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Preventing violence in Africa: Giving good governance a chance

Al-Shabaab attacks in Somalia, Boko Haram violence in Nigeria and neighbouring states in West Africa, fighting violent extremism in Mali, Somali sea piracy and oil-piracy in the Gulf of Guinea are familiar news headlines about Africa. Add the humanitarian face of migrants caught up in criminal networks off the Libyan coast and their plight in the Mediterranean Sea and one finds a news profile promoting pessimism. The overall image of African governments extending sovereignty as a responsibility, people first and expression of human security as a guide for extending good governance compete with the prevalence of violence-terrorism-criminal narratives ignoring the human side of security.

Governance responsibilities extend to all sovereign territories in Africa, including ocean territories which in certain cases are larger than landward surfaces as in the case of [island states](#). Good governance is a strong preventative measure to the violence outlined earlier. Unfortunately, decision-makers often fail to articulate good governance in a way that promotes its role to stave off drifts towards violence within and against societies. According to [Rotberg](#), if decision-makers are ill informed about governance matters in their respective countries, optimal direction of resources to promote or reinforce good governance tends to suffer.

The [Mo Ibrahim Foundation](#)'s African Governance Index goes some way to alleviate this uncertainty. Their definition of good governance is rather simple: *'The Mo Ibrahim Foundation defines governance as the provision of the political, social and economic public goods and services that every citizen has the right to expect from their state, and that a state has the responsibility to deliver to its citizens.'* Turning the attention to sea, [Shemella](#) maps out maritime governance as " ... a matter of knowing what is happening in the maritime domain, maintaining readiness to deal with threats, providing essential services, and generating wealth." The One Earth Future's [Stable Seas Index](#) sets out maritime security indicators for Sub-Saharan Africa that holds good potential to direct decisions about the maritime leg of governance off the continent. Read in conjunction, both narratives point to governing authorities having a responsibility to extend proper rule over their constituencies and emergent data sets to set in place ways and means to secure both domains to the benefit of their citizens – benefits they are rightly entitled to.

Even a basic understanding of governance alongside the principle of prevention, goes some way to tie good governance into preventative policies against radical extremism, violent uprisings, limiting space for terrorism ideologies and rise of violent opposition movements. Fighting extremism, terrorism and related low-intensity conflicts are expensive, difficult and in pursuit of negative peace – i.e. an artificial peace upheld primarily through coercion or the threat thereof. Prevention through good governance promotes positive peace, but is not an easy endeavour and often expensive, although more enduring. It lowers the

violence potential that destroys tangible and intangible security, political, economic and social public goods set in place on land and at sea. Here Somalia, Yemen, Libya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Liberia serve as earlier and more recent cases of the dynamics underpinning negative peace.

For Africa, the [Ibrahim Index of Governance](#) flags the trend that only a third of African countries drive the continent's governance improvements. Mauritius and Seychelles for example continue to reflect best governance across the safety, rule of law, participation and freedom, and human rights sets of indicators. Libya, Eritrea and South Sudan remain the three countries with the lowest governance scores. Continent wide, government involvement in armed conflict drives down security and rule of law indicators, political participation and human rights indicators show a slow-down, sustainable economic opportunity is a concern in rural landscapes and the positive trends in human development are on the decline. Of importance is [1] positive growth in governance indicators finding expression in 18 countries with [2] slowing improvement in 23 countries, [3] four countries linger between deterioration and bounce back while [4] eight countries reflect increasing deterioration.

For coastal states, their governance indicators are important as it remains one variable in determining maritime security governance in particular. The Stable Seas Index (SSI) holds an interactive qualitative set of indicators comprising international cooperation, rule of law, maritime enforcement, coastal welfare, blue economy, fisheries, piracy, illicit trades and mixed migration. Collectively, the grouping of SSI's indicators are useful data sets for decision-makers to understand security governance in their sovereign maritime zones and, as on land, where their focus and resources should go. As maritime territories entail extensive national landscapes as well, and attention to the blue economy to augment traditional land-based economies grows, maritime security governance off Africa now rivals its landward equivalent. Decision-makers do not always properly integrate Africa's landward-maritime nexus, but some ignorance, if not an unwillingness to prioritise, does not change the reality of its growing importance. Maritime security holds a demanding governance profile and competing logic in the debate on preventing violent conflict, dangerous extremism and terrorism, but is increasingly supported by flows of data and good information sets.

Governance remains a public responsibility understood as a way to lower the probability of countries falling victim to extremist practices, groups and even terrorists that destroy fragile and robust hubs of good governance on land and at sea. Placing governance within the preventative ambit requires that Africa's decision-makers grasp the constituent elements of governance, as well as its quantitative and qualitative profiles on offer. While Rotberg clarifies the importance of governance to direct attention and resources, the Ibrahim Index on Governance offers quantitative indicators for each African country. Turning the argument off-shore, SSI displays important indicators of maritime security governance for countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. This triad of governance as phenomenon, a measurement of landward and maritime governance entails practical information for decision-makers that are serious about preventing violence and forms of extremism on land and at sea from dragging their countries into violent conflicts.

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