

The Dangers of Democratisation: Lessons from the Third Wave of Democratisation in Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire

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The development of the Third World, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), is a long-standing but contested goal of the international community. The concept of 'development' often implies paternalism, orientalism, and a sense of superiority that fostered the 'good governance' campaign of the post-Cold War era. This campaign had a single aim: promoting better governance globally through democratisation. The international community believed that this could be done by establishing election processes, but elections quickly became just another tool used by power-hungry leaders to conserve their status and influence. In this paper, I examine the issues that arise from the use of elections as a measure of development and democratic engagement. I first discuss the origins of the Third Wave of democratisation in SSA in the 1980s through to the early 2000s. Next, I explore the debate concerning internal and external pressures to democratise, and consider some relevant electoral theories including the importance of second elections. I then analyse two case studies, Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire, as examples of both successes and failures in the democratisation movement. I conclude that the democratisation process is complex. It takes time, and imported models cannot be used. It is an organic process unique to every case. While democracy may be the most popular form of acceptable government, it is not necessarily the solution to the problems of development. As Rita Abrahamsen puts it, "[f]or all its deficiencies, it remains the case that democracy is the worst form of rule, except all others."¹ If people understand that democracy is not the panacea for all of the problems associated with authoritarianism, future development

efforts can avoid the parochial democratisation efforts of the past.

If democratisation is to continue, we must first understand the causes of democracy. Initially, the democratisation movement in the 1990s was deeply optimistic; some scholars described it as a “second independence.”² But as these projects began to fail, it became difficult to argue that democracy would solve the problems associated with authoritarianism and poverty present in many SSA states.³ Scholars then began to debate whether pressures to democratise arose internally or externally in those states. Prior to the latest wave of democratisation, the dominant theories included those put forward by van de Walle and Bratton.⁴ These theorists argue that democracies emerge in previously authoritarian states due to domestic pressures and popular protests.⁵ They suggest that the transition to democracy driven by the people, as evidenced by mass protests demanding democracy.⁶ Meanwhile, they interpret the conditionality of aid and pressures from external donors as “rather ineffectual and insignificant contributors to democratisation.”⁷ As Africa has continued to democratise, many theories have challenged the view that democratisation stems from the internal demands of the people, as many theorists argued that external pressures provided the strongest incentive for democratisation.

The argument emphasising external incentives to democratise is based on the economic pressures exerted on African states by the international community. Due to mounting political and economic pressures, African states and their leaders have had to rely on resources from the international community to survive.⁸ However, international powers are unlikely to provide financial aid without proof of political progress. As a result, states in need have had to exhibit signs of political liberalisation in order to procure the economic resources necessary to maintain their nondemocratic governments.⁹ Abrahamsen describes this in *Disciplining Democracy*:

Many newly elected governments on the continent had two irreconcilable constituencies: external donors and creditors and their poor domestic majorities. While governments were crucially dependent on each, for their financial survival and re-election respectively, they could not satisfy both at the same time. External sponsors demanded continued economic liberalisation, which was sure to create domestic dissatisfaction and unpopularity at the polls. Responding to popular demands for social

improvements, on the other hand, was likely to result in loss of vital financial assistance. In many countries, the first casualty of this dilemma was the democratic process itself, as governments reverted to the tried and tested methods of the authoritarian past in order to contain civil disorder and silence critics. Nevertheless, in most countries the formal trappings of democracy have been maintained, partly as a consequence of aid dependency and the international isolation that would follow from a total collapse of democracy.¹⁰

Due to this dilemma, the façade of democratisation has become more important than political liberalisation and actual democratisation. States only needed to democratise to the point where they would be deemed acceptable by the international community, a practice adopted by both African regimes and foreign donors.¹¹ African states have had little choice but to participate in this charade, as “those that resisted were threatened with suspension of aid.”¹² It was beneficial for Western states to see tangible success from structural adjustment policies, and democratisation was supposed to achieve the same results as structural adjustment.¹³ Thus, the international community promoted the illusion that democratisation would stabilise African states. The reliance of African States on the international community for economic support has led to a complicated relationship in which the pretense of rapid democratisation is more important than actual political liberalisation.

The complex economic and political interdependencies between the international community and African states demonstrates that democratisation cannot be strictly limited to internal or external factors. Democratisation often results from a complex interplay of coercion and conflicting interests. The process does not necessarily result in a working democracy; it may also result in hybrid regimes that maintain the fundamental power structures of nondemocratic states.

There is only one tool to create representative democracy: elections. However, they are easily co-opted for nondemocratic purposes. Many governments may hold elections in single-party systems to legitimise their political monopoly. Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire are two examples of this process, with Côte d'Ivoire going so far as to attempt to hold a competitive election in 1980 with only one party. Candidates had to compete within the same party ideology, strategically relying on smear campaigns. However, these elections were significantly more competitive than those previously held.¹⁴ Proponents of single-party

systems often cite the dangers of multi-party competitions in states with regional, ethnic, and localised complications, and these reasons have been largely accepted by the West. Although the worries surrounding multi-party competitions may be justified in some cases, the international community has come to consider these reasons as an excuse to prevent transition.¹⁵ Multi-party elections have become the preferred measure of a successful democracy, but this is a debatable criterion, since “it is difficult to demonstrate that multiparty competition has resulted in more effective or accountable government.”¹⁶ Multi-party elections are an *event* and are not necessarily backed by a strong judicial or economic *system*. Without the requisite civil society, elections of any kind become a rivalry between the established elites.¹⁷ It is for this reason that African states have had different experiences with political liberalisation. In the Congo, Côte d’Ivoire, and Kenya, the transition to multi-party elections did not have a positive impact. Indeed, the case study on Côte d’Ivoire discussed below demonstrates that the transition to democracy can lead to political turmoil or even war. In other states, including Benin, Mali, and Senegal, multi-party competition has led to increased diversity and openness.¹⁸

It is difficult to determine the measures of success of democratisation. Samuel Huntington’s consolidation of democracy standard called the “two-turnover test” maintains that for there to be democracy, “the winners of a founding election [must be] defeated in a subsequent contest, and the new winners themselves [must] later abide an electoral turnover.”¹⁹ In other words, genuine democracy requires more than one set of free and open elections in which an opposition party or leader wins and a transfer of power occurs. According to Huntington, this process must happen twice for successful democratisation to be achieved. The quality of the second round of elections is critical, particularly in cases involving military leaders rising to power by a coup. Since the international community is hesitant to support a leader who has gained power through violence, these military leaders often hold elections soon after having gained power. The quality of second elections is a useful measure to determine the long-term success of democratisation, and the quality of these second elections tended to decrease significantly, indicating that genuine democratisation had not taken place.²⁰ Unfortunately, there has been a significant decline in the quantity of research regarding democratisation in African states since the early 2000s, so there is little

information on whether election quality has continued past the second round of elections.

In other words, a state that holds elections is not necessarily democratic. The examination of the quality of first and second elections reveals that the wave of democratisation in Africa in the 1990s involved democracies only in name.²¹ The first elections were not perfect, but second elections tended to be even worse.²² Semi-democracies were common in the few African states that held elections in the 1970s and 1980s. In these systems, states would hold multi-party elections but preclude the possibility of defeat through the electoral process.²³ Again, instituting elections does not solve the issue of political and state-sponsored violence. Such practices led to the creation of “virtual democracies,” in which many of the features of liberal democracy are maintained, such as regular elections, but without the crucial element of an effective opposition.²⁴ Even though Africa became slightly freer overall in the 1990s, the rankings by Freedom House suggest that the ‘pseudo-democracy’ category grew significantly.²⁵

This overview of Third Wave democratisation literature demonstrates that political liberalisation in Africa is more complex than often assumed. The number of states holding regular elections increased drastically during the 1990s; by 1997, only four of forty-eight SSA states had not held at least one competitive, multiparty election.²⁶ However, long-term, stable democracies were not created and the turmoil on the continent remained unresolved. In the interest of creating the illusion of success, African states and the international community were complacent in the development and acceptance of pseudo-democracies. This was possible because elections were considered to be the only procedural measure of democracy. However, elections do not fundamentally challenge the neopatrimonialist and clientelist systems present in SSA. These systems are ingrained in the power structures of many African states, including Senegal and Côte d’Ivoire, and they provide a certain level of social stability while simultaneously having the potential to obstruct democratisation.²⁷ To compensate for this weakness, elections are manipulated to suit a clientelist system in which “political representation is seen to occur when patrons meet their obligations in respect of their clients.”²⁸ Because of democracy’s failure to stimulate economic development and improve the political stability for the majority of the African populations, it has quickly lost its appeal for local communities.²⁹

To demonstrate some of the effects of democratisation, I now examine two brief case studies. Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire are both West African states that were colonised by France. Senegal is often cited as a success story for the Third Wave of democratisation, whereas Côte d'Ivoire continues to struggle from the disastrous effects of its transition. This generalisation is not accurate, strictly speaking, but the comparison of the two cases reveals several lessons that might be applicable to future democratisation projects.

Senegal gained independence in 1960 as part of the Mali Federation before quickly pulling out to become a separate republic. Léopold Senghor was its first President, despite an attempted coup by the Prime Minister, Mamadou Dia. Senegal began to democratise relatively early with the development of a single party system in 1966, which was run by Senghor's Senegalese Progressive Union. A three-party system was created just over a decade later, in 1978. Interestingly, Senghor stepped down in 1981 to allow Abdou Diouf to become president. In 2000, the opposition leader, Abdoulaye Wade, won the second presidential elections to end Diouf's nineteen-year rule. Even though Senegal began its transition to democracy shortly after independence, it took forty years for real political turnover to occur. Wade's Senegalese Democratic Party won a parliamentary majority in 2001, and his popularity increased in the 2007 elections despite strong opposition. In 2012, Macky Sall won the presidential elections, and Senegal thus passed the two-turnover test. Recently, Senegal has experienced political unrest and protests because Sall has been suspected of restricting the opposition.³⁰

Like many colonised SSA states, Senegal has been heavily dependent on one resource. The peanut industry was controlled by a state-owned company and constituted a significant portion of the economy. As a result, Senegal was heavily dependent on foreign aid.³¹ This is a common effect of colonialism, as industries were protected under colonial rule and required continuous protection in order to compete internationally.³² Clientelism and systems of patronage continue to be a prevalent source of power. This is an important consideration, since these systems are generally viewed as counter to Western ideals of democracy and modernity.³³

The 2000 election in Senegal was remarkably free and fair. A record number of voters took to the polls, resulting in a 63 percent turnout.³⁴ Despite losing after nineteen years in power, President Diouf graciously

offered his concession to the President-elect Wade, and this moment set the tone for a peaceful transfer of power. The long and slow transition toward full-scale democratisation played a significant role. The press remained free and citizens were able to criticise the leadership of the country. In the years leading up to the historic 2000 turnover, most elections were considered fair and open, and Senegal slowly created its own brand of democracy.³⁵ Moreover, Senegal has had a fairly democratic civil society, and religion plays an active, political role in daily life; it provides a space for discussion and is one of the few social networks where one could safely criticise the authoritarian regime.³⁶ Senegal has also maintained close cultural and economic ties with its former coloniser, France.³⁷ Senegal was favoured by France under colonial rule, which led to the creation of local assemblies and thus increased colonial representation in the French legislature.³⁸ Léopold Senghor, the first president, served as one of two Senegalese deputies in France's National Assembly prior to independence, providing him with first-hand experience in the workings of a democratic state.³⁹

Although Senegal had some experience with democracy prior to its first significant political turnover via election, civil society does not invariably lead to democracy. Civic organisations are often run by members of the ruling elite, who discourage discussion that is in opposition to the state.⁴⁰ Senegal is no exception, especially given its strong class system, in which the poor must obey the more powerful, rich elite.⁴¹

Such a brief overview cannot examine all of the factors and effects that led to the development of democracy in Senegal, but it can offer important insights. For one, Senegal has passed the two-turnover test described by Huntington. This does not indicate that democracy will be free and fair, and President Macky Sall has already been accused of repressing the opposition. However, it does show that Senegal has maintained their democracy more effectively than most of the states that democratised in the 1990s. Furthermore, President Senghor had directly experienced democracy and was therefore able to peacefully transfer power and gradually introduce elections. Nevertheless, Senegal's initial multi-party system was far from perfect. In this system, each of the three parties had to choose either a liberal or Marxist-Leninist ideology, while Senghor's Parti Socialiste (PS) maintained the middle-of-the-road.⁴² Voter turnout remained low for a long time, for Senghor and his party controlled "the political organization, the money to finance it and the

patronage positions to dispense to party supporters” in order to stay in power.⁴³ Overall, however, Senegal’s experience has been relatively positive and peaceful, making it easier for the country to attract foreign donors and giving hope to the democratisation project as a whole.⁴⁴

Côte d’Ivoire, on the other hand, did not have such a positive experience. The country also gained independence from France in 1960, with Félix Houphouët-Boigny serving as the first president. Opposition parties were not legalised until 1990, when Houphouët-Boigny won the first multiparty presidential election against Laurent Gbagbo. When Houphouët-Boigny died in 1993, he was replaced by Henri Konan Bédié, who was re-elected in 1995. In 1999, he was overthrown by a military coup and replaced by General Robert Guéi, who declared himself president. He claimed to have won the presidential election in 2000 but was later removed from office after a popular uprising. Gbagbo replaced him, but his presidency was disputed by the other presidential candidate, Alassane Ouattara. There were frequent clashes between Gbagbo’s mostly southern, Christian supporters and Ouattara’s mostly northern, Muslim supporters. This bloody civil war officially continued until 2003, but fighting persisted sporadically until elections were finally held in December 2010. Ouattara was declared the official winner, but Gbagbo refused to accept the results, which initiated a period of postelection violence. Gbagbo attempted to flee, but in April 2011 Ouattara’s troops managed to capture and deliver him to the International Criminal Court (ICC), where he was charged with crimes against humanity. Today, Ouattara continues to serve as president and has restored relative peace, which allowed the UN to lift its embargo on Côte d’Ivoire’s diamond trade in 2014. While some military mutinies in 2017 indicate that the country is not completely at peace, it is relatively stable.⁴⁵

Shortly after gaining independence, Côte d’Ivoire experienced significant economic success. Politically, the transition to independence was smooth, as Houphouët-Boigny’s Parti Démocratique de la Côte d’Ivoire had been in power since 1957.⁴⁶ However, in the wake of decreasing employment in the 1970s and a larger economic crisis in the 1980s, Houphouët-Boigny abruptly started limited political liberalisation reforms to placate the population.⁴⁷ Social tensions continued to escalate as wages were cut under several rounds of structural adjustment, and Houphouët-Boigny quickly legalised opposition parties just prior to the 1990 elections in response. He won the election with 81.7 percent

of the vote, down from the previous wins of 98–99 percent, but was able to manipulate the electoral process in his favour.⁴⁸ Despite this, the election was relatively tame, especially in comparison to the turmoil that would follow Houphouët-Boigny's death. Houphouët-Boigny had tried to neutralise the ethnic and religious tensions in the country by incorporating different groups into the political structure. However, this prospect of harmony was destroyed by President Bédié, who institutionalised the concept of *Ivoirité*, which significantly limited who could be considered an Ivorian citizen. This classification would have prevented Alassane Ouattara from running for president.⁴⁹ *Ivoirité* allowed Bédié to remain in power, but it divided the country along ethnic, religious, and geographical lines.⁵⁰ The international community became increasingly involved in the ensuing civil war, attempting to negotiate peace treaties and covering the costs of elections.⁵¹ These interventions caused further complications by merely focusing peace talks on power sharing and elections instead of resolving the underlying citizenship issues caused by *Ivoirité*.⁵²

Since many complicated issues were at play in the Ivorian civil war, the international community's efforts were counterproductive insofar as they simply focused on democracy and elections. The case of Côte d'Ivoire clearly exhibits the dangers of using democratisation as a quick fix for social unrest. Houphouët-Boigny used political reform as a tool to maintain his power, for it provided quick respite from internal dissatisfaction and decreased pressures for structural adjustment from the international community. Nonetheless, Côte d'Ivoire has not managed to pass the two-turnover test. Its elections have been poorly institutionalised and have allowed manipulation for the sake of immediate personal gain. This clearly does not reflect a well-democratised state.

The comparison of the experience of the above two states reveals interesting insights about democratisation. Both states became independent simultaneously, but Senegal has had a longer history with democracy than Côte d'Ivoire. The first president of both states ruled for several decades. Both legalised multiparty elections, but Senegal took many years to do so, while Côte d'Ivoire did so abruptly in response to immediate domestic and international pressures. Senegal set a precedent for peaceful political turnover after its 2000 election and has never suffered from a successful coup. On the other hand, Côte d'Ivoire has experienced a successful military coup, and each democratic transfer of power

thus far has followed or preceded a period of intense conflict. Perhaps the most important takeaway from this comparison is that democratisation takes time. It requires a strong civil society, an established judiciary, and a robust belief in the political process. Despite democracy being a supposed replacement for structural adjustment, it does not invariably create economic growth and therefore cannot function as a tool to solve the issues caused by economic crises.

There are no shortcuts in the creation of a democracy. By holding elections without the supporting social and political institutions, the process can be manipulated to maintain an already powerful elite.⁵³ Both Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire are examples of this phenomenon. Furthermore, it is impossible to use an imported model for democratisation.⁵⁴ The Western experience of democratisation is based on its history and circumstances, whereas Africa has its own history and governmental experiences.⁵⁵ The creation of new democratic states requires an understanding of that state's experiences. The Western model may be a useful tool, but it cannot be superimposed onto every situation.

Overall, the democratisation process is complex. The assumption that democracy solves problems of development, and is therefore advantageous, is ill-informed. The histories of Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire, and of Africa in general, demonstrate that every state will have a different reaction to democratisation. The pressure to democratise quickly often leads to the creation of pseudo-democracies, in which elections mask the existing power structures. As the world prepares for a possible Fourth Wave of democratisation, it is important to keep these examples and debates in mind. The lessons of the past might help prevent future violence and failed democracies of the sort that occurred in the Third Wave.

NOTES

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