

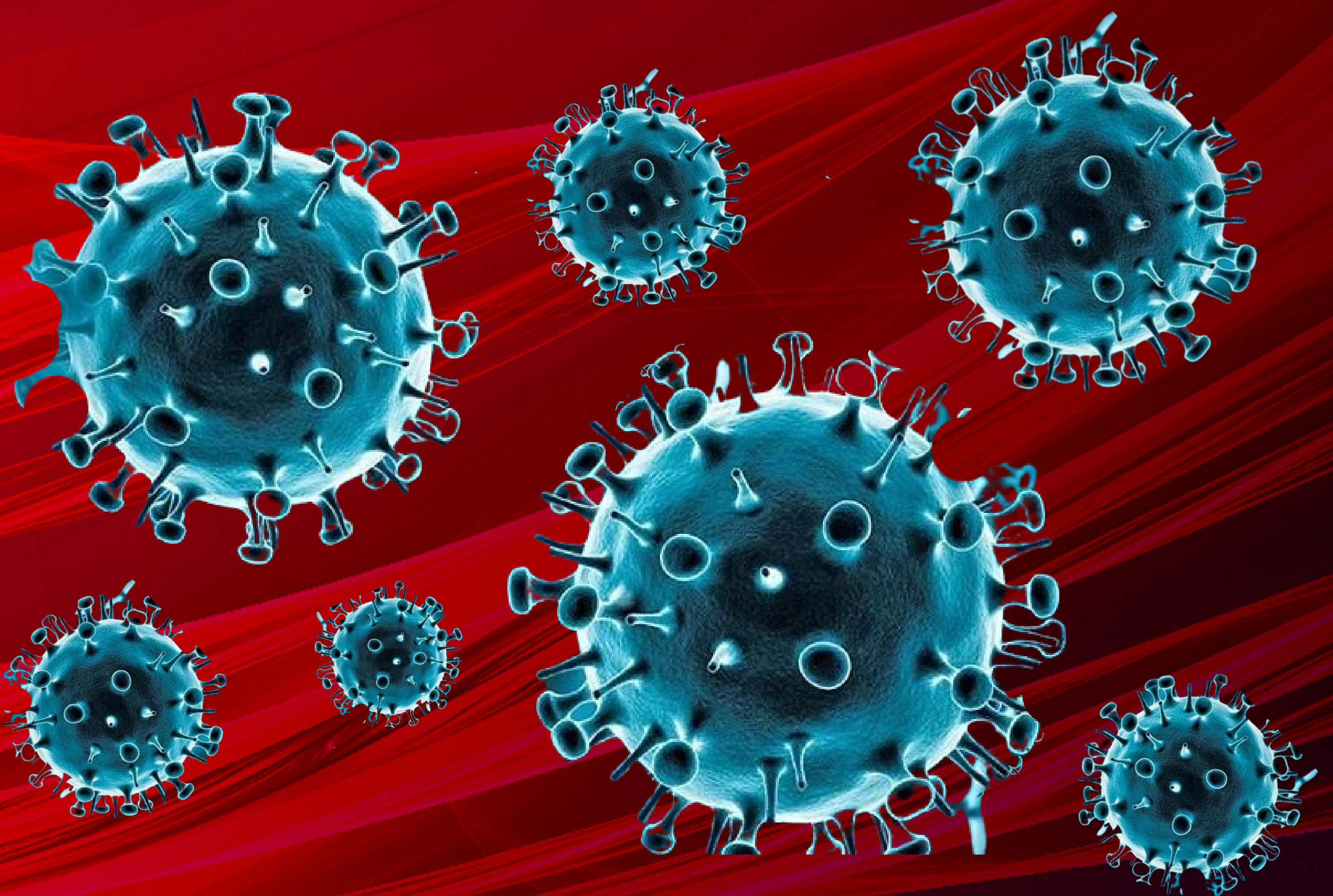
African Wars in the 21st Century

POST-COVID-19 EMERGING TRENDS

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

WORKSHOP REPORT

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DECEMBER 2021

WORKSHOP REPORT

PREPARED BY

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CENTER FOR THE STUDY
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AFRICAN DIASPORA



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Dr. Ilunga is a member of the Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network. He is the author of the book Humanitarianism and Security: Trouble and Hope at the Heart of Africa (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020). He holds a Ph.D. in Global Affairs from Rutgers -The State University of New Jersey. He tweets at @DrYvanYenda.

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Foreword

On behalf of the Center for the Study for Africa and the African Diaspora (CSAAD), and as CSAAD Director, it was our privilege, in conjunction with the Center for Global Affairs, the Initiative for the Study of Emerging Threats, the Center on International Cooperation, and the Joint Civil-Military Interaction Research and Education Network, to host the virtual expert workshop, “African Wars in the 21st Century: Post-COVID Emerging Trends, Challenges, and Opportunities”, which met on October 6, 2021, for much of the day.

Under the leadership of Drs. Olajumoke (Jumo) Ayandele and Yvan Yenda Ilunga, the workshop brought together some 30 scholars and experts who made formal presentations on such matters as the impact of Covid-19 on the protection and promotion of civil and political rights; vaccine diplomacy as it pertains to local resilience and international stability; the militarization of politics and the undemocratization of political spaces in Africa; complexities between conflict, conflict management, and public health; and risk management in relation to fieldwork, vulnerable populations and questions of ethics. I now invite you to take full advantage of the excellent workshop report carefully prepared by the conveners.

Michael A. Gomez
CSAAD Director
Silver Professor of History and Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies
New York University

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POST-COVID-19 EMERGING TRENDS CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Introduction and Regional Observation

Africa's response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has created an environment where the core tenets of democracy have been shaken to its very core in the last year. While governments continue to adopt several measures to contain the spread of the virus, the region's political landscape has become increasingly militarized, with democratic principles of state governance challenged in efforts to manage the economic and health impacts of the virus. In many African countries, undemocratic practices include: political actors consolidating power by implementing government-adopted measures intended to either suppress dissent or deny opportunities for political participation as in the case of Uganda; unconstitutional extensions of term limits such as in Algeria and Somalia; and the interference of the military in state affairs, as demonstrated by an increasing number of military coups or attempted coups in countries like Mali, Guinea and Sudan.

These practices, and COVID-related restrictions, have further impacted the security landscape of the continent. Although instability and conflict in Africa was on the rise prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020, government-adopted measures to contain the spread of the virus have heightened major structural inequalities and grievances that have driven conflict on the continent.

Additionally, increased citizen frustration over the lack of social safety nets to cushion the direct and indirect effects of the pandemic, along with the UN and AU's inability to carry out humanitarian operations in conflict-affected states, have provided opportunities for non-state armed groups to regroup and re-organize. In Somalia and the Lake Chad region, militant jihadist groups exploited gaps in governance to mobilize foot soldiers and additionally provided basic social services in areas under their control in building their legitimacy.

Nevertheless, the pandemic presents an opportunity for Africa to revisit the strengths of its current institutions. The continent seems to have weathered the pandemic relatively well so far, accounting for 4.2 percent of COVID-19 deaths globally. However, Africa's dependency on the international community for pandemic-relief packages and vaccines constitutes a wakeup call for African leaders to build more economically-independent countries. Indeed, the continent is at a stage where it must rebuild from within in order to successfully address the impacts of the pandemic. In navigating a post-COVID world, the region's recovery is dependent on resilient frameworks that simultaneously advance both human security and the demilitarization of political spaces in building a prosperous and stable post-COVID Africa.

On 6 October 2021, New York University's Center for the Study of Africa and the African Diaspora held a workshop titled "African Wars and its Militaries in the 21st Century: Post-COVID Emerging Trends, Challenges and Opportunities." Participants discussed the peace and security landscape of Africa, focusing on the dynamics imposed by the pandemic on institutions, communities, and governance across the region. The workshop was co-sponsored by the Center for Global Affairs, the Center on International Cooperation, the Initiative for the Study of Emerging Threats at New York University, and the Joint Civil-Military (JCMI) Interaction Research and Education Network. The following report is designed to be forward-looking. It will discuss the various presentations from each workshop session, identifying current and emerging trends, as well as opportunities for local, state, and regional stakeholders in building a stable and prosperous Africa in a post-COVID-19 world. We believe that the findings of this report will be beneficial in informing important scholarship on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on peace and security along with policy recommendations that can strengthen democratic institutions and Africa's resilience in overcoming fragility and conflict.

Opening Discussion

The workshop was opened and introduced by Dr. Michael A. Gomez, Director of the Center for the Study of Africa and the African Diaspora, who discussed the academic relevance of the workshop and its thematic goals. This was followed by Dr. Olajumoke (Jumo) Ayandele's remarks. Dr. Ayandele gave a brief background on the project and presented an overview of issues pertaining to the security and policy implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on the stability and prosperity of Africa. Within this opening conversation and discussion, the following observations were made:

- Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, African states have securitized public health responses at the expense of civil liberties and fundamental constitutional rights. In many countries, civil and political rights were restricted under the guise of containment measures, with state leaders deploying state security apparatuses to enforce COVID-19 restrictions, while simultaneously advancing their political agendas.
- COVID-19 responses from several African governments at the start of the pandemic unfortunately did not consider the impact of lockdown and containment measures on the informal sector, which makes up 70 percent of the economy across the continent. Without adequate social safety nets provided for workers in the informal sector, the continent experienced a sharp rise in unemployment and inflation rates. This resulted in increased frustration among African youths, and other marginalized groups, over African governments' inability to provide essential services that could cushion the direct and indirect effects of the pandemic.
- Freezes on several UN-led and AU peace operations due to countries' border restrictions at the onset of the pandemic also affected regional security responses. Armed groups and terrorist organizations were able to take advantage of the limited presence of government and international actors to regroup and build their legitimacy in areas under their control.
- Regarding public health capabilities, Africa remained in a challenging position with vaccine equity and distribution. Limited local capacity to develop and manufacture the COVID-19 vaccine fostered continued dependency on the international community for vaccines.

Workshop Sessions

Workshop sessions were organized around several themes that examined the state of political spaces in Africa, the multifaceted nature of conflict during a public health crisis, as well as approaches to issues of vaccine diplomacy from a theoretical and practical perspective.

Session 1

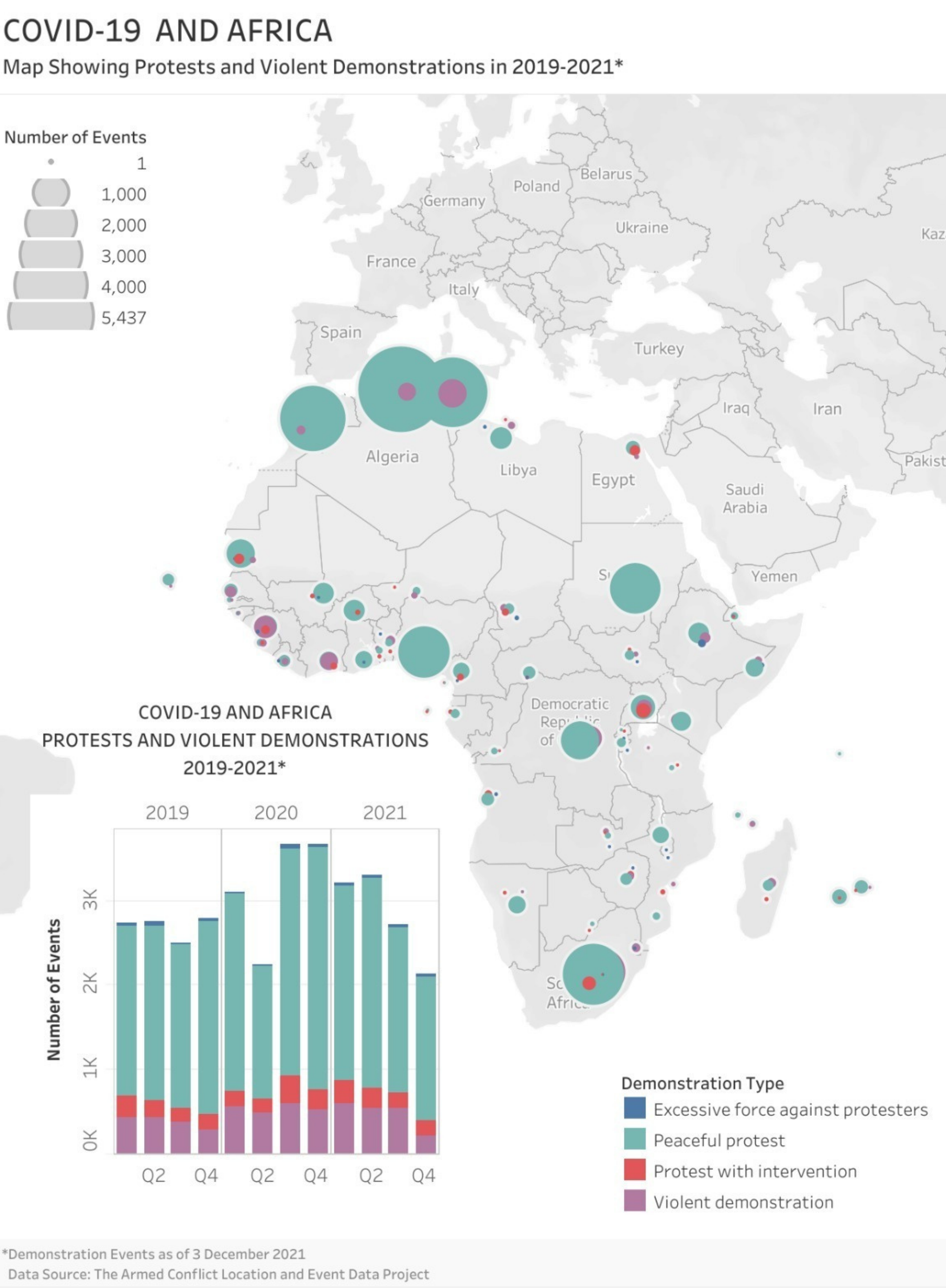
The Militarization of Politics and the Undemocratization of Political Spaces in Africa

The first session began with a conversation on the implications of the current pandemic on political and democratic trends on the continent. Participants debated on issues surrounding the exploitation of the COVID-19 crisis to consolidate power, as well as the dilemma of conducting elections during a public health crisis. Participants observed that elections in Africa were most affected during the pandemic and noted that:

- 1.** While there were genuine reasons for many countries to postpone their elections in efforts to safeguard the health of their citizens, the African political space presented varied responses in state leaders' prioritization of public health over civil and political rights. Certain state leaders exploited the COVID-19 crisis, manipulating the political process by postponing elections, which exacerbated political violence and instability in countries such as Ethiopia and Somalia. Other countries like Burundi, on the other hand, conducted elections despite evidence of increased spikes in COVID-19 infection rates during the electoral cycle. These examples bring to the forefront the dilemma African governments have faced, choosing to either promote the right to vote or safeguard the right to health during a public health crisis.
- 2.** Elections that were conducted also varied in voter turnout and participation. Countries like Mali and Benin, for example, experienced low voter turnout, while countries such as Burundi and Zambia experienced high voter turnout. Low voter turnout was also linked to pervasive abuses by state security and paramilitary forces in enforcing COVID-19 measures, undermining the effectiveness and legitimacy of the democratic process.

Participants additionally highlighted the increasing trend of political and civil instability that resulted from the socio-economic impact of the pandemic on citizens’ livelihoods. Widespread protests and violent demonstrations during the latter half of 2020 over escalating food costs, high employment and underemployment rates, and increased police brutality in enforcing COVID-19 restrictions pointed to citizens’ lack of trust in African institutions and their political leadership (see Figure 1). Participants also noted the pandemic’s impact on the militarization of the political space with respect to the number of military coups in countries such as Guinea, Mali, Chad, and Sudan. In fact, for most participants, the widespread demonstrations across the region in the last year and the military’s intervention in state affairs illuminated, for them, underlying grievances and the erosion of Western democratic values that predated the COVID-19 crisis.

Figure 1



In view of these political, economic, and institutional challenges, participants concluded that:

-  **Civil Society:** An engaged civil society was crucial in building trust between local communities and state actors. Participants noted that the virtual transition of meetings and conferences in response to the pandemic fostered increased collaboration between civil society actors and global networks consisting of scholars, state actors, as well as regional and international government institutions. This promoted community-driven approaches that were sensitive to local nuances and the grievances of marginalized groups. In Africa's post-pandemic recovery, participants agreed that the continued use of collaborative remote platforms must be encouraged in building a stable and prosperous region. Such remote platforms would foster opportunities for shared knowledge, which could inform strategies that improved local accountability mechanisms in sustaining civil and political liberties.
-  **Military Training:** Most participants also contended that the military in Africa remained an important stakeholder in stabilizing the region. However, there was a need to improve the effectiveness of the institution and to deter the further militarization of political spaces. As one participant noted, the militarization of political spaces may have been necessary for certain state leaders' political survival. However, such practices hampered sustainable peace. It was thus suggested that African governments in their national security reform efforts promote training that integrates both pandemic preparedness and human rights education in improving the security sector's capacity to respond to future health crisis and civil unrest.
-  **Socioeconomic considerations:** Participants additionally agreed that in addressing Africa's precarious fiscal situation, post-COVID responses should prioritize the region's informal economy by providing social safety nets for workers in the sector. A paradigm shift about investments in priority economic sectors was also vital in the development and design of post-COVID relief packages. In boosting national economies, participants argued that it was important for African leaders to understand the socio-economic impact of the pandemic on the informal sector in mobilizing domestic resources for sustainable development.

Session 2

New Wars: The Complexity Between Conflict, Conflict Management, and Public Health

This session started with the observation that African countries have been plagued with weak governance structures, political uncertainties, long-term economic decline, and low human development indexes. These underlying causes have resulted in the region's increasing fragility and its susceptibility to violence and conflict. In the last year, violence has been compounded by increasing frustration over the lack of basic services such as food programs, conditional and unconditional cash transfers, and public healthcare services. Local communities also experienced economic disruptions in their economic sectors resulting from various African countries' COVID-19 lockdown measures.

This session was guided by the questions below that constituted the main articulations around participants' contributions.

- 1.** In a post-COVID world, is it possible to stop violence without adopting other measures that address Africa's unique demographic, socio-political, economic, and public health challenges?
- 2.** How can African states manage to retrieve and maintain their political legitimacy in areas where non-state armed groups have successfully provided basic services to communities under their occupation (e.g., Al-Shabaab in Somalia and Boko Haram and its splinter group, the Islamic State West Africa Province, in the Lake Chad region)?
- 3.** How can regional bodies and African states maximize early warning management tools to prevent future public health disasters and simultaneously prepare themselves for security scenarios that might arise as consequences of a public health crisis?

To answer these questions, participants observed that:

- Africa and Africans are victims of their dependency on the Western model of conflict resolution and security provisions. This dependency disempowers countries in their ability to strategically and organically develop solutions anchored in local, cultural, and social dynamics. There was a need for African leaders to implement *social protection policies* that could respond to health crises and the evolving local dynamics of conflicts in the region. Some participants suggested that strategies could include the promotion of inclusive and *participatory democratic processes*. Participatory democracy would have the merit of making relevant authorities aware that their lockdown strategies were catalysts for violence, not because of their public health inappropriateness, but because these measures failed to provide social safety nets to help manage economic stress. Participants also agreed that participatory institutions were important drivers in advancing change and promoting systems of accountability between leaders and local communities. Conflict resolution measures should prioritize local and community stakeholders being at the forefront of community-centered approaches in addressing local grievances in Africa's efforts to strengthen state resiliency in a post-COVID world.
- *Regional Leadership* from the African Union was an essential component in demilitarizing political spaces and promoting the integration of local stakeholders in regional security frameworks. Country cases of Guinea, Mali, Chad, and Sudan illustrated that the continent still struggled with the political ambition of certain military leaders. Hence, a strong commitment from the AU to enhance democratic instruments as part of the continental plan for stability was a necessity. Moreover, in designing and operationalizing stabilization mechanisms, participants proposed the integration of a multilateral approach in addressing conflict and violence across the region. The rise of militant jihadist group activities in the last year in the Sahel, Lake Chad, and Great Lakes regions demonstrated that it is futile for state leaders and the African Union to view conflict as isolated country issues. These conflicts have regional consequences that affect economic development, stability, and local resiliency.

- On *early warning tools*, security and peace practitioners and scholars must cooperate and learn from each other in designing early detection and response systems. Previous challenges in operationalizing early warning systems have included the duplication of projects and interventions, competition between state security actors and local vigilante groups in protecting communities, and the non-prioritization of human rights education in the design of early detection systems. To strengthen conflict prevention mechanisms, participants agreed that there is a need to improve information sharing processes between state security forces and local community leaders to ensure long-term stability. Additionally, participants noted that the integration of human rights and humanitarian laws in early detection systems remains an essential component in developing early warning reporting mechanisms that can build state legitimacy while also enhancing civil-military cooperation. For one participant, such an integration would increase support and trust from international organizations and the public that state security forces will be held accountable for their actions.

Session 3

Vaccine Diplomacy: Local Resilience and International Stability


The session started with a discussion on the double standards that African states faced regarding the credibility of their vaccine certificates following the UK's non-recognition of Africa-administered vaccines in September, 2021. Noting the continent's low vaccination rate of less than 6 percent, participants contended that the UK's policy could increase vaccine hesitancy and was counterproductive to the global strategy of ending the pandemic. The travel bans of some Southern and West African countries in November 2021 following the discovery and transparency in reporting the latest coronavirus variant, Omicron, further undermines the much-needed trust in encouraging vaccine uptake and public reporting in the region.

In view of this observation, the session focused on the following questions:

1. On issues of public health, what can African states and their multilateral organizations do to independently promote continental policies, strategies, and frameworks to increase equitable access vaccines?
2. Should current issues surrounding vaccine certificates from Africa be a wake-up call for African leaders to re/build their institutions and ensure their credibility?

Three significant points were highlighted as participants debated issues of institutions, the role of religious leaders and social influencers in pandemic responses, and the detrimental effects of widespread misinformation on vaccine uptake.

 ***Institutions:*** Regarding institutions, participants argued that Africa is a victim of global disparities because of its lack of strong independent institutions and infrastructure. The narrative of African solutions to African issues remains a rhetoric without substance given the continent's dependency on its international partners, which has continued to characterize the mindset and behaviors of national and regional leaders. Participants contended that the continent cannot move towards a recovery plan unless it first deals with the health implications of the pandemic. The recovery of the region was thus dependent on the development and support of community and national level institutions that were inclusive and complementary in increasing vaccination rates and in ensuring the continent's resiliency when facing future disasters. Participants also highlighted that these proper investments in the health system would have a multiplier effect on women, who make up the majority of healthcare workers, and on education, the economy, employment rates, and the stabilization of the region. Governments are thus encouraged to implement the commitment of the 2001 Abuja Declaration by promoting and investing in a resilient health care system. Such investments were crucial for maintaining social stability and in reducing the risk of conflict in the region.

 ***Religious leaders and influencers:*** Participants also discussed the role of religious leaders as community influencers in Africa's response to the pandemic. Religious leaders remain active stakeholders in peacebuilding, community recovery, and the dissemination of information. Indeed, cases such as the Central African Republic and Nigeria highlight how faith-based organizations and their leaders have played a crucial role in changing public perceptions of COVID-19 and a willingness to take the vaccine. Thus, in influencing and shaping health behavior in a post-COVID world, where recovery is central to community development, it was agreed that the involvement of religious leaders at both community and national levels is a critical component in complementing governments' efforts to address the pandemic.

- ***Misinformation warfare:*** Finally, the proliferation of misinformation about the COVID-19 in local communities and on various social media platforms was cited as a major factor that undermined COVID-19 responses on the continent. From doubts about the efficiency of vaccines, to the assumed negative agenda of Western powers in advancing their agenda to destabilize the continent, it was agreed that Africa is facing a misinformation war that needs to be countered in protecting public health. The strengthening of local community institutions and formal structures that streamline public and official information is therefore vital in promoting vaccine-related information and in managing societal responses to curb the spread of misinformation.

Ways Forward

The pandemic demonstrates that African wars are not just confined to armed conflicts. Threats to security are evolving. This means that there is a need to approach African wars, peace, and security through an inclusive and holistic framework. One cannot talk about stability without economic development; economic development without addressing health insecurities; and health insecurities without taking into consideration its impact on education. These issues all influence the effectiveness of governing institutions. However, in addressing evolving threats to security, this will require innovation and collaboration across multiple levels of society in thinking, practice, and in the design of policies and programs in promoting good governance while also combating the complexity of African wars in the 21st Century.

The authors of this report want to continue to collaborate with as many African scholars and policy practitioners to reflect on sustainable solutions for Africa. Central to future workshops will be to position a variety of perspectives in our efforts to promote community-engaged scholarship that centers the role of a human rights-based approach in framing security responses. We therefore make the call to institutions, scholars, policy-makers and those interested in furthering this conversation to use our findings to inform future research and projects.

About African Wars in the 21st Century

“African Wars in the 21st Century...,” is part of a bigger project that focuses on understanding and assessing the effectiveness of African security frameworks and various civil-military interactions in the context of fragility and peace recovery. Thus, workshops are centered on bringing together scholars, policy analysts, civil society, and international organization representatives to discuss the changing landscape of security threats, as well as opportunities for state leaders to reimagine human security and stabilization mechanisms. In this workshop, sessions were tailored around public health security and its impacts on civil and political rights, governance, security sector reform, vulnerable populations, and vaccine diplomacy in the region. Our goal was to harness diverse perspectives to assess the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on peace and security in Africa and to offer solutions that can reshape the continent towards achieving long term stability in a post-pandemic world.

The expert workshop was attended by over 30 participants, representing the following institutions:

- The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)
- Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding (CCCCPA)
- Congolese Diaspora Impact Summit (CDIS)
- FemWise-Africa
- Harvard University, Belfer Center
- The Institute for Security Studies (ISS Africa)
- The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS)
- International Republican Institute (IPI)
- Joint Civil-Military Interaction (JCMI) Research and Education Network
- Kukah Centre
- Mercy Corps
- National Defence College, Abuja
- New York University, Center for Global Affairs
- New York University, Center for the Study of Africa and the African Diaspora
- New York University, Center on International Cooperation
- The Norwegian Institute for International Affairs (NUPI)
- PACT
- Social Science Research Council (SSRC)
- University of Denver, the Africa Center and the Josef Korbel School of International Studies
- University of Leiden, Institute of History

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