

Developments in African Governance since the Cold War: Beyond Cassandra and Pollyanna

Hazel McFerson

Abstract: Twenty years ago, most African countries seemed permanently mired in malgovernance and repression. The end of the Cold War triggered two contrasting developments: governance improvement associated with the end of superpower competition, and deterioration caused by the resurgence of suppressed ethnic conflicts. Based on a variety of evidence, three subperiods can be identified: fragile governance progress from 1989 to 1995; backsliding associated largely with civil conflict between 1996 and 2002; and resumption of progress in recent years. These broad trends mask major intercountry differences—with Ghana the best-known case of improvement and Zimbabwe the worst case of reversal. Overall, African governance is now somewhat better than it was two decades ago. However, the progress is fragile, and improvements in administrative and economic governance have lagged behind those on the political front. Consolidating democracy will thus require institutional capacity building through a combination of appropriate civil society efforts and constructive external pressure to strengthen accountability.

Résumé : Il y a vingt ans, la plupart des pays africains semblaient enfouis pour de bon sous les problèmes de mauvaise gestion et de répression. La fin de la guerre froide a déclenché deux impulsions contradictoires : une amélioration de la gestion gouvernementale associée à la fin de la compétition des superpouvoirs, et une détérioration causée par la résurgence des conflits ethniques. Trois périodes peuvent être identifiées si l'on se base sur les sources disponibles : Le progrès gouvernemental fragile entre 1989 et 1995 ; la régression due largement aux conflits civils entre 1996 et 2002 ; et le retour du progrès dans les dernières années. Ces tendances générales masquent des disparités majeures entre certains pays, comme le Ghana,

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cas modèle d'amélioration, et le Zimbabwe, à l'autre extrême des cas de régression. De façon générale, la gestion gouvernementale en Afrique est meilleure qu'il y a vingt ans. Cependant, le progrès effectué reste fragile, et les améliorations au niveau administratif et économique restent à désirer comparé aux améliorations du domaine politique. La consolidation de la démocratie va ainsi nécessiter un mouvement institutionnel demandant à la fois des efforts de la société civile et une pression constructive provenant de l'extérieur pour renforcer le niveau de déontologie gouvernementale.

"I Wan Bi President"

Every street go carry my name
 I go rename all University for de country
 All de towns go carry my name
 If dem publish newspaper or magazine
 Wen dey curse me even small
 Na bomb I go take teach dem lesson
I wan bi President.

Nigerian poet Ezenwa-Ohaeto, circa 1992

The Fluid Meaning of Governance

As presaged in general by Huntington (1991) and by McFerson (1992) for Africa, the year 1989 is now generally accepted as marking the beginning of sub-Saharan Africa's "democratization wave" (Rakner & van de Walle 2009)—mainly because the end of the Cold War relieved Africa from the pressures of superpower competition. A generation earlier, however, the end of colonialism had also given rise to democratic forms and modalities that eventually crumbled throughout much of the continent. Is the post-1989 "democratization wave" genuine and widespread? Has it been accompanied by the kinds of institutional development and improvements in public management necessary to consolidate it? What have we learned about African governance since then?¹

Governance, a term used almost only by academics just twenty years ago, has become the watchword for development theorists and international aid policymakers—as epitomized most recently by President Barack Obama's choice of Ghana, an example of substantial governance progress, for his first official visit to Africa in July 2009. Yet the concept continues to be elastic and is understood by different scholars and organizations in different ways. Under the umbrella of "governance" are placed such disparate considerations as the extent of civil liberties, the holding of regular and free elections, administrative effectiveness, public integrity, regulatory quality,

the rule of law and functioning of the judiciary, the risk of state failure, and so on.

Some major nongovernmental organizations focus on political freedoms and civil liberties; others choose to focus on public integrity and corruption; and various academics and think-tanks are concerned with other specific dimensions—such as political institutions or state fragility. The official aid organizations prefer the more limited constructs of administrative and economic governance—for example, the African Development Bank defines governance instrumentally as the manner by which government power is exercised for a country's social and economic development (see Boas 1998).

Governance is closely related to, but different from, democracy. While both concepts refer to processes rather than events, governance concerns primarily the manner in which power is *exercised*, while democracy encompasses also the manner in which power is *obtained*. The general assumption is that the two concepts tend to converge over time, mainly because apparently sound results obtained in arbitrary and authoritarian ways are likely to be ineffective or reversed in the long term. Similarly, exclusive concern with the quality of decisions without attention to the process of decision-making will eventually produce bad quality decisions. Thus corrupt political institutions have a major impact on the quality of governance (Ake 1996; Alence 2004), although the reverse is also true: improvements in governance are important for the achievement of “consolidated democracy” (Linz & Stepan 1996; Schedler 1998.) The argument that there is a mutual association between political and public management progress is confirmed by the findings of this article.

Measurement and Methodological Issues

A profusion of governance measures and indicators has emerged over the past fifteen years, and space limitations preclude a full discussion of the complex methodological issues involved (for a full analysis see Kaufmann, Kraay, & Mastruzzi 2007; McFerson 2009b; Rotberg 2008). However, a capsule summary of the main issues may help illuminate the uses and limitations of the evidence presented here.

The central methodological issue is whether governance should be understood only by its attributes (as measured by process indicators) or also by its impact (as measured also by outcome indicators). In brief, the existing measures can be classified in three categories: (1) comprehensive surveys of governance and corruption, (2) measures of civil liberties and human rights, and (3) specialized surveys. The three major comprehensive surveys are (1) the Transparency International (TI) survey of corruption perception; (2) the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI), which survey the governance attributes of accountability, participation, transparency, and rule of law; and for Africa, (3) the more recent Ibrahim Index of African

Governance, which is the only one that assigns comparable weight to the attributes of governance and to its outcomes. Each of these measures has pros and cons, and all can be criticized on some grounds.

The TI index, for example, has been criticized as being derived entirely from perceptions, and partly for that reason, to lag for years behind changes in corruption, whether positive or negative. The WGI have been faulted, among other things, for the relative nature of their country rankings and thus their inability to assess country-specific improvements over time, as well as an alleged bias toward the views of business elites. The Ibrahim Index includes measures only weakly related to governance and is unduly influenced by a country's recent economic performance and level of development. And even within the individual indices, inconsistencies surface among the various subindicators. For example, the substantial media freedom in Nigeria is at odds with the grave human rights problems of that country.

It is important to underline, however, that regardless of the respective strengths and weaknesses of the various governance measures, there is a remarkable degree of convergence of the country ranking results. This article, in contrast with other contributions that have drawn exclusively from one or another dimension or indicator of governance, assembles a large amount of evidence from a variety of sources to assess developments in the diverse aspects of governance in Africa during the last twenty years. The preponderance of evidence converges on the general conclusion that overall governance in Africa has improved. However, the governance progress has not been uniform across African countries, steady during the entire period, or balanced between the political and the economic/administrative dimensions—and the achievements remain fragile.

Early Political Progress

The end of the Cold War—conventionally dated to the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989—made it less tempting for the two superpowers to support repressive African regimes because they were “friendly” and oppose “unfriendly” democratic ones, and the disappearance of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991 eliminated altogether the root source of superpower competition for power and influence and the proxy battles on the continent of Africa. This enabled a new focus on the importance of good governance for development, which, combined with the impact of the revolution in information and communication technology, began to open the door to greater accountability and transparency in government and greater participation by civil society.

Because the emphasis on good governance as a prerequisite for development is comparatively recent, systematic indicators and surveys have been developed only from the mid-1990s; before then, indeed, there was almost a political correctness taboo on openly addressing the sensitive top-

ics of corruption and political malfeasance in former colonies, particularly in Africa. The major exception is the Freedom House annual global survey of political rights and civil liberties (see www.FreedomHouse.org for the subcomponents of the index and its methodology.) Table 1 shows the Freedom House classification of African countries in 1989 and 2008 according to the three categories of “free,” “partly free,” and “not free.”

It is evident from the table that most of the political improvement occurred in the early years after the end of the Cold War. The number of “free” countries stopped increasing after 1995, and the number of “not free” countries decreased by only five between 1995 and 2008—as opposed to the fourteen countries that had graduated out of the “not free” category in the previous five years. Nevertheless, the change over the last two decades is nothing short of remarkable: the number of African countries classified as “free” rose from just three before the fall of the Berlin Wall (Botswana, Gambia, and Mauritius) to ten, despite the military coup that caused the downgrading of Gambia to the “partly free” category. Equally noteworthy is that thirty-three African countries—fully three out of four—were classified as “not free” in 1989, compared to only fourteen countries—fewer than one out of three—in 2008.

This positive change is evidenced by another measure as well: before 1989 only Botswana and Mauritius had been holding regular multiparty elections, but since then thirty-nine countries have held “competitive” presidential elections and forty-one have held multiparty parliamentary elections (Rakner & van de Walle 2009). A majority of elections have been marred by irregularities, and major reversals have occurred in some countries. Still, they demonstrate at the very least the demise of the early post-colonial patronizing conventional wisdom that multiparty competition in Africa is unnecessary for democracy and inconsistent with local culture.

This evidence of substantial progress in political governance immediately after the end of the Cold War is supported by the conclusions of an early study (McFerson 1992) that classified African countries in 1989 and 1992 according to “representativeness” and “stability.” Because of the lack of systematic governance indicators at that time, this study had to rely on qualitative information gleaned from a large number of specialized magazines and periodicals focusing on Africa and cross-checked with personal communications from several individuals in some countries. In that study, a country was placed in the “representative” category if there was evidence that the population as a whole was “more supportive than not” of its government—whether or not formal elections had taken place or were manipulated in different ways. (The notion was thus akin to the concept of legitimacy.) “Stability” referred to adequate regime control over the bulk of the territory and lack of evidence of severe and mounting social tensions, large-scale communal violence, military coup potential, and the like. A country was placed in the “stable” category if the regime appeared “more likely than not” to remain in power in the foreseeable future. (The notion

Table 1. Changes in "Freedom" Rankings, African Countries, 1989–2008*

		"Free" Countries			"Partly Free" Countries			"Not Free" Countries		
		1995	2008	1989	1995	2008	1989	1995	2008	
3	Botswana Gambia Mauritius	Benin Botswana Cape Verde Lesotho Malawi Mali Mauritius Namibia S.Tomé & Principe S. Africa	Benin Botswana Cape Verde Ghana Lesotho Mali Mauritius Namibia S.Tomé & Principe S. Africa	Côte d'Ivoire Namibia Nigeria Senegal Sierra Leone South Africa Swaziland Uganda Zambia Zimbabwe	Burkina Faso Congo (B) Centr. Afr. Rep Comoros Eritrea Ethiopia Gabon Ghana Guinea- Bissau Madagascar Mozambique Niger Senegal Seychelles Tanzania Uganda Zambia Zimbabwe	Burkina Faso Burundi Centr.Afr.Rep. Comoros Djibouti Ethiopia Gabon Gambia Guinea- Bissau Kenya Liberia Madagascar Malawi Mozambique Niger Senegal Sierra Leone Tanzania Togo Uganda Zambia	Angola Benin Burkina Faso Burundi Cape Verde Cen.Afr.Rep Chad Comoros Congo (B) Congo (K) Eq. Guinea Ethiopia Gabon Guinea Guinea-Bissau Kenya Liberia Principe Seychelles Somalia Tanzania Togo	Angola Cameroon Chad Burundi Congo (K) Cote D'Ivoire Eq. Guinea Gambia Guinea Kenya Liberia Mauritania Nigeria Rwanda Sierra Leone Somalia Sudan Swaziland Togo	Angola Cameroon Chad Congo (B) Congo (K) Cote d'Ivoire Eq. Guinea Eritrea Guinea Rwanda Somalia Sudan Swaziland Zimbabwe	
		10	10	10	18	23	33	19	14	

Source: Freedom House, 1990, 2009.

* Note: Congo (B) stands for Congo-Brazzaville and denotes the Republic of Congo (former French colony); Congo (K) stands for Congo-Kinshasa, and denotes the Democratic Republic of Congo, ex-Zaire (former Belgian colony). Eritrea is not included in 1989 as it was not yet independent from Ethiopia.

was thus a precursor of the state fragility concepts underlying the recent Failed States Index—see www.Foreignpolicy.com.) The results are shown in table 2.²

Between 1989 and 1992, the number of countries classified as *both* representative and stable grew slightly from four to six, with the addition of newly independent Namibia and of Zambia after the election that ended the tenure of its first president, Kenneth Kaunda, and an additional eleven countries acquired a degree of political representativeness for the first time in their postindependence history. Although the fragility of this progress was demonstrated later by a return to repression and malgovernance (e.g., reversals in Congo Brazzaville, Côte d'Ivoire, and Togo), it proved durable in many other cases (e.g., Benin, Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Tanzania). Note, however, that the internal tensions mounting in several countries from the early 1990s were not yet evident in 1992, which led to the placement in the “stable” category of several repressive regimes that were in reality already tottering.

There is a high concordance between the countries classified as “unrepresentative” in table 2 and those listed as “not free” by Freedom House in table 1, suggesting that progress in political and civil liberties went hand in hand with improvement in legitimacy and stability. But the progress registered shortly after the Cold War came to a halt by the mid-1990s.

Developments in Economic Governance and Corruption

Since the mid-1990s it has been possible to assess governance trends on more solid evidentiary grounds. First the World Bank in 1992 and then the other multilateral development organizations developed a policy that explicitly recognized the importance of governance for development, and after 1996 they began to take the extent of corruption into consideration when determining the volume and modalities of aid to developing countries, including in Africa. (The anticorruption concern intensified after the Asian financial crisis of 1997–99.) Correspondingly, a massive effort was undertaken by international organizations to define and measure the principal dimensions of governance, while on a parallel track private foundations and entities were developing their own indices to measure the specific aspects of governance and political risk in countries in which they were interested.

The Worldwide Governance Indicators

The most comprehensive of such surveys is the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) survey. The WGI are assembled on the basis of a large number of sources and a variety of primary data, and they identify six core dimensions of governance: voice and accountability; political stability and absence of violence; government effectiveness; regulatory quality; rule of

Table 2. "Representativeness" and "Stability" in African Countries, 1989–1992

		1989				1992			
Representative Stable	Representative Unstable	Unrepresentative Stable	Unrepresentative Unstable	Representative Stable	Representative Unstable	Unrepresentative Stable	Unrepresentative Unstable		
Botswana Gambia Mauritius Senegal	Madagascar Tanzania Zimbabwe	Angola Benin Burkina Faso Burundi Cape Verde Cameroon Centr.Afr.Rep. Chad Comoros Congo Brazza. Cote d'Ivoire Equat. Guinea Ethiopia Gabon Ghana Guinea Guinea Bissau Kenya Lesotho Liberia Malawi Mali Mauritania Niger Nigeria Rwanda S. Tomé & Princ. Seychelles Somalia South Africa Swaziland Togo Uganda Zambia Zaire	Mozambique Namibia Sierra Leone Sudan	Botswana Gambia Mauritius Namibia Senegal Zambia	Benin Cape Verde Comoros Congo Brazza. Côte d'Ivoire Madagascar Niger São Tomé Sierra Leone Tanzania Togo	Burkina Faso Equat. Guinea Gabon Lesotho Malawi Seychelles Sudan Swaziland	Angola Burundi Cameroon CAR Chad Ethiopia Ghana Guinea Guinea-Bissau Kenya Liberia Mali Mauritania Mozambique Nigeria Rwanda Somalia South Africa Uganda Zaire Zimbabwe		

Source: McFerson (1992), based on data from Africa Confidential (www.africa-confidential.com), Africa News (www.africanews.com), Africa Report, and Jeune Afrique, as well as personal communications.

law; and control of corruption (see Kaufmann & Kraay 2008a for a detailed description).³ Table 3 shows the changes in worldwide percentile rankings of African countries from 1996 to 2008 in each of these six dimensions of governance.

Some country highlights: Botswana and Mauritius, traditionally the best-governed and best-managed countries in Africa, have been joined at the top of the class by Cape Verde, Ghana, Namibia, São Tomé and Príncipe, Seychelles, and South Africa. Not surprisingly, Somalia ranks consistently at the bottom, closely matched by Equatorial Guinea. Conversely, Rwanda has improved substantially in economic management during the last decade, and more recently Liberia and Sierra Leone, too, have shown encouraging governance improvement after the settlement of the civil conflict. Among the large countries, South Africa and Ghana have made remarkable progress—with Zimbabwe an equally remarkable instance of decline. And the major “problem” countries have remained the same throughout the period: Equatorial Guinea, Guinea, Somalia, Sudan, the two Congos (Republic of Congo [Congo Brazzaville] and the Democratic Republic of Congo [Congo Kinshasa, the former Zaire]).

For Africa as a whole during the period, the average percentile ranking in the major dimensions of voice and accountability, and political stability and absence of violence, did not change much. However, because of the relative nature of the WGI indicators and the worldwide improvement in governance during those years, this indicates proportionate progress in African countries. In contrast, administrative and economic governance—government effectiveness and regulatory quality—showed a relative deterioration.

In addition, a peculiar contradiction emerges between the significant decline in the indicator of rule of law and the equally significant improvement in the indicator of control of corruption. Either the effectiveness of law enforcement and justice administration worsened sharply in nongovernment sectors but improved vis-à-vis public officials (which would be counterintuitive), or the improvement in control of corruption was largely an illusion generated by the establishment of formal anticorruption organizations without much impact on public integrity. The latter hypothesis is supported by the evidence on perception of corruption, described next.

The Transparency International Corruption Perception Index

A major source of information on perceptions of public corruption, worldwide and beginning in 1998 on African countries, has been Transparency International (TI). Among other initiatives aimed at fostering public integrity, TI has elaborated a Corruption Perceptions Index (www.transparency.org), produced annually on the basis of large-scale surveys of relevant and informed opinion both within the country concerned and among external observers. As noted earlier, because perception inevitably lags behind

Table 3. Governance Indicators Percentile Rankings, 1996–2008

COUNTRY	Voice & Accountability				Government Effectiveness				Political Stability			
	1996	2000	2004	2008	1996	2000	2004	2008	1996	2000	2004	2008
Angola	9	8	13	17	3	1	19	30	4	5	9	14
Benin	66	60	52	58	88	70	46	57	61	48	37	36
Botswana	73	72	75	62	71	79	78	81	67	73	77	73
Burkina Faso	41	41	36	37	45	43	38	39	25	31	34	28
Burundi	8	4	13	28	5	2	1	10	15	4	7	10
Cameroon	13	16	19	18	12	28	27	28	9	24	21	20
Cape Verde	70	71	66	75	88	84	87	76	56	63	62	57
Central Afr. Rep.	33	27	16	20	38	12	13	7	18	5	2	3
Chad	33	20	15	9	22	11	12	4	27	29	13	3
Comoros	47	24	35	34	88	38	48	15	23	6	4	1
Congo (B)	33	5	23	15	20	15	15	25	7	3	9	8
Congo DRC	6	2	4	9	6	0	1	2	1	2	5	1
Côte d'Ivoire	26	12	10	13	40	20	2	5	42	22	8	7
Djibouti	26	25	24	16	51	30	38	38	14	12	31	14
Equatorial Guinea	7	6	4	3	32	45	41	40	4	4	6	4
Eritrea	16	12	1	1	53	13	25	20	39	15	12	5
Ethiopia	24	18	17	11	14	14	13	6	11	14	26	40
Gabon	37	36	25	24	33	56	54	53	13	32	25	26
Gambia	13	18	30	21	47	61	56	51	40	38	36	23
Ghana	39	48	56	60	39	38	49	47	40	58	47	52
Guinea	18	15	14	10	10	6	22	5	10	18	17	6
Guinea-Bissau	38	23	27	25	26	21	35	32	27	11	4	9
Kenya	25	24	43	43	24	15	16	12	48	27	27	32
Lesotho	43	33	45	50	63	47	62	43	64	52	46	46
Liberia	11	10	11	38	0	3	9	17	1	1	1	8
Madagascar	59	51	47	44	46	51	46	30	14	34	47	33
Malawi	40	45	33	42	37	27	43	46	26	45	22	30
Mali	67	56	57	57	64	52	59	36	24	22	40	22
Mauritania	21	26	15	23	63	51	42	18	65	49	48	15
Mauritius	74	80	75	74	72	72	82	76	73	69	74	71
Mozambique	50	44	48	48	19	46	44	56	47	42	44	43
Namibia	65	62	58	64	16	35	64	81	73	64	60	65
Niger	20	40	42	35	42	39	28	21	9	10	26	21
Nigeria	3	27	26	31	8	9	5	3	5	13	15	13
Rwanda	12	8	10	13	5	5	22	37	7	20	30	48
S. Tômé/Príncipe	64	59	52	56	88	80	67	55	26	32	23	25
Senegal	45	50	53	43	36	29	43	37	64	56	53	51
Seychelles	49	49	61	47	88	88	69	78	30	56	55	54
Sierra Leone	22	7	36	38	3	3	33	35	30	3	11	11
Somalia	2	2	2	4	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
South Africa	71	72	72	68	13	32	38	52	70	75	76	75
Sudan	1	3	5	4	1	2	4	2	3	9	9	5
Swaziland	17	10	11	14	44	41	53	52	45	25	21	30
Tanzania	29	35	35	45	34	31	31	45	20	39	42	39
Togo	19	13	12	16	27	39	32	40	25	9	6	4
Uganda	32	17	27	33	12	10	9	19	31	28	40	36
Zambia	31	36	37	46	29	33	51	55	29	14	19	29
Zimbabwe	29	16	6	8	25	11	8	9	41	17	10	2
Average	32.2	29.6	31.0	32.1	34.7	31.8	34.8	33.4	28.8	27.3	26.4	26.0

Source: www.worldbank.org/governance/wgi. Country scores range from a worst of -2.5 standard deviations from the worldwide mean of zero to a best of +2.5 standard deviations. In this table, based on the relative scores, countries are ranked by percentile, with higher values indicating better ratings. For example, a percentile of 70

Table 3. (cont.)

COUNTRY	Regulatory Quality				Rule of Law				Control of Corruption			
	1996	2000	2004	2008	1996	2000	2004	2008	1996	2000	2004	2008
Angola	9	4	11	17	4	2	7	8	10	3	6	6
Benin	54	45	34	36	44	46	35	34	...	32	36	42
Botswana	77	72	69	67	70	68	69	69	69	76	82	80
Burkina Faso	37	48	40	43	43	35	36	42	42	57	52	45
Burundi	8	13	11	12	22	5	5	14	...	7	17	16
Cameroon	21	31	29	26	4	11	10	17	7	9	12	19
Cape Verde	22	56	44	53	66	72	61	66	...	63	66	75
Central Afr. Rep.	34	16	9	9	46	4	2	5	...	6	7	18
Chad	19	19	20	9	22	20	11	3	...	22	9	3
Comoros	20	9	6	4	...	8	15	16	...	9	22	26
Congo (B)	18	10	16	12	6	6	8	11	21	11	17	8
Congo DRC	2	1	3	5	1	1	1	2	0	2	3	5
Côte d'Ivoire	39	34	16	17	28	17	16	4	70	38	9	7
Djibouti	54	20	21	22	48	28	26	35	...	21	39	45
Equatorial Guinea	14	6	7	7	11	10	8	7	11	2	1	2
Eritrea	44	17	4	2	46	40	32	9	...	74	49	43
Ethiopia	5	12	17	20	17	26	29	33	8	39	27	30
Gabon	46	50	35	28	19	44	31	32	4	33	29	12
Gambia	6	40	40	36	63	49	46	48	68	42	33	24
Ghana	48	52	42	55	39	52	45	52	34	49	47	57
Guinea	54	29	17	14	6	7	12	2	68	25	18	4
Guinea-Bissau	49	11	12	11	1	6	11	6	15	21	10	8
Kenya	31	36	46	51	14	18	18	18	9	13	21	14
Lesotho	24	36	28	29	44	52	50	47	...	53	51	60
Liberia	0	5	2	8	0	1	3	10	2	1	8	33
Madagascar	25	28	41	42	17	44	49	40	68	55	55	55
Malawi	35	41	31	39	34	35	45	47	33	40	23	34
Mali	39	42	36	41	31	39	48	43	42	32	42	38
Mauritania	19	35	53	30	22	43	30	16	...	52	53	22
Mauritius	48	70	75	79	73	75	81	79	72	67	65	72
Mozambique	15	42	38	35	20	29	30	28	37	29	28	34
Namibia	47	61	59	56	63	60	52	60	79	70	56	73
Niger	12	27	30	33	20	21	26	22	42	13	21	20
Nigeria	12	23	8	29	7	11	4	11	5	7	5	18
Rwanda	5	14	28	33	5	8	24	38	...	27	40	59
S. Tômé/Príncipe	34	17	19	24	...	50	40	37	...	56	26	40
Senegal	31	49	45	44	39	50	46	46	35	48	50	39
Seychelles	9	20	24	27	...	69	59	59	...	72	61	64
Sierra Leone	17	8	15	20	9	7	13	15	2	17	20	13
Somalia	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0
South Africa	45	66	69	71	61	57	58	56	76	70	69	65
Sudan	4	9	13	7	2	4	5	4	8	19	6	2
Swaziland	50	33	25	31	77	30	19	36	...	52	31	44
Tanzania	38	40	39	38	38	40	41	48	10	10	30	36
Togo	70	24	20	15	7	30	15	23	15	32	19	15
Uganda	57	51	53	50	30	24	27	37	30	14	26	23
Zambia	59	44	30	41	31	34	35	39	12	18	23	37
Zimbabwe	21	8	1	1	27	9	3	1	52	16	7	4
Average	29.8	29.7	27.7	28.7	32.4	29.1	27.9	28.6	22.0	31.8	29.7	30.8

on a given dimension means that 70% of countries worldwide score worse and 30% score better than the country in question. Thus, the higher the number, the better the situation on that particular dimension.

reality, the index is unable to reflect changes on a timely basis—whether improvements or deterioration in public integrity.⁴ Table 4 shows Transparency International’s corruption perception index score for African countries, as well as the corresponding world ranking, from 1998 to 2008.

A cursory look at table 4 suggests that the overall level of perceived corruption in African countries has increased over the last decade, from an average of 3.6 in 1998 to 2.7 in 2008. (Because the countries are ranked in order of public integrity, a lower figure indicates greater corruption.) However, this is entirely due to the expansion of the index to a number of countries where public corruption is highest—primarily Burundi, Chad, the three Guineas, the two Congos, Sudan, and Somalia. When the 1998–2008 comparison is limited to the fifteen countries that were scored in 1998, the average index remains about unchanged, at around 3.5.

Relative to the worldwide corruption rankings, Africa has more or less kept the same position—again implying some absolute decline in corruption because corruption worldwide has decreased over the past decade. Major changes have occurred *within* the continent, however, with significant reductions in public corruption perceived in Ghana, Nigeria, and Tanzania and equally large deteriorations in Kenya, Malawi, and—especially—Zimbabwe. Also, over the last decade there has been an *increase* in perception of corruption in the “best performing” countries—Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa. Although slight so far, this uptick may be a cause for future concern.

The Afrobarometer

The triennial Afrobarometer survey (www.afrobarometer.org), launched in 1999, is carried out every three years on the same sample of African countries and asks the same set of questions each time about individual attitudes and behavior. The scope of the survey can be questioned as overly broad, since it adds to the subjects of democracy and governance such disparate topics as livelihoods, citizens’ understanding of market principles, social capital, crime, and sense of national identity. The Afrobarometer, however, does provide a “pulse” of local society and adds important qualitative information to the more quantitative types of governance indicators.⁵

The latest survey, the fourth in the series, shows a noteworthy change in Africans’ attitudes toward democracy and multiparty politics over the past decade (see Afrobarometer 2009). Across the eleven countries tracked since 1999, the perceived extent of democracy has increased from 58 to 63 percent. However, the *satisfaction* with democracy has decreased by a similar extent, from 61 to 56 percent, suggesting a degree of unfulfilled expectations that followed the introduction of democratic forms and the ensuing disappointment.

One encouraging finding, however, is unmistakable: whatever the public disappointment with multiparty “democracy” may be, tolerance for the

Table 4. Corruption Perception Indices, 1998–2008

COUNTRY	Corruption Perceptions Score				World Ranking			
	1998	2000	2004	2008	1998	2000	2004	2008
Angola	...	1.7	2.0	1.9	...	85	133	158
Benin	...	...	...	3.1	...	...	...	96
Botswana	6.1	6.0	6.0	5.8	23	26	31	36
Burundi	...	...	...	1.9	...	...	...	158
Burkina Faso	...	3.0	3.2	3.5	...	65	...	80
Cameroon	1.4	2.0	2.1	2.3	85	84	129	141
Cape Verde	...	...	...	5.1	...	...	...	37
Central African Rep	...	...	...	2.0	...	...	...	151
Chad	...	...	1.7	1.6	...	...	142	173
Comoros	...	...	...	2.5	...	...	...	134
Côte d'Ivoire	3.1	2.7	2.0	2.0	59	71	133	151
Congo Brazzaville	...	...	2.3	1.9	...	...	114	158
Congo Kinshasa	...	...	2.0	1.7	...	...	133	171
Equatorial Guinea	...	...	...	1.7	...	...	...	171
Eritrea	...	...	...	2.6	...	...	...	126
Ethiopia	...	3.2	2.3	2.3	...	60	114	114
Gabon	...	...	3.3	3.1	...	...	74	96
Gambia	...	...	2.8	1.9	...	...	90	158
Ghana	3.3	3.5	3.6	3.9	55	52	64	67
Guinea	...	...	...	1.6	...	...	...	173
Guinea Bissau	...	...	...	1.9	...	...	...	158
Kenya	2.5	2.1	2.1	2.1	74	82	129	147
Lesotho	...	...	...	3.2	...	...	...	92
Liberia	...	...	...	2.4	...	...	...	138
Madagascar	...	...	3.1	3.4	...	...	82	85
Malawi	4.1	4.1	2.8...	2.8	45	43	90	115
Mali	...	...	...	3.1	...	...	...	96
Mauritius	5.0	4.7	4.1	5.5	33	37	54	41
Mauritania	...	...	...	2.8	...	...	...	115
Mozambique	...	2.2	2.8	2.6	...	81	90	126
Namibia	5.3	5.4	4.1	4.5	29	30	54	61
Niger	...	...	2.2	2.8	...	...	122	115
Nigeria	1.9	1.2	1.6	2.7	81	90	144	121
Rwanda	...	...	...	3.0	...	...	...	102
São Tomé & Príncipe	...	...	...	2.7	...	...	...	121
Seychelles	...	...	...	4.8	...	...	...	55
Senegal	3.3	3.5	3.0	3.4	55	52	85	85
Sierra Leone	...	...	2.3	1.9	...	...	114	158
Somalia	...	...	...	1.0	...	...	...	180
South Africa	5.2	5.0	4.6	4.9	32	34	44	54
Sudan	...	...	2.2	1.6	...	...	122	173
Swaziland	...	...	...	3.6	...	...	...	72
Tanzania	1.9	2.5	2.8	3.0	81	76	90	102
Togo	...	...	...	2.7	...	...	...	121
Uganda	2.6	2.3	2.6	2.6	73	80	102	126
Zambia	3.5	3.4	2.6	2.8	52	57	102	115
Zimbabwe	4.2	3.0	2.3	1.8	43	65	114	166
Number of Countries	15	19	28	47	85	102	145	180
Average Score	3.56	3.24	2.80	2.81	—	—	—	—
Average Relative Rank	—	—	—	—	0.64	0.72	0.66	0.66

Source: Transparency International. The score (ranging from 1 to 10) is in terms of public integrity, and the ranking is in terms of corruption—hence, low score and high rank indicate worse corruption. Average relative rank shows Africa's position relative to the rest of the world, with an increase in the ratio indicating worsening relative corruption.

alternatives is minimal. In the latest survey, four out of five Africans reject “Big Man” rule and three out of four reject both military and one-party rule—an inevitable reminder of Winston Churchill’s well-known aphorism that “democracy is the worst form of government, except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.” (The coups of 2008 in Mauritania and 2009 in Guinea produced major hostile popular reaction and do not impinge on this finding.) At a minimum, the new public intolerance for repression lays to rest the convenient fallacy of the early 1970s that because of Africa’s unique history and social structures, a one-party system is better suited to genuine African democracy than the multiparty politics of the early years after independence.

The Ibrahim Index of African Governance

Final corroboration of the governance improvement is provided by the findings of the Ibrahim Index of African Governance. The index was elaborated with the support of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation to respond to the legitimate concern that, in addition to measuring governance by its attributes, it is also necessary to pay attention to key verifiable outcomes in terms of basic safety and security, quality of government services, economic opportunity, and human development (see Rotberg 2009 and Rotberg & Gisselquist 2008 for a description of the genesis of the index and its methodology).⁶ According to the Ibrahim Index’s summary scores and country rankings for 2005 and 2006—the two years for which the index (which is published with a two-year lag) is available—there was a slight improvement in that period of time (see table 5).

The Ibrahim Index has advantages over other surveys but also conceptual and methodological problems. The main advantage of the Ibrahim Index is its explicit consideration of income distribution, since it includes a measure of income inequality. This is a welcome and important proxy of the degree to which national resources are appropriated by an unaccountable ruling elite. A temporary increase in income inequality is inevitable when economic growth accelerates, but very high inequality that persists over a long period of time signals the kind of governance weaknesses that allow a patrimonial regime to appropriate public resources for private use.⁷ The problems with the index stem mainly from the inclusion of outcomes such as high average per capita income or macroeconomic stability that are unrelated to good political or economic *governance*. This can produce misleading conclusions in cases of countries with high income from abundant natural resources that are appropriated by an unaccountable regime.⁸ Macroeconomic policy cannot be conflated with public management, just as underdevelopment cannot be conflated with bad governance. If “governance” covers everything, it means nothing.⁹

On balance, however, the advantages of the Ibrahim Index outweigh its weaknesses, and this index, too, produces findings consistent with the other

Table 5. Ibrahim Index of African Governance, 2005 and 2006

COUNTRY	2005		2006	
	Score	Rank	Score	Rank
Angola	43.0	42	43.3	44
Benin	61.4	12	62.5	13
Botswana	73.7	4	74.0	4
Burkina Faso	55.9	23	58.3	20
Burundi	42.3	43	50.0	35
Cameroon	54.7	26	55.4	25
Cape Verde	75.0	3	74.7	3
Central Afr Rep	44.5	41	43.6	43
Chad	38.3	45	33.9	46
Comoros	59.2	16	61.9	14
Congo (B)	53.2	28	53.3	28
Congo (K)	29.4	47	29.8	47
Côte d'Ivoire	44.6	40	45.6	42
Djibouti	53.1	29	55.2	26
Equat. Guinea	49.7	33	49.2	36
Eritrea	47.1	39	46.5	41
Ethiopia	52.0	30	50.9	31
Gabon	69.4	9	69.4	8
Gambia	56.4	20	55.2	27
Ghana	69.4	8	70.1	7
Guinea	48.6	34	47.8	40
Guinea Bissau	47.7	37	51.9	30
Kenya	59.5	15	59.1	17
Lesotho	61.2	13	63.3	12
Liberia	38.3	44	48.7	38
Madagascar	57.6	18	60.4	16
Malawi	63.7	11	63.9	11
Mali	55.9	24	55.9	23
Mauritania	56.2	21	50.8	32
Mauritius	86.1	1	85.1	1
Mozambique	56.0	22	57.1	22
Namibia	70.4	6	70.9	6
Niger	55.2	25	55.5	24
Nigeria	47.3	38	48.5	39
Rwanda	57.9	17	59.0	18
S.Tomé/Principe	70.1	7	68.3	9
Senegal	66.1	10	66.1	10
Seychelles	78.1	2	79.8	2
Sierra Leone	48.4	35	49.1	37
Somalia	22.5	48	18.9	48
South Africa	70.9	5	71.5	5
Sudan	35.3	46	34.2	45
Swaziland	47.9	36	50.2	34
Tanzania	60.2	14	61.6	15
Togo	51.4	31	53.0	29
Uganda	54.1	27	58.3	19
Zambia	57.4	19	58.3	21
Zimbabwe	51.2	32	50.4	33
Average Score	55.2	—	55.8	—

Source: MolbrahimFoundation.org.

Table 6. African Governance: The Best and the Worst, 2008

Ten Best	Ten Worst
Botswana	Angola
Cape Verde	Chad
Ghana	Congo Republic
Lesotho	Côte d'Ivoire
Mauritius	Democratic Republic of Congo
Namibia	Equatorial Guinea
Saô Tomé & Príncipe	Guinea
Senegal	Somalia
Seychelles	Sudan
South Africa	Zimbabwe

surveys and reinforces the conclusions reached on the basis of the other evidence.

The Best and the Worst

The high convergence among all the indicators on the quality of governance of African countries is nearly total as concerns the highest- and lowest-ranking countries. The countries ranking worst in terms of one measure of governance rank worst in terms of all others, and the countries at the top of the list by one standard show up at the top of the list by all standards. Combining the indicators of political and civil liberties with those of government effectiveness, accountability, and rule of law; corruption perception; the Afrobarometer; and the Ibrahim index leads to a clear identification of the ten “best” and the ten “worst” African countries in terms of all dimensions and measures of governance overall. (The cutoff of ten is of course arbitrary.) The list, in alphabetical order, is shown in table 6.

It is important to underline that all but one of the countries in the “ten worst” group have been consistently classified by Freedom House as “not free” throughout the entire twenty-year period reviewed here—in fact, most observers would agree that this has been true ever since the independence of these countries. This continuity demonstrates the deep roots of patrimonialism and repression and thus the very slight prospects of endogenous improvements. (The single exception is Zimbabwe, which has fallen into the “not free” category only in the last decade.) At the other extreme, the best ranking countries are doing quite well on their own (although Ghana, Lesotho, and Namibia have graduated to that list partly as a result of constructive external pressure and encouragement). This suggests that efforts to improve governance are useless in the worst countries (and foreign aid is counterproductive) and unnecessary in the best ones—and thus

ought to be concentrated in the other thirty African countries populating the middle of the governance quality range.

It is not a coincidence that seven of the “ten worst” are large mineral-resource exporters. The “resource curse”—with patrimonialism, repression, and corruption flowing directly from high dependence on one or a few valuable mineral resources (usually oil)—is well known. (For a contemporary synthesis, see McFerson 2009a and Naim 2009.) It may perhaps be a coincidence that seven of the “ten best” countries have very small populations. But if this is not a coincidence, the relationship between good governance and small population size deserve analysis in its own right, not only in Africa but with respect to the governance experience of small developing countries in other continents as well. For the continent as a whole, however, while there has been some progress overall, the picture of change over the last two decades is mixed, with vast inter-country and intra-period differences.

Inter-country Differences

The most impressive examples of governance improvement have been South Africa—with its peaceful transition from apartheid to representative democracy with sound public management—and Ghana—which was the intellectual beacon of West Africa at independence in 1957, then fell on hard times as a result of a series of military coups, and in 2009 underwent its second free and fair presidential election.¹⁰

By comparison, the already sad regime in Zaire has become in the re-named Democratic Republic of Congo a tragic mess without apparent exit; the early governance progress in Congo Brazzaville was cut off by a civil war that returned the previous regime to unaccountable power; and of course Zimbabwe—on the verge of becoming both democratic and stable in the early 1990s—has slipped back past the worst forms of prebendalism and remains on the edge of economic, political, and social collapse.

On the positive side, one may note that after the horrors of genocide in Rwanda, the subsequent wars in the two Congos, the civil war in Burundi, and the conflict over blood diamonds that engulfed much of West Africa, the new century has seen an authoritarian but stable and well-managed Rwanda, a peaceful settlement of the Burundi conflict, a comprehensive peace agreement between North and South Sudan, and the return of Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Ivory Coast to comparative peace and infant political interaction.

These developments are indeed noteworthy, but many sources of tension and fragility in Africa remain. The violence in the eastern DRC has become chronic. In Sudan, the increasingly complex situation in Darfur does not appear a likely candidate for peaceful conflict resolution, and the implementation of the north–south peace agreement is currently at a standstill—with unpredictable subregional implications in the likely event

of secession by southern Sudan as a result of the 2011 referendum provided for in the peace agreement. In neighboring Chad, governance has deteriorated sharply along with the increase in oil export revenue, as it also has in Congo Brazzaville with the consolidation of the power and control of old- and new-President Denis Sassou-Nguesso. Few signs can be seen of a nonviolent exit of the Mugabe regime in Zimbabwe, and the future of the uneasy Kikuyu–Luo political cohabitation in Kenya in the bloody aftermath of the December 2007 election remains cloudy. Military coups have taken place in Mauritania in 2008 and Guinea in 2009, and the rerouting of the illegal drug traffic from South America through West Africa up to Europe threatens the infant democratic elements in Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and even Ghana (see Naim 2006).

As noted earlier, aside from specific developments in individual countries, by far the clearest divergence in governance progress has been between the group of countries devoid of substantial mineral resources—where most of the governance progress has been achieved—and those with an abundance of valuable minerals, where governance progress has been conspicuous for its absence and prospects for improvement are generally poor to nonexistent.

Intra-period Differences

The changes over the entire period mask a diverse set of intra-period developments. The identification of distinct slices in history is inevitably arbitrary to some extent, but the evidence shows three subperiods in African governance during the last two decades: (1) fragile governance progress from the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 to the aftermath of the Rwandan Genocide in 1994; (2) backsliding associated largely with severe civil conflict in a number of countries between 1995 and 2002; and (3) a resumption of progress with increased stability during the last seven years.

1989–95: Fragile Progress

As noted, the end of the Cold War and demise of the Soviet Union ended the East–West competition for power and influence, including its destructive impact on African governance. (As elaborated later, there are clear signs of a resumption of East–West competition in Africa, this time involving China rather than the Soviet Union and motivated primarily by energy needs rather than the search for global influence as such.) With no need for proxy battles between the two superpowers, it became possible to address openly the adverse impact on development of malgovernance and corruption, and to withhold economic aid and political support from repressive regimes.¹¹ At the same time, the expansion of information technology began to break

down the barriers to communication and positive community interaction within the African countries themselves. The three-way interplay of the new technology, a more active civil society, and weaker negative external influences forced a number of African regimes to become more transparent and to open up possibilities for voice and participation. By 1994 the political governance changes were positive, visible, and beginning to spread.

1995–2002: Backsliding

The progress was brought to a halt in much of the continent by the emergence of severe civil conflict, largely but not exclusively ethnic based. In the Great Lakes region, the Rwanda genocide in 1994 was followed by armed conflict throughout the eastern Congo—at its peak involving six African countries—and also turned the already unstable situation in neighboring Burundi into open civil war. In Congo Brazzaville the hopeful democratic progress made since the mid-1980s was wiped out by an internal war that eventually brought the former “Pierre Cardin Marxist” president back to power. In Sudan the centuries-old north–south struggle, which had entered its latest chapter in 1982, intensified, with the year 2000 the bloodiest and most destructive.¹² And in West Africa the fight for control of diamonds and other valuable minerals, combined with long-repressed resentments of dominant ethnic minorities, virtually destroyed most public institutions in Côte d’Ivoire, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. Conflict on such scale necessarily had a grave adverse effect on governance, not only in the countries directly affected but in several of their neighbors as well. As shown in table 3, a sharp deterioration occurred after 1996 in many of the key dimensions of governance. By the start of this century, much of the progress made in the five years after the end of the Cold War had been undone, and in some countries merely bad governance had given way to bloody anarchy.

Since ethnic differences are a given in Africa, the question arises why these differences gave rise to overt civil conflict from the mid-1990s but had not done so earlier—or certainly not to the same extent. I suggest that the explanation is related to the nature of the pre-1990s superpower competition. While superpower competition did preclude considerations of good governance in the “client” countries, the political value of an African client to either of the two superpowers was in part contingent on its internal stability. Andrew Young, the former U.S. ambassador to the U.N., admitted as much in his 1978 remark that the presence of Cuban troops in Angola had a stabilizing effect, even though this statement contradicted the official U.S. foreign policy position. Not only would instability be expensive to the patron, but civil conflict would introduce an element of unpredictability into the client’s foreign policy positions. With the end of the Cold War, this external lid on internal turmoil was removed, although it took a few years for the longstanding ethnic resentments to boil over into actual conflict.

2002–2008: Recovery

The deterioration of the late 1990s was largely reversed during this latest subperiod. In general, the year 2002 marked the beginning of the end of several civil conflicts—mainly the start of negotiations in Machakos, Kenya, between North and South Sudan; the winding down of most of the conflict in Burundi; the settlement of the civil war in Congo Brazzaville; the end of the internal conflict in Angola after the death of Jonas Savimbi and the collapse of his UNITA rebel movement; and the U.N. and British interventions (both military and economic) to halt the spiral of diamond-fueled horrors and ethnic mayhem in West Africa. As conflict had been the primary cause of the reversal of governance progress in the countries affected, so did cessation of conflict permit a resumption of governance improvement in most (although not all) of these countries. Cessation of conflict was not the only reason for the Africa-wide governance improvement, however. In countries that had not been afflicted by internal strife, such progress was due to a combination of civil society efforts and constructive external pressure. Whatever the reasons for progress, governance indicators have generally been improving since about 2002, but by 2008 they had only barely recovered their mid-1990s levels.

The Prospects for African Governance

Despite the importance of the end of the Cold War, one must be careful not to imply that negative external influences on governance in Africa have ceased since the 1980s or that Africans alone are responsible for their countries' democratic deficits. Substantial external intervention has continued to this day, including the expanding influence of China and its support of the regime in Khartoum; international diamond traders' involvement in the civil conflict in Ivory Coast; the role of multinational oil companies on Nigerian repression in Ogoniland, and more recently, on malgovernance in Chad; and most dramatically in the continuing humanitarian and economic disaster in North Kivu and other parts of eastern DRC, fueled by competing foreign interests in valuable mineral resources. (For an analysis of the linkages between "the resource curse" and democratic developments, see McFerson 2009c.) However, there are three critical and inter-related differences.

First, the external interventions during the Cold War had a major geopolitical dimension. This is not to say that foreign commercial interests were irrelevant, but that they were not the primary rationale for the intervention. For example, the role of the U.S. in actively supporting the overthrow of Patrice Lumumba in Congo (and then enabling his eventual murder by Belgian and Katangan elements—see de Witte 1999) did indeed play to the very real interests of the Belgian mining company Union Minière, but the main motivation was the elimination of any possible Soviet influence in the

newly independent country. By contrast, the current external interventions are motivated almost entirely by commercial interests, particularly control over energy and the exploitation of valuable minerals. Second, and as a consequence, current external influence is concentrated in a few African countries, whereas the East–West competition for power was conducted virtually throughout the continent. (On the linkage between extractive resources, governance, and multinational companies, see McFerson 2009a and Naim 2009.)

A third difference, most relevant to explaining African governance trends, relates to the effectiveness of foreign aid. In the earlier years, because the “pure altruism” argument for foreign aid was insufficient to mobilize internal political support (except in Scandinavia), the case for aid had to be made also on national security grounds. From 1960 through the end of the 1980s this meant “containment of Communism” and counteracting Soviet influence. As Bhagwati (2010:24) has pointed out, “the argument was invented that unless the United States gave aid, the Soviet Union would provide it and, as a result, the Third World might tilt toward Moscow. In fact, the Soviets had already funded the construction of Egypt’s Aswan Dam, a project the United States had turned down.” The proximate result of this rationale was that African regimes received aid because they were “friendly” to the West—without any consideration of the representativeness of the regime or the soundness of its economic policies. The ultimate result was that the aid was captured by the ruling elite, which used it for conspicuous consumption as well as internal political repression. Thus, not only was the aid mostly ineffective, but it actually became a constraint on political development in several African countries. Much of the current skepticism about the effectiveness of foreign aid is linked to and justified by this experience, even though it is already twenty years out of date (see, for example, Moyo 2009).

The contrast with the post–Cold War emphasis on linking aid to improvements in governance is apparent. The earliest and best single illustration of the change in attitude was the cessation in late 1989 of World Bank and IMF aid to Mobutu’s “kleptocracy” in Zaire (today’s DRC). Since the early 1990s aid has increasingly been linked, in Africa and elsewhere, to improvements in governance and public management, and the trend accelerated after 1996 with the expansion of the aid paradigm to include anticorruption efforts. Started by the World Bank, this linkage was adopted by the African Development Bank and several bilateral aid donors (primarily the U.S., the British, the Dutch, and to a lesser extent the Germans).

There is an active and as yet inconclusive debate on the extent to which governance conditionality has actually succeeded in improving governance and public management. The answer is likely to be “yes, somewhat.” What can be said with confidence is that, at the very least, the attention given to governance has cut certain oppressive regimes off from the financial assistance that had helped them retain control. By the old paradigm, for

example, aid to Zimbabwe would have continued unabated to this day so long as Mugabe stayed friendly and kept voting with the West at the U.N. In recent years, however, cooperation with global “antiterrorism” efforts has become an increasingly significant consideration in the allocation of foreign aid—although much less in Africa than in West Asia. It is not inconceivable that in the years to come antiterrorism will serve the old function of anticommunism as the rationale and driver of aid. If so, the democratization agenda will again be pushed off center stage.

Looking to the Future

Clearly, the governance progress that has been made, in addition to being modest and uneven, remains fragile. That said, not only is the overall quality of governance in Africa somewhat better than in 1989, but there are encouraging indications of potential further progress. These indications include, first, the entry onto the political scene of an active new generation much less tolerant of “Big Men” and unaccountable government. Second, the accumulated experience with reforms in governance and public administration, combined with the new indicators of different aspects of governance, now makes it possible to go beyond generic assessments and disaggregate the problem into its major factors—and thus to design better-targeted reforms with a greater chance of producing concrete and durable improvements in the future. Finally, and without any rosy millennial implications, the potential for positive influence on African governance coming from the new U.S. administration is real and substantial. It is dangerously easy to romanticize the “Obama effect.” But even from the most realpolitik of viewpoints, this manifest demonstration of the power of democracy and the possibilities of empowerment of ordinary citizens has already begun to tilt ordinary Africans’ expectations away from the inevitability of patrimonialism and repression in their countries.

Concerning governance in general, the African experience of the past two decades demonstrates that improvements cannot be accomplished only from the top, but call for concrete efforts at strengthening civil society, voice, citizen feedback, and participation. Also, while constructive external pressure through judicious conditioning of aid and improved aid effectiveness is important, “reformist leaders and civil society in recipient countries must show the resolve to implement governance reforms” (Kaufmann 2009:29). Social accountability is critical for governance progress. But what kind of “civil society”? “Social accountability” for what, and to whom?

Participation and civil society must be defined and qualified very carefully. First, participation is inherently a relative concept: a lynching is a highly participatory act, and mechanisms for making one’s voice heard can be monopolized by privileged elites and small interest groups. To be used as a vehicle for governance improvements, “participation” must be understood to include both voice and contestability. Thus the legitimacy

of an unelected and unaccountable NGO leadership that is pressuring a (representative) government is questionable. The concept of “civil society” itself, while generically defined as including all voluntary social activity that is not associated either with the state or the family, can cover a variety of virtues but also of sins. Some illustrations. It is easy for a repressive government to manufacture civil society organizations (what Naim 2007 calls “GONGOs,” Government-Organized Non-governmental Organizations), and other NGOs can spring up as fronts for ethnic groups or even for criminal enterprise (MANGOS, or Mafia NGOs, the newest danger in West Africa). The unquestioning transplant of “participatory” modalities evolved in developed countries to an African context assumes a “cultural homogenization” that has rightly been criticized as mythical (e.g., by Ferguson 2006.) Slogans about participation and “community-driven development” are hardly conducive to governance improvements when the community is captured by a small local elite. There is no substitute for conceptual clarity and critical scrutiny of practical initiatives. Most important, those in civil society who advocate greater transparency, participation, and accountability must themselves meet the same standards.

Concerning corruption in particular, efforts at reducing and controlling it have generally failed when they have focused on only one dimension of this complex phenomenon. Experience shows the need to emphasize three concurrent efforts—awareness-raising, prevention, and enforcement.¹³ Prevention and enforcement cannot succeed if corruption is viewed as inevitable; awareness and strict enforcement cannot be effective if the opportunities for corruption are too easy and too profitable; and limiting opportunities for corruption combined with better awareness will be equally ineffective if enforcement is lax or nonexistent.¹⁴ Regretfully, what is often forgotten in comparisons with other countries is the constraint posed by the limited administrative and institutional capacity of many African countries. Thus, for example, the success of the Hong Kong anticorruption commission depended critically on its competent staff of more than one thousand professional auditors and investigators. Rare is the African government that possesses such abundance of talent. Thus, if international good practice is to be of use in improving public integrity in most African countries, it is important to scale it down and adapt it to the capacity of the country. Finally, it is well to remember that bribery is a two-way street. As with prostitution, both the “demand” and “supply” side of corruption need to be tackled. Successful anticorruption efforts must entail penalties and risks for the private party, local or foreign, who supplies the bribes and not only for the government official who receives them. International treaties to criminalize the bribery of officials in developing countries are thus an important part of the solution. The 1999 OECD anti-bribery convention was a major step in this direction, as was the 2003 U.N. Convention against Corruption (UNCAC).¹⁵

Conclusion: From Accountability to Capacity

Afro-pessimism typically stems from the old racist canard that Africans are unable to govern themselves. If any proof of this pernicious fallacy were still needed, the positive developments in African governance over the past two decades would provide it.¹⁶ Afro-optimism, however, sometimes rests on a patronizing attitude of viewing minor improvements in African countries as major changes—as if African governments should not be held to the same standards of accountability, transparency, integrity, respect for the law, responsiveness, and effectiveness as governments in any other part of the world. Howard French (2009:26) has put it simply and well: Africa is “increasingly well-governed and still appallingly ill-governed.” As of 2009, Afro-pessimism has been shown to be unwarranted, but Afro-optimism is a long way from being justified.

Amartya Sen (1981) famously demonstrated that there has never been a famine in a functioning democracy, but the crucial qualifier “functioning” is often glossed over. Most relevant in this respect is the finding of this article that progress in economic and administrative governance has not kept pace with the progress on the political dimension of governance in Africa. We have seen, too, how fragile and easily reversible political progress can be if it is not buttressed by institutional development. To consolidate the improvements in democracy and translate them into genuine development gains, the main challenge of the next stage of African democratization is capacity building.

Massive efforts have been made over the years and substantial financial and technical aid has been provided for “capacity building” in Africa, but generally with disappointing results. The reasons are complex, but the consolidation of democracy will require a strengthening of the institutional, organizational, and administrative capacity of African governments. What is certain is that the answer to Africa’s persisting governance weaknesses is not to be found in strong personal “leadership.” While all meaningful change requires vision and persistence by individuals in a position to influence and guide the change, there is a hardy fallacy that the main problem in Africa is lack of strong leaders, shared by even such a celebrated writer as Chinua Achebe (see Achebe 2000). But if any single conclusion has surfaced with crystal clarity from the complex postindependence experience, it is that Africa does not need saviors to rescue the system. What it needs, rather, are well-functioning systems to make “saviors” unnecessary.

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Notes

1. Throughout this article, "Africa" refers to the forty-eight sub-Saharan African countries, not including Egypt or the Maghreb countries of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya.
2. The reliance on secondary sources and the judgmental nature of the placement are not significantly different from the "expert" perceptions that underlie most governance and corruption indicators of today. Still, the classification in table 2 requires some tolerance for a degree of ambiguity, which is all but inevitable in view of the lack of any systematic governance survey available at the time.
3. Note in particular that the vast database of the World Bank Governance Indicators allows the researcher interested in testing particular hypotheses to combine and recombine the data according to the various dimensions of governance and country groupings, and in other ways. (From www.govindicators.org go to Resources, then download the categories of interest from which various subsets of relevant data can be constructed, as was done for this article.) Assigning codes to countries of interest generates any number of comparisons and provides the basis for statistical analysis—although it is well to remember that there is no substitute for in-depth analysis based on the specific country realities.
4. See www.transparency.org for a detailed explanation of the methodology, its uses, and its limits. Transparency International also compiles other surveys of corruption, such as the global corruption barometer and the bribe-payers index. In general, they all show the same broad trends.
5. The Afrobarometer is a joint enterprise of Ghana's Center for Democratic Development, South Africa's Institute for Democracy, and Benin's Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy, with technical support from the Uni-

versity of Capetown and Michigan State University. The survey is administered by national organizations in each partner country and aims at assessing the economic, social, and political atmosphere. In order to keep costs manageable as well as assure continuity and comparability across both time and countries, the survey is carried out every three years on the same 12+ set of African countries, asking the same set of questions on individual attitudes and behaviors.

6. Mo Ibrahim is a wealthy Sudanese businessman interested in fostering good governance in Africa. In addition to financing the construction of the Index of African Governance, his foundation grants the extremely generous annual Mo Ibrahim Prize for Achievement in African Leadership. The prize is \$5 million over ten years and \$200,000 a year for life thereafter, and the winner is selected by an independent committee of eminent persons—mostly Africans but including two non-African members—and chaired by former U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan. The first winner, in 2007, was former Mozambican President Joaquim Chissano, for leading his country to peace and prosperity and then stepping down voluntarily. The second winner, in 2008, is former Botswana President Festus Mogae, who consolidated the economic progress and already very good governance of the country. The Ibrahim Prize will certainly not induce African autocrats who control billions of dollars of resources to relinquish power, but it will provide a strong financial and reputational incentive for most other African leaders to foster democratic mechanisms and strengthen accountability, integrity, and transparency in public administration.
7. Along similar lines, Lewis (2008) has described the paradox of growth without prosperity. For an analysis of the link between governance and economic performance, see Kurtz and Shrank (2007).
8. Even the existence of a central bank and a national currency are deemed to be part of good governance. Accepting this paradigm would lead to the bizarre conclusion that the eight Francophone members of the West Africa Economic Union are, *on that account*, less well governed than the Republic of Congo dictatorship with its own central bank; or that governance in European countries became worse the instant they replaced their national currency with the euro.
9. These conceptual problems produce some incongruities in the results, such as the “improvement” in the 2006 governance ranking of the mafia state of Equatorial Guinea, owing to the higher income from the flare-up of world oil prices—which produced mainly an increase in the foreign-held assets of the president and elite members of his Mongomo clan. (On this and similar cases, see McFerson 2009a.)
10. Gyimah-Boadi (2009) gives an account of recent political developments in Ghana.
11. The earliest and best example is the cessation in late 1989 of World Bank and IMF aid to Zaire.
12. According to Majak d’Agoot, formerly a senior commander in the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (personal communication, 2004).
13. As in the successful experience of the Hong Kong anticorruption commission, which in the 1990s turned Hong Kong from a corrupt public administration to one of the most honest—in Asia second only to Singapore. See the comments of Bertrand De Speville, the former head of the commission (De Speville 2008).

14. There are exceptions, e.g., abolishing price controls can eliminate a major opportunity for corruption. Or, robust enforcement and prosecution of major offenders may sometimes be the urgent priority. Beyond the immediate impacts, however, concerted action on all three fronts is necessary if official corruption is to be reduced across the board in a sustainable manner.
15. The OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions was signed in December 1997 and entered into force in February 1999. It includes all thirty OECD member countries as well as nonmember countries Argentina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Chile, and Slovenia. The core provision is to treat bribery of foreign officials as a crime on a par with bribery of officials of the national government (see www.oecd.org). The antibribery treaty has been judged an initial success, but its real potential in reducing corruption in Africa remains to be realized. The more recent U.N. Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) has a code of conduct which members agree to respect (www.unodc.org/pdf/corruption).
16. For a concurring view, see, among others, Diamond (2009).