

Centering the African Union in the discourse of democratic decline in Africa: What are the issues?

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Abstract: The major typologies on democratisation in the world rank half of the African continent in the category of authoritarianism. These typologies point to the resurgence of coups and mismanagement of elections in the continent as the key issues bedevilling the democratic decline. However, a deeper analysis reveals the incomplete process of decolonisation, state fragility and lack of nation-building as the key issues for the decline. What is mainly missing from the discourse of the democratic decline is the role of the African Union in trying to resolve these issues. With the use of document analysis and literature review, this paper analyses the resurgence of coups in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, and mismanagement of elections in Kenya, Angola and Zimbabwe to bring to the fore the key issues bedevilling the democratic decline in the continent. The key argument advanced, is that although it appears the coups and mismanagement of elections are contributing to the democratic decline in the continent, they are opening up the democratic space in the specific cases. The centrality of the African Union in resolving these issues is through the Lomé Declaration and its Constitutive Act. Thus, further analysis is on how the African Union could intervene to manage the resurgence of coups and mismanagement of elections in the continent. This analysis brings to the fore, how the current AU protocols and frameworks could be reconfigured to reverse the democratic decline in the continent. This article contributes to the body of knowledge on how multilateralism could contribute to democratisation in the world.

Keywords: democratic decline, typologies, authoritarianism, democratisation, African Union

Introduction

The major typologies on democracy and governance point to a declining trend of democracy and governance in the African continent. The Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU) Democracy Index of 2024 indicates that there was one full democracy, six flawed democracies, 15 hybrid regimes and 22 authoritarian regimes in the continent¹. The report indicates that there are more hybrid and authoritarian regimes in the continent more than any region of the world². Juxtapose this report with the 2022 Ibrahim Index of African Governance which indicated that governance in the continent flatlined at 48.9 % between the period of 2012 and 2021³. These two typologies show what the nexus between democratisation and governance produce, and how the two are inseparable. The discourse on the democratic decline and the deepening of authoritarianism is reflected through the mismanagement of elections, and the resurgence of coups in Africa. In the 2022 elections of Kenya, Angola, Zimbabwe, and Nigeria issues of credibility of the Elections Management Bodies reigned supreme. While on the other hand, the resurgence of coups in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger have reignited a debate on "good coups" and "bad coups"⁴⁵⁶⁷⁸. Although these cases paint a gloomy picture about the state of democracy in the continent, it presents a case for the more pronounced role of the African Union in the public affairs of the countries of the continent, mainly on issues of management of the elections and unconstitutional changes of governments. The African Union must assume its central position as the continent's premier instrument for political order, economic prosperity, peace and stability, integration and unification of the continent.

The AU has protocols and mechanisms to help advance democracy in the continent, in case internal institutions are not empowered to play this role. An example of a country that has institutions that keeps its democratic order resilient is Kenya. In Kenya, the 2022 electoral outcomes were contested, same as they were contested in 2017⁹. The contestation of 2017 resulted in the Court nullifying the elections results and calling for the rerun of the elections¹⁰. The utility and trust in the Courts follow the horrific chapter of bloody post-electoral contestations in Kenya¹¹. The post-2007 electoral violence in Kenya, cemented a new political order of contesting election results and using the

Courts as the credible institution to serve justice and resolve political disputes. This is a brighter side to Kenya's history of messy electoral politics. This has resulted in Kenya being ranked in the category of hybrid regimes; neither democratic nor authoritarian¹². The same contestations were observed in Angola following the 2022 elections¹³, interesting same as the Kenyan case, the doubt in the credibility of Elections Management Bodies came from officials of the Electoral Body than from political elites. Following the stunt of officials of the Electoral Management Body in Angola relating to the credibility of the election results, political elites contested results and approached the Courts. In Nigeria, the results of the 2023 elections were contested as well, but the evidence presented to the Court was not compelling to convince the Judges to nullify the elections¹⁴. All these three cases present a hope and trust in the Courts as adjudicators to electoral disputes instead of violent means. This is a political culture that the AU needs to cultivate through its protocols and sub-regional economic communities.

The case of Zimbabwe is an interesting and unusual one in the region of Southern Africa and the continent. Zimbabwe has a history of electoral contestations which are quelled by violent means through the State machinery¹⁵. The Southern African Development Community's (SADC) observer mission released scathing report on credibility and fairness of Zimbabwe's 2023 elections¹⁶. This report was not well received by the political elites in Zimbabwe. What is unique about this report is that, in the past elections the scathing reports about the unfairness of the elections would always come from Western observer missions. Zimbabwean political elites could easily dismiss these reports as foreign interference in their domestic politics and attempts of recolonisation. On the other hand, the SADC reports would be mild on the fairness of the electoral process. However, the 2023 report of the observer mission pointed out key issues that affect the freeness and fairness of the elections. This points to a more emboldened regional instrument that has the capacity to advance democratisation in the region.

The analysis in this paper is on how issues that deepen authoritarianism, can be addressed to turn the tide towards democratisation of the continent. The analysis is mainly on the AU and its RECs as relevant instruments to help the process of democratisation of the continent. The analysis is rooted in pan-Africanist philosophy that embraces the rebirth of the African continent. The paper is mainly critical literature review, desktop and document analysis. It seeks to contribute to the body of knowledge on how the AU and its RECs can serve as harbingers of democratisation and turning the tide of authoritarianism from deepening.

Waves of democratisation or a façade?

The African continent seems to be a theatre of waves of democratisation since many countries of the continent obtained independence in 1960s, 1970s and 1980s¹⁷¹⁸¹⁹. The waves of democratisation in the continent are arguably linked with the changes in the global politics. Samuel Huntington argues that there has been Three Waves of Democratisation, and some political scientists have used the Arab Spring as a marker of the Forth Wave of democratisation. These waves signal the evolution of societies and the aspirations towards democratic order. Huntington indicates that "between 1970 and 2010, the number of democracies around the world increased from about 35 to nearly 120, or some 60 % of the worlds countries (Third Wave of Democratisation)"²⁰. In the context of the African continent, there emerged a narrative around "Africa Rising" marked by the increase in democratic elections and improvement in governance compared to the past periods of the 1980s and 1990s.

According to Huntington, the first long wave began in the 1820s and continued through the end of the 19th century. The second wave happened after the Second World War (Huntington, 1991). The perceived third and fourth waves of democratisation in the continent are superficial and seem not to have lasting effect on political systems. The wave that had a fundamental change in political systems in the continent is the second wave. It resulted in the triumph of the national liberation movements, and ultimate independence of African states. The third and the supposed fourth waves resulted in change of guard and reform of the systems, but not necessarily in transformation of political systems. In the early 1990s there were political transitions taking place in various countries of the continent. Among others, the transition from apartheid in South Africa into a democratic system, the overthrow of Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire, the elimination of Jonas Savimbi in Angola, the decline of one-party system in both Zambia and Tanzania. It is best to describe them as transitions as they were neither transformational nor revolutionary in the make-up of the state and political systems. The transitions widened the scope of political participation, but the structure of the economy, patterns of ownership of the means of production, land ownership and other meaningful transformations of the system did not materialise. The dominant narrative out of these transitions pointed to the third wave of democratisation. However, this qualification of the transitions is superficial.

The popular Arab Spring is one of the markers of the wave of aspirations for democratic order in the continent. Although the wave resulted in removal of certain leaders among others; Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, Ben Ali of Tunisia, it seems the gains were not cemented nor guarded. Libya is in ruins and struggles to

stabilise after the removal of Gaddafi, while in Egypt the military has returned to its position as the guardian of the State. In Tunisia, where the Arab Spring started, it still faces challenges of democratisation and socio-economic conditions²¹.

The other marker of democratic aspirations is symptomized by the pockets of sporadic protests and marches in some of the leading economies in the continent, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa. These are protests mainly influenced by the state of socio-economic conditions. South Africa has been dubbed the capital protest of the world. This has been coupled with sentiments that shun democracy and a more appreciation of the ruthless regime of apartheid.

The third and fourth waves of democratisation in the continent symbolised the desire for democratic reform. This desire remains a constant feature of the political life in the continent. It reflects resilience and steadfastness of African people to realise a democratic order in the continent. The Afrobarometer reported that 69% of Africans prefer democracy to any other kind of government²². The missing link is in the African Union, that would guide and cement these democratic aspirations through its protocols and other institutional mechanisms. The AU is not yet a supranational organisation, however, its protocols enable it to intervene in domestic affairs of its member-states.

Coups, Charter for Transitions and Democratisation

The Democracy Index report of the Economist Intelligence Unit of 2024 indicates that in Sub-Saharan Africa, the democratic decline was driven by the resurgence of coups²³. According to the Report²⁴ “Sub-Saharan Africa also suffered a significant democratic reversal in 2023, with its regional average score falling from 4.14 in 2022 to 4.04 in 2023”. The report further states that “surveys suggest that public support for or acquiescence to military takeovers reflects dissatisfaction with political systems and poverty across the continent...”²⁵. Although facts point to the dissatisfaction with political systems and the socio-economic conditions, the African Union and its Regional Economic Communities (RECs) still maintained the application of normative frameworks on Unconstitutional Changes of Government. This was responded to with belligerence by the putschists. What this presents, is basically a clash of norms and the reality brought by dysfunctional political systems.

Interventions of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on the countries that have now formed the Alliance of the Sahel; Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, was predicated on the prescripts of the Lomé Declaration. How the AU engages with these countries may further undermine its normative frameworks or bolster its efforts to get rid of the phenomenon of Unconstitutional Changes of Governments. This section analyses how the ECOWAS managed the political transitions in the three countries and teases out key policy implications for the future of the continental normative frameworks. The article recommends continued diplomatic engagement instead of the military intervention to ensure transition into civilian rule in the three countries.

The resurgence of coups in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Sudan marked the turning point in how the AU and its RECs have managed this phenomenon in the continent. The Lomé Declaration and the AU's Constitutive Act have enabled the Continental body to intervene and guide states into transition for a civilian authority. Before the passing of the Lomé Declaration, the AU's predecessor; the Organisation of African Unity, was not empowered to intervene in case there was an overthrow of civilian governments by the military. The illegitimate governments remained in place. Despite the passing of the Lomé declaration, the problem of coups has remained in place and the rate at which they occur. Between 1990-1998, there was 16 successful coups and 23 failed. This is before the passing of the Lomé Declaration. Between 2000 and 2019, there had been 16 successful coups and 23 failed. Disturbingly, there is recurrence of coups in almost all the countries recently experiencing coups; Burkina Faso leading the pack with 9 recurrences of coups, Mali with 8, and Niger with coups taking place 5 times. There are similar trends regarding the rate of coup occurrence in the continent, however, a little bit accelerated; with 6 successful coups and 3 failed between 2020 and 2022²⁶.

The formation of the Alliance of the Sahel by Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso has reignited a relook into the nature and intention of coups, whether are there bad coups or good coups²⁷²⁸²⁹³⁰³¹. The debate is centred mainly on the issues that lead to the emergence of a coup, among others, governance issues, insecurity, poverty and colonisation. The Alliance of the Sahel coalesce around security pact and the need to decolonise from France. The Alliances was formed through the signing of Liptako-Goruma in September 2023³². The resurgence of the coups in West Africa and the formation of the Alliance reinforces the scholarly debate on the typologies of coups; breakthrough coups (overthrow of the authoritarian leader and complete overhaul of the political system), Guardian coups (intervention to rescue the state from civilian misrule) and Veto Coups (prompted by threats to the interests of the military and their allies)³³. This of course leads to a discussion on how political transitions should be handled. The approach of ECOWAS and the AU on restoration of civilian rule in the three countries now constituting the Alliance of the Sahel, have common

characteristics. This discussion cannot take place without an interrogation of the Lome Declaration and the AU's Constitutive Act as overarching Normative Frameworks on Unconstitutional Changes of Governments. And the protocols such as the Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development. The Lome Declaration, AU's Constitutive Act and the PCRD are mechanisms of intervention for the AU and its RECs, they have enabled the AU and its RECs to intervene but did not help reduce the phenomenon of Unconstitutional Changes of Governments. Despite AU and RECs' interventions guided by the Lome declaration, the occurrence and frequency of coups has not changed.

The recurrence of coups in West Africa and the subsequent political transitions should be situated in the on-going discourse of democratic backsliding, recessions etc and the Mo Ibrahim Foundations governance report, stating that governance score flatlined at overall score of 48.9 between 2012 and 2021 (10 years) (Mo Ibrahim Foundation; 2023)³⁴. The governance issues highlighted in the Mo Ibrahim Foundation are issues identified in the Lome Declaration is foundations for durable peace in the continent.

Mechanisms of the current existing interventions:

Lome Declaration as a key normative framework outlines the following steps in case of an Unconstitutional Change of Government³⁵:

- Condemnation
- Warning
- Constructive engagement
- Coordination and triangulation
- Ultimatum and suspension
- Smart sanctions

These mechanisms generally follow the indicated six-month period of engagement with the putschists to restore civilian rule. One of the key lessons from the Alliance of the Sahel, is that this diplomatic engagement allows more space for the putschists to assumed belligerent posture, especially if there is euphoria around the coup by the citizens of the concerned country.

Protocols of ECOWAS:

In addition to the AU protocols, ECOWAS as a sub-regional body has its own protocols to manage the context of its own conflicts. But these are not inimical nor contradictory to the protocols and normative frameworks of the AU. They only reinforce what the AU has in place. There are two key protocols of ECOWAS; firstly, the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security of 1999. And secondly, the Democracy and Good Governance Protocol of 2001.

In line with the two protocols, ECOWAS implemented the following measures regarding Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Guinea:

- ✓ Suspension of the member-states, all four.
- ✓ Imposition and withdrawal of sanctions,
- ✓ 3-year transitional period (both Mali and Burkina Faso but denied for Niger). Military Juntas sign Charter for Transitions and Transitional Government (duration of the transitional authority)
 - Mali signed a Charter of Transition in 2020, but this was disturbed by the 2021 coup.
 - Niger has not yet signed the Charter of Transition; and the promised National Dialogue not yet held.
- ✓ African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance in Article 25 prescribes that “the perpetrators of unconstitutional change of government shall not be allowed to participate in elections held to restore the democratic order or hold any position of responsibility in political institutions of their State”.

Engaged interventions in the countries of the Alliance of the Sahel

ECOWAS suspended all four countries that experienced coups (Mali 2020 and 2021, Burkina Faso 2022 twice January and September, Niger 2023 and Guinea 2021). These suspensions were predicated on the AU's normative framework on unconstitutional changes of government. But what followed was diplomatic engagements that resulted in agreements on the contents of the Charters for Transitions for both Mali and Burkina Faso. In relation to Niger, ECOWAS had taken a hardline not to engage diplomatically and threatened to intervene militarily. Implications of the military intervention were not desirable for ECOWAS; firstly, a possibility of a regional war including countries that are not part of ECOWAS such as Chad and Algeria, secondly, this would increase the influx of refugees, thirdly, the

tensions would be heightened between Niger and France³⁶³⁷. The other implications are that although the intervention was predicated on the prescripts of the Lome Declaration, ECOWAS could be accused of protecting leaders that do not uphold issues of good governance which is the other component of the very same Lome Declaration. The Declaration has nine "...common values and principles for democratic governance in our countries..."³⁸. The ECOWAS was clearly inconsistent in application of the Declaration, a weakness that emboldened the putschists in Niger.

The second appreciation of the weaknesses of the current existing interventions of ECOWAS and AU are steeped in Traditional Liberal Peacebuilding Approach (emphasis on elections as a solution without Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development to avoid conflict recidivism). The countries that have formed the Alliance of the Sahel all experienced a coup and experienced political transitions mediated by ECOWAS in the past decade. This suggests that the liberal peace approach doesn't result in sustenance of peace but a fragile foundation. Firstly, ECOWAS supported political transition in Mali after Captain Amadou Sanogo-led coup in 2012. Secondly, the REC supported Niger in 2010, following a coup after President Mahmadou Tandjah attempted an extension of his term limit. And thirdly, it intervened in Burkina Faso in 2014 after the departure of Blaise Compaore.

An intervention in a country experiencing conflict doesn't end with elections. But there must be a deliberate intervention premised on Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development. This is mainly aimed at implementing the nine common values and principles among others³⁹;

- Adoption of democratic Constitution
- Separation of powers and independence of the judiciary
- Guarantee and promotion of human rights

These key principles if upheld and strictly enforced on member states of the AU and its sub-regional organisations would ensure the process of democratisation from the top. This would help the work of the local voices, community-based organisations and local civil society organisations in their quest for democratising African societies.

Poisoned chalice for the future stability of states; charter for transitions

There are few observable gaps in how the process of political transitions is managed and its sustainability. The AU and RECs guide the process of transition into civilian rule through the signing of roadmaps and charter for transitions. This is generally a negotiated process between the envoys and the leaders of the military governments. The argument advanced here is that the military bargains more from the process and may have future implications for the stability of the state concerned and may justify the interest of the military in politics, thus the never-ending cycle of coups. Firstly, the Juntas do not keep to the duration (schedule) laid out in the Charter for Transitions. Both Mali and Burkina Faso committed to a three-year transition period with ECOWAS, however, this was not upheld. This is among the issues that fuels the animosity between the putschists and ECOWAS. The second issue that make the transition difficult is the phenomenon of counter coups also both Mali and Burkina Faso (Mali 2020 & 2021) & Burkina Faso (2022, January and September). The new putschists do not take over the commitments of their predecessors, requiring the ECOWAS to renegotiate the terms of transition.

The AU and its RECs should learn from the Mali's Charter of Transition, in which its mission focuses on matters that should be handled by a civil authority⁴⁰:

- "Reformation of the State and creation of basic conditions for reconstruction"
- "Redesign of the education system"
- "Launch of process for political, institutional, electoral and administrative reform".

These civilian responsibilities help to extend or justify the extension of the duration of the military junta. It could also serve as the source of military's interest in politics. Firstly, the military is not capable to lead the process of State reformation. This process takes long and requires continued surveillance. It includes establishing state institutions, reform of the constitution and to certain extent reform of the entire political system. No state in the human history has ever been reformed in the context of the above point, in fact the military has no good record of good governance and improved service delivery while in state power. Secondly, the process is lengthy as it includes public participation and widened democratic governance. In Mali, the military government has indeed led the process of constitutional reforms, but this was inclusive in terms of participation and has led to a widespread criticism and public cynicism. It is one of the reasons that the Military has taken so long in government and justified their long stay. The process did not include

a referendum on whether there should be a new constitution nor parliamentary participation. Based on this, the process of constitution-making was a tick-box exercise and not guaranteed of support by all in the country. This then led to the third observation, that the military even after the restoration of civilian rule remain interested in politics due to the reforms it had implemented. This may justify why a need for another coups, basically to protect the gains of the military government. Then coups become cyclical and a never-ending process. Hence in all three countries forming the Alliance of the Sahel, the recurrence is higher than other countries in the continent. Unless this is followed by another process of state reformation, where there would be strong institutions and constitutional provisions that prevent the military from attempting a coup. This among others, include the process of civil-military relations, where the military receives new training on how they should uphold their oath. This process is normally facilitated by the RECs and the AU through the Post-Conflict, Reconstruction and Development office.

One of the points why the Charter for Transition is a poisoned chalice for the continued stability the states emerging out coups, is the mission of redesigning of the education system. This is a process generally led by specialists in educational pedagogies and appreciating the international best practices. It is a lengthy process that takes place at schools and universities. The military has no capacity and expertise to lead nor monitor the progress in this regard. It is fundamentally a responsibility of civilian government, which is basically continuous and long-term. The military may put the process in motion, but it should not be the basis of the transitional authority as an objective.

The AU's approach to restoration of civilian government is hinged on liberal peacebuilding approach, which emphasis elections as a breakthrough from a military junta. Elections bring temporary relief to the instability, but if not coupled with Nation-Building initiatives that may be supported by the AU's PCRD office, then the threat of instability would continue to linger. In the Charter for Transition of Burkina Faso, among others, there is a mission to pursue national reconciliation. However noble the idea, this cannot be handled by the military junta but a civilian government with the assistance of civil society organisations and other international role players. The process of national reconciliation is a long-term process but should also be supported with constitutional reforms to muster the new values in the political system. Madagascar may serve as an example of a case where reconciliation is pursued in a post-conflict society. It also experienced a coup in 2009, and the process of reconciliation was part of the roadmap of transition. However, it was launched few months before the 2013 elections, the process has been underway until the election of Andre Rajoelina in 2019. It was a process facilitated by Southern African Development Community, with the international actors, but solely implemented the political elites in Madagascar.

The other example includes the continued reforms agenda in Lesotho. This process was also overseen by SADC but led by civil society organisations in the country. It is a process that has been in the making since 2014. These examples, demonstrates that the insistence on having the kinds of missions in the Charter for Transitions for the countries of the Alliance of the Sahel is a deliberate attempt to prolong their stay in state power. It also would justify their future interest on how their efforts to reformulate the state are not reversed by the civilian authority.

Opportunities

Mali's Charter of Transition there is a clear adherence to the AU's normative framework. The Charter of Transition, in Article 12 states that "members of the Transitional Government shall not be eligible for election in the presidential and legislative elections that will be held to mark the end of the transition", this was the same for Lieutenant Colonel Damiba Sandaogo who led the January 2022 coup of Burkina Faso. This is an opportunity as it would be a new norm in the continent, where coup leaders would not be allowed to contest elections. In Madagascar, this proved to be effective as it allowed the new government to focus on reconciliation and a new constitution. In Zimbabwe, the leader of the military that was instrumental in the removal of President Mugabe, Constatino Chiwenga, became the deputy president after the elections of 2018.

The closer analysis of the Alliance of the Sahel reveals the importance of promotion of endogenous peace approach. Peacebuilding led by local actors and supported by the REC and AU. This endogenous approach to peacebuilding resulted in reforms agenda in Lesotho and Madagascar. This helps with the durability and sustenance of peace. It also helps with the capacity to analyse conflict transition and the emergence of the new role players. This requires a careful and balanced approached by RECs and local actors.

The resurgence of coups in West Africa undermines the normative frameworks of the AU, particularly the one on Unconstitutional Changes of Government. However, the validity of the issues that drive the coups cannot be wished away. In the countries of the Alliance of the Sahel, are issues related to the security of the region. The AU and the ECOWAS did not intervene to bolster the efforts of these countries in combating the scourge of terrorism. The second driver is a political ambition to cut ties with France, the former colonial master. This is evident in changing the

language of doing business in Mali in the form of the new constitution. A key lesson from the analysis of the political transitions in West Africa, is more on how the ECOWAS allows for issues that fundamentally fall in the domain and capability of the civilian authority to be pursued by the military junta. This ultimately help to justify the extension of the duration of the juntas. The deployment of special envoys helps the RECs and the AU to pay closer attention to issues of these nature when drafting the Charters for Transition, thus it is recommended that the AU and the RECs employ the services of special envoys and PCRD officers. In both Lesotho and Madagascar, the use of envoys was helpful in achieving the transition into civilian rule through the elections and monitoring of the implementation of the reconciliation and systematic reforms in the two respective countries.

How to enhance the effectiveness of African Peace and Security Architecture

Firstly, there is a need to redefine what constitute an Unconstitutional Change of Government (coups, amendment of constitutions to extend term limits by incumbents etc) in the context of the current discourse of good and bad coups. The intervention cannot be one-size fits all, although the values and principles should be the same. The challenge with this suggestion is that it may create indifference and inconsistencies in application of the normative framework. However, the AU has a Peace and Security Council, and the Panel of the Wise, which are critical aspects of the Security Architecture that could be helpful in standardising and contextualising application of prescripts of normative frameworks. The Alliance of the Sahel, especially its belligerence, requires appreciation of the context and realities of the issues. The Alliance of the Sahel is justified by the security concern in the region and the government's incapacity to push back on the Islamic rebels.

The second consideration should be re-interrogation of the protocols of the AU such as the PCRD and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. The PCRD could be helpful in implementing the prescripts of the Lome Declaration, thus moving the AU and its RECs away from the intervention hinged on liberal peacebuilding. In relation to the scourge of elections in the continent, the AU needs to revisit its Charter. The current phenomenon of elections disputes has more to do with credibility, basically how Election Management Bodies handle the elections, than the questions of free and fairness. In both Kenya and Angola, following the elections of 2023, the officials of the management body distanced themselves from the results. this squarely raised questions of the credibility of the results.

To have a broader discussion on the phenomenon of democratic backsliding and what it means for the continent, the discussion must be on the nexus of democracy and security. In the 2023 Democracy Index, there was only 1 full democracy (Mauritius), 6 flawed democracies, 15 hybrid regimes and 22 authoritarian regimes in the continent (The EIU; 2024)⁴¹. The biggest consideration must be on the nexus between democracy and security in the continent. One cannot be resolved without the other, thus the response must be integrated. The other element must be issues of governance. It is not a surprise that all typologies of governance, democracy and peace paint a gloomy picture about the countries of the continent.

State Fragility and Governance Challenges

Another key consideration that needs appreciation is the nature of the state we have in the continent. The Asian Tigers are celebrated due to the intervening role of the state in the economy. Primarily, developmental intervention. In the book *"Democracy and Public Management Reform: Building the Republican State"* Luiz Carlos Bresser-Pereira⁴² gives an interesting account of how the State evolved. In his analysis, he indicates

“a summary of the stages through which the modern state has passed historically. It began as authoritarian and patrimonial in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: it was the absolutist state. In the nineteenth century, it turned liberal and bureaucratic: the liberal state imposed the rule of law and assured civil rights. In the first part of the twentieth century, the transition to democracy was completed: it was the time of the liberal state, of elitist or liberal democracy, and still, of bureaucratic administration. In the second part of that century, the state becomes social-democratic, and assumes a developmental character, democracy now is social or plural rather than just liberal. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the state is aiming to become social-liberal and republican; democracy is aiming to become participatory or republican; and administration is aiming to become managerial or inspired by the principles of new public management.”

The transformation of the state may be in some of the waves of democratisation. This process managed to give the state a character and power on how to mediate social relations produced by modes of production. At each stage of development of the state, the social relations and mode of production changed in societies. This change, whether inversely or contrary, influenced the foundation and principles underpinning political systems. For example, Communalism resulted in egalitarian societies, feudalism was characterised by inequality of land ownership. Political scientists are preoccupied with analysing and making sense of these complexities in various societies in the world.

Political systems precondition the development of the society and shapes the entire modes of production and social relations.

In the African continent, the state has evolved from the colonial state to patrimonial state after the process of decolonisation, and with the third wave of democratisation opened space of participation and allowed some constitutional reform. This then gave the state a character of liberal state. Although there are some attributes of the liberal state, the features of patrimonial politics are still deeply rooted in the political culture of African societies. This creates a friction of the urge to transform into a liberal state but pulled back by untransformed political culture. This is worsened by the reality that not only is the state patrimonial but lacks strong and independent institutions to protect and deepen democracy.

Political Development Through Institutionalisation of Political Parties

Political parties are responsible for the spread and decline of democracy, depending on their international solidarity, hegemony in their national politics and political culture. Political parties were catalysts of the second wave of democratisation with their desires for self-determination and decolonisation of the Global South. Key variable that is a marker of democratic backsliding in the continent, is political culture. Political culture solely is driven by political parties and mediated by the state institutions in the society. If political parties are not institutionalised and under the rule of factions and embedded by patrimonial politics, this would translate into the broader civil culture and make up the dominant political culture in the society. Matlosa summarises the role of political parties in democratising societies as thus;

“Strong and sustainable democracy is dependent on the existence of well-functioning political parties. Political parties are crucial actors in bringing together diverse interests, recruiting and presenting candidates, and developing competing policy proposals that provide people with a choice. In a democracy there is no substitute for open competition between political parties in elections”⁴³

Although, in the current fourth wave of democratisation, political participation has morphed into other forms of activism; formation of civil society organisations, protests and social media activism, but if participation is to be enduring, it needs to be institutionalised, which for the past two centuries has meant in the form of political parties.

Conclusion

All issues discussed in this article, however viewed from any vantage point or ideological position, require the centrality of the African Union, to reverse the trend of authoritarianism and advance and in some cases deepen democracy. The discussion was fundamentally on how the AU may assume this central role in the continent. At a global level, the centrality of the United Nations in mediating global politics cannot be disputed. The challenges of countries of the continent are interwoven and intricate, thus to better response to them, the AU should function more as a supranational multilateral institution than is currently the case, a political institution without powers to shape materially the development of the continent.

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