

An Overview of Democratic Consolidation and Regression in Africa

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Abstract

Democratic rule in Africa has been characterized by uneasiness resulting from autocratic tendencies in some of the countries. From the 1990s and due to a host of factors, African countries began to experience new lease of democratization with high hopes which soon turned out to be an illusion arising from series of developments within and outside the continent. Against this background, this paper examines dimensions of democratic rule in Africa noting its tendencies towards consolidation and regression as it manifests in different countries as well as factors that are responsible for the observed trend. Data for the study is obtained from secondary sources through examination of copious literature on the subject and examining occurrences in different parts of the continent. It is concluded that the region experienced overall, though uneven and not substantial progress towards democratization. While some have experienced tendency towards backsliding, some others have experienced considerable growth in some of the indexes that promote democratic consolidation. On the aggregate however, the continent cannot be said to be making substantial progress towards consolidation. This may be due to a host of factors that include peculiar political environment of each country. It thus recommended that African leaders need to introduce reforms that would cut across the different facets of the continent and that will take into account the specific character of each African country rather than the adoption of a policy based on its success in a different socio-political environment.

Key words: Democracy, regression, consolidation, Africa

1. INTRODUCTION

Africa's journey to democratic rule has been characterized by uneasiness resulting from autocratic tendencies in the countries. Initially, struggles for democratic rule were fallout of the harsh socio economic and political terrain to which the citizens were subjected under colonial rule. Colonialism, apart from displacing the African culture and tradition also affected, negatively, autochthonous systems of administration. Commenting on the impact of colonialism on the continent, scholars (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2017; Nwakwo & Ocheni, 2012; Alemanyung, 2010) observed that Africa's connection and relationship with the West is an asymmetrical one which cost the continent positive and sustainable developments in the political, economic and social areas. The contradictions inherent in the colonial policies eventually gingered the natives to advocate for self-rule and independence for their territories. Thus, the rise in nationalist activities, especially, after the Second World War marked the first attempt by Africa and Africans for democratic self-rule. The gains of the nationalist struggles began to manifest with the granting of independence to these countries beginning from the early 1960s (Ghana was the first in 1957 while South Africa was the last to majority rule in 1991). The feat was, however, preceded by a host of political and

constitutional developments in preparation for independence. While independence came with high hopes, many Africans soon became disillusioned with the turnout of events after independence. This is because; many of the countries after independence soon degenerate into theatres of political turmoil as the experience of Nigeria between 1960 and 1966 showed. Many others developed into one party democracy with high authoritarian tendencies such as the case of Tanzania under Nyerere; Cot D'Ivoire which was ruled by Félix Houphouët-Boigny as a one-party state since independence in 1960 until 1990 (National Democratic Institute, 1997) and Ghana under Nkrumah where the CPP later became the only legal party. The cumulative impact of all these is truncation of democratic processes from the very beginning mostly through military coup d'état. According to Jega (2007), largely due to contradictions embedded in their colonial origin and the contradictions in the emergent post-colonial states, the military soon acquired the status of a highly politicized and politically active institution that seized control of their governments. The many effects of military government are well too known (Bailie, 2018; Jega, 2007). On the one hand, it led in some countries to the emergence of military political leaders who held on to power against all odds for several years as the case of Togo under Enyadema, Libya under Ghadaffi among others. On the other hand, it was characterised in some countries such as Nigeria by coups and counter coup, transitional politics or transitions without end (Yaqub, 2004; Ohuoha and Fadakinte, 2002; Diamond et al, 1997). Above all, militarism or military culture, characterized as it were, by insensitivity to plight of the masses, insubordination to political authorities, resolve to violence rather than dialogue as a means of resolving disputes and military 'jack boot mentality' (Dunmoye, 2003) became a major legacy of military rule in Africa. Consequently, rather than engender development, military rule across Africa resulted in little or no development, serious political turmoil, and instability, various forms of violence as well as squandering of state resources (Bailie, 2018; Boafor-Arthur, 2008). It is axiomatic to note that this scenario not only created disdain for military rule across Africa but also, along with other factors spur the agitations for democratization across the continent.

Africa's second journey towards democratization, or what Southhall (2003) has termed as 'Africa's second democratisation' which began in the early 1990s, cannot be divorced from the wave of democratization which was already sweeping across continents. For example there were moves towards democratization in Spain and other Mediterranean countries (Western Europe) in the second half of 1970s, it occurred in Latin America in the 1980s, though less far reaching, as well as in Eastern Europe between 1989 and 1991 (Muhammad, 2016). This development within the contemporary international system coupled with the resilience of African people made the democratization ferment inevitable on the continent (Rakner and Skage, 2011; Jega 2007; Saliu, 2004). Thus, beginning from the 1990s, African countries began to experience new lease of democratization manifesting in the collapse of Apartheid rule in South Africa in 1991 and democratization in Ghana in 1992 among others. However, it is not just enough that Africa should democratize; democracy needs to be sustained and consolidated on the continent and this imperative constitutes the new challenge before Africa's emerging democracies. In other words, what is the state of democracy on the continent? What are the factors that help or can help in consolidating democracy? What are the tendencies that make these countries susceptible to democratic reversal or regression? Probing into these issues which forms the crux of this research becomes necessary considering the fact that while the democratization wave was, astonishing and promising in the continent from the early 1990s, unfolding realities in some of the countries have revealed a situation of dashed hopes.

2. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

a. Democracy, Democratic Consolidation and Democratic Regression

Symbolically, democracy is, currently, the world's most beautiful bride. Indeed, the astonishing popularity of democracy in the world today has made it attractive to people of different ideological inclinations. Ogunsanwo (2003) observed that if the concept were not

universally attractive; efforts to associate even the most dictatorial regime with it would not have taken place. In trying to explain the popularity, Ogunsanwo also noted that this can be traced to the etymology of the two Greek words that combine to form the concept. That is, *demo* which means people and *kratia* which means rule. Together they form peoples' rule or rule by the people. Apparently, Ogunsanwo (2003) was referring to the era of direct democracy in which all free born meets in a face to face assembly to discuss issues that affect the state. Although the significance of this epoch lies in the appreciation of the majority decision making content of democracy which accounts for its popularity till date, increased sophistication and developments within the states soon make this practice unworkable thereby necessitating the need for representation. Modern democracy, therefore, means representative democracy, in which case, citizens surrender part of their rights of decision-making to elected representatives who act on their behalf and are accountable to them (Muhammad, 2006a).

It must be admitted that, irrespective of nuances in the development of democracy or its appropriation by different ideologies, contemporary world has been characterised by the ascendancy of the liberal variant of democracy or what Huntington (1995) has dubbed as 'democracy third wave' beginning from the 1990s. This ascendancy was vehemently defended by Fukuyama (2002a), when he observed that in the early 90s, the world did not just witness the end of the cold war but the end of history *per se*. That is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of western liberal democracy as the final form of human government (Fukuyama, 2002a). Although Fukuyama later recognized that history has begun again (Fukuyama, 2002b) especially with rise of militant Islamism to challenge western ideas, this has not in any way diminished the popularity of liberal democracy among countries.

In trying to understand the concept of democracy, there have been a profusion of meanings among scholar. But two trends can be observed in the various attempts. First is the tendency to conceive of democracy by noting its essential attributes that includes promotion of the rule of law, fundamental human rights, and sustained citizens' participation in the political process, free flow of information as well as recognition of the people as the source of sovereignty (Jega, 2007; Alemika 2000). Second is the tendency to define democracy in relation to the conduct of periodic elections or some set of procedures for choosing representatives (Bratton and De Wall, 1997). In whichever way it is looked at, democracy is a process of enthroning political freedom for economic and social betterment of the citizens. It is a unique process or system of making and arriving at collective and binding decisions through institutions that recognized and guaranteed the attainment of social, political and economic aspirations of the society and incorporating the individual citizen as a major player (Osaghae 2011; Muhammad, 2006a). If this is so, then it is not enough for a society to democratize but conscious efforts must be made at ensuring that it is consolidated. What then is democratic consolidation?

Democratic consolidation implies strengthening the process, stability, depth and practice of democracy. While democracy is a process, democratic consolidation implies the end of that process. This is not to suggest that democratic consolidation is an end in itself or that democracy will grow to an extent that it requires no further development. Rather, it suggested that the practice of democracy would have become standardized and characterized by certain features or elements that showed growth, strength and stability in the political system. This assures a higher level of confidence in the political system both from the citizens and from external environment. The critical question at this juncture, therefore, is when is democracy consolidated or what are the indices of democratic consolidation?

As a first word it is apposite to state that, there have been considerable writings on democracy and democratic consolidation in Africa with focus on either Africa as a whole or on a particular country in the continent. However, majority of these writings have not devoted serious attempt towards espousing on the concept or factors that aid or assist democratic

consolidation. Rather, most have delved on processes leading to enthronement of democracy, workings of some democratic institutions or a passive allusion to democratic consolidation (Muhammad, 2006b; Mato, 2006; Ujo, 2006). Although this may seem a general trend, it also reflects the extent of conceptual logjam that characterised the concept. All the same, there have been few attempts at capturing the essence of democratic consolidation.

In his work, Umar (2006) observed that it is about regime maintenance in such ways as to prevent breakdown of political institutions and processes. For Onuoha (2010), democratic consolidation entails progressive improvement in the procedural, structural and institutional capacity of an emergent democratic state to create and promote conditions that generate support for democratic permanence and sustainability. A common denominator of Umar and Onuoha's views is that democratic consolidation is about ensuring stability of democratic process both in its institutional and behavioural contexts as well as avoiding tendencies that will not only stunt the growth but also lead to decline in the quality of democracy. The above views are in consonance with that of Ogundiya (2010) when he observed that the idea of democratic consolidation is about addressing the challenges of regime stabilisation and providing answer to the question as to when democracies are secure from breakdown. It also needs to be stated that contemporary scholars have often rely on Colliers categorisation of approaches to democratic consolidation (Ogundiya 2010; Onuoha 2010, Okotie, 2008). Accordingly, three approaches were discerned: actor centred which focussed on willingness of actors to act within democratic rules; event centred which has to do with elections or constitutional ratification and; the institutional consisting of both internal and external factors. On the one hand, the internal factors focus on the degree of institutionalization - strengths of democratic institutions-, while on the other hand, an external approach concentrates on the duration of new political approach and the extent of meaningful changes - succession - therein. However, a broad classification of Collier's arguments still leads us to the behavioural and institutional requirements or contexts of democratic consolidation. To this extent, democratic consolidation can be seen as associated with regime legitimacy and nurturing the practice of democracy to attain high level of institutionalisation that makes democratic reversal or a relapse to authoritarian rule very difficult, if not almost impossible (Onuoha, 2010). It was also with this frame of mind that Linz and Stepan (1996) observed that democracy is consolidated when democratic practice, accepted by citizens and elites alike is "the only game in town". This to them involved three elements. First, behaviourally in which case no group is seriously engaged in secession or regime change. Second, attitudinally whereby most people accept that democracy is the best form of government (not only does nobody try to change the regime, nobody particularly wants to). Third is constitutionally. In this case, democracy is consolidated when all the major organs of the state act according to the constitution. While admitting that election alone cannot guarantee democratic consolidation, they further identified five conditions that must be present for democracy to be consolidated. These are, freedoms that are necessary for development of civil society; an autonomous and valued political society (existence of parties, elections, legislatures, etc.); rule of law; usable and efficient bureaucracy (i.e. state capacity) and; an institutionalized economic society to mediate between the state and the market (Linz and Stepan, 1996).

From the reviews above, it is safe to argue that democratic consolidation is a process of ensuring stability and continuity in democratic administration which entails two broad dimensional challenges. First, positively building on issues and elements that ensure continuity of democratic regimes and second, avoiding negative tendencies in democratic practice. These issues, by which we can access the extent of consolidation or regression, in broad terms include, expanding the political space, promoting the rule of law and ensuring accountability in governance and, institutionalisation of democratic structures. How these issues have played themselves out in Africa forms the focus of the next section.

b. Dimensions of Democratic Rule in Africa

Democratic rule in Africa has been met simultaneously with lots of optimism and at the same time, pessimism. This reflects the uncertainties that becloud the practice of democracy on the continent flowing from the array of progressive manifestations of challenges bedeviling it. This uncertainty is also reflected in scholars' perception of the democratic ferment on the continent. As Wiseman (1999) have observed, the widespread democratization that swept across Africa during the early 1990s gave rise to varied scholarly assessments which can simply be categorized in relation to the extent to which they presented more or less optimistic or pessimistic views of the significance of what has taken place. While "demo-pessimists" saw the changes as superficial and likely to prove ephemeral, "demo-optimists" viewed it as having important and longer-term consequences for governance on the continent (Wiseman, 1999). For instance, against the backdrop of emerging conflicts in some of Africa's new democracies, Lafenwa (2009) had observed that the democratization project is facing a lot of challenges in Africa. According to him, democratic reversal rather than democratic consolidation is imminent in most African states especially with the coups in Guinea, Mauritania and Madagascar; flawed electoral processes in Nigeria, Kenya, and Zimbabwe, conflicts in Congo Democratic Republic, Sudan, Cote D'Ivoire as well as political repression and social dilemmas in Cameroon. He thus concluded that the fluctuating fortunes of democracy in Africa cannot be doubted. Added to this was the coup in Egypt which has recorded mixed feelings, the crisis in Southern Sudan and unsettled discords in Libya. But this strong conclusion cannot be sustained for long given the fact that the existence of some of these tendencies cannot be out rightly seen as amounting to democratic reversal although, they may precipitate such. Much in this context depends on the ability of the states to curtail these tendencies in sustained and progressive manner. While it may be noted that the advent of military coups summarily amounts to destabilization of all democratic structures, the reversal in some countries, of military incursions back to democratic practice - Togo in 2005; Nigeria in 1999; Ghana in 1992 and a host of others - through sustained protests from the citizens, zero tolerance for unconstitutional takeover of power by the African Union, ECOWAS and other sub regional bodies further strengthened the determination of Africans to avoid democratic reversal. In addition, African countries have, in the new millennium, made remarkable strides and commitments towards good governance and promoting democracy in Africa which reflects their recognition of centrality of democratic rule to the social, political and economic progress of Africa. A case in point is the 2002 declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance by the African Union (AU). But as already noted in this work, contemporary Africa is confronted with the two broad challenges of ensuring democratic consolidation on the continent while at the same time, avoid democratic reversal. These two broad challenges are encapsulated in the three broad themes which are discussed below.

c. Expansion of the Political Space:

Expansion of the political space in Africa involves organizing free and fair election, fair process of inter party competition, an unbiased electoral umpire and tolerance of public opinion and or opposition including press freedom. By virtue of some international conventions and the resilience of Africans for democratic rule, most constitutions in the continent have incorporated the right to vote. The implication of this is that these countries hold periodic elections which represent the minimum standard for the enthronement of democracy. However, the extents to which these elections count have remain a big challenge for most of the countries. In other words, theoretically, African countries are gradually advancing in terms of multi-party periodic elections, but these elections have not been free from state interference. Examples of this situation abound in most democracies in Africa. The large-scale electoral disputes that followed each election on the Continent and host of electoral violence attest to this. For example, following its 2007 general elections, Kenya

experienced widespread violence that left approximately 1,100 people dead and more than 600,000 displaced from their homes (IFES, undated). Similarly, Nigeria's 2007 election has remained one of the most widely disputed in the country. This is not to suggest that all elections in Africa have been on the negative side, at least, observer groups often rate the conduct of most elections high. Equally in Senegal after the 2012 election, the government conceded defeat to a younger rival. However, as Mapuva (2013) observed, election periods in Africa are a time of despair for contesting candidates and the generality of citizenry whose efforts to seek new leadership for their respective countries have been a worthless effort in recent years. This submission cannot be divorced from the common thinking that electorates in Africa are voting without choosing.

In Africa's democracies, efforts have been made by some governments either through the constitution or other forms of legislation to incorporate those elements that amount to enhancing democratic space. For instance, in Ghana, Chapter 1 section 2 (1) of the constitution went to the extent of institutionalizing political opposition in parliament by mandatorily ensuring that one of the deputy speakers is appointed from the opposition party. This is different from the case in Nigeria where opposition parties either exist as minority parties in the legislature or co-opted in a government of National Unity by the national executive. In terms of Press Freedom, Lindberg and Zhou (2009) noted that the Ghanaian media is flourishing with numerous new newspapers, an increasing readership and a strong growth of independent radio stations discussing policy and scrutinizing politicians. To this Boakye (2006) added the vibrancy of the Ghanaian Civil Society Organisations. Commenting on the state of freedom on the Continent, Freedom House in one of its reports noted that the broad trend during the past quarter century has been one of increased freedom and institutional improvement, though setbacks remain all too common (Freedom House, n.d.). The implication of this is as noted by Ladhu (2017), that Africa has a mixed experience in terms of freedom. For instance, while Ghana may be doing well in terms of press freedom, despite the passage and existence of a Freedom of Information (FOI) Act in Nigeria, the country has remained partially free in terms of press freedom and citizens' access to information. Where this trend is allowed to continue the likelihood of democratic reversal becomes high especially considering centrality of a wider democratic space to the sustenance of democracy.

d. Promoting the Rule of law and Strengthening Accountability in Governance:

Larry Diamond was perhaps right when he observed in relation to African countries that since most states lack any semblance of a rule of law and norms of accountability that bind the conduct of those in government, their societies have fallen prey to massive corruption, nepotism, and the personal whims of a tiny ruling elite (Diamond, 1998). Consequently, the presence of these tendencies has encouraged conflict bordering on struggle for accumulation thereby threatening democratic basis of the societies. Core indices of this element of democratic consolidation include equality of citizens, fundamental human rights and constitutionalism, combating corruption and, carrying the people along. A holistic assessment of sub-Sahara African countries reveal that the region lags behind other countries of the world in rule of law. This is because, despite on-going reforms in several of these countries, there have not been adequate checks on the powers of the executive. This point was underscored by International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IIDEA) when it observed that State legitimacy is undermined when the judiciary does not act as a positive force for social change, with considered independence and in a manner that promotes ethical political leadership (IIDEA, 2016). Also, there is poor government accountability as well as weak and inefficient court system. For instance in Ghana and Kenya, while the countries have performed creditably well in other areas highlighted above, administrative efficiency and corruption are still a problem. In South Africa, it was a mixture of progress and regression as the country, though with an open government, has relatively weak control over executive authority and in addition, has a slow criminal justice system.

Although Nigeria, like some other countries, established anti-corruption agencies such as the ICPC and EFCC to help tackle the menace of corruption, however, the efficiency of some of these agencies have increasingly come under question (Muhammad, 2011) especially in terms of influence of politics.

e. Institutionalization of Democratic Structures

Democracy rests on the existence of institutions. These include institutions of the state such as the Executive, Legislature and the Judiciary whose existence derives from the constitution as well as non-formal institutions such as Political Parties and organized Civil Society Groups. In Africa, the existence of these institutions has largely been affected by a hovering military influence on the societies. This hovering military influence derives from the pervasiveness of military rule and authoritarian regimes across the continent prior to the democratization wave in the late 1980s and 1990s. As noted by Carbone (2007), out of 46 African countries before the democratization wave of late 80s and early 1990s, 11 were military regimes while 29 were under different autocratic one-party regimes. 1 (South Africa) was under racial oligarchy while only 5 were practicing what he called 'inclusive multipartism' (Carbone, 2007). The effects of this state of affairs on the continent, with regards to the development of democratic institutions both at the formal (state) and informal levels are legion, notwithstanding the recent pervasiveness of multiparty democracy on the continent. First, the legislative arm is usually the most affected institution at moments of disruption of democratic process. This is because, while others maintain their existence even in perverted forms, the legislature is completely eclipsed. In authoritarian one-party states for instance, activities of the legislature are completely regimented by the ruling party while under military regimes, it lost its existence completely. This situation also applies to non-formal institutions which lost its existence, in the case of political parties or activities circumscribed by the state in the case of Civil Society Organisations. In which ever context or manner this occurs, the implications are that, it affects capacity of the affected institutions to function effectively much as the psyche of the citizens is negatively affected. It should be noted that, consolidation of democracy not only requires the existence of these institutions over a period of time but also, developed capacity to function effectively and efficiently, independence or absence of interference in their affairs as well as access by the people to their representatives. Except in Kenya where the constitution not only made the National Assembly open to the public who wish to undertake a familiarization tour or to attend the House sittings but as well mandated that members of the public be facilitated to freely attend and listen to parliamentary business, whether legislative or committee either as individuals or groups, most other legislative assemblies in the rest of Africa largely lack the capacity to function effectively. In Ghana, limited resources for the legislature, weak capacity of the parliamentary service and, a high turnover among MPs, are part of what created a weak parliament (Lindberg and Zhou, 2009). This is also the case in Nigeria where legislators have been lamenting the weak capacity of the legislative institution especially in relation to the executive arm (Nnamani, 2006a; Nnamani, 2006b; Ray, 2004) in addition to high turnover rate.

Although the judiciary in most African states is independent as provided for by their constitutions, in practice however, judges are still vulnerable to influence from the executive. This situation could be linked to the fact that members of the judiciary are appointed by the president, though based on some criteria. In some countries such as Kenya, Nigeria and Zimbabwe, the president is required to do this after consultation with the Judicial Service Commission (JSC). Unfortunately, members of the JSC are also appointed by the government which places question mark on the ability of members of the JSC or the Judiciary itself to be independent. The proliferation of violence and conflicts before and after election (perpetrated in most cases by the ruling party) to some extent may be seen as a reflection of the lack of impartial judiciaries to interpret and adjudicate electoral disputes. This is not to suggest that all judicial institutions in Africa have been ineffective. For instance, since 1999 when Nigeria returned to democratic rule, the judiciary, through its various election tribunals,

has done creditably well in resolving some knotty electoral cases (see, Mbamalu, 2012; Iyinbo, n.d.). However, on an aggregate, the judiciary appeared to have been compromised as reflected in the wide spread of electoral violence and conflicts.

In the case of political parties, a great deal of internal democracy is required which when transfused into the larger political arena gives democracy meaning. By virtue of its diverse social base, political parties tend to be one of the institutions of democracy that engenders growth in the democratic process. This is because; it brings together people of similar ideological orientations or world view under the banner of a single system and working towards the achievement of common goals. However, this plurality in party organizations in most African countries have been their albatross. In other words, political parties in Africa are products of different historical, political and socio-economic circumstances that often influence their operation and character. The implication of this for their existence is that these parties are not developed and lack effective internal decision-making mechanisms. Decision making in this context often depends on the preference of the party leader.

Manning (2005) wrote that the most serious challenges to the long-term survival of democracy in many African countries are evident in the predominant characteristics of the parties and party systems that are emerging there. In other words, most African parties are elitist and internal democracy is affected by factors such as ethnic, regional or religious cleavages and patronage. This makes political parties to become spheres of influence for political leaders who use patronage and or sentiments to garner people around them. While noting the popularity of multiparty democracy in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region since the 1990s, Matlosa (2004) observed that key institutions of democracy such as political parties, in spite of allowing some modicum of intra party democracy, still lag behind in terms of entrenching and institutionalising democracy within their own internal operations. The Netherland Institute for Multiparty Democracy, NIMD (2004) has put forward four guides by which we can assess the extent of internal party democracy. These are:

- a) Is the party functioning according to established rules and procedures?
- b) Is decision making democratic and based on party statutes and current laws?
- c) Is there meaningful decentralization of the party's economic resources?
- d) Can the rank-and-file (the ordinary member of the party at the lowest level in the party hierarchy) exercise oversight over the party leadership? (cited in Patrick, 2012)

These four criteria has been compressed into two main features by Chisinga and Chigona (2010), to include 1) instruments that promote equal and open participation of political party members in such a way that interests are more or less equally represented; and 2) organization of free, fair and regular elections of internal party positions as well as candidates for representative bodies. It is axiomatic to note that political parties in Africa have not done well in any of the above features. Consequently, internal party politics in Africa is characterised by imposition of unpopular candidates on the electorate, internal squabbles, tacit animosity, political vagrancy and political tension in the body polity. The overall consequence of this scenario is a declining trust of citizens in political parties as Matlosa (2007) graphically illustrates in the case of South Africa. According to him, only 32% of citizens covered in his study trusted the ruling party while 60% do not have trust in them. Equally, while 12% had trust in the opposition parties, majority 76% do not have trust in them. This evidence suggests that declining trust in political parties as a result of lack of internal democracy cuts across the ruling / opposition party divide. Above all, all these are not without negative implications for the consolidation of Democracy on the Continent.

3. CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to assess the dimension of democratic rule in Africa in terms of consolidation and regression using aggregate data. From studies, it is apparent that the region experienced overall, though uneven progress towards democratization in the 1990s and the early 2000s. Sub regional and regional bodies such as the African Union have equally taken efforts to ensure democracy is firmly rooted on the continent. However, recent years have witnessed a fluctuating fortune in the advancement of democracy on the continent. While some have experienced backsliding such as Mali and Sudan, some others have experienced considerable growth in some of the indexes that promote democratic consolidation. But on the aggregate, the continent cannot be said to be making gradual progress towards consolidation. This may be due to a host of factors that include peculiar political environment of each country. Beyond this, some other plausible arguments could be advanced. These include the fact that Africa may not be ready for democracy at the time the countries were adopting it. As noted earlier, the democratisation wave swept across Africa in the 1990s and early 2000. At that period, most countries in Africa had a sudden transition from military or other forms of autocratic regimes to democracy. But central to successful democratic practice is a democratic mindset and the existence of strong institutions for aggregating plurality of opinion and resolving conflicts. Given the background of most African countries, these are conspicuously absent. On the one hand, there is lack of democratic mindset by the leaders and even followers whose psyche has been affected by long years of autocratic rule. Developing a democratic political culture as such, is something that could not be easily imbibed. On the other hand, most democratic institutions have had their existence conscripted. Most are therefore largely underdeveloped to assume a new role under democratic practice. The fact is, there was dearth of experienced hands to man and manage the emerging democratic institutions. This situation of inexperienced hands reflects in not knowing what to do or how to do it. The end result is the exhibition of tendencies that run contra to democratic practice.

Another factor that is worth considering is the character of emerging democratic leaders. Traits and characters of leaders exercise great influence on leadership style and administration much as it has potential to make or mar the administration. In Africa, many leaders have their background rooted in authoritarianism. Jerry Rawlings of Ghana, Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, Faore Gnassingbe Eyadma of Togo among others are former military rulers. Quite a number are autocrats who transformed into civilian Presidents. But they all have one thing in common: Strong and undemocratic tendencies. This derives from their background as former dictators. It therefore appears boring to them and difficult to follow the democratic routine in doing things. More so, they seem not to be used to plurality of opinion and values of compromise which democracy entails. They therefore continue more often than not on the autocratic pattern which they have been used to. Unfortunately, even leaders who emerge after them often find it convenient to follow in their footsteps in terms of dereliction of democratic ethos. This coupled with prime of place for Presidents in the ruling party hierarchy ensures that political parties exist as an extension of the Presidency.

Third, democratization is political reform but it has not been accompanied by commensurate economic reforms. While liberal democracy is triumphantly gaining root, liberal economic policies that would address endemic poverty, rising unemployment and economic deprivation of citizens are not in place. This makes citizens to be vulnerable to undemocratic tendencies if that is the next available 'social insurance' that would guarantee their survival. In this context, democratic practice becomes threatened while propensity of reversal increases. The dwindling fortune of democratic practice in Africa is a reflection of the prevalence of these vices.

Taken as a whole, it goes without saying that African countries and indeed African leaders need to introduce a host of reforms that would cut across the different socio-economic and political facets of the continent. Such reforms must take into account the specific character of each African country rather than the adoption of a policy based on its

success in a different socio-political environment. Also important is the fact that a commensurate political will to make things work is required from the leaders and the followers.

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