



# International Journal of African Studies

Publisher's Home Page: <https://www.svedbergopen.com/>



Research Paper

Open Access

## Democratization in Africa and Its Challenges

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### Article Info

Volume 2, Issue 2, December 2022

Received : 12 July 2022

Accepted : 19 November 2022

Published : 05 December 2022

doi: [10.51483/IJAFRS.2.2.2022.1-11](https://doi.org/10.51483/IJAFRS.2.2.2022.1-11)

### Abstract

Democracy is the most widely accepted political paradigm in the world today. Nevertheless, for many African independent governments, democratization and its problems have long been formidable. Despite being seen as a bad start, liberation provided many African governments with the potential to transition from colonization to democratic predominance. Unfortunately, post-independence efforts have been mainly ineffective. Given the current aspirations of many African countries, some claim that democratization is the antithesis to political goal on the continent. Suffice to say that this battle underpins the difficulties of African democratization. In this view, the paper explores the waves of democratization in Africa and its renewed call. The paper concludes that despite all the renewed calls, a huge obstacle faces the continent in its democratization process.

**Keywords:** *Africa, Democratization, New wave of democracy, Challenges*

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### 1. Introduction

The question of whether democracy works in Africa has received considerable interest. Writers such as Cheeseman (2015) argued that the focus should be on what facilitate political liberation. The concept of political liberalization draws us to the work of John Rawls (1993) as he argues that political liberalism is at the heart of “enduring free institutions”. In other words, political liberalization is a moral concept centred on human freedom; individuals and citizens are free and (John Rawls, 1993). Democracy thus provides for the protection of individual liberties; people have a major say in electing their elected representation and to hold them to account.

The recent political developments across the continent give hope to the democratization project. Over the years (even past decades), the concept of democracy has not only won but also proven to be the right governance system. This is demonstrable in Africa, where democracy is increasingly triumphant, with a shift away from autocratic rule. For instance, the 2011 Arab Spring brought about regime changes and democratic transitions in Tunisia, Egypt and while Libya which is still resurrecting to become a more stable democracy. On the other is the 2014 “Black Spring” that brought about the end to the 27-year reign of Blaise Compaore (1987–2014), and, subsequently, other developments such as the fall of Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe (1987–2017), among other highlighted cases in this paper.

What has been driving democratic change in Africa? The paper argues that there is growing autocratic/dictatorship fatigue plaguing the continent. This paper, therefore, underscores the growing call for democratic government in Africa.

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It further explores the democratic experience the continent went through and the new wave of democratic movement. The study underlines the fact that democratization in Africa has been hampered by a lack of credible opposition, a weak civil society, weak economies, a weak democratic political culture, the lack of proper legal frameworks for electoral processes, the absence of judicial independence, the potentials of military coups, ethnicity, religion and nepotism. These challenges have continued to challenge democratization in Africa.

## 2. Background: The First and Second Waves of Democratic Struggles in Africa

The African continent has long been branded as continent of bad leaders. This has been widely observed since some of those countries gained independence in the 1950s/60s. Typical examples include Uganda, Idi Amin (1971-1979), the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mobutu Sese Seko (1965-1997), Nigeria, Sana Abacha (1993-1998), Liberia, Charles Taylor (1997-2003), and Libya, Muammar Ghaddafi (1969-2011) (see Caribone and Pellegata, 2020). They were known for their firm grip on power, which included establishing a one-party state with total disregard for human rights. Their reign tainted the image of African leaders in an unprecedented way. It is because of their ruthless, autocratic nature. Thus, the only available alternative to getting them out was through the barrel of the gun and international intervention or pressure.

Moreover, it is generally observed and argued that post-independence countries in Sub-Saharan Africa were not friendly to opposition, especially to those who shared critical views against their regimes. From the 1960s onwards, this type of political oppression was visible in both Anglophone and Francophone countries (Diamond et al., 1988). It is also observed that by the 1970s nearly all the regimes on the African continent were either one-party or under military rule with the exception of a few (Diamond et al., 1988). Jean-François Médard developed the term of 'eclipse democracy' referring to Africa triumph. The explanation of this term can be based on the absence of democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa are nihilistic in the sense that it implies the inevitability of dictatorship and is thus a rationalization (Jean-François Médard, 2007).

However, the late 1980s saw a sweeping wind of change throughout the continent, making the dawn of an era. During this period many commentators refer to it as "Springtime of Africa" (Martin, 1993). This period saw a wide spread of the democratic movement after nearly three decades of political tyranny, corruption, economic mismanagement, and massive human rights violations. Many independent African countries espoused the Western democratic structures. Such as developing a democratic constitution, tolerating political participation, and ensuring regular elections. However, despite many African countries holding their first ever elections in the 1980s, the transitory phase failed to remain a permanent feature as authoritarian rule became the norm and its military variant became the most dominant. By the end of the 1980s, only The Gambia, Botswana, and Mauritius maintained their democratic status. Democracy was stifled, thus living short, and these results led to a three-decade period of democratic fatigue (Mtimkulu, 2015).

The transition to democracy in Africa takes diverse shapes and proceeds at different rates, with varying outcomes, depending on the nature of external inducements and the configuration of domestic socio-political forces. In this context, there are five forms of democratic transitions in Africa. As pointed out by Martin (1993), these include Government Change via a National Conference, Government Change via Multiparty Elections, "Co-opted" Transitions, Guided Democratization and Authoritarian Reaction, Sub-National Conflict. A study by the Carter Center's African Governance Program in 1992 found that nine African nations are "democratic," four are under a "guided democracy" system, and 31 are in different stages of transition to democracy (Joseph and University, 1996). In other words, during this period the continent was seen to have been transitioning to democracy. This win for change was seemingly bringing hope to the continent's battered image.

Furthermore, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, with the exception of Mauritius, no African country saw a change of government through multiparty elections in the post-independence era. Senegal saw a change of administration in 1988, as did Soa Tome and Principe, Cape Verde, and Zambia, all without a national convention. As the elections were a non-competitive system, the president played in time to allow multiparty elections in several other nations. The leaders were able to do so because they used their incumbency advantage to dominate state machinery, electoral bodies, the use of state money, and rampant fraud to easily win elections. Gabon and Cote d'Ivoire experienced these in 1990; Cameroon, Kenya, Ghana, and Ethiopia in 1992; and the Central Africa Republic in 1993 (Lemarchand, 1992). Also, in 1989 there was general popularize call for democratization in the African continent. This resulted in mass protests being held in many countries, putting another kink in the continent's shaky democratic system.

To sustain democracy over time, solid institutions must be established in accordance with local conditions, as well as a democratic culture deeply rooted in African values and traditions. Furthermore, Mugenyi (1985) asserts that democracy thrives in its most basic (minimalist) form across the diverse types of governance prevalent in the Third World due to its adaptability to changing conditions. The call for independence leaders to focus on national unity and priorities such as economic growth cannot be used as a pretext or an excuse for democratization to fail.

The idea of democratic adaptation, which is akin to the African socialism thesis, has demonstrated to be an overcompensation for all forms of state dirigisme, leading to the severe power grab that has rendered the majority of sub-Saharan African governments incapable of governing. Due to the lack of democracy in the majority of these governments, the crippling of government is the result. Development dictatorships in the past as the path forward for Africa demonstrate ongoing struggles since decolonization within some Sub-Saharan African states "second independence" movements whose main goal was to combat military regimes and ostensibly one-party states in order to restore democracy (Nyong'o, 2011).

From a primarily historical standpoint, Crowder (1989) would see the rapid breakdown of democracy following independence, notably in anglophone and francophone governments (with the exceptions of The Gambia, Botswana, and probably Senegal), as a certainty. There are two key reasons for this certainty. Firstly, the idea of democracy was, to him, particularly the fantasy of most nationalist leaders, whose true understanding of the phrase was as a tool for realizing their own personal political goals. Secondly, as a replacement to the colonial state, the post-independence African states embodied all of the latter's anti-democratic characteristics: unfettered use of violence, legitimacy based on force, denial of basic liberties, election manoeuvres, capitalist exploitation and neglect (Crowder, 1989).

One could argue that this was self-evident, given that colonialism was, by definition, both non-democratic and anti-democratic, though the severity varied depending on colonial territory. In the first instance, the flaws of colonialism fueled independence movements. Indeed, the shaky basis provided for independence, particularly in Zaire, was to blame for the swift political reversal that overtook several of these republics immediately afterwards.

Therefore, the culture of war and conflict perpetuated by coups and countercoups became the only hope across the continent. As a consequence, it led to many armed insurrections, coups, civil wars, and all kinds of crimes, such as genocides. The civil wars in Sierra Leone (1991–2002) were an attempt to overthrow the Joseph Momoh government, and they were directed and aided by Liberia's president Charles Taylor (Hogan, 2022). Because of that, there was a domestic uprising in opposition to his government, which led to Liberia's civil war (1999–2003). Not forgetting the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Thus, all of these conflicts led to the loss of countless lives. As a result, Africa's post-independence leaders tarnished the continent's image to a large extent.

Nationalism has always been a poor alternative for individuality, the foundation upon which the liberal form of democratic thought is built (Nwokedi, 1993). Because the 1990s were dubbed the "Age of Political Liberalization and Democracy," scholars felt compelled to discuss the contrasts between the two terms. Political liberalization and democracy are not synonymous. Scholars has pointed out that adopting political liberalization in a nation would not inevitably result in political plurality, because such liberalization may be utilized by authoritarian regimes to build fake democracies. Such a form of liberalization involves the partial openness of an authoritarian regime but does not include the selection of public officials through democratic processes.

The downfall of authoritarian regimes was seen as a significant milestone for democracy, but some commentators were skeptical that an environment of liberalization would result in a political plurality (Adejumobi, 1998). On the other hand, different from political liberalization, democratization entails the end of dictatorial regimes and the commencement of the construction of a democratic society. The total democratization process is usually lengthy, difficult, and complicated (National Research Council, 1992). For example, the debate over political liberalization and democratization cantered around politicians like the former Kenyan President Daniel Arap Moi, who saw liberalization as a strategy to defuse dissent without truly democratizing the state. Such presidents do not want to adopt truly inclusive, competitive elections, because of the fear they may lose the election, and some are even dubious about how far their country should go toward political change. In South Africa for example: "Liberalization has broadened the political landscape, but democracy has been delayed. In the absence of elections, political and social elements were liberated to choose who provided significant leadership. As observed by the National Research Council (1992) "in the absence of voting, this sorting out takes place amid violence, force, and harassment."

To sum up, democracy has acquired greater appeal and wider recognition as a political choice on the continent, albeit in theory rather than in practice. Representative democracy has become the campaign slogan for long-sought political reforms, but the discontent in Africa over the last three years has been driven by a simple question of oversight: how to

hold leaders accountable for their actions in office and how to make governments more responsive to the wishes of the people. Despite years of corrupt, apathetic, or damaging government under single-party dictatorships, Africans want answers to these problems.

Democracy appears to be the only choice capable of providing a framework for answering these problems ([National Research Council, 1992](#)). Experts were optimistic that robust multi-party systems will emerge in Africa as authoritarian governments were gradually contested across the region ([Bratton, 1997](#)). Nonetheless, they warned that rising democratic administrations would have to deal with the legacy of poverty, ignorance, militarism, and widespread poverty left by inept or corrupt regimes. Many questioned whether the young democracies could meet the new demands being put on African states by foreign donor organizations, as well as increase individual hopes for a better life.

### 3. The New Democratic Movements in Africa

The rising tendency toward liberalization and democratization in Africa is the result of both internal and foreign forces on the African continent. The bloc's decreasing economic conditions have made people more wary and critical of their governments, with a new African mentality encouraging people to break free from old social conventions. African governments are under pressure to meet expectations of economic development and prosperity in order to win the approval of structural adjustment measures sponsored by financial firms. The renewed emphasis on good governance by external assistance donors and lenders has also provided a platform for African democracies to press for openness and accountability in their respective nations ([National Research Council, 1992](#)).

People have long desired a more peaceful and democratic Africa. The African Union, despite being dubbed a "toothless bulldog," is the umbrella organization of African states that recently passed a resolution to end military takeover in Africa. There are, however, observers who will question to what degree this resolution is effective and implemented. Or some will say there are double standards, such as the recent military takeovers in Sudan in 2019 that toppled long term ruler Omar Bashir and the one in Zimbabwe in 2017 that ended Robert Mugabe's long rule, both of which were highly applauded. Because those leaders overstayed in power, and the international community wanted them out a long time ago.

West Africa is said to be the most democratic region in Africa. As indicated by the International IDEA ([2021](#)), 50% of the continent's democracies are located in West Africa. Over the last five years, the subregion has seen a mix of growth and collapse, as well as democratic transitions. However, by 2020, the area had seen severe democratic setbacks, including a military coup in Mali and the extension of constitutional term limitations in Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea. This dynamic illustrates the flexibility of the political backdrop as well as the subregion's democratic institutions' fragility (*Ibid.*).

The recent political developments speak volumes. Notably, Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe (1987–2017) was forced out of office through a palace coup, Burkina Faso, Blaise Compaoré (1987-2014), through an uprising by his people, Sudan, Omar Al Bashir (1993–2019) through military takeover; Yahya Jammeh (1994–2017) through elections. There are notable ones still left, as follows: Equatorial Guinea, Teodore Obiang (1979 to date), Cameroun, Paul Biya (1982 to the present day), Uganda, Yoweri Museveni (1986 to the present day), Republic of Congo, Denis Sassou Nguesso (1979-92, 1997 to King Mswati III of ESWATINI (formerly Swaziland), Sub-Saharan Africa's last absolute monarch (to the present day),(1986 to date), Eritrea, Isaias Afwerki (1993 to date), Djibouti, Ismail Omar Guelleh (1999 present) Morocco, King Mohammed VI (1999 to present), Rwanda, Paul Kagame (2000 present).

Additionally, Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) make sure that 15 of the 24 scheduled national and/or subnational elections took place in 2020, demonstrating resilience. Despite technological, operational, and budgetary constraints compounded by the covid pandemic, this achievement was made possible ([International IDEA, 2021](#)). Moreover, massive improvements in legislative effectiveness—for example, providing checks on the executive—were apparent, and parliaments were able to modify their operations during the pandemic. In the early stages of the epidemic, parliaments in at least 16 nations were closed, but by the second half of 2020, most had reopened. The African Union (AU) and subregional institutions have demonstrated their ability to support national efforts to organize fair elections. The African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Southern African Development Community created and disseminated recommendations for holding elections during health emergencies.

For instance, we can cite the example of the presidential elections in Uganda. Yoweri Museveni, an ex-combatant, won (59% of the votes) his sixth term as president. What does it mean for Uganda and his fellow compatriot African dictators? in an election that has been marred by intimidation, killings, and a total lack of fair playing ground for opposition leaders. Despite the difficult, oppressive environment, a musician turned politician, Robert Kyagulanyi



Ssentamu, who goes by his musical name "Bobi Wine," received 35% of the votes, and was able to pull out a significant percentage of the total votes.

Prior to and during the elections, he faced death threats, arrests, and even the death of his own driver; he was denied access to campaign across the country, in contrast to the incumbent. Even after the elections were concluded, he was still placed under house arrest and blocked from seeing visitors such as the US Ambassador in Uganda who was blocked from visiting him. On the US Embassy, Kampala Facebook page (dated January 18, 2021), part of the press release reads: "These unlawful actions and the effective house arrest of a presidential candidate continue a worrying trend on the course of Uganda's democracy". He was later released after a court ruled that his house arrest was illegal and thus, he was freed. Despite his release, Bob Wine appeals the election results to the Supreme Court. Despite the Supreme Court ruling to uphold the election results (see Monitor, March 31, 2021), however, what is certain is the fact that Uganda under Museveni is at a crossroads.

After all, what has happened and continues to happen demonstrates why Bobi Wine is such a major threat to the incumbent. In an interview with Lindsey Hilsum (International Editor and a regular contributor of the *Sunday Times*) on Channel 4 News, Museveni accused Bobi Wine "as an agent of foreign interests". For him, Bobi Wine is pushed and supported by the West to topple him and thus he will do everything to protect Uganda. Museveni following on his promise to do everything to protect Uganda, Bobi Wine was placed under house arrest and the internet shutdown before and throughout this period.

On a BBC Focus Africa show on January 18, 2021, the President of the Internet Society, Andrew Sullivan, estimated that the internet shutdown in Uganda cost approximately \$6.5 million and Sudan lost approximately \$1 billion (1% of its GDP) in just over a month in June 2019. This economic loss is largely because there are many economic activities that rely on the internet. The question is, why would the president shut down when the costs can be so high? In the case of Uganda, there is concern that open communications will lead to an uprising because it allows for easy communication and organization. Because in the same interview with Lindsey Hilsum, Yoweri cited the examples of the Arab Spring and Ghadafi in particular, fearing that the same could happen to him.

What do Uganda's elections say about the Africa-political-youth movement? Born in 1982, and just 4 years old when Yoweri took over, Bobi Wine is one of almost 80% of the youthful population in Uganda. The final vote reads that Yoweri had over 50% of the vote while Bobie Wine gathered over 30% of the vote, and the rest of the votes were shared with the rest of the nine opposition candidates. Despite the fact that observers generally regard the election as "not 100% free and credible" (see [DW News, January 16, 2021](#)), he manages to pull out that number for the first time as a presidential contender, which is enormously commendable. It speaks to the growing movement for change and the need for change. With the likes of Bobi Wine, he has now etched his name in the annals of his country and Africa.

What has been the response of the international community? Starting with the US, one of the biggest and most important allies of Uganda since gaining independence from Britain in 1965. In fact, according to the US State Department (State.Gov, December 19, 2019), the United States "provides significant development and security assistance to Uganda, with a total assistance budget exceeding \$970 million per year." As a result, it is such an important ally to Uganda. heavenly reliant on the US for support. The question now becomes: How did the US and the international community respond to the Ugandan elections? The US Embassy pulled out of the observer mission due to the fact that the Ugandan electoral commission: "deny more than 75% accreditation request". It means that the credibility of the elections was already in uncertainty, and thus looming relations with the United States. As France 24 reported (January 14, 2021): "Only one foreign organization, The African Union (AU) has sent monitors, along with an AU women's group".

How did the international community respond to the aftermath of the elections? There have been mixed reactions from different sides of the aisle. There is one side that cited the elections as free and fair, and that is the African Union. On the other hand, the US, EU, and UN are increasing pressure amid calls for an investigation into allegations of a lack of transparency and credibility in the elections. CNN (January 21, 2021) cited the EU Council of Ministers in a statement made about the elections: "Opposition candidates were harassed by security forces, the media was suppressed by the government, and "Observers' offices were raided." Immediately after Museveni was declared president, UN Watch tweeted (dated January 18, 2021), "Congratulations to Uganda President Museveni on winning re-election after murdering, imprisoning, and silencing opponents, shutting down the internet, and committing widespread voter fraud". If there is anything to go by, this shows the lack of credibility in the concluded elections and thus the challenges ahead for Museveni's government amid pressure from the international community.

Africa's youthful population, which is becoming more cognizant of human rights, presents an opportunity for citizen mobilization and increased youth political engagement. The average age in Africa is roughly 19.5 years, compared to 62

years for the continent's leaders. We are seeing more and young people and indeed young leaders taking up the mantle of leadership by putting a stiff resistance to incumbent autocratic rulers. In 2018 Nelson Chamisa (born 1978) contested against Mugabe but lost, Julius Malima of South Africa is another incredible young leader to watch. In the Gambia, Dr. Ismaila Ceesay, a strong critic was barred from contesting for the presidency in 2021.

Furthermore, in Nigeria and Senegal, two prominent young democratic leaders will also challenge the upcoming elections in 2023 and 2024, respectively. Nigerian-born Chike Ukaegbu, age 35, is set to battle against President Muhammadu Buhari as he calls for a more democratic Nigeria (Adamu, 2022). Ousmane Sonko of Senegal will run for president in 2024 against incumbent Macky Sall (who is battling constitutional eligibility due to previous terms served).

The African continent is reinventing itself via escalating democratic battles in this "second wave of liberalization" all over the continent. Though enthusiasm for democracy in Africa is not uncommon, it was a cornerstone of nationalist politics at the end of colonial rule. The very few years were a critical period of self-determination, which many Africans think ought not to be isolated from the contemporary democratic struggle. Nonetheless, the desire for democracy has recently shifted back to political plurality, human rights respect, government accountability, and public participation (National Research Council, 1992).

#### **4. The International Community and Donor Pressure for Democratization and Liberalization**

Previously, European and foreign aid donors recognized the support and funding of authoritarian regimes. However, this idea has complete change as Western countries mostly direct their funds to democratic states where the value of human rights and liberties are respected in accordance with rule of law. The former Ambassador Thomas R. Pickering, the United States' permanent representative to the United Nations, recently stated, "It is not our responsibility to select who leads any country, but we will use our influence to encourage governments to persuade their people to make that decision for themselves." Foreign donors now are more selective in their funding, thus supporting states that are undergoing a democratic transition or are in the process of democratic consolidation both economically and politically (National Research Council, 1992). For example, since the former president of the Gambia was removed the European Union has pumped millions of euros to help in the democratization of the country. "A total of €1.45 bn were mobilized by the International Conference for The Gambia, co-chaired by The Gambia and the European Union" (Europa, May 2018).

In the months and years to come, long term autocratic leaders are able to hold on to power. Despite having a firm grip on power, we see more and more elections becoming more competitive and social media becoming increasingly instrumental in communications, mobilization and organizing. Because the political awakening taking place in those countries and across the continent speaks to the growing need for change led by young people. We will have to wait and see if a similar scenario, such as the palace coup that ousted Mugabe, will occur to Museveni. This is because it is generally observed that Museveni just like many of his autocratic compatriots are facing internal party pressures as well as national movements to end their long rule.

What is the honorable thing to do is to either resign voluntary or risk facing forceful removal from power. Just like the case of Compaoré of Burkina Faso was toppled through uprising protests. He was eventually exiled and is now a citizen of the Ivory Coast to avoid prosecution for the murder of Thomas Sankara to become president. He has recently been prosecuted in absentia and sentenced to life imprisonment. It remains to be seen how or whether or not he will serve this sentence. In a more recent update, he himself apologise to the Burkinabe people for his role in the killing of Thomas Sankara (Reuters, July 27, 2022).

#### **5. The Challenges of Democratization in Africa**

The challenges of establishing a democratic regime on the continent involve defeating established regimes and supporting mounting pressures from local activists and aid donors, solidifying political reforms, and legitimizing democratic principles throughout the entire African continent. Nonetheless, effective uprisings against dictatorial states have occurred in Burkina Faso.

Participating in politics also re-emerged in several nations, as seen by the democratic change of presidents through voting in Zambia, Cape Verde, Sao Tomé and Príncipe, Benin, and The Gambia. More sensitization and participation suggest that the current reforms will be more successful than previous transitions from colonial authority (National Research Council, 1992).

There is no doubt that the African continent has undergone enormous social, economic, and political turmoil in the past and in recent years. In past decades, nearly every single African government has implemented significant economic liberalization measures and agreed to a tough economic recovery program in the 1990s. From 1990 to 1991, only five

African countries' leaders embraced multiparty politics and viable elections. Post-independence Africa was and is fragmented in numerous ways as Africa battles for another wave of democracy. There is a lot of uncertainty about whether this crossroads will also mark a turning point in the continent's political and economic path toward democratization.

Although calls for more political openness have shaken Africa in the past, the political instability in the past decades has hindered the continent's progress, despite many of the authoritarian regimes having been obliged to make modest concessions before implementing more drastic political changes (Chazan, 1992). The problem in Africa is that not only a precondition for democracy is missing, but it further lacks structures that can make democracy survive in any sense. Among these impediments are:

### **5.1. Lack of Credible Opposition**

There has been an observation that the lack of a powerful opposing party capable of challenging the incumbent party's programs and policies continues to undermine Africa's democratic trajectory. This includes the absence of adequate policy and strategic alternatives demanded by the people; zero-sum vying for control. The sluggish opposition parties are strongly associated with the poor democratic state however; the link is often not obvious. Generally, it seems that authoritarian leadership has hindered the creation of a viable opposition during the previous years; which often bolsters the government in power. As a result, the opposition's ongoing fragility is both a result of and a source of democratic weaknesses. The rising capacity of opposition parties to compete politically should, in principle, coincide with the amount and quality of democratic governance.

Furthermore, as a result of the majoritarian system in most of the countries in Africa, the ruling party does not frequently rely on the legislative backing of minor parties and independents; these strengthen the ruling party over the opposition, thus weakening them. Despite the fact that the majority of countries in the region have presidential constitutions with broad executive authority and no requirement that the legislative majority be from the president's party, split administrations have been rare. The notable exceptions are Niger and Sao Tomé and Príncipe, where succeeding presidents have not always been able to rely on a stable legislative majority.

On the other hand, for example, the Movement for Multiparty Democracy, which won the first multiparty elections in 1991 in Zambia, has been the one party that has run in all four parliamentary elections thereafter. The Gambia has no party that participated in more than three parliamentary elections under the previous regime. In Senegal, which has a well-established multiparty system, many electorally relevant parties have yet to be represented in successive elections. Lindberg's (2006) compilation highlights that in the 44 Sub-Saharan African countries, from Botswana, which has the lowest number of registered parties of seven, to Congo, which has a registered number of one hundred, half of the multiparty democracies have over 15 registered parties but, due to the weak nature of these parties, are not able to control the legislature as an opposition.

### **5.2. Weak Institutions**

Secondly, weak civil society: a lack of powerful, robust, and active civic organizations to operate as a counterweight to government dominance; such organizations are supposed to fight government co-optation rather than providing constant independent check on state authority. The weakness of civil society is associated with the lack of robust middle class with its own class interests and those of society. Despite the fact that civil society in Africa plays a critical role in fighting poverty and helping to lift many people out of poverty, it plays very little role in political life. Only if they were allowed to take an active part in the political discourse with political leaders on behalf of the people they serve, they will expand and become politically significant.

In countries like The Gambia, Botswana, Uganda, Rwanda, Equatorial Guinea, etc., their governments fail to provide a friendly environment for civil society to freely participate and give their people a voice. Additionally, trade unions, which were key vocal voices post-independence, also went silent. It is argued that the absence of a strong civil society in Africa should be weighed against the local political culture's heritage of consultation and engagement. For some, the inadequacy of civil society in Africa is due to "the Eurocentric approach" to gauging civil society.

In Africa, a public area where people gather to debate topics of common concern is still lacking in most countries. What this indicates is that with the spread of information about government activities already debated by the elites without considering the majority views, they were unable to contribute significantly to the debates (Carbone, 2013).

Furthermore, some of the indigenous cultures in Africa did not acknowledge the value of organizations but were still dependent on local leaders, thus also weakening civil society. Although civil society has been critical in some African

countries, the experience of countries overthrowing dictatorial regimes and installing democracies is vastly different in the majority of African countries.

One area where civil society manages to make a considerable impact in Africa is social development. As a result, many see civil society as a generous and efficient distributor of resources and services. On the other hand, this demonstrates their great work, but the lack of political participation doubles as a hindrance to all the massive work to democratize.

### **5.3. Weak Economies**

Thirdly, weak economies: After 1990, the fast growth of democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa has been coupled with increasing and worsening poverty, resulting in a "pause" in the process of democratization and, in some cases, a return to authoritarianism and civil warfare. Mark Malloch Brown, UNDP Administrator, stated that "to ensure the constant acceleration of human development, we must reintroduce politics into alleviating poverty.... Only if governments can demonstrate to their public that they are taking meaningful action on bread-and-butter concerns, the enormous extension of democracy risks backfiring" ([Africa Renewal, 2002](#)).

A successful economy was a required to allow the state to give goods and services to the voters; limited resources may compel, if not force, electorates to forsake democratic procedures. Alternatively, citizens might be "bought" into voting for the wrong candidates. This is in line with Lipset premises that economic development is a necessary condition for democratization. Despite elections flourishing all over the continent, democracy remains fragile. Consequently, the spread of democracy has not resulted in the anticipated boost in economic growth. Many governments use it as an excuse, thus creating an obstacle to democracy.

### **5.4. Weak Democratic Political Culture**

Autocratic African leaders and ruling elites do not uphold democratic principles such as law and order and human rights; opposition parties and pressure groups are forced or induced to abandon their role in monitoring the situation. In addition, state authorities abuse their power; and there is a lack of democratic structural features. In so many African countries, the absence of decent and democratic constitutions have proven to be a substantial cause of conflict and, as a result, a barrier to democratic consolidation.

For example, in The Gambia, the 1997 constitution was amended 54 times in favor of the government. In Zambia, its constitution has been revised five times since its independence in 1964. Even so, the constitution-making process continues to this day. This is as a result of previous governments' tendencies to focus on their political interests while forgetting national interests, thus setting a very bad democratic culture. These constitutional modifications, for whatever purpose they were enacted, lacked a national perspective. This bad political culture continues to hamper progress on the continent ([Ng'oma, 2016](#)).

### **5.5. Lack of Proper Legal Frameworks for Electoral Processes**

The 'lack of proper legal structures for election procedures' is also a key hindrance to democratic consolidation in several African nations. For example, all electoral processes in a country, like national elections, actually occur within the parameters of that country's legislative structure. Unfortunately, as illustrated in Africa in occasions of countries like the Gambia, Guinea Conakry, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Zimbabwe Kenya and Madagascar, elections are a tightrope walk between conflict and peace, or stability and unrest. Moreover, during elections, "collisions (may) emerge at the junction of political mistrust (of election rigging) and operational inability" of the electoral authority entrusted with organizing and conducting legitimate national elections ([International IDEA, 2021](#)).

Ng'oma (2016) noted that technical issues may simply be the result of organizational deficiencies or an ineffective legislative framework for election procedures. This, coupled with the presence of ineffective and incompetent election management bodies, curtails democratic consolidation in so many African nations. This is due to their inability to conduct free and fair elections without government interference. An election is viewed as free and fair if the election body can carry out all its electoral activities without government interference or influence of any kind ([Ng'oma, 2016](#)).

### **5.6. Absence of Independence of the Judiciary**

Another huge challenge to democratization is the issue of the judiciary's independence. A judiciary that is free of the intimidating shadows cast by the president or any other branch of the government is rare in Africa. Although a free judiciary enables the institution and judicial arm to decide cases without fear or favor of any kind, in Africa, the judicial arm of government has not been certain of the independence it deserves to carry out its constitutionally mandated



functions by the so-called executive arm of government in particular. Global Integrity found that 11% of the 54 African nations examined had a "fully independent" judiciary, whereas 30% did not. Botswana, Mauritius, Cape Verde, and South Africa were among those discovered to be entirely self-sufficient (Kuwonu, 2016).

A good example of a lack of judicial independence is Nigerian President Buhari's firing of the chief justice without due process. This does not only violate national laws but also human rights norms. The practice of suspension and replacement of Chief Justices by leaders in Africa is rampant, and whether it violates international human rights principles or national laws, they ignore it completely. This also discourages the spirit of check and balance between the arms of governments. The firing of judges without meeting the prescribed channels and without sufficient judicial protection is in dispute and inconsistent with the judiciary's freedom. This legal assault in Nigeria is relevant to all African countries. No African state is immune to the lack of judicial independence that impedes the democratization of African governments (Ibrahim *et al.*, 2021).

### **5.7. Potentials of Military Coups**

Any misunderstanding caused by political gridlock between parties increases the likelihood of military involvement. During the past year and a half, the African continent has seen a substantial surge in coups, with military figures taking power in Sudan, Burkina Faso, Mali, Chad, and Guinea. Many of these military commanders believe they have complete control, and they continue to hold power and demand long periods of time before elections can be held. Coups have been central to the lack of democratic consolidation as the continent registered over 214 elections, with 106 of them succeeding (Duzor and Williamson, 2022). As the wind of change continues to blow and the call for democracy continues, coups have erupted in many countries again. According to statistics gathered by Powell and Thyne, 45 of the 54 African countries have had at least one coup attempt since 1950. Many of those countries have witnessed successful military takeovers (Powell and Thyne, 2011).

A military regime uses the tactic of applying decrees and executive orders to manage the state's apparatus. This type of government does not value the protection of human rights and people's liberty, as well as press freedom, and in some instances, it controls the judiciary. Such regime rule is a direct violation of the traditional and constitutional functions designed for the military. These include promoting territorial integrity and state sovereignty; protecting the state from external aggression or aggressors; and assisting the police in maintaining internal peace and security when the police have failed on all fronts.

Moreover, in most circumstances in Africa, military rule asserts that they intervene to defend constitutional provisions from future infringement by ruling elites. As a result, military rule became commonplace in Africa after independence. After independence, corruption, foreign interference, stagnation, poverty, and ethnic conflict were all factors giving room for military intervention, thus creating such a tradition. Even after the African Union, ECOWAS outlawed military intervention, which recently resurfaced in the political authorities of certain African republics, and there is not much these bodies can do because of their weakness (Ibrahim *et al.*, 2021). These factors have posed a real challenge to democratization and its consolidation.

### **5.8. Ethnicity, Religion and Nepotism**

Politics and governance are hampered by polarizing sectarian impulses; the idea of democracy is hampered by the sectarian attitudes and loyalty of political players and voters, and state policies are impacted by sectarian fragments and views. Unfair treatment of residents based upon race is a prevalent feature of several African countries' political establishments. It is an anti-democratic activity. It is indeed illegal, as it frequently entails explicit and tacit reciprocal responsibilities among the favored groups, depending on whether the benefactors are business associates and colleagues or friends and families. It undermines the state's ability to function smoothly and implement economic expansion policies because of a lack of consensus on matters that benefit all ethnic groups (Easterly and Levine, 1997).

The government, supported by people of the same ethnic group, utilizes political influence to stymie any structural reforms that would jeopardize its grip over the country's wealth. Because leaders rely on state resources to sustain their power base, they oppose any restructuring away from this reliance, including market liberalization programs that encourage the free flow of resources to productive enterprises. They perceive economic changes as impediments to major sources of self-enrichment; hence, they meddle in all sectors of the economy rather than letting market forces allocate resources. Further, some leaders persuade their supporters that any changes will affect both their political and economic power bases.

These effectively foster more division among the varied ethnic groups, particularly in top job positions and elections. Kenya, Guinea, the Ivory Coast, Zimbabwe, etc. are good examples. In addition, the government in Africa sees it as a

normal practice to award government contracts to unqualified bidders who are in cahoots with family and cronies. This frequently results in inadequate or non-execution of initiatives. Relatives and friends are given preference when it comes to obtaining business permits and export and import business licenses, which fosters rent-seeking behavior.

Also, it is fairly unusual for authorities to create significant government-funded projects in arbitrary locations, even if the initiatives are futile. A climate of ambiguity is frequently established in the domestic sector, promoting brain drain and capital flight. I contend that engaging individuals unequally based on ethnicity is detrimental to development and a big issue in Africa's democracy. It has fueled animosity among marginalized ethnic groups, fueled disputes and, in certain cases, conflicts, and deterred investment, slowing developmental possibilities and encouraging anti-democracy (Ilorah, 2009). The reasons mentioned above serve as a key obstacle to democracy, despite the news of democratization.

## 6. Conclusion

In the final analysis, despite the rising challenges to the authoritarian regimes in many African countries, democratization will only succeed in the continent if there is a call from the local people. Looking at the democratic challenges in relation to the continent's socio-political and cultural values, democratization will be futile if its top-down approach is supported by liberal western countries. Each attempt to enforce a certain restricted method of democracy may result in just nominal conformity, like enabling multipartism in the absence of "proper democracy". In this respect, "true democracy" refers to meaningful (rather than formal) democracy. True democracy extends further than the conventional formalities of democratic regimes (such as multipartism and voting) to include components such as transparency and true citizen engagement in the nation's economic and political decision-making processes. If democratization is to be perpetuated over time, solid bases for democratic structures must be laid in conformity with local conditions, as well as a democratic mindset strongly rooted in African values and traditions. This process must be led by the people themselves, not by politicians from western powers. For many Africans, democracy is meaningless without good living conditions, freedom, and the provision of a good life for their kids. The people leading the current democratic charge might be young and hungry for change, but what remains unknown is how long this democratic call will last.

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