



## OF BREXIT AND BACKBENCHERS: HOW BAD IS UK POLITICAL RISK?

WITH BOTH OFFICIAL AND PRACTICAL BREXIT DEADLINES APPROACHING, THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY'S "OVEN-READY" DEAL LOOKS DECIDEDLY UNDERCOOKED. A MISHANDLED THREAT TO BREAK INTERNATIONAL LAW LED EVERY LIVING FORMER PRIME MINISTER TO SPEAK OUT AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT'S INTERNAL MARKETS BILL, WITH THE PM CONCEDED GROUND TO AN INTERNAL REBELLION DESPITE AN 87-SEAT WORKING MAJORITY. AMID ERODING SOFT POWER ABROAD, THERE IS LITTLE POSITIVITY AT HOME. COVID-19 CASES ARE RISING SHARPLY AFTER THE GOVERNMENT SPENT WEEKS CAJOLING WORKERS BACK INTO OFFICES AND SUBSIDISING MINGLING IN RESTAURANTS. ANY PANDEMIC POLL-BOUNCE HAS VANISHED, WITH MOST [POLLSTERS](#) SHOWING THE OPPOSITION WITHIN TOUCHING DISTANCE OF THE CONSERVATIVES FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE BORIS JOHNSON BECAME LEADER.

RISKS ABOUND. THE ECONOMY HAS BEEN AMONG THE WORST PERFORMERS IN EUROPE EVEN BEFORE ANY BREXIT FALLOUT IS ACCOUNTED FOR. INTERNAL FACTIONALISM IS GROWING AS THE PRIME MINISTER AND HIS ADVISORS PICK FIGHTS WITH EVERYONE FROM PARTY GRANDEES TO THE CIVIL SERVICE. U-TURNS HAVE COME WITH ALARMING FREQUENCY, UNDERMINING ANY SEMBLANCE OF POLICY STABILITY. WITH BREXIT DELIVERING A NEW CROP OF 'RED-WALL' VOTERS FROM TRADITIONALLY LABOUR CONSTITUENCIES, THE CONSERVATIVE ELECTORATE HAS BECOME A BROADER CHURCH THAN IT'S BEEN FOR A LONG TIME. KEEPING THE BLUE FLOCK HAPPY IS A TRICKY TASK.

DESPITE THESE ISSUES, MANY OF THE POLITICAL RISKS REMAIN BROADLY BOUNDED. THE GOVERNMENT IS FUNDAMENTALLY STABLE AND IS LIKELY TO REMAIN SO; THE CHANCE OF A SNAP ELECTION IS THE LOWEST IN A DECADE, AND THE NEXT NATIONAL VOTE IS IN 2024. BREXIT RISK ISN'T UNFORESEEN; A HARD DEADLINE AT THE END OF 2020 IS THE ONE THING THE GOVERNMENT HAVE SO FAR REMAINED CONSISTENT ON. THAT ALMOST HALF OF BUSINESSES HAVEN'T CONDUCTED A BREXIT RISK ASSESSMENT THEREFORE LOOKS LIKE A STRANGE OVERSIGHT. INTERNAL CONSERVATIVE PARTY AFFAIRS WILL PROBABLY MEAN MORE POLICY DEVIATIONS FOR A WHILE. GREATER OVERALL POLITICAL STABILITY MEANS THE BRITISH WILL NEED TO GET USED TO IT.

## HOW THIRD TERMS BECAME A THIRD RAIL IN AFRICAN POLITICS

AFRICA'S AGE OF NEARLY CONSTANT COUPS D'ETAT HAS LONG SINCE PASSED, BUT IN THEIR PLACE SO-CALLED "CONSTITUTIONAL COUPS" HAVE GROWN MORE COMMON. THROUGH CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS AND FLEXIBLE APPLICATIONS OF LEGAL TECHNICALITIES, AIDED BY PLIANT PARLIAMENTS AND COURTS, INCUMBENT PRESIDENTS AND PRIME MINISTERS HAVE BECOME ADEPT AT EXTENDING

THEIR RULE WITH A VENEER OF LEGITIMACY. SINCE 2015, WHEN THE AFRICAN UNION AND WEST AFRICA'S ECOWAS DROPPED PROPOSALS TO FORMALLY BAN LEADERS SERVING MORE THAN TWO TERMS, OVER A DOZEN COUNTRIES HAVE REMOVED, WEAKENED OR EVADED TERM LIMITS. THE LATEST MOVES BY ELDERLY INCUMBENTS IN IVORY COAST AND GUINEA TO CIRCUMVENT LIMITS AND RUN FOR THIRD TERMS HAVE SPARKED MASS PROTESTS AND RENEWED THE DEBATE ON "THIRD TERMISM".

THIS IS PARTLY DUE TO A CONFLUENCE OF ELECTORAL CYCLES; 2020 IS A BUSY ELECTION YEAR IN A THREE-YEAR PERIOD WHERE MOST AFRICAN COUNTRIES HAVE ELECTIONS SCHEDULED. LONG-ANTICIPATED SUCCESSION BATTLES ARE HEATING UP WHERE LEADERS FACE A CONSTITUTIONAL EXPIRY DATE. THE WEAKNESS OF POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS IS ALSO A CONTRIBUTOR, AS INCONSISTENT RULE OF LAW AND PERSONALISED POLITICAL PARTIES COMBINE TO INCENTIVISE CLINGING ON TO POWER. RIDING OUT PROTESTS CAN BE MORE ATTRACTIVE THAN RISKING EITHER PROSECUTION BY A SUCCESSOR OR BROADER UNREST EMERGING FROM A POWER VACUUM.

THE ISSUE OF TERM LIMITS HAS MOBILISED CIVIL SOCIETY OPPOSITION AND MASS PROTESTS FROM TOGO TO CONGO RECENTLY, WITH LIMITED SUCCESS. OBVIOUS MANIPULATION UNDERMINES SCANT TRUST IN ELECTIONS AND INSTITUTIONS, PUSHING CITIZENS TOWARDS DIRECT ACTION AND CREATING NATURAL FLASHPOINTS FOR UNREST AROUND POLLS. [COVID-19-RELATED ECONOMIC DISLOCATION](#) HAS ONLY INTENSIFIED THIS ANGER. THREE AFRICAN COUPS IN FOUR YEARS SHOULD ACT AS A REMINDER THAT THE COMBINATION OF HOLLOW INSTITUTIONS AND POLITICISED SECURITY SERVICES WILL LEAVE COUNTRIES VULNERABLE AT MOMENTS OF EXTREME STRESS ON POLITICAL SYSTEMS. HOLDING ON FOR ONE MORE TERM MAY DELAY A DEMOCRATIC RECKONING, BUT NOTHING CAN ABOLISH IT FOR GOOD.

## THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS: MUCH ADO ABOUT NORMALISATION

ON 14 SEPTEMBER, THE UAE AND BAHRAIN OPENED DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL, JOINING EGYPT AND JORDAN AS THE ONLY ARAB STATES TO HAVE DONE SO. MUCH OF THE DISCOURSE ANALYSING THE SUDDEN LEAP TOWARD NORMALISATION FOCUSES NARROWLY ON THE ROLE OF IRAN, ENVISAGING THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS AS A MIDDLE EASTERN EQUIVALENT OF THE ENTENTE CORDIAL. CERTAINLY, ISRAEL AND BAHRAIN AND TO A LESSER EXTENT THE UAE ALL CONSIDER IRAN A FUNDAMENTAL SECURITY THREAT; THEY HAVE COVERTLY SHARED INTELLIGENCE ON THE MATTER FOR YEARS. YET, THIS ALONE PROVIDES AN INSUFFICIENT EXPLANATION.

INSTEAD, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS HAVE DRIVEN BAHRAIN AND THE UAE TO BREAK RANKS WITH THEIR ARAB COUNTERPARTS. BOTH WISH TO LEGITIMISE EXISTING CLANDESTINE TRADE AND INVESTMENT TIES IN ORDER TO FURTHER CAPITALISE ON ACCESS TO ISRAEL'S PREEMINENT TECHNOLOGY SECTOR. NORMALISATION MAY ALSO PAY DIVIDENDS IN WASHINGTON, MANIFESTED IN INCREASED ARMS SALES, INVESTMENT AND POSSIBLY SECURITY GUARANTEES. MEANWHILE, ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER BINYAMIN NETANYAHU, WHO FASHIONS HIMSELF AS A STRONGMAN CAPABLE OF FORCING ADVERSARIES TO ACCEPT THE REALITY OF ISRAEL'S EXISTENCE, CAN CLAIM SUCCESS AHEAD OF POSSIBLE EARLY ELECTIONS IN 2021.

SOME ARAB STATES MAY STILL FOLLOW SUIT: SUDAN IS A LEADING CONTENDER, BUT OMAN MIGHT CHOOSE TO FORGO ITS REPUTATION FOR NEUTRALITY TOO. OTHER GULF COUNTRIES, THOUGH, ARE UNLIKELY TO EMBRACE ISRAEL. TO SAUDI ARABIA'S AILING KING SALMAN AND IN KUWAIT'S QUASI-DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM, THE RISK OF BEING ACCUSED OF BETRAYING THE PALESTINIAN CAUSE REMAINS A POTENT OBSTACLE. QATAR WISHES TO AVOID THE IRE THAT NORMALISATION WOULD DRAW FROM ITS CLOSE REGIONAL ALLY IRAN, ALONGSIDE HAMAS AND TURKEY.

DONALD TRUMP IS EXPECTED TO MARKET THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS AS A MAJOR FOREIGN BREAKTHROUGH AHEAD OF THE NOVEMBER ELECTION, HAVING CLAIMED WITH CHARACTERISTIC OVERSTATEMENT TO HAVE PERSONALLY DELIVERED "PEACE TO THE MIDDLE EAST." IN REALITY, THE CURRENT FLURRY OF DIPLOMATIC ANNOUNCEMENTS REPRESENT A FORMALISATION OF EXISTING RELATIONSHIPS RATHER THAN A SUBSTANTIAL SHIFT IN REGIONAL GEOPOLITICAL REALITIES.