

## **A short note on Kenya and early warning signals**

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The Kenya crisis came largely as a surprise, at least to outsiders. Was it possible to see it coming? Is Kenya a special case, or are there reasons to expect similar crises in other "stable" African nations with politics, ethnicity and inequality forming an explosive blend?

This short exploratory note will approach these questions by taking a look at opinion poll data from the Afrobarometer 2005 and 2003. Were any signals of what was coming already there, before our eyes?

### **Is Kenya a special case?**

This note limits itself to just four questions of the Afrobarometer:

- 1. How often are the [respondents ethnic group] treated unfairly by the government? (never, sometimes, often, always)*
- 2. Think about the condition of [respondent's ethnic group]. Are their economic conditions worse, the same as or better than other groups in this country? (alternatives: better, same, worse, much worse)*
- 3. Think about the condition of [respondent's ethnic group]. Do they have less, the same or more influence in politics than other groups in this country? (alternatives: much more, more, same, less, much less)*
- 4. Let us suppose that you had to choose between being an [national] and being a [respondent's ethnic group]. Which of the following statements best express your feelings? (alternatives: ethnic ID only, ethnic ID more than national, national and ethnic IDs equal, national ID more than ethnic, national ID only)*

Diagrams 1-4 (from Afrobarometer round 2005-2006, with the Kenyan poll made in September 2005) give a quick overview of the results. They reveal that Kenya indeed is something of a special case, but not a unique case.

Kenya is placed among the top three countries in terms of perceptions of unfair treatment by government, worse economic conditions and less political influence by the respondent's own ethnic group (question 1-3). Malawi, Nigeria and Uganda are other countries scoring high, but Kenya is special in placing itself high in all three dimensions. However, when it comes to national versus ethnic identity (diagram 4), there is nothing special with Kenya.

Diagram 1

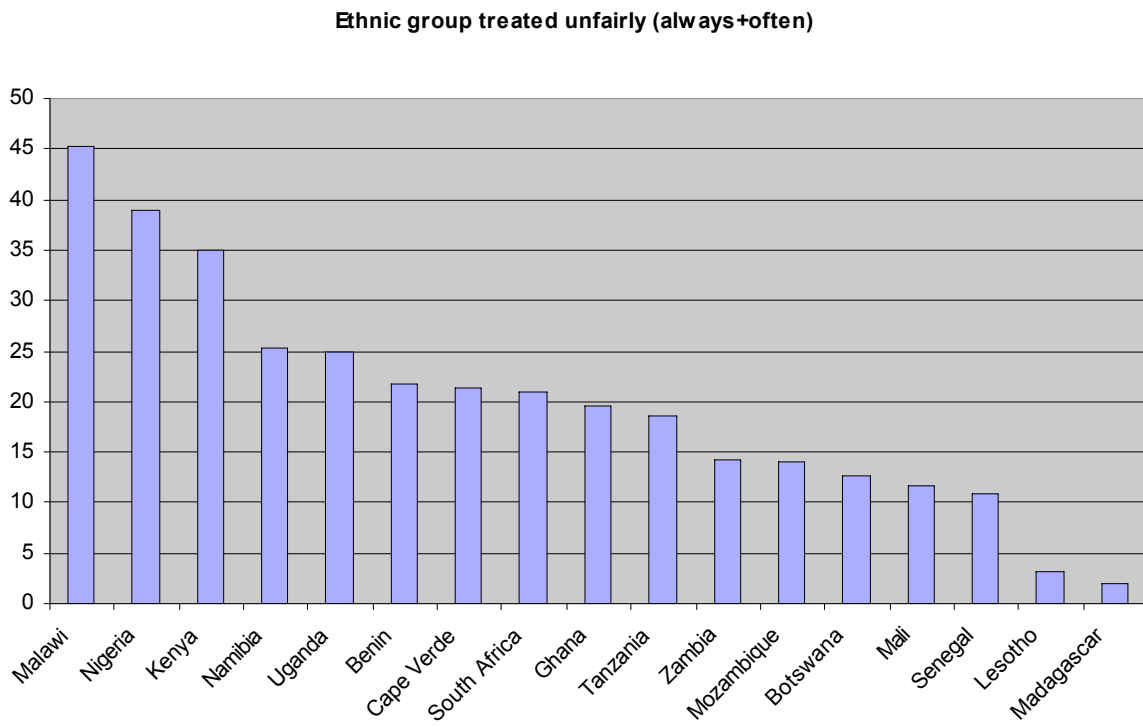


Diagram 2

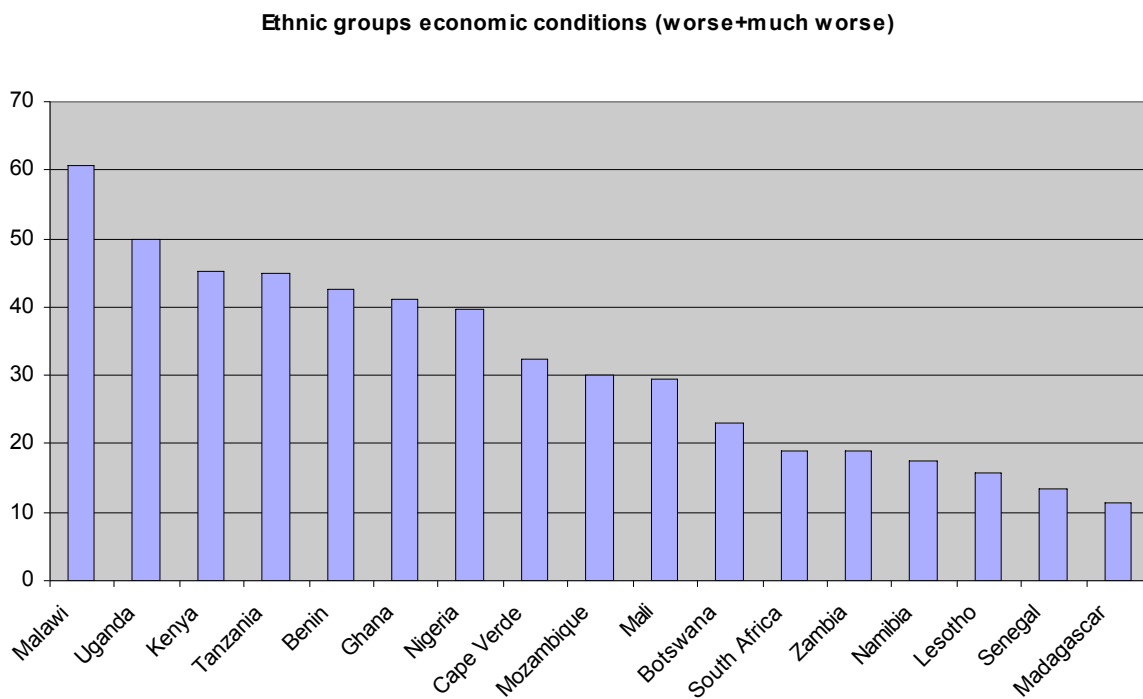


Diagram 3

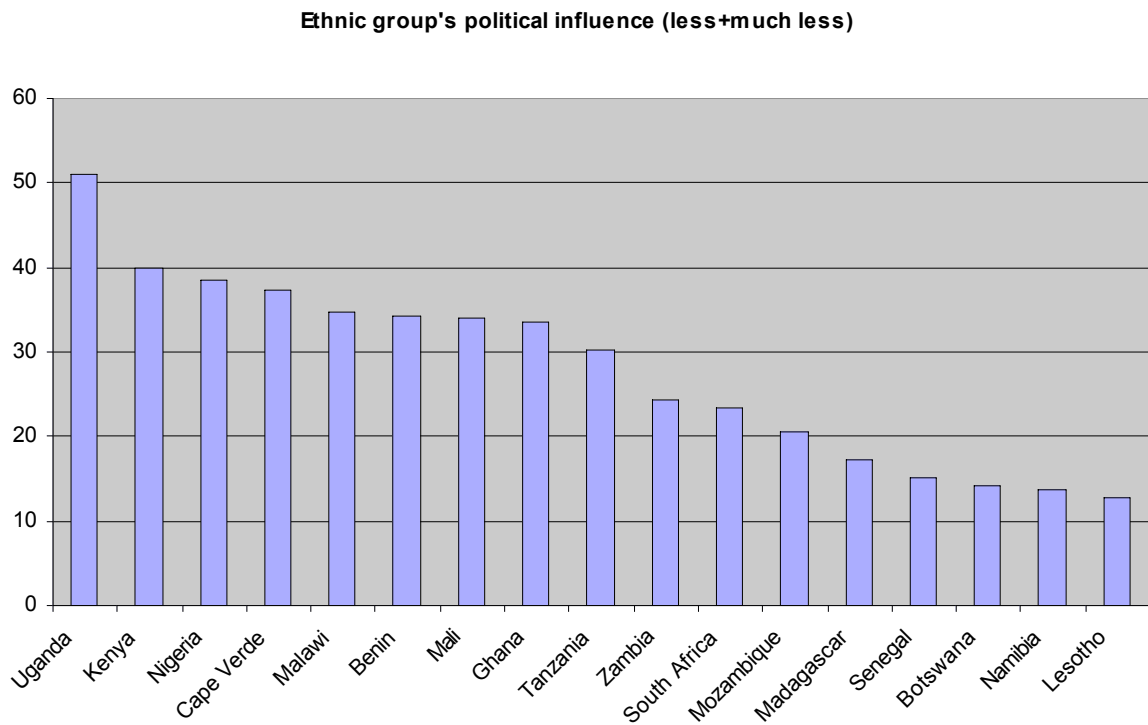
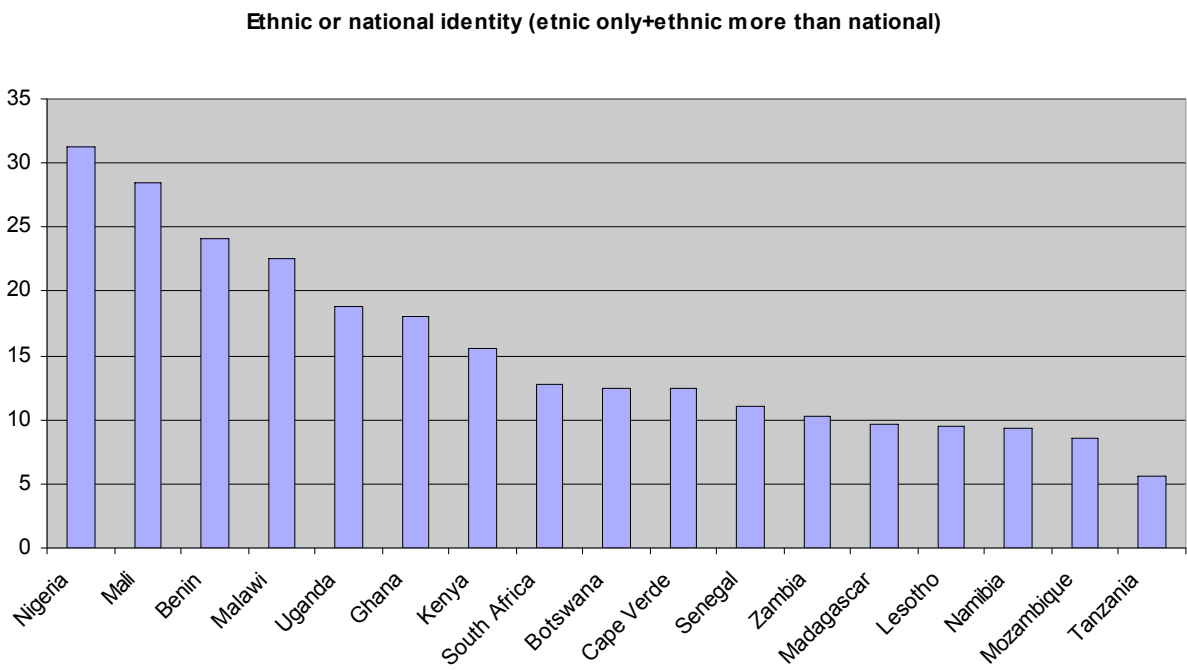


Diagram 4



Has Kenya always been a "special case" in this sense? Kenya was first included in the Afrobarometer round 2002-2004 (field work in Aug/Sep 2003 in the case of Kenya), so that is the only available point of comparison. There is a problem with the wording of the questions (round 2002-2004 using the concept "identity group" rather than "ethnic group") which reduce comparability. However, it turns out that Kenya ranked high in the dimension "economic conditions" also in the 2002-2004 round (with Malawi and Uganda at the top also in 2002-2004). When it comes to the question on unfair treatment the picture varies more, with a number of countries scoring higher than Kenya in the 2002-2004 round. (The question on political influence was not asked in 2003, and the question on ethnic identity was phrased differently.)

So to summarize, indicators do signal out Kenya as a special case among the 18 Afrobarometer countries, but not a unique case. Kenya stands out in the sense that there is a combination of perceptions that one's ethnic group is unfairly treated by government, has worse economic conditions and less political influence, than other groups. However, it is not the dimension ethnic vs. national identity that makes Kenya special.

### **Afrobarometer on ethnicity and politics within Kenya.**

How have these four questions been answered within Kenya by different groups? Afrobarometer 2005 permits desegregation per language of respondent as well as for ethnic group. However, to permit comparison with 2003, language is used here (2003 did not ask for ethnic group of respondent). Caution should of course be made when dividing up a sample, as it means that statistical margins of error will increase.<sup>1</sup> The desegregation is therefore limited only to the major language groups.

Table 1 reveals a pattern where perceptions of unfair treatment by government, as well as disadvantages in terms of economic conditions and political influence, clearly follow ethnic lines. Checking the population share of the groups feeling disadvantaged also reveals that conditions for "a coalition against the advantaged" are there.

**Table 1 Responses by major language groups, Kenya 2005, %** (*wording of questions see above, share of population taken from Afrobarometer sample*)

	TREATED UNFAIRLY (often+always)	ECONOMIC CONDITIONS (worse+much worse)	POLITICAL INFLUENCE (less+much less)	ETHNIC VS NATIONAL IDENTITY (only+more ethnic)	SHARE OF POPULATION
Luo	55	63	33	26	11
Kamba	47	85	61	11	11
Kalejin	38	28	40	15	12
Luhya	25	48	35	9	11
Kisii	15	26	36	9	8
Kikuyu	13	9	6	16	18
Meru/Embu	9	19	11	9	7

<sup>1</sup> Sample size of the 2005 barometer is 1278 respondents with a margin of error of +/- 1-3%. The smallest language groups presented in this paper have approximately 100 respondents. Additional information on samples is found on <http://www.jdsurvey.net/jds/afrobarometer.jsp>.

However, and just as at the continental level, the question on national vs. ethnic identity reveals less of a consistent pattern.

Has Kenya always been this way or did something happen recently? Table 2 compares responses to the questions on unfair treatment and economic conditions 2003 and 2005. (There exists a problem of comparability here, since the 2003 asked about unfair treatment/economic conditions for the respondent's *identity group*, while the question 2005 uses *ethnic group*, further comment on that below.)

Field work for the 2003 poll was made in September 2003, just eight months after the installation of president Kibaki who had led a rain-bow coalition against KANU and the Moi-regime.

In aggregate terms, not that much seem to have happened between 2003 and 2005. There is a pattern of increased discontent but no drastic jumps. (Perceptions of increased economic inequality in general terms is also to be found among other Afrobarometer questions than the ones analyzed here.)

**Table 2 Kenya 2003 and 2005, aggregate responses on "unfair treatment" and "economic conditions", %**

	2003	2005
Treated unfairly, (often+always)	31	35
Economic conditions (worse+much worse)	42	45

However, when divided into language groups a much clearer picture emerges. Diagram 5 and 6 reveal that there was a very clear shift in the way different language groups perceived their position in relation to other groups.

While perceptions of being "treated unfairly" seem to have been relatively more evenly distributed among different language groups in 2003, there is a new pattern in 2005. The percentage of Kikuyu speaker who answered that their group was treated unfairly drastically decreased (the proportion saying they *never* were unfairly treated actually increased from 10,8% to 41,9%). Meru and Embu followed the same pattern. Among Luo, Luhya, Kalejin and Kamba speakers there was a shift in the opposite direction with a sharp increase of shares for often/always being treated unfairly. When it comes to economic conditions (diagram 6), the same thing seems to have occurred; a relatively evenly distributed discontent became much more unevenly distributed among language groups. So underneath the relatively stable national aggregates for 2003 and 2005, shown in Table 2, major shifts took place.

Diagram 5

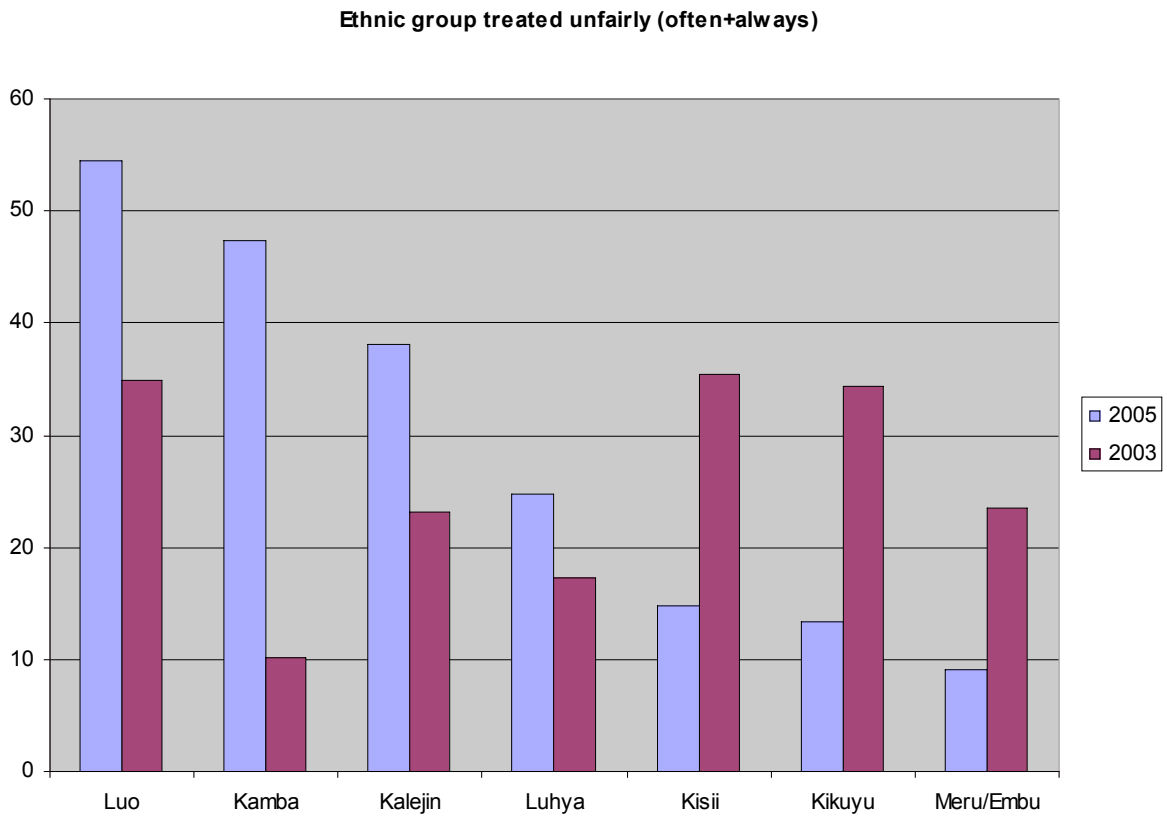
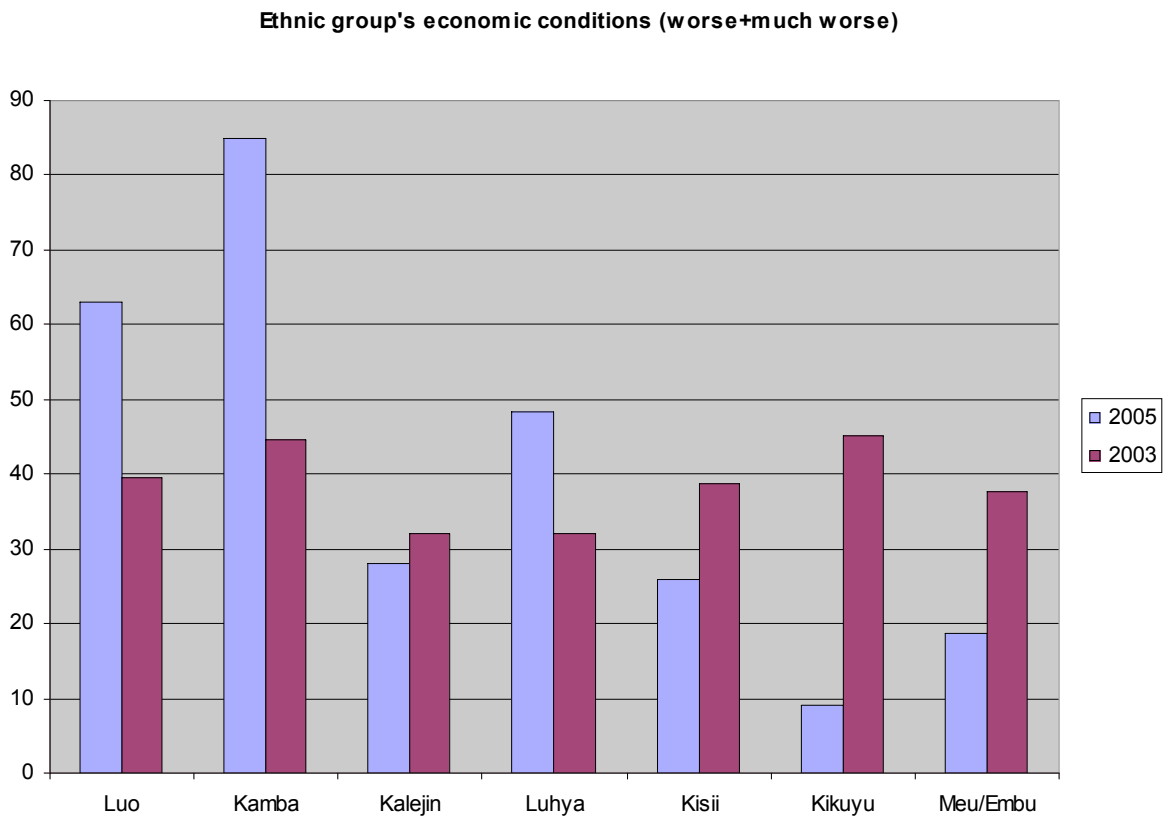


Diagram 6



It appears unlikely that this result is driven by the different wordings of the question in the two polls (using *ethnic group* in stead of *identity group*). The same exercise as in diagram 5 and 6 was made for some other discontent-related Afrobarometer questions which did have exactly corresponding wordings: “*people treated unequally under the law*”, “*trust in president*”, “*satisfaction with democracy*”, “*your living conditions vs. others*”. In these cases the questions concern the respondent’s personal view without any reference to his/her ethnic or identity group. For all these questions a similar pattern is revealed where expressions of discontent clearly became more unevenly distributed among language groups, with Kikuyu and Meru/Embo showing relatively less discontent in 2005 compared to 2003 and most other groups moving in opposite direction.

We may hence conclude that between 2003 and 2005 “something” was going on that radically changed the perceptions among different language groups of their relative position. Discontent was redistributed along ethnic lines. A risky trend had manifested itself already two years before the elections.

### **Discussion and extensions**

The results open up for a number of questions, interpretations and additional hypotheses. They provide some fuel to the debate on democracy and ethnicity, which has been intensified after the Kenya crisis. The results may also be interpreted in the light of specific political events in Kenya 2003-2005. This note will not go further in these directions, leaving it to experts in these fields.

Instead, we return to the original question of this note: Were there any signals in Afrobarometer data of what was coming in Kenya, already before it all happened? This exercise indicates that this was the case. Even a rudimentary analysis like this one would have been able to provide an early warning signal, already in late 2005. A more sophisticated use of this kind of data, with refined indicators, would of course be able to go further, particularly if combined with good theory and knowledge from other sources.

Given what we know from theory on politics, ethnicity and conflict risks, which type of indicators would most adequately reflect risk for a Kenya-like development in other African nations? This note does in no way pretend to give a comprehensive answer to that. However, it provides one suggestion: When various dimensions of inequality - economic conditions, political influence, and unfair treatment by government - combine with rapid mood swings which redistribute discontent along ethnic lines, then what appears to be stable rapidly may become unstable.

Do we see similar conditions appearing in other African nations? This note would indicate that Nigeria, Uganda and Malawi should be candidates for close monitoring.

Early warning signals are in great demand among policy makers. They do of course not provide definite forecasts, but they may orient risk assessments and further analytical work. It is an area where policy makers and researchers may join efforts. It also appears as if Afrobarometer data may be used as one ingredient of such an early warning system. The round four of Afrobarometer, now covering 20 countries, takes place between February and December 2008. A possible research project would be to prepare analytical tools to detect

risk, using perspectives from different disciplines, with inputs from researchers as well as policymakers and combining quantitative analysis with theory.

### References

All indicators have been elaborated from the website of the Afrobarometer (online analysis function): <http://www.afrobarometer.org/>