

Is Liberal Democracy Failing in Africa or Is Africa Failing under Liberal Democracy?

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Abstract

Among studies on prospects and challenges of democratization in the developing world with particular reference to issues of democratic sustenance and consolidation, a very limited body of work understudies Africa. Today, some states in Africa where liberal democracy was thought to be taking root have witnessed its truncation either through military putsches and/or social revolution. In some instances, many of these countries unconsciously have found themselves in crises so severe that they herald a bleak future for democratic practice. Accordingly, this study considers the problem with the consolidation of liberal democracy in Africa dual focused. It assumes that liberal democratization presents a systemic dilemma in the legitimation crisis that it poses for Africa. And, as a result, a set of endogenous factors, which over time have characterized contemporary African socio-political dynamics, nurse the consequent problem of a lack of democratic consolidation. However, experts and policymaking elite have long sought to mitigate this complex mix of disruptive forces within the polity by bringing the African logic of modernization into the realm of liberal governance. To this end, this study not only calls for the insertion of excluded African political thought and history into the discourse on regime legitimacy, but also transcends mono-causal stereotypes for democratic non-consolidation in Africa with a dialectical evaluation on the continent's need to reinvent liberal democracy in line with local peculiarities and critical interests of its socio-political base, without sacrificing extant democratic rights, values, and principles.

Keywords: African politics, democratic consolidation, ethnicity, liberal democracy, neopatrimonialism, political legitimation, regime legitimacy, weak economy.

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After the demise of the Cold War, there was a demand for multiparty democracy and an alternative form of governance in Africa. This yearning was the result of much gained awareness among ordinary citizens. These citizens had hoped that greater political freedom and strong institutions would lead to more government accountability and effective development. Nonetheless, the yearning for liberal democracy brought about, in a pseudo sense, only a slight change in the *modus operandi* of governments in some African countries, without the needed political and democratic culture and values or new ways of thinking regarding how citizens should be governed. In fact, there was speculation that overhauling society through reforms that were the cornerstone for the triumph of democracy and governance would produce the “good life,” eradicate poverty, provide peace and political stability, and, above all, guarantee the take-off of Africa’s economic growth and development.

Unfortunately, after more than two decades of Africa’s democratization process, instead of the envisaged development and niceties of life that the adoption of liberal democracy projected, the African scenario consistently has been perturbed by endemic and many episodic political crises as a result of dissatisfaction with the status quo. Therefore, the democratic process in some African countries is either being “stalled” or “truncated.” In some countries, regimes established by this liberalization process are collapsing or reverting to authoritarian rule.¹ In fact, many self-styled liberal democratic governments have seen a series of endemic crises, resulting in the quest for social change.

In some countries, not only has there been mass uprising against nonperforming and sit-tight governments, but also circumstances have engendered military putsches that are truncating the very existence of liberal democracy. Paradoxically, in North Africa, instead of the Arab Spring bringing about the largesse of democracy for which the people have yearned and spilled their blood, democracy is failing to take root, propelling these nations’ fast approach to an uncertain future. In West Africa, the failure of the gains of democracy has led to insurgency, a secession/self-determination bid, violent anarchist movements, and rampaging gangs of criminals.² The African scenario further depicts that the prospects for a better future and the good life have become a phantasm for many African poor,³ engendering doubts over the future of liberal democracy on the continent.

¹ Joel Barkan, “Democracy in Africa: What Future?” in *Democratic Reform in Africa: It’s Impact on Governance and Poverty Alleviation*, ed. Muna Ndulo (Oxford: James Curry, 2006), 17, and Francis Fukuyama, *The Origin of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution* (London: Profile Books, 2012), 4.

² Celestine Bassey and Efem Ubi, “Insecurity and Economic Crime in South-South Nigeria,” in *Public Policy and Politics in Nigeria: A Critical Discourse*, ed. Celestine O. Bassey and Uno Agbor (Lagos: Concept Publications, 2015).

³ “History Is So Not Over: It’s Time for a Dose of Realism When We Think about How to Build New Democracies,” *Foreign Policy* (September 17, 2014), http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/09/17/history_is_so_not_over (accessed September 23, 2014).

Critically assessing the nature of politics in Africa, can it be said that liberal democracy is failing to thrive in Africa, or are some African countries failing under democracy? What are the reasons for these failures? Alongside the mainstream neopatrimonial explanation for the perceived malfunction of Africa's evolution to consolidated democracy, are said failures rooted in the endogenous socio-political structure of African societies, or in exogenous factors—or perhaps a mix of both? While discussion of the variations within Africa is beyond the scope of this essay, we claim equivalence for Africa as a single category, recognizing not only that the absence of comprehensive data and analysis of the variations among African democratic systems is a top priority for future democratization research, but also mitigating this limitation by incorporating an extensive range of African countries of linguistic, regional, and other variations to make possible responses to the fundamental epistemic questions raised above. It would seem that this analytical footing not only coheres with the thesis, “the problem of equivalence is mitigated by research designs in which the substantive meaning and the context of topics being investigated do not differ excessively,”⁴ but also significantly justifies reporting the commonalities discovered as a means to help provide hypotheses for subsequent studies.

Africa's Democratic (Non)consolidation in the African Context of Political (De)legitimation

Studies of democratic consolidation in Africa have triggered much debate and bred controversy. In this regard, conventional notions of political and socio-economic systems of the African post-independence state adopt nonmerger of the state and society as a common expression of a set of shared values, in order to explain the state's lasting problems of legitimacy.⁵ Presuming that the state lacks the common ideals and values of the nation-state community, the general thrust of the argument is that the absence of regime legitimacy forces African elites to adopt neopatrimonialism as the only means to legitimize the state and avoid governing by open coercion and force at all times. Promoters of this view believe that patron-clientelism and other patrimonial customs emanate from African culture or society and extend beyond the spheres of tradition to penetrate modern institutions,⁶ resulting in hybrid rational-legal authority that not only incentivizes elite perpetuation of “disorder as a political instrument”⁷

⁴ Samuel Barnes, “Electoral Behavior and Comparative Politics,” in *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture and Structure*, ed. Mark Irving Lichbach and Alan S. Zukerman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 116.

⁵ Christopher Clapham, “Clientelism and the State,” in *Private Patronage and Public Power: Political Clientelism in the Modern State*, ed. Christopher Clapham (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 42-44.

⁶ Gero Erdmann and Ulf Engel, “Neo-patrimonialism Reconsidered: Critical Review and Elaboration of an Elusive Concept” (Working Paper, no. 16, GIGA Institute, 2006), 18.

within an “economy of affection”⁸ in the “belly kingdom,”⁹ but also ultimately undermines Africa’s democratic consolidation. Critiques of the above perspective point out empirical deficiencies of “methodological individualism” that err in not approaching politics as a group process involving rulers and the ruled, whose interaction is premised on a measure of autonomy and political expectation.¹⁰ Disputing the omission of Africans as a people whose political participation is based on communalism and social collectivism and not emphasizing individual interests above others,¹¹ they fault evidence depicting nonelite groups as incapable of political agency, having left out political communities from analysis.¹² Comparisons made with Asia, where patrimonial elements have successfully lubricated the Asian economic machine, contest accounts of neopatrimonialism as a primordial African tradition. As a result, claims that African politics is essentially cultural and operates from within the realm of customs instead of modernity have been opposed as “cultural determinism,”¹³ “Áfrican essentialism,”¹⁴ and a reductionist preconception that only confound analysis of the complex linkages among cultural, economic, and political processes at play.¹⁵

In view of the above, it is worth noting that democratic consolidation requires legitimation of the regime in place by both elites and ordinary citizens (i.e., popular demand for democracy), in addition to the institutionalization of its rules and procedures (i.e., perceived supply of democracy).¹⁶ Today, keeping these two factors in a sustainable equilibrium is increasingly unworkable, such that it would be only impractical to assume that fulfilling institutional and procedural conditions ought to take preeminence over, or be granted precedence

⁷ Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), xix and 4-16.

⁸ Goran Hyden, *No Shortcuts to Progress: African Development Management in Perspective* (London: Heinemann, 1983), 21.

⁹ Jean-François Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (London: Longman, 1993), 35.

¹⁰ Raufu Mustapha, “State, Predation and Violence: Reconceptualizing Political Action and Political Community in Africa,” paper presented in the panel, State, Political Identity and Political Violence, 10th General Assembly of CODESRIA, Kampala, Uganda, December 8-12, 2002, 1.

¹¹ Claude Ake, “The Unique Case of African Democracy,” *International Affairs* 69, no. 2 (1993): 243.

¹² Mustapha, “State, Predation and Violence,” 1-9.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Aaron deGrassi, “Neopatrimonialism and Agricultural Development in Africa: Contributions and Limitations of a Contested Concept,” *African Studies Review* 51, no. 3 (2008): 112-115.

¹⁵ Mustapha, “State, Predation and Violence,” 3.

¹⁶ Michael Bratton and Robert Mattes, “Learning about Democracy in Africa: Awareness, Performance, and Experience” (Working Paper, no. 31, Afrobarometer 2003), <http://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Working%20paper/AfropaperNo31.pdf> (accessed July 4, 2017).

in, the building of a supportive political culture which can precipitate or assure legitimation. The conventional view that Africans interpret democracy based on mainly substantive outcomes (i.e., material benefits such as socio-economic development and service provision), thus leading to instrumental rather than intrinsic support for the regime (i.e., based on what it does rather than what it is),¹⁷ fails to acknowledge that accountability of leadership was evident even in precolonial African societies, sometimes within the framework of strong participatory democracy.¹⁸ David Nyaluke captures this in claims that a set of indigenous ideas about the democratic state, responsive government, and accountable leadership, traceable to the early 1990s protest movements for independence and the traditional governance systems of Africa, form the basis of Africans' dissatisfaction with unresponsive leadership, including its neopatrimonial practices misperceived as an acceptable product of African culture.¹⁹ According to the author of *The African Basis of Democracy and Politics for the Common Good: A Critique of the Neopatrimonial Perspective*, this element of collective dissatisfaction with African leaders, existent even before Africa experienced much of the outside world, constitutes an organic social contract that has outlived colonialism and now co-exists with Western liberal democratic ideas on the continent.²⁰ In his view, the earlier adoption of single-party political systems and socialism by most post-independent regimes aimed to fulfill independence from colonial exploitation and achieve democracy, development, national cohesion, and invariably legitimize the state.²¹ Citing the trouble-free transition to the one-party socialist state by African regimes, Nyaluke explains that, within this action, African political elite created the potential ideological and institutional means by which to meet the promises of independence and legitimize their rule to the citizenry, who shared the vision and values of independence²²—values that incorporated

¹⁷ Bratton and Mattes, "Learning about Democracy."

¹⁸ For some earlier manifestations of democratic frameworks, see Edmund Aston, "Democracy and Indirect Rule," *Journal of the International African Institute* 17, no. 4 (1947): 235-251; Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 1-25; Thomas Burgess, "The History of the Ideal," in *Democratic Transitions in East Africa*, ed. Paul Kaiser and Wafula Okumu (London: Ashgate, 2000), 25; and Thomas O'Toole, "The Historical Context," in *Understanding Contemporary Africa*, ed. April Gordon and Donald Gordon (London: Lynne Rienner, 2007), 25-60.

¹⁹ David Nyaluke, "The African Basis of Democracy and Politics for the Common Good: A Critique of the Neopatrimonial Perspective," *Taiwan Journal of Democracy* 10, no. 2 (2014): 158-159.

²⁰ For more, see Michael Bratton and Nicholas van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 97-149, and Graham Harrison, *Issues in the Contemporary Politics of Sub-Saharan Africa: The Dynamics of Struggle and Resistance* (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 78-104.

²¹ Nyaluke, "The African Basis of Democracy," 154.

²² *Ibid.*, 154-156.

modern as well as customary ideals of the well-being and welfare of the eclectic whole, long before colonialism.²³

From the above exposé on long-existing indigenous African values, ideas, and experiences that are supportive of democracy and politics focused on the common public good (i.e., good governance), this essay deciphers that, together with material outcomes, Africans' view of democracy also alludes to liberal or procedural (i.e., competitive elections, popular rule, personal freedoms, and so on) and institutional (i.e., rule of law, separation of powers, public accountability) concepts. This gives rise to the question: If Africa always has possessed both culture on which democracy can build and a long tradition of state, why has there been such little democratic consolidation? This question is critical, as the analysis above shows that, although African politics has some appearance of neopatrimonialism, contending forces of various types indeed compete. Today, the masses and the select leaders representing their interests as well as the collective good, wrestle constantly with regimes in place to implement ideals of democratic promotion, development, social welfare, and nation-statehood on which the struggles against colonial rule and for independence were based.²⁴

To address the question above, we first realize that, driven by a need to fit Africa's supposed complexities into an explanatory scheme that is "logical" with the view of Western development, conservative political scientists have been quick to apply their modern discipline of contemporary politics to the continent, without first understanding its (pre)colonial history and its socio-political reactions to exploitation during the period.²⁵ Since stereotypical notions of African politics ignore Africa's evolution and the pursuit of democracy and the common good during precolonial and colonial times, including the struggle for independence, they at best provide a weak explanatory framework for understanding the political and socio-economic systems of the African post-colonial state. Little wonder that many scholars of African politics were caught unawares by the scale of the resistance which characterized the protests for change and more accountable governance in the late 1980s and early 1990s, having misread Africa as "unfertile terrain" for democracy.²⁶ The point at issue is that the socio-political and economic "logic" of contemporary African politics is a process of modernization that differs from Western "logic" of development in its accommodation of both African traditional and Western practices, without hindrance to its assimilation

²³ Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London: Heinemann, 1958), and Tom Mboya, "African Socialism," *Transition* 3, no. 8 (1963): 17-19.

²⁴ Nyaluke, "The African Basis of Democracy," 158.

²⁵ Chabal and Daloz, *Africa Works*.

²⁶ Richard Joseph, "Democratization in Africa after 1989," *Comparative Politics* 29, no. 3 (1997): 363.

of democracy in terms of accountability, transparency, and the rule of law.²⁷ Taken together, notions of neopatrimonialism par excellence as the bane of democratic consolidation in Africa translate as a misreading, because bringing precolonial political thought and ideals of the independence struggle, which not only inform but also determine contemporary workings of the African state, into discussions of African regime legitimacy and governance delinks unresponsive leaderships from neopatrimonialism in African regimes, and the latter from African tradition.

Of importance to this essay, and in light of Max Weber's views, is its presupposition about the patrimonial which delineates a legitimate type of authority, rather than a regime type, that embraced notions of reciprocity and voluntary compliance between rulers and the ruled, and thus institutionally enabled subjects to check the actions of leaders.²⁸ Anne Pitcher, Mary Moran, and Michael Johnson's studies eschew contemporary usage of neopatrimonialism interchangeably with corruption, bad governance, violence, tribalism, or the weak state, arguing that patrimonial authority referred to a specific source of legitimacy, with specific cultural underpinnings in which compliance to authority was constructed.²⁹ The colonial alteration of lines of political accountability in Africa not only damaged the original Weberian patrimonial authority operating then,³⁰ but also locked the continent in the observable manifestations of neopatrimonial politics, erroneously interpreted by political scientists as a cultural derivative. Regarding this, the caveat must be registered that capitulation by neopatrimonial theorists to cultural explanations for the patrimonial aberration are overly simplistic, having misread the cultural underpinnings of Weber's patrimonialism to also reference the base of neopatrimonialism.

That caveat acknowledged, the Botswana case is well cited by the authors of *Rethinking Patrimonialism and Neopatrimonialism in Africa* to show that, by building on the Weberian patrimonial authority of traditional reciprocity practices and networks instead of succumbing to the neopatrimonial stereotype, the political elite in Botswana have successfully delivered sustained economic growth under a responsive elite democracy.³¹ In fact, the writers not only point

²⁷ Chabal and Daloz, *Africa Works*.

²⁸ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, vols. 1 and 2, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 1012.

²⁹ Anne Pitcher, Mary Moran, and Michael Johnson, "Rethinking Patrimonialism and Neopatrimonialism in Africa," *African Studies Review* 52, no. 1 (2009): 126.

³⁰ Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, 22.

³¹ Englebert states that the preservation of Weberian patrimonial authority and the continuation of traditional patterns of loyalty endowed the independent Botswana state with a high level of legitimacy, leaving its leaders with the "initial allegiance" of its citizens, thus enabling their pursuit of long-term developmental strategies without need for neopatrimonial strategies in consolidating power. See Pierre Englebert, *State Legitimacy and Development in Africa* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2000), 112-116.

to the compatibility of neopatrimonial authority with high levels of legitimacy and economic development,³² but also maintain that patrimonialism does not absolutely determine any one type of regime, let alone foil the establishment of a liberal democracy.³³ This much they state by pointing out that Botswana elite, as opposed to discarding essential Weberian patrimonialism, established a durable democratic state on the foundations of that custom and practice of highly personalized reciprocities and loyalties.³⁴ However, the Botswana model is contested because the country lacks the scope of ethnic diversity present in other African states,³⁵ yet common critiques overstate “ethnic homogeneity” in ignorance of networks underlying traditional legitimacy which have fostered stability and growth. The point at issue is that the vitality of some of Botswana’s surviving traditions provides the continuing bases for its democracy. What this essay understands is that a durable democracy can be founded on indigenous patterns of loyalty, authority, or tradition, which can be the footholds for democracy. That it is viable to incorporate traditional allegiances into the service of Africa’s democratization, is not to say that it is an ideal system. In essence, there must be a coming to terms with instrumentalism in African politics possessing just as many intrinsic or procedural attributes as pork barrel politics in the United States does via means of its insertion in institutional settings.

In recapitulation, mainstream analyses of the governance and politics of the African post-independence state as a purely instrumental process, highly deficient in the participation of “critical citizenship,”³⁶ greatly marginalize “African thinking” and history and thus offer little hope for Africa’s local peculiarities in the modern political “order.” However, new and emerging research establishes the continent as possessing long-established democratic traditions and aspirations for a specific type of nation-state and governance that predates colonialism, and whose ideals yet remain at the heart of present-day political contestations between nonresponsive African leaders and the

³² Pitcher, Moran, and Johnson, “Rethinking Patrimonialism and Neopatrimonialism in Africa,” 134.

³³ *Ibid.*, 145.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Botswana possesses a tribally uniform population (95 percent Tswana ethnicity), unlike many African countries featuring more diverse ethnicities.

³⁶ Norris’s critical citizenship references “dissatisfied democrats”: citizens who adhere strongly to democratic values, but with growing expectations of democracy, find existing structures of representative government deficient in addressing twenty-first century concerns. Pippa Norris, *Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3. Extrapolating, Bratton and Gyimah-Boadi claim that “citizens routinely re-evaluate regime performance as democracies mature, often raising their expectations.” Michael Bratton and Emmanuel Gyimah-Boadi, “Political Risks Facing African Democracies: Evidence from Afrobarometer” (Working Paper, no. 157, Afrobarometer 2015, p. 21), <http://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Working%20papers/afropaperno157.pdf> (accessed January 22, 2017).

bulk of Africans who are demanding responsive, developmental, and unifying governments. This is instructive in the current era of democratization in Africa, wherein the importance of the Botswanan patrimonial yet highly democratic state, juxtaposed with the issue of legitimation of the state and post-colonial African governments at a price (i.e., capitulation to neopatrimonial strategies to consolidate power), suggests studies of contemporary African politics are premised largely on a reductionist and subjective, if not pejorative, interpretative framework. More pressing, therefore, is how to strive for a “functional” equilibrium in channeling indigenous democratic practices and fundamentals of modern liberal governance in service of democratization, because full consolidation of a democracy takes much more than a mix of institutions, rules, and patterned incentives and disincentives. This led Michael Bratton and Robert Mattes to warn, “No matter how well or badly international donors or academic think tanks rate the extent of democracy in a given country, this form of regime will only consolidate if ordinary people themselves believe that democracy is being supplied.”³⁷

Taken together, interpretations of African politics as mainly elite-based struggles for spoils are overly negative, narrow, and simplified, for how can Africa’s democracies hope to acquire legitimation without first securing the concrete and diffuse commitment of citizens to democracy, instead of relying alone on stated support that proves fleeting every so often? Notably, ideals of accountable leadership, transparency, and the rule of law that have fueled broad-based African political life since the (pre)colonial era and yet have endured to the present, amply demonstrate the strength of the ideational basis and values that inspire desirable regime legitimacy and good governance in the African context. Therefore, neopatrimonialism positions on African politics are duly challenged. “Failed working democracies” show that citizens participate, although they are poorly represented. The public has confidence in state institutions, albeit these institutions are not responsive. And, majorities are greatly interested in the political process, while they hope to curtail elite enrichment.

Problematising Africa’s Democratization Process

A survey of Africa’s political history portrays many mistakes and missed opportunities that are depicted in Africa’s developmental crisis, episodic conflict, and instability. These problems are the results of a complex mix of factors, which include, but are not limited to, the abuse of power; lack of good governance; leadership ineptitude; the perpetual cling to power; nascent, if any, national identity; ethnic politics; exclusionary practices; human rights violations; institutional corruption; weak economic bases; structural weaknesses

³⁷ Bratton and Mattes, “Learning about Democracy,” 2.

inherited by many African states upon political independence, and so forth. While these contradictions have been the main indicators of intrastate conflict and regional instability in Africa, as elsewhere,³⁸ they have remained a constant and have exceedingly characterized politics in many African countries since independence. The result, then, is the aftermath of contemporary events such as coups, social revolutions, and refusal to relinquish power in some countries in Africa. With these inherent contradictions, we do not need to overemphasize that, today, the practice of liberal democracy in Africa is infirmed and burdened with many complexities. To some extent, these are the results of both exogenous and endogenous factors. Research on the challenges of democracy often has focused on the reversal of democracy in many developing countries. However, few of these studies have made a critical examination of the intrinsic socio-political structure and characterization of African societies, coupled with exogenous factors that actually have undermined the consolidation of liberal democracy. As stated earlier, the virtual absence of any inclusive data on variations among African democratic systems represents a gap in knowledge for future research to address. The most prominent work within this limited body of literature is Bratton and Mattes's study of Africa during the late 1990s. Yet, even this work used only Ghana, Zambia, and South Africa in the attempt to generalize the political experience of the public among the different regions and linguistic groups of sub-Sahara Africa.

The resultant crisis of liberal democracy in Africa further strengthened the argument that it is easier to oust a dictator than to establish a functioning democracy. Faced with despicable events in some countries, it is not wrong to further argue that building liberal democratic institutions in Africa has turned out to be a daunting and protracted challenge that is likely to entail considerable turbulence and contestation.³⁹ A survey of some countries in Africa purporting to be under a democratic system of government depicts that some of their national governments exercise only tenuous control over the people, organizations, and activities within their territorial jurisdictions. This is because, as Robert Jackson and Carl Rosberg argued, in almost all of these countries the populations are divided along ethnic lines, clans, or races (even religions), with a noticeable threat of political disorder stemming from such divisions in some countries; in a few countries, this disorder has deteriorated into civil war.⁴⁰ And, in some cases, the governments periodically have ceased to control substantial segments of their country's territory and population. Examples are Nigeria, Somalia, Mali, the Central African Republic, Libya, and so on, although some of the challenges are self-inflicted, while others are superimposed.

³⁸ Jack Cilliers, "Towards a Continental Early Warning System for Africa" (Occasional Paper, no. 102, Institute for Security Studies, 2005), 2.

³⁹ "History Is So Not Over," *Foreign Policy*.

⁴⁰ Robert H. Jackson and Carl G. Rosberg, "Why Africa's Weak States Persist: The Empirical and the Juridical in Statehood," *World Politics* 35, no. 1 (1982): 1-24.

The persistency of the African political quagmire has led scholars both within and outside the continent to describe some African countries as either failing states, failed states, and/or collapsed states. For instance, Richard Dowden described Nigeria as a “failed state that works.” This, according to him, is because by any law of political or social science, Nigeria should have collapsed or disintegrated years ago.⁴¹ The situation itself has prompted the West to classify Africa’s democratic processes as “incomplete transitions.”⁴² Such endemic “factors” within the African socio-political scenario, to a considerable extent, not only have acted to undermine democratic gains, but also have undermined, if not stagnated, democratic progression in some countries. And so, in adherence to the prescription, “the method of presentation must differ in form from that of enquiry,”⁴³ a restrictive dialectical analysis of these factors follows.

The Resilience of Ethnicity in Africa’s Democratic Consolidation

Today, the advent of multiparty democracy in Africa has opened the possibility of full-scale ethnic mobilization,⁴⁴ manifesting in complex and vitriolic rivalries among clans, ethnic, and cultural groupings. And while agreeing that ethnicity must have existed in pre-colonial Africa, its entrenchment in modern-day Africa is arguably a by-product of the arbitrary balkanization of Africa in 1884–1885, when imposed colonial borders confined different ethnic groups within a single state. Many of these African boundaries cut through and enclosed hundreds of diverse and independent groups, with no common history, culture, language, or religion. Thus, the aftermath of the fusion of these various ethnic groups is the attendant explosive crisis of incompatibility and lack of a sense of national identity that have characterized the political landscape of many African countries since independence. For instance, it is observed that, prior to independence, one of the main concerns of British administration in the colonial era was the problem of interethnic hostility. The system of British indirect rule very often was designed to shield one ethnic group from another so as to avoid conflict.⁴⁵ Ethnocentricity, which is a dominant feature of many African countries such as Algeria, Ghana, Mali,

⁴¹ Dowden presents the paradox of a state whose politics and social processes ultimately threaten its existence and yet demonstrate its talent for survival and ability to thrive. See Richard Dowden, *Africa: Altered States, Ordinary Miracles* (London: Portobello Books, 2008), 440.

⁴² Victor Adetula, “Measuring Democracy and ‘Good Governance’ in Africa: A Critique of Assumptions and Methods,” in *Africa in Focus: Governance in the 21st Century*, ed. Kwandiwe Kondlo and Chinenyengozi Ejiogu (Pretoria, South Africa: Human Sciences Research Council, 2011), 11.

⁴³ Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970), 19.

⁴⁴ Alex Thomson, *An Introduction to African Politics*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2000), 241.

⁴⁵ Michael Crowder, *West Africa under Colonial Rule* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1968), 15.

Cote d'Ivoire, Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria, and so on, is a left-over from Africa's pre-colonial past. As an example, since the creation of Nigeria, the country's more than three hundred ethno-linguistic groups have been antagonistic and consistently fighting each other for political space. To illustrate, during the early years of Nigeria's history, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Nigeria's first prime minister, remarked in 1948 that,

since 1914 the British government has been trying to make Nigeria into one country, but the Nigerian people themselves are historically different in their backgrounds, in their religious beliefs and customs and do not show themselves any signs of willingness to unite... . Nigerian unity is only a British invention.⁴⁶

The problem of great diversity is not peculiar to Nigeria; many African states are troubled by this state of affairs. Still, the above depicts the notion that some of contemporary Africa's problems are the result of a forceful fusion of different ethnic groups into one centrally administered territory. For this reason, since the creation of states in Africa, ethnicity has led to expanding conflict, which constitutes a quandary for political progress. Thus, ethnic, clan, and race relations in large and pluralistic society have remained a major problem for many African nations. In sum, historical loyalties, sometimes demonstrated in a primitively savage fashion, have been brought into present-day African politics.⁴⁷

Today, some African states are dominated by the interests of the ruling elite and dominant social forces (usually ethnic groups) that have shaped the nature of politics in Africa.⁴⁸ Even the formation of political parties reflects ethno-regional configurations that remain pivots of intractable political conflict, engulfing many African countries. A further perusal of African politics reveals that many countries are known for the politicization of ethnicity, as different ethnic groups retreat into primordial constructs for cultural, if not political, self-preservation. Competition in politics based on ethno-regional identities often has seen victory by one group as total defeat for another, where one ethnic group is to rule over the rest. Under these circumstances, it is sometimes

⁴⁶ Martin Meredith, *The Fate of Africa: A History of the Continent since Independence* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2011), 23-24.

⁴⁷ Thomson, *An Introduction to African Politics*, 61. In another dimension, some observers consider the Brexit vote through this prism. Given its contagion in Europe, they believe it is not so much a triumph of "freedoms" as a broad and deep commitment to historic identities and enmities, territorial symbols, and traditional cultural values.

⁴⁸ Andrew Efemini, *Claude Ake's Philosophy of Development: Implications for Nigeria* (Port Harcourt, Nigeria: University of Port Harcourt Press, 2003), 279.

⁴⁹ Thomson, *An Introduction to African Politics*, 241.

difficult for the losing ethnic group to accept election results.⁴⁹ Thus, if an ethnic group feels that its interests will not be served within a nation that is ruled by its rival, then outright secession may be sought (e.g., Nigeria in 1967, Mali in 2011, the Central African Republic [CAR] in 2012, Eritrea from 1972 to 1993, and so forth), although secession is not a popular demand on the continent. Other consequences could be tension, protestation, or violent conflict that could result in civil war, if not properly managed (e.g., Nigeria's 2011 election crisis and Cote d'Ivoire's 2010–2011 crisis).

Hence, fear of politicized ethnicity partly explains why most African governments oppose competitive party systems, prefer political monopoly, lack sympathy for federalism, and attack political liberties (among other things).⁵⁰ There is little wonder why the efforts by many African governments have been channeled into emphasizing “ethnos” and political communities, at the expense of the “nation” and “nationalism.” This is also an explanation for the love of the one-party state and centralized structures in Africa since immediately after independence until today, the essence of which is the restriction of competition among groups.

Just as in pre-colonial times, in recent times, interethnic relations in Africa are often mistrustful, or discriminatory, and sometimes violent. Ethnic, clan, or race cleavages have been made even worse and aggravated by the spread of liberal democracy, which produced the further disintegration of states in multinational and multicomunal regions after both 1918 and 1989.⁵¹ In situations where different ethnic groups coexist, there have been tussles for supremacy and superiority, giving rise to a situation where some ethnic groups are superordinate and others subordinate. In many cases, the subordinate ethnic groups try to displace the superordinate groups or to raise their own position. This contestation has resulted in insecurity among the various ethnic groups and instability within the political sphere, and continually gives rise to opposition and conflicts, and sometimes outright wars. Examples are the bloodbath in Cote d'Ivoire, which resulted from the fact that Henri Konan Bedie, Felix Houphouet-Boigny's successor, attempted disenfranchisement of the north with the introduction of the concept of “Ivoirite”; the civil war between the north and the south in Nigeria; and hostilities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, Rwanda, and more. Thus, it is important to note that events in many African countries have shown the probability of civil war to be twice as high in countries where the largest ethnic group constitutes half the population than in countries where it constitutes 95 percent of the population.⁵² Although, when a country has 90–95 percent

⁵⁰ Jackson and Rosberg, “Why Africa's Weak States Persist,” 6.

⁵¹ Eric Hobsbawm, “The Dangers of Exporting Democracy: Bush's Crusade Is Based on a Dangerous Illusion and Will Fail,” *Guardian* (UK), January 22, 2005.

⁵² Marte Nilsen, “Will Democracy Bring Peace to Myanmar?” *International Area Studies Review* 16, no. 2 (2013): 116.

of a particular ethnic group, the tussle for supremacy revolves around clans, ward, or tribes, as the case of Somalia has shown.

The argument has been that, with the establishment of liberal democracy in Africa, tribalism and ethnic differences would fade, as people learned to identify themselves primarily with the nation rather than with their ethnic communities.⁵³ Yet, in contrast, recent happenings in Africa suggests that, in what are essentially artificial African states, liberal democracy inevitably leads to the mobilization of ethnic identities which, in turn, split the state into its constituent ethnic communities and render impossible any form of government based on popular consent,⁵⁴ precisely because deeply divided societies lack cross-cutting social relationships.⁵⁵ It is observed that the African democratization process actually has underestimated the role of nationalism and other forms of local identity, extolling sectarianism, ethnicity, and tribal bonds.⁵⁶ There is little wonder that it is difficult to consolidate liberal democracy in countries with diverse ethnic groupings.

Weak Economic Base and the Imminent Revolt from the Bottom

It has been observed that one of the most problematic aspects of the liberal position is the marriage of the propagation of democracy to foreign economic and political penetration, based on the notion that democracy can guarantee stability, economic growth, and development.⁵⁷ This widely held belief has generated much debate. There is the concept that liberal democracy and development must go together, or that democracy must give rise to development. Many African countries adopted liberal democracy based on the understanding that democracy is the most promising formula for unleashing individual potential, engendering political participation, and creating growth and development. But, more than a decade after the adoption of liberal democracy, social conditions in Africa are suffering⁵⁸ and continue

⁵³ Bill Geddes, "Political Experiences in Nigeria," *Pilibrary* (2010), <http://www.pilibrary.com/articles/political-experiences-in-nigeria.htm> (accessed August 25, 2015).

⁵⁴ Denis Venter, "Democracy and Multiparty Politics in Africa: Recent Elections in Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Lesotho," *EASSRR* 19, no. 1 (2003): 3.

⁵⁵ Judith Large and Timothy D. Sisk, *Democracy, Conflict and Human Security: Pursuing Peace in the 21st Century* (Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2006), chap. 1, http://www.idea.int/publications/dchs/upload/dchs_chapter_1.pdf (accessed April 14, 2015).

⁵⁶ "The Collapse of the Liberal World Order," *Foreign Policy* (June 26, 2016), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/06/26/the-collapse-of-the-liberal-world-order-european-union-brexit-donald-trump/> (accessed October 19, 2018).

⁵⁷ Tandeka C. Nkiwane, "The End of History? African Challenge to Liberalism in International Relations," in *Africa's Challenge to International Relations Theory*, ed. Kevin C. Dunn and Timothy M. Shaw (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 108.

⁵⁸ Tukumbi Lumumba-Kasongo, "The Problematics of Liberal Democracy and Democratic Process: Lessons for Deconstructing and Building African Democracies," in *Liberal Democracy and Its Critic in Africa: Political Dysfunction and the Struggle for Social Progress*, ed. Tukumbi Lumumba-Kasongo (Dakar, Senegal: CODESRIA Books, 2005), 5.

to deteriorate. Although the factors explaining democratic consolidation are still debated,⁵⁹ they often imply a political system that includes the social and economic features of liberal democracy and in which transition processes are supported by strategic reforms in a country's socio-economic structures.⁶⁰

Taking a critical look at Africa, we agree that liberal democracy, as it is practiced, is creating more problems in some countries of Africa than it is solving. Some of these problems include, but are not limited to, a weak economic base, little egalitarianism, and limited equity in relation to resource allocation. Thus, the absence of economic growth and development is at the core of the lack of the consolidation of democracy in many African countries. Citizens in many African countries fought for the institutionalization of democracy in order to qualitatively improve their material and socio-economic well-being. Instead, since the advent of liberal democracy, the mass of people has continued to suffer overwhelming inequality across social classes, even amid Africa's supposed recent economic rise over the last decade. A good example in this regard is, again, Nigeria. The country's re-entry into the democratic fold in 1999 witnessed great economic prospects. For instance, as of 2012, Nigeria ranked thirtieth in the world in GDP in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP), and third largest in Africa. However, by April 2014, after the Nigerian government rebased its economy by including previously unaccounted industries, its GDP skyrocketed to USD 510 billion, and scaled down to about USD 410 billion in 2016, still retaining the status of the country with the largest economy in Africa. The irony is that, in spite of the economic prospects achieved since the turn of the millennium, Nigeria's current global ranking on the basis of GDP is twenty-sixth, its ranking in the Global Competitive index is 120 of 148 countries profiled, and its ranking in the Human Development Index is 153 of 210 countries.⁶¹

The above data portend that, while the Nigerian economy is showing signs of modernization, there exist huge problems in the political sphere, portrayed by the economic quagmire in the forms of poverty traps, reliance on subsistence agriculture, dependence on primary commodities, corruption, impunity, and inequality, which altogether result in the insecurity that is experienced, such as the quest for secession by some ethnic groups, and so on. The Nigerian situation shows dissatisfaction with the practice of liberal democracy. In

⁵⁹ For an insight on the debate, see Gerald Alexander, *The Sources of Democratic Consolidation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002); Raymond Suttner, "Democratic Transition and Consolidation in the Republic of South Africa: Advice of the 'Experts'," *Current Sociology* 52 (2004): 769; and Wonbi Cho and Carolyn Logan, "Looking toward the Future: Alterations in Power and Popular Perspectives on Democratic Durability in Africa" (Working Paper, no. 110, Afrobarometer 2009, p. 12), <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/104729/AfropaperNo110.pdf> (accessed November 9, 2019).

⁶⁰ Adetula, "Measuring Democracy," 16.

⁶¹ Efem N. Ubi, "Africa's Economic Renaissance and the Future of Nigeria's Economic Engagement," *China and the World*, Issue 1 (2015): 122-123.

other words, the adoption of liberal democracy has not in any way enhanced the well-being of the Nigerian masses. This goes a long way to prove that, when economic (unemployment, declining real wages) and social (cuts in welfare and services) benefits are absent in a polity, they often trigger popular protest and movement—all a testimony to the misdirection of resources and accountability.⁶² This brings to the fore that often the demand for change is borne out of painful economic decline and disenchantment with the inability of democratic governance to ensure social provisioning to the common man. Thus, as many people begin to draw connections between their economic plight and the paucity of basic liberties, local grievances very quickly escalate into popular challenges against the established system of government that is seen domestically as predatory and corrupt, and internationally, as servile executors of the economic agenda of the ruling classes of Western nations.⁶³ Today, many African countries that made the transition to liberal democracy in decades past are in grave political crisis because democracy is simply not working to deliver broad developmental progress, honest and decent government, protection of human rights, and political and social tranquillity for which many people yearn.⁶⁴

It remains a truism that there is no contending formula for political legitimacy in the world other than sustained ability to provide welfare, prosperity, equity, justice, domestic order, and external security; the lack of these indicators over time could undermine the legitimacy of even democratic governments. Although it is undisputable that some African countries have shown democratic progress, many of the generic causes of the failure of the first two reverse waves of democracy are still with us in the forms of shallow value commitments to democracy, intense economic problems, social conflicts, dangers of political polarization, resistance of conservative forces to redistribution of power and wealth, terrorism, and insurgency.⁶⁵ The truth is that, coupled with the above, liberal democracy will have little chance of being sustained or consolidated if it cannot revive economic fortunes. With the tremendous challenges posed by economic volatility, high levels of poverty and inequality, and high rates of crime and violence, democracy will consistently remain under stress in many African countries.⁶⁶

⁶² Fantu Cheru, “The Silent Revolution and the Weapons of the Weak: Transformation and Innovation from Below,” in *Innovation and Transformation in International Studies*, ed. Stephen Gill and James Mittelman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 163.

⁶³ Cheru, “The Silent Revolution,” 164.

⁶⁴ Larry Diamond, “The Globalization of Democracy,” in *Global Transformation and the Third World*, ed. Robert Slater, Barry Schutz, and Steven Dorr (London: Lynne Rienner, 1993), 59.

⁶⁵ Diamond, “The Globalization of Democracy,” 60.

⁶⁶ Mark Payne, Zovatto Daniel, and Mercedes Mateo Díaz, *Democracies in Development: Politics and Reform in Latin America* (Washington, DC: Inter-American Development Bank, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, and the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, Harvard University, 2007), 271.

Prescriptively, in order to avoid its truncation and allow democracy to endure in Africa, African countries will need strong social, political, and economic foundations, whereby their economies can be vigorous engines of self-sustaining growth based on a free choice between open, market-oriented,⁶⁷ and emerging development-oriented economic models and structures, including a deliberate “government of the market” that improves mobilization and developmental allocation of resources.⁶⁸ This is because development, especially even-development, in a broad sense, is an integral part of the process of democratization.⁶⁹ It should be stated lucidly that economic deprivation is an indicator of state failure (i.e., countries with low income per capita are at increased risk of civil war).⁷⁰ Hence, the recent inability of some countries to sustain democracy in Africa is the result of two factors: (a) the alienation of the *hoi polloi*, and (b) elite alienation and disloyalty. In the former, the problem stems from mass dissatisfaction, which in recent times, is manifested in the quest for socio-economic and political revolutions across the developing world, as witnessed in the Arab Spring and the many cases of election violence in some African countries, where an abundance of unemployed and uneducated youth, in particular, often are a destabilizing tool, easily manipulated by political elites who seek to intimidate or attack rivals.⁷¹ Consequently, our argument is a repudiation of the stipulation that social and economic development is a by-product of increasing democratic tendencies, because, in Africa, it is observed that democracy is not a guarantee for development or the good life. In reverse order, as societies progress economically and developmentally, democratic values are fostered.

The Paradox of Elections in Africa

Foreign Policy magazine⁷² observed that, even though today most countries are formal electoral democracies, holding periodic elections, only a small number of the democracies that have emerged over the past three decades have become deeply rooted. This is especially visible in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. In fact, democracy in Africa, just like in other developing regions, appears

⁶⁷ Diamond, “The Globalization of Democracy,” 61.

⁶⁸ Thandika Mkandawire, “Thinking about Developmental States in Africa,” *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 25, no. 3 (2001): 302.

⁶⁹ Lumumba-Kasongo, “The Problematics of Liberal Democracy,” 4.

⁷⁰ Susan Rice, “The National Security Implications of Global Poverty,” speech at the University of Michigan Law School, January 30, 2006, 5, and Susan Rice, Corinne Graff, and Janet Lewis, “Poverty and Civil War: What Policy Makers Need to Know” (Working Paper, Global Economic and Development, Brookings Institution, 2006), 5.

⁷¹ John Campbell, “African Democracy: Elections Despite Divisions,” *Council of Foreign Relations Expert Brief* (2011), <http://www.cfr.org/world/african-democracy-elections-despite-divisions/p26288> (accessed February 4, 2014).

⁷² “History Is So Not Over,” *Foreign Policy*.

beleaguered. Although democratization in Africa has been extraordinarily rapid, there also have been setbacks for freedom in many countries. Liberal democracy “overemphasised multiparty elections to the detriment of the basic tenets of liberal governance.”⁷³ This is because the democratic model consistently anchors the legitimacy of power only on regular use of the electoral process in compliance with the constitution, including free, fair, and transparent elections open to all parties. Thus, when countries in Africa that are autocratic start to presume that they are democracies by conducting periodic elections, many nations in the West tend to feel more comfortable in relating to them, despite the fact that other indicators essential to the practice of liberal democracy are absent in the system. It is worth noting that periodic elections alone do not offer a cure for the deeper political and social problems facing many states in the developing world. As Fantu Cheru had argued, while multiparty elections and universal suffrage are important formal criteria, they are also by no means sufficient to judge the democratic qualities of any society.⁷⁴

Based on Cheru’s observation, it is pertinent to contend that, while elections have the capacity to deepen the quality of democratic governance, they also have the potential to distort and mar the system by creating chaos and disorder that raise the possibility of military putsches⁷⁵ or even civil strife, which in some cases results in civil war. In fact, Eric Hobsbawm argued that electoral democracy, in some instances, produces unlikely outcomes convenient to hegemonic or imperial powers.⁷⁶ In many African countries, elections never have portrayed the people’s wish about who should govern them; instead, elections often have been characterized by opposition boycotts, low voter turnout, massive fraud, vote-rigging, and falsification of election results.⁷⁷ A critical perusal of many democracies in Africa reveals that, while the only aspect of liberal democracy that actually has taken root is election, neither “checks nor balances” on the use of power nor effective rules on the conduct of elections exist.⁷⁸

However, we understand that, generally, elections are central to the practice of liberal democracy all over the world because they offered a way by which the people can freely decide who governs them. Yet, while all democracies

⁷³ Fareed Zakaria, “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy,” *Foreign Affairs*, November 1997, 1-22.

⁷⁴ Cheru, “The Silent Revolution,” 165-166.

⁷⁵ “History Is So Not Over,” *Foreign Policy*.

⁷⁶ Hobsbawm, “The Dangers of Exporting Democracy.”

⁷⁷ Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty* (London: Profile Books, 2013), 370-371, and Rachid Tlemcani, “Reflections on the Question of Political Transition in Africa: The Police State,” in *Liberal Democracy and Its Critic in Africa: Political Dysfunction and the Struggle for Social Progress*, ed. Tukumbi Lumumba-Kasongo (Dakar, Senegal: CODESRIA Books, 2005), 28.

⁷⁸ Efem N. Ubi, “The Role of Political Parties in the 2007 General Elections in Nigeria,” *Studies in Politics and Society*, no. 8 (2007): 99.

hold elections, not all elections are democratic. Undemocratic elections are those in which there may be only one person or a list of candidates for elective post, with no alternative choices. Such elections may offer several candidates for each office, but ensure through intimidation or rigging that only the anointed candidate is chosen.⁷⁹ For instance, since 1999, elections in Nigeria have had a dimension that at best can be described as “selection” rather than election, giving rise to what we might label as “selectoral democracy” in place of “electoral democracy.” To illustrate, during the run-up to the 2015 general elections in Nigeria, much controversy arose over the candidate presented by the All Progressives Congress (APC) Lagos state chapter for the office of governor. Eleven of the thirteen party aspirants signed and submitted a letter protesting the decision of the party’s leadership to adopt a consensus candidate through an indirect primary election that was at variance with the Electoral Act and the party’s constitution. Again, in Zimbabwe after independence, President Mugabe, who established personal control, eliminated the Senate and introduced positions in the legislature whose occupants he could nominate. In fact, the Zimbabwean 1995, 2000, and other elections have been far from competitive.⁸⁰ In some other African countries, the constitution has been altered to allow many sitting presidents to stand for election, as will be discussed later.

Without mincing words, elections in Africa have shown that they are a relatively blunt instrument of representation, with important limitations. Accordingly, the defense of democratic rights cannot be reduced to the question of electoral politics,⁸¹ particularly as elections alone are not the standard measurement of democracy. Indeed, the disillusionment with the course of democracy on the African continent today can be attributed to the aforementioned problems, thereby making some African countries only pseudo-democracies.

Sit-Tight, Permanent Presidents and the Crisis of Democratization in Africa

As noted earlier, the façade of post-colonial African politics exhibits some proclivity for power and wealth. African leaders have been known to abuse power, with negative tendencies toward governance and leadership, citizen’s welfare, and overall development. As a result of the supposed largesse of political power, it is now commonplace to see individuals struggle for state power and privileges through unethical means, such as the politics of godfatherism (as seen in Nigeria), rigging, electoral fraud, violence, and so on.

⁷⁹ Ubi, “The Role of Political Parties,” 98.

⁸⁰ Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, 370-371.

⁸¹ Nkiwane, “The End of History,” 107.

And once they obtain power, leaders not only ignore the demands of the poor for fundamental change,⁸² because it is inimical to their interest, but also they perpetuate themselves in power and undermine the poor.

Since independence, African politics has been characterized by the preponderance of a “winner takes all” mindset. As a matter of fact, losing an election in Africa means losing access to patronage; therefore, power seekers are willing to risk everything to make certain that they have and keep a grasp on power. They mobilize divisions within society, whether ethnic, religious, or regional, to protect their access to state wealth and power.⁸³ The unequal power distribution among people and the different ways that power is used considerably influence the nature of democracy and politics in Africa. Between the 1950s and 1990s, Africa saw sit-tight leaders, autocrats among whom many were military strongmen, who later metamorphosed into “democratic leaders” who did not permit democratic space for other interests in society. This syndrome, the study realizes, was in part owing to the nature of pre-colonial African socio-political structures and dynamics, and in part the result of the African colonial state, which was a pure model of bureaucratic authoritarianism. Colonialism in Africa offered a regime of rights from which the colonized were excluded. The much-acclaimed fundamental rights and freedoms that are advocated by liberal theorists were applied historically in a racialized and exclusive manner in Africa.⁸⁴

It is understandable why the leaders of the regimes that the legacy of colonialism bequeathed to Africa continued with the same policies and practice of infringing on rights and freedom based on ethnicity and religion, and socially and politically silencing opposition in order to perpetuate themselves in power. Control of power was a defining characteristic of the colonial state in Africa, in which the European top administration enjoyed almost an entire monopoly over central authority until its final years. According to Claude Ake, the colonial state was of necessity violent in order to contain the rising agitations of the African elite and the masses, agitations for political emancipation and freedom from economic exploitation.⁸⁵ This notwithstanding, the structures of the post-independence polity were a legacy of colonial autocracy, which proved more enduring than the hastily created and weakly rooted democratic institutions that normally were assembled during the final hour before independence. Thus, in most countries, the command habits and authoritarian routines of the colonial state were soon reproduced in single-party or military-political monopolies,⁸⁶

⁸² Cheru, “The Silent Revolution,” 154.

⁸³ Campbell, “African Democracy.”

⁸⁴ Nkiwane, “The End of History,” 106.

⁸⁵ Efemini, *Claude Ake's Philosophy*, 280.

⁸⁶ Crawford Young, “The Heritage of Colonialism,” in *Africa in World Politics: Reforming Political Order*, ed. John W. Harbeson and Donald Rothchild (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2009), 33.

with the eventual emergence of sit-tight leaders in Africa, who consistently clung to power and never hoped to give it up. As a matter of fact, the above observation is still as valid today as it was in the early days of independence.

Recent evaluation of the practice of liberal democracy in Africa has shown that constitutional and institutional offices independent of the personal authority of rulers have not taken root in many African countries.⁸⁷ Rather, pseudo-democracies that undermine electoral turnover of political parties have been cultivated,⁸⁸ whereby many African leaders have perpetuated themselves in power and further marginalized minority groups and the public. For instance, between independence and the end of the 1980s, not a single African head of state in three decades had permitted his being voted out of office. During this period, among 150 heads of states, only six had voluntarily relinquished power. These were Senegal's Leopold Senghor, after twenty years in office; Cameroon's Ahmadu Ahidjo, after twenty-two years in office; and Tanzania's Julius Nyerere, after twenty-three years in office.⁸⁹ Even today, instances of sit-tight presidents abound in many countries of Africa. For instance, in Angola, Jose Eduardo dos Santos has been president for thirty-five years. Others are the former Zimbabwean president, Robert Mugabe, in power thirty-four years; Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, who held office for twenty-nine years; President Paul Biya of Cameroon, in office more than forty years,⁹⁰ and Rwanda's President Paul Kagame, who has ruled Rwanda since 2000 and decided to run for a third term of seven years, following manipulation of the Rwandan constitution.⁹¹

Common to nearly all countries in Africa where the leaders extend their tenures and stay longer than necessary is that they become authoritarian and dictators, and, in many cases, clamp down on opposition and curb basic freedoms and human rights. Examining African politics, Michael Bratton and

⁸⁷ Jackson and Rosberg, "Why Africa's Weak States Persist," 7.

⁸⁸ For an analysis of the problems challenging Africa's emerging democracies, see Crawford Young, "Africa: An Interim Balance Sheet," *Journal of Democracy* 2, no. 3 (1996): 53-68, and Larry Diamond, "Is the Third Wave Over?" *Journal of Democracy* 7, no. 3 (1996): 20-37.

⁸⁹ Martin Meredith, *The Fate of Africa: A History of the Continent since Independence* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2011), 378-379.

⁹⁰ Data on the longest serving African presidents was culled from Dennis Lynch, "Burkina Faso's President Blaise Compaoré Is Not Even among Five Longest-Serving African Presidents," *International Business Times* (October 30, 2014), <http://www.ibtimes.com/burkina-fasos-president-blaise-compaore-not-even-among-five-longest-serving-african-1716521> (accessed April 14, 2015).

⁹¹ "Rwandan President Paul Kagame to Run for Third Term in 2017," *Guardian* (January 1, 2016), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/01/rwanda-paul-kagame-third-term-official-constitutional-changes> (accessed September 24, 2017), and Ludovica Iaccino, "Rwanda: President Paul Kagame Lambasts US for Third Term Criticism," *International Business Times* (January 5, 2016), <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/rwanda-president-paul-kagame-lambasts-us-third-term-criticism-1536036> (accessed July 21, 2016).

Nicolas Van de Walle point out that political transition in Africa is molded by the *ancien* regime's neopatrimonial features. According to them, the means for political participation and competition are affected by the incumbent regime, which influences the extent of people's inclusion in politics and determines, to a significant extent, the nature of democratic transition and consolidation.⁹² In other words, constraints on democratic freedoms, uncompetitive elections, political stalemates, and so forth, can be directly attributed to the actions of the incumbent regime that oversees and guides the processes of political transition.

The consistent tensions which Africa's permanent presidency syndrome injects into the systems makes clear that the emergence of a consolidated democracy on the continent is not likely to occur through a hurried end to dictatorship or a carefully managed transition in a competitive one-party and even multiparty system. In this regard, the character of the democratization process in Africa raises an important general question about the credibility of African leadership. Today, the African political scenario depicts an impossible task to remove underperforming leaders, on the one hand, due to the lack of free and fair elections, and, on the other hand, due to the voice of the people having no representation in a parliament whose members belong to the ruling class. Indeed, the distortions in Africa seemingly result from the nonsymbiotic fusion of liberal democracy in the continent.

Liberal Democracy in Africa and the Crisis of Fusion

Although many African societies were believed to have practiced one form of democracy or another, today there seem to be many intellectual squabbles about the nature of the problems caused by the import of liberal democracy into Africa, leading to rigorous analysis, especially since the third wave of democratization. The problems stem from the failures to consolidate liberal democracy. The extant failures of liberal democracy in some African countries have further entrenched the argument that democratization is not just a process, but an alien product that the West imposes upon the South.⁹³ In other words, the disputation in this essay and among like-minded scholars is that liberal democracy cannot be adopted and applied hook, line, and sinker, and that many countries of Africa accepted the introduction of liberal democracy as an introjection—only to impress or be accepted by the West. This is because, after the Cold War ended, it was no longer fashionable in the West to continue to prop up repressive regimes in Africa merely because they were friendly and antagonistic to the Eastern Bloc. In that vein, foreign aid was the leverage used by the West to coax many of these developing countries to acquiesce to the practice of liberal democracy. To achieve that end, the West mandated and

⁹² Michael Bratton and Nicolas Van de Walle, "Neopatrimonial Regimes and Political Transitions in Africa," *World Politics* 46, no. 4 (1994): 453.

⁹³ Cheru, "The Silent Revolution," 166.

emphasized the need for democratic reform, making it clear that one-party regimes lacking in popular participation constituted a serious threat to economic development. Therefore, a shift toward pluralism, public accountability, respect for the rule of law, human rights, and liberalization of the economy was a *sine-qua-non* for obtaining aid and achieving bilateral relations with the West. Hence, many developing countries, with special reference to Africa, decided to acquiesce to liberal democracy, many of the efforts being channeled toward the formation of political parties and the conduct of elections. However, since the turn of the millennium, some of these countries' democracies have been truncated and are in utter chaos. This is because, as we argue, open resort to political conditionality by the West not only may pre-empt distinctive local paths to democracy,⁹⁴ but also might undermine the democratic process itself. Today, it is believed that the African post-colonial state has come to accept superimposed democracy only as a matter of survival.

Furthermore, the assumption that political parties are the appropriate framework for political representation and competition is disputable because, as Africa has shown, single-member constituencies are barely suited for societies which are federations of ethnic groupings and nationalities.⁹⁵ From observation, the communal nature of a typical African society shapes the peoples' perception of self-interest, their freedoms, and their place in the eclectic whole. It is evident, therefore, that the usual political assumptions and constructs of liberal democracy are insignificant in the African socio-political context, hence, the failures in efforts toward the consolidation of liberal democracy in some African countries and the resultant distortions on the continent. If analyzed and situated within the African socio-political structure, some scholars have argued that Western liberal democracy is a problematic legacy and its practice is complicated⁹⁶ for Africa. The inherent problems of democracy in Africa are a validation of Jorge Dominguez and Anthony Jones's thesis that the construction of liberal democracy is difficult, and historically rare, precisely because the negotiations inherent in such a project are neither readily created nor easily sustained.⁹⁷

Consequently, the spread of liberal democratic institutions in Africa has been accompanied by a democratic deficit and great power domination at the international level, such that the state has remained dysfunctional and increasingly unable to cope with an ever-larger number of transnational

⁹⁴ Venter, "Democracy and Multiparty Politics," 2.

⁹⁵ Ake, "The Unique Case," 224-239.

⁹⁶ Large and Sisk, *Democracy, Conflict and Human Security: Pursuing Peace in the 21st Century*, chap. 1.

⁹⁷ Jorge Dominguez and Anthony Jones, eds., *The Construction of Democracy: Lessons from Practice and Research* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2007), 1.

⁹⁸ Ann Tickner, *Gendering World Politics: Issues and Approaches in the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 96.

⁹⁹ "The Collapse of the Liberal World Order," *Foreign Policy*.

forces⁹⁸ interference in the internal affairs of these countries.⁹⁹ Hobsbawm warned of the danger of reordering the world, when he opined that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are but one part of a supposedly universal effort to create a world order by “spreading democracy.”¹⁰⁰ In fact, not only did he abhor the spread of liberal democracy, but also he submitted that the idea is both quixotic and dangerous. According to him, the West erroneously thinks that liberal democracy, applicable in a (Western) standardized form, can succeed everywhere, remedy today’s transnational dilemmas, and, above all, guarantee peace.¹⁰¹ The reality is that there are very real-world policy implications and consequences pertaining to the export of the “democratic model” to countries throughout the globe. Notably, if liberal democracy thrives in the West, it is because Westerners have molded their institutions to fit its process. Its growth was the result of a transcendental progression that underwent adaptation and adjustments over a period of many years to enhance the process. It was never imposed in the West as it has been in Africa, whose people require a different pathway to socio-political and even economic development.

Today, the truth remains that importing and applying Western liberal democracy with exactitude has been part of the *raison d’être* why many countries in Africa have failed to consolidate liberal democracy. This is so because it is difficult for Africa to deconstruct a system it knows nothing about nor understands. The deconstruction and reconstruction of liberal democracy in Africa as both a historical and philosophical process must be framed within the logic of a broader epistemic ideological foundation of power struggles that has shaped and characterized African socio-political dynamics for over fifty years.¹⁰² All factors taken together, it becomes crucial for African scholars to interrogate the substance and meaning of liberal democracy.¹⁰³

As universally valid as liberal democratic values may be, they sometimes can be trumped by traditional sentiments, particularly when social change is rapid and unpredictable and homogenous societies are pushed to assimilate concepts within little time. As Cheru avidly expounds, Western interpretations of democracy suffer from the same flaw as Western interpretation of development,¹⁰⁴ meaning that the conceptualization and interpretation of democracy is not a universal constant. In other words, while for Western donors and leaders democracy means political liberation and pluralism, or multipartism laced with the principles of liberalism, within the extant disposition of African leaders, democracy means that their people bear no right to engage in further struggles or to ask further questions about their existential realities, let alone

¹⁰⁰ Hobsbawm, “The Dangers of Exporting Democracy.”

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Lumumba-Kasongo, “The Problematics of Liberal Democracy,” 1-3.

¹⁰³ Nkiwane, “The End of History,” 107.

¹⁰⁴ Cheru, “The Silent Revolution,” 166.

interrogate the legitimacy of the leaders—the new found democrats¹⁰⁵—but to simply embrace and obey their rule. Invariably, democracy finds its meaning only in the way in which it is put into operation or applied.¹⁰⁶

Accordingly, under certain conditions, governments have surfaced that were adjudged democratic because either the societies termed themselves democracies, or their actions conformed to a given tenet of democracy. For instance, leaders of the former Soviet Union often declared that their political system was democratic. Even today, the debate about who is practicing democracy, or otherwise, is ongoing between the People's Republic of China and the West. Although, these societies share the real test of providing “good governance” or expected public goods to their populations, it is difficult to determine what is distinctly common to these societies. Not only do several of them differ in many of their institutions, but also the members within any one of them differ in many ways. There probably is no single debatable issue in relation to which all of them would hold to the same position.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, the way in which the United States, Western Europe, and other advanced democracies practice and institutionalize liberal democracy is expected to exceedingly differ from how other civilizations and people practice it. In this regard, apologists for liberal democracy fail to take into consideration the fact that democracy, no matter how and where it is practiced, must constitute a perpetual process in which the people themselves must define and redefine democracy in light of the problems and challenges confronting them,¹⁰⁸ versus in keeping with the rigidly fixated principles and institutions of Western liberal democracy.

A critical survey of how liberal democracy is practiced in the developing world, especially Africa, depicts that the institutionalization of liberal democracy has surreptitiously sown more discord and disorder than peace and development. The African socio-political scenario depicts the argument that the template of Western liberal democracy is not “one-size fits-all.”¹⁰⁹ For instance, Ake posited that individualism, which is a core precept of Western liberal democracy, is in conflict with existing African norms, because

¹⁰⁵ Abubakar Momoh, “Democracy and Sustainable Development in Nigeria,” in *Civilian and Security Agencies Relationship: Role of Military in Consolidating Democracy in Nigeria*, Proceedings of a National Workshop, Part II, ed. Sani Mohammed (Abuja, Nigeria: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2006), 13.

¹⁰⁶ Large and Sisk, *Democracy, Conflict and Human Security: Pursuing Peace in the 21st Century*, chap. 1

¹⁰⁷ Alfred De Grazia, *Political Behavior: Volume One of the Elements of Political Science*, new rev. ed. (New York: Free Press, 1965), chap. 9.

¹⁰⁸ Yoshikazu Sakamoto, “Civil Society and Democratic World Order,” in *Innovation and Transformation in International Studies*, ed. Stephen Gill and James Mittelman (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 208.

¹⁰⁹ Abdoulaye Bathily, “Democracy in West Africa: An Appraisal,” in *Peace Building and Democracy in West Africa*, ed. The Sahel and West African Club (Cotonou, Benin: Forum for Political Parties, the Media and Civil Society, 2005).

Africans interact on a communal basis.¹¹⁰ Thus, liberal democracy assumes individualism, whereas there is little in Africa; it assumes the abstract universalism of legal subjects, which is applicable only in Africa's urban areas. Again, political parties have no relevance in African societies where interactions are basically associational and where the principal groups are interest groups. Thus, Africa's adoption of liberal democracy in exactitude is tantamount to structural distortions and chaos.

It is important to note that the view of this essay is not that liberal democracy is bad for Africa, because the concept of democracy itself is not alien to the continent; some of its forms and institutions existed in pre-colonial African societies, and still are practiced in some rural areas today. For instance, before colonial and independent Africa, there was a system of checks and balances. Before implementing public decisions, scores of rulers and kings had to consult with community leaders, a council of tribal or clan elders, who were elected by the community. By encouraging popular participation through consultation as well as preserving peace and societal unity through consensus as a form of dispute resolution, African leaders further legitimized their rule.¹¹¹ These practices further suggest that traditional rulers in African societies, as opposed to African practice of Western liberal-style leadership, could not enforce obedience without communal consent or input. Some of these democratic traits of African indigenous traditional institutions and practices have been sustained, even in the post-colonial era (e.g., the community palaver and the Botswana *kgotla*).¹¹²

Ergo, the disposition of this essay is that the reason why liberal democracy is failing in Africa, or why Africa is failing under it, is because Africa is democratizing in an international context in which there apparently is no allowance for the fact that liberal democracy is a historical product. For it to work in Africa, it must address the character of the state, its institutions, and social systems with the aim to transform and transcend them.¹¹³ Also, it must be carefully nurtured, as democratic values (especially political tolerance) cannot be inculcated in its societies overnight.¹¹⁴ In keeping with this disposition,

¹¹⁰ Thomson, *An Introduction to African Politics*, 241.

¹¹¹ Sahr J. Kpundeh, ed., "The Movement toward Democracy in Africa," in *Democratization in Africa: African Views, African Voices* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1992), 6.

¹¹² "Palaver" refers to a dialogue in which everyone expresses an opinion, after which the minority opinion complies with the majority position, thereby making the final decision unanimous. In many parts of Africa, legislative sessions and debates resemble traditional palaver processes. A *kgotla*, on the other hand, acts like a judicial organ to hear and resolve disputes. With powers to dethrone chiefs, colonial governments employed it as a check and balance against the former. Originally handling cases involving adult males, it now caters to women, younger men, and minority groups.

¹¹³ Okechukwu Ibeanu, "The State, the Market and Democracy: Revisiting Some of Ake's Political Work," in *Ake and African Development: Selected Issues*, ed. Andrew O. Efemini (Port Harcourt, Nigeria: Paragraphics, 2002), 75.

¹¹⁴ Venter, "Democracy and Multiparty Politics," 3.

liberal democracy, no matter where and how it is practiced, must take into consideration extant peculiarities of its local base, and its application must reflect the values, culture, and social action of any society or nation practicing it, with a focus on the eclectic whole.¹¹⁵

Conclusion

In the few arguably stable African democracies, not only is democratic culture failing to take root, if not rolling backward, to the extent that they now are described as “democracies at risk,”¹¹⁶ but also what has been heralded as liberal democracy is failing to address political and socio-economic issues within. Among blames for this crisis are the crucial factors of how Africa practices democracy and how democracy was teleported into Africa, adopted, and implemented hook, line, and sinker, without recourse to the local socio-political dynamics of African societies. Consequently, scholars and policymakers, alike, must stake a great deal on whether Western institutions of liberal democracy are contextually viable in Africa, with special reference to developing responsive adaptations, including home-grown particular structures to suit individual countries. Regarding this, it is imperative that democratic consolidation not only should be based on African values and initiatives with local relevance, but also focused on restructuring and reforming key political institutions and structures such as political parties, national assemblies or parliaments, judiciaries, electoral bodies, and so on, in local terms, as an impetus to democratic sustenance. What is more, the importance of leaders and political elites cannot be overemphasized in promoting “the emancipation of thought,”¹¹⁷ consistent with the local peculiarities of each country’s socio-political base and dynamics. Africa is a paradox between what is expected of liberal democracy and its implications for social and economic conditions, such that the continent’s economic quagmire fuels concerns over liberal democracy as a guarantor of development. Many African masses fought for democracy in order to improve their material and socio-economic well-being qualitatively, but, in the contemporary times of multipolar growth juxtaposed with uncertainty about Africa’s strategic value, the reverse is the case. Pointedly, poor growth and value chain development, including weak economic competitiveness, also are drivers of today’s problem of democratic non-consolidation in Africa. This

¹¹⁵ Momoh, “Democracy and Sustainable Development in Nigeria,” 36.

¹¹⁶ Michael Bratton and Robert Mattes, “Support for Democracy in Africa: Intrinsic or Instrumental?” (Working Paper, no. 1, Afrobarometer 2003, p. 17), <http://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Working%20paper/AfropaperNo1.pdf> (accessed March 23, 2017).

¹¹⁷ Deng Xiaoping’s “emancipation of thought” refers to the jettison of rigid or obsolete thinking, enabling the proposal of new ideas and concepts that are consistent with social progress and the requirements of the times.

means that, for the ultimate success of Africa's fledgling democracies and the prevention of further relapse into despotism and dictatorship, democratization must be laced with stable economies that retain productive levels of industrialization, distributive growth, and economic well-being.

Finally, if pressed for suggestions, we would propose a modified form of independent representative democracy that combines indigenous democratic practices and core aspects of the liberal system, such as open democratic elections and public freedoms, to check the deep-rooted primacy of leaders and divest the states' monopoly on power for greater civil and political accountability. We envisage public election of epistocratic leaders not only endowed with the traditional allegiance or legitimation of the governed public that disincentivizes the neopatrimonial consolidation of power—as opposed to the transplanted or non-adaptive semi-French, British, or American presidential and parliamentary systems with a strong executive—but also sensitive to the agreed collective needs and aspirations of the people, which include the grievances of sundry social groups. Simply stated, we look toward elected leadership that is protective of the mode of government agreed upon by public consensus, and which applies itself to delivering just and efficacious governance that not only insures or underwrites social protection but also supports mass innovative entrepreneurialism. Stability would likely result, given that this model permits a healthy accommodation of intrinsic and instrumentalist considerations, projected not only to guarantee delivery of both political and economic goods, but also to precipitate diffuse commitment to democratic governance. If Western countries boasting a long history with democracy often advocate individual forms of democracy, African countries which have experienced only about six decades of independence ought to constantly reinvent their conception of democracy in terms of their traditions and local conditions, without becoming repressive, and so on. In short, there is the need to return to the drawing board. Africans must discuss how they wish to be governed, what ideas should inform governance, what social forces should take preeminence,¹¹⁸ and, above all, what types of political, socio-economic, and institutional reforms are necessary, in line with societal adjustments and local particularities. These are major concerns for liberal democracy in terms of the manifest capacity of the state to promote those conditions that generate citizen commitment to democratic permanence, rather than fleeting support for democracy alone that forecasts a democratic future that is hollow, shallow, weak, and uncertain, while many African societies persistently fall into chaos.

¹¹⁸ Momoh, "Democracy and Sustainable Development in Nigeria," 36.