



Editors' Notes

Elections and Electoral Politics in Africa

Movements Forward, Backwards or Nowhere?

Toby Leon Moorsom, Wangui Kimari, and Christopher Webb

Virtually every African country has held multi-party elections in the past 4 years, most of them under systems of liberal democracy, and some on the heels of 'uprisings' of various forms. This is extraordinary considering that 30 years ago there were somewhere in the range of 35 single-party systems on the continent. The period 1952-1970 saw 28 successful coups, and by the late 1980s the majority of African countries faced single-party systems, many with leaders that had been around for more than two decades. Most of these were, however, swept aside between 1989 and 1994, as no less than 27 African countries underwent 'third wave' democratizations spurred by a changing geopolitical order, the rise of civil society organizations and new political conditionalities tied to IMF and World Bank Structural Adjustment Programs.

At the core of these latter changes were the 'good governance' policies of the IMF and the World Bank that were intended to liberalize African economies and address state corruption. The impact of these reforms has, however, been decidedly mixed across the conti-

ment. While some countries have held free and fair elections with minimal incident, others were plagued by widespread intimidation of opposition groups, silencing of the press and civil society, and little independent oversight.

More recently, some African countries have witnessed elections that have challenged the legitimacy of entrenched nationalist movements that still held power, both through the ballot box and through popular mobilization. For a time, the monumental upheavals of the so-called 'Arab Spring' and 'African Summer' seemed to generate new political currents. The failure of these movements to alter state power and institute more democratic forms of rule demands further analysis. At the same time, current mobilizations in Algeria, Sudan (and, to a lesser extent, Zimbabwe) show us that this moment of collective struggle for transformation is not over. Activists in Sudan appear to be taking lessons from the Egyptian and Zimbabwean experiences, and are so far unwilling to settle for a resolution orchestrated by generals from within Bashir's inner circle.

While the winners of these voting rituals are often predictable, the electoral process is also constituted by unpredictable twists and turns which are often accompanied by repression. A prescient example is the case of the 2018 elections in the DRC. After only one week, with 53% of votes counted, Félix Tshisekedi was announced the winner, a move that the opposition say was blessed by former president Joseph Kabila. These events occur against the suspension of Internet services by the government a day after votes were cast, the deportation of an international journalist and the inability of local election monitors to gain access to the count.

Unfortunately, the Congo is not an exception on the continent. In the Nigerian elections earlier this year, logistical problems and electoral violence caused significant voting delays, and voting patterns continued to reflect deep geographical, religious and ethnic divides. As Kialele Nyiyaana describes in this issue, entrenched patterns of voting along ethnic and religious lines in the landmark 2015

elections calls into question the democratic nature of Nigeria's political space. On the other side of the continent, the Kenyan elections of 2017 witnessed abusive police operations, with police killing at least 100 opposition activists and bystanders (HRW 2018). In other cases, the military has played a prominent role in both destabilizing existing political regimes and instituting new forms of despotism, as the Egyptian and Zimbabwean cases make clear.

The 'good governance' elections of the 1990s increasingly coexist with renewed forms of despotism and attempts to quell political opposition both on the street and online. While there are undoubtedly signs of democratic process in many cases, these exist amidst what Cheeseman and Klaas (2018) describe as, "the greatest political paradox of our time", in which globally "there are more elections than ever before, and yet the world is becoming less democratic". Certainly, there is a gradual decline in the quality of democracy in the world, based upon measures of political freedoms, independence of the civil service, functioning checks and balances between branches of government, freedom of the media, minority rights, vote-buying, violent repression, the assassination and imprisonment of rivals, gerrymandering, voter suppression, ballot-box stuffing, digital manipulation and the control of the media—among other assaults on common citizens.

While regimes in the Global North, particularly the G7 powers, continue to decry 'anti-democratic' regimes in the South, there is a growing tolerance among them for anti-democratic behaviour. The maintenance of a global capitalism rests, it seems, on increasingly authoritarian forms of rule, from Bolsonaro in Brazil and Putin in Russia to Erdoğan in Turkey. The sweeping back of the Pink tide in Latin America has also been treated, with some fanfare, as an indication of the supremacy of the market and the anti-democratic impulses within socialism. These moves come, of course, as economies in the North are keen to reassert their influence in Latin America. The resurgence of right-wing populism in the North finds its mirror

in the South; these alliances of the right threaten not only democratic systems but civil society, indigenous communities and political activists who push back against the forces of global capital.

The positive side of these new contortions of empire is that, globally, movements against the normalization of this new wave of authoritarianism are also emerging. In North America, we see the prominent role of indigenous movements calling for climate justice, while in places like Algeria and Sudan we see movements against both political despotism and the ravages of neoliberal austerity. Thus, Africa continues to be at the frontlines and the margins of the global anti-poverty movement as it was during the misnamed 'Arab spring' and 'African Summer' (Moorsom 2011).

Africa's new batch of authoritarians are qualitatively different than many of those who emerged on the African continent post-independence. While the former single-party states were ultimately authoritarian regimes, they came into being with reasonable claims to democratic legitimacy because of the post-colonial conditions many states found themselves in (Macpherson 1965, Zolberg 1966). In particular, they had tiny capitalist classes with limited space to maneuver within the global economy. Their lack of class articulation meant they often did not form into political parties with distinct ideological positions. While resistance to colonialism existed in popular, grassroots forums and among labour unions, formal representative bodies tended to come through the leadership of classes associated with the state (teachers, civil servants and others educated abroad), utilizing an amalgam of liberal, ethnic and nationalist discourses. This led to broad coalitions, often with significant tensions between 'traditional authorities' and those interested in land reform. Political mobilization was also along ethnolinguistic and regional lines. Such tensions remained latent when European powers were forced to acquiesce either by resistance of the colonized, or through budgetary pressures.

The result was that a diverse set of political actors, with insufficiently articulated politics, united around the need to achieve material benefits from independence; what some have described as the developmental state moment (Leys 1996). They cooperated with each other, and with the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (the World Bank), to build schools, universities, public works like water distribution networks, health centres, and roads (Shivji, 2009). They also sought to widen and de-racialize markets. They worked to build a newfound national culture through various state-supported schemes to promote cultural exchange, knowledge of differing populations and promoted the "nation" over ethnolinguistic divisions (read: 'tribalism'). A massive political science literature supported anti-statist IBRD and IMF depictions of these states as rife with corruption, neo-patrimonialism, and dominated by a "politics of the belly" (Bayart 1993). Despite a degree of truth behind these depictions, there is now evidence they were far more successful than the narratives of the late 1980s and early '90's made them out to be (Mkandawire 2001, Moorsom 2016).

Much has happened between the independence struggles and the 'third wave' liberalizations. Initially the most radical, that sought more fundamental transformation of colonial societies, were taken out by war, military coups or assassination. Sometimes well-meaning leaders found pragmatic reasons to tolerate imperialism, while others were true compradors. However, it was the oil crisis of the 1970s, the declining terms of trade and sky-rocketing interest-rates following the Volcker shocks of 1979-1981, which brought the contradictions within those initial coalitions into, at best, a state of dysfunction, and, at worst, civil war. It was in this context that the early heroes of independence were turned into authoritarian leaders who opened the door to the IFIs and loan conditionalities.

There were, at times meaningful, grassroots movements in the early 1990s that contested the IFI agenda. They were comprised of broadly popular movements, of which workers played a significant

role. However, this was also the era of the 'new social movements', which in turn coincided with a new-found love of 'civil society' coming, rather uncritically, from the left and right. If there is one truth about neoliberalism in Africa, and globally, it is that it has significantly disciplined labour and working-class unionism in particular. Aside from South Africa and Nigeria, there is virtually no labour movement on the continent, and these too have succumbed to pro-business, 'third-way' unionism that has led to the creation of two-tier workplaces and subsequent inter-class divisions. The energy and symbolism of nationalist struggle has been concentrated in the state and more precisely in ruling parties, while the dynamism of civil society has failed to create cross class and ethnic forms of unity that could challenge this order.

The type of democracy that was implemented following this 'third wave' was often a disciplinary form. This democratic model separated the political from the economic, while stripping democratic controls in the latter (multi-faceted assaults on trade unionism, deregulation of finance, exchange rates). Meanwhile, the political dimensions of this democratic model led to increased factionalism, heightened clientelist and neopatrimonial fighting for dwindling state resources (Allen 1995). While the number of political parties multiplied, platforms had virtually no variation. Politicians parroted simplistic phrases about efficiency and good governance, and private media did nothing to supply citizens with tools to challenge the pseudo-scientific justifications for neoliberal policy. Political debate fixated on the personalities and character attributes of candidates that stoked regional and ethnic chauvinisms. Civil society organizations multiplied and morphed into powerful NGOs as philanthropies poured money into the continent, and many often came to stand in for the state in policy circles.

Thus, is it unsurprising that Nyiayaana, in this current volume, describes recent elections in Nigeria as 'voting without choosing.' While elections have been generally solidified as the main method

of gaining legitimacy, they function as a ritual that legitimizes authoritarians, as Cheeseman and Klaas (2018) point out. There are, of course, significant overlaps between the ambitions of authoritarian leaders and global capital. For them, it is critical that the economy is formally and juridically separated from the sphere of popular control, in a manner described by Wood (1995) as a means of liberating class power from democratic control. Just prior to her death, Wood argued that, given these circumstances, the contemporary definition of democracy is in fact its opposite; the disempowering of the people.

The articles collected in this special issue of *Nokoko* provide a range of perspectives on electoral politics, voting behaviour and the mixed outcomes of Africa's 'third wave' democratizations. While recognizing the value of democratic spaces and freedom of speech, they call into question the democratic nature of these processes and the ends they serve. In the Nigerian and Ghanaian cases, political parties have similar platforms with voting largely determined by regional and ethnic commitments alongside ostentatious and obscene levels of corruption and wealth concentration. Tatenda Nhapi and Takudzwa Leonard Mathende describe the disenchantment among Zimbabwean youth with major political parties, as they are seen as unresponsive to the social and economic challenges faced by young people. In the Kenyan case, Oyunga Pala surveys the country's turbulent elections of 2017 and 2018, the 'self swearing-in' of Raila Odinga and the eventual, though questionable, victory of Uhuru Kenyatta. The fragile orchestrated peace between them, he argues, provides little hope for an end to inter-party factionalism and actual peace, principally in a context of increasing precarity for the majority of citizens. Thomson and Hopper's paper focuses on the entrenchment of authoritarian power by Paul Kagame's Rwandan Patriotic Front through 'electoral management.' The manipulation of electoral politics does more than simply entrench the power of political elites,

in the Rwandan case it renders political participation a form of compliance to power.

The article by Anastasia Ufimtseva offers an excellent example of the links between the political and economic dimensions of democratization. She shows that Angola suffers from weak regulatory regimes and governance structures coinciding with an overly centralised 'hyper-presidential' regime (with marked similarities to the Rwandan case). As with the cases of Ghana and Nigeria, the Angolan economy remains overly dependent upon fluctuations of prices of two or three commodities, which, in turn, leave the country prone to financial uncertainty. In addition, the country is overly dependent upon 'resource for infrastructure' contracts amidst decreasing public ownership in the petroleum sector. Angolans have good reason therefore to question the nature of 'independence' after decades of civil war.

The issue also includes an extended book review by Andrew Heffernan reflecting on three influential monographs of recent years. It examines the failures of the theoretical tools of the discipline of International Relations to actually make sense of the complexity and historical specificity of politics among African states. It in turn examines the possibilities for an increased flow of knowledge from the South to the North, which can begin to counter the overwhelming dominance of knowledge production outside the continent.

Finally, this issue culminates with an interview with African political thinker and publisher Firoze Manji, who reflects on the lineages of his 2011 book *African Awakenings: The Emerging Revolutions* (Manji and Ekine 2011). At the time, the book was the first to situate the Arab Spring moment within Africa itself, and to look for the echoes of the uprisings across the continent. The disappointing outcome of the Arab Spring moment is, unfortunately, reflected across the continent where opposition movements, trade unions and civil society face violent constraints. Manji situates the rise and decline of these movements in their historical context and in relation to the

global forces (neoliberal orthodoxy) that has guided development on the continent. He argues there is the pressing need to move beyond old organizing models and generate more inclusive practices combining both progressive political and economic aspirations. This, he suggests, will lead to a renewed left politics across the continent. Fortunately, we have some lights to guide us down this path. Here Manji reflects on the life and writings of Samir Amin, who died in 2018. Amin's commitment to a socialist internationalism, and his abiding interest in the political economy of African development leaves a rich resource and legacy for scholars and activists in Africa today. It is our hope that this issue makes a small contribution to furthering the radical scholarship and debate that sustained Amin's life and work.

The production of this issue was subject to a series of delays, the most significant being due to the grave tragedy of losing our editorial board member, Pius Edesanmi. Pius was the Director of the Institute of African Studies the vibrant space that we have all been connected to in some way since its founding nearly a decade ago. For this reason, the special issue opens with a few words from the former Director, Blair Rutherford. Many of us have taken inspiration from Pius' writings as well as from his friendship, warmth, camaraderie, sharp mind, and the wit it included. He played a nodal role in a wide intellectual community associated with African Studies. We hope that in his absence, the community will be drawn into this journal as a means of keeping those links that Pius nurtured alive.

We thank all those who contributed to this issue, and the nuanced discussions they brought forward, from Ghana to Angola, towards engendering more complex debates on elections and electoral politics in Africa.

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