

2

Democratic divergence in Africa: lessons and implications for aid

*Joseph Siegle*¹

Africa's contemporary democratisation experience is a story of divergence. After decades of static autocratic dominance, the region shifted sharply toward representative government after the end of the Cold War. Led by Benin, South Africa, Ghana, Senegal, and Mali, some 30 African countries have taken steps toward democracy over the past two decades. In 1989, only three African countries could claim democratic governments. This swing has been accompanied by an upsurge in the number of civil society organisations, independent media, and opportunities for political expression. Moreover, reflecting a maturity that scholars long deemed unrealistic in low-income countries, popular support for democracy in Africa remains strong, despite ongoing challenges.²

Democratic progress in Africa is far from universal, however. A dozen autocratic governments remain firmly in place, maintaining a monopoly on power and repressive practices little changed from the 1960s-1980s era of impunity. An equal number of others have adopted features of democracy, though power remains concentrated in the hands of a single political actor. While opposition parties, civil society organisations, and elections are allowed, these bodies are heavily constrained and there is little genuine oversight of the ruling leadership.

The spectrum of governance types in Africa parallels other critical challenges the region faces. Economic stagnation, underdevelopment, financial volatility, humanitarian catastrophes, susceptibility to Islamic extremism, and conflict are all closely linked to closed and unaccountable political systems. Put succinctly, a country's political institutions define the 'operating system' or incentive structure under which that society functions. Establishing constructive and responsive political processes in Africa is indispensable to addressing the many other difficulties the region is facing.

Despite Africa's remarkable democratic advances, the future trajectory of Africa's governance norms remains uncertain. The expanded transparency, accountability, and rules-based processes accompanying Africa's budding democracies are countered by personalistic regimes that stubbornly cling to long-accepted norms of control, coercion, and patronage. These practices,

moreover, are increasingly bolstered by disparate sources of external support that benefit from seeing these 'strongmen' stay in power.

This is the context in which the debate on aid effectiveness in Africa is occurring.

Democracy and Africa's development and stability

Categorising democratic progress is an inherently imperfect process. Democracy takes many forms, the democratisation road is typically bumpy, and a leadership's commitment to democratic processes is often open to interpretation. Recognising these limitations, a compilation of two independent democracy indices³ suggests four broad categories of Africa's political systems (see table 1).

By this count, ten African countries, labelled 'consolidating democracies', have gone far towards establishing democratic institutions.⁴ An additional 14 democratising countries have made noteworthy headway in adopting pluralistic practices. A third of these democratisers appear to have a good chance of joining the consolidating group in the near term. Despite these historic advances, a full half of all African governments remain tilted toward the autocratic side of the ledger. If northern Africa were considered, this persistent autocratic character would be even more pronounced. As a share of population, just less than 60 per cent of Africans live in a democratic or democratising society; just less than 50 per cent if Nigeria were excluded.⁵

The variation of Africa's political liberalisation is a useful lens through which to compare the region's equally varied social and economic progress. Each of the four regime categories had median per capita income levels in 1990 of roughly US\$275 to US\$375 (excluding Botswana and Mauritius, which had begun their economic take-off prior to the 1990s). Since then, consolidating democracies have realised aggregate increases in per capita incomes of 15 per cent on average (35 per cent, including Botswana and Mauritius). The growth record of democratisers has been more varied, partly due to the fact that a number of these countries are emerging from civil conflicts. Still, median per capita incomes in this category have typically expanded by 7 per cent since 1990. Semi-authoritarians, also representing a number of conflict-torn countries, in contrast, have suffered an average 5 per cent contraction in per capita incomes during this time. Finally, autocracies, half of which collect sizeable oil and mineral revenues (notably Equatorial Guinea, which has experienced a seven-fold expansion since 1990), have realised impressive median per capita growth of 28 per cent. There is more to this story, however.

Table 1: Categorisation of African political regimes in 2006

Consolidating democracies	Democratisers	Semi-authoritarians	Autocratic
Benin	Comoros	Angola	Cameroon
Botswana	Kenya	Burkina Faso	Chad
Cape Verde	Lesotho	Burundi	DRC
Ghana	Liberia	Central African Rep.	Equatorial Guinea
Mali	Madagascar	Congo	Eritrea
Mauritius	Malawi	Côte d'Ivoire	Gabon
Namibia	Mozambique	Djibouti	Guinea
São Tomé & Príncipe	Niger	Ethiopia	Mauritania
Senegal	Nigeria	Gambia	Somalia*
South Africa	Seychelles	Guinea Bissau	Sudan
	Sierra Leone	Rwanda	Swaziland
	Tanzania	Togo	Zimbabwe
	Uganda		
	Zambia		

* Somalia is still largely ungoverned, though best classified as autocratic.

Economic growth in African democracies is considerably more stable than in other regime types. African democracies have had growth rates five times more stable than growth in the autocratic economies.⁶ Democratic growth stability is consistent with experience from other developing regions of the world. This is highly meaningful for societies where large numbers of people are living on the margin, and even slight downturns in economic conditions can mean the difference between subsistence and calamity.

In total, nine of the ten consolidating democracies have realised sustained economic expansion since the mid-1990s (with São Tomé being the exception). Democracies and democratisers comprise two-thirds of the 18 African economies that have seen real per capita incomes grow by more than 20 per cent over the past 10 years.⁷ Meanwhile, pluralist systems make up only a quarter of those that have had stagnant or negative growth during this period. In contrast, despite the impressive average rate of expansion in the autocratic category, eight of these 12 countries have had negative or stagnant growth since 1990.

The steady economic growth in Africa's democracies translates into improved living conditions for their citizens. Infant mortality rates, a proxy for many other measures of well-being, have declined by 18 per cent among consolidating democracies since 1990, on average. This is despite starting

from lower (ie superior) initial levels than the other regime categories. Democratisers have also seen a commendable 14 per cent average improvement in the rate of infant deaths during the past 15 years. Infant mortality rates under Africa's semi-authoritarian and autocratic governments, in contrast, have been mostly stagnant, posting median changes of only 2,4 per cent and nil, respectively, since 1990. In other words, despite massive oil revenues that have flowed into government coffers in recent years, the vast majority of citizens in autocratically-governed countries, such as Gabon, Cameroon, Congo, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, and Angola, have seen little or no improvement in their standards of living. This pattern of superior development performance by democracies is robust globally.⁸

This reveals an essential point: while growth and development may move together in aggregate, this should not be assumed. Deviations are far more common in autocratically governed societies. Emblematic of this is Equatorial Guinea, which, while it has a per capita income a quarter larger than South Africa, retains infant mortality rates that are twice as high.

African democracies are also much more likely to avoid other forms of instability - famine, conflict, and refugee crises. Illustratively, democratisers are the source of less than 12 per cent of Africa's refugees; consolidating democracies comprise a fraction of a percentage point. Perhaps most importantly, and contrary to popular perceptions, the numbers and magnitude of conflicts in Africa have declined dramatically over the past 15 years of democratic advances.⁹ Where conflicts in the region persist, they are disproportionately represented by the autocratic or semi-authoritarian categories. This is true for the medium- to high-intensity conflicts in Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), as well as the low-intensity conflicts in Algeria, Burundi, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, and Somalia, versus Nigeria and Uganda in the democratising category. While all African conflicts are currently intra-state, the potential destabilising effects for neighbouring countries are acutely apparent.

These patterns should not come as a surprise. At its core, government is a mechanism for setting priorities and allocating limited public resources in a society. The incentives governments face to retain power shape these priorities. Governments that depend on popular support and are required to operate in an environment of transparency are likely to place greater emphasis on public goods and services that benefit a greater share of the population. Governments that instead rely on elite political, military, and business networks logically respond to these interests. The differences in development performance posted by these categories of political regimes in Africa match these tendencies.

Dismantling neo-patrimonial political systems

The upshot is that societies that have been able to move most decisively away from the neo-patrimonial systems¹⁰ that have long characterised African politics have realised more sustained and broadly shared development. Countries that do a better job of creating checks on the executive branch, an autonomous private sector, property-rights protections, reliable contract enforcement, and civil liberties, particularly a free press, have tended to grow more rapidly and consistently.¹¹ Growth in countries without these ‘institutions of accountability’ tends to be more anaemic, volatile, and skewed. Put bluntly, the characteristics of neo-patrimonialism are diametrically opposed to the governance qualities conducive to development. Rehabilitating the dysfunctional, personalistic political structures with which most African societies are familiar is indispensable to democratic advances, development effectiveness, and stability in the region. This reality should serve as a guidepost to aid providers in Africa.

Democracies, on the whole, do a far better job of creating such institutions of shared power – the antidote to neo-patrimonialism – than other governance systems. This characteristic of democracies goes a long way toward explaining democracies’ superior development performance. It is democracy’s recognition of protected private space that underlines its greater support for property rights and expropriation protections. It is democracy’s premise that all citizens, including the head of state, are subject to the law that gives a foundation to the rule of law. It is democracy’s openness that provides the vehicle for policy debate, puts pressure on political leaders to reverse ineffective policies, exposes deviations from the law, and shines the light of transparency on corruption.

It is for this reason that the keywords should be democratic governance, and not solely the politically correct ‘good governance’. While not all democracies are well governed, the probability is far greater than for other regime types. And democracies that aren’t can be much more readily changed. The checks and balances, incentives for responsiveness, and accountability in democracies are simply incomparable to other systems. Newly elected Liberian president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf candidly acknowledged that an incentive for her to honour a campaign promise ‘to get the lights on in Monrovia by independence day’ (26 July) was a daily front-page countdown kept by a leading newspaper in Liberia. Strengthening governance institutions is about changing incentives, not just a technocratic exercise in building capacity.

The task of building accountable political structures in Africa is becoming more challenging, however. China’s presence on the continent has grown in recent years, primarily seeking to meet its escalating energy requirements.

China's interests in Africa transcend economics, however. China has provided financial, diplomatic (including at the UN Security Council), and arms support to a wide variety of autocratic governments in Africa, including Zimbabwe, Sudan, Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Algeria, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Gabon. Recognising that every democratic advance heightens pressure for political reforms elsewhere, China has a vested self-interest in maintaining the viability of these autocratic governments.

Paralleling China's interventions, funding from the ultra-orthodox Saudi-based Wahhabi sect of Islam has stoked radicalism in a number of heretofore moderate Muslim communities in Africa. Youth are prime targets of this sectarian competition to define Islam, with the result that younger generations now hold more militant views of Islam and its relationship to the state than do their parents. This has heightened the risk of religious strife and challenges to the state, making the task of governance in these countries even more difficult. The rise of extremism and concerns over terrorism, in turn, are generating additional leverage for African autocrats (such as Ethiopia, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Eritrea) who can portray themselves as reliable partners in the 'war on terrorism'. This portends a revival of the Cold War status-quo-reinforcing rationale that autocratic governments are better guarantors of stability on the continent.

The expanding flow of oil revenues to Africa is another counterforce to democratic advances. Experience has shown that countries that exploit vast, extractive resource reserves before they have established democratic systems of government are far more likely to experience stagnant development, widespread corruption, sharp economic disparity, and conflict (that is, 'the natural-resource curse'). Some 10 of Africa's 24 autocratic or semi-authoritarian governments rely heavily on revenues from the extractive sector (13 of 29, if North Africa is included). This gives them considerable leverage from which to sustain their hold on power. Tightening global markets for these commodities, particularly oil, are likely to deepen these strangleholds - and pit Western economic, development, and security interests against one another.

Aid and lessons for democratisation

For aid donors, the central theme from Africa's democratisation experience is that the transformation of African political systems from personalistic to accountable structures of shared power should be at the heart of all that they do. Democracies and democratisers in Africa consistently generate superior development outcomes, avoid economic and humanitarian catastrophes, and are less prone to civil conflict.

The democratisation experience in Africa also shows that external influences matter. The end of the Cold War created a more hospitable environment for democratisation to take root on the continent. The superpowers were no longer undermining democratic reformers who were challenging the status quo of big-man rule. Moreover, the winds of change that drifted into the region from previously stultified Eastern Europe altered perspectives of what was possible in Africa. The effect was contagious. Following Benin's precedent-setting democratic breakthrough in 1991, 26 African countries held presidential elections over the next three years. By 1994, not a single *de jure* one-party system remained. Sanctions on and isolation of the apartheid government in South Africa created an impetus for it to change. The introduction of the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) by the United States, with the prospect of significant increases in funding for countries that self-select on criteria of democracy, corruption, economic rights, and investment in citizens, has similarly stimulated a flurry of interest among borderline countries to improve their standing on these measures.

The direct role that aid has had in advancing democracy is less clear. This is not surprising, given that the seemingly more concrete linkages between aid and economic development are still in dispute.¹² Many factors, some intangible, contribute to successful democratisation – institutional legacy; cultural values; social capital; conflict history; democratic progress in neighbouring countries; recent economic performance; quality of leadership, especially during democratic openings; and organisational capacity of opposition parties; among others. Moreover, much analysis of the relationship between aid and democracy in Africa is confounded by Cold War-era dynamics. Most aid provided to Africa prior to 1991 was not intended to enhance development, much less encourage democratisation. In fact, just the opposite. It was often used to prop up authoritarian regimes with allegiances to one superpower or the other. The world's leading democratic nations used their influence to undermine, not enhance, democratic reform movements in Africa during this time. Noting this convoluted aid history, and recognising that Africa's democratisation process is still unfolding, lessons must be drawn with caution.

A first observation about the role of aid in enhancing democratisation in Africa is that context matters. There is an inverse relationship between a government's interest in democracy-promotion funding and the need for such assistance. Little progress may be possible in the most repressive environments via conventional democracy-promotion activities (though, where possible, these efforts may help create space for subsequent democratic dialogue). Rather, in these difficult contexts, active diplomatic engagement, involving tangible carrots and sticks, is likely to be more influential in facilitating democratic openings. Countries that have already made the decision to

democratise provide a far wider array of options for strengthening democratic values, institutions, and governance capacity. The challenge in these settings is sustaining the political will to pursue reforms that often entail curbing executive authority once reformers are in office.

These realities underscore that 'democracy aid' should not be interpreted too narrowly. It is as much the political, diplomatic, peacekeeping, trade, and investment engagement that has positively impacted Africa's democratic development as the direct project funding and technical assistance. Similarly, it is a mistake to separate economic assistance from democracy-promotion funding. Over 90 per cent of democratic backtracking in Africa has occurred in countries facing economic stagnation. Aid monies that can generate economic momentum, and help new democratic leaders demonstrate responsiveness to the priorities of the general population, are as relevant to sustaining support for democratic progress in materially challenged African societies as direct democracy-building measures (important though they may be). This responsiveness can signal a break from the past, and represent a 'democracy dividend' that bolsters popular support during the difficult times that inevitably emerge. The timely and meaningful support that donors provided to Mali, Ghana, Mozambique, and Benin, among others, during their early transition periods was vital to the steady democratic progress made there.

Secondly, democratisation takes time, and is frequently subject to pitfalls. Forty per cent of contemporary African democratisers have experienced at least one period of backsliding. This choppiness is unsurprising, given that the starting point is often a highly centralised executive power structure with well-entrenched patronage networks that have vested interests in undermining the credibility of new democracies. More than half of the cases of backsliding in Africa occur in the first six years following a democratic transition, highlighting the fragility of the early stages of democratisation. Democratisation efforts in post-conflict environments are especially prone to setbacks, and in need of longer gestation periods.¹³ Steadfastness is a virtue, however. African democratisers that have stayed with it for 12 years or more rarely backtrack to autocracy.¹⁴ For comparison's sake, Africa's consolidating democracies have been on the democratic path for 15 years, on average. Donors rarely think in such time frames, however. In fact, donor funding to democratisers typically drops off dramatically after the first competitive elections, even though this is in many ways the beginning rather than the end of the democratisation process.¹⁵

Africa's embryonic democratisation experience provides few concrete indications of appropriate thresholds above which aid can be phased out. Global experience has shown that, with a few exceptions, once democracies have reached a per capita income level of US\$2 700, they are unlikely to revert to

authoritarianism. The democratic track record in Africa is too fresh to make confident judgments about whether a similar pattern holds. Thus far, Congo's backsliding in 1997, with a per capita income of US\$940, holds the mark for 'wealthiest' African political erosion (and Congo never reached the consolidating democracy category). These evolving patterns suggest that the longer African democracies and democratisers stay on the reformist path, the more the prospect of reversals drops. The most vulnerable are those that have not been able to generate consistent improvements in economic and social development. Nigeria, Comoros, Niger, São Tomé, and post-conflict Liberia and Sierra Leone currently fit this description.

Thirdly, African countries starting down a democratic path often lack the institutions to implement the basic functions of democracy. Needless to say, this is an area that autocratic or semi-authoritarian governments have been content to neglect. As a result, the credibility of a nascent democratic process and the legitimacy of the leaders emerging from it can be compromised. External support for independent electoral commissions in Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia, Mali, Namibia, and Madagascar, among others, has greatly helped these countries pivot forward in a democratic direction. The creation and technical proficiency of independent media, in turn, is virtually a prerequisite for the airing of alternative views, fostering transparency among government officials, mobilising government action on emerging humanitarian crises, and enforcing the rule of law. External support for civil society groups, another segment of society that is typically stunted under authoritarian governments, can contribute to strengthened capacity, increased public participation, and more effective oversight in democratisers.

Fourthly, aid advocates frequently make the mistake of assuming that the impact of aid is always positive. This overlooks the reality that money is power – and will be used in line with the incentives a recipient government faces. In fact, research has shown that autocratic recipients of economic assistance from the United States were more likely to experience stagnant development, continued political repression, and civil conflict than other countries at comparable income levels, even 15 years after that assistance was allocated.¹⁶ The incentives for autocratic governments to use aid to bolster their patronage networks and hold on power are nearly irresistible – and rational. With some 93 per cent of official development assistance going to central governments, there is a real risk that donors may be contributing to the problem as much as the solution. Other research suggests that the risk of aid undercutting democracy grows as aid volume, as a share of government revenue, increases.¹⁷ Countries persistently in the top quarter of total aid allocations are particularly susceptible to subsequent declines in their democracy

rankings. If the government is the problem, then channelling more resources into it will not yield better outcomes.

This risk includes autocratic governments that are seemingly overseeing steady growth. These leaders often become aid darlings, and benefit from major aid flows and softer reporting requirements. Rather than building greater trust, openness, and proclivity for reform, however, this approach risks deepening corruption and neo-patrimonial instincts. Uganda under Yoweri Museveni exemplifies this dynamic. Supporters have long pointed to Uganda's steady growth and Museveni's strong leadership as justification for increased aid flows, despite his unwillingness to adopt democratic reforms. Over time, corruption has widened, development progress has stalled, security threats have grown, and prospects for eventual democratisation dimmed. By pouring resources into these contexts, donors risk enabling the corrosive influence of unchecked power that can transform a benign dictator or even an earnest reformer into a repressive and destructive force. Such, arguably, characterises the course donors have followed with Robert Mugabe, Issais Aferwerki, Meles Zenawi, Paul Kagame, and Frederick Chiluba, among others, to varying degrees.

Fifthly, humanitarian crises are another common rationale for funding autocratic governments in Africa. Autocracies are frequently at the centre of the region's humanitarian catastrophes. Conflict, refugees, famine, HIV/AIDS, and the prospect of an avian flu outbreak all rightly elicit emotive responses from the international community. This is further warranted given the strong spill-over probability of these crises into neighbouring countries and the world at large. However, the means by which the international community responds to crises in autocracies should differ from how they are addressed elsewhere. Specifically, international actors must exert greater control over the targeting and oversight of humanitarian resources in autocracies in order to ensure that these funds are indeed being used to benefit the intended communities. If left to the discretion of these governments, the likelihood of misappropriation is great. ZANU-PF's allocation of emergency food aid in Zimbabwe based on political allegiances is an all too typical recent example of this tendency.

Implications for aid

Africa's democratisation experience over the past 15 years has shown that external influences have had an important, complementary role to democracy's advance. Global trends, such as the end of the Cold War and heightened expectations for democratic governance, have clearly shaped openings for political reform. Individual countries have also benefited from diplomatic

engagement, peacekeeping operations, and expanded trade access, as well project-focused institution building, capacity strengthening, and economic assistance. While helpful, and in some cases indispensable, this assistance is not sufficient to ensure democratic progress. That is ultimately dependent on the actions of citizens and national elites who are necessarily the driving force behind establishing systems of self-governance. With this in mind, the following recommendations are put forward to improve aid effectiveness in Africa:

Differentiate funding based on democratic commitment. Democratic progress in Africa has been highly varied. Donors should systematically calibrate their aid accordingly. Currently, Africa's semi-authoritarians receive as much aid, as a share of GDP, as either democracies or democratisers at comparable income levels. This should change. Democratisers and lower-income consolidating democracies should receive relatively greater levels of aid, as a share of GDP, than countries that have not made commensurate steps toward reform. This will help these democratisers overcome the political and economic hurdles that can derail the consolidation process and help establish them as anchors of democracy on the continent. Such funding also represents a tangible manifestation of a democracy dividend, sending a clear signal to the populace that democracy is rewarded, while encouraging ripple effects among neighbouring countries. Recognising that democratic consolidation takes time, such support should be sustained for at least 15 years, and in some cases, particularly post-conflict contexts, longer. Non-aid-oriented differentiation, such as according African democratic leaders a more prominent place on the world stage and in bilateral relations, would further burnish the prestige attached to democratic legitimacy. Additionally, governments in industrialised democracies could do far more to educate private investors of the democratic gains and advances in rule of law made by genuine democratisers in Africa. Most international investors have highly undifferentiated impressions of African investment environments.¹⁸ An increase in private direct investment in democratisers, in turn, creates scenarios for selectively scaling back external aid.

Strengthen mechanisms of shared power. The key institutional obstacle to democratisation and sustained development in Africa is overcoming entrenched neo-patrimonial models of governance. Helping to build the ethos, capacity, and structure of institutions of shared power that are the hallmark of democratic governance is a strategic use of aid to augment democratic consolidation. Strengthening the technical, managerial, and financial capacity of independent media; ensuring the competency and effectiveness of independent electoral commissions; building the technical expertise of legislators, from which they can effectively oversee the executive branch; stimulating the emergence of independent think-tanks and watchdog groups; promoting

the creation of a paper trail in judicial systems, from the dissemination of laws through to the requirement of written decisions by judges; sponsoring inter-provincial business competitiveness initiatives; and ensuring that anti-corruption or ombudsman's offices are fully funded and staffed are examples of potential high-impact institution-building initiatives that enhance democratic accountability.

As with other recommendations, building accountable institutions is as much a political as a technocratic process. To have a positive impact, international actors will need to signal their objections clearly if actions that weaken democratic checks and balances are undertaken. The rescinding of term limits, political meddling with the court system, harassment of opposition parties, and state intimidation of the media are examples of red flags that warrant sharp responses from the international community, lest they be deemed acceptable.

An institutions-focused approach to democratic reform is markedly distinct from personality-based strategies that rely on favoured leaders to enact reforms. The aim is to create systems of oversight and accountability that transcend any single individual, regardless of how charismatic or reformist. Otherwise the risk of inadvertently reinforcing neo-patrimonial tendencies is great. The largely unified and unequivocal stance donors have taken toward corruption allegations in President Mwai Kibaki's administration in Kenya is a hopeful sign that external actors are capable of making this distinction.

Create incentives for ongoing democratic reform. Once a country has started down a democratic path, it will be inevitably buffeted by forces intent on subverting it from this course. Spoilers commonly include functionaries of the former regime, leaders who are superficially committed to reforms, social and economic pressures, cultures of corruption that foster democratic disillusionment, or genuinely reformist leaders who are seduced by power and manoeuvre to perpetuate their hold on authority rather than strengthen systems of checks and balances. To maintain democratic momentum, therefore, donors should consider framing their aid according to three broad stages. The first stage, the critical first six years of a democratic breakthrough, requires timely engagement by external actors so that reformers can show tangible material benefits from the transition. This is also a critical period to invest in institutional checks and balances that can facilitate greater popular participation and oversight, while countering the historically disproportionate influence of the executive branch. The second stage, six to 15 years on, would entail graduated increases in export, aid, political support, and investment opportunities in response to sustained advances in democratic reforms, providing leaders with incentives to stay the course. In other words, donors would aim to reward success. Currently, more times than not, international

interest and support wanes after the early years of a transition. Indeed, one of the risks of naming countries that have only recently realised democratic breakthroughs to the United States' MCA, is that it sends the message that 'they've arrived' rather than 'they've made a good start.' The incentive for continued reform that could be gained by holding off these selections until after several years of demonstrated commitment to democratic rule (the original intent of the MCA), is otherwise lost. After 15 years, donors would weigh levels and types of funding for each country on a case-by-case basis, considering criteria such as progress on democratic accountability, aid effectiveness, infant mortality rates, access to sources of private capital, and conflict history.

Raise regional democratic standards. At its essence, the future trajectory of democracy in Africa is a battle of norms. Will democratic reformers be successful in establishing basic democratic principles of openness, accountability, recognition of private space, and equality before the law? Or will a modified version of neo-patrimonialism, with its deference to personality-based decision-making, patronage, and state exploitation remain dominant? While these battles are waged in each country individually, the outcomes in one have a direct bearing on expectations in others. Benin's constitutional convention and elections in 1991 changed the parameters of democratic possibility across the continent. The endorsement by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) of Faure Gnassingbe's disputed election in Togo in 2005, similarly, provided a guidepost to leaders wishing to orchestrate hereditary succession outcomes.

External actors can contribute to the spread of democratic norms in Africa by rewarding countries that pursue these reforms, while facilitating the exchange of lessons learned around the continent. Regional and sub-regional bodies are important forums for conveying these standards. Through the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), the African Union (AU) has advocated expanded democratic practices and introduced a peer review mechanism (PRM) to assess progress toward these practices. This innovative, indigenous regional accountability strategy has considerable merit and potential. Donor support for NEPAD and the PRM, as requested, could facilitate expanding democratic expectations. Similarly, the AU and sub-regional bodies ECOWAS, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the Inter-governmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD) play vital roles in responding to crises and criticising actions by members that threaten the interests of the group as a whole. Increased international engagement with these bodies can elevate awareness of how other parts of the world have pursued democratic reforms, enhance the exposure and exchange of ideas within these sub-regions, and boost the capacity of these organisational

structures. Strengthening regional associations of journalists, legislators, judges, and businesses is a complementary means by which advances in democratic norms in one country can be shared elsewhere.

Recognise the oil curse. Disentangling the dysfunctional neo-patrimonial political structures in Africa runs directly through the challenges of establishing accountable extractive sectors. Despite commendable efforts by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to finance extractive infrastructure in African countries with autocratic governments in an accountable and developmentally friendly manner, most notably via the Chad-Cameroonian pipeline, the results have been counterproductive. Heretofore under-resourced autocrats have instead gained access to valuable revenue flows. Rather than trying to refine this approach (as per negotiations with Congo), in the interest of 'doing no harm' to the democratisation cause in Africa, the international financial institutions (IFIs) and other international donors should cease funding for extractive sector infrastructure in countries with autocratic governments.

In contexts where extractive infrastructure already exists, a logical entry point is the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI). Established in 2003 under the leadership of the British government, this initiative sets out a protocol for the disclosure of royalties paid by firms for extracting natural resources in developing countries. Establishing this benchmark will better enable internal non-governmental organisation (NGO) watchdogs, whose capacity would be simultaneously enhanced, to track the flow of these revenues through the government. Having taken a reputational and financial beating from their investments in countries with autocratic governments that yield little benefit to local populations, there is growing receptivity to EITI among firms in the extractive sector. As these corporations are indispensable actors in any effort to remedy the ill effects of the natural-resource curse, this interest provides an important opportunity for public-private partnership.

Africa has made dramatic progress toward democracy over the past 15 years. With it, prospects for major improvements in living conditions have risen. Still, the arc of Africa's democratic norms remains uncertain. More than half of Africa's governments retain dominant autocratic characteristics. These governments are resisting change, and are increasingly bolstered by new sources of external funding. To contribute to Africa's progress, aid providers must consider how their efforts are strengthening incentives for institutions of democratic accountability. As such institutions are enhanced, African societies will have the means to take the self-correcting course adjustments that consistently enable democracies to realise steady economic and social development while avoiding calamity.

Endnotes

- 1 The author is grateful to Dave Peterson, Cheryl Igiri, and Jeremy Kanthor for their insights and comments.
- 2 Michael Bratton, Carolyn Logan, Wonbin Cho, and Paloma Bauer, Afrobarometer Round 2: compendium of comparative results from a 15 country survey, Afrobarometer Network, 2004.
- 3 The Polity IV democracy index assigns a (0-10) democracy score annually to each country in the world (with populations above 500 000), based on demonstration of selected institutional features of political competition and popular participation. Freedom House's *Annual Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties*, assesses a (1-7) score for every country in the world based on the manifestation of basic political rights and civil liberties, respectively.
- 4 Consolidating democracies are countries that have established democratic political systems and are in the process of institutionalising these processes to a point where autocratic reversions would be highly unlikely. The democratisers, category captures political systems that have made observable gains toward the establishment of democratic institutions. While at different stages of progress, in general, their trajectory remains generally upward. Nonetheless, backsliding toward autocracy remains a distinct possibility. Semi-authoritarians are a class of autocratic regimes that have adopted certain trappings of democracy (such as a parliament, opposition parties, and elections), though have retained ultimate control over nearly all levers of power. These governments wish to accrue the international credibility that comes from being labelled a democracy without actually engaging in a system of shared power. (See Marina Ottoway, *Democracy Challenged: the rise of semi-authoritarianism*, Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.) Autocracies are political systems where power remains concentrated in the hands of an unelected leader or party. There is no political competition to speak of, limited scope for civil society, and coercion is employed to implement the policies of the state.
- 5 Excluding Nigeria, the average population size of each of the categories is comparable - between 10,1 and 13,7 million. Share of the rural population is also very similar - 60-65 per cent (though slightly smaller for the consolidating democracies - 53 per cent). Some mild sub-regional patterns emerge: only three of 13 Southern African countries are in the autocratic classifications; West African countries are evenly distributed across the four categories; no East African country has yet made it to the consolidating democracy category and they are spread evenly among the others; Central African countries all tilt toward autocracy.
- 6 The coefficient of variation (the standard deviation over the mean growth rate) for the 1990-2003 period for democracies was 1,14 (1,29 without Botswana and Mauritius), 6,5 for democratisers, 35,5 for semi-authoritarians, and 5,9 for autocracies.

- 7 While an annual average per capita growth rate of two per cent may seem modest by global standards, that 18 African countries have been able to sustain this steady growth over the course of a decade is indeed noteworthy, given the region's history of economic instability.
- 8 Morton Halperin, Joseph Siegle, and Michael Weinstein, *The Democracy Advantage: how democracies promote prosperity and peace*, New York: Routledge, 2004.
- 9 Monty Marshall and Ted Robert Gurr, *Peace and Conflict 2005: a global survey of armed conflicts, self-determination movements, and democracy*, Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland, 2005.
- 10 Neo-patrimonial political systems are those in which authority and loyalty are tied to a person rather than to an office, despite what may be written in a constitution. This individual dominates the state apparatus and stands above its laws. Distinctions between public versus private resources are blurred. Patronage relationships pervade political and administrative systems, and shape the parameters of opportunity in commerce. Officials occupy bureaucratic positions less to perform public service than to acquire personal wealth and status. See Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa: regime transitions in comparative perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- 11 Daniel Kaufmann, Aart Kraay, and Massimo Mastruzzi, Governance Matters IV: governance indicators for 1996–2004, policy research working paper 3630, The World Bank, 2005; Joseph Siegle, Developing democracy: democratizers' surprisingly bright development record, *Harvard International Review* 26(2), 2004; Mancur Olson, Dictatorship, democracy, and development, *American Political Science Review* 87(3), 1993; Steven Knack and Phillip Keefer, Institutions and economic performance: cross-country tests using alternative institutional measures, *Economics and Politics* 7, November 1995.
- 12 William Easterly, *The Elusive Quest for Growth: economists' adventures and misadventures in the tropics*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002; Michael Clemens, Steven Radelet, and Rikhil Bhavnani, Counting chickens when they hatch: the short term effect of aid on growth, working paper 44, Washington: Center for Global Development, 2004.
- 13 Monty Marshall and Ted Robert Gurr, *Peace and Conflict 2005: a global survey of armed conflicts, self-determination movements, and democracy*, Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland, 2005.
- 14 The notable exception is Gambia, which had enjoyed relative democratic openness for 28 years before the military coup in 1994 led by Yahya Jammeh. Gambia had a per capita income of US\$330 and stagnant growth for the decade prior to the 1994 coup. It has endured stagnant growth and autocratic government since 1994. Moreover, while infant mortality rates declined by a third from 1984 to 1994, they have increased by 12 per cent since.

- 15 See Minxin Pei and Merrit Lyon, Bullish on new democracies: research notes on multinationals and the third wave, *The National Interest* 70 (Winter 2002/2003).
- 16 Morton Halperin, Joseph Siegle, and Michael Weinstein, *The Democracy Advantage: how democracies promote prosperity and peace*, New York: Routledge, 2004.
- 17 Simeon Djankov, Jose Montalvo, and Marta Reynal-Querol, *The curse of aid*, World Bank, 2005. (Autocracies comprised more than half of the regimes in the top quartile of this sample, clearly shaping these findings.)
- 18 Paul Collier, *Living Down the Past: how Europe can help Africa grow*, London: Institute of Economic Affairs, 1998.