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Africa: Year in Review 2020

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Cover image: Citizens in Madagascar receive COVID-19 testing from the World Bank and other organizations. Credit: World Bank / Henitsoa Rafalia. Source: https://www.flickr.com/photos/worldbank/49834249446. License: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/2.0/.

Image on page 4: Protestors during an #ENDSARs protest. Credit: Becker1999/Flickr. Source: https://www.flickr.com/photos/becker271/50531054661/. License: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/.

Image on page 5: Cover image: Nigerian youth protesting against police brutality in Ibadan, Nigeria on October 13, 2020. Credit: Femi Komolafe/Shutterstock. Source: https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/13-october-2020-ibadanoyo-state-image-1834715263.

Africa: Year in Review 2020

A Letter from the Director

Welcome to Africa: Year in Review 2020. For this special edition, marking our fifth year, we continue the tradition of asking policymakers, scholars, practitioners, and stakeholders what they considered to be the most meaningful and important developments in Africa and in U.S.-Africa relations in 2020. And what a year it was!

Without doubt, the biggest story was the COVID-19 pandemic, with over nine of our contributors writing on the topic. Several authors examine the cross-cutting impact of the pandemic, exploring its intersection with trade and development, gender, security and peacebuilding, and the continent's democratic trajectory. One essay reflects on the importance of prioritizing African knowledge and traditional medicine to address the continent's health and development needs, while another examines what remote work means for Africa. Another contributor looks at how African women leaders mobilized around the COVID-19 crisis to call for the prioritization of women's needs. Several authors highlight how the pandemic raised new challenges and exacerbated pre-existing ones, but also raised new opportunities for democratic governance in Africa.

Five contributors focus on the state of U.S.-Africa relations in 2020. They reflect on the tone, tenor, and substance of U.S-Africa engagement during the Trump Administration and on the hopes, challenges, and opportunities for U.S.-Africa relations under the incoming Biden Administration. Authors highlight the need to re-establish the global standing of the U.S., to reset and revitalize U.S.-Africa relations, and to pay more attention to addressing the democracy recession, climate justice, and the late-in-2020 developments relating to Western Sahara.

Security, political instability, and peacebuilding were top issues in 2020, with several conflicts intensifying or remaining unresolved, while violent extremism continued to wreak devastation and insecurity in various parts of the continent. One contributor discusses the importance of scaling up and strengthening community-centered responses to more effectively address violent extremism. Focusing on ECOWAS, two contributors focus on the important role played by African institutions in managing crises and promoting peace and security in West Africa in general, and Mali in particular. While lauding ECOWAS's role, one contributor also makes the case for the African Union and United Nations to play a bigger role in maintaining peace and security in order to allow ECOWAS to focus more on much-needed trade and development. Still on the security front, the U.S. reorganized its security engagement with the continent by merging U.S. Army Europe and U.S. Army Africa into a single command in order to enhance collaboration and partnership with European and African partners, and to boost the capacities of African militaries. Another author focuses on the link between water, peace, and security in the East Africa Community, and the role that water management and water diplomacy can play in building peace and security in the region.

Another key concern in 2020 was the recession in democratic governance globally, including in Africa. More than seven contributors analyze the state of democracy in Africa, with several identifying democratic backsliding

as a worrying trend. The erosion of term limits in several countries in Africa, including constitutional amendments in Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea, contested elections in Tanzania, and a military coup in Mali were all troubling developments. Along the same lines, another contributor examines Somalia's upcoming presidential election and expresses concern regarding the potential for a non-peaceful transition of power. However, there were glimmers of hope amid this troubling democratic landscape. Almost a dozen African countries held presidential or general elections and took steps to consolidate democracy, as highlighted by peaceful transitions of power in Ghana and Niger, and the annulment of a flawed election in Malawi. The relationship between security forces and civilians in general or segments of societies came under intense scrutiny in 2020 as popular protests against police brutality and abuses emerged as a global issue. Africa was not spared, as highlighted by two authors who focus on the #EndSARS protests in Nigeria.

On the economic development front, Africa's debt crisis continued to escalate in 2020, made worse by the impacts of COVID-19. One author notes the disruption caused by the pandemic to Africa's digital journey and progress, which also exposed and exacerbated the scale and scope of its digital divide. At the same time, and as noted by several authors, innovation gathered steam on the continent with plenty of potential for the digitization of African economies, which could be facilitated through an African digital game plan. Other contributors emphasize the need for strong leadership and innovation to avoid a potentially deep recession, the prioritization of agricultural productivity and resilience to spur Africa's economic transformation, and purposeful adoption of sovereign wealth funds to foster sustainable development.

Looking at Africa's role in the global arena, one author focuses on how Africa, the host of many multinational corporations, could benefit from the growing push in Europe to hold multinational corporations accountable for safeguarding human rights and protecting the environment as part of their corporate social responsibility. Another contributor explores Turkey's engagement with Africa in the year of COVID-19. The contributor notes that while Turkey's strategic goals in Africa have not changed, as exemplified by its continued engagement in Libya, the country's engagement with the continent was characterized by COVID-diplomacy, aimed at entrenching its image as a reliable partner in Africa's time of need. The final submission in this year's edition focuses on the innovations that have emerged from the continent, especially youth, in response to COVID-19. It is a powerful reminder that Africa's most important resource is her people.

We found this year's special edition of Africa: Year in Review to be a particularly compelling read of perspectives and analyses, and thank all of the authors for their insightful contributions. As we approach 2021, we look forward to an Africa that successfully navigates COVID-19, establishes a sustainable "new normal" in the post-COVID-19 world, and addresses the governance, security, and development challenges raised in these essays while bolstering the security of its citizens and its role as a key player in the global arena.

Dr. Monde Muyangwa
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U.S.-AFRICA RELATIONS

Time to Revamp—Not Revert—U.S. Diplomacy in Africa

Mr. Alan Boswell

The world is changing. As the new Biden Administration seeks to repair U.S. diplomacy in Africa, it needs to do much more than simply try to revert to the pre-Trump normal.

During the Trump Administration, we've seen U.S. diplomacy several steps behind (Sudan), ineffectual (the Nile dispute), or simply absent (South Sudan) on countries and disputes in which the world had grown accustomed to watching the U.S. playing a leading mediation role.

Some of this is reflective of the Trump Administration, of course. But less so than many Americans might assume. The U.S., once the key foreign actor in much of Africa, no longer assumes that role. Despite the focus on China as a great power competitor in Africa, it's the rise of so-called "middle powers" that has most changed power politics on the continent. In the Horn of Africa, these include various Gulf powers and Turkey. The European Union is more assertive. And, increasingly, both the African Union and continental powerhouses such as South Africa are rising to assume the actual, not just symbolic, lead.

This is no longer the 1990s, and U.S. diplomacy requires a much-needed makeover to play the stabilizing role in Africa that many in Washington hope for. Increasingly, the realistic answer to crises and conflicts on the continent is not the coercive arm-twisting that Washington has historically deployed, but rather the deft, bespoke politics of ad hoc coalitions of both regional and international players. A world with more actors, and competing interests, requires smarter, more nimble U.S. diplomacy.

Two modest (or not) proposals: first, Washington should take Africa seriously enough to develop broader regional—as opposed to bilateral—strategies, as do other African and outside powers. Second, the U.S. should deploy in the field regionally-focused diplomats—be they special envoys or other similar positions—and support staff to conduct shuttle diplomacy. In today's world, stationing such officials in Washington—an 8 hour time difference and 30 hours of travel away from Africa—risks relegating them to the diplomatic sidelines.

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Doomed Hope?

Mr. Nii Akuetteh

Joe Biden wins the U.S. presidency and taps terrific John Kerry as climate envoy while UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres speaks climate truth to power. These developments constitute 2020's best news for Africa. A trifecta of hope. But is it doomed hope?

To answer, one must start by borrowing heavily from Guterres to assert this: especially since the industrial revolution, today's G8 countries have grown rich and powerful by waging war on nature. Unsurprisingly, she is pushing back. This is suicidal, endangering the only livable planet humans have. But a bitter irony lurks: those hit hardest by nature's fury are indigenous peoples—the populations that are materially the poorest and most vulnerable precisely because they have respected nature the most.

Here Africa is Exhibit A. The vast Sahara is spreading. Most of Lake Chad has evaporated. Violent cyclones are battering southern Africa more frequently, bringing deadly flooding and landslides. Huge locust clouds have brought food insecurity to the Horn. Somalis and other Africans are catching drastically fewer fish. This results partly from criminal poaching by giant European and Chinese trawlers. But environmental factors are wreaking even greater havoc in African seas. Temperatures have risen while oxygen levels have plummeted. The rising seas problem is unmistakable; coastal West Africans observe that "the sea is swallowing West Africa." Examples are in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, where recently the Atlantic Ocean has quickly smashed two significant cities. Across Africa, wars, mass displacement of dozens of millions, and scary food insecurity are only three of the ways that climate crisis is devastating the continent.

The African theory of the case for climate justice is this: industrialized countries achieve and maintain wealth and dominance by abusing nature. In contrast, Africa and its less-developed peers have been injured the most by the climate crisis. The rich perpetrators must therefore have an unshirkable responsibility to repair the injuries and reduce their abuses of nature sufficiently.

Unforgiving electoral calculus stopped Biden from endorsing the "Green New Deal." Still, his climate policy—especially the intent to rejoin the Paris Accords on day one—should prove kinder to climate justice than did President Trump's.

But this hope is likely to be dashed. To avert this, varied stakeholders must step up across America. Crucially, Africans now living inside the U.S. must lead in firmly holding the feet of the Biden Administration to the fire regarding climate justice. Such leadership action (or inaction) will massively impact Africa's 1.3 billion people. Any wonder their eyes *will* be watching America.

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Africa and the Biden Administration's Summit for Democracy

Mr. Judd Devermont

The incoming Biden Administration has an early opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to Africa at the forthcoming Summit for Democracy. During his 2020 presidential campaign, Biden committed to "renew the spirit and shared purpose of the nations of the free world" by hosting a global Summit for Democracy during his first year in office. This not only is an important signal after four years of neglectful U.S. policy toward Africa, but also represents a moment to redefine U.S. engagement and reimagine its approach to democracy promotion. A new U.S. relationship with Africa—defined by the region's global sway and strategic importance—will find its roots in how this first Summit is conducted: which African countries receive invitations, what engagements are promoted, and how Africa features in the conference's commitments.

Since this is a global summit, there almost certainly will be a food fight over who receives an invitation. In determining which African countries to invite, the Biden Administration should favor a mix of countries from across the democratic spectrum. In addition to established democracies, it should include countries on the cusp of a breakthrough, including Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malawi, Niger, and Sudan. Moreover, the organizers should use the promise of an invitation to extract reforms; for instance, it could offer a spot to Nigeria if the security services are held accountable for human rights abuses perpetrated during the #EndSARS protests. The Summit for Democracy is expected to invite civil society organizations. However, democracy requires commitments from the opposition as well as ruling parties. The summit should include both ruling and opposition parties, and, to make a point, invite opposition leaders under threat from repressive governments—for Africa this would include Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.

Africa's role in tackling global democratic challenges should be showcased at the summit. Cabo Verde, for instance, recently arrested Venezuelan leader Nicholas Maduro's financial fixer, and The Gambia in 2009 filed a lawsuit against Myanmar for alleged genocide against the Rohingya. At the summit, African representatives should be asked to chair sessions and pressed to talk about xenophobia in Europe and the crackdown on protesters in Hong Kong. Finally, Africa should prominently feature in the summit's outcomes. In addition to anti-corruption goals, the summit organizers should establish a partnership program in which countries from different regions agree to hold themselves accountable for shared commitments. For instance, Senegal and Romania—ranked 47 and 48, respectively, in the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedoms Index—could work together on the role of the media in democracies.

President-elect Biden's Summit for Democracy promises to mark a turning point in an era when democracy is in a global recession. Africa has the potential to play a prominent part at this marquee event, moving from sideshow to center stage.

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Getting U.S. Policy in Democratic Sync

Mr. Thomas P. Sheehy

Africa enjoys a growing population of young people yearning to shape their future. U.S. policy should help affirm their vision. But to do so, the Biden Administration must accept that African democracy, the key means for change, has been steadily declining, while the U.S. has mainly watched.

Africa is no exception to democracy's decade-long regression worldwide. Once the most democratically-advanced African region, West Africa has but a single country, Ghana, considered "Free" by Freedom House[1] in its 2020 annual report. Long-ruling autocrats in Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea shattered constitutional term limits in 2020, continuing a troubling trend seen elsewhere on the continent. Ruling parties routinely rig elections, and keep power through violent repression and sophisticated technology.

Why should Americans care? Non-democratic governments are more likely to commit human rights abuses. Democracy best promotes government transparency that fosters economic development. And democracy is what most Africans want, according to Afrobarometer polling.

Yet rather than taking forceful action, U.S. efforts to promote democracy have long been weak. U.S. and international election observation missions issue meek statements in the face of even the most undemocratic practices. U.S. embassies barely protested flawed elections in Tanzania (2020), Mozambique (2019), and elsewhere, responding with no substantial actions.

Despite China and other countries hostile to democracy gaining influence, the U.S. still has clout on the continent, especially in alliance with like-minded countries. What to do? One, speak honestly and forcefully when elections are stolen. Otherwise, Washington is cynically undercutting the morale of Africa's many struggling democrats. Two, work with allies to sanction Africans who brutally undermine democracy. Three, challenge the African Union to back democracy. Four, bring a sense of urgency to empowering African civil society with more direct and plentiful assistance to challenge repression. It's Africans themselves who must resist autocrats, yes, but the U.S. can help. These aggressive policies would alienate some governments, maybe jeopardizing U.S. commercial interests, but autocratic countries make for weak partners to start.

The U.S. and others acted forcefully when the South African apartheid government brutally denied democratic rights decades ago. Any regrets for doing so? If not, why the big change, especially at this moment of deep challenge to African democracy?

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When Elephants Fight the Grass is Trampled

Ms. Vivian Lowery Derryck

A fraught planet has learned a chilling lesson: When U.S. attention is diverted from global issues and other countries are riveted by the U.S. domestic political spectacle, democracy across the globe is undermined. Tanzania is of special concern.

Tanzania, an African icon of democratic stability largely shaped by legendary nation-builder Julius Nyerere, is being systematically upended by President John Magufuli and the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi party (CCM).

The October 27-28, 2020 elections damaged Tanzanian democracy and gave license to other would-be autocrats on the continent. Most alarming is the ongoing descent of CCM into a political party increasingly viewed as repressive. Tanzania came to independence in 1961 with a single political party (TANU) that governed with transparency until the 1990s'global embrace of multi-party democracy. Tanzania's Nyerere-guided transition to multi-party democracy involved consultations with every district on the mainland and in Zanzibar, as TANU and CCM merged to become the vibrant dominant party in the new political universe.

Today's CCM has degenerated into a party that has violated democratic norms—muzzling the opposition, harassing the press and social media, expelling NGOs, threatening LGBTQ citizens, and eviscerating civil society. Political parties are the lifeblood of a democracy, regulating competing interests and organizing government. And democracies cannot thrive without a robust civil society to serve as the guardian of civic and cultural norms and the watchdog holding government accountable.

Ironically, Tanzania and the U.S. mimicked each other in their 2020 elections, held one week apart and demonstrating eerie parallels. Both countries' incumbents have undermined the sanctity of democratic institutions and debased their parties, putting power above patriotism and the fundamental democratic values of their nations. Now, both countries must work to restore confidence in institutions and in leaders to ensure broad citizen trust. If citizens have no state-sanctioned avenues to express their grievances, they may seek extra-legal alternatives.

Tanzania requires sustained world attention. Already there are ominous murmurs of amending the constitution to end the two-term limit on the presidency. The nation's reassertion of democratic principles is vital to the continent.

The entire world has watched the U.S. navigate an uneven path toward a once-taken-for-granted peaceful transfer of power. If the incoming Biden Administration manages to rebuild trust in U.S. institutions and foundational values, it could be a model for democratic recovery globally—and touch Tanzania.

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GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

Key African Democratic Advances in 2020

Dr. Alex Vines

A number of democratic retreats occurred in 2020: a coup in Mali; amended constitutions in Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea that paved the way for re-elected third-term presidencies for Alpha Condé and Alassane Ouattara; and a fraudulent election in Tanzania. Yet, a re-run of presidential elections in Malawi in June, a presidential incumbent's defeat in Seychelles in October, and Ghana's smooth national elections in December signaled democratic advances on the African continent.

Malawi was only the second African country to annul a presidential election, after Kenya in 2017, and the first in which the opposition won the re-run. The initial May 2019 vote had narrowly returned incumbent Peter Mutharika to the presidency. But in February 2020, the result was annulled in a landmark ruling by Malawi's constitutional court that cited "widespread, systematic and grave" irregularities.[2] New elections were ordered within 150 days. The constitutional court ruling also changed Malawi's electoral system, replacing a first-past-the-post model with one requiring an outright majority. In a decisive contrast with the annulled election, the fresh polls in June 2020 saw the coming together of nine opposition parties headed by Lazarus Chakwera of the Malawi Congress Party and running mate Saulos Chilima of the United Transformation Movement—who had fiercely competed as the leading challengers previously. The Chakwera/Chilima ticket was victorious, polling 58 percent of votes to Mutharika's 39.

Wavel Ramkalawan's winning of Seychelles' presidency in October 2020, his sixth attempt, was the first victory by an opposition presidential candidate since the country's independence in 1976. Incumbent Danny Faure had held the presidency since 2016, representing the United Seychelles Party that had been in power in various forms since a 1977 coup. This election marked an important new chapter for Seychelles' democracy.

Ghana is regarded as one of the most stable countries in West Africa since its transition to multi-party rule in 1992. It is a vibrant democracy, and its tightly contested December 2020 presidential elections resulted in incumbent Nana Akufo-Addo winning a second term. Ghana's elections, along with those in Malawi and Seychelles, are reminders that democracy in Africa advances in fits and starts, and benefits from strong institutions, vibrant civil society, independent media, and political party leaders who are magnanimous in victory and gracious in defeat.

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The Erosion of Term Limits in Africa Reflects Worrying Trend

Dr. Joseph Siegle

Africa saw a precipitous decline in the upholding of term limits in 2020. Of the 12 presidential elections held on the continent, five had incumbents facing term limits. Yet, in only one case, Niger's President Mahmadou Issoufou, did the incumbent abide by this limit. Conversely, Faure Gnassingbé (Togo), Alpha Condé (Guinea), and Alassane Ouattara (Côte d'Ivoire) all remain in power. Pierre Nkurunziza, who bypassed Burundi's two-term limit in 2015, died prior to this year's election.

This circumvention of term limits continues a recent trend. Since 2015, there have been 13 cases of African leaders extending their time in power beyond their mandated two terms.

This is a problem for Africa's governance, security, and development. Leaders in countries where leaders have evaded term limits have been in power four times longer, on average, than leaders in countries upholding term limits. Countries where leaders have eluded term limits, moreover, are ranked as considerably more corrupt, according to Transparency International.

Not coincidentally, 11 of the 14 African countries currently facing civil conflict are those without effective term limits. These countries generate roughly 90 percent of the continent's record 30 million refugees and internally displaced populations.

Citizens peacefully protested the lifting of term limits in each country in question this year. Yet, in every case, government crackdowns resulted in the loss of lives. Regional bodies and international actors, meanwhile, have remained largely silent.

The deterioration in term limit norms is undercutting more than two decades of reform aimed at institutionalizing checks and balances on executive power in Africa. Some 45 African countries had at one point adopted term limits. Currently, only 21 uphold these limits. Left unchecked, this deterioration is a harbinger of a return to de-facto one-party political systems that many thought Africa had left behind.

The United States shares values and interests with the millions of Africans calling for term limits as a means to overcome the legacy of "big man" politics. The evasion of term limits does not occur in isolation, but is part of a pattern of skirting the rule of law, civil liberties, property rights, and contract enforcement. Such an environment will have a chilling effect on broader Africa-U.S. relations, affecting security cooperation, investment, the generation of jobs, and the continued expansion of Africa's middle class.

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The Changing Dynamics of Democratic Engagement in the Time of COVID-19

Mr. Gregory Kearns

The COVID-19 pandemic ushered in opportunities for change in democracy and governance in Africa. Some changes, such as greater restrictions of the political space, were anticipated. Others, such as the expansion of digital democratic space, were welcome surprises. The doomsday scenarios that predicted increased authoritarian rule are yet to materialize.

COVID-19 has nonetheless provided a welcome opportunity to authoritarian governments in Africa. Under the guise of public health, governments have constrained opposition candidates' ability to engage the public. This has been perhaps most acute in the case of Uganda, where Bobi Wine, a popular musician and charismatic opposition leader, has been prevented from campaigning and performing. He was recently arrested for violating COVID-19 restrictions, after having been detained in other instances without charges. In Guinea, voters were instructed to leave polling stations immediately after voting, preventing many from observing vote-counting. This reduced the transparency of vote tabulation and transmission of results, which was widely seen to have benefited the incumbent government.

Conversely, on the mobilization front, African civil society organizations and their partners have seized on the capabilities of various digital platforms, e.g., Zoom and Teams, to garner support and push along their democratic initiatives. If there were any doubts about the value of Digital Democracy, it is evident today that COVID-19 has forced an acceleration and expansion of this trend. Training workshops, rallies, and other gatherings have moved online, where skilled trainers and facilitators now have access to higher numbers of participants. Democracy training can be portable and off-shored if the local political environment is particularly sensitive. Training materials can be more easily shared. With a few exceptions, mainly involving countries in the Sahel and Central Africa, there has been a seamless transition to online learning.

Digital engagement offers democracy and governance advocates in Africa two major benefits: 1) civil society organizations can now limit their exposure to physical control and harassment by state agents, and; 2) donors and implementers can afford to reduce overhead costs and reallocate scarce resources to other pressing programmatic needs. These other needs and challenges include the high cost of high-speed internet infrastructure and security in Africa, as well as the operational imperative of dealing with the cat-and-mouse nature of ever-expanding state surveillance and control of the continent's digital space.

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New Horizons for Niger

Dr. Sophia Moestrup

For the first time in its history, Niger is on the way to a peaceful transfer of executive power. This is all the more remarkable for a country that has experienced three coups d'état and a successful attempt at bypassing term limits since transitioning to multi-party democracy in 1993. President Mahamadou Issoufou, by respecting the constitution and his promise to step down at the end of his second term this April, has made history and supported the consolidation of constitutional rule in Niger.

The December 27, 2020 presidential poll was peaceful, and the winner of the February runoff between ruling party candidate Mohamed Bazoum and former President Mahamane Ousmane will take over from President Issoufou when his mandate ends in April 2021. Niger's democratic progress is particularly welcome as, in the past year, other West African countries experienced significant democratic backsliding: for example, a coup in Mali, and controversial third terms for incumbent presidents in Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire. Niger is an important partner in the fight against violent extremism, and a smooth executive transition there will support efforts by the U.S. and other allies to help stabilize the Sahel.

Despite this breakthrough on the political transfer of power, not all is well in Niger. Political tensions continue to fester between the ruling party and main opposition leader Hama Amadou, the runner-up in the 2016 presidential poll. Amadou served prison time for a human trafficking case he claims was politically motivated, and his candidacy for the 2020 race was rejected by the constitutional court because of that prison sentence. Also, arrests of journalists and civil society activists have contributed to Niger's "partly free" classification by Freedom House.

Niger's new political leaders will have to renew political dialogue and strengthen Nigeriens' confidence in their political institutions. A peaceful transition in April will be an important first step, as democratic power transfers through elections are a rare commodity in francophone Africa these days. Within political parties, leaders must establish orderly succession processes. Outgoing President Issoufou has managed tensions within the ruling party by starting early and personally tracking the candidate selection process closely. It is now up to his successor to further consolidate this and other democratic practices in this still-fragile but promising democracy.

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Somalia in 2020 and Beyond

Dr. Ladan Affi

2020 was a challenging year for Somalia, which faced security, economic, political, and social challenges. Although Somalia has largely escaped the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, it continues to battle drought, famine, floods, and locusts, which have led to a humanitarian disaster in the country. This has been exacerbated by the global economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic in that international partners are less invested in what is taking place in Somalia.

The country faces a serious security threat, particularly in southern Somalia, from the Al-Shabaab terrorist group. Somalia's insecurity will be worsened by the December 2020 announcement of the withdrawal of American troops, as well as by the recent departure of Ethiopian troops that have returned home to deal with their own conflict. In addition, Somalia's strained relationship with Kenya has both security and economic implications.

In the upcoming elections, Somalia was to transition from an indirect electoral college model to a one-person, one-vote system. This has not happened; instead, an expanded electoral college based on the 2016 model will be adopted. There is fear that the escalating disagreement between the federal government and federal member states, particularly Puntland and Jubbaland, over the election process could lead to serious problems. Already, the parliamentary elections that were scheduled to take place on December 1 have yet to occur.

Somali opposition parties and presidential candidates have criticized the federal government's handling of the election, fearing that the government is trying to pre-determine its outcome. The capricious doubling of the candidate registration fee to USD$10,000 for the lower house and USD$20,000 for the upper house signals that only elites will be able to take part in this election. Most affected will be minority candidates and women, who were permitted to pay half of the registration fee in the 2016 election but will not receive such relief for the upcoming election.

For the past twenty years, Somalia's elections have resulted in a new president being peacefully sworn in every four years. The upcoming election threatens to upend that, as Somali political actors seem unwilling to come to an agreement on how to hold the elections. An added complication is that the U.S., EU, and other international partners, who could pressure the government and opposition to defuse the brewing conflict, are focused on their own priorities in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Women Leaders Respond to COVID-19

Dr. Aili Tripp

Although COVID-19 has had less impact in Africa than in other regions of the world, it has compounded existing problems faced by women and girls. COVID-19 forced many African women to leave their formal and informal work and do more care work in the home, tending to and schooling children where there were school closures. As seen elsewhere in the world during the pandemic, women in Africa became more exposed to sexual exploitation and domestic violence as rates increased in homes already under stress. These patterns were exacerbated in African countries afflicted by conflict, humanitarian crisis, and insecurity. Women with disabilities were particularly vulnerable.

Across the continent, South Africa, Ethiopia, Kenya, and North African countries have been hit hardest by the virus. However, in general, African countries have not witnessed the exponential spread of COVID-19, as had been initially feared. The continent's COVID-19 death rates have been relatively low, partly because Africa has a fairly young population, with over 60 percent of its populace under the age of 25. Health problems like obesity and Type 2 diabetes are also less common in Africa. Comparatively low rates of travel and the prevalence of outdoor living activities (cooking, eating, socializing, etc.) in many parts of the continent might also contribute to Africa's lower infection rates. Since testing on the continent is low, the true extent of the impact of the virus is unknown.

African women leaders like Graça Machel, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Vera Songwe, and Maria Ramos have used their visibility to demand that African governments seize on the COVID-19 crisis as an opportunity to prioritize women's needs. At the international level, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed launched a "Women Rise for All" initiative in April 2020 to mobilize support for a UN socio-economic response to COVID-19 to save lives and protect livelihoods, placing women leaders at the forefront of efforts to address these concerns. UN Women and the African Union, together with the UN Economic Commission for Africa, convened African ministers for gender and women's affairs in May 2020 to respond to COVID-19.

Initiatives at the national and local level have been equally vital. On November 25, from Sierra Leone to Uganda to Namibia, activists used the annual international campaign, 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, to address the issue in the context of COVID-19.

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Evaluating COVID-19 in Africa: Responses, Effects, and Future Risks

Ms. Fabiola Michele Lawson

Following the first COVID-19 cases reported in Wuhan, China in December 2019, Egypt was the first African country to register cases the following February. Although African states reacted proactively to the outbreak, the pandemic gravely tested the agility of their policy responses to natural disasters and health crises. The stringent countermeasures implemented by many African countries strained the continent's economy, and the challenge is unlikely to let up as a second COVID-19 wave washes over Africa.

Given Africa's prior experience with viral outbreaks of Ebola, Lassa fever, and Dengue, its governments partnered with the World Health Organization to counter the COVID-19 pandemic even before the discovery of the first case on the continent. Countries including South Africa, Kenya, and Egypt addressed education and public health management challenges by adopting education technology solutions. Ghana and Rwanda pioneered using zipline drones to deliver COVID-19 test samples. According to live updates on Worldometer, Seychelles is one of the few countries in the world that has yet to register any COVID-19 deaths.

Despite Africa's relatively low rates of COVID-related deaths and infections, many African countries nonetheless implemented strict countermeasures such as lockdowns, curfews, and social distancing. The downsides of these public health measures included destabilizing trade and market opportunities, and further exposing some countries to instability and food insecurity, including Sudan and Zimbabwe. African countries that had been projected to experience growth in 2020 are now on track to undergo a decline, including Tanzania, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Uganda. Moreover, as South Africa surpasses a million registered cases, scientists there have found a new, faster-spreading coronavirus variant. Consequently, many observers fear the continent's second wave of COVID-19 may worsen the destabilizing effects Africa is already experiencing.

Africa's COVID-19 countermeasures, many of which are derived from its experience countering previous viral public health threats, can be replicated elsewhere in the developing and developed world. At the same time, Africa's struggles during the pandemic highlight areas in which countries need to strengthen their resilience in order to alleviate economic instability and promote food security.

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Youth Riots in Nigeria: Was it Predictable? Who is Next?

Dr. Adesoji Adelaja

The #EndSARS youth protests across Nigeria in October 2020 began with calls to disband the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a unit of the Nigerian Police well known for systemic brutality, extortion, illegal detentions, and extrajudicial killings. State governments responded by imposing curfews, and President Buhari ultimately announced the disbandment of the SARS. However, the protests nonetheless continued, went viral, and garnered global support for Nigerian youth. The #EndSARS movement later escalated its demands into calls for major reform of the country's management.

Police shootings of some youth at a toll gate in late October quickly turned the previously peaceful protests into riots across Nigeria. Many homes, businesses, and government buildings were ransacked, looted, and in some cases burnt down. Nigeria's elites feared a major law and order meltdown of the type that toppled many long-term regimes in the Middle East during the 2011 Arab Spring.

The outbreak of violence in Nigeria was attributable to the build-up of "latent anger," as explained in "Grievances, Latent Anger and Unrest in Africa,"[3] my recent article with Justin George in *African Security*. The article showed the use of cross-country data to construct a latent anger index showing the culmination of grievances as the precursor to various forms of unrest. As was the case in the Middle East during the Arab Spring, unaddressed and deeply-rooted long-term grievances built into latent anger that national leaders often failed to see. The lack of an early warning system to measure latent anger in fragile and unrest-prone states makes prevention a challenge.

Coincidentally, Nigeria ranked first in Africa on the latent anger scale and thus the most likely to erupt in violence. Not far behind Nigeria on the scale is the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Africa, Kenya, Cameroon, Mali, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Angola. The 2020 uprising in Nigeria was not a flash in the pan, according to this predictive model of unrest. Simmering African countries can avoid boiling over by taking a preventative approach to national instability by carrying out socio-economic intervention programs aimed at dousing high but latent temperatures.

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#EndSARS and the Rise of Africa's Activist Generation

Ms. K. Riva Levinson

On the morning of October 20, 2020, tens of thousands of young Nigerians camped at the Lekki Toll Gate in Lagos, Nigeria. The protestors were mobilized under the hashtag #EndSARS, a mass action campaign seeking to dismantle the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS).[4]

What had started off two weeks earlier as a demonstration against police brutality was now something much more. The movement had morphed into a reckoning over the failure of Nigeria's democratic institutions to stand stronger than its corrupt and unaccountable politicians. It was about an empowered youth that has found their voice,[5] and about the hopes for a new Nigeria, one able to realize its considerable productive, entrepreneurial, and artistic potential.

The mood at the toll gate was celebratory as dusk approached. And then uniformed forces were deployed, and the shooting began. When it was over, more than 12 people were dead,[6] and dozens injured.[7] After the carnage, the Feminist Coalition,[8] a leader of the protest, called for a tactical retreat, urging Nigerians to live to fight another day.

The #EndSARS movement is part of the rise of an activist generation in Africa, and is the most important political trend on the continent over the last two decades. The demand for change echoes throughout Africa. It is being felt in Senegal, Burkina Faso, Uganda, Malawi,[9] Zimbabwe, Zambia, Tanzania,[10] the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan,[11] and beyond. Unlike their parents before them, these young people[12] are empowered through education and technology, with social media platforms connecting them with like-minded people across the globe. They are democracy's keepers. History will judge them well, but their path ahead will not be easy.

As the Biden Administration formulates its policy for Africa, it ought to hold tight to the fact that the Democratic ticket was propelled to a significant extent[13] by #BlackLivesMatter supporters—young and hopeful voters who reject the status quo of inequities in American society. Let us not overlook the obvious: that America's greatest export to the world (despite its many imperfections bared for all to see during the 2020 election season) remains its democratic system of governance.

The Biden Administration should make a greater investment in global democracy promotion, an area where funding has been under attack over the past several years. Furthermore, a new playbook must be written to help the international community create enabling environments for political inclusion, and challenge laws that disenfranchise voters and repress media freedom. The days of accepting election outcomes rigged by ruling elites must be over.

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CONFLICT PREVENTION, PEACEBUILDING, AND SECURITY

U.S. Army Remains Committed to African Security, Stability

Major General Andrew Rohling

The year 2020 presented significant changes and challenges for the world, for the continent, and for the U.S. Army in Africa.

The most substantial change for the latter was the consolidation of U.S. Army Europe and U.S. Army Africa headquarters into one command: U.S. Army Europe and Africa. U.S. Army Africa, based in Vicenza, Italy, was re-designated as U.S. Army Southern European Task Force, Africa (SETAF-AF) in October 2020. Although the name changed, the U.S. Army's commitment to its African partners' remains steadfast.

The consolidation allows greater access to and collaboration with land force commanders and defense chiefs of NATO allies and partners, both in Africa and Europe. As the SETAF-AF commander, I remain committed to strengthening partnerships across Africa and Southern Europe.

Despite COVID-19 challenges, the SETAF-AF team found innovative ways to strengthen partnerships with and improve the capacity of African land force militaries, completing 85 security cooperation activities in 23 African countries during 2020. In February, SETAF-AF co-hosted the African Land Forces Summit with the Ethiopian National Defense Force. The summit, held in Addis Ababa, gathered 42 African land component chiefs to discuss defense institutional development.

In another 2020 structural change, the Defense Department aligned a U.S. Army Security Force Assistance Brigade (SFAB) with the U.S. Africa Command. Specifically designed to develop partner capacity across a wide range of specialties, SFAB teams advised and assisted African partners in Djibouti, Senegal, Somalia, and Tunisia during 2020. The SFAB's persistent engagement with these countries demonstrates the U.S. Army's commitment to its African partners.

Many of the multinational exercises planned in 2020 were cancelled to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus and protect U.S. service members and their African partners. Exercise African Lion, SETAF-AF's flagship training event that involves thousands of troops from African, European, and global partners, is on schedule to occur in Morocco, Senegal, and Tunisia in June 2021.

Looking forward to 2021, the SETAF-AF team of professionals is eager to forge ahead, with or without COVID-19, to find ways to work alongside African, European, and interagency partners to build and maintain security and advance mutual interests in Africa.

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Strengthening Community-Centered Responses to Violent Extremism

Mr. Tony Carroll and Ms. Kristen O'Connell

Violent extremism has cost sixteen African nations an average of USD$97 billion[14] per year since 2007. A steady rise in violent extremism and terrorism, with major attacks in 2020 in Burkina Faso,[15] Kenya,[16] Mozambique,[17] and others, is placing increasing pressure on U.S.-Africa relations in three key ways, by creating: 1) a direct risk to U.S. interests in Africa; 2) reputational threats resulting from anti-U.S. propaganda, and; 3) a threat to security relationships like the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM).

According to the Global Terrorism Index,[18] 10 of the 20 countries most impacted by terrorism are in Africa. Since that report's latest publication, the Islamic State (ISIS) has resurged in northern Mozambique and across the Sahel. New violent extremist groups are emerging, and existing groups being emboldened by the COVID-19 pandemic and African governments' responses to it. Terrorism across Africa also undermines GDP growth and economic performance, diverts scarce financial resources, disrupts frontier markets, and impedes state-building.

While security-based responses to terrorism can be effective in the short term, they rarely have a lasting impact. They can generate resentment, undermine civil liberties, and fail to address the underlying issues that drive people—youth in particular—toward radicalization and violent extremism. The U.S. has dedicated increased funding to terrorism prevention efforts in Africa over the past few years, a testament to their effectiveness, both practically and financially.

The Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) has pioneered a new preventative approach to violent extremism in Africa, the Asia-Pacific region, and Eastern Europe (GCERF is currently working in Bangladesh, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, the Philippines, Somalia, Tunisia, and the Western Balkans. It will soon be working in Burkina Faso, Mozambique, and Niger). It supports 100 community-led initiatives to address the drivers of radicalization where the risk is highest. Its unique approach focuses on co-creation with civil society organizations and capacity-building for local NGOs. The United States is one of GCERF's largest donors (the U.S. co-founded GCERF with Switzerland, where it is currently headquartered), and through a specific earmark in the Global Fragility Act[19] that funding will increase. As the U.S. continues to adapt its strategy following a monumental presidential election, GCERF remains a focal point for best practices and advice regarding violent extremism in Africa.

GCERF has demonstrated the return on investment for the prevention toolkit and community-centered responses to violent extremism. It is in the U.S. national interest to continue to address the drivers of the transnational threat of terrorism in the communities where it emerges, to support community-centered initiatives that leverage the impact of security approaches, and ultimately to support peace and prosperity in Africa.

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Bridges Over Troubled Waters: Women, Peacebuilding, and Water Diplomacy in the East African Community

Dr. Marisa O. Ensor

The East African Community (EAC—Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda) is home to some of the greatest water sources in the world. These include Lake Tanganyika, Lake Victoria, and the Nile River Basin. The distribution of water varies significantly within the EAC; some areas often experience a rain surplus (e.g., Burundi, Rwanda, and parts of Uganda), while others usually suffer a considerable water deficit (e.g., central Tanzania and large parts of Kenya). This disparity contributes to regional tensions. Women and girls in the region are responsible for water collection in eight out of ten households obtaining water off premises. Their participation as water leaders is increasingly prominent, especially at the community level. Women's leadership, often championing dialogue over dispute, has become even more critical given current water resource challenges.

Water security in the EAC countries, destabilized in 2020 by COVID-19 and the worst devastation from locusts in half a century, was further compromised in 2020 by floods that contaminated water sources across much of the region. This was triggered by torrential rains that started in March and intensified again in August and September, leading to massive flooding and landslides. This caused almost 500 deaths, mainly in Kenya and Rwanda, and vast population displacement. In South Sudan, months of flooding and violence in 2020 forced an estimated 600,000 people to flee their homes. Most of those displaced were women and children.

Successfully resolving complex water management issues in the EAC would substantially contribute to the region's peace and security. Fostering water diplomacy is one promising avenue to attain this goal. Water diplomacy offers an entry point to strengthen domestic and regional water-management institutions and develop mutually beneficial policies on water and other issues. Empirical research has demonstrated the positive effects of women's participation in decision-making on water cooperation and conflict prevention. As proclaimed in the Water Vision for Africa 2025, these objectives can only be achieved with "political will, public awareness and commitment among all for sustainable water-resources management, including the mainstreaming of gender issues and youth concerns and the use of participatory approaches." This approach has the potential to reframe water management conflicts as opportunities for cooperation and joint decision-making. Given the compounding sources of uncertainty currently facing the African continent and the world, supporting EAC women's role as water diplomats and peacebuilders has never been more critical.

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ECOWAS' Peace and Security Shattered by Unconstitutional Coups

Ms. Kamissa Camara

As the world was staggered in 2020 by the coronavirus pandemic, West Africa was also dealing with a series of unconstitutional changes of power. This called into question the influence of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in promoting peace, security, stability, and good governance in the troubled region.

On August 18, amid growing popular protest, a military coup deposed President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita in Mali. A few days later, Guinea's ruling party confirmed that 82-year-old President Alpha Condé would seek a third term in office. This unpopular decision sparked mass protests in Guinea that left at least 30 people dead. Condé eventually won reelection in October with 59 percent of the vote. That same month in neighboring Côte d'Ivoire, President Alassane Ouattara, who was finishing his second and constitutional final term in office, also sought a controversial third term. The opposition boycotted the election, which Ouattara easily won with 94 percent of the vote and a body count of at least 30 people in pre-election violence. The casualties evoked memories of the country's 2010-2011 crisis that left 3,000 dead.

In the recent past, ECOWAS had been more successful in preventing unconstitutional changes of power. For example, in 2017, the regional organization was the main actor making Gambian President Yaya Jammeh relinquish power after he had lost elections. This was a big win for ECOWAS. That same year, Morocco applied for ECOWAS membership, and Mauritania signed a new associate-membership agreement 17 years after having left the organization. ECOWAS also led successful peacekeeping operations in Liberia, Guinea Bissau, and Mali, and its mediation efforts led to peaceful elections in Mali (2013) and Nigeria (2015).

ECOWAS is home to 300 million people and covers about one-sixth of Africa. When the Treaty of Lagos established the organization in 1975, its main goal was to foster economic cooperation and promote intra-regional trade. However, due to chronic instability in the region, economic integration took a back seat while the promotion of peace and security became an urgent and vital mission. ECOWAS has since made great strides in strengthening its mediation and conflict prevention capability, as demonstrated in the months leading up to Mali's August 2020 military coup. Still, a stark gap remains between the ECOWAS mandate and its capacity to consistently avert regional crises. For this reason, the African Union and the United Nations should shoulder their original roles of "African and world police" and let ECOWAS revert back to its original focus on economics and trade.

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The Coup in Mali and the Case for Privileging African Institutions

Ambassador J. Peter Pham

In the early morning of August 18, shots rang out at a military base nine miles northwest of Bamako. For the second time in less than a decade, the overthrow of a democratically-elected Malian government was underway. Around midnight that day, President Keïta announced his resignation from the barracks where he had been taken by the mutineers. Within hours of the uprising, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) called for a return to constitutional order and suspended Mali's membership, closed all borders between Mali and its ECOWAS neighbors, and, days later, added sweeping financial and trade restrictions on Mali that included the freezing of government accounts in regional banks. Before the week was out, ECOWAS then sent a high-level delegation to Bamako. From then on, ECOWAS, with close support from the G5 Sahel—the security and development cooperation institution embracing the five countries in the Sahel—spearheaded international efforts to achieve a timely, civilian-led transition to return Mali to the rule of an elected government. Their efforts paid off. On October 5, with a largely technocratic transitional government in place and committed to holding elections after an 18-month transition period, ECOWAS lifted its sanctions.

While Mali's future stability is far from assured, ECOWAS' role in the immediate aftermath of the coup is a compelling case for working with, and through, African institutions. Why? First, those directly affected by the coup were in the driver's seat. ECOWAS' speed and decisiveness—largely driven by then ECOWAS chair Nigerien President Issoufou—were likely motivated by self-interest in avoiding a collapse in Mali as well as by a chastening from past West African coups and a determination to dissuade any future ones. Second, regional ownership of the crisis was something the entire international community accepted. This made ECOWAS' leadership an effective coordinating mechanism that kept the international community aligned despite fissures emerging among some partners eager to continue ongoing security operations. The consistent support of the international community, in turn, greatly strengthened ECOWAS' hand vis-à-vis the putschists.

ECOWAS' charting of a path to the return of elected government in Mali, while still too early to fully evaluate, highlights the important role African institutions can play in achieving shared objectives. With conflict in the Sahel likely to continue, those directly affected need to be central to resolution efforts—as underscored by the convening in Bamako of the inaugural meeting of a "Support Group for the Transition in Mali," led by the African Union and ECOWAS with participation by the Malian transitional authorities. Participants agreed to create a flexible mechanism to ensure smooth implementation of key reforms during the transition. While the outcome remains to be seen, the chance of success has been increased by involving regional stakeholders together with relevant international partners.

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New Challenges to Thawing the Conflict in Western Sahara

Ms. Hannah Akuiyibo

After holding for nearly 30 years, the ceasefire between the Polisario Front and Morocco over the contested territory of Western Sahara ended in November 2020. The conflict—largely frozen since a 1991 UN-brokered ceasefire—flared in October 2020 when Polisario announced it would no longer honor the agreement following clashes in the buffer zone and shortly after the United Nations Security Council had voted to renew the peacekeeping mission, MINURSO. Renewed peace talks that began in 2018 have been stalled since the UN Secretary General's Personal Envoy resigned in 2019 citing health reasons. Morocco is still offering autonomy to Western Sahara under Moroccan rule, whereas Polisario is insisting on a national referendum to decide the territory's future.

The conflict is occurring amid complex regional relationships. The African Union (AU) has supported the Saharawi's claims to self-determination and recognized the self-declared Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic as a full member state. Algeria and South Africa also back Polisario's cause, with the South African president (who currently chairs the AU) reiterating this support in February 2020. However, Morocco rejoined the AU in 2017 following a 33-year absence, which may lend it more leverage within the AU. Another uncertainty in the region is Algeria's ongoing political transition following the downfall of its long-standing leader, Bouteflika, in 2019.

In a surprising development, the United States announced in December 2020 that it recognized Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara. This move accompanied Morocco's decision to recognize the state of Israel in a deal brokered by the Trump Administration. This recognition marked a significant change from the United States' historical stance of not explicitly taking sides. The Trump Administration had also broken with previous U.S. policy by threatening in 2018 to withdraw U.S. support from MINURSO to incentivize negotiations.

Given bipartisan Congressional condemnation of Trump's recognition announcement, the incoming Biden Administration could reverse course and revert to the earlier U.S. stance. This would mean taking its cue from the UN and supporting negotiations between the parties. Yet, with the greater Sahel region growing increasingly insecure over the last 30 years, countering violent extremism there has become a priority for the U.S. Government. Some in Washington are concerned that an independent Western Sahara could create a power vacuum that radical groups could exploit to gain territory and set up operations. If this view prevails, the new administration may opt against expending political capital on the Western Sahara sovereignty issue to avoid angering Morocco in the context of a deteriorating security environment in the greater Sahel.

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What the Crisis in Ethiopia Entails for Bordering States

Ms. Monique Walker

Months of escalating tensions between Ethiopia's government in Addis Ababa and leaders from the country's northern Tigray region erupted into military conflict in November 2020, threatening to tip the country into civil war. The effects of Ethiopia's federal government declaring war on its northern Tigray state threatens the stability of one of the world's most strategic regions: the Horn of Africa. Tigrayan forces and the Ethiopian national military have clashed, and Amnesty International has recorded evidence of the alleged massacre of civilians. Hundreds of people have been reported dead and thousands of civilians have fled and sought refuge in neighboring states. Violence in the region has continued to escalate and so have issues with displacement.

The conflict could very well spread to other parts of Ethiopia. A prolonged dispute between well-armed groups inside of Ethiopia could send hundreds of thousands of refugees across borders, disrupt trade routes, and force Addis Ababa to abandon its role of anchor state and enforcer in the volatile Horn of Africa. The conflict could produce one of the largest cases of displacement the world has ever seen, and poses a major threat to international peace and security. States such as Sudan and Somalia are nowhere near prepared to house hundreds of thousands of refugees that could result from an Ethiopian civil war. Both countries have been affected by the violent engagement as a consequence of Ethiopia's continued perpetuation of the dispute. The broader consequences of more violence in Ethiopia include increased poverty rates and further instability in a state already reeling from the coronavirus pandemic, climatic shocks, and devastating locust plagues.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees views the situation as a full-scale humanitarian crisis, with destabilizing consequences far beyond Ethiopia's border. The African Union (AU) and United Nations have called for dialogue, and Tigrayan officials appear open to a role for the AU. Experts agree that the military escalation in Ethiopia threatens the stability of the whole country and region. Given Ethiopia's size and its significance within the Horn of Africa and wider Red Sea region, the scale and consequences of a civil war would be dire. If the violence continues, international donors may need to re-evaluate the foreign aid they give to Ethiopia as well as their close partnership with the country's current leader.

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TRADE, INVESTMENT, AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Africa's Response in the Wake of the Pandemic: The Economy Versus Lockdown

Mr. George Boateng and Ms. Beatrice Dankyi

COVID-19 is testing health schemes and policy responses globally. The public health systems of Africa, with an average 1:5,000 physician-patient ratio,[20] are highly susceptible to a still evolving pandemic. The World Bank reported a decline in economic growth in Africa in 2020 due to the pandemic—leading to Africa's first recession in 25 years. Additionally, the African Development Bank estimates continent-wide losses of up to USD$100 billion due to falls in commodity prices.

Since the pandemic's inception, African countries have responded with some successes—Nigeria was the first African country to sequence the SARS-CoV-2 genome,[21] while South Africa led the continent in testing per capita. About 42 African countries applied various levels of lockdowns. To support pandemic-related countermeasures, Senegal created a Resilience Program to offset income losses and purchased food for one million poor households. Ghana launched a fund to support businesses, paid consumers' utility bills, and offered food assistance. Angola, Egypt, Gabon, Kenya, and Rwanda, among others, adopted similar economic stimuli.

Some African countries instituted mandatory wearing of protective masks following easing of movement restrictions. Others, including Tanzania, and Guinea-Bissau, ordered shipments of Madagascar's herbal "cure" for COVID-19. In partnership, the African Union's Centers for Disease Control (Africa CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) launched an expert advisory panel to provide support as well as independent scientific advice on COVID-related issues, including the safety and efficacy of traditional medicine therapies. They also offered to do clinical trials to test the viability of the Pan-African Clinical Trials registry. Furthermore, the Africa CDC launched a response fund aiming to raise USD$150 million to prevent COVID-19 transmission and another USD$400 million to support the procurement of essential medical supplies, and enhanced testing and tracing across the continent.

Technological innovation was critical in African countries' responses. For example, Kenya converted existing factories into mask production sites, Ghana used drones to deliver samples to testing sites and retooled factories for hand sanitizer production, and Rwanda deployed drones to increase health awareness through in-flight public broadcasts. Also, Kenya, South Africa, Egypt, and Morocco launched e-learning platforms to facilitate home-schooling.

Concerns of a second wave of COVID-19 are fueling uncertainty in Africa. But decisive leadership and innovation can continue to spur Africa's efforts to fight COVID-19 and stave off economic recession.

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African Countries Face a Debt Crisis

Mr. Ian Gorecki

While concern over sovereign debts in Africa has been rising for years, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought the issue to a head. The International Monetary Fund's November 2020 debt stability assessments of low-income countries lists six low-income African countries as currently in debt distress: the Republic of the Congo, Mozambique, São Tomé and Príncipe, Somalia, Sudan, and Zimbabwe—with another 14 at high risk. The pandemic-driven global recession has aggravated this, with public debt in Sub-Saharan Africa rising from 56.4 percent to 65.6 percent of GDP according to the Financial Times. In November, Zambia became the first African country to default on its debt payments since the beginning of the pandemic.

To avoid a major crisis, the G-20 established the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) last May, freezing bilateral debt service for some countries through mid-2021. However, the DSSI does not affect multilateral or private debts, and fails to address debt restructuring—which is made more complicated by the large roles of China and private lenders. While many African and international leaders have called for more comprehensive measures, the G-20 is divided: the U.S. opposes the use of special drawing rights, and China is skeptical of debt relief.

This debt crisis is not merely due to African governments spending more than their counterparts in other parts of the world. African countries generally have lower debt-to-GDP rates than the U.S. or many European countries, but face greater fiscal distress—in part due to the nature of their loans. The Inter Press Service reports that while the U.S. and European governments benefit from interest rates around 0 percent, most African countries pay between 5-16 percent. This two-tiered system limits African governments' ability to react to economic crisis—including the ongoing COVID-19-induced recession—while saddling them with crippling debt.

This is not to say that all of the African governments struggling with debt are entirely blameless. Many previously benefited from debt forgiveness, only to find themselves struggling again now. Some African countries have used loans to pay for infrastructure projects that have failed to generate enough income or economic growth to offset the cost of debt service, while others have completely misallocated their loan funds. In these cases, poor management of loan funds has eliminated any potential gain from these very expensive loans.

How the debt crisis is addressed will shape Africa's economic recovery from COVID-19. Comprehensive debt restructuring paired with improvements in accountability and public management of borrowed funds would give highly-indebted African countries breathing room to address the economic crisis and move forward in a more sustainable direction. Conversely, a failure to address unsustainable debt payments would have a dire impact on the continent's ability to recover and prosper.

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Africa's Digital Journey—Interrupted, Not Halted

Ms. Viola A. Llewellyn

Events in 2019 promised a coming burst of economic activity in Africa. Africans eagerly celebrated the African Continental Free Trade Agreement and took some steps on the journey toward Africa's digital destination. Then along came COVID-19 in early 2020. Amongst its casualties was Africa's digital journey, which had been taking Africans to the "land of financial and digital inclusion." Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic forced the world to go on pause, digital innovators across industries jumped at the opportunity to capitalize on the new reality. *Business is not as usual, and the digital divide cannot be bridged.*

Africa's previous narrative around internet penetration and access to finance was already of concern, but in 2020 COVID-19 magnified this. Some informal sector and last-mile entrepreneurs had neither the digital literacy nor the incentive to jump Africa's digital divide and gain or provide access to services that were no longer available in person. Stuck on the other side of the divide were regulators, who admired the academic elegance of digital currencies but failed both to address the policy and legal framework implications, and to develop a digital response to pandemic-driven economic instability.

Addressing disaster planning and recovery with digital solutions has far-reaching ramifications that Africa's regulators have struggled with. The big insight from 2020 is that economic stability in Africa requires a long-term blended view on policy development and digital engagement, which in 2021 must include digital scenario development—i.e., a sandbox in which to model economic outcomes.

The existing model of governance and the regulatory posture in some African countries have not been effective in supporting SMEs during COVID-19. The pandemic presents an opportunity to drive forward digital adoption. Africa needs to diversify its response toolkit by mobilizing young, tech-savvy innovators to help bring regulators up to speed on technology development, which currently out-paces policy response. A digital game plan is essential for Africa to be a full global partner.

It would be a game-changer if Africa and the U.S. were to build upon the foundation of the African Growth and Opportunity Act and transition to a harmonized, digital partnership enabling the exportation of African technological innovation and services. This would be a meaningful milestone on the way to Africa's digital destination.

As the old saying goes: All journeys start with a single step, no matter how far the destination.

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Making Remote Work Work for Africa, with U.S. Collaboration

Ms. Liz Kitoyi and Ms. Garnett Achieng'

As COVID-19 rapidly spread across the world, halting business and travel, people around the globe shifted to working from home, relying on technology to earn their incomes and get work done. According to a September 2020 Gallup poll on COVID-19 and Remote Work,[22] two-thirds of Americans who have been working remotely during the pandemic would like to continue to do so, meaning this trend is likely here to stay.

Conversely, in Africa, remote work culture has yet to kick off in many countries, as some Africans still hold negative perceptions toward it. In Uganda, for instance, researchers found that freelancers often had difficulty[23] explaining what they did for a living as many Ugandans did not understand internet-based jobs. In Ghana and Nigeria, working virtually is often looked upon suspiciously[24] because of the prevalence of digital scamming networks. Other myths about remote work in Africa revolve around management and productivity. Furthermore, in many African countries, the lack of constant connectivity and high cost of internet data hinder employees from staying online.

Although the online pivot has been challenging for Africa, it has nonetheless become clear that remote work is the future, and Africa's workforce must prepare to embrace it. One potentially positive outcome for the United States is a realization that, given the large pool of African youth seeking employment, American business owners can find highly educated, talented Africans to hire.

To ensure a win-win outcome, both the public and private sectors in the U.S. and Africa must urgently invest in digital skills training for remote work. These skills include writing, social media management, relationship-building, networking, strategic communications/branding, and digital etiquette. Moreover, U.S. policy for small businesses should allow them to more easily employ Africans, as this would allow for a more widely distributed workforce and growth in new markets. At the same time, attention must be paid to ensure fair compensation in order to avoid the exploitation of African talent. The transition to remote work in Africa can be a game-changer for Africans and U.S. businesses alike, but needs to be done equitably, strategically, and in alignment with existing work and life cultures.

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Agricultural Productivity, Resilience, and Economic Transformation in Sub-Saharan Africa

Dr. Adesoji Adelaja, Dr. Thomas S. Jayne, Dr. Louise Fox, and Dr. Keith Fuglie

In 2020, USAID's Board for International Food and Agricultural Development requested the four co-authors of this piece to review the role of agriculture in economic transformation and progress toward resilience in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), with consideration for the varying challenges facing fragile, low-income, lower-middle-income, and resource-rich countries. The resulting report highlighted several findings:

First, despite the challenges facing many SSA countries, there is evidence of significant economic transformation since the early 2000s. SSA achieved substantial progress in human development, with the greatest achievements obtained in lower-middle-income countries, and the least in resource-rich and fragile states. Second, since 2000, SSA has achieved the highest rate of agricultural growth of any region in the world. This contributed to rural poverty reduction and employment growth in agrifood systems and in non-farm sectors. Third, while agricultural growth was a key driver of SSA's economic transformation, it mostly came from cropped-area expansion rather than productivity growth. This highlights the need for greater investment in agricultural research, development, and extension.

Fourth, the most pressing need for all SSA countries is to recover from the economic and social setbacks of the current COVID-19 pandemic. Fifth, post-stabilization from COVID-19, SSA countries need to resume their economic progress by: (1) accelerating agricultural and scientific research and development; (2) improving the policy support environment for agricultural productivity growth; (3) expanding employment opportunities through growth and jobs-oriented policies; (4) expanding public investments that support private investments; (5) investing in human and organizational capacities; (6) empowering women; (7) strengthening intra-African agricultural trade by supporting the African Continental Free Trade Agreement; (8) developing transport and communications infrastructure between African countries to promote competitiveness, and; (9) reducing the infrastructural deficit through greater infrastructure investment and efficiency, improved planning and project selection, and better environment for private financing.

The report concluded that economic transformation and resilience are mutually reinforcing, but fragile and resource-rich countries face added problems that require unique strategies. Therefore, a balanced approach that considers the full range of actions necessary to achieve economic transformation is required to capture the synergies between growth in agriculture, downstream value chains, non-farm sectors, education, governance, water, sanitation, health, and infrastructure. As USAID engages with Africa in the coming years under the new Biden Administration, it would be well served by adopting such a balanced approach.

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Sovereign Wealth Funds in Africa: Getting the Message and Aims Right

Mr. Munashe Matambo and Dr. Adam Dixon

Establishing a sovereign wealth fund (SWF) has become a common policy decision among African governments over the past decade, particularly as a tool to manage natural resource revenues. As of November 2020, 22 SWFs had been established in Africa, with another seven on the drawing board. While there can be benefits to establishing a SWF, it is important to stress that successful SWFs such as Botswana's Pula Fund are by-products of prudent resource revenue management frameworks and robust macroeconomic policies. A SWF only makes sense in countries that have robust mechanisms for capturing and accounting for resource rents, and a budgetary framework that channels those rents to broad-based and inclusive social and economic development. The benefit of a SWF is that it can provide financial stability over time by taking in more resource rents than can be feasibly absorbed by the domestic economy during peaks in the commodity-price cycle, as well as by releasing cash to the government during economic downturns or shocks in order to mitigate the worst effects and retain existing development gains.

The U.S. government has promoted the creation of SWFs in Africa, for example in Mozambique in 2020. In October, the central bank of Mozambique announced an ambitious plan to establish a SWF to manage the government's projected USD$96 billion revenue from new hydrocarbon projects and other extractive industries. The plan was supported by a USD$300,000 grant from the U.S. State Department's Fiscal Transparency Fund to help *N'Weti*, a non-profit NGO, lead a national dialogue surrounding the proposal to establish the SWF. This is a positive development, as there should be broader public understanding around what a SWF is and why a government would want to save resource revenues. But rather than focusing solely on the issue of saving, the dialogue needs to be framed around the SWF as a tool to support sustainable long-term public spending and investment in Mozambique. Leaving future generations with a healthy and robust economy and society is better than leaving them with a bank account.

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AFRICA'S EVOLVING ROLE IN THE GLOBAL ARENA

Making Multinational Corporations Respect Human Rights and the Environment in Africa

Mr. Yusuf Kenan Küçük

On November 29, 2020, Switzerland held a referendum on a popular initiative aimed at holding Swiss-based multinational companies accountable for their human rights and environmental practices in foreign countries. Even though the popular vote was in favor, lack of approval by a majority of the country's 26 cantons led to rejection of the initiative.

While this result could be seen as a "win" for multinationals, there is nonetheless a growing trend in Europe calling on multinational corporations to adopt more responsible and sustainable practices nationally and internationally. France took a pioneering step in 2017 by introducing the "Duty of Vigilance Law," which enables victims of corporate actions to seek remedies before French courts. Similar measures are under consideration in Germany and several other European countries. At a wider level, the European Union expressed in April 2020 its intention to adopt requirements for human rights and environmental due diligence for corporations and their supply chains.

These meaningful initiatives certainly concern the global South, notably Africa. The continent has been a high-yielding ground for multinational firms since the start of the colonial period. However, profits come with a heavy price for Africans when some multinationals do not respect human rights and the environment. Many companies have gotten away with unsustainable and harmful practices mainly due to their significant negotiating power as well as political corruption in the host countries. The growing trend of enabling victims to seek remedies outside their own countries can play a decisive role in deterring multinationals from engaging in harmful activities.

Ensuring corporate respect for human rights and the environment is crucial for sustainable development and requires concerted ownership by all stakeholders. Prior voluntary measures, such as the United Nation's Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (2011), have proven ineffective. Recent European initiatives alone might not suffice to end misconduct by multinational corporations. Therefore, similar steps by the incoming U.S. administration and growing local awareness in Africa can help strengthen corporate social responsibility and accountability on the continent. In the final analysis, it is primarily Africans themselves, through their ownership of the issue at both national and regional levels, who can make multinationals respect their fundamental rights and aspirations for a sustainable future.

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Turkey is Here to Stay Amid Challenges to its Ambitious Africa Strategy

Dr. Elem Eyrice Tepeciklioglu

The third Turkey-Africa Summit was due to take place in April 2020, but was postponed because of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this setback, Turkey was quick to engage in coronavirus diplomacy in an effort to boost its reputation across the world. Although struggling with the outbreak's domestic impact, Turkey was among the first countries to send medical supplies to African countries in order to help them fight the coronavirus pandemic. Recipients included Somalia, Sudan, Niger, and Chad, all of which already received significant amounts of Turkish humanitarian aid. Turkish medical equipment was also delivered to South Africa, one of Africa's most heavily virus-affected countries. In short, Turkey's coronavirus diplomacy aims at presenting itself as a rising and reliable donor country in the middle of the ongoing pandemic.

Yet, the country's engagement with Africa in 2020 went beyond COVID-19 diplomacy, and was marked mostly by its deep involvement in the ongoing Libyan civil conflict. Ankara attaches utmost importance to the stability of oil-rich Libya, which has been divided by two rival groups: Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA); and the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) led by Fayez al-Sarraj. Turkey has long been providing diplomatic, logistical, and military support to the latter, and its diplomatic interventions have been instrumental in the withdrawal of LNA forces from the capital of Tripoli. Also, in 2020 Libya was the first African country to receive Turkish medical aid.

Ankara hopes not only to get a strong return on the billions invested in Libya's construction sector by Turkish companies during the Gaddafi-era, but also to secure its maritime agenda in the Eastern Mediterranean. In pursuing these goals, however, Turkey finds itself at odds with other external players, most notably Russia. In any case, with various political, geostrategic, and economic interests at stake, Turkey won't be disengaging from Libya anytime soon.

Turkey's increasing involvement in Libya came at a time when the Turkish economy was hit hard by the pandemic. Although Ankara has benefited from its coronavirus diplomacy, the pandemic has nonetheless revealed its own economic vulnerability. As a result, Turkey's African engagement in the post-COVID-19 era can be expected to slow down, while at the same time Ankara will likely reiterate its commitment to sustaining its relationship with the continent, particularly in terms of preserving Turkish-African trade relations.

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Africa and COVID-19: Reflecting on Local African Knowledge and Agency

Mr. Gregory Gondwe and Mr. Lawrence Kamanga

Notwithstanding the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, little substantive evidence is provided by Africans at the grassroots level about the actual effects of the pandemic. Most people in Africa have to rely on outside sources to provide them with information about the state of the pandemic in their local areas. This has led to questions of whether we can truly know the real impact of the pandemic in Africa. The Africa Centers for Disease Control (Africa CDC) has a critical role to play in bringing African research and knowledge to the forefront to minimize this dependency.

The reality is that Africa suffers from the devaluation of its own knowledge, such that whatever information is African-sourced is perceived as either inept or having nothing to contribute to global epistemologies. Unfortunately, this situation is emblematic of the widespread perception of Africa: dependent on others and failing to harness its extraordinary untapped potential. This is demonstrated by the way most African leaders, including in the Africa CDC, responded to claims by some Africans that they had found a cure for COVID-19. We are not suggesting the claims were true; however, we believe there was enough justification for the Africa CDC, and the African Union, to explore these claims more expeditiously and in a way that demonstrated acceptance and value of African knowledge, and either confirm or scientifically debunk them.

Instead of continuing to be overly dependent on outside/Western solutions while neglecting its own knowledge and expertise, it is hoped that the lessons provided by COVID-19 will be built upon. COVID-19 has presented an opportunity to utilize African knowledge, including tapping into African traditional medicine and supporting African-based research to address Africa's development and health needs, including in fighting future pandemics. Only Africans can make African knowledge impactful, and this can be done by promoting African research rather than downplaying local knowledge.

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Africa's Youth Find Innovative Approaches to Combat COVID-19

Ms. Gamuchirai Mhute

The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic has prompted innovations in Africa to help combat its spread. At the beginning of the pandemic, many predicted that Africa, due to its limited healthcare infrastructures and technological resources, would struggle to prevent COVID-19 from devastating the continent. Instead, innovators across Africa have responded to the challenges of the pandemic with several creative inventions. Most notably, many of these innovators are young Africans.

As highlighted by the British Broadcasting Corporation, some examples include a nine-year-old student from Kenya, Stephen Wamukota, who invented a wooden hand-washing machine to help reduce the spread of COVID-19. A 20-year-old engineering student from Nigeria, Usman Dalhatu, built a portable automatic ventilator to help patients with breathing problems. Engineering students from the Senegal Dakar Polytechnic School built a multifunctional medical robot to lessen the load on health care workers. As highlighted by Voice of America, young Senegalese graffiti artists are engaging in the fight against COVID-19 by creating murals to spread information, notify the population, and support healthcare personnel. The United Nations highlighted 23-year-old Sam Masikini, who designed an offline mobile learning app called "Inspire" in Malawi to help out-of-school students gain access to e-learning in a country with low digital literacy. The United Nations also singled out 26-year-old Mahmoud el-Komy from Egypt who designed the Cira-03 robot to help limit healthcare personnel's exposure to the virus.

According to United Nations statistics, Africa is the world's youngest continent, with 1.2 billion people between the ages of 15 and 24. This number is estimated to increase to 1.3 billion by 2030. With this in mind, Africa offers a distinct and powerful opportunity for youth empowerment and development. The United States seeks to engage with and invest in the emerging generation of African leaders via the Department of State's Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI). Since its launch 10 years ago, YALI has made a significant impact on the U.S.'s soft power and engagement with Africa's youth. Africa's youth-led COVID-19-related innovations demonstrate that there are additional creative ways for the U.S. to help advance youth development in Africa. As the next U.S. administration starts shaping its policy toward Africa, it should consider expanding programming to support youth development in Africa. Furthermore, African governments should continue to create empowering spaces for the continent's young leaders. If Africa's youth are given the opportunities they need to thrive, they can help bring about meaningful change and shape Africa's post-pandemic future for the better.

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