



Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa

# **CALLING A SPADE A SPADE?**

Electoral Conflict in APRM Reporting

by **Michelle Small**



Paper series edited by Grant Masterson

ISBN: 978-1-920446-49-9

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This paper is part of a series commissioned by the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) exploring the content of APRM Country Review Reports (CRRs) currently available on issues including gender, land, youth, extractive industries, elections and violence, and government responses to the APRM CRRs.

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by Michelle Small

In 2015, 24 African states were scheduled to hold local, national and/or executive elections (EISA 2015)<sup>1</sup>. Burundi's ruling party pressed ahead with a 'sham' election on 29 June 2015 despite an opposition boycott and significant violence surrounding the election, which has thus far resulted in 70 deaths, 150 000 displaced persons and a failed coup (The Guardian 29 June 2015). In Nigeria elections were postponed for six weeks (14 February to 25 March 2015) due to the ongoing Boko Haram insurgency and problems with the biometric voter registration process. While Nigeria's 2015 elections were free from the large-scale electoral violence of those of 2011, in which an estimated 800 people died (Bekoe 2011), 58 people were killed in the run-up to the 2015 election (NHRC February 2015). Meanwhile, elections in South Sudan have been postponed to 2017 as a result of the bitter political power struggle between President Salvar Kirr and former Vice-President Riek Machar that has resulted in a two-year civil war and 50 000 deaths (International Crisis Group 2015).

Elections on the continent present both challenge and opportunity. On the one hand, they can spark violent contest and conflagration among political parties, actors and elites, as is evidenced in the cases of South Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire (2000, 2010), Mozambique (2004, 2008, 2013), Kenya (1992, 1997, 2003 and 2007), Nigeria (2003, 2007, 2011), Madagascar (2013), Democratic Republic of Congo (2011) and Lesotho (1998, 2007, 2015). Electoral violence can be one-sided and vertical, directed by the state or incumbent party to deter

competition and a possible change/challenge to power, as evidenced in Zimbabwe (2000, 2005 and 2008) and Ethiopia (2005). However, elections have also been used successfully as a mechanism to negotiate political parties out of conflict and protracted civil war, as was the case in South Africa (1994), Mozambique (1994) and Sierra Leone (2003).

Elections remain a powerful peace process tool and, with that in mind, the international and donor community is currently pushing for elections in Côte d'Ivoire, Libya and the Central African Republic. Further, it is argued that regular competitive elections institutionalise democratic forms of government and lead to 'good governance'. Nonetheless, the spectre of political violence during electoral periods persists, even in countries where elections have led to peace (eg, South Africa, Mozambique and Sierra Leone)<sup>2</sup>.

'Electoral conflict' has emerged as an ascendant type of conflict in and of itself on the continent, distinct from other categories of warfare such as civil war, insurgency, or rebellion<sup>3</sup>. The concept of electoral violence is poorly understood and it is insufficiently interdicted at the national, regional, continental and international levels, despite policy commitments, legal instruments, election monitoring and repeated denunciation.

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) Framework Document establishes the ambit, purpose and objectives of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), which identifies '...

<sup>1</sup> The states are Benin, Burundi, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, DRC, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Côte D'Ivoire, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mali, Morocco, Nigeria, São Tomé & Príncipe, Somaliland, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Zambia. Nine of these countries are APRM members. Indirect elections are not included.

<sup>2</sup> Low intensity and sporadic instances of violence are reflected in the South Africa, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Nigeria and Lesotho country reports.

<sup>3</sup> The author is aware that electoral conflict is not a new phenomenon in Africa, it has been a feature of politics on the continent since African countries achieved independence. However, this paper refers only to contemporary forms that have taken place since the re-introduction of multiparty democracy in Africa in the 1990s. It should also be noted that electoral conflict can (and has) led to civil war and attempted coups/unconstitutional changes in government.

democracy and good political governance as preconditions and foundations of sustainable development and the eradication of poverty' (NEPAD March 2003). Regular, competitive, 'free and fair' elections are pre-requisites of democratic government and good political governance. The purpose of the APRM review process is to promote standard-setting and best practice, identify areas of under-performance, flag associated risks and signal potential sources of conflict within member countries, all with the aim of establishing better governance.

Of the 35 APRM country members, 17 have undergone the country review process based on the original 88-page self-assessment questionnaire<sup>4</sup>. Currently, the APRM does not give enough prominence to electoral conflict. There are not enough indicators or measures of electoral violence tied to an assessment of whether an election is 'free and fair' and how this affects political governance. This paper, which is based on a review of the APRM Country Review Reports (CRRs), explores how electoral conflict and disputes have been depicted and discussed within the APRM CRRs. It further sets out to highlight ways in which the APRM can better identify and report on incidents of electoral conflict. The research employs text-mining and thematic analysis to conduct a critical analysis of the CRRs.

## METHODOLOGY

The approach used is the mixed methods approach, defined as 'research that combines quantitative and qualitative methods' (Lamont 2015). Combining quantitative and qualitative methods allows for complementarity in gathering and evaluating data by demonstrating

whether a statistical correlation exists among variables (quantitative method) and allowing for an in-depth analysis (qualitative method) of the underlying causal paths of variable correlation and interaction (Lamont 2015, p116).

Qualitatively, the research employs thematic analysis, which identifies and categorises patterned meaning across a data set. Patterns are identified based on data familiarisation, data-coding and theme development across the APRM reports. The standardised APRM self-questionnaire template was amenable to this type of coding and theme development.

Quantitatively, text-mining was used to determine 'word frequency', that is, the number of times a word appears across the reports. The number of raw text words in the reports totalled 1 440 000. Of these, 6 000 root words or 'numerators' appeared more than 850 000 times. Given that frequency is expressed as the number of times a particular word occurs per 10 000 words, a word that appears more than 800 times in each report is determined as being important or significant<sup>5</sup>. 'Elections' as a root word occurs 888 times and 'conflict' 847 times. The occurrence of these root words is mainly confined to the 'Democracy and Political Governance' chapter in each report, which is consistent with what one would expect in terms of the thematic area. As a focus area, 'Democracy and Political Governance' tends to be the longest chapter in each report because it covers nine objectives<sup>6</sup>.

The length of a chapter also affects the concentration of word frequency. For example, the 'Cross-cutting Issues' chapter, which is the

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<sup>4</sup> Original refers to the 2004 questionnaire and not to the 2013 revised self-assessment questionnaire, which has not yet been implemented.

<sup>5</sup> This does not include 'stopwords' such as 'the' or 'and' or 'country words' such as 'Rwanda' or 'Kigali'.

<sup>6</sup> The nine objectives are: Prevention and reduction of intra- and inter-state conflicts; Constitutional democracy, including periodic political competition and opportunity for choice, the rule of law, citizen rights and supremacy of the Constitution; Promotion and protection of economic, social and cultural rights, civil and political rights as enshrined in African and international human rights instruments; Uphold the separation of power, including the protection of the independence of the judiciary and of an effective legislature; Ensure accountable, efficient and effective public office holders and civil servants; Fighting corruption in the political sphere; Promotion and protection of the rights of women; Promotion and protection of the rights of children and young persons; Promotion and protection of the rights of vulnerable groups including internally displaced person and refugees.

shortest, has a disproportionately high root word frequency and density, yet its content does not add to the substance of the report or present new information. Hence, the value of combining qualitative thematic analysis with quantitative text-mining.

### Word clusters

Word clusters were derived based on 'root word' and synonym (e.g., root word 'election' and synonym 'vote'; root word 'conflict' and synonym 'violence'); and/or word-subject associations (e.g., word 'conflict' and subject association 'militia'; word 'conflict' and subject association 'rebels'). Word clusters and word frequencies are depicted in Tables 1 and 2.

The 'elections' word cluster contains analogous terminology such as 'elect' and 'elected', or terminology which is contingent on other terminology, for example, 'election' and 'vote'. The combined 'elections' word cluster amounts to 2 887 showing high significance as an issue area in political governance. Interestingly, 'vote' and 'voting' do not feature prominently in APRM reporting on electoral processes.

**Table 1**  
**'Elections' word cluster**

<b>'Word'</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Elect	22
Elected	368
Election	325
Elections	888
Elective	36
Electoral	720
Electorate	52
Vote	151
Voted	22
Voter	53
Voters	81
Votes	86
Voting	83
<b>Total</b>	<b>2887</b>

Table 2 details the 'conflict' word cluster and frequency and contains both analogous and similar but not equal terms (analogous: 'conflict' and 'war', 'conflict' and 'violence'; similar but not equal: 'conflict' and 'rebellion', 'conflict' and 'militia'). On the one hand this reflects the different outcomes of conflict and the different histories and legacies of countries and, on the other, the differences in association between conflict and elections in different countries. Interestingly, two trends are identified: either conflict has ceased with the holding of elections (i.e., elections perform a conflict resolution function), or conflict has been the result of the holding of elections (i.e., elections serve as a site for electoral competition, contestation, conflict and dispute).

Paradoxically, where elections have performed a conflict resolution function, subsequent elections still involve varying levels of violence. In the case of Sierra Leone, electoral violence occurred within the context of a civil war (1996) in which 'soldiers', 'rebels' and 'militias' were involved (Sierra Leone CRR 2012, p7). Elections and democracy were also used as a conflict resolution tool in Sierra Leone's 2003 election following the end of the 11-year civil war. Violence continues to feature during electoral contests in Sierra Leone despite the ending of the civil war and the country's transition to democracy.

Contrastingly, state violence directed against the opposition entailed the use of 'security forces' in Ethiopia's 2005 election. For this reason, the 'conflict' word cluster is the most extensive and varied word cluster with a considerably higher frequency – 4 145 per 10 000 words.

**Table 2**  
**'Conflict' word cluster**

<b>Word</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Armed	140
Army	89
Combatant	35
Conflict	847
Conflicting	28
Conflicts	580
Insecure	15
Insecurity	124
Militia	11
Rebellion	13
Rebels	20
Security	872
Soldiers	50
Violence	674
Violent	141
War	482
Wars	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>4145</b>

Two heat maps (Figure 1: Elections and Figure 2: Conflict) provide a graphic depiction of word frequency, concentration and distribution across chapter/focus area and country. The darker the shading the higher the frequency.

The word frequency, concentration and distribution of the word 'elections', as per Figure 1, varies among countries, with some clustering:

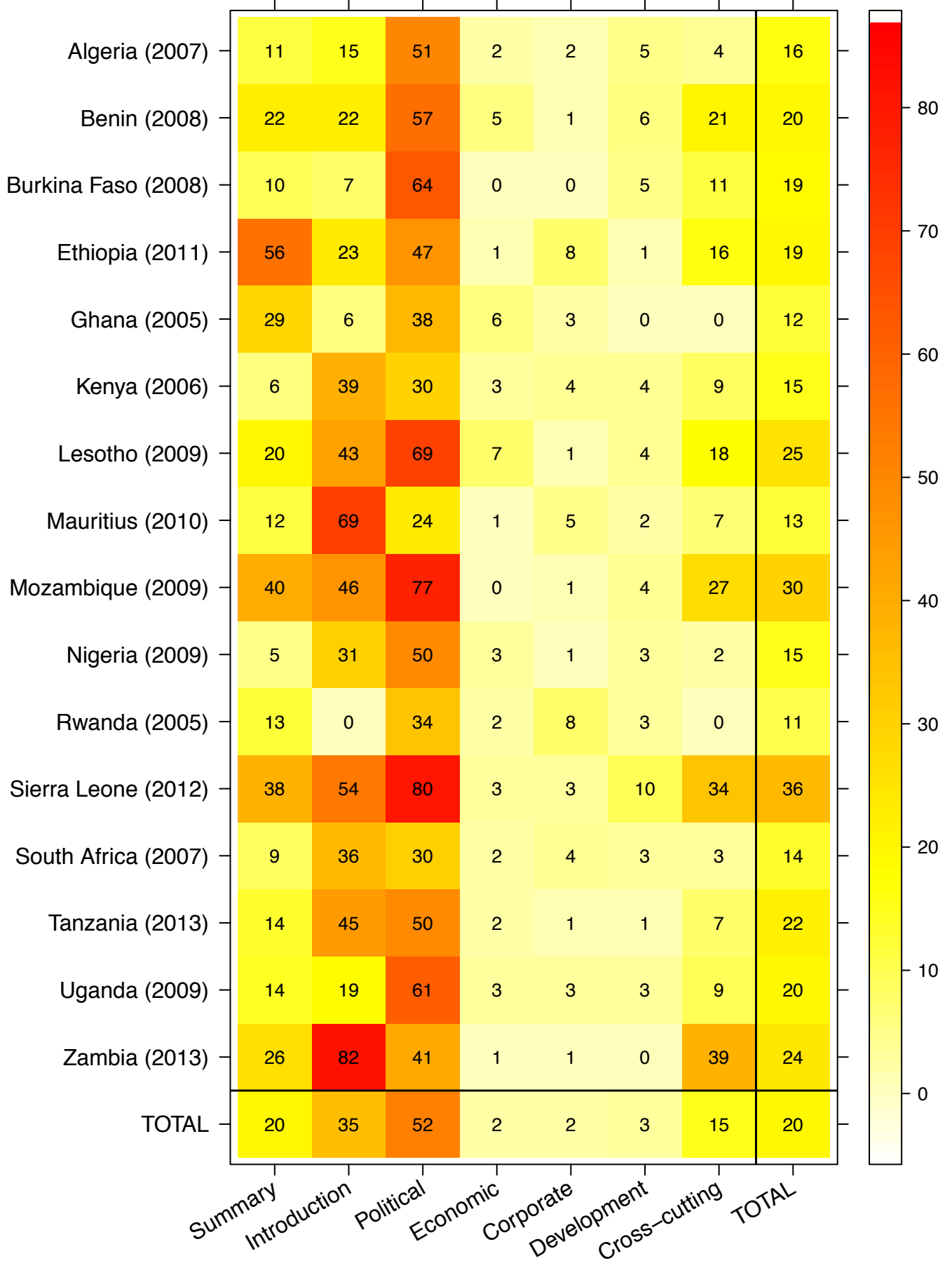
- lowest frequency: Rwanda, Ghana, Mauritius, South Africa;
- low frequency (11-16 words): Kenya, Nigeria, Algeria;
- median frequency (19-22 words): Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Benin, Uganda, Tanzania; and
- high frequency (25-36 words): Lesotho, Mozambique and Sierra Leone.

Country clustering is interesting due to the markedly contrasting electoral processes, attributes and outcomes among countries falling within the same frequency cluster.

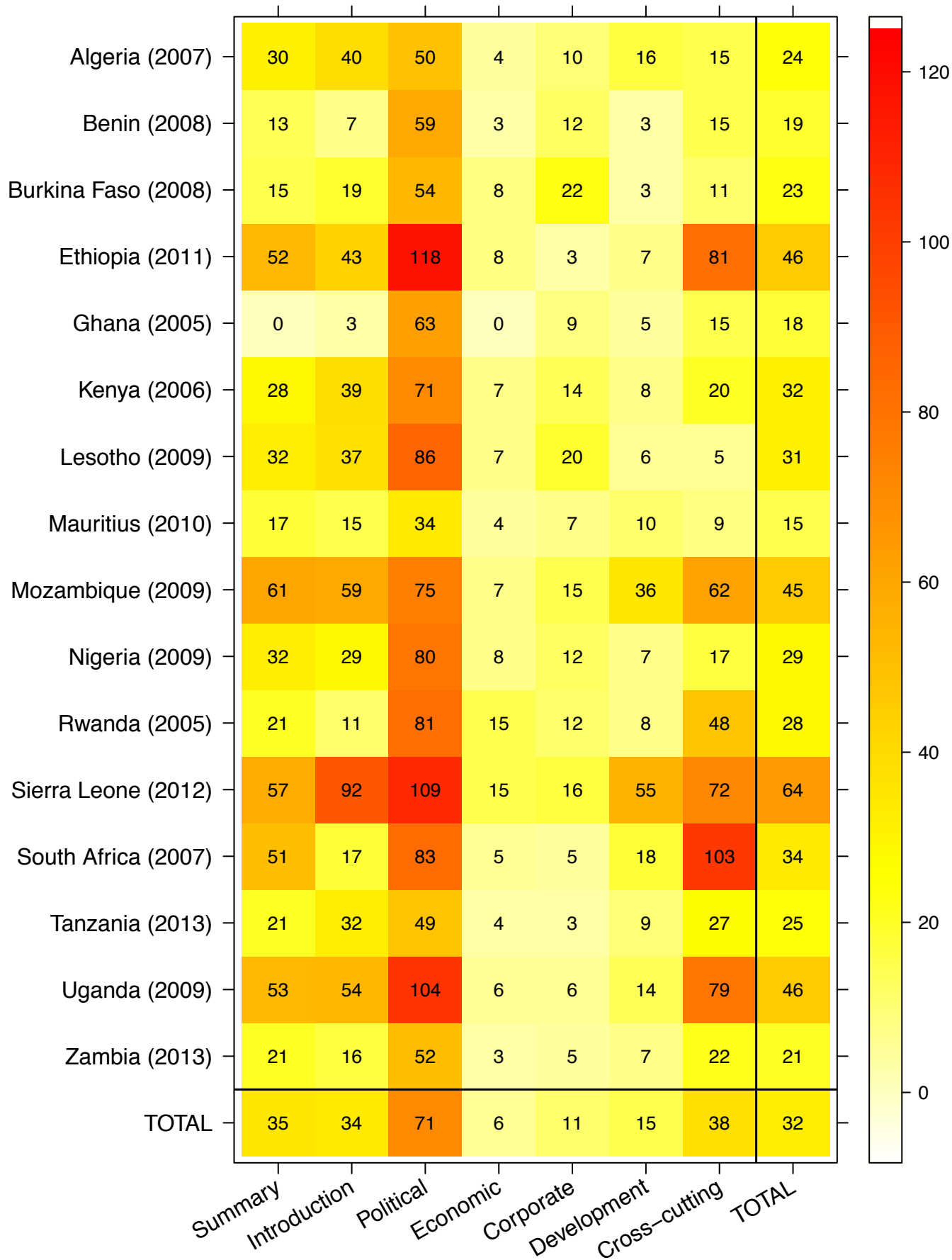
Mauritius, for example, has a history of almost 40 years of peaceful elections, but sits alongside Rwanda in the lowest-frequency 'elections' cluster. Rwanda's artificially low elections frequency score is due to reporting and assessment problems encountered by the Country Review Mission (CRM) which meant that the CRM was unable to provide an assessment of 'international standards and codes on democracy and good political governance [due to]: (a) tardiness in acceding to them; (b) timely reporting on implementation; and (c) inadequate domestication' (Rwanda CRR, p31). In addition, the 'operationalization of the Constitution is fraught with major problems that are not elucidated in Rwanda's CSAR [Country Self-Assessment Report, such that] the existence of core aspects of democracy and political freedoms were not clearly visible' (Rwanda CRR, p37). Further, the Rwandan CRR indicates that 'political parties are not able to operate freely' (Rwanda CRR, p37) and raises alarm about the undemocratic practice 'in which voters line up behind candidates' (Rwanda CRR, p38).

Kenya and Nigeria, which fall into the low-frequency 'elections' cluster, both have a history of repeated electoral fraud, disputed electoral outcomes and electoral violence. Correspondingly, Sierra Leone, Lesotho and Mozambique, which have all experienced incidences of violently-contested elections, fall within the high-frequency cluster. The way in which 'elections' are discussed and dissected within the reports, therefore, substantially affects word frequency and distribution. This is further highlighted in the median cluster in which Uganda, Burkina Faso, Tanzania and Ethiopia exhibit instances of electoral conflict and violence and Benin does not. Benin 'is often cited as a model of democracy in Africa' (Benin CRR, p54). Throughout the CRRs the overall conversation, whether it relates to transitional or more established democracies, centres on

**Figure 1**  
**Elections (occurrences per ten thousand words)**



**Figure 2**  
**Conflict (occurrences per ten thousand words)**





improving the electoral process. Aspects like voter registration, the geographical distribution and proximity of voting stations, vote-buying, expedient party coalitions and floor crossing are highlighted. In most reports concerns are raised about election safeguards such as the political/executive appointment of office holders/officials serving on national election bodies/boards and the ability of opposition political parties to compete equally (especially in terms of party financing and access to national media) (See Mozambique, Rwanda, Kenya, Lesotho, Uganda, Nigeria, Kenya CRRs).

Despite the variations in frequency and distribution among countries, it is clear that the APRM considers the conduct of elections to be a central standard in the area of political governance.

The word frequency, concentration and distribution of the word 'conflict' as per Figure 2 falls into three categories:

- low frequency: Mauritius, Ghana, Benin, Burkina Faso, Zambia, Algeria, Tanzania;
- median frequency: Rwanda, Nigeria, Kenya, Lesotho, South Africa, Mozambique; and
- high frequency: Ethiopia, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Uganda.

The word 'conflict' is prevalent in the 'Democracy and Good Political Governance' chapter in all the CRRs, with some repeated occurrences in the 'Cross-cutting Issues' chapter. This is in part due to the fact that the objective, 'Prevention and Reduction of Intra- and Inter-state Conflicts', and the question, 'What are the recent or ongoing conflicts in your country and the sources of these?' are listed in the 'Democracy and Good Political Governance' chapter of the self-assessment questionnaire (APR Secretariat, p27). This is also the chapter in which historical background, including political histories that refer to liberation wars, civil wars, secessionist

wars and border wars are discussed and which identifies ongoing or potential sources of tension such as land, resources, ethnicity, inequality, the politicisation of state institutions and elections.

In 10 of the 17 countries, namely Uganda, South Africa, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Nigeria, Mozambique, Lesotho, Kenya, Ghana, and Ethiopia, the discussion of conflict is very comprehensive and based on each country's political, liberation and independence history. Significantly, in all the CRRs, with the exception of Mauritius, Rwanda and Benin, the occurrence of election violence and/or electoral conflict is highlighted to varying degrees and levels (though it is hard to reach conclusions about the lack of, or potential for, electoral conflict in Rwanda and Algeria due to the incumbent party's control of the political space).

In the case of Kenya and Nigeria, sporadic ethnic conflict centred on access to communal land and resources are flagged as sources of conflict, as well as the the politicisation of militias and unemployed youth during electoral periods (Nigeria CRR, p83; Kenya CRR, p62). Democratic forms of governance and participation have not transformed these latent disputes; the opening up of the political space and competition appear, rather, to have escalated them. In Tanzania, Kenya, Nigeria and Lesotho, varying levels of election-related violence are flagged as sources of conflict. In Lesotho, the chief source/site of conflict has been the adoption of multiparty democracy and democratic consolidation. Interestingly, Mauritius, as an outlier, has not experienced conflict on a mass or national scale, the frequency of the word 'conflict' relates to the 'ethnic riots' of 1964, 1968 and 1999 (Mauritius CRR, p70).

Sierra Leone had high scores for both 'elections' and 'conflict' because there was a civil war in the country between 1991 and 2002 and elections

took place in 1996, while the conflict was raging. There has also been recurrent electoral violence (2003, 2007) since the end of war, with 'violent clashes between SLPP [Sierra Leone People's Party] and APC [All People's Congress] supporters in Bo, Kono, Kailahun, Kambia, Port Loko and Freetown' (Sierra Leone CRR, p82).

On 14 January 2015 the African Union Peace and Security Council (PSC) convened a session on 'The Prevention of Election-Related Conflicts in Africa', which highlighted the continued risk of political violence centred upon elections in Africa, in the presence of

institutional weakness; issues of citizenship and voting rights; eligibility of candidates; attempts at extending the constitutional term limits; politicization of state institutions, including security institutions; lack of autonomy of electoral management bodies; an uneven playing field and highly restricted political spaces; issues of inequality; marginalization and youth unemployment.

Recognition of electoral conflict and the risks associated with the democratic process have resulted in the creation of two continental policy instruments, namely, the 2002 African Union (AU) Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections and the 2007 African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. To date, the 2007 charter has only been ratified by 23 countries. Neither of the documents specifically alludes to electoral conflict as a typology or a political practice.

The upswing in conflict associated with democratisation and elections in Africa following the end of the Cold War is well documented in academic literature (see Bekoe 2012; Høglund

2009; Mansfield & Snyder 2007; Sisk & Reynolds 1998; Nohlen, Krennerich & Thibaut 1998)<sup>7</sup>. In 2011 alone, Bekoe (2012, p252) writes, 60% of elections in Africa were violent to some degree. The findings, statistics, causal paths, outcomes and explanations put forward by scholars in relation to incidences of electoral conflict and the reasons for electoral violence vary widely. The Social Conflict in Africa Database (SCAD) identifies 685 occasions in Africa between 1990 and 2011 in which elections were a major source of conflict (SCAD 2013).

The SCAD dataset follows a 36-month pre-election, election and post-election cycle to examine violent events. Lindberg (2006, p61), on the other hand, limits reporting to a 120-day election cycle, estimating that roughly 80% of Africa's 'third wave' multiparty elections held between 1990 and 2003 involved some level of violence. Strauss & Taylor (2012, p 23) break this down further in their study, arguing that 'serious incidents' of electoral violence are rare, involving only 10% of all elections held in sub-Saharan Africa between 1990 and 2008. 'Repressive violence' is apparent in 10% of elections in the same period, while 20% exhibit 'limited violence', 38% 'violent harassment' and 42% 'no violence' at all<sup>8</sup>. Statistically, 1992 and 1993 are classified as highly violent electoral years, with an upswing in 2000 and 2005. Overall,

*... the result is counterintuitive: even though on average sub-Saharan African states are becoming more democratic – at least as measured by Freedom House's scores on political and civil liberty – elections, on average are not becoming less violent.*

Strauss & Taylor 2012, p28

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<sup>7</sup> This paper only considers countries covered by the APRM for analytical focus and application.

<sup>8</sup> The data-set considers serious incidents of violence to include generalised killing directly tied to the electoral contest; repressive violence to include targeted assassinations, detentions, torture, disappearances; limited violence is considered violent harassment and intimidation; while no violence reflects that no violent incidences were to be directly tied to the electoral contest. Part of the problem here is that the focus is on violence tied directly to the electoral contest, so pre-election violence is excluded. This is important in a country such as South Africa, where election violence was evident from the inception of the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) in 1993 to the first democratic election in 1994.

According to the Uganda CRR (2009, p54), the challenge posed by the spread and adoption of multiparty 'donor democracy'<sup>9</sup> (that is the meeting of technocratic criteria and standards, e.g., holding of elections, existence of term limits, separations of powers, access to information), without true democratic empowerment of the citizenry or political opposition, has meant that it is possible to have elections and democratic standards, but not substantive democracy. This is also highlighted in the Ethiopian, Rwandan, Ugandan, Mozambican and Lesotho country reports, which state that although elections are a statutory component of the governmental system, a restrictive political culture dominated by the incumbent political party has developed, undermining true democratic plurality, freedom and practice. Significantly restricted political participation is a notable source of grievance and contestation during electoral periods.

According to the SCAD data-set (2013, p4), in the 1990s electoral conflict represented 7.6% of all conflict in Africa, increasing to 10.1% by 2000. Statistically, this upturn is probably best attributed to the overall increase in the frequency of elections. Elections, however, are not supposed to lead to violence and conflict, they are supposed to lead to democratic consolidation and political stability. It is the persistence of violence and conflict in the presence of elections and democracy that is troubling for governance in Africa. Indeed, in Tanzania's CRR (2012, pp 77 and 82), it is argued that democratic competitive politics 'has engendered another type of dispute in the form of sporadic election violence'. There was violence in the 1995, 2000 and 2010 mainland Tanzanian elections and in every election in Zanzibar since 1995.

The persistence of electoral conflict in a number of countries is recorded in Table 4.

**Table 4**  
**Top 10 Most-Violent Elections, 1990-2010**

COUNTRY	ELECTION DATE	DEATHS
Kenya	December, 2007	1502
South Africa	April, 1994	239
Nigeria	April, 2007	226
Cote d'Ivoire	October, 2000	178
Kenya	December, 1992	156
Zimbabwe	March, 2008	114
Togo	April, 2005	110
Nigeria	April, 2003	57
DRC	October, 2006	42
Sierra Leone	February, 1996	28

*Source: SCAD 2013, p4*

Electoral conflicts occur predominantly in countries experiencing ongoing civil discord/war (e.g., Sierra Leone 1996, South Africa 1993), in post-election periods based on a disputed electoral outcome (e.g., Lesotho 1998, Ethiopia 2005, Kenya 2007) and/or within countries with a history of recurrent electoral violence (e.g., Nigeria 1993, 2003, 2007; Kenya 1992, 1997, 2002, 2007; Lesotho 1998, 2007, 2015; Uganda 1996, 2001, 2006, 2011 and Tanzania 1995, 2000, 2005). A thematic analysis of the CRRs reveals a number of factors common to countries which experience violence and conflict during election periods. These include ethnic enmity, high youth unemployment, nepotism/cronyism/patronage, partisan politics, land disputes, competition for access to state and/or mineral resources and horizontal inequality within society. These conditions are consistently identified as being sources of past conflict, current conflict, or potential conflict. In some countries chiefs and traditional rulers are regarded as latent sources of conflict (e.g., Lesotho and Ghana) or

<sup>9</sup> The review alludes to issues surrounding democratisation in Africa in the 1990s being driven by the international community and donors packaging political and economic conditionality, and the derived weakness.

as instrumental in igniting violence (e.g., Sierra Leone), while in others, the politicisation of religion has acted as a significant fault line for dispute (e.g., Nigeria and Mali).

However, the exact interaction of these wide-ranging factors in generating conflict in the context of competitive elections is not clear. Why, for instance, does electoral conflict occur in some states where these conditions are present, but not in others, and why is conflict prevalent in some election periods in a particular country but not in others? The APRM review and reporting should direct attention to these issues.

Some CRRs (Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia) specifically identify factors which have played a role in violent electoral outcomes. Others, however (Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa), downplay or ignore the scale or seriousness of conflict centred on the political and electoral process (depending on whether the occurrence is assessed as ‘major’ or ‘minor’ by national, regional, continental bodies and/or the international community). Further, given the variance in levels of electoral violence and conflict among countries and even within countries (in the Burkina Faso CRR – 2008, pp 86-87 – ‘political conflict’ is listed as latent and open to varying degrees and in the Tanzania CRR it is noted that electoral violence varies between the mainland and semi-autonomous Zanzibar), an understanding of elections and conflict is contingent on a reading beyond the APRM reports.

## APRM REPORTING AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The revised questionnaire goes a long way towards recognising previous deficiencies and broadening the descriptors of democracy and good political governance tied to observed trends and experiences since the initial 2004 self-questionnaire. Much of this has to do

with elections and the political environment. The revised questionnaire homes in on specific political malpractices such as term limits, inclusive and legitimate participation, independence of election management institutions, political corruption, civilian oversight of security agencies, independence of prosecutors, obstruction of civil society, public service delivery, executive abuse, incumbency abuse, manipulation of the judiciary, accountability of executive agencies between elections, impartiality, penalties for public office holders and abuse of office (APR Secretariat 2013, pp15-23).

These changes also reflect principles articulated in the 2007 African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. Significantly, in the revised questionnaire Objective 3, Question 1: ‘What Conditions Generate Conflict in Your Country?’, ‘pre, during and post electoral violence’ are recognised, along with an expanded list of other cross-cutting issues such as ‘inequality among groups and/or regions; competition for natural resources e.g. land; unfair exploitation of natural resources e.g. oil and minerals; and political instability’, as giving rise to conflict (APR Secretariat 2013, pp17-18).

The questionnaire also asserts that ‘the core principle of every review exercise carried out under the authority of the mechanism must be technically competent, credible and free of political manipulation’ and urges a ‘domestication of the questionnaire on the selected cross-cutting issues ... that might be of special significance within the context of the country’ (APR Secretariat 2013, pp1 and 5). This recognition is also based on observed trends and experience since the initial 2004 questionnaire, in response to which some country members attempted to exert their influence in doctoring the content of the reports. This is highlighted in the Rwanda CRR (2005, p31), which states that ‘ratification has not been accompanied

with resolute compliance with reporting requirements and domestication, so that it is not possible to verify the country is in fact implementing all the standards and codes’.

A number of key areas that could be improved on are detailed below:

### Improving self-reporting quality

The benchmarking and standardised design of the questionnaire allows for consistent and equivalent comparisons across countries. However, voluntary contribution/elaboration permits for great variance in the detail, depth and length of the reports. This is certainly evident in reporting on incidences and the intensity of conflict/violence/armed clashes/protests related to the democratic process and elections. For example, election violence since South Africa’s 1994 election is underreported in the country’s CRR.

While the report concedes that there ‘have been sporadic expressions of dissatisfaction, as well as isolated election-related violence’ (South Africa CRR 2007, p75), such a statement does not provide any clarity about the scale, location or nature of electoral violence and conflict since the country’s first democratic elections, in 1994. For instance, there has been growing contestation at the local inter-party political level, with a number of political killings in wards and districts (Bruce 2009). Similarly, the wide-ranging fraud, rigging and election violence in Nigeria’s 2007 election is underplayed in the country’s report, despite widely publicised reporting on these issues. In its final report, for instance, the European Union Election Observer Mission (2007) observed that the elections

were marred by very poor organization, lack of essential transparency, widespread procedural irregularities, substantial evidence of fraud,

widespread voter disenfranchisement at different stages of the process, lack of equal conditions for political parties and candidates and numerous incidents of violence.

### Framing of questions and structure of questionnaire

A key limitation of the original self-assessment questionnaire is that no question specifically deals with electoral conflict. This despite such conflict being empirically observable on the continent at the time the APRM was formed (2003) and the questionnaire formulated (2004). APRM reporting does not provide for a specific, coherent, methodical or analytical assessment of electoral conflict or electoral violence despite the fact that it is mentioned in most of the CRRs. A definition of what constitutes electoral violence and electoral conflict is needed in the APRM self-assessment questionnaire, framed within Objective 2, Question 1.

A working definition should include recognition of random or organised acts or threats of violence, harm, intimidation, or coercion against persons and/or property that form part of the electoral process, the electoral process itself and other electoral participants. This may include any of the following: physical attack resulting in injury or death, arson, looting, assassination, forced assemblies, confinement, riots, destruction of property, rape, ballot box stuffing, candidate visibility, presence of militias/youth gangs and incentivising electoral participation, to name a few<sup>10</sup>. By providing an expanded definition of what constitutes electoral violence or electoral conflict, the CSAR and Country Review Mission (CRM) will be better equipped to report on these identified acts. What needs to be addressed and targeted is elections as a site for contestation and this is not dealt with effectively in the APRM reports.

<sup>10</sup> Composite conceptualisation drawn from ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, National Democratic Institute, International Foundation for Electoral Systems, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA).

### Scoring of indicators

The APRM self-questionnaire (APR Secretariat 2004, p22) posits that ‘indicators in Democracy and Political Governance are not amenable to quantitative measurement’ and that the ‘focus is on qualitative measurement’. There is both truth and fallacy in this approach. Certainly, descriptions of political practice and culture rest on a discursive approach, however, a more robust evaluation, in which a country describes practice, policy or implementation linked with a scored assessment, would strengthen reporting by providing an objective aggregate.

Democracy and electoral indicators are amenable to measurement and can be placed on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 signalling weakness/poor performance and 10 signalling strength/attainment<sup>11</sup>. A specific measurement tied to a definition of and questions about electoral violence and electoral conflict is needed here. This would provide for better comparative data among and within countries over time, especially given that there are such variations in electoral violence. It would also allow for a more targeted understanding of where a country is underperforming in relation to ‘Democracy and Political Governance’, where intervention is needed most, what type of intervention is needed and whether interventions have been successful.

Another benefit of providing quantitative scoring of performance is that claims (which, in some cases, are debatable) about meeting technocratic ‘donor democracy’ versus a lack of ‘substantive democracy’ can be better extrapolated, understood and analysed. Further, qualitative reporting on the extent to which a country complies with the conceptualisation and

measurement of democracy and ‘free and fair’ elections as defined by the APRM is not always clear or accurate. Signing and ratifying treaties does not equate with implementation, and where there is implementation, there is no way to assess its impact accurately.

### Country self-monitoring censorship

Each country should be required to respond to each question and objective in the four focus areas, even if the response is not applicable because of the specifics of the country and the domestication of the questionnaire. There is currently too much leeway given and omissions or under-reporting caused by countries selecting which objectives to report on has led to some either not reporting on or providing only rudimentary details about democratic deficits and/or electoral malpractice and conflict. This is evident in the reporting on Nigeria’s 2007 election, Uganda’s 2006 election, Kenya’s 1992, 1997 and 2002 elections and the absence of elaboration about ‘isolated election-related violence incidents’ in South Africa (South Africa CRR, p75)<sup>12</sup>.

The 2004 APRM questionnaire (pp 29-30) currently asks countries to:

- (iv) Describe your electoral system, providing relevant legal and institutional provisions as appropriate;
- (v) Assess the effectiveness of the electoral system in terms of its capacity to deliver results that are adjudged to be broadly free and fair;
- (vi) Provide reports produced by governmental sources and other sources on recent elections held in your country;
- (vii) Provide evidence of recent contentious electoral cases and how they were resolved by the courts.

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<sup>11</sup> For example, the Mo Ibrahim African Electoral Index measures, among other elements, electoral procedures, freedom of association and assembly, restrictions on political parties, equal opportunities for political parties, impartial allotment of public funds, vote buying, voter intimidation, secrecy of the ballot, use of political patronage, freedom of the press, and incidence of electoral violence and the Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance measures and scores rule of law, accountability, personal safety, participation, judicial independence among other issues. Other bodies which do similar research include Freedom House, the National Democratic Institute, and International IDEA.

<sup>12</sup> In South Africa, political assassinations continue to form part of political life, with 120 political killings in three successive elections since 2003. A total of 76 incidents of election-related violence were reported in the run-up to the 2014 election.

Most countries report successfully on the technocratic aspects of the electoral process (points iv and v) but ignore point (vii). For example, Tanzania's CRR deals quite comprehensively with all the objectives, but Ghana's does not. There is a possible explanation for this. Ghana's CRR was conducted in 2005 while Tanzania's was conducted in 2012 and, in the interim, assessment criteria and reporting evolved.

questionnaire will contribute considerably to enhancing the country review and reporting process, establishing the practice of peer review and, ultimately fostering good governance on the continent.

## CONCLUSIONS

Political stability rooted in democratic forms of governance has been recognised as the institutional basis for securing socio-economic rights and state and human security and building organisational capacity across all sectors of society. Democracy and elections continue to be viewed as prerequisites for one another and to be used as the barometer of good political governance on the continent. Yet, in combination they do not always deliver rights, freedoms, liberties and protection, especially where violence and conflict persist (Mozambique CRR, p58). Elections have been marred by serious violence, conflict, intimidation, rigging and fraud, with resultant 'democratic reversals' reported in many African states. They have not eradicated the spectre of conflict, and have instead served as a site for new or renewed contestation. This requires urgent attention in APRM reporting.

The APRM CRRs remain a useful diagnostic tool for identifying gaps, deficiencies, shortcomings, weaknesses and conditions that create conflict within countries. The APRM review must be viewed as a learning process. It is a novel undertaking on the continent and the reports offer key insights into each member country. The revised (but yet to be implemented) 2013 self-assessment questionnaire certainly does better in asking countries to report on more detailed and precise aspects, of which 'pre, during and post-election violence' is one. The revised

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## ANNEXURE A

**Method of deriving ‘heatmap’ graphics from APRM Country Research Reports using word stemming and clustering**

Grant Masterson and Rod Alence

Each APRM country review culminates in a book-length report. Given the way these reports are compiled, and their proven accuracy and reliability in identifying critical governance issues in APRM member states, they warrant further examination. However, the length and technical language of the reports is often cited as a major obstacle to broader levels of engagement with their content. To address this, the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) piloted a text-mining methodology to simplify and disaggregate specific issues from the reports in a manner which, hopefully, enhances their utility.

Text mining reduces the reports to ‘bags of words’, whose frequencies can be analysed statistically. The first step was to capture the text from the

16 reports electronically and to ‘clean’ it – by, for example, removing all punctuation and numbers and deleting page headers and footers. Next the text was summarised in a word-frequency matrix showing how often each word occurs in each chapter of each report. Using this full list of words, paper authors compiled a list of words usually associated with their specific paper topic. For example, in the paper on ‘Extractives and Mining’, words pertaining to mining, oil, and resource extraction were conceptually grouped together under these three umbrella terms.

This allowed the paper authors to calculate the frequencies of these specific concepts within each chapter of each report. The frequencies, as raw word counts or as counts normalised per ten thousand words of text, provide rough indicators of the degree of emphasis on the paper’s key concepts. Note: Each time any of the grouped words is flagged in the text a result is returned as an instance of the main concept word (see Table 1).

Table 1  
Paper topics and key concept terms by paper

Subject of paper	Author	‘Concept’ words (example)	Grouped words linked to ‘concept’ word
Land and the APRM	Lisa Van Dongen	Land	land landless
Gender and the APRM	Jacqui de Matos Ala	Female	female females girl girls woman women womens*

Subject of paper	Author	'Concept' words (example)	Grouped words linked to 'concept' word
Extractives, Mining and the APRM	Rod Alence	Minerals	mineral minerals miners mines mining diamond diamonds gold tin coal aluminium copper iron quarrying
Elections, Conflict and the APRM	Michelle Small	Election	elect elected election elections elective electoral electorate vote voted voter voters votes vote voted voter voters votes voting
Youth and the APRM	Melanie Meirotti	Youth	youth
Government Responses to the APRM	Grant Masterson	Executive	Cabinet executive minister ministerial ministers ministry president Primeminister*

\*punctuation is removed from the text to avoid data confusion prior to running the analysis.

The analysis is aided by the fact that all the APRM country reports have similar structures. All contain four core thematic chapters on key themes of the APRM: ‘democracy and political governance’, ‘economic governance and management’, ‘corporate governance’ and ‘socio-economic development’. These core chapters are preceded by an introductory discussion of the APRM process and country background. In early reports the introductory material occupied a single chapter, but in later reports it spans two chapters. For ease of comparison, where it occupies two chapters the text is combined into a single document, called ‘introduction’ and treated as a single chapter. The core thematic chapters are followed by a concluding discussion of ‘cross-cutting issues’, findings, and recommendations. In early reports this concluding material occupied a single chapter, but in later reports it spans two chapters. Again, where it occupies two chapters these were combined into a single document, called ‘cross-cutting issues’ and treated as a single chapter. Each report also starts with an executive summary, which is treated as a chapter in its own right. All other front matter and appendices are excluded from the analysis.

Except for the first few reports published the word counts are reasonably consistent. The first two reports, on Ghana and Rwanda, are quite short, averaging only 36 000 words. The third, on Kenya, is 75 000 words. The average length of the other 13 reports is 99 000 words, with nine falling between 90 000 and 110 000 words, and the longest two being Mozambique (117 000 words) and Nigeria (114 000 words). The four thematic chapters account for nearly two-thirds of each report, averaging 65 000 words. Among these, ‘democracy and political governance’ is longest, averaging 21 000 words; the average in the other three – ‘economic governance’, ‘corporate governance’, and ‘socio-economic development’ – is slightly more than 14 000 words. The average number of words in the remaining chapters –

‘executive summary’, ‘introduction’, and ‘cross-cutting issues’ – is about 8 000 words.

The combined word count of all 16 reports (excluding front matter and appendices) is about 1 400 000 words. Three pages of typed, double-spaced text in a standard font equals about a thousand words. Using this as a rough approximation, the text analysed is roughly equivalent to 4 200 typed, double-spaced pages.

The final heatmaps illustrate the intensity of word occurrences by country and by chapter. The higher the frequency with which a word appears in a chapter, the darker that block will appear. Country chapters with dark red blocks are therefore those with the highest frequency of a word, while those with very pale yellow blocks have no or almost no references to that word. The use of the heatmaps themselves allows for a unique and otherwise unattainable perspective on the contents of the 16 APRM Country Reports analysed. It is possible to identify trends in the occurrences of key concept words in the reports and, due to the thematically arranged structure of the reports, this provides the reader with additional perspectives on the context in which these words are being referenced.

However, caution should be exercised in reading too much into the heatmaps themselves. The brief given to all the authors in this series of papers was to view the heatmaps as an indication of which APRM Country Reports, and specifically, which chapters, warranted further examination with respect to the theme of the paper. The heatmaps are useful insofar as they point a researcher in the direction of interesting trends as well as unexpected (or expected) anomalies and outliers in terms of the referencing of a word within the reports. It is not possible to deduce the content of the reports from the heatmaps, simply which sections of which reports warrant specific referencing when examining specific issues such as those in this Occasional Paper series.





## About the Author

Michelle Small is a Lecturer in International Relations at the University of the Witwatersrand and a PhD Candidate at King's College London. Her research interests include weak states, violent non-state actors (VNSA's), private military and security companies (PMSC's), and electoral violence in Africa.

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Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa

T: +27 11 381 60 00 • F: +27 11 482 61 63

14 Park Rd • Richmond • Johannesburg

PO Box 740 • Auckland Park 2006 • South Africa



The EISA APRM Programme is supported by the  
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

ISBN: 978-1-920446-49-9

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