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Contrasting Dynamics of Democracy and Authoritarianism in Sub-Saharan Africa: Historical, Institutional, Judicial, and Sociopolitical Factors

Abstract: This paper examines the current dual political system in Sub-Saharan Africa, where democracy exists side by side with some element of autocracy. It looks at the varying perspectives of history, institutions, judicial, and socio-political factors that all contribute towards influencing regimes' outcomes across the region. Colonial and post-colonial eras have observed the birth of different state structures, often centralized, exclusionary, and resistant to diverse governance. These structures have played a significant role in nation-building. The paper also explores how socio-political factors like international influence, economic backwardness/progress, and grassroots mobilization can play a part in shaping regime outcomes. Consequently, the paper explains the diverse political developments observed across African states, contributing to broader debates on governance, state legitimacy, and democratic transitions in postcolonial contexts.

Keywords: Political regimes, Sub-Saharan Africa, Democratization, Authoritarianism, Colonial legacy, Governance and state-building, Political transitions, Democratic consolidation, Civil society

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Introduction

Africa boasts diverse political trajectories among its member states, showing the continent's historical development and current challenges. The wave of independence swept through African states in the 1950s and 60s, and since then, most African states have seen their political paths shift from autocracy to democracy, to transitional governments, and what we might call a hybrid authoritarian regime.[2] While it can be said that many African states seem to have stabilized their democracy, some others are still traversing the lines between democracy and autocracy. The question that demands an answer is how Africa can ensure that democracy becomes stable across the continent. This multiplicity of political regimes that sway between democracy and autocracy has become a feature of African politics. This study aims to discuss the factors driving this multiplicity through a multidimensional analytical approach.

There is a need to consider three aspects of this discourse. Firstly, how historical legacies, especially colonial and postcolonial state development, influence the structure and logic of modern political regimes; secondly, the impact of institutional strength and integrity on fostering democratic resilience or supporting authoritarian continuation; and thirdly, the importance of sociopolitical factors, such as civil society activism, electoral mobilization, international involvement, and economic changes, in determining regime outcomes.[3]

The Sovereign National Conference held in the 1990s brought promises of democracy and political liberalization,[4] but unfortunately this promise is yet

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2 Crawford Young, *The Postcolonial State in Africa: Fifty Years of Independence, 1960–2010* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2012); see David Collier and Steven Levitsky, "Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research," *World Politics* 49, no. 3 (1997): 430; Christian Coulon, "Senegal: The Development and Fragility of Semidemocracy," in *Politics in Developing Countries: Comparing Experiences with Democracy*, ed. Larry Diamond , Juan Linz and Seymour Martin Lipset, 2nd ed. (Lynne Rienner, 1995), 493; d'Olivier Dabène, ed., *Amérique latine, les élections contre la démocratie?* (Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 2008).

3 Daniel Bourmaud, "Aux sources de l'autoritarisme en Afrique: des ideologies et des hommes," *Révue Internationale de Politique Comparée* 13, no. 4 (2006): 625–41, https://doi.org/10.3917/ripc.134.0625.

4 Bourmaud, "Aux sources de l'autoritarisme en Afrique."

to be fulfilled in parts of Africa, especially in West Africa, where even leaders elected by seemingly democratic means systematically bypass constitutional provisions to overstay their mandated terms.[5] This is often referred to as 'de-consolidating revisions' and is presented as legal reforms. However, the aim is often to extend a government's term in power, and this consequently weakens democracy safeguards and diminishes public trust in institutions. Such attempts have also been termed 'constitutional coups', which are characterized by the threat they constitute to the consolidation of democracy, and are often seen where institutional oversight mechanisms are weak and civil societies have their voices stifled. Although it might be said that constitutional coups have occurred several times in the regions that make up Africa, it is encouraging to note that the region of West Africa has the strongest record in refusing acceptance of such constitutional coups. By way of illustration, in 2006, the then President of Nigeria, President Olusegun Obasanjo sought to prolong his time in office through a bill that would enable him to serve three terms in office instead of two; however, the bill was rejected by the legislative arm of government.[6] Civic movements have played their own role in frustrating the efforts of leaders to perpetuate in power like in Burkina Faso, the Citizens' Broom (Le Balai Cito yen) movement, which happened in 2014, led to the ousting of President Compaore.[7] The Y'en, a Marre movement in 2011 in Senegal, led to the removal of President Abdoulaye Wade.[8] However, in Togo, President Gnassingbe Eyadema in December 2002 successfully changed the constitu-

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5 Paul Biya (Cameroon), Yoweri Museveni (Uganda), Denis Sassou Nguesso (Republic of Congo), Ismail Omar Guelleh (Djibouti), Pierre Nkurunziza (Burundi, deceased), Faure Gnassingbé (Togo), Alassane Ouattara (Ivory Coast), Alpha Condé (Guinea, ousted).

6 Bayo Wahab, "He Did Everything to Retain Power—Bugaje Debunks Obasanjo's 3rd Term Denial," *Punch Newspaper*, available at https://punchng.com/, accessed 22 September 2025.

7 See Michel Camau, "La disgrâce du chef. Mobilisations populaires arabes et crise du leadership," *Mouvements* 2, no. 66 (2011): 22–29; Marianne Saddier, "The Upright Citizens of Burkina Faso," Africa Is a Country, published 31 October 2014, https://africasacountry.com/2014/10/the-citizens-of-burkina-faso, accessed 23 September 2025.

8 Camau, "La disgrâce du chef. Mobilisations populaires arabes et crise du leadership"; Saddier, "The Upright Citizens of Burkina Faso."

tion, which contained a provision that the president was entitled to two terms of five years each. In effect, the president removed the limits imposed by law for him to remain in power.

For the good of democracy and sustaining its values, very robust, independent, and sincere civil societies and institutions must be prioritised over leaders with dictatorship tendencies in Africa. There is also a pressing need for academics and policy makers to study the causes of failures in our democratic settings. This requires analysing the broader and comparative historical context. This study contributes to ongoing debates about regime stability, change, hybridity,[9] democratic erosion, and the institutional bases of political accountability in Africa. It analyses why some regimes strengthen democratic governance while others regress into authoritarianism. Additionally, the discussion examines how internal and external actors can effectively promote democratic norms in environments characterized by political volatility and institutional fragility.

Historical Factors: Colonial Legacies and Post-Independence Trajectories

This topic can be examined from two perspectives: firstly, the European colonization era, and secondly, the postcolonial era. Speaking of colonization, it is worth noting that the European Colonial masters, regardless of ethnic realities, grouped and divided Africans, which have led to African states still battling for compatibility and political stability to this day. After gaining independence,

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9 The concept of hybrid regimes has gained significant scholarly attention over the past two decades. Levitsky and Way (2002) introduced the term "competitive authoritarianism" to describe regimes that combine formal democratic institutions with authoritarian practices. Their work highlighted how such regimes maintain the appearance of democracy while systematically undermining its foundations. Similarly, Diamond (2002) emphasized the emergence of "pseudo-democracies" or "electoral authoritarianisms," arguing that many regimes conduct regular elections that are neither free nor fair. See: Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 51–65, https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2002.0026; Larra Diamond, "Elections Without Democracy: Thinking About Hybrid Regimes," Journal of Democracy 13, no. 2 (2002): 21–35.

many African countries adopted the institutions introduced by their colonial masters, without any form of rethinking or amending; hence, just as the Europeans had ruled, the states remained centralized and undemocratic, with the people not adequately represented. On the other hand, the pre-colonial political/community structures were mostly preserved by the colonialists as agents of indirect rule. Most of these pre-colonial African structures were authoritarian in nature, but for the few that appeared to be democratic,[10] the colonialists came with their own style of leadership, which is centralized with a head of state/governor or by whatever name termed that controls most of the power, with often no checks and balances. This is another form of authoritarianism. The combination of these precolonial and colonial administrative methods all played a part in shaping the authoritarianism we witness in Africa. Britain introduced indirect rule in Nigeria; hence, it is no wonder that, since its independence, Nigeria has maintained a more decentralized administration, which has made it seamless for democratic transitions, though this democracy may not be described as perfect and is very much a work in progress. On the other hand, countries like Guinea and Angola that were administered by their colonial masters directly continued after their colonial era with fragile institutions and more authoritarian governments. Upon gaining independence, many African states chose to operate a one-party system which they felt would help them build national unity. African leaders like Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Modibo Keïta of Mali, Félix Houphouët-Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire abolished multi-party systems in their countries, establishing centralized governments, where the ruling party controlled all institutions.[11] The period between 1960 and the 1990s saw several coup d'états across African states, which introduced military regimes. Such regimes were a pure definition of autocracy, with democratic constitutions and institutions deposed, and the military leader becoming the head authority and law maker. These coups are usually rationalized as aiming to bring stability or

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10 Renske Doorenspleet and Lia Nijzink, eds., *Party Systems and Democracy in Africa* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137011718.

11 Doorenspleet and Nijzink, eds., *Party Systems and Democracy in Africa*.

fighting corruption, but more often than not they brought greater instability, cronyism and repression. Recently, the ghost of military coup d'états seem to be returning to Africa with a military man, Ibrahim Traore, still standing as the leader of Burkina Faso. Apart from Burkina Faso, countries like Côte d'Ivoire and Niger have recently experienced coup d'états, factors which often encourage these coups are the questions of the legitimacy of civilian government, which emerge from a seeming rigged process, poor governance and so on.[12]

Institutional Factors: Role of State Structures and Governance Mechanisms

Any nation striving to implement democratic principles, must establish strong political institutions. It is the characteristics of these political institutions that show whether a nation is following the democratic path or the autocratic path. The principle of separation of powers is essential to democracy; this ensures that power is not concentrated in one person or authority, thereby creating checks and balances. It is on the basis of such checks and balances that the power to make laws is given to the legislators, while the executive arm of government executes the laws and the judiciary administers the laws. These powers may not be concentrated in one person or authority. Outside that, there are also tiers of government, for example, federal, state, and local government. With every tier of government there are powers ascribed, and each functions within its own list. For example, under the Nigerian Constitution, there is an exclusive list for the federal government, a residual list for the states, and a concurrent list for the states and the federal government. Montesquieu explained this idea clearly and systematically in his work *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748). According to him, political freedom can only exist if power is checked by other powers; simply put, when powers are divided, it enables different authorities to supervise each other rather than submitting to one another. These checks

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12 Doorenspleet and Nijzink, eds., *Party Systems and Democracy in Africa*.

and balances are there to see that citizen's rights are not breached and that the polity remains stable. Another principle closely related to that of separation of power is the independence of institutions. Firstly, there cannot be a true separation of powers unless the arms of government (executive, legislature, and judiciary) are independent of each other politically and economically. Then there are crucial agencies of the executive that must also remain independent to ensure a stable democracy. For example, electoral commissions are essential, as there can be no stable democracy without free and fair elections conducted in line with the country's constitution and other relevant laws.[13]

Judicial Factors: The Impact of Judicial Institutions on Democratic Governance

The judiciary is called the last hope of the common man, as that is the avenue through which individuals in a state may enforce their rights, which may include political rights, and ensure that their voice is heard in a democracy. The importance of the judiciary in a democratic setting can never be overemphasized: it protects constitutional integrity, democratic accountability, and the principles of the rule of law. This is why judicial independence is crucial to the survival of democracy. The fragility of the judiciary in Sub-Saharan Africa has weakened democracy in the region**.** For example, in Togo, the deficiency of judicial independence significantly facilitated President Gnassingbé Eyadéma's constitutional amendment in 2002, which sought to prolong his tenure and consolidate authoritarian rule.[14]

In Nigeria, the executive's interference in the judiciary has always raised questions. O such question refers to the manner in which the former Chief Justice of Nigeria, Justice Onnoghen, was removed before the 2019 election, an

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13 For instance, The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 in its 2nd schedule contains the residual and exclusive lists. The Constitution also creates and empowers the different arms of Government.

14 Denis M. Tull and Claudia Simons, "The Institutionalization of Power in Africa: The Case of Togo," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 55, no. 2 (2017): 200.

action that many Nigerians still believe had a political undertone and sought to ensure that the ruling party kept control of the judiciary prior to the election at the time. Recently, the President of the Nigerian Bar Association, Mazi. Afam Osigwe, SAN, suggested that the needs of the judiciary should be contained in the budget and the funds handled by the judiciary itself, as that will reduce the judiciary's dependence on the executive.[15]

The judiciary is the body empowered to uphold free and fair elections, while also quashing any electoral victory obtained by fraud and other forms of irregularity. In fact, the judiciary is empowered to intervene in proceedings concerning elections, from the pre-election declaration of interests to the process of candidates' nominations by parties, and post-election matters.[16] Given that it is the job of the judiciary to interpret the laws guiding a state, it is also the task of the judiciary to interpret the law that outlines when a political office is vacant and prevents usurpers from occupying such an office.[17]

Ghana and Senegal demonstrate how independent judiciaries support the consolidation of democratic processes. Ghana's judiciary has consistently maintained transparent electoral procedures, fostering stable democratic governance. In Senegal, judicial rulings in 2011 backed civic movements like Y'en a Marre, ensuring electoral fairness and preventing any backsliding into authoritarianism.[18] Similarly, Senegal's judiciary played a pivotal role in 2011 by endorsing civic resistance against President Abdoulaye Wade's efforts to prolong his term, thereby strengthening democratic institutional norms.[19] Weak judi-

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15 Tosin Oyediran, "Judges Shouldn't Be Beggars, NBA President Slams Govs' Gift to Judges," *Punch Newspaper*, 16 August 2025, https://punchng.com, accessed 20 September 2025.

16 In Nigeria, for instance, the constitution and other relevant legislations have empowered different tribunals and courts to handle cases concerning the processes of an election, for example, Section 285(1) of The Constitution of The Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended created the National Assembly Election Tribunal.

17 Section 272(3) of The Constitution of The Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended grants the Federal High Court of Nigeria the power to determine when an office of a House of Assembly member, State Governor or Deputy Governor is vacant.

18 A. Carl LeVan, "Nigeria's Democratic Rollercoaster: Obasanjo's Third-Term Bid and Its Aftermath," *African Affairs* 114, no. 456 (2015): 346.

19 LeVan, "Nigeria's Democratic Rollercoaster."

ciaries often struggle to challenge constitutional abuses, allowing authoritarian practices to take hold. The 2002 constitutional revision under Eyadéma, which removed term limits, was enabled by a judiciary that accepted it, showing how a fragile judicial system can lead to such outcomes as authoritarianism.[20]

Where there is a weak judiciary, electoral irregularities often go unpunished; this will cause a public loss of confidence and interest in the electoral process and may lead to social unrest. Recent military coups in Mali and Burkina Faso exemplify concerns regarding electoral integrity, further aggravated by judicial shortcomings in safeguarding the fairness of electoral processes.[21] In Nigeria too, a secessionist group known as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) have used incidents of electoral malpractice, amongst other things, as an excuse to discourage people from participating in elections.[22]

Many courts across Africa face significant challenges, such as a lack of funding, limited expertise, and corruption, which hinder their ability to uphold democratic principles. The key issue is that underfunded courts often struggle to handle complex constitutional cases or to issue timely decisions, which ultimately weakens their role as defenders of democracy. When civil society and international partners back the judiciary, it becomes more effective. For example, civil society groups like Senegal's Y'en a Marre and Burkina Faso's Le Balai Citoyen have teamed up with judicial institutions to push back against authoritarian practices, which boosts the judiciary's impact.[23]

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20 LeVan, "Nigeria's Democratic Rollercoaster."
21 E. Gyimah-Boadi, "Africa's Waning Democratic Commitment," *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 1 (2015): 112.
22 Lawrence Njoku, "IPOB and Web of Election Boycott in the Southeast" *The Guardian Newspaper*, 18 February 2023, https://guardian.ng, accessed 25 September 2025.
23 Daniel Branch and Nik Cheeseman, "Populism and the African State," *Africa* 86, no. 1 (2016): 1–10; Alcinda Honwana, *Youth and Revolution in Tunisia* (Zed Books, 2013); A Gueye, "Y'en a Marre : « Le ras-le-bol » citoyen et la lutte pour la démocratie au Sénégal," *Politique africaine* 131, no. 3 (2013): 43–58; M Bamouni, "Le Balai Citoyen et l'insurrection populaire d'octobre 2014 au Burkina Faso," *Afrique contemporaine* 255, no. 3 (2015): 31–48; International Crisis Group, *Burkina Faso: Transition et tension* (Africa Report No. 223) (International Crisis Group, 2015).

The judicial institutions in countries like Ghana and Senegal deserve praise for their role in upholding democracy in their respective countries. However, unfortunately, many African countries are still afflicted with a very weak judiciary and are highly dependent on the executives. Such a case is Togo, where the judiciary upheld the constitutional coup that gave the president the ability to extend his term in office in 2002.[24] When the executives assume an authoritarian approach and the legislative arm becomes a mere rubber stamp, the masses should be able to turn to the judiciary. Unfortunately, in some Sub-Saharan African countries, the executive chooses what court orders to obey and which to ignore. The famous human rights lawyer from Nigeria, Femi Falana, SAN, decried that the late Muhammadu Buhari administration, which lasted from 2015 to 2023, saw more substantial disregard for court orders than even the country's military regimes.[25]

The judiciary does not only act as a check on the executive but also on the legislative arm, where they use their powers in a manner that does not meet the standards set by the law, for instance, the impeachment of Enyinnaya Abaribe by the Abia State House of Assembly was challenged in court for failing to meet the standards set by law.[26] The judiciary also partners civil societies and international groups to uphold the rule of law and democracy in a state.

The Role of Civil Society and Citizen Mobilizations in Political and Democratic Transformation

Civil society is a collection of organizations, pressure groups, associations and individuals outside government who make contributions to democratic processes by mobilization, advocacy, and citizen oversight. Such organizations

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24 Adewale Banjo, "Constitutional and Succession Crisis in West Africa: The Case of Togo," *African Journal of Legal Studies* 2, no. 2 (2008): 147–61, https://doi.org/10.1163/22109708-00202004.

25 Taiwo Adebulu, "Falana Asks Osinbajo to Stop Disobedience of Court Orders," https//www.thecable.ng//Falana-asks-osibanjo-to-stop-disobedience-of-court-orders/, accessed 6 August 2025.

26 *Abaribe v. Abia State House of Assembly* (2002)14 NWLR (pt 788) 466.

ensure that institutions are performing as they should and serving the needs of the citizens instead of just the leaders. The wave of protests that started in the early 2010s across the Maghreb and Mashreq countries, often called the "Arab Spring," clearly demonstrated civil societies' power to challenge political systems long seen as unchangeable.[27] The Citizen's broom (Balai Citoyen) movement in Burkina Faso as earlier mentioned is a perfect example: by rallying young people and putting consistent pressure on Blaise Compaoré's regime, it played a crucial role in the regime's collapse in 2014 after 27 years in power.[28] This shows what can be achieved by an organized, purposeful, and sincere civil society in pushing citizens' demands and holding the government accountable. Such movements are backed by the fundamental rights like the right to freedom and the press,[29] and the right to peaceful assembly and association.[30] Such rights are also contained in many international treaties, like Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. This freedom is also supported by regional agreements, such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. It is crucial that such organizations/bodies/societies remain peaceful and operate within the tenets of the law.

There is an obligation for states to allow the public to have access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, as enshrined in target 16.10 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as Aspiration 3 of the African Union's Agenda 2063, which further strengthens this legal and political duty. It is essential to note that civil society organizations have faced challenges in operating in certain African countries. In November 2023, the President of the Nigerian Labour Congress, who went to Imo State Nigeria to organize a peaceful protest for improvement of workers welfare, accused the Nigerian Police force of arresting him and handing him over to thugs, who consequently beat

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27 Michael Safi et al., "How the Arab Spring Engulfed the Middle East and Changed the World," *The Guardian*, 25 January 2021, https://guardian.ng, accessed 20 September 2025.
28 Ibid at n 4.
29 Section 39 (1) Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999.
30 Section 40 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999.

him up.[31] Several calls made by civil societies like the Nigerian Bar Association against President Bola Ahmed Tinubu of Nigeria's suspension of the democratically elected Government of Rivers State in 2025 fell on deaf ears, As a result of this act, the Nigerian Bar Association termed 'an alarming Breach of the Nigerian federal structure' refused to hold its Annual General Conference in Port Harcourt Rivers State as earlier scheduled.[32]

For an active civil society, there is a need for a free press; however, in certain parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, like Eritrea and Rwanda, the press is still heavily regulated, and the voices of the masses are stifled. In countries like South Africa and Kenya, where free press is allowed, we see a more robust political debate and participation and government accountability.[33] At the African Media Convention held in Arusha in May 2022, stakeholders from the press, civil society, and the public and private sectors emphasized the need to strengthen regional collaborations to combat the digital assault on independent journalism. This kind of multidimensional collaboration now seems essential for protecting freedom of expression and maintaining an open civic space. The role of civil societies and citizen mobilization is key in every society where democracy must thrive; it is the tool through which citizens express their approval or disapproval of the government's actions and inactions. Social media has also been a very helpful tool for civil societies and citizenship mobilization. The #ENDSARS protest that rocked Nigeria between September and October 2020 started on social media. It is little wonder that some governments with authoritarian tendencies will try to prevent their citizens from using social media.[34]

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31 Francis Adebayo-Folorumsho, "I Can't Explain the Beating I Received in Imo," *Punch Newspaper*, 10 November 2023, available at https://punchng.com/, accessed 22 September 2025.

32 Emmanuel Agbo, "Emergency Rule: NBA Condemns Tinubu's Suspension of Rivers' Governor, Elected Officials," Premium Times, 19 March 2025, https://www.premiumtimesng.com, accessed 1 September 2025.

33 Reporters Without Borders, "Africa: Media Independence Undermined by Ownership Consolidation and Pressure from Advertisers," RSF, https://rsf.org/en/region/africa, accessed 1 September 2025.

34 The Administration of Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria banned Twitter, now known as X, for about seven months following the removal of an offensive post made by his official account,

The Impact of International Actors on Political Trajectories Under International Law

One issue that comes to mind in discussing the role played by international actors is that of sovereignty and legality of international interference in a state's domestic affairs.[35] Some international organizations, such as the African Union, ECOWAS, and those outside Africa, notably the European Union, United Nations agencies, and international financial institutions, are incorporating a normative dimension into their assistance efforts, emphasizing respect for human rights, the rule of law, and democratic principles. The recent military takeover in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso was not received warmly by international organizations, including ECOWAS, which threatened sanctions.

At the centre of the role that can be played by international organizations and foreign states lies the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states, as enshrined in Article 2(7) of the United Nations Charter. This principle emphasizes that the UN and other international actors must refrain from intervening in matters essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state. The respect for state sovereignty has been a cornerstone of international law since the mid-20th century, reflecting a balance between collective security and national autonomy (Charter of the United Nations, 1945). In practice, this means that international bodies are limited in the actions they can take when states violate human rights or democratic norms internally. Typically, responses are confined to diplomatic measures, economic sanctions, arms embargoes, or suspension of development assistance, rather than direct physical intervention.[36] For instance, when governments uppress civil movements or manipulate constitutional orders, international actors may condemn such actions and pressure the regime through punitive measures. However, except

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which caused outrage amongst many Nigerians. Sami Olatunji and Temitayo Jaiyeola, "Buhari Lifts Twitter Ban After 222 Days Suspension," *Punch Newspaper*, 13 March 2022.

35 Richard Banégas and Jean Merckaert, "Mobilisations citoyennes, répression et contre-révolution en Afrique," *Revue Projet* 2, no. 351 (2016): 6–11.

36 Thomas M. Franck, "The Emerging Right to Democratic Governance," *American Journal of International Law* 86, no. 1 (1992): 46–91, https://doi.org/10.2307/2203138.

in cases where the United Nations Security Council authorizes coercive action under Chapter VII of the Charter, no foreign power or international institution may lawfully intervene militarily or forcefully. This inherent tension between sovereignty and international responsibility often limits the practical impact of external actors, leaving local political dynamics to shape outcomes on the ground.[37]

Autocracy in the Robe of Democracy

In recent times, an authoritarian regime and a democratic one could have almost the same structures, but the difference will always lie in how they implement their core principles.[38] They may both use written constitutions, frequently based on international standards, declaring the universality of fundamental rights and enshrining the separation of powers in their constitution, but these will remain superficial. An authoritarian government may even emerge from an insincere electoral process. What makes a government democratic is its acceptance of democratic principles and values. For instance, the principle of separation of powers must be allowed to operate as it should, without any attempt to cross the boundaries of powers set for another arm of government or tier of government. Fundamental rights must be fully respected.

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37 Michael W. Doyle, *The Question of Intervention: John Stuart Mill and the Responsibility to Protect* (Yale University Press, 2018); Simon Chesterman, *Just War or Just Peace? Humanitarian Intervention and International Law* (Oxford University Press, 2001); ICISS, *The Responsibility to Protect: Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty* (International Development Research Centre, 2001).

38 Juan Linz, "Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes," in *Handbook of Political Science: Macropolitical Theory, Vol. 3*, ed. Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby (Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1975), 175–411; Jérôme Heurteaux, "Les impensés non-démocratiques en Pologne postcommuniste," in *Autoritarismes démocratiques et démocraties autoritaires au xxie siècle. Convergences Nord/Sud*, ed. Olivier Dabène et al. (La Découverte, 2008), 113–32.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Africa's political landscape is characterized by the diversity of movements toward democracy and back toward authoritarianism. This may be attributed to a complex blend of history, levels of institutional autonomy, and dynamic sociopolitical atmosphere that affect state development. It is widely noted across the world that democracy remains a better form of governance than autocracy, because democracy ensures that the populace is carried along in decision-making; hence, international bodies all over the world will always encourage democracy over autocracy, and even countries under a monarchy have started remodelling their monarchy to embody democracy.

Some African countries have managed to stabilize their democracy, while others are still battling internal and external forces that hinder their progress. This has brought about a form of governance that wears the robe of democracy but operates as an autocracy. This false democracy is the type that emerges through a flawed electoral process and undermines every principle and standard of democracy, including undue interference in the running of other arms of government, especially by executives.

For democracy to strive in a nation or state, the individuals at the helm are key. Hence, Africa is in need of leaders who are truly committed to the overall good of their nation or state over their own selfish interest with sincerity. Such leaders will not force themselves on the people they lead, thus cases of electoral malpractice aimed at achieving a result not desired by the majority of voting citizens will be less common. Such leaders will also uphold existing laws and make more laws to see that the will of the people thrives over the selfish desires of government officials.

Africa's judicial institutions must be strengthened and independent, both in funding and operation; as seen in the discussion above, the weakness of the judicial arm of government has contributed greatly to the weakness of democracy in Africa.

Concerned and knowledgeable citizens should help in educating the less knowledgeable to know that they have rights to demand accountability from

their leaders and that the leaders ought to obey both the law of the land and the will of the masses. An active civil society and citizens ready to battle for their democratic rights are vital in the struggle for a true and stable democracy. Considering that leaders are selected by citizens, it is also crucial that citizens reassess values and prioritize the collective good of their country over personal gain. Moreover, it is imperative to state here that calling for citizens to take up activism is not an endorsement to riot or undertake other forms of violent and unlawful protest; citizenship education should rather teach peaceful and lawful means of airing grievances of citizens, even in time of protests.

Armed institutions like the police force should also be educated that they should not turn themselves into the weapons fashioned against the citizens when they air their views about the government in a lawful manner. Such institutions must play their part in ensuring adherence to the laws during election periods.

For multi-cultural countries in Africa like Nigeria, where issues of cultural compatibility and tribalism have somehow hindered democracy, this paper recommends that they embrace federalism in the true sense. In this view, the central authority becomes weaker than its constituent units in a sense that every unit gets to take charge of its resources while contributing a portion to the central to sustain it and help any units that are struggling. This move is designed to mitigate the struggle by people from different tribes to seize central leadership through any means, thus reducing tribal frictions.

Adherence to international standards of democracy is also highly important; however, even in such considerations, leaders in Africa should take note that democracy is primarily designed to uphold the desires of most of a state's citizens, not to pander to international pressure.

International organizations, especially those within the African continent like the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), must also take issues concerning democracy seriously and implement sanctions wherever a manifest breach of democracy occurs.

One thing that empowers an authoritarian regime is the knowledge that the people's played no role in its coming to power, and may still not matter when

it remains in power, hence they behave as they wish, irrespective of the voices and choices of the citizens. Hence, there is an urgent need to maintain strong institutions, such as the electoral commission and the judiciary, to uphold electoral laws and ensure that fundamental rights are not breached.

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