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## Is Africa ripe for democracy?

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### Abstract

In the 1990s, the wind of democratization blew across Africa. Many people have longed for a better tomorrow. Unfortunately, "the mountain gave birth to a mouse", because it is struggling to take root in Africa. This paper focuses on analyzing democracy in Africa through its strengths and weaknesses. To get there, the following countries were considered: Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, The Democratic Republic of Congo, and Algeria. This is because of attempts to entrench democracy and election-related crises. This work, both qualitative and quantitative, is based on data collection techniques and tools (interview guide, questionnaire, and documentation). The study presents the results from the field. It explains some democratic progress made in African countries (integration of women into positions of responsibility). It also analyzes the democratic deficit through rigging of elections (ballot boxing or electoral technology), corruption, despotism, and diseases in short bad governance. The existence of situations of discomfort shows the need for a deconstruction of democratic management in African states.

**Keywords:** democracy, governance, democratic deficit, deconstruction, Africa

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### Introduction

This article focuses on the democratic management of cities in Africa. The issue of country administration is a thorny issue which concerns both political and administrative authorities and researchers. They tried to understand it and explain it through different theoretical approaches (sociological, economic, political, etc.). Before political independence, democracy was not in exile in Africa. Thus, in traditional African age-class societies, the management of the city is collegial. The example of the coronation of rulers (êb-eb) among the odjukru in the lower Ivory Coast (Memel, 1980) <sup>[5]</sup> is an illustration of democracy being practiced before political independence. In the aftermath of independence, the population who gained freedom the colonial yoke expressed their joy. Unfortunately, this enthusiasm has turned into a nightmare due to repression, tampering with the constitutions (paragon), and tribalism which is responsible for conflicts. Thus, Lundborg (1998) wonders whether the hegemony of the ruling party which has, one day after the elections of May 11, 1997, one hundred and one (101) seats in the national assembly, faced with a represented opposition by three parties totaling ten (10) seats, does not constitute an obstacle to democracy. Carbone (2006) <sup>[7]</sup> agrees with the study of Lundborg. According to the author, partisan pluralism appeared in Africa in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and then at the end of the colonial era. Parties are expected to play an important role in the organization and regulation of modern democratic systems. African political lives are generally considered to be marked by violence, disorder, the personalization of power, and the weakness of constitutional rules. The parties, organizations of Western origin, seem to have found it difficult to take root in African political life. Guèye (2009) <sup>[2]</sup> and Sakpane (2011) <sup>[3]</sup> ask questions about the democratic nature of African countries, because there are many leaders who are singled out by the international community for anti-democratic practices (close relations between ethnic groups and political parties, repression, rigging of elections). Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Algeria, which live to the rhythm of independent (modern) countries, were faced with the same situation. These localities interest the study for several reasons attempts to root democracy in African countries. In Burkina Faso, transparent elections are organized after the fall of the Blaise Compaore regime in November 2015. In Seychelles, the state promotes gender equality in March 2019. In Algeria, Abdelaziz Bouteflika gives up under pressures from the people to run for a fifth presidential term in March 2019. In traditional African societies (among the odjukru of Ivory Coast), democracy is not in exile because the transmission of power is peaceful, the existence of a democracy deficit. The repeated crises linked to the twisted elections, the ethnic wars, the confiscation of power, arbitrary imprisonment, corruption, and, health problems indicate that democracy is hard to root in Africa. These observations give rise to a series of questions. The main one of which is: "How can democracy take root in Africa once and for all"? To this question are attached those which are secondary: "What are the democratic advances in Africa"? "How is the democratic deficit manifested in African Countries"? Therefore, the objective of this study is to analyze democracy in Africa so as to understand its strengths and social implications. The thesis defended is as follows: "Democracy is not in exile in Africa. It knows little progress. However, there is a democratic deficit in the management of cities."

### Material and Methods

Our survey site includes Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast (sub-Saharan Africa), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Central Africa), and Algeria (North Africa). The choice of these localities is linked to the attempts to root democracy in these countries as mentioned above. It is also justified by political instability (repeated coups, repressions of demonstrations, famines, diseases linked to poor governance, etc.). Respondents are selected according to criteria including availability, knowledge of democracy, and its strengths and weaknesses. They made a reasoned choice since it is a question of targeting resource people who are able to learn more about democracy in Africa. A total of 100 respondents, men and women, are involved in the study. The documentary analysis, the interview guide, and the questionnaire are used to gather information. The deepening of the results required the theories of social capital and human capital to justify the democratic deficit in Africa. Stakeholder theory explains good governance. The study has two parts. The first analyzes the forces of democracy in Africa, while the second explains the social implications in these countries.

### Result

#### Some democratic advances in Africa

The data collected from resource persons, through the interview guide and the questionnaire, have been grouped together which was presented in the study. To achieve this, the respondents were asked: "Can we talk about democratic progress in Africa"?

Here are some of the responses:

"It is true that in Europe democracy has become a reality. The population expresses itself freely, the elections are well organized. There is no electoral technology like we have in Africa. But in some countries like Ghana and Burkina Faso, we can speak of democratic advances" (A.L., 28, student).

"Already in our pre-colonial societies, democracy existed. The choice of the kings of the chiefs was written in the drummed texts; only because persons belonging to the line of chiefs of royal blood. The whites have sent us a kind of democracy, which only divides populations" (K.F, 69, retired civil servant).

#### The responses obtained are set out in the following table

**Table 1:** Democratic Advances

<b>Numbers Answers</b>	<b>Number of persons</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Yes	20	20
No	80	80
Total	100	100

**Source:** Our Survey, 2019

Out of 100 people questioned, only about 20% said that there are democratic advances in Africa.

#### Comment

These respondents are made up people who have lived in traditional societies. In these, access to the throne and to power is regulated by generally drummed texts. Each member; knowing their status or social position, acts accordingly. They are also people who follow daily political news. They believe that in view of certain realities, by comparison, some democratic progress has been recorded in African countries. If there is an attempt to take root, the management of cities is always a problem.

#### Democratic deficit

On this thorny question: "Did you say democracy in Africa"? However, here are the respondents answers:

"It's more like a decoy than a glow. Take most of the countries, these are dictatorships. Look at what's going on in Sudan, Lybia, Congo, and Ivory Coast. They are still practices from the Middle Ages which have free rein in our independent countries. Corruption rigged elections, tampering, even trivialization of constitutions, compasses of nations, nepotism, embezzlement of public funds are part of the daily lives of populations" (D.M., 35 years old, Teacher; G.L., 53 years old, Civil servant).

"Mismanagement or bad governance has caused many situations of discomfort. The dead are counted in the past or by the thousands. Children are enlisted in wars. Civilians are victims of sexual violence. Epidemics and emerging diseases are recurrent, because of poverty due to conflicts" (Y.T, 44 years old, Teacher).

On the country, the respondents that are to say 83% of those questioned, maintain the existence of a democratic deficit.

#### Comment

For this social category, African countries being considered as democratic, in terms of daily experience; is a mistake even an aberration. These people are disappointed by the approximate (corruption, clientelism) and dictatorial (non-respect of constitutions, coups) management of the cities. Many of those interviewed had lived

through the bitter experience. Most of them have been victims of atrocities, injustices, and imprisonment. The death of close relatives in inter-community, inter-religious conflicts, the impoverishment of populations, and the fate of “economic cancer patients” are all factors justifying their position.

## Discussion

### Attempts to entrench democracy

The above data show the existence of democracy efforts in African countries. Observation of the reality and the evolution of political life in certain states indicate that democratic advances have been recorded in Africa. Indeed, after the fall of Blaise Compaore, free elections are organized in Burkina Faso. The transparent management of the ballot allowed the country to avoid protest and a bloodbath. French television France 24 (2015) attests to this effect:

“Although the former Prime Minister of Blaise Compaore has appeared as the candidate for change in a country in crisis for over a year, with 53.5% of the vote, Roch Marc Kaboré won the presidential election in Burkina Faso in the first round which was announced by the electoral commission. Its most serious rival, Zephirin Diabre, obtained 21.65% of the votes. He admitted his defeat a few minutes before the announcement of the provisional results by the Independent Electoral Commission”

Since the country's independence in 1960, Burkinabè leaders had almost always come to power by force. This victory is exceptional. It must with the legislative elections organized in parallel, complete the transition, sometimes chaotic, opened with the fall of Blaise Compaore in October 2014, after 27 years in power and led by Michel Kafando. This election took place in calm and serenity, which proves the maturity of the people of Burkina Faso, said Barthélemy Kere, President of Ceni, during a press conference. This calm is due to the Curfew which is still in force as explained by Pauline Simonet, France 24 special envoy to Ouagadougou, who has also cut short the party at Roch Marc Kaboré's headquarters. The advance lies in the fact all the candidates accepted the results and the verdict of the ballot boxes. A few moments after the official announcement of the results, Roch Marc Kaboré confided in France 24 his joy that the party of his rival did not contest the results of the election. In return, it was stated that, concerning power: “I would like to associate all Burkinabè in the management of this country”, thus indirectly inviting Zephirin Diabre to play a role in the next government (France 24, 2015).

The “*eb-eb*” (coronation of the governor) among the *odjukru* of Ivory Coast helps support the existence of democracy in Africa. According to Akmel (2005), the term “*eb-eb*” comes from “*eb*” (village, city) and “*eb*” (to take care, to care of), which literally means accepting society. It is an action of recognition to the city which saw the birth of the individual and who gave him everything. Clearly, it is about power management. The *Lodjukru* makes another reading of the transmission of power. Two age groups are involved in the political system. The first holds power while the second class (younger) is the one who receives the insignia of power. It is after eight years of management of the city that the age group at the end of its mandate, holder of the authority, gives power to the class which succeeds it during the ceremony of the “*eb-eb*”. No election is held for this purpose. Certainly, written text relating to the transmission of power do not exist in *odjukru* country like traditional African societies.

However, they are recorded in drums (*brem*) and collective memories. As a result, from young to old, each social category is educated and trained on the issue of governance. Transmission is therefore downward (older to cadet) and is mainly through age classes. Unlike modern democracy, power is passed on without argument. The age group at the end of their term is aware that they no longer have political authority. Therefore, it is required to return power to the succeeding class without bloodshed. The handover takes place in a festive, fraternal atmosphere because the main objective to be achieved is the prosperity and stability of the city. In *odjukru* country, power is not disputed but transmitted peacefully. Overthrow of governments, attempted usurpations, and rigging of elections do not exist. Clearly, ballot stuffing, and changes of constitutions to stay in power forever has no place among the *odjukru* since they are prohibited. The population as a whole, all categories combined, has a democratic culture. Age groups know that they will necessarily be in power. Consequently, the struggle for power seems like nonsense, haste, and even social disorder. In addition, it breaks up society. Through this attitude, society teaches the individual certain values, including respect for fundamental texts (the constitution), patience, probity, self-giving, values trampled underfoot in modern African democracies, by people who are hungry for power. Like the great democracies, there is a separation of power. He is a legal guarantor. Like Montesquieu (1748), the *odjukru* know that the spirit of inequality leads democracy to aristocracy or the government of one, and the spirit of extreme equality leads to the despotism of one, as the despotism of one ends in conquest. To avoid the confusion of powers and choose the representatives of the age group, various virtues including good character, self-giving, and double vision are required by the sages who are holders of gerontocratic power. Thus, the “*milôwl*” assures the executive, the “*mbwa*” represents the legislative power, while the “*agnan*” exercises the role of judiciary.

The division of responsibilities aims to prevent the promoted actors from becoming corrupt by implementing laws which are favorable to them. Certainly, people are chosen to act on behalf of the age group. However, no decision is made without the consent of the group members. Clearly, the management of power is collegial. The cyclical administration of power can inspire modern societies facing a democratic deficit which is justified in the

first chapter of the study. Like the United States, where two parties (republicans and democrats) occupy and animate the political scene, the multitude registered in Africa can regroup in two big entities, to exercise a mandate of five renewable only once, in a cyclic way. This will prevent coups and prevent attempts to confiscate power. Failure to respect democratic principles leads to situations of discomfort.

### **Poor governance and social implications**

Through the above information, democracy in Africa is an illusion. For the majority of respondents, there is a democratic deficit. The principles of good governance are not applied. This assertion is justified by anti-democratic practices which have free rein in various African countries. In our survey areas, observation of the daily experience of the populations and the literature review led authors to support this thesis. JED (2012) is asking himself: 'Do we need to remember that press freedom is the thermometer through which we measure the degree of democracy in a city? Must we also remember that respect for human rights is an essential aspect of good governance, and that it is now the fundamental criterion by which all governments of the world are judged? How do we hide the particularly dramatic situation of the media and journalists during the last legislature, and not to remember that during the last five years, at least eight journalists have been murdered?

Furthermore, hundreds of others have been arrested and thrown behind bars, and several more are subjected to threats and physical assaults daily as a result of their work. In general, elections in Africa are punctuated by serious incidents (injuries, deaths, destruction of public buildings). Those involved in the presidential election, who has become enemies rather than adversaries, are fighting hard for power. Politics perceived as the art of government has turned into a battlefield. The structures responsible for organizing the elections are biased, accused of ballot stuffing, and rigging of results. All these things contribute to the destruction of social cohesion. Ardan (2007) agrees. According to the author, electoral disputes confirm the democratic deficit in the said countries. Inseparable from democracy, the election has become a democratic rite. The consequences of the democratic deficit are shared by several countries in West Africa. This is the case with Ivory Coast. Indeed, the socio-political crisis from September 19, 2002 to April 11, 2011, linked to the unrestrained quest for power left more than 3000 dead, not to mention the destruction of public and private property, sexual violence against women girls. Food, water, gas, and deaths related to the shortage of medicines, diseases like typhoid, cholera are part of the disasters caused by the democratic deficit. Patients with metabolic pathologies (high blood pressure, obesity, vascular and cardiac accidents, diabetes) have paid a heavy price due to lack of adequate care. Indeed, an embargo by the European Union has asphyxiated the country. The health system has been deprived of essential medicines to care of the sick. Faced with this difficulty, saturated emergencies are overwhelmed with patients. There are many families whose close relatives have died as a result of their illness. This respondent confirms:

"During the crisis that rocked our country after the 2010 presidential election, we saw many disappointing things. Westerners have caused the death of several patients with diabetes, hypertension, heart attack for nothing. How can one be foolish to the point of being insensitive to the suffering of innocent people? An embargo on medicines is unheard of. Sick people have died because of poorly informed politicians" (G.K., Ivorian, 53 years old, employee).

Faced with this discomfort, a re-reading of democratic management of cities in Africa is essential. Since international responsibility is engaged and bad governance has collateral effects (sexual violence, deprivation of liberty, nepotism, recurrence of diseases), a deconstruction of the management of states is to be considered. To achieve this, the West must stop influencing the choices of leaders in Africa. In order to defend their pre-squares, since the partition of Africa at the Berlin conference (February 26, 1885), and to protect the interests of their multinationals, the Westerners have always imposed leaders directly or indirectly on their pay. Those who escape the cracks are overthrown through war, which they feed, in defiance of human dignity. Thus, the sales of wars arms, the external supports to the rebellions, overthrow of governments, are as much practice, which destroy social cohesion, and expose the countries to the plundering of the resources of the countries by those who in the shadow pull the things, and causes chaos and desolation (killings, famine, poverty, disease). The cases of Lybia, Ivory Coast, Liberia, sierra Leone, and Biafra (Nigeria) speak for themselves. By implicitly supporting dictatorial, and anti-democratic regimes to protect their interests (economic gains). Westerners are undermining democracy which they have deliberately imposed on societies other than own. As a result, they are accountable for the democratic deficit in Africa. Hence, there is the need for a deconstruction of the management of the states. This provision necessarily involves re-reading the relationships between colonizing and colonized countries.

### **Conclusion**

Is Africa ripe for democracy? Two types of response can be distinguished from field data. The first, from a minority of respondents, maintains that the existence of democratic advances or progress in Africa. This is the case of Burkina Faso where the 2015 election was conducted transparently. Algeria is not spared. Under pressure from the street, Aziz Bouteflika, President of the republic gave up on winning a fifth term without bloodshed. In Ghana, the elections also went smoothly which indicates the political maturity of these countries. In addition, the "èb-èb" among the odjukru shows that democracy is not in exile in Africa. If this table shows democratic

progress, the situation is not so bright in several countries. Indeed, leaders tamper with constitutions at will to maintain or perpetuate themselves in power. Demonstrations relating to deprivation of liberty, poor living and working conditions are of people's daily lives. Repressions, most often bloody, coups were recorded (Democratic Republic of Congo, Togo, Benin, Sudan, Ivory Coast). This also includes the destruction of health infrastructure and its corollary and the persistence of disease. In addition, there are disputed elections due to poor organizational conditions (ballot box stuffing, rigging of results), external (Western) interference in the internal affairs of African countries, thus causing poor governance and autocratic management in cities. This situation of discomfort shows the unsuitability of democracy modeled on the Western model. Its deconstruction is essential.

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