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Transitions from Undemocratic and Authoritarian Regimes to Liberal Democratic and Accountable Governments in Africa

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Abstract:
Over the past two decades, African countries have experienced major political transitions that seemed to have checkmated the consolidation of governments with authoritarian tendencies which triggered development challenges. What has been the impact of democratic rule on politics and governance in Africa, past and present? To what extent has the opening up of the political space impacted on development and human security governance in Africa during the same period? Understanding the impact of democratic administration on African development will provide real insights into the elements of continuity and/or change in Africa's quest for sustainable stable political environment. The perspective of this paper is that the obstacle to the achievement stable polity is the reluctance of the contemporary political regimes to embrace change from business as usual. It identifies and interrogates substantive issues involved in the current democratisation challenges in Africa. The paper concluded that the development and consolidation of liberal democratic government; that is accountable and embraces the principles of good governance, is one important missing link in the current effort to make the desired transition complete in Africa.

1. Introduction

More than two decades ago, the World Bank argued that underlying the litany of Africa's development problems is a crisis of governance (World Bank, 1989). Poor quality institutions, weak rule of law, an absence of accountability, tight controls over information, and high levels of corruption still characterize many African states today despite the experiences of political transitions from authoritarianism to democratic government. One distinctive impact of the end of the Cold War has been the worldwide resurgence of democratization; or to borrow the term used by Huntington (1991), the 'third wave' of democratization[1]. This development, in the view of some scholars, brought to an end the struggle for supremacy as to which system of government is best as the final form of human political governance (Fukuyama, 1989). Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) experienced the radical and transformative impacts of the post-Cold War era as previous autocratic regimes of military and one-party genre, as well as restrictive democracy (in South Africa) that had dotted the continent less than one decade after independence in the 1960s collapsed to give way for democratic political systems. The emergence of multiparty democratic governments in Benin Republic, South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria, Angola, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, to mention a few, are the manifestations of the impact of the 'third wave' of democratisation. However, the wave of democratization that swept away authoritarianism in Africa was largely a product of pressures exerted on the states by internal and external forces (Lawson, 1991: 1-25; Agbu, 1996: 1-16; Osaghae, 1999:3-25; Zack-Williams, 2002:215-218). With the political transitions to a semblance of democratic governments in SSA, scholars and political observers were optimistic that, for the second time, a major turning point in the post-independence history of sub-Saharan African countries had come. The sheer number of countries that made the difficult transitions from full-blown military/civilian authoritarian regimes to kinds of multiparty rule offers some hope that the continent could still redeem itself despite widespread pessimism, internally and externally (Ake, 2000). The spread of what Fareed Zakaria called 'illiberal' democracies (Zakaria, 1997) and its legitimacy crisis as well as the increasing failure of government to fulfill its pre-election promises have eroded the value of, and confidence in the 'newly' emerged liberal democracies. The disappointment arising from these democratic governments' failures raises fundamental questions about the state of democratization in Africa. What has been the impact of democratic rule on politics and governance in Africa since the 1990s? To what extent has the opening up of the political space impacted on political and economic governance in Africa since the same period? Understanding the impact of democratization on African economies, as presented in this paper, provides real insights into elements of continuity and change in Africa's quest for

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[1] The coining of this phrase is attributed to Samuel Huntington, who in 1991 observed that transitions from non-democratic to democratic regimes occur in waves.

development. Finally, what are the alternatives for solving the socio-economic challenges in Africa, especially as the continent sails through the 21st century and the phenomenon of democratic consolidation continue to generate far-reaching academic and public policy concerns?

This paper elucidates African countries' proclivity towards democracy in their search for development and analyses the nature of 'new' political order in the continent as well as the impact of governance on the socio-economic development in sub-Saharan Africa. It highlights the importance of good governance in democracy; and development as an outcome of a consolidated liberal democracy, whilst it also assesses the important linkage that exists between them. While this paper argues that the universal features that define democracy are requisite for development anywhere, there are however some peculiar factors that stringently inhibit the manifestation of this relationship in SSA. These factors, in their internal and external forms, are epitomized by leadership failures, weak governance institutional capacities, bureaucratic corruption and other illiberal characteristics of democratic government across SSA. External supporters that assisted African countries continue to rely on electoral democracy instead of focusing on how to institutionalize democratic traditions and values. They also emphasize on external accountability to democracy assistance donors rather than domestic accountability to their citizens. This paper approaches the complimentary relationship of democracy and good governance in terms of the socio-economic benefits emanating from the relationship. The thrust of this paper is that given the significant changes caused by the 'third wave' of democratization, it would no longer be satisfactory to retain the age-long narrative of history which focuses primarily on colonial and post-colonial political as well as economic arrangement, without cognizance to contemporary critical governance challenges to SSA's progress in the socio-economic fronts. Thus, there is no better period than now to appraise the capacity of, and resources available to sub-Saharan African countries in confronting the socio-economic challenges triggered by the quality of democratic governance. Therefore, the analysis in this paper centers primarily on whether or not there is synergistic effect of democracy and good governance on solving socio-economic challenges in Africa in the 21st century.

2. Conceptualizing Democracy and Good Governance

Broadly, democracy is generally conceived as a process of choosing and changing political leaders, primarily through regular elections. A classical definition, in this regard, is that offered by Samuel Huntington who conceived the twentieth-century political system as democratic, "to the extent that its most powerful collective decision makers are selected through fair, honest and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which virtually all the adult population are eligible to vote" (1991:7). Larry Diamond (2005) also defined democracy 'as a system of government in which the people choose their leaders and representations, and can replace them, in regular, free, and fair elections. These definitions tend to focus on necessary but insufficient barometer of democracy. Such a focus on elections and the electoral process alone has generated protracted debate against the backdrop of the tendency for the promoters of both democracy and development to place faith in the importance of the rituals of elections as the core of democracy. Although, there is an implicit assumption that elections would be not just a foundation stone but a key generator, over time, of further democratic reform (Carothers, 2002), but the inability of 'new' political systems to consolidate the values of liberal democracy had eroded this assumption. Given the 'illiberal' tendencies of democracies in many parts of Africa, therefore, it is increasingly evident that the process of democratization entails not only the transition to formal democracy, but also the more difficult attempt to consolidate the process. Analyst have therefore found out that relying on mostly minimalist definitions of democracy cannot appropriately capture the spectrum of issues and phases of Africa's democratization process beyond elections. Rather attention should be given to the one that gives greater prominence to the role and importance of accountability, rule of law and separation of powers and how to consolidate the political and institutional organs of governance.

The model of liberal democracy has gained growing international currency over the past two decades (Bardham and Carothers, 2003; Leftwich, 2005); to become a "universal value" (Sen, 1999; McFaul, 2004) and 'the only game in town' (Linz and Stepan, 1996:15). Despite the fact that scholars might have emphasized different aspects of democracy, there is a general consensus that liberal democracy has some basic principles, namely: citizens participation in choosing their leaders; political tolerance; accountability; transparency; regular, free, and fair elections; control of the abuse of power; the separation of the powers of the executive, legislature and judiciary; guarantee of human rights; a multiparty system and the rule of law (Edigheji, 2005:3), that makes it outstanding among others. Moving beyond procedural definitions of democracy therefore, explanations of democracy must take cognizance of its essence, value and consolidation.

Consolidating and deepening the institutionalization of democracy is important for the actualization of its aspirations and values. The core value of democracy is the realization that it is the most appropriate framework for the achievement of social and economic progress. Hence, democracy must be perceived as a means to an end, not vice versa. Ake (2000) even emphasized that the success of a 'liberal' democracy would be determined by the extent to which it places the masses (populace) at the epicenter of the democratization agenda. In other words, the success of democracy is best measured by the quality of governance as it provides the framework through which peoples' aspirations of socio-economic development issue can be determined and secured. In a nutshell, the outcome of a democratic government is the manifestation of its value which, in turn, presents the staggering reflection of the quality of governing institutions put in place to administer peoples' affairs. What is good governance? Why should countries aspire for good governance?

3. Good Governance

The concept of 'good governance' remains germane in the analysis of the essence and value of, as well as, consolidation of democracy. Laid at the core of democracy, is the concern about how states should govern – that is, about the rules and practices according to which governments and state power as well as authority are exercised (Kjaer, 2004). Clearly, accountability and checks and balances are not only a part and parcel of an effort to build stronger democratic institutions, but also other aspects of the good

governance agenda, such as state capacity and effective service delivery, that are very important in the development and consolidation of democracy. Governance is about processes of achieving the purposes (essence), aspirations and values of democracy.

Given that the term 'governance' means different things to different people, it is useful to use the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) definition of 'governance' among the many existing definitions of the concept. UNDP defines governance as "the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences" (UNDP, 1997: 2-3). The role of the state is viewed as that of creating a stable political and legal environment conducive to sustain democracy. Another definition of good governance, perhaps very instructive to the analysis in this paper, is the one offered by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). It defines governance as the use of political authority and exercise of control in a society in relation to the management of its resources for social and economic development (OECD, 1995:14). This broad definition encompasses the role of public authorities in establishing the environment in which economic operators function and in determining the distribution of benefits as well as the nature of the relationship between the ruler and the ruled. Kofi Annan also gave a definition of good governance which depicts its functions. Good governance, according to him, means ensuring respect for human rights and the rule of law; strengthening democracy; promoting transparency and capacity in public administration (cited in Weiss, 2000:797).

4. Democracy and Good Governance: The Inseparable Linkage

The quest for and struggle by African peoples for democratic governance were conceived as means rather than an end; one that is aimed not only at doing away with repressive and autocratic governments, but also one with a material value to improve the quality of life of the people. What then, has been the impact of democratic rule on politics and governance in Africa?

The political space created as a result of political transitions in SSA has witnessed the proliferation of democratic governments whose governance has impacted on the rules and practices as well as the exercise of state power and authority. Governance is usually, largely influenced by the character, content and context of a particular government in power. The strict adherence to and observance of the rules and practices of democratic government are, therefore, dependent on the quality of democracy; exemplified by its democratic credentials enumerated above. The post-independence African countries' political landscape was dominated by military/one-party authoritarian regimes whose autocratic rule undermined and weaken the capacity of these countries to initiate, develop and consolidate socio-economic programmes. For instance, military governments undermined institutions of good governance, namely, the constitutions, political parties, the media and the judiciary. The structural adjustment programs of the Breton Woods institutions (I.M.F and World Bank) that was recommended as panacea for resolving the economic crises of the 1980s also undermined the capacity of public institutions in health and education, as well as the civil service and public enterprises (ECA, 2005). In many respects therefore, undemocratic rule and international solution for socio-economic challenges in SSA since independence have been found wanton. The post-Cold War political space created in SSA provided an opportunity not only for the countries to have democratic governments, but also governments whose democratic governance could facilitate the achievement of socio-economic progress in the continent, as a whole, and in the respective nation-states, in particular. However, the illiberal characteristics of the political systems: manifesting in abuse of power, powerful executive Presidents that are hardly checkmated, bureaucratic corruption, judiciary that is cowed with its appointment and dismissal procedures, have had negative impacts on the politics and allocation of values for the improvement of the living standards in SSA. The pathologies of corruption embedded in these semi-democratic political systems creates poverty as resources are stolen, diverted out of their much-needed economies to overseas that are better off and stabilized. Stolen resources distort investment, while its consequential chronic fiscal drain continues ultimately, to drive away crucial resources in terms of direct and indirect foreign investment. In the absence of state financial capacity and will to address public health problems, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and new viruses proliferate, and mutate within and across borders (USAID, 2002). In the fertile soil of mostly weak and fragile African states, the feckless legal system, organized crime networks have taken roots, threatening the rule of law and security through terrorism, kidnapping, and money laundering and trafficking in weapons, drugs and people. Within the national boundaries, as a result of violent activities emanating from hungry, angry and desperate citizens, national and human securities are threatened. The Nigeria Niger Delta attacks on petroleum pipelines and the rampant cases of kidnapping for ransom; the incessant 'Boko Haram'[2] bombings and robbery cases are instructive here. The collapse of democracy in Niger, Cote d'Ivoire, and Zimbabwe, as well as the prolonged civil war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ethiopia are clear indications that countries could have competitive national elections and yet characterized by governance that fails to generate public goods and end up losing public confidence and legitimacy. Few leaders have been able to deliver and sustain good governance in Africa; either by promoting the people's welfare and restraining the abuse of power or by advancing the process of institutional accountability among the branches of governments. Even when some leaders are sincerely committed to reform, the absence of institutional mechanisms, or the existence of weak regulatory mechanisms to monitor and restrain abuse of power eventually defeats their intention and performance of government. These mechanisms include an independent judiciary that enforces clear and predictable laws, an elected parliament that can check the power of the executive, and a civil society that can participate in making and implementing policy. Also, when governance is open to the scrutiny and involvement of a wide range of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), interest groups, think-thanks and mass media, it is more likely to be transparent, public spirited and thus becomes human welfare compliant.

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[2] Although, this is a religious fundamentalist movement fighting a guerrilla war against Western education, but then, it has religious, socio-economic challenges undertone

The thinking and the perception of scholars and promoters of democracy that democratic political systems are favorable to the achievement of socio-economic development have been defeated; because sub-Saharan Africa's democratic political governments have not been built on the foundations of coherent, functioning states. Many of the countries that were tucked under military/civilian autocratic regimes are not only trying to democratize but are also more fundamentally grappling with the task of building a capable state. This is because there had not been any fundamental changes in the character of the ruling elites in African countries, except for very few ones. What the continent has experienced is basically a change in the context but not in the content of political governance. In fact, in some countries, what we witness is the transition of old, unrepentant, recalcitrant but corruptly enriched political elites from previous autocratic regimes of their respective countries to contemporary political regimes.

How then can countries in Africa or the so-called 'new' democracies ensure good governance in order to promote and sustain socio-economic development in the continent? The democratization process should simply not stop at political transitions, but go further to the developmental and consolidation stages to become deeply rooted democratic, stable and prosperous national, regional and continental environments in Africa. The illiberal character and the consequential failures of SSA's democratic political systems emanate from lack of institutional capacity building that are supposed to support and strengthen human and political institution's ability to effectively design, implement and evaluate development activities according to democratic aspiration. In the realization that the numerous political transitions in Africa over the years have had little impact on the politics and governance styles of their respective countries, some political analysts and observers of political and development trends in Africa have started to question the value and essence of democratic approach to solving the continent's socio-economic challenges.

To address these challenges, the continent must tackle its human and institutional governance capacity deficits. The first step in tackling these challenges must come from African political elites. If African countries are to forge ahead with their development visions, they must build their governance capacities. The need for capacity building should be driven by demands for transparency and accountability in Africa's democratic governance. The capacity deficit manifest in lack of or inadequate regulatory institutions to checkmate governance excesses. Where these institutions exist, their incapacitation is the critical missing link in Africa's governance and democratization process. Human development entails enormous socio-economic transformation which in turn, requires the building of appropriate capacities to ensure its achievement (Mohiddin, 2007). African governments have launched capacity-building initiatives such as the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). APRM is a mechanism aimed at promoting the political, social and economic objectives of NEPAD. However, the obstacles to the realization of APRM objectives are too numerous to the extent that such objectives remain largely in principles than in substance. What is largely absent is the commitment, on the part of African countries, to issues of capacity building for development and the building of the capable state. The realization should coincide with consensus and determination to address the capacity deficit of the institutions of governance so that they can deliver services efficiently, effectively, equitably and predictably.

Apart from the threats that governance challenge poses to people within and outside the territorial boundaries of states; there is a legitimate fear that bad governance-induced conflicts could undermine whatever modest political progress has been achieved in African Countries The imperative of democratic governance serving as the irreducible requirement for promoting socio-economic development in Africa cannot be overemphasized. Intrastate conflicts such as civil wars, youth restiveness, ethnic and religious clashes and other violent crises continue to contribute to state fragility and political instability. Fragile and unstable polities with its consequential policy are in turn responsible for sustained underdevelopment. Socio-economic issue is discerned as a worldwide or regional public good. This explains why African democratic governments should commit human and material resources to encourage the development, formulation, and implementation of strategies, policies and actions to provide social and economic goods for all their citizens. How can this plausible goal of liberal democracy be achieved? What should be the role of the state as a primary provider of socio-economic issue, and in what significant ways have democratization made African countries capable or otherwise in advancing human development? It is within this framework that the quality of democracy that is capable of providing an enviable environment for the promotion of social and economic goods in African countries will be examined.

There is a significant correlation between and among the quality of democracy, political stability, and legitimacy, and progress toward consolidation of democracy (Diamond, 2009). According to Larry Diamond, weak and fragile states also suffer from other problems as such states are usually poor and poorly governed, politically unstable with deeply polarized class, ethnic, or other lines of cleavage, and executive power is seriously abused (Diamond, 2009:2-3). Two tested and confirmed propositions about the quality of democracy and its performance are that 'democracies last longer when they perform better', and 'when democracies have higher quality they also tend to perform better'. There are considerable accumulations of evidence for these propositions (Adams Przeworski et. al, 2000; Diamond, 2009). Liberal, sustainable and performing democracies are achievable through deliberate and consistent restraint on institutions of governance. Regulatory restraints will not only enhance the capacity of institutions of governance, but also checkmate the unwarranted and obnoxious discharge of their constitutional powers. These objectives of regulatory mechanisms, forms the analytical perspective in this paper.

There can be no democracy without checks and balances among the institutions of governance. Steven Fish (2006) has developed an index of parliamentary powers that cut across the presidential/parliamentary distinction. Fish does find that the power of legislatures to checkmate executive governance excesses is crucial to democratic consolidation. In the absence of strong legislatures (and broader constraints on executive authority) elected executives tend to abuse and aggrandize their power, thereby diminishing the quality of governance. Likewise, in polities with weak legislatures, political institutions drift and stagnate rather than develop and mature. As a result, citizens, through their elected and civil servants, find it difficult to control and exercise vertical accountability over the human and political institutions of governance. It should be noted that each of these consequences- weak constraints on the executive, abuse of executive power and weak legislatures- has been associated in the historical case study literature with democratic consolidation. For

instance, Ghana, Namibia and Benin, which have become more democratic since the 1990s are said to adopt stronger parliamentary powers in their constitutions (Diamond, 2009). There is a common, core problem in all badly governed democracies. That is, pervasive corruption. Corruption is a major challenge of governance that impedes socio-economic development in Africa. It erodes the capacity of the state to deliver services efficiently, provide security and maintain peace, order and social stability. When deep-seated, corruption generates poverty and turns resource-rich countries into low-income, backward societies (Diamond, 2009). According to Economic Commission for Africa's report, many African countries are trapped in this cycle of corruption, poverty and underdevelopment (UNECA, 2009). Corruption usually affects its victims (in this case sub-Saharan African countries) in three significant ways. First, it undermines the country's ability to achieve its desired socio-economic (like education, health, rural roads and electricity) and other development goals as resources meant for them are usually diverted for personal use. Second, it increases the cost of doing public business (governance), and third, it is a disincentive for foreign direct investment. Although, the pervasiveness of corruption, especially in African countries, has generated momentum to address the problem[3], to eliminate corruption, regulatory institutions and effective rule of law are indispensable in the crusade. Within the countries, building a critical anti-corruption constituency in the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government and in the media and civil society is also important. Former United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan once pointed out that corruption causes enormous harm by impoverishing national economies, threatening democratic institutions, undermining the rule of law and facilitating terrorism (Webb, 2005). Although, many African countries have ratified the AU Convention, their commitment to this document remains more in formal than substantive. At the national levels too, most of them have initiated and established anti-corruption institutions, but the missing link is the lack of political will to institute serious investigation, prosecute and punish the guilty. Rescuing African countries from the abyss of corruption will require reinventing the anti-corruption institutions where they are non-existent and strengthen them where they already exist.

A country's constitution determines and spells out the distribution of political power in a democracy. The purpose and effectiveness of political power are products of the dynamic interplay of constitutional provisions, the political dispositions and capabilities of those managing the organs of government. Each of these organs is empowered to checkmate the other. Powers are separated to facilitate and ensure checks and balances. The principal objective of the check and balance is to ensure strict conformity to the provision of the constitution and to strengthen accountability and transparency. However, the tendency of the executive (with the power of the purse) to dominate the other two organs of government, usually frustrates the regulatory power of the two organs over the executive (ECA, 2009).

5. Summary, Recommendations and Conclusion

The expansion of political space has fostered the growth of democratic governments in many African countries. Yet, the illiberal and fragile state of these democratic governments largely impact on their capacities to fulfill the pre-election promises as well as the major goals and values of democracy. To consolidate democracy in Africa, many of the countries in the continent have constitutions that spell out the authority and powers of the organs of government. Many African countries have also established ombudsmen, auditor-general and parliamentary investigative committees to combat misadministration. However, the capacity, autonomy and performance of these regulatory and anti-corruption institutions are seriously impeded by executive and high level authority's intervention in the administration of these anti-graft agencies. In a few African countries, the judiciary has demonstrated the will to address corruption. But in most countries, the judiciary does not exercise real independence, and its ability to fight corruption is weak. This weakness could be linked to the benevolent procedure of appointment of the judges and chairmen of anti-graft commissions by the executive presidents. Despite constitutional reforms, the executive still dominate. Although the phenomenon of 'big man' in African governance may be fading, yet, the tendency of the executive to dominate continues in many African countries and such dominance also impact, in many significant ways, on governance generally, and especially on regulatory organs (anti-graft, judiciary and legislative).

Since the 'third wave' of democratization, other regions in the global South have been making headway in economic growth, but Africa seems to be caught-up in a development quagmire. During the first three decades of post-independence years, most African countries were marred with inept economic policies exacerbated by unfavorable IMF/World Bank lending programmes. Politically, the excesses of authoritarian regimes resulted in protracted civil and ethnic wars, institutional collapse, and destruction of civil society and governance accountability. Socio-economic and other human security indices was at its record low with most African countries at the bottom of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) human development index. Over the past two decades, African countries have experienced major political transitions that seemed to have checkmated the excesses of previous authoritarian governments. Accordingly, citizens' expectation was aroused as a result of sharp rise in the number of democratic governments in the continent. The citizens' ultimate desire has been to harvest the most gain from the restructuring of political, and by extension the economic power of the state. However, the quality of the 'new' political order in African countries continues to hinder economic growth as their governance style portend the business-as-usual syndrome, of the collapsed authoritarian/autocratic regimes, at the detriment of sustainable political and economic development. The perspective of this paper is that the obstacles to the achievement of development and guarantee of socio-economic and other human security issues are heavily, if not fundamentally, political.

The development, support and sustainability of regulatory institutions, with political will and enhanced capacity, devoid of executive influence, have been the missing link in the important complimentary relationship between political governance and sustainable socio-

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[3] In Africa, continent-wide and regional instruments have emerged to tackle the problem. For instance, the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption (AU Convention) was founded in 2003, and the Economic Community for West African States and the Southern Africa Development Community has developed regional frameworks.

economic development in African countries. Such regulatory mechanism will make the organs of government more accountable and transparent. Regulatory institutions (anti-graft) and mechanisms (Africa Peer Review Mechanism of African Union) have been put in place to enhance capacity and promote good governance in Africa. These measures have developed public trust in government and state legitimacy. However, clandestine and subtle measures by the executive arm of the government (that has the keys to the national treasury) are always in place to frustrate the anti-graft institutions. Hence, it has always been very easy for the three arms of government to collaborate, while the process of checks and balances that could promote good governance appears to be working. If the dominant tendencies of the executive arm of government continue unchecked, it portends a gloomy future not only for democratic consolidation, but also the guarantee of socio-economic development in the continent. Also, the legislative and the judiciary organ of government should rise to the occasion of holding firmly to the tenets of democracy so as to achieve the anticipated goals of liberal democracy in Africa.

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