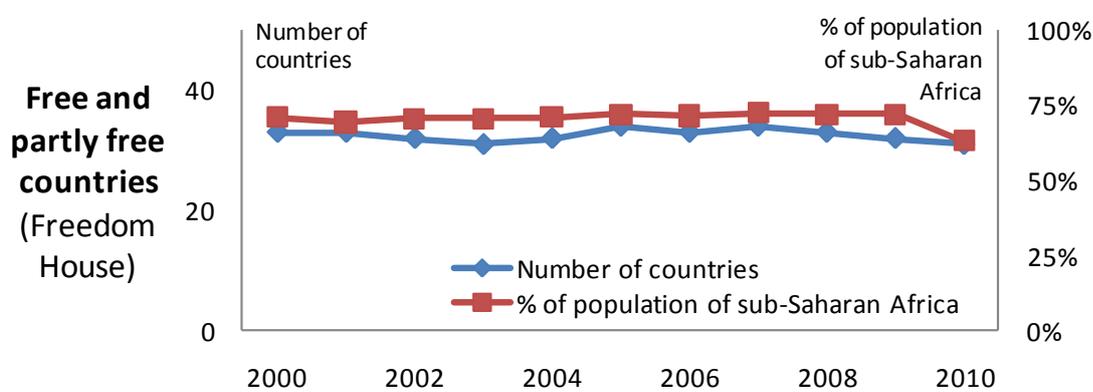
Political rights in sub-Saharan Africa improved slightly in the first half of the decade but declined in the second half, resulting in no net change in the average rating for the region. On a population-weighted basis, a decline in political rights is evident towards the end of the decade, which is largely due to simultaneous worsening in the ratings of Nigeria and DRC from 2007 to 2008, but a partial recovery took place in 2010 when Nigeria's rating recovered. Because of Nigeria's large population, a move of one point up or down on the scale has a large effect on the population-weighted average for the region.



Civil liberties followed a similar pattern, with several countries improving performance in the first half of the decade followed by a slight decline in the second half, resulting in a small net improvement over the period.

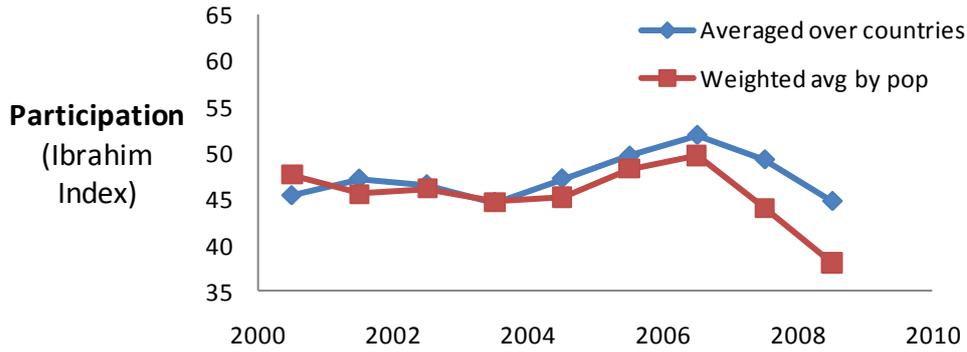


Freedom House classifies countries as ‘free’, ‘partly free’, or ‘not free’ based on the status of political rights and civil liberties. The number of countries and the proportion of population in free or partly free countries was stable throughout the decade, with the exception of 2010 when Ethiopia, the second most populous country in the region, was reclassified as ‘not free’.

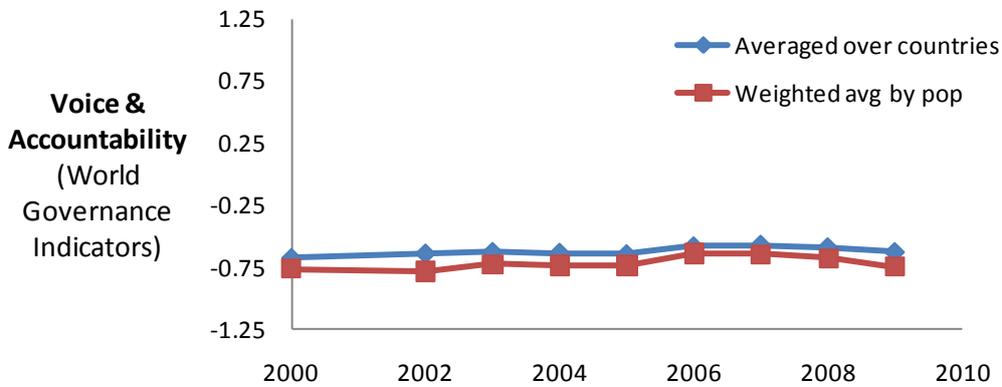


4. Political participation

The Ibrahim Index of African Governance collects data on participation, including political participation, effective power to govern, free and fair elections, electoral self-determination and free and fair executive elections. The average level of political participation improved towards the middle of the decade but declined at the end, resulting in no net change in the regional average calculated on a country basis. However, the weighted average by population shows a dramatic decrease towards the end of the decade. This is largely due to sharp decreases in the participation indicator in Nigeria (from a steady 48 for most of the decade to 33 and 27 in the last two years) and Ethiopia (from a steady 39 for most of the decade down to 27 and 26).

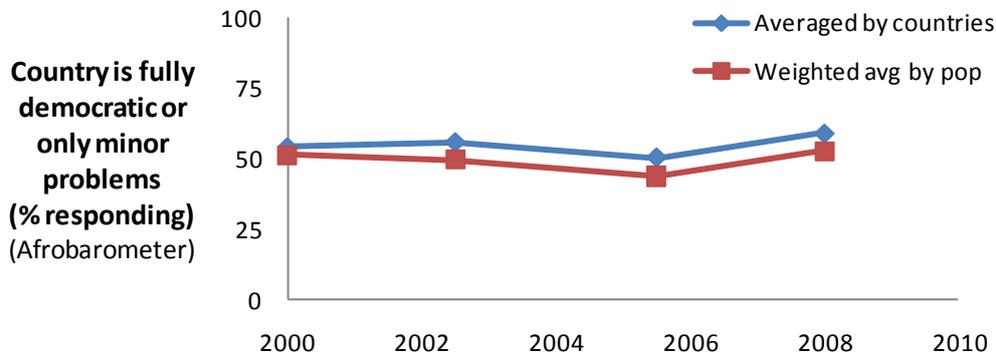


According to the World Bank's World Governance Indicators, a scale ranging from -2.5 to +2.5, sub-Saharan countries score poorly on levels of voice and accountability. The regional average here was quite stable over the course of the decade.



5. Perceptions of democracy

Afrobarometer looks at the perception of democracy among the population. While it does not cover all countries in sub-Saharan Africa, it offers an indication of some of the views of citizens in their countries. Data from surveys between 1999/2001 and 2008³ show that slightly more than half of sub-Saharan Africans consider their country to be either fully or mostly democratic, and that these perceptions tend to be quite stable over time.

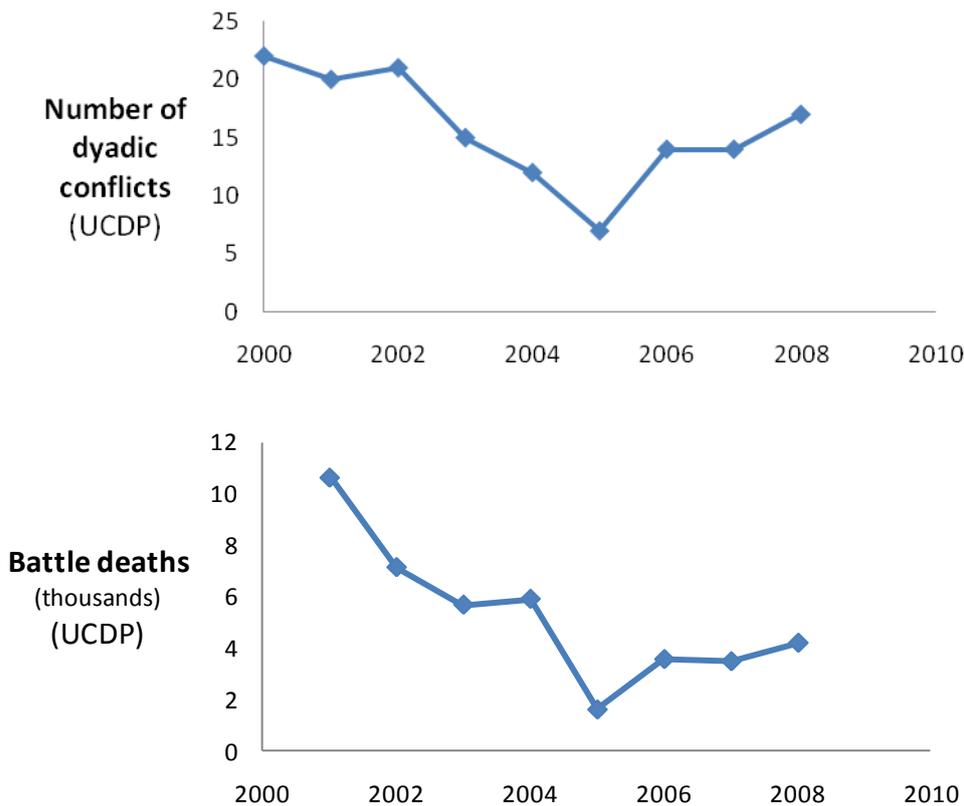


³ The number of countries covered by the Afrobarometer increased from 12 in the 1999/2001 survey to 15 in 2002/3, to 18 in 2005/6 and to 19 countries in 2008. Caution must therefore be exercised when comparing these results.

6. Conflict and violence

The Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) counts the number of dyadic conflicts and battle deaths in Africa. The conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia in 1999 and 2000 resulted in approximately 50,000 deaths each year, about ten times the average for the rest of the decade. From 2001 to 2005 the number of conflicts and the number of deaths both declined, but both began increasing again from 2006 to 2008.

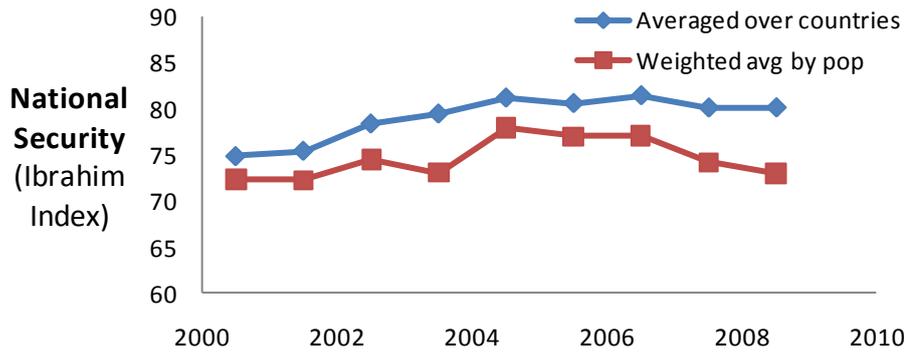
Battle deaths do not include deaths that may have been indirectly caused by conflict, such as deaths that occur as a result of displacement.⁴ This has led some scholars to argue that these numbers grossly understate the number of civilians killed in conflict (Obermeyer et al., 2008).



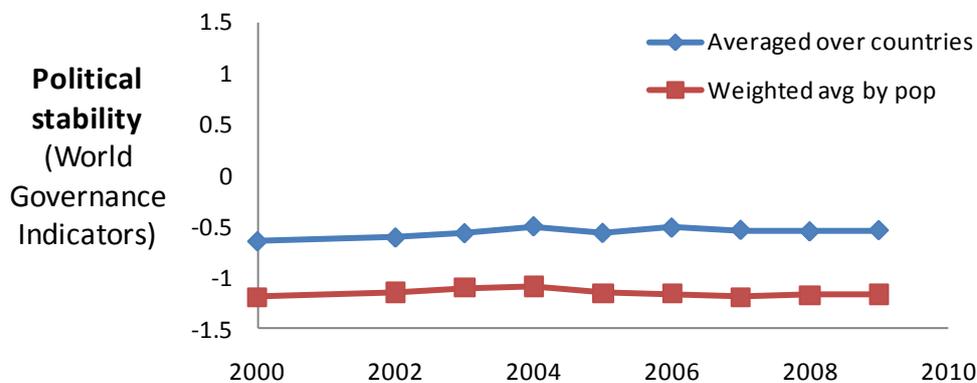
The Ibrahim Index shows some improvement in national security⁵ in sub-Saharan Africa over the past decade, although when considered on a population-weighted basis the improvements that took place in the first half of the decade were lost in the second half. This is largely due to significant declines in security in Nigeria, from an average of 85 for most of the decade down to 78 and 72 in the last two years of available data.

⁴ For a full definition of 'battle deaths' see the UCDP website: http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/definitions/#Battle-related_deaths

⁵ Measured through the following variables: Domestic Armed Conflict, Government Involvement in Armed Conflict, Battle Deaths (Civilian and Combatant), Civilian Deaths from Civilian-Targeted Violence, Refugees Originating from the Country, Internally Displaced People and International Tensions.



The World Bank's World Governance Indicators include an indicator of political stability and absence of violence and terrorism which shows poor but slightly improving performance in sub-Saharan Africa. The country-weighted average has improved slightly while the population-weighted average has remained almost unchanged, suggesting that smaller countries have been slightly more stable than large ones.



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