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Contemporary Democratization Processes in Africa: Post Dictatorship, and The Gambia's Fragile Democracy

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Abstract

Contemporary democratization processes and regime changes in Africa warrant a closer examination. Why is the focus on Africa? Despite a positive trend in democratic progress in the African continent, however, recent democratic backsliding and coups and counter coups have taken center stage in African politics. This is not to say that democracy around the world has not weakened; it is the case for all continents, not just Africa. While there has been contributions to the discourse on the factors of regime change in Africa, however, there is a gap when it comes to the political "stagnation" and/or democratic "backsliding". What factors may trigger democratic backsliding and stalled transitions in contemporary African politics? Some of the key factors highlighted in the article are: elites, military coups, protest democracy, external influence through so-called "liberalization projects". This article looked at wide range of contemporary case studies across the African continent. It goes further to explain the causes as well the consequences of democratic backsliding and failed political transitions/ stagnations that are undermining the continent's democratic pathways. This article first provides an extensive overview of contemporary regime changes in Africa and then delves into the depths of one specific example as a successful transition: The Gambia.

Keywords: *Democratization, Political transitions, Backsliding, Africa, Regime change, Coups*

1. Introduction

In recent times elections, protest democracy, and coups are a key processes of regime change. What seems to be missing in the literature is the growing failures 'stagnation' and/or 'backsliding' in political transitions in Africa. This is particularly visibly in post dictatorship era as outlined in this article. In essence, studying these processes provides a unique opportunity to examine what was and what is now. This article aims to provide a critical assessment of contemporary regime changes in Africa. There is a gap when it comes to successful "contemporary" political transitions. The contribution is empirical because of the case study, literature and as well as online and newspaper sources used in this article.

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The paper also underscores rare successes of political transition from autocracy to democracy in Africa. Some of the case studies used in this article are grouped into two categories: protest democracy and military coups as means of change of government. Protest democracy underscores how they have become breeding grounds for military coups and constitutional crisis such as (2011 to date, Burkina Faso in 2014). Second case studies looked at the reemergence of military coups in African politics and a total of 5 military coups have been recorded in from 2021 to 2021. Notable examples are Mali in 2020, Chad in 2021 and Guinea in 2021. Not forgetting Sudan coup in 2019 that ended more than 30 year rule of Omar Bashir.

In particular is The Gambia's successful, but challenging political transition from autocracy to democracy: why is The Gambia political transition standing of wider dynamic in Africa? The Gambia managed a successful regime change to democracy and that this is more the exception to the rule in Africa. The Gambia's democratic power-transition is a unique exception to democratic backsliding and failed political transitions. It is thanks to swift international community response to help Gambians installed political stability after former president, Yahya Jammeh refused to stepdown when he lost in the December 2016 presidential elections. The Economic Community of Western States (ECOWAS) led this effort after a month political impasse in The Gambia. Until date and since January 2017 ECOWAS military forces (ECOMIG) is still providing security and protection for the elected president. As opposed to other political transitions such as Burkina Faso which continue to witness coups, Libya fractions amongst other, the swift intervention of ECOWAS made it possibly for peaceful democratic transition to take place. In The Gambia we could say that swift diplomacy and military international intervention by ECOWAS brought about political stability.

In context, the current president Adama Barrow, he is the first post dictatorship president after the fall of Yahya Jammeh's autocratic regime in 2016. What lesson can we learn from Jammeh's fall? On December 1, 2016, The Gambia took the world by storm. It is the smallest country in mainland Africa, found in West Africa. Since gaining independence in 1965, democratic change was only possible in December 2016. What this means is that the first president of The Gambia, Dawda Jawara was in power from 1965. He was however forced out of power through military coup in 1994. Yayha Jammeh and four of his comrades led that military coup. He became the leader and stayed in power until December 1, 2016.

Therefore the discourse on democratic backsliding and stalled transitions in Africa is relevant. As opposed to failed international interventions such as in Libya; the Gambian case study standouts in a wider political transitions debate in the continent. By looking at the Gambian case study, this article makes a unique contribution on this subject matter that needs attention especially in the debate on contemporary African politics.

2. Literature Review

What factors may affect/define regime changes in Africa? Moreover, are there any particularities for a democratization process in the African continent? Why is The Gambia an outlier in Africa's many failed transitions? Democratization has become an interesting field study to explore processes of democratic transitions. In simply term democratization is movement towards democracy (Hagan, 2014; Whitehead, 2002). Diamond (2014) has outlined for key characteristics of democracy: (1) choose and replace elected representatives in a free and fair election; (2) citizens to actively participate in politics and social life; (3) the protection of the human rights of all citizens; and the (4) adherence to the rule of law. As said by a participant during one of the international conferences (on democratic transitions in Africa) held at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) in October 2021: "We know that we have our rights, at the same time, it is the duty of our governments to guarantee those rights". This quotation is relevant to probe into the subject of democratization as it relates to citizens expectations towards their governments. Even though democracy guarantees among others freedom, and however, the appetite to fight for freedom is what is driving democratic change around the world. This is particularly relevant especially in the continent of Africa in recent times.

Political transitions are defined by movement towards democracy. What then is political transition? Political transition explains the interval-period between one political regime and another (Cheeseman, 2015). In this article, it will imply the period of transition from autocracy to democracy through democratic transition. For Codato (2006) "transition is an open-ended, a critical moment throughout which the nature and the course of change depends, above and beyond all, on the strategies adopted by the groups, of actors involved in these process". Going by this quotation transition can be a complex process and it is defined by the actions of those in power. It is either they maintain the status quo and/or are willing to transition to a democracy. However,

this process could be limited and in some cases be seen as a big gamble. In other words, not every change could lead to a democracy. As cited by the founder of the World Economic Forum, Klaus Schwab once said: "Change can be frightening, and the temptation is often to resist it. But change almost always provides opportunities— to learn new things, to rethink tired processes, and to improve the way we work". This explains the challenges of democratization processes in a democratic transition. The challenges that come with change require strong democratic institutions for democracy to strive.

It is important to note that theories on regime and democratic change have varied in recent times. What seems to be silent in the literature is the role of elites in regime change and political transition. What precipitate regime and democratic change in a country remains contested? In this context, little literature exists on the role of elites in a regime change. This is to say elites (men of high status and groups) involved in the process of governing (Mahajan, 2006) in a country. The behavior and influences of elites may explain the success and failures of democratic transitions. To explain its intricacies and implications on democratic transitions, Higley and Burton (2012) argued that: "A disunified national elite, which is the most common type, produces a series of unstable regimes that tend to oscillate between authoritarian and democratic forms over varying intervals. A consensually unified national elite, which is historically much rarer, produces a stable regime that may evolve into a modern democracy […]". Therefore, the role of elites in democratic transitions can either produce a stable democracy and/or unstable transition. Because political transition can be a delicate process, especially if it fails thus creates a vacuum for instability as well internal and even external influence to undermine the political transition. This help to explain why political transitions in 'fragile' democracies could easily backslide to the old ways. When regime change occurs, especially in autocratic regimes the expectation is for democracy to triumph.

The power relations between elites and opposition are crucial to understanding democratic transitions. Because elites support the incumbency and are coopted to be part of the regime structure. On the other hand, opposition parties and leaders are often left isolated and frustrated in the fringes of governance. Osei (2018) has outlined this power relations between elites and oppositions: "Elites in non-democracies are typically described as centralized in the presidency, state-dependent, and recruited from a small social segment. Regime opponents, on the other hand, are often excluded from patronage systems or threatened with repression, which leads to serious mistrust and a lack of cooperation between government and opposition". The tension therefore between the regime in power and opposition it is what often drives the country into transition chaos. Elites tend to be comfortable and supportive of the regime, while opposition drives their opposition, unless there is elite's breakaway.

But that breakaway is largely possible if the opposition manages to get the attention of the people to call for a revolution. In that case as Acemoglu and Robinson (2001) pinpoints the fact that the elite at all costs will try to prevent a revolution. This may come in the form of economic concessions to the poor, and that is for instance income redistribution. Thus, the threat of revolution they further argue might be 'transitory', only if the current redistribution does not guarantee future redistribution. This explanation provides basis to understand threat of revolution in waiting as well as uncertainty in a political system. Economic revolution is threat to the existing political regime fortified in their theory. What is also clear is the fact that economic is not only the factor that may trigger chaos in political transition. It is thus the drive, urge and hunger for people to live in a democratic country.

This increasing pressure for democratic change is what may bring about political instability. What is often missing in the literature is the fragility of democratic change, especially post dictatorship. A country with weak democratic institutions is more likely to backslide. This could be coined as 'part-time democracy'. It explains a situation in which regime change is effected for a short period of time, merged with seasonal joy and democratic expectation but only to slide back to the old regime and/or autocracy. This theorizing is supported by Haggard and Kaufman (1997) "Third World [are] preoccupied, not with democratization, but with the emergence of new types of authoritarian rule". To put it simply, what happened next is continually in the minds of the people for fear of protracted conflict and political instability. For Epstein *et al.* (2006): "Not only are such regimes becoming more numerous, [but] there is also growing evidence that they behave differently from either full democracies or full autocracies". This argument is supported by Elbadawi and Makdisi (2017) that "partial democracies tend to be volatile and characterized by unpredictable polit; hence they are likely more susceptible to democratic transition than autocracies".

3. What is the State of Democracy Around the World?

The global trend of democratic backsliding and democratic transitions around the globe is worrisome. To put it bluntly democracy is losing and autocracy as well hybrid regimes are on the rise. This is particularly evident especially transitioning from autocratic regime to a more democratic one. In this process, countries struggle to implement basic democratic ideals. By denying citizens and people their basic human rights, it creates an opening for regime change; and thereby plunging the country into protracted political transitions. Often non-democratic countries are trapped into long political transitions (see succeeding sections) and thus can be a challenging process. But what is an established fact is that political transition is smoother and resistant to democratic backsliding in more democratic regimes than the opposite. This goes without stating the fact that democracy has been at a decline. For instance, the latest Democracy Index report of 2021 made it categorically clear that less than half of the world the world lives in a democracy. Freedom House Report (2020) democracy has declined over the past 14 year in more than half of the world's established democracies. The report goes further to add the key aspects of declining include having a functioning government, decline in freedom of expression and belief, and rule of law. As described by Pino and Wiatrowski (2006), "these ideals include developing and protecting individual freedoms and civil liberties, [ensuring] citizens safety and security, promoting the rule of law, direct and representative democratic institutions, the establishment of justice systems".

It is therefore evident there are evidenced challenges on regime and democratic change. These challenges are what drive democratic backsliding in turn affect democratic transitions. This article therefore focuses on the continent of Africa as it relates to the key processes that influences as well impede democratic transitions. The article has drawn from a variety of contemporary case studies in Africa. In addition, it has gone further to critic, in the context of understanding the influence of the 'liberalization project' (see section on political transition in Africa) in African politics. The article has outlined certain key factors that continue to affect the democratization project in the continent. Some of the factors that are considered, along others are: role of elites, elections, and not least external viz-a-viz the so-called "liberalization project".

4. Democratic Backsliding in Africa: Is Africa's Democratic Trajectory at a Brink?

What the outside world thinks of Africa's democratic trajectory is crucially important. It goes to say that the continent is part of a larger global community. What has become of Africa's regime change and democratization project is a good point to reflect on ts democratic standings. According to Freedom House (2020) democratic backsliding in Africa (particularly West Africa) accelerated in 2019. This is precipitated by "flawed elections" in West Africa. The report mentioned among others: Benin a country once rated as one of the continent's top performers had witnessed 13 points decline. The 1990 National conference paved the way for a peaceful political transition from military rule to democracy. This decline is associated with the lack of political space for opposition and the government ambition to stay longer in power. Prior to the legislative elections which the opposition boycotted because, the government, "adopted an electoral code that introduced an endorsement requirement that resulted in the exclusion of the main opposition parties [including] from the presidential run" (Institute for Security Studies, 2021). This made it possible for incumbent president, Patrice Talon who has been in power since 2016 to cling to over 80% lead amid boycott from some opposition parties.

The report also singled out two giants of Africa's democracies. Notably Nigeria and Senegal. For instance, Nigeria fell by three points decline. According to the report balloting was marred by procedural irregularities and violence and intimidation. Similar observations were made by the Human Rights Watch (2019) and has recommended that: "Buhari should take concrete steps to address the widespread political violence, and to ensure accountability for human rights abuses by soldiers and police as he begins his second term". The security challenged is attributed to the failure of security forces to effectively respond to the security challenges during the election period. This is because the election period witnessed constant insurgent attack by Boko Haram, communal violence and banditry including kidnapping and killings. As reported by CNN (2018): "Nigeria's elections were marred by poor logistics arrangements, which led to the electoral commission moving the presidential election date by one week — just hours before the polls opened". Furthermore, "On the day itself, there were reports of voter intimidation, ballot boxes snatched at polling stations and voting papers burned in at least one place. Nigerians were left waiting for several hours at polling units across the country for voting materials to turn up" (*Ibid.*).

Senegal one of the key democratic players in the continent has experienced 1 point decline. The report attributed this decline due to the fact that the government barred two of the country's opposition figures from contesting the presidential election. These two candidates (former Dakar mayor Khalifa Sall and ex-minister Karim Wade) barred of corruption allegations a move seen by observes as crackdown on dissent. As reported by the BBC (2019), "he took 58% of the vote in the poll in which he faced four challengers, but was accused of preventing some of his main rivals from running". Macky Sall is now under tough scrutiny because of his hidden intention to cling on to power for a third term. His political camp "argue that changes to the constitution in 2016—which shortened presidential terms from seven to five years—reset the clock on his term limits, allowing him to run for another mandate in 2024" (DW News, 2022). However, the August 2022 parliamentary elections gave him a big blow. As cited by France 24 (2022), "it is the first time since the historically stable West African country's independence in 1960 that the ruling party's camp has lost that majority and will have to rely on other forces in parliament to pass legislation". If this observation is anything to go back it shows his regime's decline. Being Africa's strongest democracy brings Senegal under the microscope. Therefore, the evolving democratic backsliding is observable under Macky Sall.

Overall, the literature therefore underscores the challenges of democracy in Africa. This is a salient topic in the context of understanding political transitions in the African continent. The succeeding section underscores as well give an in-depth analysis into this subject matter.

5. Analysis

5.1. Is the Liberalization Project a Threat to Africa's Democratic Transition?

Contemporary political transitions are making waves in Africa. Using contemporary political theory/discourse is to examine current political transitions in Africa. As Mahajan (2006) puts it "is to understand politics in the most comprehensive fashion possible". There is also the internationalist theory that helps to understand regime change and democratic transitions. This theory exemplifies the role as well influences of external donors in democratic transitions. Curiously, is the liberalization project a threat to Africa's democracy transitions? Criticism levied against this theory is the fact that donor western countries interfere in the internal affairs of countries and their interest to promote free-market capitalist system in the developing world (See Ojo, 1999; Renninger, 2013). Through its Bretton Woods Institutions: The International Monetary Fund and World Bank established after World II in 1944; they practice what could be described as 'Economic Dictatorship' on developing countries. This dictatorship is not only evident in the monopolization and extraction of resources and manufacturing of products, but it goes as far as determining the economic policies in how to measure economic policies (Mawere and Mwanaka, 2015).

The poor state of economies in developing countries put governments and institutions in a difficult situation. As argued by Ndulu *et al.* (1996) the economies of Africa are structurally weak and arguably the most vulnerable than other developing economies. In addition, due to liberalization reform orchestrated by international financial institutions makes it difficult for African economies to control their economies. Cheeseman (2015) argued that "reforms such as privatization of state-owned banks and the elimination of credits controls effectively meant that state ceased to serve as gatekeeper for capital". In other words, liberalization project takes ownership of Africa's economies in the name of democratic change. Due to external influence and interferences countries are likely face increasing pressures leading to toppling the regime in power (see section on coups). This will in turn create more political transitions as witnessed in many parts of the world. According to the World Economic Outlook of 2022 about 30 million people were into extreme poverty in 2021 and in 2022 about 22 million. Furthermore, the economic disruption because of the Russia-Ukraine War is likely to further push 1.8 million across the continent into extreme poverty in 2022. This number is predicated to rise to 2.1 million in 2023. Bearing in mind the population of Africa is 17% of the current world's population. Amongst other issues the continent is battling with immigration, climate change and these factors combined would put pressures on national governments.

5.2. Does Elections Consolidate Democracy and/or Facilitate Democratic Backsliding?

Elections are an important part of democratic change and democratic transitions. For Katz (1997) "elections are the defining institutions of modern democracy". This statement goes to underscore the centrality of elections in modern democratization discourse in the context of political transition. It is electoral integrity and credibility

that will represent a transition to democracy and reflects the popular will (Imam, 1992). An election thus provides an opportunity for citizens to choose the leader of their choice in a democratic fashion. For democratic countries it is an open opportunity to consolidate and strengthened even celebrate their democratic systems. On the other hand, non-democratic countries it posed a challenge to unseat incumbency, and if successful, transition to democracy. Elections are crucial aspect of regime change and that is to foster in order to usher in democratization in non-democratic countries.

It has been debated whether elections lead to democratic regimes or whether elections are an expression of democratic regimes in Africa. Why Africa? Historically speaking the continent has been on political transition since independence. As summed up by Lindberg (2006) authoritarian regimes dominated the political landscape of Africa until the end of the 1980s; thus, the early 1990s created an air "demo-optimism" and, however this "demo-optimism" was turn into "demo-pessimism". For the "demo-optimism" external pressures donor western countries are concerned with democratic principles. Bratton and Walle (1994) argued that "Between 1990 and 1993 more than half of Africa's 52 governments responded to domestic and international pressures by holding competitive presidential or legislative elections". These pressures resulted to competitive elections, an opening for opposition parties to contest and subsequently led to the emergence fragile democratic regime change. For the "demo-pessimism" an explanation to this pheromone according to Cheeseman (2015) it is because of the quest to retain power: "many African leaders responded to multiparty elections by refusing to allow for free and fair elections". It is therefore noticeable to say that elections have played a key role in Africa's political transitions. This is despite its flawed in some autocratic countries. Therefore, while elections are an important part of the continent's political transition, there remains a big question on its workability especially in fragile states as would be discussed below.

With this background in mind, it is as well imperative to examine failed/stalled political transitions. It is fair to say that stalled political transitions are hampering the possibility for credible elections to take place because of political violence. As outlined in the sections below, election delays are as a result of political violence, democratic backsliding and coups. The recent political developments such as coups or conflict has resulted to elections delay in some African countries in Libya (2011 to date), Somalia (1991 to date), Mali (2021 to date), Guinea Conakry (2021 to date), and Chad (2021 to date) (see section on Military coups). These countries have continued to witness increasing political violence thus affecting their democratic transitions. In other words, elections in these countries in terms of timing remains up in the air. Thus, political transitions in these countries remained highly uncertain due to the fragile political environments as foreseen.

Looking ahead are some important upcoming elections in Africa. As indicated by the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (2022): "Africa's 2023 elections, therefore, will be dynamic and complex. Given the legitimizing authority that a credible electoral process can bring, it is the manner in which these elections are managed, more than the specific outcomes that will be significant for shaping Africa's governance and security environment". What we can draw from this assessment of Africa's upcoming elections speaks to the stake at hand to organizing free, fair and transparent elections. Therefore, organizing credible elections and/or upholding the true verdict of the people 'election results' are a big test for Africa's democratic transition. It is those key democratic processes that may define the outcome of a transition period. Even though elections are citizens avenue to choose their governments, however, this process might be hampered with fraud, lack of credible and free space opposition to operate. But also, the fragility of elections is also challenged by the security concerns. This may as well turn into political unrest as well as disrupting a political transition.

The map below by the Africa Center for Strategic Studies gives an overview to the election quagmire of the aforementioned countries. It shows democratic transitions threats/uncertainty spreading across the continent. It does not only affect the presidential elections but as well legislative elections. It shows that these vulnerable countries spread across the continent. Regionally two are from West Africa (Guinea Conakry and Mali), North Africa (Libya), North-Central Africa (Chad), East Africa (Kenya and Somalia) and Southwestern Africa (Angola). On the other hand Kenya is recently concluded its presidential elections, and Somaliland whose presidential elections have been postponed until 2023. This and other important electoral processes are explained in the table beside the electoral crisis map in Figure 1.
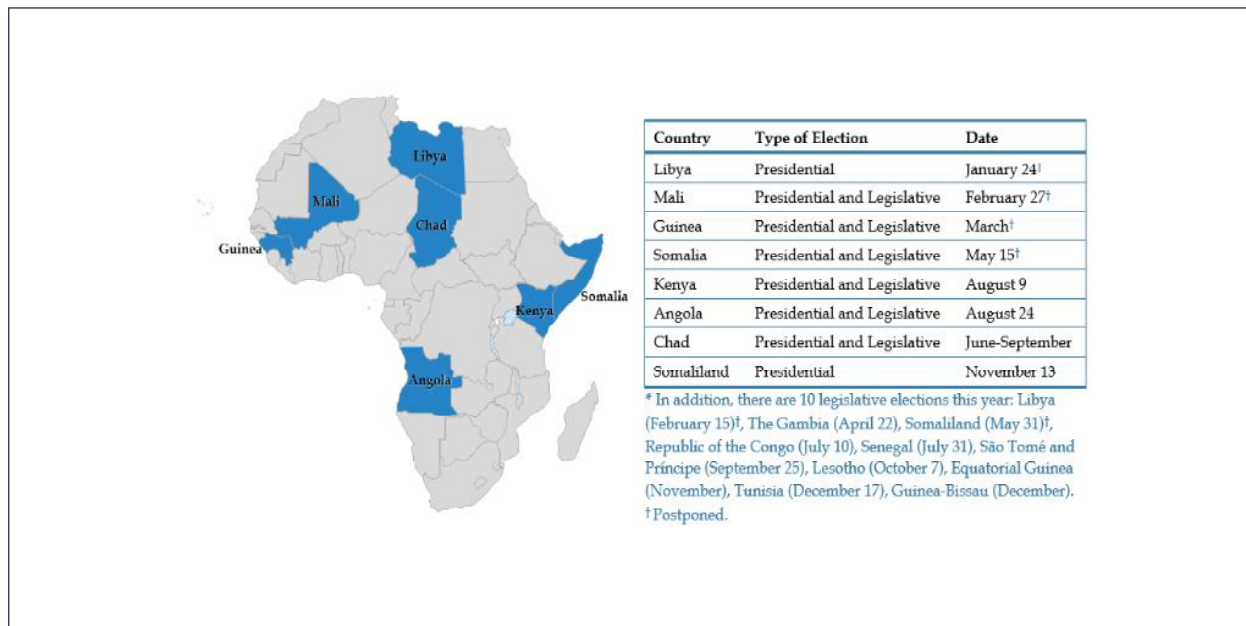
Country	Type of Election	Date
Libya	Presidential	January 24†
Mali	Presidential and Legislative	February 27†
Guinea	Presidential and Legislative	March†
Somalia	Presidential and Legislative	May 15†
Kenya	Presidential and Legislative	August 9
Angola	Presidential and Legislative	August 24
Chad	Presidential and Legislative	June-September
Somaliland	Presidential	November 13

* In addition, there are 10 legislative elections this year: Libya (February 15)†, The Gambia (April 22), Somaliland (May 31)†, Republic of the Congo (July 10), Senegal (July 31), São Tomé and Príncipe (September 25), Lesotho (October 7), Equatorial Guinea (November), Tunisia (December 17), Guinea-Bissau (December).
† Postponed.

Figure 1: Elections Table

5.3. Recently Concluded Elections in Africa

In contemporary African politics, still plays a crucial role in regime change. Despite dictators having strong grip on power, opposition and united oppositions put pressures in their governments. Despite some of Africa's longest serving rulers emerge victorious but faced stiff opposition as compared to the previous times. This changing dynamic to end 'rule for life' in the African continent is welcoming. For instance, President Paul Biya of Cameroon, who has been in power since 1982 unaspiringly won by over 70% of the votes in the 2018 presidential elections amid allegations of massive fraud, marred by insecurity and violence (October 22, 2018). Similarly, in Uganda president Yoweri Museveni won 59% of the 2021 presidential election but was challenged by Bobi Wine who got 35% of the votes (BBC, 2021). If anything, these results show is the dwindling popularity of Yoweri Museveni, and emergence of the 'people's power movement' associated with Bobi. The irony here is that Yoweri prior to coming to power wrote a book called: *What is Africa's Problem?* In the book one of the major arguments he made is that the biggest problem faced by Africa is leaders who overstayed in power. But here he is after gaining power in 1986 he still hanging onto it.

These presidents are among the few remaining longest serving rulers in Africa. In other words, Africa currently holds the record of the longest serving president (see Africa Business Insider, 2021).

Table 1: List of Current Longest Serving Rulers in Africa		
Name	**Country**	**Term in Office**
1. Teodoro Obiang Nguema	Equatorial Guinea	1979 to date
2. Paul Biya	Cameroon	1982 to date
3. Yoweri Museveni	Uganda	1986 to date
4. Denis Sassou Nguesso	Congo Brazzaville	1997 to date
5. Isaias Afwerki	Eretria	1993 to date - A country that never held elections since gaining independence in 1993.
6. Paul Kagame	Rwanda	2000 to date

These regimes have firm grip on power and thus making it difficult for opposition and democratic transitions to take place. What seems to be an important observation is that just as in other regime cases discussed in this article; either the rulers die in power, the masses/people rise up to demand for their rights, thus opening up for regime change such as elections, or disunity within the regime (elites) may trigger opposition, and/or the military takeover. The successes of such type of regime changes are further discussed in the preceding sections below.

6. Is Protest Democracy Breeding Ground for Military Coups and Constitutional Crisis?

Protest democracy is another interesting aspect for democratic transition in Africa. Simply put protest democracy is "public demonstration" (Brancati, 2016) in which the people demonstrate to demand for or uphold democratic change. The Arab spring in 2011 it is well cited as it led to regime change in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. However, Libya is still protracted into long civil and political instability. There are many factors that continue to trigger the political instability in Libya thus undermining its political transition. On the international front, since the fall of Muammar Ghadafi there has not been any smooth transition. As former United States of America, president Barack Obama admitted there was lack of planning for the aftermath of the end of the Ghadafi's reign (See CNN, 2016). This speaks to the lack of international coordination leading to the country falling into militias to date. The absence of a single and functional government has made its political transition uncertain. This is particularly evident between the Presidential Council/Governmental of National Accord and House of Representative (See Mezraan and Varvelli, 2017). The country has been in what I would describe as 'political coma' and that is despite international efforts such as the UN-led political reconciliation process launched in 2015. This conflict speaks to the 'internationalization' of the Libya conflict. The split in factions coupled with the complicated role of the international community makes it difficult for the country to overcome its democratic transition.

In West Africa another interesting case study to look at is in Burkina Faso. In West Africa Burkina is said to have had most successful coups, with eight takeovers and only one failed coup (BBC, 2022). In 2014 protest democracy dislodge its longest serving president Blaise Compaoré (1987 to 2014) as he fled to Ivory Coast. He came to power in 1987 through a military coup. He toppled the regime of Thomas Sankara and killed his long-term friend. He was sentenced in April in absentia to life imprisonment and has recently made a public apology for the killing of Thomas Sankara. He said in a message read by the government spokesperson of the current regime in power: "I ask the Burkinabe people for forgiveness for all the acts I may have committed during my tenure, and especially the family of my brother and friend Thomas Sankara" (Reuters, 2022).

Compaore's military experiences helped him govern. Since coming to power he ruled with an iron fist (Bangura, 2022). It is fair to say that although he organized and survived 'multiparty elections', however, the waves of urban protests challenged and ended up defeating his regime in 2014 (Malka, 2020). This is because he wanted to circumvent the presidential term limit to contest for a fifth term. His attempt to force his way for another term gave birth to what was deemed as the "Black Spring". After the success the country was in a democratic transition, an interim leader, Michel Kafando was appointment to lead the transition. However, less than a year after the revolution that ended Compaore's rule, with the approach of presidential and legislative elections scheduled for October 11, 2015, a coup took place (Tchawe, 2021). However, due to international pressures the interim president was reinstated. This thus allowed the planned November 2015 elections to go ahead. Roch Marc Christian Kaboré was elected as the president. He was forcefully removed from power by the military in January 2022 by the military and has since then announced 3-year transition period (See Aljazeera, 2022). Until date Burkina Faso transition has been marred by coups and political instability.

7. Are Military Takeovers a Cursed-On Africa's Democratic Transitions?

Military coups are old fashion in African politics. The first ever coup in Africa occurred on July 23, 1952, in Egypt and in West Africa Togo was the first country to have experience coup in 1963. This is just 3 years after independence. It is therefore an established fact that one of the biggest challenges to Africa's democratic transitions are coups and counter coups. It brings about democratic backsliding to mean "democratic breakdown" (Cassani and Tomini, 2019). Powell (2012) in their study military takeovers in Africa, they have identified over 200 coups attempt from 1950 to 2010 and half of them were successfully and that is lasting more

than seven months (Powell, 2012). One of the key explanations to military in African politics is that leaders overstay their welcome (Lindstaedt, 2012). For instance, president Mugabe (1987-2017) in 2017 was forced to stepdown through a military 'palace' coup as he was then replaced by his former vice president.

The question to ask is are coups making a comeback in Africa? What warrant this question is because of the latest re-emergence of coups as a means to effect regime change in Africa. We can cite many cases in contemporary African politics. There are at least five major coups in Africa from 2020 to 2021. Some of these military led to counter coups and as well ended long rule in Africa. But at the same time received mix international reactions and condemnation. These military coups continue to plunge these countries into protracted political instability. In Mali August 2020 led by Colonel Assimi Goïta, and but few months into the transition, the interim president in the person of Bah N'Daw was arrested and dispose in May 2021 by the very same coup leader (France 24, 2022). Thus, he is currently the president of the country. This can be referred to as coup within a coup. This coup was condemned, and sanctions imposed on the new regime by Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS). Another coup was in Chad April 2021. The military took over following the death of slain president Idriss Deby after 30 years of rule. His son General Mahamat Idriss was installed as the transition president for the next 18 months. The International Community led by France was quick to endorsed Mahamat Idriss Deby (EURACTIV, 2022). In Guinea Conakry in September 2021 the military seized power, arresting president Alpha Conde. The coup followed after Conde changes the constitution in order to extent his mandate. Sudan as well saw yet another coup aside from the 2019 coup that ended more than 30 years rule of Omar Bashir. He was replaced by the Transition Military Council (TMC). This transition was interrupted just two years into the transition to full civilian rule, when the head of transition and coup leader, General Abdel Fattah Burhan, arrested the civilian prime minister and later reinstated due to international pressure (See UN News, 2021). He would then resign as prime minister just six weeks after returning to his post, and, therefore, as it stands Abdel Fattah is the Sudanese de-facto leader.

8. Is The Gambia Democratic Transition Standing of a Wider Dynamic?

Democratic transitions as we have seen in the preceding sections take different forms. One such country that has made tremendous strides is The Gambia. The basic question to ask: is the democratic change in The Gambia standing for a wider dynamic? The Gambia was known for its stable multiparty democracy since gaining independence in 1965. It was not until the 1994 military coup that The Gambia lost its democratic standing. In the 1970s and 80s, only three countries in Africa sustained multiparty democracy: Botswana, Mauritius, and The Gambia (Larry and Plattner, 2010). During this period according to Young (2012), "elsewhere nearly 40% of the countries were led by the military figures that frequently created their own single parties". Similarly, this period still witnessed some European countries in Europe such as Spain and Portugal in the 1970s were under dictatorship/autocracy, while multiparty democracy was striving in The Gambia.

Why is The Gambia's democratic change in 2016 uniquely interesting? Firstly, for 52 years (1965-2016) The Gambia never had a change of government through the ballot box, secondly, the country organized its first presidential elections post-dictatorship: on December 4, 2021, and thirdly, with the recent political developments in Africa (uprising in Burkina Faso (2014), palace coup in Zimbabwe (2017), military coups Sudan (2019) Mali (2021), etc. speaks to the wider regime change taking place around the continent. Despite the country emerging from dictatorship, it manages to conduct an orderly democratic transition from 2016 to date. This however was not without challenges. This article thus highlighted both the challenges and the strives made, by focusing on its political transition. But firstly, the article presented a situational analysis and challenges confronted with by the new dispensation as well as the current state of affairs of the country.

9. The Gambia Situational Analysis

To understand The Gambia's regime change is to first have a situational analysis of the country's development trajectory as it relates to governance. This relates to the challenges of post-dictatorship era touching on major sectors such as the economy, migration and deportation, health and education sector. The Gambia is the smallest country in mainland Africa, and it is situated in West Africa. It has a population of about 2 million inhabitants. It is one of the poorest countries in the world. According to United Nations Human Development Index of 2020: "The Gambia's HDI value for 2019 is 0.496—which put the country in the low human development category—positioning it at 172 out of 189 countries and territories". With an unemployment rate of 29.8% (see The Gambia Government, Decent Work Country Programme 2015-2017). Lack of employment and underemployment plays a key role in pushing Gambians to migrate. As indicated in the paper: Autocracy,

Migration, and the Gambia's 'Unprecedented' 2016 Election, "In 2015, the number of Gambians asylum seekers application across the EU reached 12, 205". In addition, the IOM Gambia Website states that: "Over 35,000 Gambians arrived in Europe by irregular means between 2014 and 2018". This situational analysis provides that perspective foreseeable as challenges for the postdoctoral regime.

Deportation is major a talking point in post dictatorship era and the recently held 2021 presidential elections. As opposed to the previous regime of Yahya Jammeh which was less receptive to deportation of Gambians. This has caused strained relations with the Gambia and the West (Mehler *et al.*, 2009). But post dictatorship catered for more deportation as the country is deemed democratic as opposed to the regime that was. As indicated on the International IOM Website: "Of some 5,002 Gambians who returned home with IOM's support, two-thirds have received some form of reintegration assistance". Before the presidential elections the government which has reputed itself for accepting deportees is now putting a halt to it at the moment. DW News Africa (2021) that The Gambia government "says it will block about 2,000 of its deported citizens from reentering the country. Gambia—which reached a deal with Germany for their return—now says flights carrying the deportees would be blocked because "they pose a risk to national security." This was seen as a political move by the current government that keen on receiving deportees Gambians.

The depilation of the country's health sector underscores a key challenge the country was and is still facing post dictatorship. As the saying goes "a healthy nation is a wealthy nation," however, as it stands the healthcare challenges undermines progress and development. The health sector as described by Mr. Essa Faal (former lead Counsel of the Truth Commission) during his presidential announcement (August 27, 2021) as a dead trap. There is more to this reality and could be attributed to lack of medicine, trained and qualified medical staff, and professionalism and ethical conduct. With fertility rate of 5.6 and a population growth rate over 3% per year and the country's population is expected double in the next 25 years (Health Policy Plus, 2019). This explains the state of the country's health sector which has prompted many Gambians to opt regularly or instead to travel to Senegal for treatment. There are many underlining factors affecting this very important sector: lack of trained medical staff, infrastructure, resources (Luttich, 2010), and a host of the issues it is confronted with quality and access to education remains a big challenge. Education sector in The Gambia as described by UNICEF has "significant bottlenecks that hinder equitable quality service-delivery" (see UNICEF Gambia Website). "Decent Work Country Programme" (2015-2017), highlights the fact that the literacy levels are dependent on education. The report further highlights the overall "rate for Gambians aged 15 years and over was 42.1%, but it is much higher for males (52.2%) than for females (33.2%). 60.3% of young Gambians between age ranges 15-24 years were literate. About 66.0 % of males compared to 55.8 % of females were literate".

10. Post Jammeh Era: Change or Continuity?

December 2021 Presidential Election was a milestone in the country's political development. It was the first ever election in post dictatorship Gambia. The election was applauded and observed by the EU. Josep Borrell the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Secuirty Policy and Vice-President for the European Commission was quoted by saying (European Union External Action, 2021): "Anchoring the democratic change that the Gambian people achieved in 2017 continues to be on top of the EU agenda. This will be the first EU mission to observe a presidential election in The Gambia and its deployment reaffirms our commitment to supporting the consolidation of democracy". Thus, it avails the opportunity for the country to conduct democratic election in a level playing ground. This is because the past regime of Jammeh was seen as unfair towards opposition. But it was not until December 2016 that he was defeated; and thanks to the on-the-spot counting that led to his defeat. This is because the on the spot count allowed for spot counting as opposed to the earlier method in which casted ballots were assembled in one place before the results were announced to the country. This same on the spot count 'method' was applied in the December 2021 presidential. The incumbent Adama Barrow won by over 53% of the votes, while his nearest rival Ousainou Darboe of the United Democratic Party got 28 percent of the votes (BBC, 2021).

There is also wider political space for political. For instance, there are 18 registered political parties and unaccounted independent candidates (See The Gambia Electoral Commission Website). Despite all these registered parties only four were eligible to contest for the elections and two independent candidates participated. They include among others things an open debate and the first presidential debate ever held in the country's history organized by the Commission on Political Debate in The Gambia. With the exception of the incumbent president, candidates participated in a countrywide televised debate and opposition candidates were free to

campaign across the country and there was evidently massive interests in policies as opposed to the previous elections. In the end politicians were contesting for votes and about 1.8 million Gambians registered to vote (See The Gambia Electoral Commission Website). With all these democratic developments, it speaks to the wider opportunity democracy space brings to a country like The Gambia.

One of the biggest challenged faced with the under Jammeh was freedom of speech. Even though the 1997 Constitution of The Gambia guarantees freedom of speech, Section 25-part IV states that every person shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression. However, under Jammeh there were draconian laws still put in place to stipple and to criminalize. For instance, the Criminal Code Act (2004) restricted freedom of speech (Jallow, 2013). Post regime change, it is evidenced that the media is freerer, politicians are being engage and scrutinized regularly, and people are hearing their plights being discussed. As Freedom House reported (2017 and 2020); the freedom (including internet) environment has improved in the Gambia since 2017. Similarly, World Press Freedom Index report of 2019 ranked the Gambia 92nd position out of 180 nations and that is 30 places up on the previous year's index ranked.

11. Challenges: Democratic Backsliding?

The improvement of freedom of expression made it possible for Gambians to engage in protests. One such protest was the famous 3 years jotna movement to remind him of this agreement. However, the group was later disbanded and some of its members arrested and charged (*Foroyaa Newspaper,* 2011). This was considered a big setback in the country's transition. This is because Barrow before joining the coalition had agreed to serve for 3 years, organize the transition and not to contest for president office. This was part of a political transition agreement enshrined in the "Coalition 2016 Manifesto". However, he reneged on this promise to continue serving his 5 years constitutional mandate. He in turn proceeded to contest for the December 2021 presidential elections. He formed his own political called the National People's Party (NPP), breaking away from the old political party the United Democratic Party (UDP) he once served as Treasurer prior to joining the coalition. His action was a stalked reminder of the previous regime who came to power with the slogan: "soldiers with a difference" (Perfect, 2016). Yayha Jmmeh after the 1994 coup, failed to go back to the barracks and went on to form the APRC party, he ruled for 22 years.

12. Failed Constitution

The failed passing of the new constitution was seen as hampering the democratic transition. As commonly called 'Jammeh's 1997 Constitution' is still in place. This constitution according to public revelation of the Constitutional Review Commission it was in the past amended over 50 times by the former regime. After the change of government in 2017, The Gambia Constitutional Review Commission was constituted (has completed its task in 2020) to prepare a new constitution. However, the new constitution was voted against in parliament. The failure for the constitution to pass was linked to his ambition to stay in power. He wanted the commission to not insert a clause for his first term to count. He was however able to get the bill voted against 55% against and 45 percent (RFI, 2020) with the support of other political parties. Those who voted against this bill majority of them were willing to switch allegiance to his new political party which now holds seats at the national assembly. Such as his old party the United Democratic Party and the party of Yahya the APRC. In the December 2021 the same faction helped him to win the elections as the APRC party, and some other political parties even independent candidates joined the "Barrow Coalition".

13. Call for Justice

There is increasing call for justice in The Gambia. However, Adama Barrow's coalition with Jammeh's political the APRC has raised questions as to whether or not justice will be served. This is seen as undermining the transition. On the other hand, are external pressures. For instance, UN backs hybrid court for Jammeh-Era Crimes be prosecuted (Human Rights Watch, 2021). What TRRC report has highlighted the following key issues/recommendations (The TRRC Report, 2021): (1) Need to probe disappearance as the reported highlighted over 100 disappeared people; (2) Top officials to be banned because of their involvement in human rights violations under the previous regime; (3) Security sector including recruitment and well-trained of security of personnels on human rights as per volume 8 of the report; (4) There is need to repeal the existing archaic prison laws to meet democratic standard; (5) A total overhaul of the National Intelligence Agency used by the previous regime trample upon the rights people; (6) there is need for urgent reform of media laws: to repeal all repressive laws and) there is need for a new constitution because the 1997 constitution is deeply flawed.

14. Conclusion

In conclusion, democratic and regime changes continue to define Africa's political transition. Evidently, elections, protest democracy, coups and international pressures are central to this unflinching change. While this has created a huge opportunity for democracy, on the other it creates stalled transitions in countries especially with weak democratic institutions. There is a need to relook at these stalled democratic transitions in its entirety. Despite such a challenge, there is also the unique case of The Gambia, even though it is a one of a rare case study in Africa in the context of successful democratic transition. The country successfully transition into a democracy, even though there still major reforms to take place. The Gambia democratic and regime change transition could be a viable case to look into for other countries in Africa still trapped into protracted conflicts.

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