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Understanding the Nature and Origins of Violent Conflict in Africa

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Weak governance, historical animosities, exclusionary politics, contested legitimacy, resource competition, external factors, globalized conflicts and extremist ideologies have combined to create various episodes of violent conflict across the African continent since most countries gained independence in the 1960s. Millions of lives have been lost and violence has cost African countries billions as a result of wanton destruction and foregone economic gains, in spite of numerous attempts to foster sustainable peace. Over time, the nature and causes of violent conflict have changed as political, economic, social and environmental circumstances evolved. The number of African countries embroiled in violent conflict rose sharply in the 1960s, as groups contested the legitimacy of post-colonial governance structures. Nigeria's Biafran War is a notable example. In other cases, contested legitimacy took the form of independence and liberation struggles, which

were protracted and costly in terms of lives and treasure. This second wave of violence coincided with the Cold War era, which conferred legitimacy on a number of odious regimes (such as Mobutu's Zaire and South Africa's apartheid regime). Proxy wars in Angola, Liberia and Mozambique are also examples of Cold War-related violence. The end of the Cold War coincided with a gradual opening of African economies, attempts at more pluralistic governance and increased globalization. Vacuums created by decades of weak governance were being filled by non-state actors who, for the most part, were transnational in nature. After a relative lull of more than a decade, groups such as Al Shabaab in East Africa, Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin and a host of groups in northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) contributed to an upsurge of violent conflict after 2010. Also notable during this period were the post-independence conflict in South Sudan, the Malian crisis and post-Gadhafi Libya.

Although a distinct governance deficit appears to be at the core of most conflict across the continent since the 1960s, it is worth noting that a confluence of economic, social and external factors help explain the complex emergencies that unfolded over time. Thus, attempts at classifying violent conflict in Africa have always been fraught with difficulty. Some scholars and practitioners have sought to define violent conflict on the basis of numerical thresholds, the nature of participants or the ostensible precipitating factors.[1] Others point to the complex interplay of explanatory factors, but fare no better in coming up with a comprehensive categorization. Consequently, both policy and practice have been adversely affected, as remedial efforts across the continent generally focus on the symptoms and not the root causes of conflict. This chapter examines various definitions of African conflict, analyzes trends and causative factors, and provides a set of recommendations that should enhance our understanding of conflict drivers and inform more effective approaches.

Conceptualizing Violent Conflict in Africa

Most contemporary definitions of violent conflict are rooted in Carl von Clausewitz's notion that war is the continuation of politics by other means.[2] Although they correctly highlight the governance gap, they tend to be overly focused on how such unrest impacts the state, which is assumed to be Westphalian or pre-Westphalian. The political framework for such analysis derives from the notion of the Westphalian nation-state. While this approach could be useful for some level of analysis, it does not provide a full picture of violent conflict in Africa. First of all, the concept of statehood in Africa is greatly contested. African countries are geographical entities that are struggling to relate to the "nations" that exist within their boundaries. Colonial conflicts were not about statehood, they were about group survival and freedom from oppression. Post-colonial upheavals were not

intra-state in the classical sense, since very few of the conflicts were confined to national borders. Also, proxy violence during the Cold War era was more about geopolitics than statist politics in Africa. Using the state, non-state distinction in Africa is unhelpful as it does not address the underlying dynamics in most cases. Swaroop Sharma (2014) argues against reductionist state-centric definitions of violent conflict, and for the adoption of a "social theory of war," which highlights the social organization of actors, their motivations and desired end-states. This could be more applicable in Africa, where group dynamics are more pertinent than statist constructs.

However, most attempts to categorize violent conflict focus on warfare (the act of prosecuting war) and not war (the basis for conflict). Thus, the inter-state versus intra-state distinction has become a dominant theme, which is not always useful in the African context. The Correlates of War typology, pioneered by David Singer and Mel Small, identifies eight types of conflict that derive from this dichotomy (see Table 1).[3] As discussed later in this chapter, this typology fails to fully reflect the complexity of inter-linked factors that explain violent conflict in Africa. A framework that analyzes the full range of domestic, transnational and global factors is more appropriate in Africa.

Another consideration for categorizing conflicts is the number of deaths annually, leading to the distinction between low- and high-intensity conflict. The threshold of 1,000 deaths for "high intensity conflict" and 25 deaths per year for "armed conflict" might be a useful datapoint for determining when and how international organizations (such as UN agencies) intervene but it is fraught with some difficulty in the African context. It is worth noting that the timeliness and quality of conflict-related data are problematic and the issue is often politicized. This makes it difficult to get the categorization right. Also, the toll of persistent, low-intensity conflict adds up over the years, particularly since these conflicts could get ignored and remain unresolved because

Table 1: Typologies of War

Traditional Typology	Expanded Typology

I. International Wars
   A. Inter-state wars
   B. Extra-systemic wars
     (1) Colonial
     (2) Imperial
 	
II. Civil Wars
	I. Inter-state wars (war type 1)
	
	II Extra-state wars
	   A. Colonial-conflict with
	     colony (war type 2)
	   B. Imperial -state vs.
	     non-state (war type 3)
	
	III. Intra-state wars
	   A. Civil wars
	     1. for central control
	       (war type 4)
	     2. over local issues
	       (war type 5)
	   B. Regional internal
	     (war type 6)
	   C. Intercommunal
	     (war type 7)
	
	IV. Non-state wars
	   A. In non-state territory
	     (war type 8)
	   B. Across state borders
	     (war type 9)

Source: Sarkees, Meredith Reid. The COW Typology of War: Defining and Categorizing Wars

they effectively fly under the radar. Quantitative thresholds are more appropriate for traditional warfare, which generally has a discrete beginning and end. More frequently, African conflicts remain unresolved or partially resolved, which might diminish the number of war-related deaths while underlying drivers (including political alienation, ethnic cleavages and entrenched socio-economic inequality) and sustainers (including proceeds from natural resources and diaspora inflows) persist.

Michael Bhatia (2005) argues that the increasing number of violent non-state actors across the continent (i.e. militias such as the M23 in northeastern DRC, rebel groups such as the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone and extremists such as Al Shabaab in the Horn of Africa) has led to the resurgence of another type of categorization, which some literature describes as "labelling." Terms such as "violent extremism," "terrorism" and "insurgency" have been used to categorize various forms of non-state violence primarily on the basis of their motivation,

organization and modalities. These terms are politically loaded and are generally intended to convey the need to restore law and order. Bhatia (ibid.) explains that labelling has a tendency to deepen societal cleavages with counterproductive consequences, as groups leverage their monikers to either gain sympathy or legitimacy in their areas of operation, or instill fear and forcibly recruit. It has also been argued that labelling has had an adverse impact on scholarly analysis by leading to the development of specializations (such as terrorism, counter-insurgency and civil war studies), producing silos that are unhelpful. Michael Boyle (2014) believes that the "unfortunate side effects" of this specialization is the tendency for scholars to cross-pollinate ideas across types of violent conflict and the tendency to be detached from other explanatory variables.

Jacob Mundy (2011) highlights the apparent inconsistency between the lack of consensus among scholars about what constitutes a "civil war" and the frequency with which policy conclusions are drawn from what are termed "civil wars." In analyzing the reasons for the contestations, he describes disagreements relating to whether civil wars could be extra-state or extra-systemic, the tipping point of internationalization, temporal boundaries and the organizational coherence of non-state belligerents. These distinctions are important in Africa because they could lead to a better appreciation of conflict dynamics and the design of more effective and sustainable interventions. Mundy (ibid.) also discusses the politicization of labels such as civil war, explaining how non-state actors generally embrace the term as it confers a modicum of legitimacy, while governments tend to prefer delegitimizing terms such as insurgency or terrorism. Labelling in this context could have dire political and practical implications for the conflict.

An article by Lasse Heerten and A. Dirk Moses (2014) also explains the difficulties of labelling African conflicts. Their work on the Biafran War describes the range of ethnic, political,

commercial and international considerations involved in determining whether the conflict should be described as a civil war, an insurgency or a genocide. The authors concluded that labelling is not as important as a comprehensive diagnosis of the causative factors, pointing out that genocides can take place during a war and can be waged in a genocidal manner. Incorrectly labelling African conflicts leads to wrong diagnoses and inappropriate or potentially harmful responses. This applies to more recent episodes of violence perpetrated by groups such as Boko Haram, the Lord's Resistance Army and Al Shabaab, or in countries such as Mali and South Sudan.

Correct categorization in Africa is a practical necessity and not just an academic convenience. In addition to helping identify the trigger, underlying and sustaining causes of violent conflict, correct categorization also helps frame more effective and realistic responses by national governments and external stakeholders. The design and implementation of remedial action and intervention strategies is critical to the success of efforts to address violent conflict.

Overview of Historical Conflict Trends in Africa

The number of African countries affected annually by violent conflict rose from a pre-independence average of less than three during the 1950s, to more than 12 during the 1990s, before dropping below nine during the 2000s (see Figure 1).[4] Four conflict epochs may be discerned since independence: the immediate post-independence years, characterized by liberation struggles and contested legitimacy; the Cold War years, characterized by proxy wars; the post-Cold War transition years characterized by recurring conflicts that were fuelled by economic and political exclusion; and the era of non-state actors, characterized by extremist groups and globalized violence.

Figure 1: Incidents of Violent Conflict in Africa (1948-2012)
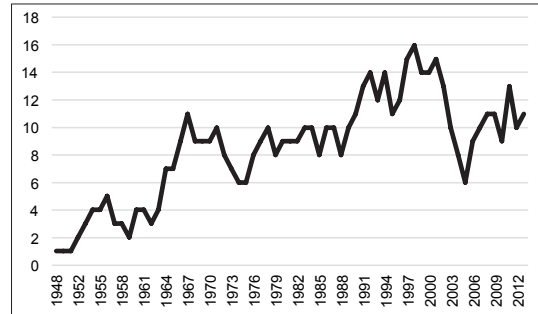
Source: Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project.

Immediate Post-independence Violence (1960–1974)

The number of African countries experiencing violent conflict (causing at least 25 battle-related deaths annually) rose steadily during this period. Some countries (such as what was then Zaire) were racked by internal dissent as groups contested the legitimacy of governments bequeathed by the colonial powers; others (such as Angola) waged bloody independence struggles. The liberation struggle in South Africa was not internal. It engulfed most of the subregion and the front-line states provided support and sustenance for anti-apartheid fighters. At this juncture, most African states had two fundamental flaws. First, no "social contract" was established between the governments and the governed. This means the notion of financing governance receipts via taxation receipts and governments using those receipts to provide services and security for all citizens was notably absent. African governments continued the colonial practice of resource extraction and failed to govern effectively. Patrimonial governance networks, which were generally organized around ethnic lines and fuelled by access to national resources, quickly emerged to protect the interests of the governing classes at the expense of the vast majority of citizens and the state.[5] These networks exacerbated societal cleavages, fomented violent unrest and ushered the era of zero-sum, "winner takes all" politics on the African continent. It

should, however, be noted that external actors (principally the prior colonial powers) still had vested commercial interests in African states and contributed to instability and violence during this period by taking sides in these conflicts and arming the belligerents. This intensified and prolonged the violence and sowed seeds of distrust, which resurfaced in later years.

Cold War Violence (1975–1992)

As most African countries gained independence in the 1960s and fragile governance structures tried to consolidate, the number of conflict-affected countries in Africa fell steadily to a low of six in 1974. Cold War geopolitics and oil shocks in the late 1970s combined to trigger a resurgence of violent conflict during this period. There was a discernable shift from a predominance of low-intensity conflict during the previous era to violence that claimed more than 1,000 lives annually (see Figure 2). The influx of small arms and light weapons during this period accounted for the marked rise in fatalities, while the geostrategic nature of the proxy wars sustained the violence for longer periods (Aning 2010). The Cold War resulted in what Alex Bellamy (2012) describes as a "cognitive dissonance" between behaviour and beliefs. External actors on either side of the Iron Curtain conferred legitimacy on domestic political actors (and their actions) for purportedly geo-strategic reasons. For example, heads of state such as Zaire's Mobutu Sese Seko, Liberia's Samuel Doe and Ethiopia's Mengistu Haile Mariam were tolerated and propped up by external allies for this reason. Conferred legitimacy, which enabled these regimes to justify rather than modify their behaviour, institutionalized impunity and worsened tyranny. Groups concerned about representative governance, human rights and the rule of law have few (if any) political channels to address their grievances, since violent patrimonial governance and exclusionary politics denied them political space for conflict resolution, reinforced a zero-sum approach to politics, and systematically marginalized opposition and minority groups.

Thus, politics became increasingly violent during this period.

Figure 2: Violent Conflict Trends in Africa during the Cold War
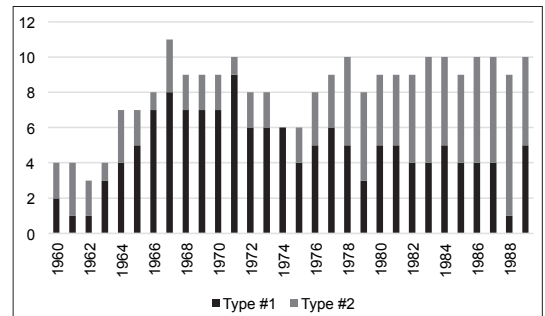
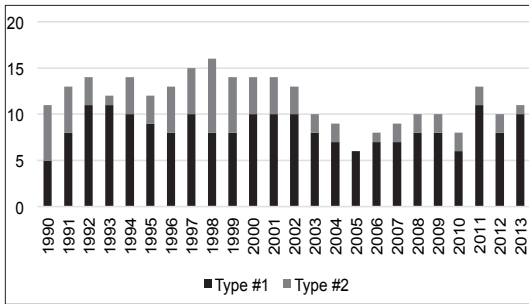*Source*: Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project.

Post-Cold War Transition (1993–2005)

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 signalled the end of the Cold War. The once relentless arms flow that sustained proxy wars and illegitimate governments in Africa fell substantially in the immediate post-Cold War years, but the underlying causes of unrest remained. Although some proxy wars subsided and the number of African countries recording more than 25 battle-related deaths each year fell, the aggregate number of battle-related deaths rose precipitously during this period (see Figures 3 and 4), primarily due to one-sided conflict (Rwanda) and cross-border violence by rebel groups (DRC, Liberia and Sierra Leone). A hallmark of this era is the prominence of conflicts related to the abuse and control of natural resources — for example, blood diamonds in Liberia and Sierra Leone, and conflict minerals in northeastern DRC. The failure to establish viable post-independence social contracts in most African countries encouraged leaders (and aspiring leaders) to focus on resource control, rather than the establishment of credible fiscal regimes that would have advanced stability and human security. These conflicts led to a surge in the debate over the relative importance of economic drivers (the greed) and political factors (the grievances) in explaining violence perpetrated by non-state actors in resource-rich regions (Collier and

Hoeffler 2002). Most analysts agree that violence and instability in resource-rich regions can be explained by a combination of political, social, economic and environmental factors. However, Richard Snyder (2004) explains the centrality of political-economy considerations in explaining instability and violence in resource-rich regions where patrimonial networks exist. He uses a case approach to demonstrate how violence could result from the weakening of such networks, which creates a vacuum that opposition groups, military or political, can exploit. The changing nature of conflict reflects a combination of cultural, economic, governance, regional and transnational factors, which are explored in more detail in the next section. The resolution of major conflicts, such as in Angola and DRC's 1996–2003 war, did however lead to a drop in the number of conflict-affected countries across the African continent during the latter years of this period.

Figures 3: Post-Cold War Violent Conflict Trends in Africa

Source: Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project.

Figures 4: Battle-Related Causalities
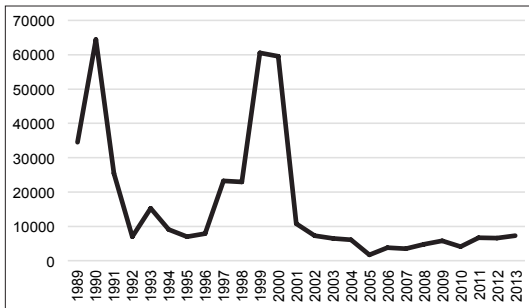
Source: Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project.

Non-state Actors (2006–2013)

As Figures 3 and 4 illustrate, fatalities attributed to non-state violence and one-sided conflict increased during this period. The key drivers of instability were the intensification of activity by internationally influenced extremist groups — such as Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb and Al Shabaab — the Arab Spring and its aftermath, the Malian crisis and the recurrence of unrest in countries such as South Sudan and Sudan. These conflicts have thrived on societal and governance failures that have provided havens and recruiting grounds for extremist groups. Societal challenges worsened disaffection among groups and political weaknesses resulted in governance vacuums that these groups eventually fill. Consequently, this era has been characterized by persistent, expanding and deepening low-intensity conflict in many parts of the continent. This era also highlighted the growing role of urbanization and civil society groups in Africa's governance equation. The gradual opening of political space has granted agency to civil society groups, which are more active in demanding accountability and advocating for basic human rights for all. The food riots in Egypt (2008 and 2011), the fuel riots in Nigeria (2012) and the anti-immigration riots in South Africa (2008) are all examples of this. These groups generally have broad-based support, but are primarily led by educated, disaffected youth. Being statist in their orientation, patrimonial systems of governance generally view such groups as threats to the state and overreact with heavy-handed measures that worsen the violence. A significant proportion of Africans moved to cities during this era, causing researchers such as Joao Pontes Nogueira (2014) to describe Africa's urban areas as a "new frontier" for instability and violence. An increasing amount of violence took place in the cities, where the governance deficit was quite prominent at local and community levels. Illicit networks found it relatively easy to thrive and operate with impunity, while at the same time influencing politics and co-opting politicians. Thus, the lines between politically

instigated violence and drug-fuelled instability became blurred in a number of cases.[6] Fragility and instability became the order of the day in most countries, with external factors becoming as important as domestic factors in precipitating violence.

The evolution of violent conflict since a country achieves independence reflects the complex interplay of causative and sustaining factors that account for fatalities and unrest across Africa. It also underscores the folly of typecasting African conflicts given the dynamic environment within which violent conflict unfolds, as well as the importance of country-specific analysis

Disentangling the Causes of Violent Conflict

Analyzing the factors that explain violent conflict in Africa requires a lot more than an examination of triggers (such as elections, price hikes and extremist ideologies) and underlying causes (such as poverty, marginalization, inequality, bad governance and ethnic grievances). A more meaningful approach would be to interrogate complex linkages among the explanatory factors against a historical backdrop. The following vignettes illustrate this point.

Al Shabaab in Kenya

The dominant narrative following the Westgate Mall attack in 2013 and the massacre at Garissa University College in 2015 was that Al Shabaab was retaliating for Kenya's role in the African Union's Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), which most Somalis view as an occupation. Following this narrative, it becomes easy to assume that terrorist attacks in Kenya would abate if Kenyan troops leave Somalia. However, this is only part of the story. First, Kenya is the fourth most important troop contributing country to AMISOM, after Uganda, Burundi and Ethiopia.[7] If the AMISOM occupation is the primary reason for Al Shabaab

attacks, why are there not more attacks in the other more significant troop-contributing countries? Or in Ethiopia, home to a significant Somali population? The reasons for terrorist attacks in Kenya are related to a long history of ethnic strife, and a politics of exclusion that disadvantaged many ethnic Somalis. This point was acknowledged by Kenyan President Uruhu Kenyatta in a 2014 interview.[8] Border disputes, land rights issues and the continued presence of the Dadaab refugee camp (where many Somali youth are believed to have been radicalized and recruited by extremist groups) were also contributing factors. Clearly, Al Shabaab-related violence in Kenya requires much more than a cursory analysis of the potential impact of Kenya's contribution to AMISOM.

Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin

The group popularly called Boko Haram rose to global prominence after the abduction of 274 schoolgirls in Chibok, Nigeria, in April 2014. Before then, and since, the group had killed thousands, abducted tens of thousands and displaced close to two million. Boko Haram is usually linked to Islamic extremism because its moniker can be translated to mean Western education is forbidden. Its calls for the application of strict sharia law in territories it controls have led many to conclude that it is essentially a fundamentalist insurgency. When the group began in 2002, it was called Jamā'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihād' (Arabic for "Group of the People of Sunnah for Preaching and Jihad"). They decried corruption, inequality, unemployment and failed governance in northern Nigeria, particularly among the religious elite. They earned the moniker Boko Haram because locals likened their call for the revival of northern Nigeria to similar efforts by Islamic religious leaders during British colonial rule, who saw their culture and livelihood threatened by the introduction of Western influences.[9] The diminution of Lake Chad, which decreased in size by 90 percent between 1963 and 2010, severely impacted commerce in the Lake

Chad Basin and led to the forced migration of thousands to regions such as northern Nigeria, thereby worsening existing socio-economic and political tensions.[10]

The evolution of Boko Haram has followed three phases. From 2002 to 2009, its demands for social justices, economic opportunity and good governance — which they viewed in religious terms — put them in constant conflict with the religious and political leaders in northern Nigeria. Violence was minimal during this period and community support for the organization grew. The year 2009 was a watershed, as violence increased after the extra-judicial killing of the Boko Haram leader, Mohammed Yusuf, in July of that year. The group is estimated to have killed around 15,000 between 2009 and 2014. In 2014, the group changed its name to Wilāyat Gharb Ifrīqīyyah (Arabic for "West Africa Province of the Islamic State") to reflect its affiliation with the international terrorist network, the Islamic State. In 2014 alone, the group is thought to be responsible for as many as 10,000 deaths. The root causes of Boko Haram are as complex as its evolution. Labelling is clearly unhelpful in understanding or addressing this phenomenon.

M23 in Northeastern DRC

Persistent violence in and around lucrative tin ore mines in DRC's northeastern provinces of North and South Kivu led to a groundswell of concern among advocacy groups and policy makers to sever the link between mining and armed militia. In 2010, Section 1502 of the Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act was passed by the United States Congress, requiring all companies registered to trade in the United States to certify that any gold, tin, tungsten or tantalum used in the manufacture of any of their products was "conflict free"– that is, not obtained from warlords or militia in the DRC or any of its neighbours.[11] The rationale was that if the warlords or militia could not sell their ill-gotten wealth, they would be unable to purchase arms and the violence

would abate. However, this initiative did not address the economic drivers in the Kivus for two reasons. First, groups found ways to diversify their income base. The infamous M23 group, which was founded in 2012, got its seed capital by robbing banks, and sustained its operations through illegal taxation, extortion and kidnappings. Second, a number of the groups were funded from outside the DRC — some, purportedly, by neighbouring governments (Doyle 2012). Fig 6stions to make title more specific. Also, nd recommendations. sEconomic instruments (through Section 1502) were necessary, but certainly insufficient, to address violent conflict in this resource-rich environment. It took a combination of muscular diplomacy, community-level investments and targeted security operations to quell the violence.

These vignettes illustrate the layered nature of violent conflict in Africa, as well as the interconnectedness of the multi-faceted causative factors that can be both domestic and external. These attributes make country- and context-specific analysis indispensable, and highlight the problems with labelling or attempts at classification. Furthermore, a more nuanced understanding of factors that trigger and sustain violent conflict in Africa also bodes well for the development of prevention and response strategies that are both effective and sustainable.

Emerging Trends

African countries will face a number of emerging threats in the twenty-first century, including rapid urbanization, climate change, border disputes, demographic transitions and illicit transnational networks. While these factors could give rise to instability and unrest, it is important to consider their potential impact within the context of the milieu of historical, political, environmental and socio-economic issues already discussed.

Africa is the most rapidly urbanizing region, with the UN-Habitat's *The State of Africa's Cities 2014: re-imagining sustainable urban transitions*

predicting growth rates around 50 percent between 2010 and 2050. The vast numbers leaving the towns and villages for the cities put pressure on existing services and infrastructure, and outpace initiatives that could transform service delivery and promote the rule of law. Robert Muggah (2012) believes that such urbanization without commensurate economic growth and minimal security creates a "new frontier" in Africa's security paradigm. Inter- and intra-group friction heightens as the various groups are now in closer proximity and the state is incapable of exercising a monopoly of force. In a comparative study of Nairobi and Lagos, Adrienne LeBas (2013) examines the roles of informal security arrangements within the various identity-focused urban groups and traces channels through which they contribute to a rise in urban and political violence.

Growing population rates and youthful demographic structures in Africa have been a cause of concern for decades. More recently, proponents of the "youth bulge" theory, such as Hannes Weber (2011), have argued that regions with large populations of young men are more prone to instability and political violence. Others point to a range of socio-economic factors (such as unemployment, education and the attainment of socially-acceptable adulthood) as more reliable predictors of unrest in countries with youthful populations (Sommers 2011). Another school of thought sees the youth bulge as a potential boon, given their entrepreneurial spirit, spending propensity and increasing connectedness through mobile technology. This untapped potential could be realized through efforts to improve education, expand economic opportunity, foster a spirit of civic engagement and reinforce institutions that prevent crime.

According to Lee (2010), temperature increases and rainfall variability experienced in Africa between 1960 and 2010 could produce environmentally induced conflict in various parts of Africa. In these fragile ecosystems, resulting shortages of water, deforestation, decreases in the availability of arable land and slumps in productivity deepen inequality, trigger forced migration and precipitate violent competition for dwindling resources. Clashes between pastoralists in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa have already led to conflict and violence, as have exacerbated inter-group tensions. African countries need to focus more on mitigation and adaptation strategies that provide adequate safety nets for affected communities, bolster the resilience of key institutions and prevent violence. Population movements caused by climate change also impact contested land rights issues and, in some cases, reopen age-old border disputes.

Lessons and Recommendations

Summary of Lessons

Traditional classification of violent conflict are generally unhelpful in the African context. Instability and violence are caused by a confluence of factors that have their roots in a failed statist paradigm and decades of weak governance. Understanding how the various political, economic, cultural, ideological and social factors interact is critical.

The evolving nature of conflict in Africa demands a *dynamic* approach to conflict analysis. Unresolved conflict drivers and societal grievances evolve over time and the cumulative effect is often a complex emergency, rather than a specific threat. Unravelling conflict requires approaches that peel back the historical layers and pay particular attention to each causative factor.

Underlying causes of conflict are harbingers of violence, while conflict triggers could be described as predictable surprises. This is because the violence often revolves around some permutation of a governance failure. The focus in addressing these issues in Africa should not be exclusively on building institutions. Establishing a social contract, and its attendant institutions, must be prioritized.

Conflict sustainers, recurrence and recidivism are under-researched aspects of violent conflict in Africa. Natural resources, patrimonial networks, illicit networks and external actors should receive greater attention.

Attempts to address violence (such as counter-insurgency campaigns, economic sanctions and a focus on elections) could be counterproductive and do harm. Adopting comprehensive, long-term approaches accomplish a lot more.

Africa could face a number of emerging threats in the future. Some are potentially within the control of African governments, such as urbanization and demographic transitions, while others such as climate change and transnational illicit networks are not. It is important to avoid treating these challenges in isolation. Understanding how they impact the existing mosaic of threats and challenges should be paramount.

Recommendations for Peacemakers

Avoiding labelling helps practitioners focus on the root causes of violent conflict in Africa, and not the symptoms. Getting the diagnosis right is critical for effective country ownership and eventual success. Traditional conflict assessments could be replaced with dynamic conflict analysis that more fully incorporates the effects of layering.

Establishing a social contract should be prioritized. Creating a more synergistic relationship between African governments and all those being governed will go a long way towards introducing a sense of civic responsibility and national cohesion. Strategic investments could focus on the domestic revenue side of the social contract. Predictable policies, transparent mechanisms and accountable officials could anchor such efforts, which have had some success in other parts of the world.

Security sector transformation is crucial. Security institutions in most African countries are governed by legacy institutions that are statist in their orientation. This is out of sync with contemporary reality, which is defined by citizen-centric prerequisites and the role of non-state actors. Transformation would entail refocusing uniformed forces on the safety and welfare of all citizens, redefining professionalism to mean safeguarding the social contract and investing in institutions that foster more productive civil military relations.

Regional institutions such as the African Union and other subregional organizations play a fundamental role in fostering peace and security across the continent, particularly since most of the threats are now transnational. However, they are in urgent need of a strategic overhaul. **The African Union must implement measures that would increase the proportion of funding it receives from member states.** Having the vast proportion of its funding come from external partners is neither helpful nor sustainable. Also, the African Standby Force concept should be updated to make it more flexible and relevant to evolving threats.

Serious efforts should be made to coordinate donor assistance provided for conflict prevention and resolution. In addition to avoiding duplication and conflicting programs, enhanced coordination would facilitate the application of more balanced conflict management programs that include proportionate economic, governance and security sector assistance.

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Endnotes

1   See Small, Melvin, and J. David Singer (1982).

2   See von Clausewitz (1984).

3   See The Correlates of War Project, www.correlatesofwar.org.

4   See Uppsala Conflict Data Program at www.pcr.uu.se/research/UCDP/ and Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project at www.acleddata.com.

5   For descriptions and illustration of patrimonial networks, see Gilpin (2015).

6   See West African Commission on Drugs (2014).

7   For details of AMISOM's troop contributing countries see http://amisom-au.org/frequently-asked-questions/.

8   See www.reuters.com/article/2014/06/17/us-kenya-attacks-idUSKBN0ES0HE20140617.

9   For historical roots of the name Bako Haram see www.csmonitor.com/World/Security-Watch/Backchannels/2014/0506/Boko-Haram-doesn-t-really-mean-Western-education-is-a-sin.

10   For Lake Chad's diminution see www.unep.org/dewa/vitalwater/article116.html.

11   For two perspectives see Wolfe (2015) and Bafilemba, Mueller and Leznev (2014).

12   Source for all charts see Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project.