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## Rethinking Democracy in an Age of Instrumentalism and Adversity: The Political Future of Contemporary Political Systems

Gabsa Wilfred Nyongbet

Associated Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Yaounde II-Soa, Cameroon

### Abstract:

*In contrast to the optimism of the early 1990s, when some observers heralded an 'end of history' that would definitively seal the victory of liberal democracy across the world, a realistic assessment of the state of democracy today must admit that democratic regimes are faced with numerous challenges that threaten to undermine their very legitimacy (Kristi et al., 2007:1). Today, citizens in democracies are increasingly disillusioned with their political leaders and institutions. In its 2016 report, Freedom House writes that whatever the underlying strength of their institutions, leading democracies betrayed a worrying lack of self-confidence and conviction during 2015. The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the major challenges that confront political systems in their struggle to become democratic or to consolidate democracy, as the case may be, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and to ascertain the basis of optimism or pessimism about the future of democracy. It proposes a theoretical framework based on two assumptions about threats to democracy. The first is that democracy is increasingly being used and considered in instrumental terms. The second, which is a derivative of the first, is that of the emergence of an adversary political culture which emphasizes the 'self' against the 'other'. These variables are not exclusive but are additional contributions to existing literature.*

**Keywords:** *adversary political culture, democracy, instrumentalism, political system*

### 1. Introduction: Democracy in Context

In contrast to the optimism of the early 1990s, when some observers heralded an 'end of history' that would definitively seal the victory of liberal democracy across the world, a realistic assessment of the state of democracy today must admit that democratic regimes are faced with numerous challenges that threaten to undermine their very legitimacy (Kriesi et al., 2007:1).<sup>1</sup> Contrary to the optimists' predictions, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the triumph of democracy it symbolized have given way to a severe political malaise almost everywhere in the world. Today, citizens in democracies are increasingly disillusioned with their political leaders and institutions. This disillusionment is, for example, expressed in the increasing populist mobilization in Western Europe and the U.S., or in declining levels of electoral and increasing levels of non-electoral participation. In its 2016 report, Freedom House writes that whatever the underlying strength of their institutions, leading democracies betrayed a worrying lack of self-confidence and conviction during 2015 which are due to populist, often bigoted reactions as well as new security measures, both of which threaten the core values of an open society.<sup>2</sup> The migration crisis in Europe put unprecedented pressure on the EU's fundamental principles of liberty, solidarity, and respect for human rights. The massive influx of people not only exposed areas of weak institutional capacity across the region, but also cast doubt on the EU's ability to maintain high democratic standards among current and aspiring member states in a time of rising populism.

Beyond the West, the process of democratization has proven to be more difficult than expected.<sup>3</sup> According to Freedom House, vicious criminal gangs, political violence, and systemic corruption pose a growing threat to freedom and democracy in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Meanwhile, in Africa, nations across the Sahelian belt from Mali to Kenya continued to grapple with threats from Islamist militants. That is not all. In Burundi, Burundian president Pierre Nkurunziza's controversial decision to run for a third term sparked civil unrest, a failed coup, and political violence that threatened to spiral into civil war. In neighbouring Rwanda, where President Paul Kagame has efficiently closed the space for political opposition or critical viewpoints, Senate approval and a successful national referendum cleared the way for Kagame to potentially remain in office until 2034. And an October constitutional referendum allowed longtime Congo Republic president Denis Sassou-Nguesso to forego term limits and run to extend his rule in

<sup>1</sup>Kriesi, H. et al. (2007). National Center of Competence in Research: Challenges of Democracy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, *Position Paper*, Swiss National Science Foundation.

<sup>2</sup>Freedom House. (2016). Freedom in the World 2016: Anxious Dictators, Wavering Democracy, Global Freedom under Pressure, [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FH\\_FITW\\_Report\\_2016.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FH_FITW_Report_2016.pdf) access January 2017.

<sup>3</sup>Kriesi, *Ibid*.

2016, triggering the largest antigovernment protest since 1992.<sup>4</sup>In a wide range of Asian countries, there was a correlation in 2015 between strained political institutions and various forms of religious nationalism or extremism. To sum it up, Freedom House's report is categorical that the world in 2015 was battered by overlapping crises that contributed to the 10th consecutive year of decline in global freedom.

The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the major challenges that confront political systems in their struggle to become democratic or to enhance democracy or to consolidate democracy, as the case may be, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and to ascertain the basis of optimism or pessimism about the future of democracy. It proposes a theoretical framework based on two assumptions about threats to democracy. The first is that democracy is increasingly being used and considered in instrumental terms. The second, which is a derivative of the first, is that of the emergence of an adversary political culture which emphasizes the 'self' against the 'other'. These variables are not exclusive but are additional contributions to existing literature.

### *1.1. Challenges of Democracy Revisited*

The prediction of the extinction of democracy is not at all new. It has always been the concern of scholars and policy makers to question and try to describe the future of democracies. Crozier and his colleagues (1975:2) in a report cite Willy Brandt as saying when leaving office in the early 70s that Western Europe had only 20 to 30 years of democracy left in it, after that; it will slide, engineless and rudderless under the surrounding sea of dictatorship.<sup>5</sup> Under the persistent challenges of depression, a British official had predicted that if Britain does not solve the problem, its parliamentary democracy will be replaced by a dictatorship, and Takeo Miki cautioned that Japanese democracy will collapse, unless major reforms can be carried out and people's confidence in politics restored.

Kriesi and his colleagues propose two broad challenges to democracy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: 1) the increasing role of mediated communication in the political process and 2) the loss of problem-solving capacity as a result of denationalization.<sup>6</sup> The mass media (social media) is increasingly becoming indispensable forums of mass communication where input and output functions mediate. Although much political communication is still practiced in the discrete rooms of government and parliament, hidden from public view, democratic politics, by its very nature, must sooner or later go through the 'front-stage', which increasingly means the media today. With regards to the second challenge, the authors argue that beyond the nation-states, the processes of globalization and regional integration are threatening to undermine the congruence between problem-structures, decision-making processes and participatory mechanisms, with troublesome consequences for the accountability and legitimacy of national political systems and emerging supranational political structures. They acknowledge however that there are other challenges such as 1) technological change which tends to drive economic transformation with a vast range of implications for political interest mobilization and the complexity of policy making, 2) demographic change, which has become a major force, making it increasingly difficult for politicians to deliver rising levels of benefit and satisfy popular demands at a time of rising pressure on health and social security systems, 3) the increasing socio-economic inequality and cultural heterogeneity of national political communities, which may also feed on globalization, tend to undermine the societal preconditions for political equality, 4) social-cultural preference formation may be a partially autonomous force of democratic change that gives rise to new demands for democratic accountability and 5) the continuing expansion of the constitutionalist element of democracy to the detriment of its popular element, is also driven by forces internal to the political system. While this study acknowledges that the above give us a significant apprehension of some of the challenges of democracy, it is important to note that their very existence is not in themselves a problem. It is rather the instrumental use that is given to these processes that can constitute a problem. For example, the existence of the mass media is not a problem but can become one when actors use it to direct politics into anomic paths. In addition, significant public policy decisions are not taken in mass media forums but by and in constituted governmental structures. The mass media cannot direct politics out of anomic paths as political parties will do.

According to Crozier and his colleagues (1975), there are three major challenges that confront democracies.<sup>7</sup> The first is what they call contextual challenges which have to do with external constraints such as involvement in a foreign interactionism or relations (engagement and defeat in war), worldwide depression or inflation (1975:4). These factors create an environment which makes it extremely difficult for democracies to operate smoothly. Struggling democracies of Africa have been confronted with the problem of increase in the price of their export products in the world market and this is independent of them. Even though the USA is well equipped to deal with economic challenges; she has and is still likely to face serious military and diplomatic reversal more than any previous time in its history. This has not and will be without a traumatic shock to American democracy, argues Crozier et al. (1975:5). Secondly, the social structure and social trends in specific political systems can have a deathblow on democracy. For example, democracy would have difficulties to emerge and be consolidated in political systems where wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few and/or where there is deep division between ethnic or regional groups (Crozier et al. 1975:6). These threats are caused by groups who became aware of themselves as distinct, who rose and challenged the State, and who sometimes demand a new political status for themselves and sometimes at the expense of the very nature of the State (e.g. demands for confederation, federation or secession). These groups within political systems include but are not limited to the aristocracy, the military, the middle and working classes but also groups of individuals and communities who consider themselves as minorities as they may sometimes define themselves.

<sup>4</sup>Freedom House Report, *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>Crozier, M., Huntington, S., and Watanuki, J. (1975). *The Crisis of Democracy*, New York, New York University Press.

<sup>6</sup>Kriesi, *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup>Crozier et al. *Ibid.* p.5.

Even if industrialization and urbanization meant to some extent economic development which indeed contributes to democracy, it could under particular circumstances threaten democratic stability. For example, the development of cities and the emergence of bourgeoisie diversified the sources of power, and led to the assertion of personal and property rights against the state. In divided political systems of Africa, the quest for political recognition is a consequence of peoples' awareness of themselves as distinct and different from others. Intellectuals and related groups act as eye openers and sometimes instigators of instability when they assert their disgust for a particular system and request change through violent and nonviolent means.

A major challenge to democracy (particularly in struggling democracies) has also been how to overcome the political habit of unwilling to genuinely share power or to be inclusive on the part of some leaders. This challenge has strong colonial origins and responsibilities. The responsibility of colonial powers and governments has often been espoused to explain the weakness of some democracies. The forms of governments introduced by these powers were not in a way to lay a strong foundation for democracy. Through the indirect rule system, the colonial government pretended to be inclusive meanwhile, in fact, Britain, France, Portugal, Germany and Belgium, which were key colonial powers, selected 'trusted' local leaders who would later be unwilling to relinquish their newly found powers. Peters (2002:303) observes that after the end of colonialism, these European trustee leaders were unwilling to relinquish their newly found power, and therefore reluctant to push for democratic reform and democratic participation in politics, because that will mean relinquishing part or all of the proceeds that come with political power.<sup>8</sup> This political culture seems to have grown and be well entrenched into the political habits of African leaders of the third generation of the post-colonial State, except for a few. Very few have, if at all they did so without skirmishes, been able to relinquish power, in spite of the third wave of democratization that swept across the continent after 1990, and that imposed the regular organisation of free, fair and transparent elections in a substantially competitive environment, as pillar of democracy.

This situation adds to the fact that African democracies are comparatively new and still in the process of defining themselves. They are struggling democracies. This is a challenge to democracy because we do not know how long they may take to mature and there is a risk of moving backward. In addition, even if they were to emerge to full democracies, they may not reflect western-style democracies because of differences in history, politics, economics and culture (Peters, 2002:305). Ethnicity, regionalism and diversity continue to influence the ability of countries to democratize. Diskin et al. (2005:293) for example argue that countries with deep or parallel social cleavages, or both, are more prone to democratic collapse than those with low or cross-cutting cleavages, or both.<sup>9</sup> With regards to history, the same authors ascertain that countries with undemocratic or mixed historical backgrounds (Peru and Turkey, respectively) are more prone to democratic collapse than those with democratic historical, cultural, and civil societal backgrounds (Switzerland).<sup>10</sup>

Institutional variables such as the nature of the State can put democracy in danger. According to Diskin et al. (2005:292), federal states are more prone to democratic collapse than unitary states. The reason is that it can lead to center-periphery struggles that can undermine democracy. A second institutional variable is about the nature of the presidency. It is assumed that presidentialist or semi presidentialist regimes are more prone to democratic collapse than parliamentary ones.<sup>11</sup> The reason is the possibility of conflict between executive and the legislative branches. Finally, the nature of the constitution can determine the survival of a democracy. Here, political systems with low constitutional stability are more prone to democratic collapse than those with high constitutional stability.<sup>12</sup> Frequent constitutional changes could be an indicator, not only a cause of democratic weakness.

However, within these institutional factors we also have both mediating and extraneous variables. With regards to levels of party fragmentation and polarization, it is assumed that party systems with a high level of fragmentation (Weimar Germany) are more prone to democratic collapse than systems with low fragmentation (the USA) and highly polarized party systems are more prone to democratic collapse than systems with low polarization. The reason is that polarization produces extremist or anti-system parties which can undermine the legitimacy of the regime, are usually excluded from power, and hinder the formation of governments—thereby limiting the range of parties that have access to government.<sup>13</sup> Finally, with regards to foreign involvement: countries experiencing serious levels of involvement by foreign forces are more prone to democratic collapse than those with low involvement.<sup>14</sup> Foreign involvement has, in numerous cases, been the major factor in bringing about an end to democratic rule. This paper offers two explanations to the risk of extinction of democracy. The first is based on the instrumental use of the term and the second has to do with the emergence of an adversary political culture.

### 1.2. Democracy as Political Instrument: An Analytical and Theoretical Approach

One of the major problems of democracy is that it offers opportunities for its instrumentalism. This is because democracy as a concept can be twisted in any direction by anyone at any time to justify 'just' claims. Democracy is an ethically charged concept with multidimensional political undertones. Today authoritarianism and dictatorships are not purposefully seen as major threats to democracy.

<sup>8</sup>Peters, B.L.(2002). The Challenges of Democracy and Democratization in Southern Africa. *SA Yearbook of International Affairs*, 03:301-307.

<sup>9</sup>Diskin, A., Diskin, H., and Hazan, R.(2005). Why Democracies Collapse: The Reasons for Democratic Failure and Success. *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 26, No. 3, 391-309.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid. p. 294.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid. p. 292.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid. p. 293.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid. p.295.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid. p.296.

Would one be wrong to assume that democracy is the dictatorship of the majority? Would one be wrong to assume that democracy is the recognition and protection of the right of the minority? In any case, democracy can be used to provide convincing answers to each of the above rhetorical questions.

Democracy is a slippery concept. It is a concept with political, economic and socio-cultural undertones. Politically, it is about the organisation of free and fair competitive elections to choose public office holders, the maintenance of peace and stability, the right to challenge government. Socio-culturally, it is about enhancing social welfare and protecting the identity of a people. Economically, it is about enhancing material welfare and wellbeing; and so on.

Far from being a (desired) form of government, democracy is increasingly being used in instrumental terms. Individuals, groups, organisations, civil society and whole political systems talk and use democracy to gain some (strategic) interest. Democracy is used to justify going to war, it is used to bring order and disorder, it is used to enhance stability and instability and it is above all about us against them, the minority against the majority and vice versa. Democracy is used to justify war, peace, stability and instability. It is used to justify terrorism, the rise of insurrections, populism, manifestations and so on. Governments can use repression against unarmed group of manifestors in the name of preserving peace and stability, leaders can (un)constitutionally extend their term limits in the name of continuity and consolidation of peace and stability. Manifestors can use violence against government and symbolic state artefacts as a means to coerce government in the name of demanding more rights and some other form of concession. Today, democracy is a problem because it is a double edge sword concept. Why would a popular vote in favour of a particular candidate be rejected at the expense of the vote of the electoral college of another candidate in America? People use a federation against a unitary state to justify democracy while on the other hand; unitary states resist federation as being unconstitutional. Identity groups who want to secede from main state do so, on the precept that it is a democratic right to choose where to belong, yet, conservative governments resist secession on grounds that it is the obligation of the state to protect society from fragmentation. Where do we go from here? It is very much likely that any justification and counter-justification has a claim for democracy. Democracy itself can be imposed or negotiated.

Democracy has moved from its human right dimension to security dimension. Peoples' human rights are being infringed upon in the name of security, peace and stability. Freedoms such as freedom of assembly, freedom of religion, freedom of association, freedom of the press, freedom of speech and the like, are being compromised for the sake of security and stability. Governments have restricted the right to manifestation, the right to strike and so on for security reasons.

In recent decades, a less carnivorous form of authoritarian government has emerged, one better adapted to the globalized media and sophisticated technologies of the 21st Century (Guriev and Treisman, 2015:2).<sup>15</sup> Illiberal regimes have managed to consolidate power without isolating their countries from the world economy or resorting to mass killings—instead of inaugurating "new orders," such regimes simulate democracy, holding elections that they make sure to win, bribing and censoring the private press rather than abolishing it, and replacing ideology with an amorphous anti-Western resentment.<sup>16</sup>

If to become democratic means to first of all go to war, then war itself becomes democratisation. The purpose of war is certainly to dismantle existing obstacles to democracy. War is used of course when all other options have either failed or are seen to be inefficient. Would one be wrong to assume that the price of freedom is war? Or that war is another way of democratizing or doing democracy? Who then will condemn war as bad under this context? Who then will condemn the use of State power to bring about political order in democratising societies? The rule of law is a democratic common fashion principle in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, it can be achieved at the expense of other forms of democracy such as freedom of manifestation.

Democracy particularly after 9/11 is increasingly being perceived from instrumental and strategic terms. US have used democracy as a means to justify the isolation of unfriendly regimes and the unruly invasion of dictatorships. Bush's "forward strategy on freedom" was used to justify the invasion of Iraq and the struggle against terrorism (Wittes, and Youngs, 2009:3)<sup>17</sup>. Any attempt to try to impose a project by force suggests there are strategic interests and calculations behind. After 9/11, the US was in disagreement with the EU of the approach to the democratic project in the world. The Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative was then put in place (BMENA) in 2004 during the G8 summit but the US wanted a swift and aggressive approach while EU wanted a gradual and concerted approach. At a point in time, EU issued frequent warnings to US that democracy cannot be "imposed by force" (Wittes, and Youngs, 2009:4). The US and EU do not view their democracy project in the world as complementary, rather, they see in terms of competition dictated by the quest for and safeguard of strategic interests.

In addition, promoters of democracy adopt marginal and discriminate promotion policy. They feed in the same spoon with democratic and undemocratic regimes. This double sword attitude can still explain the instrumental dimension of democracy: strategic interest prime over democracy. US policy towards Arab-Israeli conflict is not the same with other Arab countries. In fact, democracy is used only to the extent that their interests permit. Democracy is not promoted for promotion sake—it is promoted when it is seen to enhance and/or safeguard the interest of the promoter. US Middle East policy is a clear example: at one point, she tends to support dictators and at other points we see them failing to lend support to those regimes that make an effort to democratize.

The quest for stability overrides democracy. Insecurity has seriously compromised the efforts of States to democratize. Some statesmen have even acknowledged this fact in public speeches. In 2005, during a visit to Cairo University in Egypt, Condoleezza

<sup>15</sup>Guriev and Treisman, (2015). How Modern Dictators Survive: An Informational Theory of the New Authoritarianism. *Political Economy Meeting of NBER* (April 2015), pp.1-46.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> For more on the origins of the "Freedom Agenda," see Tamara Cofman Wittes. (2008). *Freedom's Unsteady March: America's Role in Building Arab Democracy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 4-5.

Rice said “for sixty years, my country, the United States, pursued stability at the expense of democracy in this region...and we achieved neither. Now, we are taking a different course.”<sup>18</sup>

Also, individuals outside governments use democracy (freedom) to justify violence as a mode of political expression. This is the case with violent uprisings and manifestations (authorized or unauthorized).

### 1.3. *The Rise of An Adversary Political Culture*

Democracy seems to have sown the seeds of its own danger and destruction. Democracy has been found to sometimes function so as to give rise to forces and tendencies, which if unchecked by some outside agency will eventually, lead to the undermining of democracy.<sup>19</sup> These are intrinsic threats.

The emergence of an “adversary culture” in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a fundamental challenge to the consolidation of democracy. The culture of “us against them” or “them against us” is increasingly being used as a political weapon to threaten not only particular groups but also state institutions. Power seekers who adhere to this culture have used it to engage in anomic paths to get to power. The adversary culture is likely to shun and repudiate the existing political order. It is a culture that is prone to acting violently and anarchically in the political scene. It is a culture that minimizes the ability of democratic elections to bring about effective power change. It is a culture that is highly conspiratorial and manipulative. It is also about civil disobedience. According to Crozier and his colleagues,<sup>20</sup> intellectuals with an adversary culture in advanced industrial societies often devote themselves to the derogation of leadership, the challenging of authority, and the unmasking and delegitimation of established institutions, their behaviour also contrasting with that of technocrats and bureaucrats.

## 2. Signs of Democracy Extinction across Holistic Political Systems

This part examines examples of democracy extinction across holistic political systems in the world. Examples for illustration were selected from Africa, Asia, America and Europe, Latin America and the Middle East.

### 2.1. *The US and Europe : Leading or Misleading Democracies ?*

Are the US and Europe examples of democracies to be copied? Do they have a divine mandate over democracy and its promotion? In its 2016 report, Freedom House writes that whatever the underlying strength of their institutions, leading democracies betrayed a worrying lack of self-confidence and conviction during 2015 which are due to populist, often bigoted reactions as well as new security measures, both of which threaten the core values of an open society. In effect, the European establishment’s inability to manage these new challenges—on top of the lingering economic woes that began nearly a decade ago—gave fresh impetus to those who have long questioned the European project and the liberal, universal values that it represents. In France, for example, Marine Le Pen of the right-wing National Front spoke of a split between “globalists and patriots,” suggesting that the mainstream, pro-EU socialist and conservative parties were indistinguishable and essentially anti-French.

In addition, opinions differ as to whether the EU has a democratic weakness or how it should be remedied if it exists. Pro-Europeans (i.e. those in favour of the EU) argue that the EU should reform its institutions to make them more accountable, while Eurosceptics argue that the EU should reduce its powers and often campaign for withdrawal from the EU. As a supranational union or confederation there is a problem of how to reconcile the principle of equality *among* nation states, which applies to international (intergovernmental) organisations, and the principle of equality among citizens, which applies within states. A 2014 report from the British Electoral Reform Society wrote that “[t]his unique institutional structure makes it difficult to apply the usual democratic standards without significant changes of emphasis. Certainly, the principles of representativeness, accountability and democratic engagement are vital, but the protection of the rights of minorities is perhaps especially important. The EU is a political regime that is, in one sense at least, entirely made up of minorities.”<sup>21</sup> The low turnout at European elections has also been cited as weakening the democratic legitimacy of the EU. In fact, the figures that are compared, the European Parliament voter turnout from 1999 (49.51%) and the US presidential voter turnout from 1996 (49%) are only marginally different, and the US voter turnout for 1996 was the lowest turnout in the US since 1924 (when it was 48.9%). In spite of the marginal difference, the turnout in European elections has been declining in every election without exception to a low of 42.54% in 2014.<sup>22</sup>

Although, the US did not face refugee flows or terrorist attacks on the same scale as Europe, it too is experiencing a crisis of confidence in its democratic institutions and international role. While the American system remains dynamic and open to the participation of minorities and immigrants, its elections and legislative process have suffered from an increasingly intricate system of gerrymandering and undue interference by wealthy individuals and special interests.

Racial and ethnic divisions have seemingly widened, and the past year brought greater attention to police violence and impunity, de facto residential and school segregation, and economic inequality, adding to fears that class mobility, a linchpin of America’s self-image and global reputation, is in jeopardy.

<sup>18</sup> For details, see Wittes, and Youngs, 2009:7-9.

<sup>19</sup> See Crozier et al. *Ibid.* p.8.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 6-7.

<sup>21</sup> Electoral Reform Society — Close the Gap — Tackling Europe’s democratic deficit. (PDF). Retrieved 2017-04-10.

<sup>22</sup> *Euractiv.Com (2014-05-25). It’s official: Last EU election had lowest-ever turnout. Euractiv.com. Retrieved 2017-04-21.*

## 2.2. Sub-Saharan Africa: Struggling with Term Limits, Terrorism, Insecurity and Instability

It is hard to talk of democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa under the present dispensation and even harder to make a claim for the consolidation of democracy. Rulers in sub-Saharan Africa States (except for few cases) compel their legislatures to rewrite the constitution whenever it is inconvenient or threaten the courts into creating whatever interpretation of the law suits them. The law ends up being an obstacle to overcome rather than an ideal to uphold. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the current president has sat in office for 15 years and is facing another election at the end of 2016. However, the president, Joseph Kabila, has had elections indefinitely postponed until a census can be conducted. That is part of the reality of the State in Africa where democracy exists in name, but where laws are not respected in spirit. Paradoxically too, some African nations elect somebody who started civil wars or turned dictators such as in Liberia and Congo. A similar reality was the outcome of a finding in Latin America by Seligson: the willingness of many Latin Americans to grant, and even encourage, their newly elected Presidents to disregard the normal checks and balances of a modern democracy and assume semi-authoritarian powers.<sup>23</sup> In Congo, riot police used tear gas in the capital to disperse dozens of opposition supporters who alleged vote irregularities. But incumbent President Denis Sassou Nguesso won re-election after eliminating the two-term constitutional limit. In Burundi, President Pierre Nkurunziza's decision to run for a third term sparked civil unrest, a failed coup and conflict that threatened to ignite civil war. Contentious elections in each of these states threaten fragile prospects for stable democratic governance in Africa.

Peters (2002:302) observes that although democracies of the Southern African States are still in their infancy, they are nonetheless characterised by electoral intimidations in Namibia and Zimbabwe, weaker labour unions in Swaziland and a trend towards a one-party state without checks and balances in South Africa.<sup>24</sup>

Burkina Faso recovered from a September military coup by supporters of ousted president Blaise Compaore, who in 2014 had tried to change the constitution and extend his own 27-year rule, leading to a popular uprising. The country went on to hold its most successful presidential and legislative elections ever, marking a turning point in its political transition and serving as an example for other nations contending with leaders who attempt to overstay their mandates. Tanzania, whose presidents have consistently honored the two-term limit, held its most competitive elections since its transition to multiparty rule in the early 1990s, with ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) candidate John Magufuli winning 58 percent of the vote. However, it was unclear whether Magufuli would reform laws passed earlier in the year that severely restricted freedom of expression.

While a deadly terrorist attack on a luxury hotel in Bamako in November triggered a state of emergency in Mali, there were few reports that the government used the incident to restrict citizens' basic freedoms. However, elsewhere in the region, violations of civil liberties and the rule of law continued in the fight against Boko Haram, which spread from northeastern Nigeria to parts of Cameroon and Chad. In the wake of yet another attack by Somalia's Shabaab militant group, which in April killed nearly 150 people at Garissa University College in northeastern Kenya, the government in Nairobi continued its ham-fisted domestic counter-terrorism campaign. This included alleged extrajudicial killings and disappearances, as well as a crackdown on nongovernmental organizations and critical media.

Meanwhile, Ethiopia used the war on terrorism to justify a deadly crackdown on protests against forced displacement in the Oromia region in November and December, as well as ongoing repression of political opponents, journalists, bloggers, and activists. The scenario revolves around the reconciliation of the individual freedoms and the survival of the State and so long as this equation remains unresolved, prospects of democracy in this part of the world will continue to dangle.

## 2.3. The Middle East & Arab World: Juggling between Freedom, Dictatorship, and Extremism

If there is any region in the world today where greatest attention needs to be paid with regards to democracy is the Arab region. There are two reasons for this, the region's democratic culture is weak and in some cases non-existent and the region is suffering from endemic violent conflict. So, there is every need to question about whether democracy is going to be the most appropriate type of government. This is a region that has not willfully accepted to embrace democracy or has done so with reluctance.

In Syria, the rule of majority has been compromised. The ruling elite in Syria are drawn from the minority Alawite which constitutes 12 percent of the 22.5 million populations against a 65 percent majority Arab Sunni Muslims (Hof and Simon, 2016).<sup>25</sup> Christians and other minorities remain largely caught in the middle. This majority is the protesters in Syria. The escalation of the conflict in Syria is espousing signs of coming apart along traditional sectarian fault-lines that in recent years have been suppressed under the veneer of national unity.<sup>26</sup> From 1970 to 2000, power was under the Alawite minority owing to President Hafiz al-Assad and from 2000 to the escalation of violence President Bashar al-Assad, himself an Alawite is ruler. The consequence has been the rise of anti-Alawite rhetoric; the murder and assassination of Alawites, the desecration of religious shrines, and the infiltration of jihadist groups such as al-Qaeda. Sectarian violence, mass atrocities and cleansing that could amount to genocide are expressions of the path to state failure that

<sup>23</sup>Seligson, M.A.(2008). *Challenges to Democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean: Evidence from the Americas Barometer 2006-07*, Vanderbilt University.

<sup>24</sup>Peters, *Ibid*.

<sup>25</sup>Hof, C.F and Simon, A. (2016). *Sectarian Violence in Syria's Civil War: Causes, Consequences, and Recommendations for Mitigation. A Paper Commissioned by the Center for the Prevention of Genocide*, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid*. p. 1.

compromise democracy in Syria (Hof and Simon, 2016).<sup>27</sup> The initial peaceful and non-violent demands for justice in Syria were brutally repressed. However, state violence failed to crush the nascent movement. Instead, the protest movements did not only spread but increasingly became militarized. What is taking place in Syria is no longer an uprising, a protest, or public manifestation per se, it is an armed resistance.<sup>28</sup>

The invasion of Iraq and subsequently Libya, to restore or introduce democracy has turned out to be a credible threat to democracy. The invasions have fragmented societies, weakened the ties between the State and society, and have introduced terrorism.

#### 2.4. Latin America: Back and Forth between Authoritarianism and Democracy

In Latin America, Seligson notes that continued progress in the direction of democratic consolidation and higher quality democracies is certainly not a foregone conclusion.<sup>29</sup> The results of Freedom House's 2007 "Freedom in World" survey notes a decline in the state of freedom worldwide, and a growing pushback against democracy by authoritarian governments, including Venezuela. Even in the relatively consolidated democracies of Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil, "freedom scores" declined last year. While competitive electoral politics continue to thrive, and the institutionalization of electoral institutions is indeed a significant hallmark of progress, other democratic institutions show worrisome signs of weakness in the region (Seligson, 2008).

Continuing government corruption scandals illustrate the weakness of accountability and rule of law, as do high crime rates. Furthermore, after being democratically elected, a number of presidents are pushing the boundaries of executive power to new extremes, making every effort to amass greater and greater power at the expense of representative institutions fundamental to liberal democracy. Political parties in many countries remain weak. The rule of law is fragile in many countries, while local governments are starved for resources. Ethnic-based parties are on the rise in some countries, suggesting increasing sectarianism.<sup>30</sup>

Surprisingly enough, many Latin Americans are willing to encourage their newly elected Presidents to disregard the normal checks and balances of a modern democracy and assume semi-authoritarian powers (Seligson, 2008). However, at times it has been a president himself who has sought widened powers, expanding the use of "decrees," for example, that can be enacted with limited legislative input, or none at all. Many presidents have also successfully lobbied for Constitutional changes allowing them to stay in power beyond their original limits; a scenario that is not critically different from what obtains in sub-Saharan Africa. But it would be a mistake to think that presidents in these relatively new democracies are taking on these powers without citizen approval. Such changes, in fact, are usually very popular. It appears that many citizens want to have their free and fair elections, but that once elected; they feel comfortable with giving their presidents extraordinary powers (Seligson 2008, xv). What a paradox!

### 3. Conclusion: Possible Future Scenarios and Ways for Hope

This part gauges on the possible scenarios of democracy in the future of political systems of today, and questions whether there are signs of hope that this celebrated system of government survives across the horizon. It ends with a concluding remark about the entire piece.

#### 3.1. Possible Future Scenarios

Democracy refers to "government by consent of the governed," but this has never historically applied to the entirety of the governed, or even the majority. When the American system of government was established, only a minority could vote; and so it was not a democracy, but simply a populist oligarchy.

The movement/transition to and consolidation of democracy is complicated by internal and external security threats. The desire and willingness to promote equality and freedom is seriously compromised by the efforts to maintain order and political stability.

In what became known as the Arab spring states of North Africa, Mubarak may be on trial, Gaddafi is dead and Ben Ali is currently in exile in Saudi Arabia. But the ruling elites they created, the state structures they built, the powerful secret services and crony capitalists they nurtured did not disappear when they were deposed. The post-revolutionary transitions in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Libya are unlikely to deliver on the hopes that united the protestors in their struggle.

All these suggest that the future of democracy is not bright. Political systems tomorrow will likely embrace or deal with democracy with caution. The potential for the implementation of certain democratic rules and principles and not others will likely increase. The stability of democracies or the consolidation thereof depends on the ability of future political systems to play down on the extremist or radical adversary political cultures. The danger of this culture to democracy is that it is unwilling to compromise with existing national discourse.

Another scenario is the possibility of political system backsliding. Recent decades have shown that the enthusiasm for democratic opening can quickly be followed by backsliding into various forms of "competitive authoritarianism", where formally pluralist

<sup>27</sup> It was on March 15, 2011 that protests against the regime led by President Bashar al-Assad started. It sparked off when 15 children, all under the age of 17 were arrested and tortured in the southwestern town of Dara'a, for having engraved on the wall the common Arab spring refrain: "The people want the fall of the regime".

<sup>28</sup> It was in the summer of 2012 that the international community acknowledged that Syria had reached the state of civil war.

<sup>29</sup> Seligson, *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* p. xiii.

elections mask *de facto* authoritarian regimes (Ahmed and Capoccia, 2014).<sup>31</sup> There is little reason to believe that a post-war Syria is going to recover anytime soon. Protracted civil wars create entrenched local political economies of black markets and local warlords whose social power depends on the continuation of conflict (Lynch, 2013:6).<sup>32</sup> If democracy as an outcome of the uprising was always uncertain, its prospects have been severely crippled by the devastation of civil war and the deepening fragmentation of Syrian society (Heydemann, 2013).<sup>33</sup> Conflict has not only eroded possibilities for democratic reform, it has provided the impetus for a process of authoritarian restructuring that has increased the Assad regime's ability to survive mass protests, repress an armed uprising, and resist international sanctions.<sup>34</sup>

The increase in the number of regimes who simulate democracy is a possibility ahead. In recent decades, a less carnivorous form of authoritarian government has emerged, one better adapted to the globalized media and sophisticated technologies of the 21st Century.<sup>35</sup> These illiberal regimes have managed to consolidate power without isolating their countries from the world economy or resorting to mass killings—instead of inaugurating "new orders," such regimes simulate democracy, holding elections that they make sure to win, bribing and censoring the private press rather than abolishing it, and replacing ideology with an amorphous anti-Western resentment.<sup>36</sup>

### 3.2. *The Hope across the Horizon*

Governments fail when they no longer have a monopoly of force. However, to obtain and keep that monopoly of force, governments must win the consent of the majority, not by force but by constitutional and electoral means. Tomorrow popular elections will likely continue as a democratic mechanism to elect leaders. If the question is when does democracy provide best for its citizens, that depends, but it works in general when citizens are motivated by electing people who will fight against injustices they face and are pragmatic, but do not vote out of revenge or utopian ideals.

Some contests in Africa provide room for hope. For example, in Cape Verde's parliamentary elections, the ruling party was defeated, the campaign saw little conflict and the opposition came to power after 15 years. Benin's last presidential contest also saw a relatively peaceful government turnover where Prime Minister Lionel Zinsou, a former investment banker, conceded defeat to businessman Patrice Talon, the "king of cotton" in the second-round runoff. Nor are these cases unique. Previous African elections which also worked relatively well, according to international observers and experts, have been held in Mauritius, South Africa, Lesotho and Namibia.

In addition, there is growing consensus among States over insecurity as a major threat to peace and stability and in particular terrorism. For example, in spite of the diplomatic disagreement that characterised US and EU relations after 9/11, they both made strong commitment in supporting Arab democracy in the wake of 9/11 and articulated the understanding that democratic development in the Arab world was important to the security of the western States (Wittes, and Youngs, 2009).<sup>37</sup> Closer to this point is the fact that the use of force to implement democracy will have an effect of deterring potential dictators and authoritarians across the globe. Although there is little prospect about the emergence of genuine democracy in countries where leaders were ousted by force (such as in Libya), the use of force in this case remains a warning signal to emerging leaders. The use of force to implement democracy is an institutional framework for democracy, once installed; helps create conditions for its own persistence.

### 3.3. *Conclusion*

This paper identified and analyzed the major challenges that confront political systems in their struggle to become democratic or to consolidate democracy, as the case may be, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It found that the potential for the instrumentalism of democracy and the emergence of an adversary political culture represent significant threats to democracy both in political systems that are striving to become democracies and those that are trying to consolidate democracy. Representative examples were selected from across the world including America, Europe, Africa, Latin America and Middle East. It was revealed that Western policies that sought to strengthen democratic values abroad during the 1990s and early 2000s were based on the implicit assumption of a lasting Western hegemony that would allow the projection of norms abroad (Kausch, 2015).<sup>38</sup> Today, competition for power and influence in the world increasingly supersedes calls for democratisation. Those states that vow to support democratic development face a number of seemingly irreconcilable dilemmas as they attempt to further their geopolitical interests at the same time. Unlike in Eastern Europe, however, in the Middle East democratisation often seemed to clash with, rather than serve, Western geopolitical interests. Whatever the gloomy

<sup>31</sup>Ahmed, A. and Capoccia, G. (2014). The Study of Democratization and the Arab Spring. *Middle East Law and Governance*, No. 6, 1-31.

<sup>32</sup>Lynch, M. (2013). The Political Science of Syria's War. In *POMPES Studies*, Project on the Middle East Political Science, No. 5, pp. 3-6.

<sup>33</sup>Heydemann, S. (2013). Syria's Adaptive Authoritarianism. In *POMPES Studies*, Project on the Middle East Political Science, No. 5, pp. 54-58.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.* p. 54.

<sup>35</sup>Guriev and Treisman, *Ibid.* p.2.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup>Wittes, T.C and Youngs, R. (2009). Europe, the United States and Middle Eastern Democracy: Repairing the Breach. *Analysis paper*, No.18, The Saban Centre for Middle East Policy; The Brookings Institution.

<sup>38</sup>Krausch, K. 2015, *Geopolitics and democracy in the Middle East*, FRIDE, Spain.



scenario, there is hope for the future given that one of the basic democratic principles of organizing popular election seems to be unshakable even if this is sometimes at the expense of transparency.

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