Politics Of Democracy and Democratisation in Africa: Unearthing the Challenges, Opportunities and Lessons from the Middle East

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Abstract

The paper aims explores the notion of democracy and democratisation in Africa with special reference to the practices, challenges s well as the prospects of democracy in Africa. All countries either already have or are seeking to adopt democracy, despite the fact that its implementation is challenging and complex. Sub-Saharan African countries started adopting democracy thirty years ago, yet the region is still distinguished by a high level of political regime diversity. Some of the least democratic regimes in the world border fragile democracies, which typically face a number of challenges and deficiencies. Elections with many parties, which were almost unheard of in 1990, are now the norm, albeit they still infrequently bring about changes in power. The current trends in democratic recession have not spared Sub-Saharan Africa, however the effects have varied by nation. A few surprising democratic transitions happened at the same time as a widespread democratic decline. Two factors—one that is basic to political and institutional contexts and the other that is external to those contexts—make sub-Saharan African democracy unstable. Among the first are low socio-economic development, conflict, and instability; among the second are weak institutions, a lack of judicial independence, election law manipulation, significant restrictions on civil and political rights, and war. On the basis of the experiences of a few African countries, brief case studies that emphasize the significance of the conceptual framework and the idea of self-enforcing constitutional principles are provided and this is done in consonance with experiences from the Middle East.

Key Words: **Democracy, democratisation, political regimes, Africa, authoritarianism**

Introduction

Because there are different definitions of democracy, it can be challenging to define democracy in practice for instance, there is disagreement over how to indicate the start and finish of the democratization process. According to one definition, democracy occurs during the time between the fall of an authoritarian government and the conclusion of the first democratic national elections. Others denote earlier starting points, such as when authoritarian regimes started liberal reforms or when structural adjustments made authoritarian regimes vulnerable enough for opposition parties to press for democratic

reforms. Similar to this, some democratic theorists claim that democratization continues long after the first elections because elections do not guarantee a functioning democracy on their own. The problem with this approach is that it is not clear when the democratization process stops. If measured against the ideal of a perfect liberal democracy, all countries may be viewed as perpetually being in a process of democratization. This limits the utility of democratization as an analytical tool.

A political regime can become democratic through the process known as democratization. Beginning in the middle of the 20th century, democracy grew rapidly around the world, changing the political landscape from one in which democracies were the exception to one in which they were the rule. The establishment of international norms that link democracy with many significant positive results, from respect for human rights to economic prosperity to security, is largely to blame for the rise in interest in democratization among academics, policy makers, and activists alike. In actuality, authoritarian regimes have honed their ability to justify their hold on power by putting on the appearance of legality. Compared to other regions of the world, the region was less severely hit by the corona virus pandemic, but it nevertheless had a substantial impact on democracy and human rights principles. Concerns for the EU, a significant partner and provider of development aid to the region, include the constricting space for civil society, the need to increase political participation for different groups like women and youth, as well as the effect of digital developments on democracy and human rights in societies that still struggle with poor internet access and inadequate digital infrastructure.

Recalling the Trends in democratization:

Global and wave-like transitions to and from democracy are more common than random distribution; as a result, they have been clustered in both space and time. There were three significant phases of democratization, according to American political scientist Samuel Huntington. The first, which lasted from 1826 to 1926, coincided with an increase in the number of people who could vote, primarily in Western Europe and the United States. The first reverse wave, which lasted from 1922 to 1942, was caused by the fall of several European democracies following World War I. The occupation of Axis nations by the Allies after World War II, initiatives at democratization in newly independent former British colonies during the post war period, and the expansion of democracy in Latin America all contributed to the second main wave (1943-62)'s occurrence.

In 1974, the military administration in Portugal was overthrown, marking the start of the third major wave. The global reach of democracy grew dramatically over the next 25 years. Southern Europe and Latin America were the first regions where democracy was introduced, followed by Eastern Europe and Asia, and then Africa. The proportion of countries with electoral democracies increased from around one-fourth to nearly two-thirds over this time.

Most observers concur that, if not already reversed, the third wave has crested. Rather than reverting to authoritarianism, however, many third-wave democracies have become mired in hybrid or mixed regimes that combine elements of both democracy and authoritarianism.

Transition Versus Consolidation

One common approach to specifying the democratization process whether in Africa or elsewhere is to differentiate between two phases:

(1) The initial transition from an authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regime to an electoral democracy

(2) The subsequent consolidation of the democracy. The transition to and consolidation of democracy are often viewed as distinct processes driven by different actors and facilitated by different conditions.

The transition process is oriented around the undermining of an authoritarian regime and the emergence of nascent democratic institutions and procedures. The consolidation process entails a much broader and more complex process of institutionalization of the new democratic rules for political life. As the reverse waves of democratization suggest, a transition does not always lead to consolidation.

To understand the above, there is need for on to understand the different modes of transition.

Modes Of Transition:

Democratization theorists have identified different patterns of interaction among social groups that shape the way democratization unfolds in a particular environment. Numerous such modes of transition have been identified, reflecting variations in the role of elites and masses in confronting the authoritarian regime, the degree to which the transition is managed by elites from the old regime, the speed with which the transition occurs, and the degree to

which the new democratic regime breaks dramatically with the old regime. In all cases, transitions occur when a democratic opposition becomes strong and united enough to confront the authoritarian regime, and the authoritarian regime is too weak and divided to control the situation, either by co-opting the democratic opposition or cracking down through force.

Three very general modes of transition include pacted transitions, bottom-up transitions, and top-down transitions. In instances of pacted transitions, moderate members of a weakened authoritarian regime negotiate the conditions of a transition with moderate leaders of a pro-democracy movement. These transitions tend to occur relatively rapidly and result in power-sharing arrangements that preserve elements of the old authoritarian regime. Examples include the democratic transitions in Spain and Chile. In bottom-up transitions, social groups develop a broad-based grassroots movement for change that weakens the authoritarian regime through mass protests and ultimately forces the regime to relinquish power. These transitions often result in a radical break with the old regime. Examples include the democratic transitions in Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic in the second half of the 20th century.

In top-down transitions, an authoritarian regime's leaders put democratic reforms into place because they come to believe that the reforms are essential to the regime's survival. As in the case of Mexico, these reforms can result in protracted transitions during which the new democratic system does not significantly diverge from the pre-reform one. Sometimes accidentally, as in the case of the Soviet Union, reforms may result in more abrupt and dramatic transformations in other situations. The boundaries of liberal democracy have undoubtedly steadily widened over the past twenty years in both regions, but especially in Africa. For instance, by the 1990s, the entire continent of Africa had undergone dramatic political transformations, including South Africa, where the white settler apartheid system was replaced by multi-party democracy.

Decades of one-party dictatorships and military control came to an end as a result of democratic changes in Algeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Benin, and Kenya. The democratic wave that swept through Africa in the 1990s and 2000s has been dubbed "second independence" and has been compared to the anti-colonial efforts that ended European colonial projects in Africa in the

1950s and 1960s (Eke, 1995: 25). But unlike advancements in development, democratic reform was less pervasive in the Middle East.

The region did, however, see internal democratic reforms that led to the development of local democratic structures supported by regional cultural dynamics. For instance, because of the tribal systems in most states, democracy appears to favor tribal rulers and their supporters. That is, the region's aristocratic and tribal structures have resisted modern democracy. Instead, the area seems to have tailored liberal democracy. There is ongoing discussion on the sincerity and usefulness of liberal democracy in meeting the needs of indigenous people. By outlining the main points of discussion and providing some interesting articles that were submitted to the current issue of Information, Society and Justice, which each address a particular topic like elite politics, political corruption, elections, and oil resource in relation to democracy-building in Africa and the Middle East, it is important to comprehend the fundamental challenges of democracy in Africa and the Middle East.

The Challenges of Liberal Democracy in Africa: Learning from the Middle East:

One can compare Africa and the Middle East to better understand how these systems are being challenged and developed, as well as the potential for post-liberal democracy in former colonial states in both regions, particularly if they have certain similarities and differences.They have a number of characteristics in common, including colonial histories, firmly entrenched dictatorships, neo-patrimonial societies, weak economies, and foreign influence. Both regions are frequently categorized as having conflict-prone societies marked by interstate fighting, civil wars, and struggles for control of resources. There are subtle variations, too; for instance, the undeveloped, more diverse, more imperialism-prone nations of Africa. the Middle East, on the other hand. Being descendants of colonialism, the majority of African nations have stronger political ties to their former colonial rulers (Britain, France, Spain, and Italy) and are overcoming post-colonial issues such disputed borders, ethnicity, corruption, nepotism, and patron-client relationships.

The alleged "colonial hangover" is ingrained profoundly. In order to preserve its neo-colonial hold on these nations, France, for example, has long maintained close connections with its former colonies in sub-Saharan Africa. Middle Eastern nations, however, have evolved relatively diverse political traditions. Many broke their alleged links to colonial powers by refusing to sign defence agreements with them and even abandoning the colonial Lingua Franca in favour of regional official languages. But in those regimes, tribal and clan systems

with hierarchical social stratification, as well as strong ties to religion (particularly Islam in nations like Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, and Syria), characterized the social structures. Tribal lords and theocratic elites in the Middle East frequently serve as both community leaders and state representatives, which has allowed religion and tribalism to have an impact on political cultures there (e.g., in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq).

Family rulers have arisen in monarchical regimes like the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia, establishing complex political state structures that can impose hegemony over a variety of nomadic and sedentary tribes. Middle Eastern nations also had quite rapid economic development and attracted FDI from Western nations. The demands of democracy appear to have been overshadowed by the realities of development in the 1990s, when Western donors were using "stick" tactics to democratize Africa while using mild "carrot" tactics on Middle Eastern nations. Simply because these political regimes were making progress in terms of growth, they ignored their excesses. As previously said, western donors played a leading role in promoting liberal democracy in underdeveloped nations, particularly those in Africa and the Middle East. This new political model is defined as Political change moving in a democratic direction from less accountable to more accountable government, from less competitive (or non-existent) elections to fuller and fairer competitive elections, from severely restricted to better protected civil and political rights, from weak (or non-existent) autonomous associations to more autonomous and more numerous associations in civil society (Potter, 2004: 368)

In practice, a liberal democracy is “a type of regime in which binding rules and policy decisions are made not by entire community but by representatives accountable to the community. This accountability is secured primarily through free, fair and competitive elections in which virtually all adult men and women have the right to vote and stand for elective office” (ibid: 366-7). This new political model is defined as political change that shifts in a democratic direction from less accountable to more accountable government, from incomplete or non existent elections to full and fair elections, from severely curtailed to better protected civil and political rights, and from weak (or non existent) autonomous associations to more autonomous and numerous associations in civil society (Potter, 2004: 368) In actuality, a liberal democracy is "a sort of system in which enforceable rules and policy decisions are established by representatives accountable to the community rather than by the entire community. Virtually all adult men and women have the right to vote and run for

political office in free, fair, and competitive elections, which serve as the primary means of securing this accountability (ibid: 366-7).

A liberal democracy's citizens also have the unalienable right to "express themselves on matters of general political concern without fear of severe punishment, including criticisms of officials, the government, the regime, the socio-economic order, and the dominant ideology, and to form relatively independent associations or organizations, including independent political parties and interest groups" (Dahl, 1989 in Potter, ibid, 367). The aforementioned cliches about liberal democracy are problematic in Africa and the Middle East because there, compared to Western democracies, where the ideas of liberal democracy first emerged, the political culture and nature of social and economic processes are very different.

Applying liberal democracy in less developed nations is fraught with serious issues. The common belief is that "Western concepts of democracy are more or less embraced around the world," or that "western efforts to foster democratization are welcomed by everybody but those who would be dislodged by the process." This belief was notably prevalent in the 1990s and 2000s (Barkan, 1994: 3). Less developed nations need to strengthen their weak structures, and some of their norms conflict with those of liberal culture. Writing about Africa, Ake (1993: 241) observes that "African democracy will have to be substantially different from liberal democracy in order to be relevant and viable.

For one thing, it will have to de-emphasize abstract political rights and stress concrete economic rights, because the demand for democracy in Africa draws much of its impetus from the prevailing economic conditions within". Joseph (1997: 367-8) offers the following critique of what he calls the glorification of liberal democracy as virtual democracy as applied to African countries:

1. *Hollow symbolism:* While liberal democracy is symbolically based on citizen rule, "the making of key decisions, especially in the area of economic reform policies, is insulated from popular involvement".

2. *Hegemonic class rule:* Liberal democracies do not necessarily uproot the powerful ruling class; on the contrary, they strengthen the rich: "For a smooth transition from authoritarian rule to take place, hegemonic economic forces in society, as well as those in control of the state apparatus, must be secure in the protection of their interests and able to minimize threats to them by formerly excluded or dominant groups."

3. *Capitalism's entrenchment:* Liberal democracies forbid the adoption of other political and economic systems. According to this version of democracy, possibilities must be provided for the continued growth of a capitalist or market economy. Although democracy can exist without capitalism, there are no modern democracies that are neither democratic nor that do not build the institutional foundation for the growth of capitalism.

4. *External pressure and dominance*: Western pressures in the post-Cold War era contributed to the current efflorescence of liberal democracy.

The implication of this is that the emergence of democracy in regions that were previously under authoritarian rule depends heavily on external circumstances. However, these pressures are not motivated by any other rational theme save the entrenchment of western interests.

5. *Maintenance of the status quo:* "The decisions taken by those in positions of social and political authority when confronted with challenges to their domination are most important in democratic transitions.

These people and organizations are aware that democratization can be used against them to maintain their dominance. African societies are under pressure from both internal and foreign sources, which has resulted in this new attitude toward democratization. Undoubtedly, the continent's deteriorating economic situation has led to a rise in scepticism and government criticism, with fresh African thinking encouraging people to break free of long-held taboos. African leaders are under pressure to fulfil the promises of economic growth and prosperity they made in order to promote adoption of structural adjustment programs supported by international financial institutions. This pressure comes from within the African countries.

The renewed emphasis on good governance by foreign assistance donors and creditors has also given African democrats a chance to advance accountability and transparency in their nations. Protests have also been influenced by the global democratic revolution and its call to safeguard and advance individual human rights. A major source of disappointment for planners, economists, and policy makers who want African governments to launch a reasonable and collective attack on poverty, disease, illiteracy, and other development barriers has been the small numbers of people in power who have managed to undermine any semblance of accountability, legitimacy, democracy, and justice in most African countries.

During the discussions, it was determined that a number of critically important components of good governance were lacking, including popular participation in governance, accountability and transparency, the eradication of corruption, the defence of human rights and the freedom of the press, and the decentralization and devolution of power.

Western aid donors used to accept the argument that Africans supported authoritarian leadership, but they now frequently state their preference for nations with representative governments and a strong human rights record. Former Ambassador Thomas R. Pickering, the United States' permanent representative to the UN, recently made some remarks that reflected this shift in perspective: "It is not our role to decide who governs any country, but we will use our influence to encourage governments to get their people to make that decision for themselves."

Future aid from Western donors is probably going to be more targeted, concentrating on nations undergoing both political and economic reforms. Some previous African heads of state, well-known Africans, and African groups who have grown more angry with corruption, repression, violations of human rights, and egregious economic mismanagement under one-party rule also hold this opinion. Salim Ahmed Salim, the Organization of African Unity's (OAU) Secretary General, and Julius Nyerere, a former president of Tanzania, were two among the many eminent African and other world leaders that participated in the Stockholm Initiative on Global Security and Governance in April 1991.

In the 1990s, it stated in its Memorandum on Common Responsibility that "some democratic requirements are needed to sustain progress. Respect for human rights, the rule of law and constitutional government, as well as transparency in the exercise of power, are essential components of the idea. and the responsibility of people in positions of authority. Although democracy must develop from within a society, the international community still has a responsibility to promote the upholding of human rights and the growth of democracy, according to the memorandum. It is required by human solidarity. In addition, the OAU is now placing more emphasis on economic recovery and sound governance than it did previously on decolonization.

OAU Secretary General, Salim Ahmed Salim advocated for democratization at the 26th OAU conference in 1990, saying that "Africa could not disregard the global agreement on the value of democracy; but democracy must be home-grown." In his speech as the new OAU chairman in June 1991, Nigerian President Ibrahim Babangida made democratization a key

theme. He emphasized that Africans faced the dual challenges of "handling urgent problems of economic restructuring and of developing free and democratic institutions for social expression" as they underwent the process of development. He advised his fellow leaders that "now is the moment to re-examine the concept and practice of power and leadership on our continent. Democracy is not just a desirable option, but also a sensible one.

Due to Africa's continued reliance on foreign assistance, there are more opportunities than ever for bilateral and multilateral aid organizations to shape regional policy. The big donors have been gathering frequently to plan aid programs for African governments and to talk about debt and development issues.

As a result, foreign assistance is now more frequently associated with a list of recommendations for modifications to the economic and political strategies employed by African countries. The 'new world order' has had a major impact on African states as well. Western states and the organizations they control gained far more sway over African countries as the Soviet Union's influence and interest in the continent waned (and ultimately collapsed with its fall), surpassing the overall client-dependent relationship of the 1970s and 1980s. The international financial institutions declared in the 1980s that they would only provide aid to African countries under the condition that structural reform and economic stabilization initiatives would be implemented.

The World Bank, the IMF, and the U.S. Agency for International Development took the initiative in calling for policy changes, including currency devaluation, the elimination of public service subsidies, a reduction in state intervention in agricultural pricing and marketing, increased attention to the development needs of rural areas, privatization of parastatal organizations, and a reduction in the size and expense of the public sector.

Donors started to become interested in supporting political transformation in addition to economic reforms at the beginning of the 1990s. The importance of democratic political reforms was underlined in determining how much future aid will be provided to Africa. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Advisory Committee has publicly stated its support for "participatory development," which includes democratization, better governance, and human rights. Nearly all Western funding is now conditional, at least ostensibly, on implementing political reforms. The actual donor policies vary: Japan talks about linking aid to reductions in military spending, while France suggests

better liberty and democracy, Great Britain urges good governance, the United States concentrates on good governance.

But regardless of strategy, there is growing consensus among donors that for political reforms in Africa to be truly effective, there must be less corruption, greater financial accountability, better respect for human rights, independent media, independent judiciary, participatory politics, and a liberalized market economy. The claim that all of Africa has engaged in poor governance "is not a true statement," according to one participant in the Namibia summit.

There aren't many Mobutu Sese Sekos in actuality. The majority of African administrations have faced challenging circumstances and chosen the simple solution. Additionally, foreign nations did not demand decent governance. Even when policies didn't work, help kept flooding in. Donors have only recently brought up the topic of governance in relation to aid intended to ensure that the economy and politics are liberalized. Africans are arguing more and more that such requirements should be connected to the effectiveness of policies rather than to a specific democratic model. A culture of democracy between the rulers and the ruled should be developed, and perhaps better governance will take hold before democracy. Africans should establish their own approach to democracy, make a good-faith effort to govern well and have programs work well, and strive for these goals. Africa is liberalizing, but it will take time, therefore one needs to be willing to stick with it.

Conclusion

Higher levels of economic freedom, lower inflation, lower political instability, and higher levels of human capital accumulation are all indicators of democracies. Democracy is intimately linked to economic growth factors like longevity and educational levels through advancements in educational and medical institutions. Democracy's foundation is citizen engagement. As creative methods of integrating citizens in policy-making have gained popularity with governments and citizens worldwide, a deliberative wave has been rising.We, as Africans should better start thinking of deliberative democracy as it is today.

Africa has not been forgotten either: Deliberative procedures are undoubtedly reviving African democracy, from deliberative participatory budgeting in Kenya to combating corruption in Malawi to risk management in flood-prone areas in Uganda. Through the process of "deliberative democracy," regular citizens from various backgrounds who were chosen at random become more involved in governmental activities. The representative group

has access to a large range of reliable, pertinent, and easily accessible information and knowledge on a topic of general interest. This gives them the capacity to have deep reflections and consultations on the problem at hand, and then make recommendations which are shared with decision makers. An illustration is the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) in Malawi's Salima District.

The government, Members of Parliament (MPs), decision-makers, council members, district councils, and the community all participate in the distribution of CDF in the district, just as they do throughout Malawi. However, the public's mistrust is impacted by a number of factors, including a lack of accountability and transparency, a lack of community involvement, and perceptions of excessive political influence in CDF's implementation.

The New Democracy Foundation launched Salima district's first-ever citizens' jury, a model of deliberative democracy, in an effort to restore the lost public faith. Twenty participants were chosen at random from each of the district's five constituencies. The objective is to include those typically excluded from political processes in the suggestion of practical solutions for making the CDF initiative fair, transparent, and inclusive. There is considerable evidence of institutional development in a variety of governments, including some where the challenges to democratization first looked to be greatest, despite the fact that countries with more dysfunctional institutional arrangements often dominate the headlines. For instance, term limits have been firmly established in Kenya and Nigeria, two strongholds of Big Man politics, while peaceful transitions of power have taken place in conflict-prone Sierra Leone and coup-prone Ghana. These results prompt a crucial query: under what circumstances can we expect to witness the growth of formal institutions in Africa? How much variety is there? Which theoretical framework is most suitable for capturing this?

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