After more than three decades of independence, many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have not yet developed stable political systems. Since the 1960s, when African countries began to achieve independence, many of them have encountered significant levels of institutional instability. In recent years, political violence has emerged as the most common method of governmental change. In this study, the effects of political violence on economic and human development in Sub-Saharan Africa are examined. It is seen that political instability is a significant constraint to the improvement of the human condition in the region.

Recent studies show that economic and social conditions in Sub-Saharan Africa have deteriorated significantly during the last thirty years. Some writers argue that unless appropriate political and economic reforms are undertaken, economic conditions in the region will continue to deteriorate.¹

In 1989, the population of Sub-Saharan Africa was 480 million. The World Bank estimates that by the year 2000, the region will achieve a population of 679 million people. Growing at an average annual rate of 3.2 percent, the population of Sub-Saharan Africa is expected to reach 1.3 billion by the year 2025. Without a substantial investment in the productive capacity of the Sub-Saharan African economies, such population growth could pose a significant threat to the quality of life of the people. A number of researchers have argued that the security of property rights significantly affects economic development in a society. Since the individuals who provide the funds for capital accumulation must be
reasonably assured that they will be able to obtain the earnings generated by their savings, the security of property rights can be seen as an important determinant of savings, and subsequently capital formation in a society. Increased levels of political violence reduce the security of property rights, leading to a decrease in savings and capital accumulation. In addition, political instability encourages capital flight, including "brain drain," and discourages the flow of foreign capital. Political violence, thus, is a significant impediment to economic development in Sub-Saharan Africa.  

Researchers and some policy makers have identified both external and internal constraints to economic development in Sub-Saharan Africa. External causes of the region's economic malaise include the economic policies of the industrialized countries, the international exchange system, which often functions to the disadvantage of economies that are primarily agricultural, and natural disasters.  

Internal obstacles to economic development in Africa include excessive government control of economic activity, corruption in the public sector, and political violence.  

This article examines the relationship between political instability and economic development in Africa. Specifically, it attempts to present additional evidence to show that political instability constrains economic and human development in Sub-Saharan Africa.  

Political violence has been identified as one of the most important obstacles to economic and human development in Africa. Since the 1960s, Sub-Saharan Africa has encountered significant levels of institutional instability. Between 1956 and 1984, for example, the region experienced fifty-six coups d'état. Many more coups have occurred since then, making the coup d'état the region's most important method of regime change. The frequent use of nonconstitutional methods for governmental change has increased the level of political instability and contributed significantly to economic stagnation.  

THE CONCEPT OF POLITICAL INSTABILITY  

Political instability has been defined in terms of either a change in the existing political system or a challenge to it. According to Morrison and Stevenson, a change in the government may involve a reshuffling of the cabinet, a removal and subsequent replacement of the head of state, or a