

# A G D I Working Paper

WP/21/041

## **Human Rights in Sub Saharan Africa: Understanding the Influence of Militarization, Governance and Democracy**

Forthcoming: Economics Bulletin

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January 2021

**Abstract**

This study provides empirical evidence on the impact of militarization, governance, and democracy on human rights in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) for the period 2002 to 2018. The study employed the instrumental variable Fixed Effects model to account for simultaneity/reverse causality, and unobservable heterogeneity as well as the instrumental variable quantile regression with Fixed Effects to account for existing levels of human rights in SSA. Based on the Fixed Effects results, it is revealed that militarization significantly increases human rights violation in the region, while governance and democracy significantly improve human rights. Results from the quantile regression show that (1) the negative impact of militarization on human rights is observable across all quantiles, (2) the positive impact of the control of corruption on human rights is more pronounced in countries where the existing level of human rights is high, while political stability and rule of law exerts stronger impact on human rights in countries where the existing level of human rights is low, (3) the positive impact of democracy on human rights is stronger in countries where the existing level of human rights is high. Policy recommendations based on these findings are discussed.

**Keywords:** Human Rights; Militarization; Governance; Democracy; Sub-Saharan Africa

**JEL Codes:** C21; C23; K38

## **1. Introduction**

The protection of human rights across the world is a key factor for social and economic development. Human rights cover an extensive range of rights, some of which include the protection of physical integrity, freedom of speech, the right to education among other rights. The term human rights gained importance in contemporary debates after the second world war and ever since then, the protection of human rights have become a global phenomenon.

In 1948, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) to ensure that human rights and freedom become a reality. The UDHR became a sign of optimism for better protection, promotion, and enforcement of the rights of humans. Over time, important treaties such as the International Convention of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) were established. According to Obioha (2017), human rights and freedom are beacons and springboard for human flourishing, pillars of world peace and the wellbeing of man. Stamatopoulou (1999) acknowledged that human rights are inextricably linked with economic development and democracy. In the economic sphere, respecting human rights is very critical to the rate and magnitude of investment. This is supported by Blume and Stefan (2007) who observed the importance of human rights to investment. This reflects that those countries that do not promote human rights are likely to make economic losses.

In Africa, and in particular sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), the level of human rights remains weak in comparison to other regions of the world (see Schnakenberg and Fariss, 2014; Fariss, 2019). This reflects a situation where the protection of human rights has not been given the considerable attention it deserves. According to Amnesty International (2018), the landscape of human rights in Africa has been shaped by numerous negative issues such as political crises, concerted attacks, violent crackdown on civil defenders, among others. In Nigeria and many SSA countries, the government continue to violate human rights through unlawful arrest and detention, intolerance of peaceful dissents and attacks on journalists (Nnodim, 2018). These have been achieved through the defamation of law and the justice system, and the use of force through the military and other armed agencies.

Militarisation has traditionally implied the process which militarises the civilian space. The concept of militarisation according to Bernazzoli and Flint (2009) has evolved from one that once denoted the evolution of a separate, dangerous military ethos to one that emphasizes the embeddedness of a militaristic mentality in civil societies. In the 1970s, the process of

militarisation was consolidated in Africa with military spending increasing substantially. According to Saba and Ngepah (2019), Africa's military expenditure has increased by 91 percent since 2005. Worthy to note, the West African sub-region is currently faced with numerous security challenges that have continued to threaten peace and stability. It has been acknowledged by Conteh-Morgan (1993) that a link exists between militarisation and conflict which likely precipitates to human rights violations. In areas most prone to conflict, the military has consistently been accused of violating human rights (Adeakin, 2016). While military presence may be important for peace, it can also result in significant human rights violations.

On the other hand, good governance is an important factor that ensures respect for human rights. For instance, without the rule of law, independent courts, and accountability, human rights protection may not be fulfilled. A transparent, responsible, accountable, and participatory governance is a precondition to enduring respect for human dignity and the protection of human rights. As acknowledged by Iheonu et al. (2019), the quality of governance in a society affects various aspects of the socio-economy. This denotes that a positive association intuitively exists between governance and human rights. Further, Kaufman, Kraay and Mastruzzi (2005) reveal that good governance fosters economic development, which also precipitates to influencing positively other social indicators of an economy. It has also been pointed out by Saikia (2013) that improving governance is mandatory for the improvement in human rights.

Additionally, the importance of improved democratic institutions cannot be overemphasized in promoting human rights. Democracy continues to gain ground in international discourse due to its perceived benefits. Boutros-Ghali (1996) described democracy as a system of government which embodies, in a variety of institutions and mechanisms, the ideal of political power based on the will of the people. In SSA, democracy is gradually replacing authoritarian regimes as a system of governance. This gradual replacement is termed democratization which has been a major pursuit of the United Nations.

The influence of democracy on human rights is generally accepted to be positive. According to Evans (2001), democracy is an important foundation to propel the advancement of human rights. To the United Nations (2013), the nexus between democracy and human rights is symbiotic, intricately and mutually constitutive. Democracy has been regarded as the most consistent safeguard to the protection of human rights. However, according to Conrad (2014),

practical democracy does not always improve human rights, and in other cases can increase human rights violation.

This study intends to examine the influence of militarisation, governance, and democracy on human rights in 33 SSA countries for the period 2002 to 2018 and thus provide empirical backings to a much wider theoretical discourse, thereby contributing to literature. This study is justified based on the importance of human rights to socioeconomic progress and its attendant effect on economic development. The study utilises the Instrumental Variable (IV) Fixed Effects (FE) model in the modelling exercise to correct for simultaneity/reverse causality and account for country-specific unobservable heterogeneity, as well as the IV Quantile Regression (QR) with FE which has the advantage of ascertaining the impact of militarisation, governance, and democracy on human rights in SSA across various quantiles of human rights. This is in line with providing robust policy options which account for SSA countries with low, intermediate, and high levels of human rights. The remainder of this study is composed of the method and data section, presentation, and discussion of empirical results as well as conclusion with relevant policy recommendations.

## **2. Methods and Data**

### ***2.1 Methods***

#### ***Instrumental Variable Fixed Effects Regression***

Employing the IV-FE model addresses the problem of simultaneity via the process of instrumentation. In this process, we instrument the explanatory variables with their first lags through the procedure of saving the fitted values from an Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regression with Heteroskedastic and Autocorrelation Consistent (HAC) standard errors in equation (1), which are then employed as instruments for the explanatory variables.

$$z_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_j(z_{i,t-1}) + \varepsilon_{i,t} \quad (1)$$

here,  $z_{i,t}$  is an independent variable in country  $i$  at time  $t$ .  $\beta_0$  is the intercept,  $z_{i,t-1}$  is the first lag of the independent variable and  $\varepsilon_{i,t}$  is the error term.

The FE regression is utilised to accounts for country specific characteristics via the intercept parameter in the modelling exercise. While these characteristics are constant overtime for the

individual cross section, they vary across cross sectional units (Asongu, Iheonu and Odo, 2019). The FE model can be expressed such that:

$$hrv_{it} = \vartheta_i + \pi m_{it} + \tau g_{it} + d_{i,t} + \sigma X_{it} + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (2)$$

here,  $hrv$  is the human right score,  $m$  is military expenditure, percentage of GDP, a proxy for militarisation.  $g$  represents four governance indicators which include the control of corruption, political stability, rule of law and general governance—which will be constructed via the principal component analysis aimed at capturing the overall effect of governance on human rights in SSA.  $d$  is democracy.  $X$  is human development index which acts as a control variable.  $\vartheta_i$  is the country specific characteristics which denote the fixed effects and means that variations in the regressand must be due to impulses other than the fixed individual characteristics (Stock and Watson, 2008).

### ***Instrumental Variable Quantile Regression with Fixed Effects***

To provide robust policy options, the study improves upon the estimation strategy by employing the IV-QR with FE. While conditional mean regressions are important, we can still be exposed to blanket policy options which can be futile unless such policies are based on various levels of human rights. This implies that when countries with a high, intermediate, and low level of human rights are expressed in the estimation procedure, policy implications can be more effective because they are tailored to be consistent with existing levels of human rights. The QR also has the advantage of being robust to outliers in the dependent variable. Solving the optimisation problem in equation (3) obtains the  $\theta^{th}$  quantile of human rights.

$$\min_{\beta \in R^k} \left[ \sum_{i \in \{i: y_i \geq x_i \beta\}} \theta |y_i - x_i \beta| + \sum_{i \in \{i: y_i < x_i \beta\}} (1-\theta) |y_i - x_i \beta| \right] \quad (3)$$

where  $\theta \in (0,1)$ . The QR minimises the weighted sum of absolute deviation along different quantiles such as the 25<sup>th</sup> quantile where  $\theta = 0.25$  or the 90<sup>th</sup> quantile where  $\theta = 0.90$ . The conditional quantile of dependent variable ( $y$ ) given the regressors ( $x$ ) is such that  $Q_y \left( \frac{\theta}{x_{i,t}} \right) = x'_i \beta \theta$ . The unique slope parameters are modelled for each  $\theta^{th}$  specific quantile.

## **2.2 Data**

This study focuses on a panel of 33 SSA countries from 2002 to 2018. The human right scores sourced from Schnakenberg and Fariss (2014) and Fariss (2019) and available in

Harvard Dataverse is employed as the dependent variable. It denotes the extent to which governments protect and respect human rights. Its value ranges from -3.8 to 5.4. The higher the score, the better the extent to which the government protects and respects human rights. Military expenditure (% of GDP) is utilised to measure militarisation, which is sourced from the World Development Indicators, WDI (2019). The study by de Soysa (2019), and Iheonu, Odo and Ekeocha (2020) have employed this variable as a proxy for militarisation and acknowledges it to be a direct measure of the variable. The study employs four indicators of governance already outlined in section 2.1 (see appendix for definition). Employing the PCA to generate a composite indicator for governance is to estimate the total effect of governance on human rights in the sub-region. In the construction process of general governance, we retain factors that have an Eigen value greater than one. This is in line with extant literature such as Jolliffe (2002), Asongu et al. (2017), Tchamyu (2017), Iheonu (2019). The control variable employed in the study- the human development index is sourced from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). This variable is included in the modelling exercise because of its linkage to human rights. Intuitively, human development (and its component) can greatly reduce the rate of human rights violation in any country. For instance, education can aid in the reduction of poverty and improve peace which reduces human right violation.

Countries employed in the study include Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cabo Verde, Central African Republic, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Republic of Congo, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Togo, Zambia.

### **3. Results**

This section begins with a simple descriptive statistic of the variables employed in the study. Table 1 shows that the mean value of human rights is -0.1148, reflecting a low level of human rights in SSA. Further, the human rights score has a maximum value of 2.2764 and a minimum value of -2.3597. Military expenditure is seen to have an average value of 1.7890. However, it has a maximum value of 20.8657 and a minimum value of 0.1792.

**Table 1: Summary Statistics of the Variables**

Variable	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Observations
HR	-0.1148	-2.5839	2.2764	528
MIL	1.7890	0.1792	20.8657	458
CC	-0.6482	-1.8263	1.2167	561
PS	-0.4557	-2.6992	1.2002	561
RL	-0.7037	-1.8165	0.7305	561
D	3.0065	-7	10	462
HDI	0.4835	0.263	0.728	554

Source: Author's computation.

Note: HR is Human Rights score, MIL is Military Expenditure, CC is Control of Corruption, PS is Political Stability, RL is Rule of Law, D is Democracy and HDI is Human Development Index.

Governance indicators are also observed to be negative reflecting poor governance in the region. Based on their average values, it is revealed that the rule of law in SSA seems to be the poorest compared to other governance indicators. On the other hand, democracy has a mean value of 3.0065, a minimum value of -7 and a maximum value of 10. The average value of HDI is also observed to be 0.4835. This indicates that the level of human development in SSA is low.

**Table 2: Correlation Matrix of the Variables employed in the Model**

	HR	MIL	CC	PS	RL	D	HDI
HR	1.000						
MIL	-0.0084	1.000					
CC	0.6273	-0.0084	1.000				
PS	0.8295	-0.0011	0.7036	1.000			
RL	0.6750	-0.1310	0.9189	0.7874	1.000		
D	0.2500	-0.2330	0.5234	0.2227	0.5363	1.000	
HDI	0.2892	0.0187	0.4865	0.4833	0.5078	0.1974	1.000

Source: Author's computation.

Note: HR is Human Rights score, MIL is Military Expenditure, CC is Control of Corruption, PS is Political Stability, RL is Rule of Law, D is Democracy and HDI is Human Development Index.

Table 2 reveals the correlation among the variables in the study. This analysis is conducted in order to avoid the issue of multicollinearity which can lead to estimation bias. This is important because of the relationship the regressors in the model could have—reflecting the importance of utilising data that are not near-perfectly correlated. The result reveals no strong correlation among the explanatory variables except for the indicators of governance. This



means that for us to obtain the individual effect of the governance indicators on human rights, we model them separately. Further results show that human rights variable is positively correlated with the explanatory variables in the model apart from military expenditure as seen in the second column of table 2.

Before proceeding to estimating the regression, we create a composite index of governance to capture the overall effect of governance on human rights in SSA. Table 3 provides the results of the principal component analysis. It is revealed that the first principal component will be retained because the Eigenvalue is greater than one. This means that the new index for governance is created with the first principal component.

**Table 3: Principal Component Analysis**

Principal Component	Eigenvalue	Proportion	Cumulative	Eigenvectors	
				Variable	First PC
First PC	2.5282	0.8428	0.8428	CC	0.5848
Second PC	0.3859	0.1286	0.9714	PS	0.5392
Third PC	0.0857	0.0286	1.0000	RL	0.6060

Source: Author's computation.

The empirical result from table 4(a) shows that military expenditure has a negative and statistically significant impact on human rights in SSA on average. However, this effect is more intense in the 10<sup>th</sup> quantile and declines at increasing quantiles. This suggests that the negative impact of militarisation on human rights is more pronounced in countries where the existing level of human rights is low in comparison to countries where the existing level of human rights is high.

**Table 4(a): IV-Fixed Effects Regression and IV-Quantile Regression with Fixed Effects(a)**

Variables	Fixed Effect	Q.10	Q.25	Q.50	Q.75	Q.90
Military	-0.1938*** (0.000)	-0.2439*** (0.008)	-0.2250*** (0.001)	-0.1903*** (0.000)	-0.1643*** (0.005)	-0.1443* (0.067)
Control of Corruption	0.1817 (0.141)	0.1748 (0.369)	0.1774 (0.230)	0.1822* (0.064)	0.1857 (0.133)	0.1885 (0.260)
Democracy	0.0580*** (0.000)	0.0618 (0.113)	0.0604** (0.042)	0.0577*** (0.003)	0.0557** (0.024)	0.0542 (0.107)
HDI	0.4926 (0.400)	0.4247 (0.724)	0.4503 (0.623)	0.4974 (0.415)	0.5326 (0.487)	0.5597 (0.590)
Constant	-0.1175 (0.687)					
F-Statistic	10.74*** (0.0000)					
Within R- Squared	0.1137					
Observations	370	370	370	370	370	370

Source: Author's computation.

Note: \*\*\*, \*\* and \* denotes statistical significance at 1%, 5% and 10% respectively.

Furthermore, results from the FE model reveal that the control of corruption raises the human rights score insignificantly. This result is supported by the QR results. However, statistical significance is revealed in the 50<sup>th</sup> quantile, denoting that controlling corruption increases human rights in countries where the existing level of human rights is at the median.

Also, the IV-FE model reveals that democracy increases the human rights score significantly. However, the results from the IV-QR show that for countries where the existing level of human rights score is at its lowest and highest level, democracy does not significantly influence human rights score. Furthermore, democracy increases the human rights score in the 25<sup>th</sup>, 50<sup>th</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup> quantiles. Results from table 4(a) did not see any significant relationship between human development index and the human right score. However, the relationship between human development and human rights is positive.

Table 4(b) shows the impact of militarisation, governance, and democracy on human rights in SSA when political stability acts as a proxy for governance. The result reveals that military expenditure has a negative effect on human rights, similar to the result in table 4(a). Political stability is seen to improve the human rights score positively and significantly across both estimation techniques. However, the influence of political stability on human rights is more

pronounced in countries where the existing level of human rights is low compared to countries where the existing level of human rights score is high.

**Table 4(b): IV-Fixed Effects Regression and IV-Quantile Regression with Fixed Effects(b)**

Variables	Fixed Effect	Q.10	Q.25	Q.50	Q.75	Q.90
Military	-0.1257*** (0.000)	-0.1738* (0.069)	-0.1512** (0.022)	-0.1255*** (0.007)	-0.1025* (0.071)	-0.0922 (0.308)
Political Stability	0.6199*** (0.000)	0.7385*** (0.000)	0.6827*** (0.000)	0.6194*** (0.000)	0.5627*** (0.000)	0.5125*** (0.000)
Democracy	0.0266** (0.039)	0.0229 (0.414)	0.0246 (0.202)	0.0266* (0.053)	0.0283* (0.090)	0.0298 (0.209)
Human Development	1.0279** (0.035)	0.6591 (0.517)	0.8321 (0.235)	1.0293** (0.038)	1.2065* (0.046)	1.3629 (0.112)
Constant	-0.2256 (0.346)					
F-Statistic	53.46*** (0.0000)					
Within R-Squared	0.3896					
Observations	370	370	370	370	370	370

Source: Author's computation.

Note: \*, \*\* and \*\*\* denotes statistical significance at 1, 5 and 10% respectively.

Furthermore, democracy increases human rights significantly only in the 50<sup>th</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup> quantile. However, the IV-FE result shows that democracy significantly raises the human rights score in the region. Human development can be revealed to be significant only in the 50<sup>th</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup> quantile of the QR result. This reveals that the significance of human development to human rights is sensitive to the measure of governance quality in the econometric model.

Empirical evidence employing rule of law as a proxy for governance as shown in table 4(c) show that while military expenditure reduces human rights significantly, rule of law increases human rights significantly. This is observed in both estimation techniques. It is also revealed that the rule of law exerts more influence on human rights in countries where the existing level of human rights is low. Further results from the IV-FE model show that democracy improves human rights in SSA significantly while human development has no significant relationship with human rights.

**Table 4(c): IV-Fixed Effects Regression and IV-Quantile Regression with Fixed Effects(c)**

Variables	Fixed Effect	Q.10	Q.25	Q.50	Q.75	Q.90
Military	-0.1495*** (0.000)	-0.1377 (0.151)	-0.1437** (0.024)	-0.1495*** (0.001)	-0.1556*** (0.003)	-0.1602** (0.029)
Rule of Law	0.9929*** (0.000)	1.3783*** (0.000)	1.1829*** (0.000)	0.9926*** (0.000)	0.7953*** (0.000)	0.6470** (0.019)
Democracy	0.0439*** (0.002)	0.0440 (0.247)	0.0439* (0.081)	0.0439** (0.012)	0.0438** (0.035)	0.0438 (0.132)
Human Development	-0.0013 (0.998)	-0.2057 (0.813)	-0.2057 (0.813)	-0.0009 (0.999)	0.2114 (0.768)	0.3709 (0.712)
Constant	0.6023** (0.035)					
F-Statistic	27.19*** (0.0000)					
Within R-Squared	0.2451					
Observations	370	370	370	370	370	370

Source: Author's computation.

Note: \*, \*\* and \*\*\* denotes statistical significance at 1, 5 and 10% respectively.

The result from the QR show that the influence of democracy on human rights is significantly in the 25<sup>th</sup>, 50<sup>th</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup> quantile. The study does not see any significant relationship between human development and human rights when the rule of law acts as a measure of governance quality.

In table 4(d), we employ the constructed governance quality indicator as the measure of governance which we term general governance. The empirical result reveals that general governance increases the human rights score.

**Table 4(d): IV-Fixed Effects Regression and IV-Quantile Regression with Fixed Effects(d)**

Variables	Fixed Effect	Q.10	Q.25	Q.50	Q.75	Q.90
Military	-1.1335*** (0.000)	-0.1738** (0.069)	-0.1512** (0.022)	-0.1255*** (0.007)	-0.1025* (0.071)	-0.0822 (0.308)
Governance	0.4917*** (0.000)	0.5850*** (0.000)	0.5408*** (0.000)	0.4907*** (0.000)	0.4457*** (0.000)	0.4060*** (0.000)
Democracy	0.0266** (0.034)	0.0229 (0.414)	0.0247 (0.202)	0.0266* (0.053)	0.0283* (0.090)	0.0298 (0.209)
Human Development	0.9689** (0.040)	0.6581 (0.517)	0.8321 (0.235)	1.0293** (0.046)	1.2065** (0.046)	1.3629 (0.112)
Constant	-0.4457*** (0.052)					
F-Statistic	60.44*** (0.0000)					
Within R-Squared	0.4038					
Observations	394	394	394	394	394	394

Source: Author's computation.

Note: \* and \*\* denotes statistical significance at 1 and 5% respectively.

Results from the IV-FE model show that democracy and human development significantly increases the human rights score in SSA. In the quantile regression result, the significant impact of democracy and human development on the human rights score is revealed in the 50<sup>th</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup> quantiles.

#### 4. Conclusion

The protection of human rights remains very important for the socio-economic development of societies. The first step in protecting human rights is understanding what factors influence the level of human rights. This study provided empirical evidence on the impact of militarisation, governance, and democracy on human rights in SSA-- a region where there is a predominance in human rights violation. The study employed data for 33 countries in the region for the period 2002 to 2018 in a panel data environment. To account for simultaneity/reverse causality and country specific heterogeneity, the study employed the IV-FE model and the IV-QR with FE. The QR was also employed in the study to account for the existing level of human rights. The empirical result from the IV-FE model shows that military expenditure, a proxy for militarisation has a negative and statistically significant

impact on human rights in Africa. This is in line with the result of Vadlamannati and Pathmalal (2010) where the increase in military spending reduces human rights. Further results from the QR show that when the control of corruption, political stability, and general governance acts as a proxy for governance, the negative effect of military expenditure on human rights is a decreasing function of the human right score. i.e. militarisation effect is more pronounced in countries where the existing level of human rights is lower compared to countries where the existing level of human rights is high. Further results from the IV-FE model show that the control of corruption and democracy have a positive impact on human rights.

It is also revealed that the influence of controlling corruption on human rights is more pronounced in countries where the existing levels of human rights are high. However, the significance is revealed only in the median. It has also been revealed that political stability has a more favourable impact on human rights in countries where the existing level of human rights is low. Similar findings can be obtained on the rule of law-human rights relationship. The influence of rule of law on the human rights score is more pronounced in countries where the existing levels of human rights are low compared to the countries where the initial levels of human rights is high. General governance is also revealed to significantly increase human rights in SSA. The quantile estimates show that governance generally will reduce human rights violations more in countries where existing levels of human rights are lower. Finally, democracy is revealed to affect human rights in countries where the existing level of human rights is moderately high.

Based on these findings, the study recommends the following (1) the abatement of militarisation in SSA should be prioritised. Instead, governments should focus on peaceful and logical reconciliations in times of crises, the conflict management model of compromise can be employed in times of uprising as against the competitive model, (2) an improvement in the quality of governance is also recommended with particular emphasis on controlling the level of corruption in the region, improving political stability via an inclusive political system, and ensuring the rule of law, (3) there is need for the continued democratisation of the SSA region as well as the need for the improvement in the level of democracy. One of such ways to improve democracy in SSA is through constitutional amendments and adherence to such constitutions. This is particularly important for those countries where the existing levels of human rights are neither very low nor very high based on the SSA experience.

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## Appendix

Table A1: Definition of Governance Indicators Variables

Variables	Definition
Control of Corruption	The control of corruption is the perception of the extent to which public power is employed for private gain, comprising both minor and grand forms of corruption, as well as the capture of the state by elites and private interests.
Political Stability	Political stability captures the perception of the likelihood of political instability and/or politically motivated violence, including terrorism.
Rule of Law	Rule of law shows the perceptions of the extent to which individuals/agents have confidence in and stand by the guidelines of society, and also the quality of contract enforcement, property rights, courts and the police, as well as the chances of crime and violence.