



المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات
Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies

سياسات عربية
SIYASAT ARABIYA

Siyasat Arabiya

Call for Papers for a Special Issue on:

Politics in Africa:

The State, Ethnicity, and the Regional and International Order

Background Paper

Since the end of the Cold War, international and regional powers have engaged in what some scholars have called the “new scramble for Africa,” reminiscent of European powers’ struggle for control of the continent in the late 19th century. This new wave differs from its predecessor in the nature of the actors involved, their goals, and their means. The continent has undergone major domestic developments, including the collapse of the state in Somalia and the subsequent, failed American military intervention there, as well as a shift in patterns of conflict, from inter-state wars to intra-state ethnic fighting, as in the cases of Rwanda, Cameroon, and Ethiopia.

The continent also experienced its share of democratic transitions, but certain countries have since reversed that trend as military coups have returned to the political arena. African conflicts have taken on forms that cannot be characterized as mere domestic disputes, but rather implicate a diversity of actors including states, mercenaries and private security firms, local armies, militias and paramilitary organizations. This has given rise to patterns of intersecting interests, complicating the process of conflict resolution — notably in Sudan, Libya, Chad, and elsewhere across the Sahel region.

Africa is a major natural extension of the Arab world, due to the significant Arab presence in the north of the continent, which is heavily intertwined with its African neighbourhood in the Sahel or the Horn of Africa, whether culturally, economically, demographically or in terms of security. This Arab-African interaction is evident in Africa’s growing trade with several Arab countries; the volume of commerce between the continent and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries has grown rapidly, at a rate of five percent in 2018 and 10 percent in 2020. Over the past decade, the United Arab Emirates has emerged as the largest GCC investor and the fourth largest global investor in Africa, after China, Europe and the US.

Africa represents a promising region both as a market and as a source of labour, poised to provide the world with a working-age population. The global working-age population will increase by 428 million between 2020 and 2040, with 420 million in Africa alone; the net increase in this age group worldwide will be about 8 million.¹ Between 1980 and 2020, Africa tripled its GDP from \$600 billion to \$1.9 trillion.

Given the growing importance of the continent and its significant interactions and relations with Arab countries, whether on the north of the continent or beyond, and given the noticeable lack of research attention in the Arab world to the topic of Africa, despite this global rise, **Siyasat Arabiya** is launching a call for essays on the following theme: “Politics in Africa: The State, Ethnicity, and the Regional and International Order.”

Papers that are accepted for publication will appear in more than one issue, in a special issue, or as part of a thematic section within the journal, over the course of 2026 and 2027.

¹ Jack A. Goldstone & John F. May, “The Global Economy’s Future Depends on Africa: As Others Slow, a Youthful Continent Can Drive Growth,” *Foreign Affairs*, 18/5/2023, accessed on 30/1/2025, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9zQFN>.

The project will be managed and edited by **Siyasat Arabiya** editorial board member Hassan El Haj Ali, a professor of political science and researcher at the Centre for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies, part of the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS).

The journal is seeking contributions on five major themes:

1. The Dynamics of African Politics

Africa's political and socio-economic diversity poses a challenge to scholars using general political approaches to reflect the diverse political activities underway on the continent. Nonetheless, scholars of Africa have consistently attempted to find general or quasi-general patterns. The dynamics of African politics demand further study, and can perhaps best be understood through the actions of institutions and their role in influencing political processes. This is highlighted once again by the emergence of a general trend in political studies that has returned to emphasising the study of the state and its institutions, rather than focusing on processes and actors.²

This interest in the study of institutions extends to research focused on the national level and related to the design of systems that enable the management of diversity, such as decentralised and federal governance systems,³ and that concerned with the role of supranational institutions, whether continent-wide, such as the African Union (AU), or regional, such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) or the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Studying the dynamics of African politics also focuses research interest on the classification of party systems on the continent, measuring their degree of institutionalization, the prevalence of small parties and their ability to influence pluralistic systems,⁴ and research into whether competition between political parties in some African countries can be seen as a competition for control of state resources.⁵ Related to this is the impact of electoral systems on party systems, governance of the electoral process, and the success of some African countries in achieving the civilian transfer of power, despite certain shortfalls in the electoral process. Others have analysed the role of ethnic and religious identities in the dynamics of politics on the continent.

Within this general theme, **Siyasat Arabiya** proposes the following sub-themes:

- The impact of the colonial legacy on the structure and function of political institutions in African countries today.

² Nic Cheeseman (ed.), *Institutions and Democracy in Africa: How the Rules of the Game Shape Political Developments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

³ Charles Manga Fombad, Assefa Fiseha & Nico Steytler, *Contemporary Governance Challenges in the Horn of Africa* (London/ New York: Routledge, 2023).

⁴ Catherine Lena Kelly, *Party Proliferation and Political Contestation in Africa: Senegal in Comparative Perspective* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

⁵ Rachel Sigman, *Parties, Political Finance, and Governance in Africa: Extracting Money and Shaping States in Benin and Ghana* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

- The state, systems of governance, and ethnic or tribal predominance.
- Ethnic and religious identities and conflicts.
- Experiences of federalism in Africa and the challenges of managing diversity.
- African party systems and the effectiveness of party actors.
- The role of the African Union and regional organisations in achieving political integration and securing political stability and governance across the continent.

2. Security issues

Security issues in Africa pose challenges that researchers should not overlook. Indeed, there has been a significant research response to this reality. On the one hand, studies have emerged on what Barry Buzan calls the “Regional Security Complex” in parts of the continent. This term refers to a level of analysis showing that states or actors are highly interconnected, making it difficult to separate out the security issues they face.⁶ This theoretical approach has been applied to the security overlaps between the states of the Sahel region.⁷ Scholars in security studies have tended to use the concept of “Security Assemblages,” which describes a complex security reality characterised by the implication of multiple actors, differentiated patterns of security or lack thereof, and diverse forms of violence. Advocates of this approach believe it enables scholars to address the symbolic aspects of violence as well as other forms of violence.⁸

Some areas of the continent have been arenas of foreign military interventions under the banner of counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency. As a result, there is an interest in analysing counter-terrorist and counter-insurgent military activities as an area of governance. The framing narratives, theoretical visions and concepts associated with or inspired by counter-insurgency, relevant to the Sahel region, are not limited to countering the threat, but we find that they influence the shaping of the Sahel region and its states.⁹ As an extension of the security governance track, hybrid security governance has been conceptualised based on the multiplicity of actors or the existence of hierarchies in the area of security;¹⁰ in countries with fragile security, there is a “security arena” in which security-related activities take place among domestic circles in which actors are active and establish stable patterns of security arrangements, while foreign circles characterised by fluidity, representing spaces of violent redefinition of security governance. The cases of Somalia, Central

6 Barry Buzan, “Regional Security Complex Theory in the Post-Cold War World,” in: Fredrik Söderbaum & Timothy M. Shaw (eds.), *Theories of New Regionalism: A Palgrave Macmillan Reader* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 141.

7 Marton Varga, “The Place of the Sahel Region in the Theory of Regional Security Complex,” *AARMS*, vol. 19, no. 2 (2020), pp. 49–63.

8 Philippe M. Frowd & Adam J. Sandor, “Militarism and its Limits: Sociological Insights on Security Assemblages in the Sahel,” *Security Dialogue*, vol. 49, no. 1-2 (2018), pp. 70–82.

9 Bruno Charbonneau, “Counter-insurgency Governance in the Sahel,” *International Affairs*, vol. 97, no. 6 (2021), pp. 1805–1823.

10 Niagale Bagayoko, Eboe Hutchful & Robin Luckham, “Hybrid Security Governance in Africa: Rethinking the Foundations of Security, Justice and Legitimate Public Authority,” *Conflict, Security & Development*, vol. 16, no. 1 (2016), pp. 1–32.

Africa and South Sudan are examples of this pattern of security arrangement.¹¹ The field of security studies in Africa thus merits further research and inquiry.

Within this general theme, the journal proposes the following sub-themes:

- Managing hybrid Security in fragile regions of Africa.
- The implications of non-state armed actors for the security situation on the continent.
- The impact of external actors (states, organisations and corporations) on the dynamics of African security.
- Governance in areas controlled by non-state armed movements.
- The dynamics of “security clusters” in certain regions of Africa.
- Resources, Conflict and Security.

3. Democratic Backsliding

Many African countries witnessed democratic transitions following uprisings in the 1990s. Yet this wave of democratization has receded in recent years, amid a general decline in democracy in various parts of the world. In Africa’s case, indicators of this decline include some 13 military coups on the continent since the turn of the millennium, most recently in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Some countries have also amended their constitutions to allow incumbent presidents to remain in power for multiple terms; prominent examples include Côte d’Ivoire and Rwanda. These negative trends are compounded by the manipulation of electoral results, such as in Uganda; crackdowns on the opposition, as in Tanzania; election-related violence, as in Kenya; and the corruption and negligence towards security that has become part of the fabric of the multiparty system in Nigeria.

Some scholars attribute this rolling back of democracy to the growing intensity of political polarization, the executive branch’s encroachment on the legislative branch, and the gradually growing problem of exploitation of influence, which has divided oppositions and reoriented them politically.¹² Another view argues that the decline in democracy currently underway represents not a general trend, but rather a drive by ruling elites to push back against a civil society that had sought to expand its scope of rights and freedoms. In light of this trend, elites have resorted to strategically using the courts, constitutions and legislation to extend their hold on power and limit the actions of civil society seeking to restrict them.¹³

¹¹ Tim Glawion, *The Security Arena in Africa: Local Order-Making in the Central African Republic, Somaliland, and South Sudan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

¹² Stephan Haggard & Robert Kaufman, “The Anatomy of Democratic Backsliding,” *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 32, no. 4 (October 2021), pp. 27–41.

¹³ Leonardo R. Arriola, Lise Rakner & Nicolas van de Walle, *Democratic Backsliding in Africa? Autocratization, Resilience, and Contention* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

The impact of the policies of international powers on the decline in democracy cannot be overlooked. These policies represent an extension of colonial policies, particularly those undertaken by France, to which coups are a reaction.¹⁴ This complex context also highlights the influence of authoritarian regimes, such as Russian and Chinese support for the survival of regimes similar to their own.

Within this general theme, we propose the following subthemes:

- Factors behind the resurgence of military coups in some African countries and their political and social contexts.
- The future of civil-military relations on the continent.
- The differences between contemporary military coups and those witnessed on the continent earlier in its modern history.
- The expansion of executive power in African countries and its impact on democratic transitions.
- Rent-seeking and authoritarian rule in Africa.
- The impact of political settlements on the persistence of authoritarian regimes in post-conflict situations.
- Does the model of militarism in Africa influence its surroundings?
- The electoral system and electoral governance.
- The impact of external factors on the persistence of authoritarian regimes.

4. International Relations and Foreign Policy

The topic of African international relations presents several topics that are of interest to researchers, first and foremost the persistent attempts to theorise international relations stemming from an African reality based in part on the decolonization approaches, along with attention to issues of hegemony and inequality.¹⁵ External military interventions in Africa also occupy a prominent place in this research, with a focus on the political impacts of interventions by former European colonial powers on the continent.¹⁶

Competition over resources and the ability to influence and power by international powers has also attracted the attention of scholars,¹⁷ with a focus on interventions by specific regional powers. In addition to these external influences, there is a growing interest in the role of African agency in the

¹⁴ Yvan Guichaoua, "The Bitter Harvest of French Interventionism in the Sahel," *International Affairs*, vol. 96, no. 4 (2020), pp. 895–911.

¹⁵ Thomas Kwasi Tiekou, "The Legon School of International Relations," *Review of International Studies*, vol. 47, Special Issue 5: The Multiple Origins of IR (December 2021), pp. 656–671.

¹⁶ Emizet F. Kisangani & Jeffrey Pickering, *African Interventions State Militaries, Foreign Powers, and Rebel Forces* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

¹⁷ Emizet F. Kisangani & Jeffrey Pickering, *African Interventions State Militaries, Foreign Powers, and Rebel Forces* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

foreign policies of African states, as well as attempts to define theoretical frameworks for these foreign policies.¹⁸ In the field of African international relations, there is growing interest in African-Arab relations, manifested in the cultural, economic, political, and security spheres. South Africa's lawsuit against Israel at the International Court of Justice is a model for this bilateral interaction.

Within this general theme, we propose the following subthemes:

- Factors influencing the formation or non-formation of African agency in international relations, and the patterns of such agency, if they exist.
- Decision-making in the foreign policy of African states.
- The role of African states in the structures of global governance and international organizations.
- Arab-African relations (bilateral or multilateral).
- The impact of international and regional competition on Africa's foreign relations.

5. Political Economy

Africa's political economy underwent significant transformations as the Cold War drew to an end. After years of relying heavily on the state to promote development, provide services, and address social imbalances, several African countries responded to the demands of the so-called "Washington Consensus," which called for a transition to neoliberal economic systems. These structural reforms had various impacts on sectors of society and political stability. Such transformations sparked controversy over their feasibility and the effectiveness of their outcomes, as well as impacting the aid provided to African countries.

Meanwhile, competition has been growing between international and regional powers over Africa's resources, particularly regarding rare or strategic minerals. Rivalry is intensifying in this regard between China's Belt and Road Initiative and the US-led Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII).¹⁹

Competition has also intensified in the fields of port management, logistics, and infrastructure construction since regional countries entered the struggle for control over supply chains. African countries' debts have also received significant attention due to their far-reaching repercussions; most of the world's poorest and most indebted countries are located on the continent, having fallen into debt traps in various ways.²⁰ Those debts have become significant burdens hindering these countries from progressing.

¹⁸ Stephen M. Magu, *Explaining Foreign Policy in Post-Colonial Africa* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

¹⁹ Magnus Ericsson, Olof Löf & Anton Löf, "Chinese control over African and Global Mining—Past, Present and Future," *Mineral Economics*, vol. 33 (2020), pp. 153-181; Sophia Kalantzakos, "The Race for Critical Minerals in an Era of Geopolitical Realignment," *The International Spectator*, vol. 55, no. 3 (2020), pp. 1-16.

²⁰ S.C. Thacker, "The High Politics of IMF Lending," *World Politics*, vol. 52, no. 1 (1999), pp. 7-38; Nicolas Lippolis & Harry Verhoeven, "Politics by Default: China and the Global Governance of African Debt," *Survival*, vol. 64, no. 3 (2022), pp. 153-178.

Under this general theme, we propose the following subthemes:

- The nature of African economies and their role in shaping political systems.
- To what extent do economies and resources fuel internal conflicts in Africa (for example, the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam) and international and regional competition?
- The pressures for neoliberal transformations in African economies, and their social and political impacts.
- The economy and class inequalities in African societies.
- The political economy of rare minerals on the continent.
- Competition over the management of ports, strategic facilities, and supply chains.
- The African debt debate.
- The pursuit of regional integration and the role of regional economic groupings.
- The political economy of international aid.

Contribution Regulations and Deadlines

Siyasat Arabiya welcomes submissions of research papers on the aforementioned fields, addressing theoretical or applied aspects, or case studies. The journal will accept research proposals of approximately 250 words until Saturday, May 31, 2025. The journal is committed to inform authors of whether their proposals have been accepted or rejected, by Thursday, July 3, 2025.

Authors of accepted proposals have until Saturday, January 10, 2026, to submit final versions of their papers, which should adhere to the formal and substantive research specifications of the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. All submitted studies are subject to peer review, and approval of the research proposal does not automatically imply acceptance for publication, as the peer review may not approve the entire research paper on completion.

After the paper is accepted, the researcher will be informed as to whether it will be included in a specific file or special issue, or published as a separate article. Research proposals should be submitted via the researchers' system.

For additional enquiries, please contact the journal at: siyasat.arabia@dohainstitute.edu.qa

References

- Arriola, Leonardo R., Lise Rakner & Nicolas van de Walle, *Democratic Backsliding in Africa? Autocratization, Resilience, and Contention* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).
- Bagayoko, Niagale, Eboe Hutchful & Robin Luckham, "Hybrid Security Governance in Africa: Rethinking the Foundations of Security, Justice and Legitimate Public Authority," *Conflict, Security & Development*. vol. 16, no. 1 (2016).
- Charbonneau, Bruno, "Counter-insurgency Governance in the Sahel," *International Affairs*, vol. 97, no. 6 (2021).
- Cheeseman, Nic (ed.), *Institutions and Democracy in Africa: How the Rules of the Game Shape Political Developments*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).
- Ericsson, Magnus, Olof Lof & Anton Lof, "Chinese Control over African and Global Mining – Past, Present and Future," *Mineral Economics*, vol. 33 (2020).
- Fombad, Charles Manga, Assefa Fiseha & Nico Steytler, *Contemporary Governance Challenges in the Horn of Africa* (London / New York: Routledge, 2023).
- Frowd, Philippe M. & Adam J. Sandor, "Militarism and its Limits: Sociological Insights on Security Assemblages in the Sahel," *Security Dialogue*, vol. 49, no. 1-2 (2018).
- Glawion, Tim, *The Security Arena in Africa: Local Order-Making in the Central African Republic, Somaliland, and South Sudan*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).
- Guichaoua, Yvan, "The Bitter Harvest of French Interventionism in the Sahel," *International Affairs*. vol. 96, no. 4 (2020).
- Haggard, Stephan & Robert Kaufman, "The Anatomy of Democratic Backsliding," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 32, no. 4 (October 2021).
- Kalantzakos, Sophia, "The Race for Critical Minerals in an Era of Geopolitical Realignment," *The International Spectator*. vol. 55, no. 3 (2020).
- Kelly, Catherine Lena, *Party Proliferation and Political Contestation in Africa: Senegal in Comparative Perspective* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).
- Kisangani, Emizet F. & Jeffrey Pickering, *African Interventions State Militaries, Foreign Powers, and Rebel Forces* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).
- Lippolis, Nicolas & Harry Verhoeven, "Politics by Default: China and the Global Governance of African Debt," *Survival*. vol. 64, no. 3 (2022).
- Magu, Stephen M., *Explaining Foreign Policy in Post-Colonial Africa* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

- Ramani, Samuel, *Russia in Africa: Resurgent Great Power or Bellicose Pretender?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).
- Sigman, Rachel, *Parties, Political Finance, and Governance in Africa: Extracting Money and Shaping States in Benin and Ghana* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).
- Söderbaum, Fredrik & Timothy M. Shaw (eds.), *Theories of New Regionalism: A Palgrave Macmillan Reader* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).
- Thacker, S.C., "The High Politics of IMF Lending," *World Politics*, vol. 52, no. 1 (1999).
- Tieku, Thomas Kwasi, "The Legon School of International Relations," *Review of International Studies*, vol. 47, Special Issue 5: The Multiple Origins of IR (December 2021).
- Varga, Marton, "The Place of the Sahel Region in the Theory of Regional Security Complex," *AARMS*, vol. 19, no. 2 (2020).