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DEMOCRATIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA: BETWEEN PROMISE AND PARADOX

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Abstract
Africa's transition to democratic governance in the 21st century generated widespread optimism across diverse social groups, including labour unions, students, market women, rural populations, and the urban poor, who perceived it as a pathway to reversing decades of political repression, authoritarian rule, and systemic disillusionment. Despite these expectations, the practical outcomes of democratization across the continent remain deeply contested. Relying on secondary data, this study critically examines the relationship between democratization and development in Africa, drawing on democratization theory as its analytical framework. The findings reveal a fundamental paradox: while democratic transitions have expanded political space and enhanced civic participation, in many instances this space has been manipulated by political elites, resulting in constrained pluralism, weakened institutions, and the suppression of entrepreneurial initiative. Nonetheless, the opening of political space remains a central component of the democratic aspirations of African societies. The study concludes that although democratization holds significant promise for advancing sustainable development and safeguarding human dignity, its transformative potential is contingent upon the consolidation of democratic institutions, the promotion of genuine political inclusion, and the entrenchment of accountability mechanisms across the continent.

Keywords: Democracy, Development, Democratization, Institutions, Political Participation

Introduction

The causes and consequences of democracy have long occupied a central position in both scholarly inquiry and policymaking, aimed at understanding the conditions that support democratic governance and demonstrating the tangible benefits of its adoption worldwide. A significant body of research, employing increasingly sophisticated cross-national methodologies, has sought to test competing theories concerning the establishment, consolidation, and maintenance of democratic rule. Another strand of literature examines the practical benefits of democracy at domestic and international levels, including more equitable economic development, the promotion of intra- and inter-state peace, the protection of human rights, and the enhancement of human security (Foweraker & Landman, 1997). Across these diverse approaches, democracy emerges both as an end in itself and as a means to achieving broader developmental and societal outcomes.

Comparative democratization studies have flourished globally, particularly in Europe and the United States, while international donor agencies have gradually shifted from narrow

concerns with financial management to broader notions of good governance, encompassing the rule of law, human rights, and, in some cases, democracy itself. For instance, on 1 May 2007, Hilary Benn, the then UK Secretary of State for International Development, publicly affirmed the Department for International Development's (DFID) commitment to democracy as the institutional framework best suited to poverty reduction and equitable development (International IDEA, 2011). Similarly, the foreign policies of major powers have included support for civil society organizations and emerging political parties in transitional states, state-building efforts, institutional consolidation, and, in certain instances, armed intervention to establish democratic governance, as exemplified by US and UK engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan (Huntington, 1991).

Analysis and policymaking in the field of democracy rely on clear definitions, measurement frameworks, and the identification of empirically significant relationships that can guide the building of democratic institutions and the cultivation of a long-term democratic culture. This paper contributes to this discourse in several ways. First, it delineates different conceptualizations of democracy, including procedural, liberal, and social democracy. Second, it examines the principal approaches to measuring democracy, encompassing categorical distinctions, ordinal scales, expert-coded international rankings, objective indicators related to elections and party systems, and hybrid measures that integrate objective data with expert judgment. Third, it evaluates how aid conditionality policies increasingly integrate questions of democracy, governance, and human rights in structuring long-term partnerships with recipient states, with examples including the US Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), the World Bank's Country Policy Institutional Assessment (CPIA), and DFID's Country Governance Assessment (CGA) (Foweraker & Krznaric, 2000).

The Third Wave of democratization, emerging in the late 1980s, significantly transformed the global political landscape. Transitions in the Philippines, South Korea, and Taiwan preceded the dramatic collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe, leading to the emergence of new democracies. Similar democratizing trends also spread across Africa and Latin America (Huntington, 1991), prompting Francis Fukuyama's (1992) assertion that democracy may represent the "endpoint" of political evolution.

Despite these advances, there remain persistent concerns regarding the depth of public support for democracy in developing nations (Schaffer, 1998; Seligson, 2004; Canache, 2006; Baviskar & Malone, 2004; Schedler & Sarsfield, 2004). Some scholars argue that citizens prioritize economic survival over political modernization and thus exhibit limited engagement with democratic processes. Others contend that the public may hold a superficial understanding of democracy, associating it primarily with positive connotations, higher income levels, or Western living standards rather than with democratic institutions and governance. This phenomenon is further illustrated by the adoption of democratic nomenclature in non-democratic regimes, such as the German Democratic Republic and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

This paper interrogates how ordinary citizens conceptualize democracy. It seeks to determine whether contemporary publics focus on procedural dimensions, such as elections, institutions, and political processes, or interpret democracy in terms of economic and social welfare. In doing so, the study assesses whether democracy, as a model of governance, has effectively contributed to the preservation of dignity and the advancement of development across the African continent.

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Theoretical Conceptions of Democracy

Democracy is a classic example of an "essentially contested" concept (Gallie, 1956), as there is neither a universally accepted definition nor a likely final consensus on its full content. Nevertheless, certain core features of democracy are widely agreed upon, and numerous examples of democratic practices have persisted over long periods and across diverse geographical regions. The notion that democracy constitutes a form of governance grounded in popular sovereignty and collective decision-making is largely uncontested. Debate arises primarily over the additional features that complement this basic formulation, generating extensive scholarly discussion regarding the various definitions of democracy. For this study, democracy is examined through three primary conceptual lenses: procedural democracy, liberal democracy, and social democracy.

Procedural definitions, most notably articulated in Robert Dahl's seminal work *Polyarchy* (1971), emphasize two dimensions: contestation and participation. Contestation refers to the competitive uncertainty inherent in democratic governance, presupposing the legitimacy of opposition, the right to challenge incumbents, the protection of freedoms of expression and association, free and fair elections, and a consolidated party system. Participation, in turn, reflects the principle of popular sovereignty, encompassing the protection of voting rights and the establishment of universal suffrage.

Liberal definitions of democracy retain the procedural dimensions of contestation and participation while incorporating explicit protections for human rights. This perspective adds an institutional dimension, emphasizing accountability, constraints on leaders, representative governance, and universal participation. It also incorporates a rights dimension, upheld through the rule of law, encompassing civil, political, property, and minority rights. Social definitions further expand this framework by including economic and social rights, highlighting the importance of material well-being and access to basic services as essential for meaningful participation in collective decision-making.

Collectively, these three conceptualizations share foundational elements, namely peaceful political competition and participatory governance, while progressively extending protections to individuals and groups across broader social, political, and economic domains. Procedural definitions delineate the minimal institutional requirements for competitive politics, liberal definitions add robust civil and political rights to mitigate potential abuses of majority rule, and social definitions further ensure the protection of social and economic rights, which are essential for the equitable participation of all citizens. These distinctions give rise to "thin" and "thick" conceptions of democracy, reflecting the degree to which scholars can measure, analyze, and evaluate the emergence, consolidation, and performance of democratic systems (Landman, 2007).

Collier and Levitsky (1997) note that most widely employed definitions of democracy emphasize procedural elements. Dahl's works (1971, 1989) provide a benchmark in this regard. In *Polyarchy*, he identifies eight essential criteria: the right to vote, the right to be elected, political competition among leaders, free and fair elections, freedom of association, freedom of expression, alternative sources of information, and institutions responsive to electoral preferences. For many theorists, these institutional and procedural components constitute the essence of democracy.

This institutional or procedural conception often serves as the minimal measure of democracy. From Schumpeter (1943) to Przeworski et al. (2000), democracy is frequently equated with electoral processes. Consequently, democracy promotion by governments and international NGOs frequently prioritizes the establishment of electoral institutions as the defining element

of democratic governance. From this perspective, citizens are expected to associate democracy with institutional processes, citing features such as "free and fair elections," "responsive government," "multiparty competition," and "popular control" or "majority rule."

Alternatively, democracy can be conceptualized in terms of its outcomes. Much democratic theory implicitly acknowledges this perspective; for example, Dahl's discussion of electoral democracy presupposes the existence of rights, such as freedom of speech and assembly, necessary to make electoral competition meaningful. Democracy, therefore, emphasizes freedom and liberty as its ultimate goals, with institutions serving as mechanisms to achieve these ends. Historical political rhetoric, from the preamble to the U.S. Declaration of Independence to Franklin D. Roosevelt's articulation of the "four democratic freedoms" in 1941, reflects this outcome-oriented view. Diamond (1999) similarly identifies political liberties, citizen participation, equal justice under the law, and women's rights as core democratic values. While other regimes may seek to achieve comparable goals, autocratic governments are typically constrained from fully guaranteeing these liberties.

Focusing on democratic outcomes emphasizes individual rights and liberties, freedom of speech, religion, and assembly, as essential to democracy. Even when citizens in developing nations may lack a full understanding of institutional procedures, the aspiration for freedom and liberty can generate substantive support for democracy as a means to achieve these ends.

A third dimension considers the social aspects of democracy, particularly relevant in developing countries. Marshall (1992) highlighted a social conception of democratic citizenship, in which democracy encompasses not only civil and political rights but also social rights, such as access to services and provision for the general welfare. Scholars argue that without sufficient resources to meet basic social needs, political equality and participation are rendered meaningless (Huber, Rueschemeyer, & Stephens, 1997). Indeed, one of FDR's four freedoms—the freedom from want—reflects this perspective. Support for democracy in such contexts may reflect a desire for improved living standards rather than solely political institutions, as observed in studies of democratic transitions in Eastern Europe and other developing nations (Hofferbert & Klingemann, 1999; Fuchs & Roller, 2005). Citizens may thus define democracy in terms of economic improvement, social welfare, and security.

Collectively, the three conceptual approaches: procedural/institutional, freedoms and liberties, and social benefits, constitute the primary theoretical frameworks for defining democracy. Each lens provides a basis for interpreting public support for democracy and offers distinct implications for understanding the principles and processes guiding democratization.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the theory of democratisation as its theoretical framework. Prominent scholars in the field include Whitehead (1986), Bratton (1997), and Huntington (1991). Democratisation has emerged as a relatively recent analytical concept for understanding the behavior of public agents in democratic settings of the 21st century. Its development reflects the concerted efforts of political analysts across disciplines to construct empirically grounded theories that correspond to global political patterns, particularly as these processes unfolded in advanced democracies. It is important to note that democratisation is a concept closely related to, but distinct from, democracy itself. Huntington (1991, pp.13–16) describes democratisation as a wave-like evolutionary process that unfolds over time, systematically reshaping the global political landscape. In essence, democratisation can be understood as the transition from non-democratic to democratic regimes.

Building on Huntington's framework, Alumona (2010, p.98) argues that democratisation is a gradual process in which both the state and the populace play active roles, demonstrating

commitment to sustaining democracy across society. Diamond (1997, p. 15) further contends that democratisation theory facilitates successful political transitions, noting that the Third Wave of democratisation has profoundly altered the balance of political regimes worldwide. This observation underscores the relevance of democratisation theory for understanding contemporary democratic processes.

According to O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead (1986), as well as Elaigwu (1998), the essence of political transitions lies in transforming political systems to become more people-oriented. Democratisation thus establishes a critical linkage between the masses, the electorate, and political elites (O'Donnell, Schmitter, & Whitehead, 1986). Saka (2014, p. 111) emphasizes that the modern evolution of democratisation incorporates diverse perspectives, situating the concept within the practical realities of contemporary democratic governance. Empirically, the relationship between Huntington's and Bratton's analyses has enriched the literature on democratisation. Huntington (1991) emphasizes elections as central to establishing democratic government and ending authoritarian rule, portraying them as the lifeblood of democracy. Bratton (1997) complements this perspective by conceptualizing democratisation as a process involving both participation and the construction of competitive political institutions. The process begins with challenges to authoritarian regimes, progresses through political struggles over liberalisation, and culminates in the installation of freely elected governments (O'Donnell, Schmitter, & Whitehead, 1986; Elaigwu, 1998).

From these perspectives, democratisation can be understood as an open-ended process that extends to the highest levels of the state, fostering national integration, particularly in African countries currently embracing deliberative democracy. Adesoji (2006) builds on Huntington's and Bratton's frameworks by proposing additional approaches to understanding democratisation. The transitional approach, for instance, emphasizes political processes and elite initiatives as key drivers of the shift from authoritarian rule to liberal democracy, highlighting the strategic role of political elites in strengthening democratic institutions (Adesoji, 2006, p. 9). Adesoji (2006, p. 43) further links democratisation to development, arguing that the organization and interaction of political elites in constructing effective political structures can advance both political empowerment and economic welfare.

Democratisation theory is thus highly relevant to this study. First, it demonstrates how the interplay between democratisation and democracy contributes to the establishment of political institutions that serve the collective good. Second, it positions democratisation as a gateway to structural socio-economic development. Third, by emphasizing the role of actors in shaping transitional outcomes through their interests, strategies, and interactions, the theory frames democratisation as a dynamic, open-ended process that culminates in a democratic political system capable of facilitating human engagement and societal progress.

Democracy as a Model

Scholars and statesmen have historically conceptualized democracy in varied ways. Despite these divergent perspectives, democracy, whether conceived as a concept, a model, a theory, or a system of governance, possesses universally recognized tenets. These include: (i) governance derived from the general will of the people through periodic elections; (ii) institutionalization of civil liberties; (iii) independence of the judiciary; and (iv) adherence to the rule of law. These features clearly distinguish democracy from autocracy. Nevertheless, the practical application of democracy has generated debates among scholars, giving rise to different perspectives or variants, notably liberalism and Marxism.

In democratic discourse, politics often intersects with economic concerns. Liberal theorists generally prioritize political democracy, whereas Marxist theorists emphasize economic

considerations. This study proposes the development of an operational and quantifiable index of economic democracy to complement the political democracy index, thereby reconciling liberal and Marxist perspectives. A joint index for assessing both political and economic democracy in Africa is also advocated.

Two influential schools of thought, Liberalism and Marxism, have shaped political, sociological, and economic theory globally. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe provided liberal theorists with the opportunity to examine the collapse of communism, while Marxist theorists focused on the transition toward capitalism. This study contends that liberal and Marxist approaches are not mutually exclusive; rather, their insights can be synthesized to enhance understanding of democratic practice. Accordingly, the study proposes an alternative index incorporating fundamental insights acceptable to both schools, aiming to promote a more comprehensive understanding of democracy and its global acceptance.

Phillips (1991), from a liberal perspective, describes modern democracies without relying on subjective conceptualizations. He argues that governance not founded on democratic norms is aberrant and notes that undemocratic regimes became largely unacceptable in the post-World War II international system. While his perspective aligns with liberal thought, viewing democracy as the best form of governance, it remains normative and idealistic rather than empirically validated.

By the 1970s, following Schumpeter's influential contributions, scholars increasingly distinguished rationalistic and empirical definitions of democracy from utopian and normative ones. Schumpeter's minimalist, procedural conception of democracy, focusing on competitive elections, became central in Western political science and in studies of democratic transitions. Similarly, Przeworski (2002) defines democracy as a system in which government positions are filled through competitive elections, combining liberal and Marxist norms. Essential conditions include regular, free elections; inclusive political participation; and the protection of civil liberties. However, like Phillips, Przeworski's work emphasizes ideological and normative dimensions without empirical validation. This study departs from such approaches by proposing a procedural conceptualization in which citizens freely and competitively elect and remove their representatives.

Historically, liberal representative democracy has facilitated greater freedoms in modern societies, though it also introduces tensions in conceptualizing democracy. The French Revolution (1789), the American War of Independence (1775–1781), and the English Glorious Revolution (1689) catalyzed the "democratising shock" that expanded liberalism beyond elite circles, giving rise to today's liberal democracy. Liberal democracy allows broader citizen participation, separates public and private spheres, and curtails governmental tyranny, thereby exemplifying indirect representation. Yet, as Rousseau argued, popular sovereignty cannot be fully delegated, highlighting inherent tensions between direct and representative forms of democracy.

Cohen (2010) characterizes democracy as both a problem and a solution, capable of addressing the unique challenges of different societies. He critiques the realist perspective, which views democratic institutions as constrained by human nature, and distinguishes Rousseau's normative ideal of participatory democracy from the institutional structures required to approximate it in complex modern societies. Cohen emphasizes the potential of democratic culture to cultivate collective reason and serve the common good, particularly in promoting socio-economic and food security.

Held (1993) similarly frames democracy as a set of strategies, agendas, and institutions requiring sustained effort, yet his idealist orientation limits attention to the realist challenges of democratic practice. Ranny (1975, p. 528) views democratisation as an ongoing struggle, requiring active participation to consolidate democratic principles. While idealists highlight normative conditions for democracy, this study interrogates whether these conditions are universally achievable, particularly in diverse socio-political contexts.

Enemuo (1999) portrays democracy as embodying progressive norms and values aimed at the greatest good, emphasizing a liberal and utopian perspective. However, this approach neglects the practical use of state instruments to advance socio-economic welfare, a gap addressed by Ochoga and Shishi (2019, p.76), who argue that democratic governments must actively employ state resources to improve citizens' well-being. Ake (1996) further critiques the universalist application of democracy in Africa, contending that socio-cultural, economic, and political conditions differ markedly from those in Western and Asian contexts, thereby necessitating contextually grounded models of democratic governance.

Determinants and Implications of Democracy as a Model and System of Governance

Various approaches to measuring democracy have been employed in large-scale analyses examining its emergence, maintenance, and consequences. Since Lipset's (1959) pioneering observation that "the more well-to-do a nation, the more likely it is to sustain democracy," scholars have explored the economic prerequisites of democratic governance. Regardless of whether democracy is measured categorically or on a continuous scale, and independent of the time period under consideration, global comparative analyses consistently demonstrate a positive and significant association between high levels of economic development and the persistence of democracy. This has generated both cautious claims of correlation and stronger assertions of causation, each seeking to identify the endogenous and exogenous factors influencing democratic emergence.

Endogenous explanations posit that internal changes linked to economic development precipitate social and political transformations conducive to democracy. Key factors include the rise of an educated and politically conscious middle class (Lipset, 1959), mobilization for inclusion by the working classes (Rueschemeyer, Stephens, & Stephens, 1992), and shifts in the distribution of land, income, and capital (Vanhanen, 1997; Boix, 2003; Boix & Stokes, 2003). In contrast, exogenous explanations emphasize factors external to economic development that facilitate democratization, such as strategic interactions among elites within authoritarian regimes (Geddes, 1999), engagement between regime elites and opposition actors (Przeworski, 1991; Colomer, 1991; Colomer & Pascual, 1994), and social mobilization advocating individual rights (Foweraker & Landman, 1997). International influences, including diffusion, contagion, coercion (Whitehead, 1996), and globalization (Li & Reuveny, 2003), are also highlighted. While economic development remains relevant in these explanations, it is viewed as a stabilizing factor for established democracies rather than a determinative force in their initial emergence (Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub, & Limongi, 2000; Landman, 2001).

Despite the robustness of these findings, they raise important questions about why numerous low-income countries have maintained democratic regimes. Such outliers, including Costa Rica, India, and Uruguay, illustrate that democracy can persist even below the $5,500 per capita GDP threshold identified by Przeworski et al. (2000). While these analyses underscore the importance of economic development for democratic stability, they provide limited practical guidance for policymakers and national leaders seeking to consolidate democratic institutions and foster long-term democratic culture under conditions of constrained economic resources (Linz & Stepan, 1996).

A further challenge lies in assessing the quality of democracy itself. While the proliferation of democracies during the third and fourth waves is evident, many of these regimes are classified as "illiberal democracies" (Diamond, 1999; Zakaria, 2003). These systems often establish institutional mechanisms for elections, freedom of expression, and association, yet fall short in protecting citizens from discrimination, arbitrary detention, and violations of economic and social rights. This gap highlights the distinction between procedural-institutional democracy and substantive guarantees of civil, political, and social rights.

Institutional and cultural factors contribute to the persistence of illiberal democracies. Presidential systems, particularly with multi-party configurations, are more susceptible to instability and executive overreach (Stepan & Skach, 1994; Foweraker & Landman, 2002), whereas parliamentary and consensus-based systems exhibit stronger performance in political stability, economic development, and minority rights protection (Lijphart, 1994b, 1999). Additional institutional constraints include weak judiciaries, corruption, residual military influence, and legacies of authoritarianism (Méndez, O'Donnell, & Pinheiro, 1999; Linz & Stepan, 1996). Cultural factors include patrimonial and neo-patrimonial governance practices (Bratton & van de Walle, 1997) and public prioritization of security over human rights adherence.

Nevertheless, democracies exhibit demonstrable benefits. Empirical studies indicate superior human development outcomes (Ersson & Lane, 1996) and comparable economic growth relative to authoritarian regimes (Przeworski et al., 2000). Democracies, particularly during transitions, significantly enhance the protection of personal integrity rights (Poe & Tate, 1994; Davenport, 2001), a trend reinforced through successive elections (Zanger, 2000; Lindberg, 2006). Democracies also tend to participate more actively in international human rights regimes, ratifying treaties with fewer reservations, though substantive protections remain stronger in mature democracies (Landman, 2005b).

Moreover, democracies demonstrate a lower propensity for both inter- and intra-state conflict. Research on the "democratic peace" has consistently shown that pairs of democracies rarely engage in war (Levy, 2002), and the presence of even a single democracy reduces the likelihood of militarized disputes with other states (Russett & Oneal, 2001). Beyond minimizing conflict, democracies serve as effective mechanisms for advancing human security and international cooperation (Large & Sisk, 2006).

Foundations of Democratic Governance

Democracy, as both a model and a system of governance, is underpinned by tenets that are widely recognised and actively promoted by its proponents within the international system. The question of whether democracy serves as "a means to an end or an end in itself" largely hinges on how these tenets are institutionalised and operationalised within a political system. Central to any democratic state is the political party, which serves as the foundation for articulating and aggregating the political aspirations of individuals and groups. This process is effective when political actors institutionalise fundamental democratic principles, including periodic elections that reflect the electorate's preferences; the guarantee of civil liberties, enabling civil society to question government policies and programmes freely; freedom of expression and association; an independent judiciary; and strict adherence to the rule of law. Collectively, these principles ensure the institutionalisation of good leadership practices, which are critical to promoting the well-being of citizens.

Closely linked to these democratic tenets is the concept of good governance, which has been a central theme in democracy and development studies since the 1980s, coinciding with the

wave of democratic transitions across Africa and South America. Good governance has emerged as a highly valued commodity among state actors, as it forms the foundation for national development, poverty eradication, access to quality education, and the protection of fundamental human rights. The persistent development challenges in Africa are often attributed to the absence of good governance, highlighting a clear causal relationship between poor governance and underdevelopment (Agidi, 2018).

The importance of good governance has been increasingly emphasised in contemporary development literature. Scholars such as Okolo and Agidi (2018) note that good governance occupies significant space in democratic studies, particularly in nations where citizens actively elect representatives to serve in various capacities. Shedrack (2007) defines good governance as the positive and effective management of governmental affairs to deliver public goods for the benefit of the populace. The World Bank (2019), in its report on Sub-Saharan Africa, frames good governance in terms of the responsible use of power to foster socio-economic development. Similarly, Agidi (2013) argues that good governance entails sustaining peace, maintaining law and order, and creating enabling conditions for economic growth and social security. Kola et al. (2017) further assert that good governance is achieved when government actions are consistently oriented toward promoting the general welfare of society.

According to Ajene (2003), good governance encompasses several fundamental principles. First, it entails the promotion of the collective interests of the majority, as reflected in the policies and programmes of constituted authorities. Second, it requires the accommodation and tolerance of the aspirations of minority and dissenting groups. Third, it emphasises broad-based consultation, involving diverse segments of society in decision-making processes so that public preferences are consistently articulated and pursued. Fourth, it demands strict adherence to the rule of law at all levels of society. Fifth, it underscores the importance of accountability and transparency among political leaders and public officials.

This conceptualisation suggests that good governance embodies the mechanisms, processes, and institutions through which citizens articulate their interests, fulfil their responsibilities, and mediate their differences. It also implies the existence of effective public administration, sound policy formulation, and the prudent management of national resources.

Although good governance is often associated with identifiable features or indicators, it is not necessary for a state or organisation to exhibit all such attributes before it can be so described. Nonetheless, the presence of a combination of these core features remains essential. As noted by Odo (201, pp.1–9), good governance fundamentally reflects an inclusive system of management that integrates critical stakeholders into decision-making processes. While this position is valid, good governance is also intrinsically linked to democratisation. In this context, democratisation refers to the extent to which a political system adheres to democratic principles, including effective representation, credible electoral processes, and active citizen participation.

Participation constitutes a central pillar of good governance. It requires that all citizens, irrespective of gender, physical ability, or socio-economic status, be afforded opportunities to engage in governance, either directly or through legitimate intermediary institutions. This, in turn, presupposes the protection of fundamental human rights, particularly freedoms of association and expression. Closely related to this is the maintenance of law and order, which ensures that decision-making processes are conducted within the confines of established legal frameworks. Such adherence reinforces transparency, which itself is a critical attribute of good governance. Transparency entails the free flow of information and its accessibility to the public, thereby minimising distortion and enhancing trust in governance processes.

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The entrenchment of good governance in Nigeria, and indeed in any political system, cannot be overstated. Given its centrality to state legitimacy and development, governments continually strive to achieve it. Drawing from Agidi (2012) and Agidi (2018), several key advantages of good governance can be identified.

Good governance contributes significantly to the reduction of social tension, thereby fostering peace and stability. It enhances the capacity of governments to identify and effectively address societal problems, recognising that while no society is devoid of challenges, the ability to manage them is critical. It also promotes social cohesion by harmonising divergent interests within plural societies, facilitating collective action towards the common good.

Furthermore, good governance sustains peace and tranquility by providing institutional mechanisms for the amicable resolution of conflicts. It stimulates overall development, as economic, political, cultural, agricultural, and educational activities are more likely to thrive in stable and predictable environments. It also ensures the equitable distribution of resources across different groups and regions, thereby reducing grievances associated with marginalisation.

In addition, good governance protects human rights and upholds the rule of law, ensuring equality before the law and respect for constitutional provisions. It guarantees judicial independence, allowing legal processes to operate without undue interference. It also enhances the legitimacy of political authority, as citizens are more inclined to support governments that are responsive and accountable.

Moreover, good governance facilitates the formulation and implementation of people-oriented policies, promotes rational and timely decision-making, and ensures the delivery of quality public services through effective oversight mechanisms. It strengthens ethical standards in governance, thereby minimising corruption and fostering integrity within public institutions. Indeed, good governance is inherently antithetical to corruption, as its emphasis on transparency and accountability constrains opportunities for malfeasance.

Beyond these, good governance contributes to poverty reduction and food security, while also promoting education and human capital development, which are essential for sustainable development. It further enables leaders to fulfil their responsibilities effectively, ensuring that public projects are executed in accordance with established standards and timelines.

In summation, Ejumudo (2010) argues that the culture of good governance enhances state responsiveness, transparency, and accountability, while simultaneously empowering citizens. These attributes are indispensable to the developmental trajectory of any state. Conversely, their absence often explains the persistence of socio-economic crises in many political systems.

Measuring Democracy: Conceptual Foundations, Models, and Systemic Applications

Social science measurement establishes a systematic linkage between abstract (background) concepts and observable indicators by refining such concepts into analytically tractable forms, operationalising them into measurable variables, and generating meaningful scores that vary across units of analysis (Adcock & Collier, 2001). In the context of democracy, most measurement efforts in political science have tended to conceptualise it in minimalist and procedural terms or to construct indicators centred on institutional arrangements and civil and political rights, as reflected in liberal democratic frameworks. More comprehensive attempts to operationalise social democracy, however, have remained limited. This limitation is partly attributable to the intellectual traditions and ideological orientation of (American) political science, which have historically privileged narrower conceptions of democracy, and partly to

enduring methodological challenges in developing valid, reliable, and comparable indicators for economic and social rights (Landman, 2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2006).

To address these challenges, social scientists have employed a variety of measurement strategies, including categorical classifications, ordinal scales, objective indicators, hybrid indices of democratic practices, and perception-based measures derived from mass public opinion surveys. While these approaches enhance comparability across time and space, they often do so at the expense of adequately capturing context-specific dimensions of democratic practice. In response to this limitation, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) has advanced an alternative framework for assessing democracy. This approach shifts away from externally imposed rankings toward comprehensive, internally driven evaluations conducted by national teams comprising government actors, civil society organisations, and academic institutions. The framework allows for the integration of existing quantitative measures with context-sensitive qualitative assessments, thereby offering a more nuanced understanding of the quality of democracy and its linkage to domestic processes of democratic reform. These diverse measurement and assessment strategies are examined in turn.

Democratic Performance and Citizens' Trust in Democratic Institutions

In addition to conventional measures of democracy, an alternative measurement strategy eschews external evaluations based on predefined criteria and objective indicators and instead relies on citizens' perceptions derived from individual-level survey data. Such data offer valuable insights into the extent to which the mass public supports democracy as a form of governance, as well as their assessments of its performance and their level of confidence in democratic institutions. The emergence of 'barometer' surveys, initially in Europe and subsequently extended to Latin America and Africa, has culminated in broader initiatives such as the World Barometer Surveys. Unlike other approaches to measuring democracy, these perception-based datasets capture variations in citizen support across and within regions (e.g., Lagos, 1997).

Notwithstanding their analytical utility, the cross-national application of survey data is underpinned by a critical methodological limitation: the assumption that respondents across diverse socio-political contexts share a common understanding of democracy when responding to standardised questions. This assumption may not always hold, thereby raising concerns about the comparability and validity of such measures.

A central determinant of citizens' trust in democratic institutions is the extent to which democratic governments uphold and protect fundamental human rights, as articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). These rights include, among others, the right to life, freedom from inhumane or degrading treatment, freedom of belief, the right to citizenship, and, importantly, the right to self-determination.

However, while the UDHR establishes universal normative standards, the responsibility for their implementation rests with sovereign states. Democratic governance fosters citizens' trust when it ensures the effective realisation of these rights through the principles of equality and the rule of law. Equality implies that all individuals are treated without discrimination, while the rule of law ensures that all persons are subject to the same legal framework without exception. Complementing this is the administration of justice, whereby individuals receive fair and impartial treatment from law enforcement agencies and the judiciary. Collectively, these elements reinforce public confidence in democratic institutions and enhance the legitimacy of the state.

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Citizens' Rights, Freedoms, and Responsibilities in Sustaining Democratic Governance

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights establishes a framework of fundamental rights; however, the obligation to actualise these rights lies with sovereign states. In democratic systems, governments are expected to guarantee and protect the rights and freedoms of their citizens through effective institutions and policies.

These rights encompass both political and economic dimensions. Political freedoms include freedom of expression and of the press, the right to vote and be elected, freedom of belief, and the ability to seek redress for violations of one's rights. Economic freedoms extend to the right to own property, engage in lawful economic activities, choose one's occupation, move freely within the country, and access education as a foundation for personal and professional advancement (UDHR, 1948).

Democracy sustains human dignity by entrenching law and order within a coherent legal framework. Such a framework provides predictability and stability, enabling individuals to exercise self-determination. In addition, democratic systems often institutionalise social protection mechanisms, such as social security and healthcare, which help to safeguard citizens' welfare and reinforce their autonomy. These outcomes, however, are contingent upon transparency and accountability in governance, as corruption undermines equitable participation and public trust.

Importantly, democracy extends beyond the mere protection of rights to include active citizen participation in governance. This participation is expressed through electoral processes, public service, civic engagement, and lawful advocacy. A critical hallmark of democratic governance is the peaceful transfer of power through credible elections, ensuring that authority derives from the consent of the governed.

At the same time, citizens bear corresponding responsibilities in sustaining democratic systems. The exercise of political rights, such as voting, engaging in public discourse, and holding leaders accountable, is essential to preserving both individual dignity and collective self-determination. Democratic governance, therefore, is sustained through a reciprocal relationship between responsive institutions and active citizenship.

In essence, democracy represents a governance system that advances human dignity by protecting fundamental rights, upholding the rule of law, and promoting transparency and justice. Its durability ultimately depends on the interplay between accountable governance and the informed, consistent participation of citizens.

The Debate on "Democracy First, Development Later" and Africa's Development

Over the decades, a substantial body of scholarship has interrogated the relationship between democracy and development (Ake, 1996; International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2011; Anna, 2013). Central to this discourse is the enduring question of sequencing: whether development should precede democracy or vice versa. In this regard, Thomas Carothers and Diane de Gramont (2013, p. 207) identify three principal schools of thought. First, the democracy-governance perspective underscores the indispensability of democratic institutions and practices for sustainable development. Second, the developmental state perspective prioritises economic development as a precursor to democratic consolidation. Third, the pluralist or contextual approach emphasises the importance of political dynamics and context-specific pathways to development.

These perspectives remain subjects of considerable debate. Anna (2013), for instance, explains that the developmental state school highlights centralised decision-making, a strong

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commitment to development, substantial public investment, and an autonomous bureaucracy as critical drivers of rapid economic growth and structural transformation. Proponents of this view argue that a centralised governance framework can create a stable and predictable environment that attracts investment and facilitates efficient resource allocation. Within this logic, the concentration of decision-making authority enables the state to direct economic priorities effectively, with the expectation that the benefits of growth will eventually diffuse across society. Consequently, it is often contended that democracy tends to flourish more effectively in economically advanced societies than in less developed ones. It is on this basis that Anna (2013, p.29) contends that:

> This is built on the tremendous developmental successes of Asian countries, such as South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. From this perspective, countries centralised power and kicked off development. Similar patterns can be found in China, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Vietnam. In fact, the development success of China provides a strong new argument in this approach.

Khan (2013) emphasizes the primacy of investment and technological advancement in driving development, rather than political activities aimed at immediate democratisation. He argues that collective action and state efficiency are more critical than democratic institutions for achieving economic growth. In this view, investment in the economy and the adoption of new technologies are the main engines of development, whereas democracy is not necessarily a prerequisite. Drawing on the experiences of China and several Southeast Asian countries, proponents of this perspective contend that development precedes democracy, with political liberalisation often following sustained economic growth. While Khan (2013) does not explicitly address whether development guarantees sustainable democracy, or whether democracy without development is prone to instability, his analysis underscores the argument that economic development creates the conditions for democratic consolidation. At the same time, proponents of the "democracy first" perspective are not entirely dismissed, as they argue that democracy can itself foster development under favourable circumstances.

Similarly, Ochoga and Shishi (2015) support the developmental state approach, arguing that while democracy has the potential to facilitate development, its effectiveness depends on the vision and commitment of political actors. They contend that democracy alone does not automatically generate development; rather, it requires nationalistic and strategic leadership. According to these scholars, democracy is often at odds with the decisive, centralised decision-making that has proven effective in countries like China, where state-led policies have accelerated economic growth. Boroth (2012, p.19) reinforces this position, noting that while the multiple-paths approach recognises the importance of politics in development, the political strategies employed must be context-specific. Carothers and de Gramont (2013) similarly observe that governance is a critical variable in development, but no single system universally guarantees success. Different countries may achieve development through different governance models, suggesting that economic growth may, in some contexts, need to precede the establishment of full democratic structures.

The argument follows that democratic transformation is most likely to succeed when a stable middle class exists, capable of generating growth through investment. In the absence of such economic foundations, democracy may even be counterproductive (Anna, 2013). This perspective supports Oteh's (2019, p.4) assertion that Nigerian democracy is constrained by pervasive poverty and low levels of civic awareness. However, while Oteh highlights the socio-economic limitations of democracy, his study lacks quantitative evidence to substantiate these claims. Despite this, democracy remains widely regarded as a universal normative ideal, with the "democracy first" approach dominating much of the academic discourse. Yet, in practice, the developmental state model appears to have greater empirical success in countries

such as China, Vietnam, Ethiopia, and Rwanda, raising the question of whether democracy is truly capable of delivering development outcomes.

In this context, Anna (2013) interrogates whether democracy effectively delivers public goods. Responding affirmatively, it can be argued that democracy is not an end in itself but a means to achieving broader social and economic goals. Democratic systems possess institutional mechanisms, tenets such as accountability, transparency, and rule of law, that encourage political actors to formulate policies, make decisions, and allocate resources in ways that promote collective welfare. The extent to which democratic states have realised this ideal provides the basis for the debate between proponents of development-first strategies and advocates of democracy-first approaches. While authoritarian developmental states may demonstrate rapid economic growth, strong evidence also indicates that democratic governance yields significant social benefits. Studies show that even in poorer economies, democracies often outperform autocracies in delivering socio-economic services and improving human welfare (Siegle, Weinstein, & Halperin, 2004).

Specifically, Siegle, Weinstein, and Halperin (2004, p.1) note that:

> Data on low-income countries from 1960 to 2004 shows that poor democracies grow as rapidly as poor autocracies. Outside Eastern Asia, the median per capita growth rates of poor democracies have been 50 percent higher than in autocracies. Moreover, the risk that poor autocracies will experience is twice as much as that of poor democracies.

The analysis by Siegle, Weinstein, and Halperin (2004) suggests that democracies have a greater potential for achieving development than autocracies. This perspective aligns with the argument that democratic systems are better equipped to avoid development failures or catastrophes (Ochoga & Shishi, 2015). Supporting this claim, Amartya Sen (1999, p.1) observes that no democracy with a free press has ever experienced a major famine. While Sen did not extensively examine the causal links between political mismanagement, starvation, and broader developmental outcomes, his findings remain widely accepted and are frequently cited as evidence of the benefits of democratic governance.

Ochoga and Shishi (2015, p. 1) further contend that if underdevelopment were inherently tied to democracy, African nations would consistently rival the world's most developed countries, a scenario that empirical evidence does not support. They caution, however, against dismissing democratic regimes as inherently incapable of delivering development, noting that many nations in Europe, North America, and Australia have achieved sustained economic growth and social development within democratic frameworks.

From any analytical perspective, both democracy and development are inherently political phenomena. Their success is closely linked to the quality of political institutions and governance, particularly the degree to which politics is inclusive yet non-extractive. It is on this basis that Acemoglu and Robinson (2012, p.1) argue that:

> Many countries that show all the trappings of procedural democracy are still haunted by grossly extractive politics, characterised by politicians who play every trick in the book when it comes to political manipulation of the state and society.

Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) highlight that one of the most critical challenges facing development is the interplay between politically motivated corruption and the quality of democratic practice. While Africa's developmental needs may be unique, the political realities of each country differ significantly. These realities are shaped by national political cultures, which in turn influence how democracy affects development outcomes.

At this point, it is important to acknowledge that governance is central to achieving development. Every political system, whether democratic or authoritarian, operates within a

particular political culture. Countries that have attained significant development under authoritarian regimes did so not through autocratic coercion alone, but by institutionalising a culture of development-oriented governance. Political scientists often describe this as political will. The absence of political will, even within democratic systems, can render development illusory.

Accordingly, this study contends that while democracy is essential for facilitating development, its effectiveness is largely contingent upon the commitment and vision of political actors. This perspective resonates with Ake's (1996, p.18) observation that Africa's greatest developmental challenge is fundamentally political. Rather than concluding that the development project has failed, it may be more accurate to assert that, in many cases, it has never been genuinely initiated.

Conclusion

This study offers three key insights into popular conceptions of democracy. First, citizens in new and developing democracies are generally capable of defining democracy in their own terms, often emphasizing the freedoms, liberties, and rights it provides rather than its procedural or institutional mechanisms. This suggests that the appeal of democracy lies less in formal electoral processes and more in the personal and collective liberties it guarantees. While democratization may reinforce public awareness of rights, the relationship between democratization and perceptions of freedom remains complex.

Second, this emphasis on rights and liberties has implications for democratization efforts. Governments and international agencies often focus on procedural elements of democracy, yet citizens are primarily concerned with the freedoms these procedures enable. Consequently, democratic education and promotion might be more effective if framed as tools for securing rights and liberties rather than as ends in themselves.

Finally, variations in how citizens conceptualize democracy influence their political engagement and support. Evidence shows that procedural understandings of democracy, such as elections and the rule of law, can drive pro-democratic attitudes and resistance to authoritarian actions more strongly than formal education or positive evaluations of government performance (Bratton, Mattes, & Gyimah-Bodi, 2004; Baviskar & Malone, 2004; Canache, 2006). Multiple conceptions of democracy, combining procedural and substantive elements, appear most conducive to active civic participation.

Overall, this study suggests that understanding democracy as both a model and a system of governance offers significant potential for Africa's development and the protection of the continent's dignity.

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