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Fewer Bullets, More
Ballots?

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Politics in Africa in 2006: Fewer Bullets, More Ballots?

(based on the *African Economic Outlook 2007*)

by Andrea Goldstein and Federica Marzo

- ◆ The long-term decline in political instability continued in 2006 and armed conflicts, though still widespread, have diminished.
- ◆ Multiparty elections have taken place in several African countries and progress towards participative democracy is encouraging.
- ◆ Progress in economic governance is still insufficient, with corruption continuing to hamper socio-economic development.

Good governance is a key ingredient in increasing economic growth and accelerating poverty reduction. It is therefore no surprise that the promotion of good governance has become a mainstay in policy dialogue between African governments and international donors. Overall, results are encouraging, even if the affirmation of representative democracy often suffers from breakdowns and setbacks to varying degrees of severity.

The 2007 edition of the *African Economic Outlook* includes a set of political indicators¹ that allow close monitoring of political and social trends in the 31 major African countries².

The transition to competitive, multiparty politics continued in 2006. Almost 59 million Africans participated in the presidential elections held in ten countries in 2006 (67.3 per cent turnout rate). The incumbent head of state was re-elected in nine cases, with margins ranging from 67 per cent in the Gambia to 42 per cent in Zambia. The first free and fair elections in 40 years that were held in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in July 2006 were an historic achievement. Moreover, seven countries (including Uganda, where no such polls had taken place since 1986) organised multiparty legislative elections.

1. A *political troubles* indicator and a *political hardening* indicator, both computed using weekly information from *Marché Tropicaux et internationaux*.
2. For more details on the methodology, see "Moving Towards Political Stability? Monitoring Political Instability, Governments Response and Economic Performance in African Countries", Céline Kauffmann, Federica Marzo and Lucia Wegner; OECD Development Centre, *Working Paper* series, forthcoming.

The long-term reversal of political instability, observed since 2002, also continued. In Algeria political troubles have dramatically reduced in number since 2001, and in Ethiopia and Kenya there has recently been a large decrease in ethnic clashes. In Uganda, the government and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels signed an historical truce in August 2006 to mark the cessation of hostilities and the beginning of peace talks. In Côte d'Ivoire, President Gbagbo and the leader of the rebels, Guillaume Soro, signed an important agreement in March 2007, which led the latter to become prime minister in April.

Likewise, according to the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research, the number of state-based armed conflicts has decreased from 13 in 2002 to 5 in 2005 and the number of countries involved fell from 11 to 4. Deaths in state-based armed conflict decreased from 4 741 to 1 851 over the same period. Despite these positive trends, armed conflicts remain the strongest threat to democracy and human rights, and the incidence of violent conflicts remains higher in sub-Saharan Africa than anywhere else. In 2006, regional conflicts also re-emerged. Besides the Darfour crisis, which has had repercussions in neighbouring countries, the Horn of Africa showed ominous signs of breakdown, with Somalia experiencing all-out civil war, Eritrea arming the Union of Islamic Courts, and Ethiopian troops entering Somalia to restore the transitional federal government.

Yet, in terms of the political climate, no real improvement was recorded in 2006, as the sharp deterioration in some countries offset the smaller improvements in many others. A hardening of political stance has been provoked by the outburst of new conflicts (e.g. in Chad), by slow progress in resolving ongoing crises (for example in Côte d'Ivoire) and in some cases by the holding of elections (such as in DRC). In Guinea, a series of strikes that started towards the end of 2006 provoked a harsh response from the government in early 2007 and caused many civilian deaths. Developments in Nigeria have also been mixed. Despite the Senate decision not to modify the Constitution, which underscored the consolidation of parliamentary democracy, the political climate worsened with the approach of presidential elections in 2007 and chaos reigns at the present time.

If Africans themselves³ rate the quality of their elections relatively highly, in many countries the press is still controlled and corruption is often perceived as endemic and regarded as one of the major hindrances to economic and human development. There can be no doubt that African problems demand African solutions and again the record is patchy. The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), launched in July 2002 in the framework of the NEPAD, offers an

important opportunity to African leaders to show their commitment to improving economic governance, fighting against corruption and fostering human development. To date, the process is on track, and the country review reports have been finalised for several countries (Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda and South Africa), while the draft report on Mauritius has been completed. Ghana and Kenya have achieved stage five, with the publication of country report and programme of action. No further countries ratified the 2003 African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption in 2006, leaving it four ratifications short of the 15 needed for it to enter into force. The 2002 Durban Summit of the African Union endorsed the establishment of the African Standby Force (ASF) as one of the cornerstones of a new African security initiative. Although phase two of the ASF force development has begun, progress in developing the capacity to manage complex peacekeeping operations remains unsteady and has reached a satisfactory level only with the creation of the Western African Standby Brigade, building on the peacekeeping experience of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire.

1. According to the latest Afrobarometer results.

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