Forecasting the Future of Democracy, Conflict, and Displacement in Africa: An Analysis of 2023

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FEBRUARY 2023

The Reformers' Initiative for Development in Africa (Reformers of Africa), a non-profit, pan-African civic-tech organization based in Nigeria, provides analysis and insights on participatory governance, digital social innovation, peace and government accountability in Africa.

Its three major tasks are to:

- Produce policy-relevant and data-driven research on emerging challenges to open governance, accountability, transparency, and civic participation in Africa.
- Formulate and recommend policies, dedicated to shaking off public complacency and stimulating citizens' participation in the decision-making process.
- Design and deliver a social accountability project, Citizens Watch— a digital tool to help citizens track government promises and participate in policymaking and implementation.

Our mission is to conduct research and analyse data that provides authoritative and accurate evidence to support Reformers of Africa's advocacy work for institutional reforms and to influence social change in Africa.

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SUMMARY

The political landscape of Africa is constantly shifting and evolving, and the upcoming presidential elections in various countries may have far-reaching implications for the stability and security of the region. The continued armed conflicts and the threat of terrorism in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel raise serious concerns about the potential for further destabilisation and the exacerbation of humanitarian crises. The protracted displacement of refugees, combined with the Cessation Clause and ineffective durable solutions offered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), pose a significant challenge for the region, leaving hundreds of thousands of former refugees without access to essential resources and support.

Furthermore, the potential for political leaders to subvert the democratic process and tighten their grip on power poses a significant threat to the advancement of democracy in Africa. The results of Presidential Elections in Nigeria, Gabon, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Somaliland, Sudan, and Zimbabwe, and the potential for new political forces to challenge established elites will have a profound impact on the future of the continent. The prospects for peace in the Sahel and Horn of Africa remain uncertain, and the possibility of significant changes or challenges cannot be dismissed. While worst-case scenarios may seem unlikely, it is important to remain vigilant and prepare for potential challenges.

My analysis focuses on the potential outcomes of the 2023 elections and the prospects for peace in the Sahel and Horn of Africa. Additionally, I examine the post-refugee situations in Africa, with a particular focus on the challenges faced by former refugees and the efficacy of durable solutions offered by the UNHCR. It is imperative to consider these issues in order to create a stable and secure future for the people of Africa.

CAN NEW POLITICAL FORCES EFFECTIVELY CHALLENGE ESTABLISHED ELITES IN THE 2023 ELECTIONS?

In 2023, several African countries will hold presidential elections that offer a chance for political change. [1] These elections have the potential to shape the future of the region and impact democracy in Africa. On one hand, traditional political parties will have the opportunity to retain power and bring about positive change by continuing to implement policies that improve the lives of citizens. These parties have the experience and resources to govern effectively and address pressing issues such as socio-economic development, governance, and security. On the other hand, new political forces have a chance to challenge established elites and secure power. These forces are driven by fresh ideas and a desire for change, and they offer an alternative vision for the future of the country. New political forces can bring new perspectives and solutions to long-standing problems, and they have the potential to shake up the status quo and bring about meaningful change.

New political forces are a vital component of politics and governance, and they should be approached realistically. They are driven by vision, passion, and necessity and can occur at various levels, involving different actors, and manifesting in different spaces and times. They play a crucial role in driving political change and can lead to revolutionary moments. [2] The approach to governance and the questions asked must be different if the quest for alternatives is integral to everyday life and politics, rather than just revolutionary change. This is a crucial consideration in Africa's rich history of social movements, which have a long legacy of resistance against oppressive policies and rulership. [3] However, the challenge has always been how to convert resistance into power to push for alternatives and change national governance.

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My analysis takes a deeper look at the underlying factors at play in these elections, focusing on the conceptual and empirical angles. I use Nigeria and Zimbabwe as prime examples to illustrate the challenges and opportunities presented by these elections. Achieving collective change in the upcoming elections in Nigeria, Zimbabwe and other African countries is the responsibility of all who seek a just, peaceful, and prosperous continent. Addressing the root causes of socio-economic underdevelopment and poor governance will require a concerted effort from all stakeholders.

The Opportunities

The recent fall of incumbents and ruling candidates in countries such as Kenya, Malawi, and Zambia has raised hopes for change in the upcoming 2023 Presidential elections in other countries like Zimbabwe and Nigeria. [4] In Kenya, Mr William Ruto, defeated ex-Prime Minister Raila Odinga in the recent election.[5] Similarly, in Malawi, Lazarus Chakwera, who was part of an alliance of 9 political parties, defeated the incumbent president Peter Mutharika in the 2020 election.[6] **In Zambia, the opposition candidate emerged victorious in the recent elections.**[7] These results demonstrate that change is possible, even in countries where ruling parties have been in power for several consecutive terms. It is also noteworthy that the opposition candidates were able to mobilise support from different sectors of society and were able to articulate a vision that resonated with a large number of voters.

Source: Wikipedia; Image of President of Kenya, Malawi and Zambia

Moreover, the recent political changes in Kenya, Malawi, and Zambia also highlight the importance of a vibrant civil society, a free press, and an engaged citizenry in the democratic process. [8] These institutions provide the necessary checks and balances to ensure that the political process remains transparent, fair, and credible. In addition, the role of opposition parties in providing a credible alternative to the ruling party is crucial in maintaining a healthy democracy. These developments have shown that democracy is not a one-time event, but a continuous process that requires the active participation of citizens and all stakeholders in society. Indeed, citizens have the power to hold their leaders accountable and to bring about change through the ballot box.

The 2023 Presidential elections in Zimbabwe and Nigeria will be an opportunity to build on these recent developments and to bring about positive change. As the citizens of these countries go to the polls, they will have the power to shape their future and to determine the direction their countries will take. The hope is that these elections will be peaceful, transparent, and credible, and that they will result in the peaceful transfer of power. This will be an important step in consolidating the democratic process and ensuring that the gains made in recent years are not lost. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen whether the same momentum for change will be observed in the upcoming presidential elections in Zimbabwe and Nigeria, but the recent examples from Kenya, Malawi, and Zambia give reason for optimism.

https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/12/28/africa-2023-preview-nigeria-elections/

The Risks

While these elections have the potential to bring about positive developments, they also pose risks.[9] The outcome of these elections has the potential to create instability and social unrest if the results are perceived as unfair or if the losing parties reject the outcome. Social unrest can be sparked by disinformation campaigns and discontent with the candidate declared as winner by the electoral commission.[10] Instability can be occasioned with widespread protests, large-scale demonstrations, and labor strikes across multiple countries.[11] Political tensions can escalate and lead to violence if the process is not transparent and credible.[12] In some cases, this can even result in civil unrest, which can have devastating consequences for the stability of the country and the region as a whole.[13]

Furthermore, the rise of new political forces can create challenges for established parties, leading to political gridlock and policy paralysis. This can negatively impact the functioning of government, slow down economic growth, and disrupt the lives of citizens.

It is important that all parties involved in the electoral process ensure that the elections are free, fair, and transparent. This will help to ensure that the results are accepted by all parties, reducing the risk of instability and social unrest. A credible and transparent electoral process will also help to build trust in the political system and strengthen the foundations of democracy in Africa.

The Challenges

New political forces face challenges in Nigeria and Zimbabwe due to the timing, phasing, and sequencing of change.[14] Alliance and coalition-building is needed and it should not be assumed that there is a ready-made and willing constituency for alternatives. Political and civic education is necessary to mobilise active citizenship and sustain alternatives that negate established practices of cronyism, maladministration and abuse. It is important to examine the motivations behind new political forces and determine if they are truly committed to changing the status quo or if they are simply seeking to secure power for themselves. The role of civil society and civic organisations in providing a platform for critical engagement with political actors and alternatives is critical in ensuring that the candidates put forward by new political forces are genuinely committed to positive change. The mobilisation of voters is crucial in achieving change through the ballot box,[15] but sustained efforts are required to build and sustain alternative visions, practices, and narratives.

https://issafrica.org/iss-today/slim-chance-that-zimbabwes-2023-elections-will-be-competitive

Some citizens in Nigeria and Zimbabwe have embraced certain Presidential candidates like **Peter Obi** of the Labour Party; and **Nelson Chamisa** of the Citizens Coalition For Change (CCC) as "alternative politics" but it is debated if this can truly be considered as alternative as it still plays out within the framework of the established political status quo, primarily dedicated to competing for political power. **Peter Obi** was previously a Governor under APGA and member of PDP, before joining the Labour Party.[16] **Nelson Chamisa** served as Minister under the Government of National Unity, before joining the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and now the CCC. [17]

The opposition in Nigeria and Zimbabwe also face several weaknesses that may hinder their ability to challenge the ruling parties in the upcoming presidential elections.[18] One major weakness is the lack of unity and cohesion within the opposition. In Nigeria, the opposition is divided into several factions and parties, which makes it difficult for them to present a unified front against the ruling party.[19] Similarly, in Zimbabwe, the opposition is also divided and has struggled to form a coalition that can effectively challenge the ruling party. [20]   The formation of the CCC is a sign of greed that can cost them credibility vote, as it seems that the main goal is to share power instead of having a clear agenda for the country. As a result, it is uncertain whether the upcoming presidential elections in these countries will be credible.

The Way Forward

To foster a political system that is both inclusive and developmental, it may be necessary to revamp the current majoritarian "winner takes all" electoral system. This is especially relevant for the upcoming 2023 Presidential elections in Nigeria and Zimbabwe where a close race is anticipated.[21] As former Governor of Ekiti State, Dr Kayode Fayemi has pointed out, a candidate who wins with only 50.5% of the vote may not bring stability or foster alternative politics.[22] An electoral system that prioritises accommodation and inclusivity is crucial for establishing a sustainable democracy in a pluralistic and divided society. However, the question remains: Do these countries have such an electoral system in place? If the 2023 presidential election outcome is uncertain, it may require the formation of a national unity government with a consensus-driven reform agenda.

The outcome of upcoming presidential elections in African countries is uncertain, with new political forces seeking to challenge established elites. For a successful outcome, these new forces must unite and form a national movement that brings together diverse groups of people from different regions. This movement must have a broad leadership consensus and a visionary leader who can rise above faction and shape a new national imagination.

The results of these elections will have a significant impact on the future of the region. It is imperative to guarantee that the elections are free, fair, and that all voices are heard. Whether the traditional political parties retain power or new political forces emerge, the ultimate objective should be to enhance the quality of life for citizens and establish a stable and secure future for the people of Africa.

WHAT ARE THE PROSPECTS FOR PEACE IN THE SAHEL AND HORN OF AFRICA?

Source: Sahel area view in africa http://aicd-africa.org/about-us

In 2023, Africa has the opportunity to tackle the conflicts that stem from underlying tensions and drivers that often spill over national borders.[23] This is a crucial moment for the continent, as resolving these conflicts will lay the foundation for long-term peace and stability.

Conflict in Africa is often rooted in complex issues such as competition over resources, unequal distribution of wealth, ethnic and religious differences, and disputes over land and borders.[24] Addressing these underlying drivers is key to preventing future conflicts and promoting lasting peace. In order to effectively address these conflicts, a comprehensive approach is necessary. This involves engaging with all stakeholders, including local communities, civil society organisations, and national governments. It also requires a deep understanding of the root causes of conflict and the development of tailored solutions that are sensitive to local contexts.

It is important to acknowledge that conflicts in Africa are often interconnected and can have a spillover effect across borders.[25] This highlights the importance of regional cooperation and collaboration between African nations. Working together to address common challenges and promote peace can help prevent the escalation of conflicts and promote stability across the continent.

1. The Conflict in Ethiopia reaches a Conclusive Cessation

After years of conflict, the war in Ethiopia's Tigray region has finally come to a close with the signing of a historic peace agreement.[26] The signing of the agreement in November 2022 marked a new chapter in the country's history and sparked hope for a brighter future. However, despite the peace agreement, several critical issues remain to be addressed.[27] These include land rights, disarmament, the removal of Eritrean troops, and the TPLF's role in regional administration.

The conflict began in late 2020 when Tigray's forces seized national military bases in the region. The fighting caused a staggering number of deaths, with estimates of 385,000 to 600,000 civilians killed by August 2022 and millions internally displaced.[28] Additionally, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), around 59,000 people have fled Ethiopia and sought refuge in eastern Sudan, putting them in need of humanitarian aid and protection.[29] This crisis is exacerbated by the fact that Ethiopia is already home to over 924,000 refugees and asylum seekers, mainly from South Sudan, Somalia, and Eritrea, making it the third-largest refugee-hosting country in Africa.[30] International non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and aid groups are facing challenges in providing crucial humanitarian aid and essential services as a result of the conflict in the Tigray region.

But, the future of Ethiopia and Eritrea looks promising, as projections indicate that the peace settlement between the TPLF and the Ethiopian government will be long-lasting.[31] This will be facilitated by the withdrawal of Eritrean troops, constitutional reforms, and the implementation of policies that address the root causes of the conflict.[32] The end of the war is also expected to trigger a series of economic reforms, including the devaluation of the currency and liberalization of industries, leading to a significant increase in foreign investment and economic growth.[33]

To ensure stability in the region, it is imperative that the government and TPLF work together towards a common goal. This includes implementing reforms that address the root causes of the conflict, promoting economic growth and development, and ensuring the well-being of all citizens. A united effort towards a peaceful and prosperous future is essential for the stability and security of the region.

2. *Insurgency in the Sahel poses Threat to Regional Stability*

https://www.voaafrica.com/a/insurgents-hit-burkina-faso-again/6688150.html

The Islamist insurgency in the Sahel region of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger continues to escalate, with Western leaders uncertain about how to respond.[34] Burkina Faso is in the direst situation, with 40% of its territory controlled by jihadist groups, causing widespread death and displacement.[35] In Mali, two coups in 2020 and 2021 have left the state largely absent in the far north, where ISIS and Al Qaeda-linked militants fight non-jihadist rebels.[36] In Niger, despite the integration of civilian militias into the security forces, there are concerns about potential hostility within the army due to a failed coup attempt against President Mohamed Bazoum in March 2021.[37]

The West's approach to the Islamist insurgency in the Sahel region is evolving. France has ended its operations in Mali due to tense relations with Bamako, but maintains bases in Niger.[38] The UN mission in Mali has been unable to make progress. The UN's intervention in the Sahel region has been unsuccessful, as evidenced by the failure of peacekeeping efforts in Mali and the eventual withdrawal of French troops after an extended stay. This raises the question of what holds the future of peace in the Sahel region. Is internal or external intervention/diplomacy the key to achieving stability in this area?

The West's main focus is now on preventing the spread of jihadist groups to the Gulf of Guinea.[39] Region-wide anger against France is rising due to a decade of failures and Russian disinformation.[40] A new approach is needed that focuses on mending intercommunal relations, winning support in rural areas, and potentially negotiating with militant leaders.

While insurgency has subsided in Nigeria under President Muhammadu Buhari's administration, a new threat has emerged that can put the nation in dire situation. The rise of an industry in kidnapping, banditry, and potential terrorist attacks in major cities like Lagos and Abuja has put the security of all Nigerians at risk.[41] This growing trend has expanded the boundaries of contemporary national insecurity, leaving citizens feeling vulnerable and uncertain. To combat this new threat, the Nigerian government must make addressing the post-Boko Haram issue a top priority in 2023, particularly with a non-military approach.

A Nigerian military officer briefs his working group during a Lake Chad Basin Multinational Joint Task Force planning and coordination exercise conducted at Douala Naval Base, Cameroon (April 26, 2017). US ARMY AFRICA

A non-military approach to insecurity would focus on addressing the root causes of the problem rather than relying on military force. This approach typically involves utilising a combination of social, economic, and political solutions to address the issues that contribute to insecurity.[42] Some examples of non-military approaches to insecurity include:

- Community Development Programs: These programs aim to empower communities by providing them with the resources and support they need to tackle their own security challenges.
- Social Services: Providing access to education, healthcare, and job training can help to reduce poverty and inequality, making communities less vulnerable to insecurity.
- Good Governance: Addressing corruption, promoting transparency, and protecting human rights are key components of good governance that can help to reduce insecurity.
- Economic Development: Encouraging economic growth and providing opportunities for employment can help to create stability and reduce poverty, thereby reducing the risk of insecurity.
- Conflict Resolution: Mediation and dialogue can be effective in resolving conflicts and reducing tensions between communities.

These non-military approaches to insecurity can be slow and challenging, but they can offer a long-term and sustainable solution to security challenges in Nigeria.[43] By addressing the root causes of insecurity, a non-military approach can help to build a safer and more stable future for all residents.

source: FT montage / Getty

However, neglecting to address this evolving threats will have far-reaching consequences that could impact the nation's economy, security, and quality of life.[44]
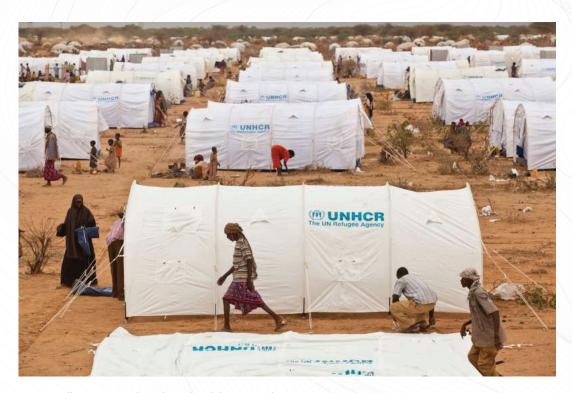
For starters, a decline in demand and market access in key commercial areas could occur, causing a slowdown in economic growth. Moreover, the absence of safety in major cities will result in a negative impact on business and leisure travel, as visitors and investors are deterred by the risks involved. This could lead to a significant decline in the already fragile tourism industry, causing further economic damage. Additionally, the increasing insecurity could cause an exacerbation of the already worsening cost of living and inflation, making life even more difficult for the average Nigerian.

It is time for the Nigerian government to act now and address this pressing issue. Failure to do so could lead to long-term consequences that could affect the security and stability of the nation for years to come. The future of Nigeria depends on it.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLDS WITH THE POST–REFUGEE SITUATIONS IN AFRICA?

The humanitarian crisis faced by refugees has taken center stage in recent years, with the UNHCR estimating that 78% of refugees are in a state of protracted displacement.[45] Many of these refugees have been in this situation for over two decades. However, this trend does not account for many long–term displaced populations in Africa who are no longer under the protection of the UNHCR. These individuals have been deemed "concluded" by the UNHCR, leaving them in a precarious and uncertain state.[46]

https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2011/8/4e4522ee9/unhcr-readies-transfer-somali-refugees-new-camp-areas.html

These population, classified as "residual refugees," have remained in exile despite the repatriation of their fellow nationals.[47] The termination of their refugee status means that they are no longer protected and can face negative consequences such as precarity, marginalisation, and detention. For example, there are still "residual" refugees from Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Rwanda who have been in camps in Nigeria, Ghana, and Guinea for more than 3 decades.[48]

Let's take a detour from the Forecast for a bit: Despite the importance of understanding the post-refugee experience, it remains under-researched in the field of refugee and forced migration studies. Scholars have called for a closer examination of this topic, as the experiences of "residual refugees" are often neglected in international refugee policy and national development planning.[49] This is where my thesis comes in.

My research seeks to explore the post-refugee status experience and to better understand how precarity and marginality are expressed and negotiated. I aim to shed light on the role of the host community in shaping these experiences and how they are contested. The literature on precarity and resistance is divided, with some arguing that the precariat lacks the capacity for social change, while others believe that the temporariness of precarity can lead to resistance and a struggle for power and resources. My project aims to explore this debate within the context of "residual" Liberian refugees in Nigeria and Ghana and provide a unique perspective on this important issue.

source: https://thenewdawnliberia.com/7000-liberians-to-be-repatriated-from-ghana/

Let's get back on track with the Forecast: As we enter the new year, a daunting reality is looming on the horizon – the number of refugees trapped in protracted displacement is expected to skyrocket. Tragically, more and more refugees are losing their status under the cessation clause, leaving them with no legal protection or assistance. However, there is hope.

Source: Ghana Refugee Board – https://www.grb.gov.gh/

To combat this growing crisis, it is vital that host governments, origin countries, and the UNHCR work together and empower refugees to play a key role in finding lasting solutions. Forced repatriation and local integration are not enough – refugees deserve the right to choose their own path to stability. By involving refugees in the process, we can ensure that they are fully invested in their future and not resistant to repatriation. The international community must also recognise the unique challenges faced by 'residual' refugees, who are often marginalised and overlooked. These 'residual' refugees deserve the same level of support and access to durable solutions as all other refugees.

It is time for a new approach to refugee displacement. We must not abandon these individuals who have already suffered so much – it is our responsibility to support them and ensure that they are not left behind.

About the Author

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Durodola, Tosin Samuel is a social anthropologist, research analyst, and policy communicator with a track record of awards, and work experience in research and sub-national governance initiatives in Africa. He specialises in displacement, humanitarian aid, politics, development, and security sector governance. He is a member of the Centre for Security Research SPS, and a Research Associate at the Reformers' Initiative for Development in Africa (Reformers of Africa).

He has worked with and collaborated extensively with relevant policy institutions such as Oxford University's Centre for Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS); Global Research Network's (GRN) Think Tank Programme on War, Conflict and Global Migration; Palgrave Macmillan; and French Institute for Research in Africa; amongst others. He is a recipient of the Global Thesis Award organised by Routledge and the Border Criminologies Network based at the Centre for Criminology, University of Oxford. Previously, he worked as a development practitioner and served as Special Assistant on Digital Communications to the Governor of Ekiti state, and currently works with other organisations involved in research on conflict, development, and migration.

Tosin was awarded the prestigious Graduate School of Social and Political Science (SSPS) funding to commence his PhD program at the Centre of African Studies, University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom. He holds M.A in African Studies (Diaspora and Transnational Studies) with the highest Distinction from the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. He completed his B. A (Hons) History and International Studies at Bowen University, Nigeria.

Acknowledgements

This Analysis was initially delivered at the Panel Discussion on "Africa 2023: Prospects and Forecasts" hosted by the University of Edinburgh and Royal African Society on Wednesday 25 January, 2023.

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