

African Electoral Politics, Instability and the Burgeoning Economic Crisis

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All across the continent the continuing dependency on trade with the Western states has resulted in another round of uncertainty

Recent national elections in the West African state of Ghana were heavily influenced by the growing crisis in various economies throughout the region.

Ghana, which was hailed over the last few years for its phenomenal growth rates, during April 2015, was approved for assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) valued at \$US918 million.

Ghana is no stranger to the IMF when during the final days of the First Republic led by President Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the Convention People's Party (CPP) founder sought help from the Bretton Woods institution just prior to a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and United States State Department engineered police-military coup against the socialist-oriented government in February 1966. Incumbent President John Dramani Mahama, the leader of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) ruling party evoked the industrial legacy of the Nkrumah administration during the elections saying that he would revive at least some of the 600 development projects which were in operation by early 1966 at the time of the Washington-backed coup.

Over the last two years Ghana has suffered from inflation creating conditions for mass demonstrations demanding measures to improve the national economy. The opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP), which is the successor to the conservative and right-wing anti-Nkrumaist political tradition in Ghana, utilized the economic difficulties to accuse the Mahama administration of mismanagement.

In an article published by Lexology.com, it says of the present situation in Ghana that:

“Something had to give as West Africa's second largest economy hit the buffers. When alternative financing options failed, Ghana turned to the IMF in April 2015 accepting a near \$1bn extended credit facility. Some \$465m has so far been disbursed to date and in September 2016 the country also raised \$750m through a bond auction that was more than four times oversubscribed. Yet the new President faces a daunting task. While his party has a reputation for prudence, and being the party of business, in October the IMF said Ghana's economic growth for 2016 will slow to its lowest for more than 25 years. Growth is expected to be 3.3 percent, the slowest since 1990 against 3.9 per cent in 2015.” (Dec. 19)

A change in government may not improve the economic situation inside the country. There have been conflicting opinions over whether the incoming NPP administration should renegotiate the terms of the IMF package. If there is no change in the character of the agreement it will illustrate clearly that the incoming government does not have any substantial ideas that would distinguish its approach to the crisis.

The elections in the small state of Gambia were also influenced by economic considerations in the largely agriculturally and tourist-based economy. President Yahya Jammeh, a former lower-ranking military officer who staged a bloodless coup over two decades ago, had initially accepted defeat in the polls. However, several days later, he reversed his view and rejected the results. His stance has prompted a regional crisis where a delegation from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was deployed to the country in efforts aimed at avoiding a constitutional dilemma.

Jammeh's opponent, a businessman Adama Barrow, has expressed fears for his life. ECOWAS leaders headed by Nigerian President Muhammadu Burhara and Ghana President Mahama have threatened harsher action if Jammeh refuses to relinquish control of the state. Reports indicated that Jammeh dispatched troops to the electoral commission headquarters in Banjul on the eve of the visit by the regional delegation. Jammeh, in a nationally televised address on December 9 said there was overwhelming evidence that the elections were rigged in favor of Barrow who ran as a compromise candidate representing several other opposition parties.

Of course Nigeria, which has had its own share of political problems since its independence in 1960, is today confronted with a declining economy. Abuja as well was being lauded for outstanding economic progress when designated in 2014 as having Africa's largest economy.

Nonetheless, with the decline in oil prices over the last two years, the most populous country on the continent has been declared to be in recession. Buhari has consequently come under criticism for not advancing fiscal policies which can effectively revitalize the economy.

Also the Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast continues to cause difficulties for the government. Buhari had pledged to resolve the war within six months after taking office nonetheless this has not materialized.

Southern Africa: From Zimbabwe to South Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Struggle Continues

Within the member-states of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) economic uncertainty has been a major concern for the governments and the people. Zimbabwe has been under the yoke of draconian sanctions since 2000, when the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) ruling party embarked upon a sweeping land reform program which transferred ownership of commercial farms from several thousand descendants of British settlers to the African majority.

Despite the advent of the administration of U.S. President Barack Obama, the sanctions against Zimbabwe have not been lifted but intensified. Over the last few months a crippling cash shortage has surfaced where the former national currency collapsed years ago being replaced by the U.S. dollar as the medium of exchange.

Zimbabwe has now begun to issue bond notes in an effort to ease the shortage. Discussions over trade in consumer goods with neighboring South Africa have taken place as well.

The ZANU-PF National People's Conference held in December in Masvingo, passed resolutions which give priority to solving the economic crisis. President Robert Mugabe, the First Secretary of the ruling party, maintains his undisputed leadership of the party while opposition groups continue fail to garner any semblance of political momentum in their stated objective of removing the former school teacher and guerilla leader from state power.

South Africa, the on-again and off-again largest economy in Africa, is also in recession like its Nigerian counterpart. The fall in prices for strategic minerals is largely to blame for the drop in the value of the national currency the rand.

A local governmental election in August witnessed a significant erosion in the percentage of the votes won by the ruling African National Congress (ANC) party. Although the ANC achieved twice as many votes as the leading opposition party the Democratic Alliance (DA), its control of key municipalities such as Johannesburg, Pretoria and Nelson Mandela Bay were lost.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a SADC member, a controversy is escalating over the status of the administration of President Joseph Kabila. The mineral-rich state in Central Africa has been a source of imperialist intrigue since its national independence in June 1960.

President Kabila's term of governance has expired yet there are no dates set for national elections. Opposition forces are organizing demonstrations demanding that Kabila hold elections. Nonetheless, no clear cut political direction is being articulated by the opposition. Instability continues in the east of the country on the borders with Uganda and Rwanda which have been a regional base of insurgencies seeking to destabilize the country.

Conclusion: Unity and Political Transformation Needed to Enhance Stability

Although most African states have been independent from European imperialism for several decades, the economic tentacles of international finance capital remains firmly intact. Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, who anticipated the deepening crisis of political economy in Africa as early as the 1960s, said that until there was a unified continent pursuing a socialist development program there would not be genuine independence and sovereignty.

Nkrumah's 1965 book entitled "Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism", states in the chapter "The Mechanisms of Neo-Colonialism" that: "In order to halt foreign interference in the affairs of developing countries it is necessary to study, understand, expose and actively combat neo-colonialism in whatever guise it may appear. For the methods of neo-colonialists are subtle and varied. They operate not only in the economic field, but also in the political, religious, ideological and cultural spheres."

This same chapter continues noting how the western capitalist states:

"Faced with the militant peoples of the ex-colonial territories in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America, imperialism simply switches tactics. Without a qualm it dispenses with its flags, and even with certain of its more hated expatriate officials. This means, so it claims, that it is 'giving' independence to

its former subjects, to be followed by 'aid' for their development. Under cover of such phrases, however, it devises innumerable ways to accomplish objectives formerly achieved by naked colonialism. It is this sum total of these modern attempts to perpetuate colonialism while at the same time talking about 'freedom', which has come to be known as neo-colonialism."

Africa must defeat this renewed insidious form of foreign domination. The discussions within the African Union and other continental organizations should focus on this essential direction in order for the centuries-long legacy of slavery and colonialism to be reversed.

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