

THE CONSTRAINTS AND IMPACT OF DEMOCRACY IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: A STUDY OF AFRICAN STATES

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the constraints and impact of democracy on development in developing countries, with a particular focus on African states. It seeks to establish the relationship between democratic governance and socio-economic development, emphasizing how successful democratic processes, particularly through credible electoral systems, can promote effective governance and sustainable development. The study evaluates the performance of democracy in Africa during the twenty-first century by assessing both its achievements and the challenges that have hindered its effectiveness. It also examines the extent to which African states have developed the institutional and political capacity necessary to support democratic governance and national development. Furthermore, the study explores the relationship between democracy, peace, and political stability, analyzing how these factors influence governance and development across the continent. Based on its findings, the study offers recommendations aimed at strengthening democratic institutions and promoting sustainable growth and overall development in Africa.

INTRODUCTION

A system of government rooted in the rule of law, is Democracy hence it has received wide acceptance (Dahl, 1998; Diamond, 2019). The concept of democracy has a set of ideas, institutions and process of governance that allows the broad masses of people to choose their leaders and also guarantees them a broad range of civic rights (Schmitter & Karl, 1991; Diamond, 2020). Democracy means the rule of the people (Dahl, 1998). It is a basic form of government where political power is ultimately in the hands of the whole adult population (Held, 2006; Merkel, 2014). For proper governance to be achieved, advocates that democracy that democracy is the best option for development (Sen, 1999; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). President could be easily enhanced through the application of democratic principles in the electoral system and selection of candidates for various offices in governance (Lindberg, 2006; Cheeseman, 2015).

This is the sorry point of African politics as demonstrated in several countries where elections have been held recently (Bratton, 2013; Cheeseman, 2015). Few countries like Ghana, Liberia, Zambia, Nigeria and Senegal, have gone through the election process peacefully, but many countries in Africa have not been so successful like Zimbabwe, Kenya and Somalia, where the electoral process was abused and maligned because of the tussle for power (Lindberg, 2006; Gyimah-Boadi, 2015). It has therefore stagnated development in many countries since political stability is lacking (Acemoglu et al., 2019; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2022).

Development is related to democracy in that development is in essence, an improvement that reflects a particular vision politically, socially and economically (Todaro & Smith, 2020). It aims at sustained increase and enhancement of the conditions of the good life enjoyed by citizens (Seers, 1969; Sen, 1999). Thus development is much more than economic growth (Sen, 1999; Todaro & Smith, 2020).

DEFINITION OF TERMS

1. Development: Development means improvement that reflects a particular vision (Todaro & Smith, 2020). It has been used to describe an evolutionary process which is multi-dimensional, and which is dynamic and reflects the transformations of a society (Seers,

1969; Hoogvelt, 2001). Development is the progressive creation, proliferation and enhancement of the condition of the good life for citizens within the boundaries of their nations (Oghale, 2005; Todaro & Smith, 2020).

2. Government: Government is the act or state of governing. It is the system of government, authority of control. It is the act of controlling and directing the affairs of the country, state or organization. It is the act of guiding or influencing the management of public affairs (Appadorai, 2004; Heywood, 2019).
3. Democracy: This is derived from two ancient Greek words Demo's meaning the people and Kratia means to rule (Held, 2006). Democracy represents the desire of man to live peacefully together under a government that is representative of all sundry (Dahl, 1998). Democracy rests almost exclusively on representation, as it is government of the people for the people through their representatives (Oghale, 2005:129; Schmitter & Karl, 1991).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Democracy is the name for a form of government in which the ultimate control of the machinery of government is committed to numerical majority of the country (Marley, 2003; Dahl, 1998). Cartit (2005) conceived of democracy as a form of government by the whole of the majority, generally through the representatives elected by secret ballot. Romney (2004) describes democracy as a form of government organized in accordance with the principle of popular sovereignty, popular consultation, political equality and majority rule in which the citizens freely choose their ruler who stand for two or more political parties in a regular election, and rules in the interest of the masses (Held, 2006; Diamond, 2019).

Dahl (1991) defines democracy as polycentric political system in which there exists many decision making centers with the opportunity to participate in decision widely shared among all citizens. Democracy is a basic form of government where political power is ultimately in the hands of the whole adult population (Dahl, 1998; Merkel, 2014). According to Oghale (2005:131) democracy recognizes opposition. Accordingly, it also recognizes the rule of law, the enforcement of fundamental human rights, and allows initiative and competition, ideals which provide goals towards which the leader and men in society constantly aspire for the better society (Diamond, 2019; United Nations, 2023).

DEVELOPMENT AND DEMOCRACY

Development could be linked with democracy in the sense that democracy succeeds through the ballot box and translates into development which is a multi-dimensional process which is dynamic, and reflects in the transformation of the society (Sen, 1999; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). Development is the progressive creation, proliferation and enhancement of the conditions of the nation (Todaro & Smith, 2020).

Development not involves the sustained increase in such aggregate economic indices as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Gross National Income (GNI), and Per Capital Income (PCI), the end result of development is the capacity of citizens to meet their vital daily commitments which allow them a comfortable margin to save for the rainy day, a reduction and subsequent elimination of inequality, unemployment, poverty, disease and ignorance (Seers, 1969; UNDP, 2022).

Oghale (2005) sees development as more than economic growth. It is a continuous and cumulative conscious endeavor which results in the attainment of a combination of economic growth, guaranteed basic freedoms, assurance of peaceful political stability and sustained productive activities (Sen, 1999; Acemoglu et al., 2019).

Rostow (1960) defines development in terms of modernizing a basically traditional society with the aim of attaining self-sustaining growth. Development has been described as growth plus changes which involves material, mental, psychological, physical, institutional and organizational motivations (UNESCO, 1963; Todaro & Smith, 2020). Lapalom bara and Weiner (1966) see development as a process of induced economic growth and change in an internationally stratified world. Hoogvelt (1969) gives three points on development-change in a society, an interaction with other societies and thirdly, development is regarded as action that is consciously planned and

monitored towards growth and change. Iziren (2005) see development as depicting urbanization socio cultural transformation, mass literacy, vertical and horizontal mobility employment opportunities and the emergences of specialized and independent occupational roles. Nwankwo (2007) defines development as the socio economic and political changes, which pervade the relationship of man to the environment and to his fellows (Todaro & Smith, 2020).

THE PRACTICE OF DEMOCRACY IN AFRICAN STATES

Ghana which only 20 years ago seemed lost in intrigues of military rule, successfully held its forth national election since 1992, to the well-deserved praise of local and international observers alike (Gyimah-Boadi, 2015; Cheeseman, 2015). A growing divisions across this vast continent of 54 states shows that Ghana and other consolidating democracies at one end, having developed fragile democracy and good governance, while at the other end, other failed states are seemingly caught in a downward spiral of authoritarianism, ethnic chauvinism, warlord and collapsing state institutions (Somalia, Eritrea, Guinea Bissau, and Zimbabwe) are likely examples (Bratton, 2013; Freedom House, 2023).

Many African observers (Keir, 2012) have observed that variations of this trend of evolving democracies in Africa, reflects a "tale of two Africa's." On one side is an Africa that is unfolding across the continent, and paths towards progress or decline. Yet African countries at both ends of this divide appear to have come to a common consensus that the democratic path is the socio-economic progress demanded by populaces across the continent (Cheeseman, 2015; Afrobarometer, 2024).

Successful nations like Ghana, South Africa, Kenya and Senegal are well on their way to consolidating democratic rule (Lindberg, 2006; Cheeseman, 2015). Collapsed states like Somalia and Eritrea meanwhile are still searching to develop democratic frameworks that can stitch their countries together, and even authoritarian states like Uganda and Cameroon hold sham elections to claim a strong indicator of their level of overall socio-economic progress (Bratton, 2013; Freedom House, 2023).

The Happening of Democratic Development in African States

Democratic consolidation is essential, if not a pre-requisite to stability and socio-economic development across Africa (Linz & Stepan, 1996; Acemoglu et al., 2019; Diamond, 2020). Given the massive of cases across Africa, can we still discern some common elements to the democratic solution for African political and economic development? (Cheeseman, 2015; Gyimah-Boadi, 2021). Almost all African countries share one political fact, their state structures were imposed by imperial powers over a century ago (Herbst, 2000; Englebert, 2020). This imposition of the state created remarkably similar set of dilemmas that Africans have faced across the continent (Ake, 1996; Cooper, 2002; Cheeseman, 2015). Ethnic security dilemmas in which ethnic groups are caught in a reciprocal struggle for power to secure the interest of their group, and a subsequent economic dilemma which growing numbers of people must vie for portions of shrinking economic output (Horowitz, 1985; Posner, 2005; Fjelde & Höglund, 2021). A review of how these dilemmas unfolds how the successful states have a set of options for strengthening democracy across the continent and for path to prosperity with the first Africa (Diamond, 2020; Resnick, 2021).

Soon after President Alassane Ouattara came to power-following a protracted stand-off with Laurent Gbagbo and forces loyal to him-human rights groups issued reports alleging that abuses had been carried out by both sides (Human Rights Watch, 2011; Amnesty International, 2012). Gbagbo's supporters have claimed the International Criminal Court (ICCS) move is simply a political manoeuvre and an attempt to "liquidate" the former President (International Crisis Group, 2012). The chief prosecutor at the ICC, Luis Moreno-Ocampo has emphasized that more arrests could follow (ICC, 2012). In the meantime the country traced the prospect of legislative elections on the near horizon in a political climate that have become considerably more intense (Freedom House, 2013; International Crisis Group, 2012).

Sierra Leone's President Ernest Bai Koroma has a bit of a fight on his hands. The All People's Congress (APC) party flag bearer faces an election in November in which his rival will probably be retired Brigadier Julius Maada Bio of the Sierra Leone Peoples Part (SLPP) (Kandeh, 2020). The two men appear evenly matched-Koroma remains popular in his party's Temne and Limba strongholds in the north of the country, while Bio can count on the Mende strongholds in the South and East (Harris, 2022; Kandeh, 2020). Because of this the candidates have to appeal beyond their ethnic base, and so the contest looks likely to become one of policy as much as personality (Cheeseman, 2015; Resnick, 2021). Bio is a controversial choice, having first been involved in the coup that overthrew former President Joseph Momoh in 1996 after deposing the military ruler Captain Valentine Strasser (Kandeh, 2020). Since then he has been in private business. His policy offering is vague, however apart from sweeping statement about the need to improve Sierra Leone's investment climate (World Bank, 2022). On that, least, both men agree President Koroma's opponents say he has undermined the project of national renewal (Harris, 2022).

Undemocratic Dynastic Leadership in African States

The arrest of Saif-al-Islam, son and former heir apparent of the late Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, showed how endangered undemocratic dynastic leadership had become in North Africa (Anderson, 2011; Bellin, 2012). The events of the Arab spring had already begun to ring the death knell of family politics, with the toppling of Presidents Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and the initial removal of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi of Libya in October 2011 (Lynch, 2012; Brownlee et al., 2015). All these three drastic despots countries run like family business, Ben Ali was paving the way for his son, Gamal, to take over and Gaddafi was known to be grooming both Saif and another for decades, and all wanted to ensure the continuation of their legacy through the family line (Brownlee, 2007; Bellin, 2012).

Said Ajebbar, Cambridge University Political analyst on North Africa, believes the Arab spring put an end, forever to attempts to turn republics into regimes with royal trappings. He describes Egypt under Mubarak as a 'rouge regime', based on succession and inheritance of power "but strongly believes that the days of such regimes, all over Africa, are over (Focus on Africa, Jan-March 2012). Togo and Gabon are obvious example of family dynasties in operation in Africa- where sons replaced fathers in 2005 and 2009 respectively (Cheeseman, 2015; Van de Walle, 2022).

There have been no substantial protest movements in either country in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, but Christopher Fomunyoh, a senior associate for Africa at the Democratic Institute for International Affairs in the U.S. thinks the uprisings of the Arab spring may set something in motion (Fomunyoh, 2012; Lynch, 2012). The Arab Spring has really changed the dynamics of this issue, and would be much harder now for autocrats in Africa to try to line up their sons than would have been the case before (Bellin, 2012; Brownlee et al., 2015).

Uganda can be taken as something of a test case. President Yoweri Museveni's government already including many family members among them his wife, who is both a minister and a member of parliament, and his brother (Tripp, 2018). Museveni was widely believed to be grooming his son Muhoozi Kanerugaba, who has recently been promoted to a general in the country's Special Forces, as his successor (International Crisis Group, 2022). However, protests which begun as "walk to work" protests which started in April over high price of living, soon turned into a major challenge to the Uganda President himself and his succession plans (Branch & Mampilly, 2015).

More recently in Senegal, President Abdulayi Wade (85 years old) changed the constitution to stand for a third term in office (Villalón, 2013). People rose against him nationwide. He had planned to reduce the threshold needed to win the 2012 presidential election and to create a new post of vice president, widely suspected to be his son (Villalón, 2013; Cheeseman, 2015). A demonstration of peoples power witnessed the largest protests since he took power in 2000 and his subsequent defeat in a run off presidential election won by Marchary Sall (Galvan, 2016).

Malawi is also an interesting case in point. Many believe the country's President, Bingu Wa Mutharika, has earmarked his brother Peter for the top job. Opposition to this only intensified in July 2011 when 20 people died in pro democracy protests, which were met by a severe government crackdown (Englund, 2011; Freedom House, 2012). Equatorial Guinea's President is grooming his son Teodoro to be his successor. Teodoro serves as the minister of agriculture and forestry in his father's government and has an estimated net worth of six hundred million dollars (Focus on Africa Jan-March, 2012; Human Rights Watch, 2023).

The Development Constraints in African States

After about a year of failure and procrastination, in the midst of rapid political changes, the leaders of Africa at the meeting of the Africa Union (AU) Summit in Ethiopia on 23-30 January, have resolved to reverse the setbacks and steer the organization into a course of development and reform (African Union, 2012; Tieku, 2017). This is overdue almost after ten years of the formation of the African Union (Murithi, 2008).

The African Union (AU) was launched in Durban in 2002, complete with plans to monitor governance through the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and to raise Eighty Billion Dollars a year for continental infrastructure through the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) (APRM, 2019; African Union, 2023). This has been inspired by the diplomatic energy of South Africa's Thabo Mbeki and Nigeria's Olusegun Obasanjo, the AU aimed to outlaw military coups and edge corrupt autocrats off the political stage (Tieku, 2017; Souaré, 2020).

These "charters of democracy" were set out to give a future of free elections monitored by credible observers and established a Peace and Security Council that would help to resolve conflicts, and if necessary dispatch troops to defend citizens' rights (African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, 2007; Williams, 2022).

Political progress, according to Smith (2012:4) has been halting but Africa's economic managers can claim some credit for a decade of annual growth of more than 5% (World Bank, 2012; African Development Bank, 2023). The continent attracted record levels of foreign investment, \$52.3 billion in 2010, but that will not be enough to counter the growing demands for change in Africa (UNCTAD, 2011). Unemployment runs at 20% according to the World Bank. African economies would have to grow at an average of more than 7% a year. Economic stasis and reduced growth rates will make Africa's economic tasks harder still (World Bank, 2022; AfDB, 2024).

Like the Arab League and the European Union, all leaders cannot ignore the calls for change (Lynch, 2012). They could start by ratifying their own charter of democracy, which needs another set of signatories in Africa to come into force (African Union, 2023). AU leaders should act decisively and effectively against flawed elections (Cheeseman, 2015; Gyimah-Boadi, 2021). A redesigned African Peer Review Mechanism to act as a kind of political ratings agency would also help (APRM, 2019).

In the case of recalcitrant regimes like Zimbabwe, Gambia and Cameroon, the AU should lead an incremental campaign of sanctions, asset freezers, travel bans, economic boycotts and prosecution of human rights violators (Murithi, 2008; Williams, 2022). Beyond heads of state and prime ministers, the sanction should target top military officers who enforce the crackdown on dissidents (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

The African Union could make elections less competitive and less of a zero-sum game (Lindberg, 2006; Cheeseman, 2015). It could make politicians prepare to lose graciously, positions could be found for them on commissions and advisory boards. It could also be deployed in force to Zimbabwe well ahead of elections to pre-empt a repeat of the violence of 2008 (Raftopoulos, 2013). Soft-landing would be prepared for those longer term leaders who do not have a record of repression and grand corruption. The fate of those autocrats who refused to go voluntarily in 2011 may serve as an incentive to their successors (Brownlee et al., 2015; Diamond, 2020).

Conclusion

This study sought to establish the relationship between democracy, governance, and development in Africa. It examined the extent to which democratic practices have contributed to development across African states and assessed the successes and challenges associated with the continent's democratic experience. The findings reveal that the democratic journey in Africa has been characterized by mixed outcomes. While some countries have made notable progress in strengthening democratic institutions and promoting good governance, others continue to be constrained by authoritarian tendencies and leadership structures that hinder political and socio-economic advancement.

The study further observed that democratic governance has not always translated into peace, stability, and sustainable development across the continent. Political instability, electoral malpractice, and weak institutions remain significant obstacles to democratic consolidation in many African countries. Nevertheless, democracy remains a vital instrument for achieving inclusive governance, political accountability, and sustainable development. Therefore, the promotion and strengthening of democratic processes are essential for Africa's continued progress and long-term growth. The efforts of electoral commissions in countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, and Sierra Leone, which have demonstrated resilience against political interference, deserve commendation as positive examples of democratic advancement on the continent.

Recommendations

1. Electoral commissions and electoral systems across Africa should be strengthened and reformed to ensure their independence, credibility, transparency, and effectiveness in conducting free and fair elections.
2. African leaders should adopt and uphold a continental principle whereby only individuals who emerge through credible, free, and fair electoral processes are eligible to occupy leadership positions within regional and continental organizations.
3. Politically credible leaders should actively support and promote democratic governance. The rule of law, fundamental human rights, and civic freedoms must be protected and upheld at all times.
4. Constitutional term limits should be strictly enforced for all elected offices to prevent the entrenchment of authoritarian rule and ensure regular democratic transitions of power.
5. Military coups should continue to be unequivocally condemned and prohibited throughout Africa. Military intervention in politics should not be allowed to undermine democratic governance. The African Union Peace and Security Council should continue to play an active role in preventing and resolving unconstitutional changes of government, as demonstrated in countries such as Côte d'Ivoire and Mali.
6. African economies should be diversified and strengthened to attract greater domestic and foreign investment, reduce unemployment, and promote sustainable economic growth. Greater emphasis should also be placed on sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and technology in addition to oil and gas.
7. Civic liberties and fundamental rights of citizens should be protected and, where necessary, safeguarded through regional mechanisms established by the African Union. Furthermore, the African Union should continue to strengthen and promote democratic governance frameworks suitable for the challenges of the twenty-first century.
8. African governments should intensify efforts to reduce illiteracy through comprehensive literacy programmes, public enlightenment campaigns, and expanded access to quality education in both rural and urban communities. Such initiatives will help foster a democratic political culture and strengthen citizens' commitment to democratic values and principles across the continent.

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