



WHAT WOULD IT TAKE TO HAVE GENUINE DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA?

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ABSTRACT

Democracy in Africa is a window dressing meant to appease the west. On the ground, the reality presents authoritarian tendencies where some people are more equal than others and fundamental freedoms and human rights are a luxury. The purpose of the paper is to explore possible paths that Africa can take to realize real democracy. The outline first takes on the introduction, which defines some keywords and looks at the current status of democracy on the continent. It then provides the solutions in different subtopics and ends with a conclusion.

Keywords: *Democracy, Africa, Democratisation*

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Democracy is not a bed of roses. It is not perfect, but it is a better alternative to all forms of government that have been tried in this world. Democracy as an idea has remained widely contested with no consensus on what it really means. The word democracy is from two Greek words: demos which mean “people” and kratos which means “power.” That is, democracy is people’s power. Merriam-Webster defines democracy as a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections. A widely quoted definition is by Lincoln (1863) in Gettysburg, where he said democracy is, “government of the people, by the people, for the people”. Types of democracy include parliamentary, direct, Islamic, African, authoritarian democracy and so on. As such, definitions will differ according to the school of thought. We can further subdivide democracy into procedural or substantive and liberal or illiberal democracy [1-4].

On the Freedom House Report, among 12 countries listed with the worst aggregate scores for political rights and civil liberties, eight are in Africa, and only 10 in 55 states are listed as free [2]. These appalling indicators signify that most of the democratic processes in Africa are simply a façade meant to appease the international community. There is no credible commitment to address the challenges faced by Africa following transparent democratic processes. The core values of democracy such as political liberties, participation rights of citizens, equal justice before the law, and equal rights for women [3] are lacking in Africa. A more detailed analysis is that liberal democracy entails some features notably the plurality, state of law, rule of law, checks and balances, guarantee of human rights and freedoms, free and fair elections, decentralization, delegation of powers and good governance [4].

On the other hand, intentional ignorance of such liberal values gives credence to the illiberal democracies although where elections take place, but citizens are cut off from knowledge about the activities of those who exercise real power because of the lack of civil liberties [4].

Recently, we see constitutional coups in some African countries where presidents either attempt or successfully removed the presidential term limits such as Paul Kagame of Rwanda, President Sam Nujoma of Namibia, Burundi's president Pierre Nkurunziza, and in Guinea, President Lansana Conte. Democracy is in crisis in Africa, and what can it take to bring about a democratic Africa?

1.1 Objective of the study

This paper attempts to provide a comprehensive view of steps that can accelerate Africa's democratization process. The paper is based on the rationale that previous and current democratic attempts in Africa are inept and non-responsive to African needs, thus becoming a spawning ground for conflict, deteriorating economic conditions and social disintegration. As such, the suggested solutions below could be implemented in tandem or selectively, depending on the context.

2.0 DISCUSSIONS

2.1 Firm foundations of democracy

With the "third wave" of democratization that swept Africa and other regions in the early 1990s, there was hope that democracy would bring development much needed and liberate Africa from the shackles of poverty. Seventeen years later, Africa remains impoverished with high levels of unemployment, diseases and mounting external debt. The democratization process, envisaged by Francis Fukuyama as the "end of history" has scuttled away from the norms of liberal democracy. A fragile democracy exists and only a few countries have embraced an existence of a consolidated phase. Many states seem to be in a standstill where regimes remain in the grey area of semi-democracy or semi-authoritarianism [5]. What are the foundations that lead to a true democracy?

For democracy to flourish, several authors have provided a proviso for democratization [5-6]. Firstly, national unity is fundamental to democratization. A field of operation should be well specified. That is, the majority of citizens in a democracy-to-be without a doubt should be knowledgeable of the community they belong to [6]. Issues of ethnic, religious, racial and language questions should be addressed and be integrated into the national constitution. Democratization needs settling of the national question: who are the nations that are going to democratize [5]?

A constitution of the country should have a special constitutional engineering based on the diversities of people on the ground. It is relevant to decide if the state is going to be a republic, unitary or federal. A unitary state would work well in countries that are less ethnically diverse such as Lesotho. Federal arrangements include giving regions some form of autonomy and giving guarantees to minorities. Even though this cannot be a panacea to conflicts outbreak, it can significantly reduce their occurrences.

In what is called the preparatory phase, individuals, civil society, and classes challenge the authoritarian rule and they demand democracy [5-6]. Although there might be resistance from the elites, they will eventually give in. Diamond (1993) as cited in [7], states that "Elites choose democracy instrumentally because they perceive that the costs of attempting to suppress their political opponents exceed the costs of tolerating them." It is important to highlight that in Africa, elites gave democracy not much due to pressure from within, but external pressure from the West. In a bid to become accepted they chose to install pseudo-democracies. In Nigeria, for instance, Abacha implemented a transition programme which was a sham, aimed at entrenching him in power and it was incomplete due to his death in June 1998 [8]. Under Abacha's regime, there was the existence of five political parties that contested in an election run by an Abacha controlled electoral commission.

Furthermore, there should be a credible commitment by the leaders to institutionalize several aspects of democracy. Leaders should fully accept democracy. Democracy should not be lip service for leaders who are not democrats. The existence of an independent judiciary that scrutinizes petitions and an independent body that runs elections under a multiparty system are key determinants for willingness to accept democracy although these or any processes mentioned above are not sole determinants of the existence of a democracy. All these should culminate into a consolidation phase where all institutions of democracy have been created, everybody accepting the rules of fair play, the courts' decisions being respected, and there is a possibility of power changing hands without any display of belligerence.

2.2 A need for strong Institutions

In his speech to the Ghanaian parliament in 2009, Barack Obama declared that "History is on the side of these brave Africans, and not with those who use coups or change constitutions to stay in power; Africa doesn't need strongmen; it needs strong institutions" [9]. The statement seems to suggest strongmen as leaders who 'trample' the constitution and use repressive force to stay in power. Part of Africa's failures can be blamed on leaders who cling on to power and repress civil and political rights because of lack of strong institutions that consolidate good governance and democracy and check the abuse of power. Montesquieu recommends separation of powers whereby power should be checked by separation of legislature, judiciary and executive. To minimize the misuse of political power, the country has to set up several political institutions which check and control the abuse of power in a system of checks and balances [10]. Paul Biya of Cameroon is a glaring example of dictators who continue to thrive under weak institutions. He is criticized for having unlimited executive and legislative powers, and to a certain degree power over the judiciary.

Freedom of speech is very limited, and in the Anglophone region of Cameroon internet was cut for three months last year; the region continues to face internet disruption with a very weak broadband compared to other regions of the country. This blatant attack on democratic institutions is a complete antithesis to good governance, a brazen display of an autocratic regime and a gross violation of human rights. By contrast, Botswana has been a rather unique case in Africa. There is a little power struggle among the ethnic groups and the government has adopted comparatively good macroeconomic policies [11]. Botswana scores higher than any other non-island African country on measures of institutional quality: levels of corruption, rule of law, and bureaucratic capacity.

On the other hand, some authors indicate that focusing on strengthening democratic institutions is a wrong obsession for Africa and that diverts attention from Africa's real problems. Europe, China, Japan, and even America did not give universal suffrage to all when they were at the same level of development as Africa; in the United States, it took the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 before the majority of African Americans in the South were registered to vote [12]. However, the author in [12] overlooks the fact that in the United States and other countries where some form of authoritarianism existed, the leaders were very disciplined and incorruptible unlike here in Africa where leaders horde the countries' resources and expatriate them to off-shore accounts, leaving the people poor.

A strong civil society and private media that is neither a pawn of the government nor a tool of opposition propaganda is a priority in checking abuse of power by informing the public of the misdeeds of those in power and being flag-bearers of democratization drive. The media and civil society will educate people about their rights which will strengthen the democratization process. African governments continue to appropriate financial resources, commit human rights abuses and hold bogus elections because of a dormant media and civil society. The availability of a strong media and civil society will significantly reduce any attempt by the government to carry out sham elections by reporting in a timely basis of occurrences of manipulation. In short, we need strong institutions to curb impunity and corruption and guarantee accountability and transparency.

2.3 Consociational democracy

Consociational democracy "means government by elite cartel designed to turn a democracy with a fragmented political culture into a stable democracy by forming a grand coalition" [13]. Consociationalism is sometimes viewed as power-sharing in societies deeply divided along ethnic, ideological, religious and linguistic lines. Attributes expressed as fundamental for the success of consociation are: elites have to show credible commitment in conflict management; elites must lead deferential segments, and there must be a multiple balance of power with stable subcultures (one subculture should not enjoy overriding majority because they will demand majority rule) [14]. However, the above-mentioned conditions are not overarching or

indispensable for the success of consociation; with or without the attributes, consociation can still thrive [13].

Efforts at consociationalism are not always successful as it has failed in Rwanda before 1994, Cyprus and Uruguay but it succeeded in Switzerland and Netherlands and to some extent, its features are apparent in India and Japan [13]. In Africa, where there are many ethnic groups in one country, consociation can be an effective tool for uniting conflicting groups into a sort of grand coalition where there is no opposition. For example, consociationalism is used in the Great Lakes region of Africa to try to resolve the current conflicts, and in my view, this inclusive approach can be effective in service delivery and conflict resolution since divergent interests are given credence than what obtained before its implementation.

In his book, *Leviathan*, Hobbes considered man as innately selfish, driven by the hope of personal gain. As such, if African governments are formed by only one or two major ethnic groups, like the case of Kenya where Kikuyus and Kalenjins have ruled since independence [15], there is a likelihood of excluding other ethnic groups in service delivery. Elites become inward-looking, creating the best opportunities for their ethnic group and ignoring the rest of the country. This ethnic bias fuels post-election violence because losing elections also means losing access to economic opportunities. To curb political fragmentation, elites would want to consider adopting consociationalism. Its successful implementation will depend on the commitment of elites and the society at large to overcome their differences in the development of the country.

The new Lesotho electoral system has elements of consociationalism. The British-based plurality electoral system was reformed in the early 2000s to anchor a new mixed electoral system [16]. The British-based system led to an outbreak of the war in 1998 due to the dissatisfaction of the election results that offered all legislative seats to Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) with only 60 per cent of the votes under the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system [17]. The proportional representation (PR) system currently used has resulted in a greater diversity of parties as even the smallest parties have a chance of getting at least one PR seat. Although this type of setting has not brought consolidated democracy, it has reduced the likelihood of a 1998 recurrence.

Consociationalism has been vigorously challenged in recent years by a number of writers. Authors in [18] for example, are of the view that using power sharing as a solution to conflicts in Africa has led to political entrepreneurs who use their ethnic group to provoke violence since a likely response from the mediators would be to suggest a grand-coalition. Another argument is that the major problem with consociationalism is that it enhances ethnic cleavages it is supposed to solve [19].

Authors in [18] raise a valid argument, but they ignore the fact that grand coalitions are recommended based on empirical evidence of ethnic diversity being a historical problem in a given country, not on a spur-of-the-moment

decision. Such tendencies will be apparent in the investigation phase and a grand coalition will not be the suggested conflict resolution strategy. Authors in [19] also raise a sound critic; however, the key problem with their examination is that they view consociationalism as an end. When successful power-sharing arrangements are in place, efforts should be made to educate people to put their country first; before seeing themselves as belonging to a particular ethnic group, they should see themselves first as being of a particular country. Efforts to unite people at the grassroots level such as sporting activities and multi-ethnic schools should be made to unite different groups.

2.4 A need for moral and ethical leaders

It has been observed that one of the major causes of failures of Africa is poor leadership. Since independence, Africa is replete with examples of uncharacteristically poor leaders who pillaged state resources, deepened ethnic cleavages, committed crimes against humanity and caused untold sufferings to millions of people. Ake & Onoge as cited in [20] opined that leadership in Africa "is parochial rather than national, and corruptly converts national resources into its project of primitive accumulation. Many people in most African countries die of poverty and any form of rebellion is crushed with firing live rounds on protesters. It is thus vital to instill ethical principles in African leaders to curtail these immoral tendencies. It is only when high moral standards are a norm of African leaders that we can take strides towards a consolidated democracy.

A moral leader is someone who is value driven and adheres to high standards of good behaviour. He or she is someone who sacrifices their life to maximize stakeholder value (citizens, foreign investors and local business people) through their good performance and conforming to the ethical guidelines for his or her office. Such a person understands that being a leader of a country is not a matter of earning the best salary or having the best benefits, but using the resources of the country in an efficient manner. The leader promotes good governance, a Democrat in spirit and practices democratic values. Distribution of wealth is done fairly and transparently and the citizens' happiness goes up while corruption is kept at its barest minimum.

In Botswana, for example, academics and people of Botswana admit that the first president, Sir Seretse Khama was an ethical and exemplary leader who left a precedent for high ethical standards, a strong and relatively independent but accountable civil service, and a developmental orientation of government [21]. As a result, Botswana has enjoyed good economic growth and abhorrence of corruption or any forms of crime. Botswana hasn't experienced any power struggle as leaders are satisfied to serve their two terms and then vacate office. The legacy left by Sir Seretse Khama continues to live. Recently Ian Khama, the son of the first president, left office voluntarily one year prior to his official time. Such is the ethical leadership that we need if we were to have real democracy in Africa.

2.5 Economic development and democracy

While the issue of economic development and democracy has been widely debated, it will be argued in this part that democracy can be consolidated if there are efforts towards developing African economies. Economic development that puts people first liberates their minds and accords them independence and the ability to question political malpractices by the government. There will be an independent media and civil society which do not dance to the government's tune. African politics are the politics of hunger, so democracy rarely thrives in poverty-stricken societies because the government has an economic muscle to reward loyalty. In such societies, those who challenge the status quo receive direct threats from the military or police. Their businesses receive politically motivated attacks for not complying with certain business regulations. Those who remain loyal are rewarded with tenders and promotions at work.G

In a road to democratic transition in Europe, the organized working class was the most pro-democratic force which had placed much emphasis on universal suffrage and parliamentary government at the centre of their program; similarly, for consolidated democracy to be installed in South America, the middle class joined forces with the working class to push for democracy since the working class had a significant strength [22]. Farming remains the primary source of food and income in Africa which provides up to 60 per cent of available jobs [23]. Most of these people working in farming in Africa are peasant farmers working in their small fields and they are clustered across the country; as such, it becomes difficult to be organized like in other economic sectors. This becomes a stumbling block to democratization in Africa. The political leaders continue to thrive in semi-authoritarian states because there is no strong organized force to urge the government to provide robust democratic rights.

Development should not only focus on growth. While also adhering to universal principles of democracy, development should put people at the forefront. Africans should be beneficiaries of economic growth or active participants in it. In the similar fashion, if the people possess their own development, the development will not exclude the people by appropriating their rights into self-realization [24]. In South Africa, workers' unions are very strong because of their huge membership. The apartheid regime that deprived black people of their land made it easy to have strong organized groups such as Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), National Union of Mine Works (NUM) and others which have not only pushed for better working conditions and pay rises but have also played a significant role in driving for a democratic government that saw Nelson Mandela as the first democratically elected president of South Africa.

Economic empowerment reduces conflicts arising from ethnic exclusion or other inequalities, reduces political alienation and polarization [7].

On the other hand, economic decline threatens the viability of a sustained democracy: a failure to lead an economic growth trajectory and equal distribution of available resources may weaken civilian support of the government and authoritarianism may be seen as an alternative to the government in a bid to hold on to power [7].

Although Botswana showed signs of democracy before it could be rich, it is a small country with less population that speaks almost the same language, Setswana. The problems it faced in the early years of post-independence are not as manifold as big countries with different ethnic groups and population, yet it is important to also highlight that its exceptional leadership as highlighted above has played an important role, coupled with good management of its diamonds.

2.6 Independence of the military and police

Since the 1960s, Africa has experienced at least 200 successful and failed coups, with Burkina Faso topping the list with 10 coup attempts; similarly, in Guinea-Bissau, no president has completed a full term since the country's independence in 1974 because of coups [25]. Coups scare off investors and undermine the democratization process. The military is often personalized by the incumbent who use it to crush opposition and to stifle dissent; in return, the military gets huge budget allocations which are misused. A breakdown in such faux-alliances leads to the military takeover when they believe their interests are no longer a priority.

In the same instance, the police are used as a torture tool and to arbitrarily arrest people who express different views from the president or prime minister. Such victims are held in police custody without trial beyond the legal timeframes, which undermines the constitution and democratic principles. A recurring trend by Lesotho police is using a euphemism that a victim died during questioning due to the difficulty of questions, which means a victim was tortured to death.

To avoid such bad governance, the military and police should receive proper training on upholding democratic principles. They should be trained in seeing the constitution as the supreme law and not being swayed by politicians who fail to wage their wars through the scribble of a pen or vocal rhetoric. The military should engage in projects that make them revenue so that they do not only rely on government money as it is used as a tool to tempt the top brass of the forces in a bid to create loyalty for the incumbent rather than the constitution. Military recruits should also have an academic training of at least a first degree. This will help them in having conscience of the good commands from the bad ones.

3.0 CONCLUSION

The paper sought to highlight the possible solutions for having substantive democracy in Africa. Africa is a diverse continent with different ethnic groups hence Africa needs a democracy that recognizes different ethnicities and cultures. A democracy that is context-

based will use power-sharing tools such as consociation or proportional representation type of parliament. A proper national question will consider the people in state formation. It will mean considering if a state should be unitary or federal. Credible commitment from leaders who walk the talk and adhere to the utmost moral standards and exemplary leadership, who recognize ethnic diversity and distribute resources equally can diffuse ethnic tensions and lead a growth trajectory that will satisfy the needs of all citizens. Western partners should equally support the democratization drive of Africa by tying their aid with democratization and good governance while also restraining from imposing economic policies that do not benefit Africa as has been the experience with the Structural Adjustment Policies and Heavily Indebted Poor Countries' policies that undermined poverty alleviation efforts. Countries that do not comply should continue to be isolated until they feel the pressure. On a positive note, a giant is starting to awaken, and a vista of light seems to have crept into the continent and there is hope for a positive future for Africa's youthful population with efforts displayed by remarkable economic growth of individual countries, positive strides on regional integration efforts and increasing functionality of the continental body.

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