

South African democracy: democracy *Sui generis*

Keywords: democracy, liberation, public issues, commands, quarrels

Introduction

The demand for improved governance in the world in general and African countries in particular invariably led to the rise of democracy, and as such, democracy is increasingly considered as one of the most legitimate form of government which is common in Africa.^{1,2} A question is whether or not it is possible for the whole world to become democratic, and the answer is complex; ‘yes’ it is possible³ and no. Gitonga⁴ and Oyugi⁵ argue that democracy is rare. Therefore, implementing genuine democracy in the African context will be far from easy, and it will take a long time for many African states to master the implementation of genuine democracy. It will require efforts to fight for the replacement of the corrupt black elite leaders and their systems bequeathed by the post-colonial order with reliable and ethical leaders. Masolo⁶ actually posits that ‘it may appear that as if a new kind of liberation is necessary before democratic systems can take root in Africa; a mental liberation or shift from dogmatism to a state of *Cartesian dubitatio*. It is an undeniable fact, however, that the corrupt black elites will vehemently resist such replacement as ferociously and fiercely as possible.⁷ As a governance regime, democracy existed for many decades, however, there is no common definition that commands universal acceptance of the term, and this is partly due to the fact that there is no common practice of democracy since different countries approach it differently. Thus when it comes to democracy, no country can serve as a model for another since different countries practice their different versions.^{8,9} Besides, the three major arguments against democracy are that citizens do not know enough to decide on important public issues, that democracy produces poor leaders, who are good at getting elected, and that rule by vote of the majority suppresses different ideas and alternative lifestyles.¹⁰

In its Greek morphology, the concept *democracy* is made of two (2) words, “*demos*” which means “*the people*” and “*kratein/kratos*” which means “*to rule/power*”.^{2,11,12} This is one of the most rudimentary definition which is simply a direct interpretation of the concept, and it was also emphasized by Becker & Raveloson¹¹ who utilized Abraham Lincoln’s definition of democracy as “the government of the people, by the people and for the people”. However, Diamond, & Linz¹³ as well as Diamond¹⁴ conceive democracy as a system of government that satisfies the following three (3) essential requirements or elements. The *first* one is extensive competition among individuals and organized groups (political movements) for elective positions of government office in regular intervals without quarrels or the use of force. The *second* one is the inclusive political participation in the selection of leaders and policies through regular, free, and fair elections. The *third* and final one is civil and political liberties like freedoms of speech, association, press, and to form and join organizations that will guarantee the integrity of political competition and participation.

A serious controversy of what democracy actually is starts when methods that define ways to bring power to rule the people are effected.¹² This controversy is accountable for exposing different approaches and understandings to democracy which in turn make

Volume 2 Issue 6 - 2018

NS Mathonsi,¹ SL Sithole²

¹Department of arts, University of Limpopo, South Africa

²School of Social Sciences, University of Limpopo, South Africa

Correspondence: SL Sithole, School of Social Sciences, University of Limpopo, South Africa, Email Sello.Sithole@ul.ac.za

Received: October 25, 2018 | **Published:** December 20, 2018

its applicability and implementation different in various parts of the world, with much emphasis in Africa which is the one of the continents where democracy does not originate in.

Currently, there is no specific overarching theory developed on African democracy. Democracy is a Western concept - Athens of ancient Greek, to be specific. African democracy theory is probably still under construction. Therefore, the phrase “African democracy theory” exists for the purposes of describing and understanding the context within which democracy is practiced in Africa. The African approach to democracy will be discussed against the ideals of democracy. Also, it will be important to consider what democracy that will be relevant to the African context should contain. This will be in specific reference to South Africa’s unique context of democracy. This paper will provide recommendations that can contribute to the ongoing debate of African democracy.

Theoretical review of democracy

What is important to note is that there are striking similarities in what is argued to be the crucial essence of democracy. At a bare minimum, the views on what democracy should contain are succinctly summarised by Becker & Raveloson¹¹ who argue that a democratic regime should comprise the following aspects/elements: freedom and fundamental rights, electoral system for leadership, rule of law, separation of powers, parliament, democratic pluralism, government and opposition, and public opinion as well as freedom of the media. Other authors such as Dahl,¹⁵ Bollen,¹¹ Diamond,¹⁶ Leon¹ concur in discussing similar elements mentioned above as the key aspects to the conception of democracy. It is important to note that the basic elements contained in a democracy provide a basis for the theoretical approach to democracy. For the purposes of this paper, the minimalist and maximalist theories to democracy will be considered, although with more emphasis on the latter since it provides a more global view of democracy. According to minimalist theorists, democracy can be understood as a system of governance wherein government administration replaces another through competitive and peaceful elections.¹⁷⁻¹⁹ In terms of this theory, elections are the fundamental condition for democracy. This could mean that all countries that conduct “free and fair” regular elections can be considered as democratic. This is a view that Leon¹ and Jotia²⁰ strongly oppose since they argue that elections alone are not a yardstick to be used as a determining factor for democracy.

More than just regular free and fair elections, maximalist theorists of democracy argue that the fundamentals of democracy are civil

rights, freedom of expression, freedom of association, freedom of the press, multi-political party government participation and polling contestation, as well as functional autonomy of judicial, legislative, and executive organs of state.^{1,12,13,15} Schmitter & Karl⁸ adds to the maximalists' list by indicating that some of the elements for democracy include, among others: availability of capable rulers in the public realm, active citizens, civil rights, and cooperation, among actors. The list may be added depending on what seems to be standard practices in different countries that consider themselves democratic. There are limited restrictions according to the maximalist theory, and these democratic elements are usually beneficial to the citizens since they provide them with social well-being as opposed to the leaders since leaders would always seek to sustain voters in order to retain power.²¹ It is interesting to note however, that besides all these liberal elements that can generally serve the interests of the public, there exists an element of criticism to the maximalist approach to democracy. One fundamental criticism of the maximalist theory is that it can include as much elements as possible, and as such, governments might take advantage of that open-ended bouquet of elements to include some of the elements that are inherently not democratic, but self-serving and advancing individual supremacy. This is one of the aspects that make its applicability incongruous in various countries. In all candour, the ideals set by both the minimalist and maximalist theorists of democracy are not conclusive. One may critique these ideals and argue that there is no single country in the world, inclusive of those that are regarded as the best examples of liberal democracy, which have mastered all the above ideals equally perfectly without fail.¹⁴ Fayeni² puts it better as he argues that democracy cannot be a perfect system in practice. What is practically common is that countries that have mastered the practice of free and fair elections might be struggling when it comes to other aspects of democracy.

Mukandala²² argues that for a country to be democracy and has strongly consolidated its democracy, following tests: considered to have fully transitioned to such a country should have mastered the

- (i) *Second test election*—Second test election is when the newly elected democratic regime survives another general election following the first election that brought it to power. Many countries that claim to be democratic have mastered this test.
- (ii) *Alteration in power test*—This refers to a constitutional change between two political parties that represent two different forces/ideologies. For example, this is when in a case of Zimbabwe power can shift from Zimbabwe African National Union—Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) to Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). This has proven to be one test which is more difficult to master.
- (iii) *Longevity test*—This simply refers to the survival of a democratic regime in terms of years of its rule. Many countries around the world can claim that their democracies are twenty (20) years and more old. This demonstrates that this test is easily mastered.
- (iv) *The only game in town test*—This is when there is certainty that there is no other political majorities, movements, institutions, and or groups that consider an alternative regime besides the one at hand as an alternative. This is practically impossible to achieve since hidden interest of other groups cannot be easily determined.

The above-mentioned tests begin to expose that the transition to democracy in Africa is not as successful as the African countries would claim it to be. Looking at the second test above, it can be said that only Botswana in Sub-Saharan Africa was able to demonstrate change in political force across political parties without hassles.²³ Be that as it

may, Diamond¹⁴ has noted with much concern the recent recession of democracy in Botswana: where a president (Ian Khama) with a career in military background evinces an intolerance of opposition and distaste for civil society beyond anything seen previously from the long-ruling Botswana Democratic Party. Increasing political violence and intimidation—including assaults on opposition politicians, the possible murder of a leading opposition candidate three months before the October 2014 parliamentary elections, and the apparent involvement of the intelligence apparatus in the bullying and coercion of the political opposition have been moving the system in a more authoritarian direction.

Diamond quotes Levitsky & Way (2010) who argued that a number of years ago Botswana was not a genuine democracy in the first place. Whatever kind of system it has been in recent decades, “respect for the rule of law and for established institutions and processes” began to diminish in 1998, when Khama ascended to the vice-presidency, and it has continued to decline since 2008, when the former military commander “automatically succeeded to the presidency”.²⁴

(African) democracy versus liberal democracy

There is an apparent commonality of holding regular elections between African democracy and liberal democracy. This commonality is also noted in both minimalist and maximalist democratic approaches as seen above. The difference between the two (2) starts with regards to the actual implementation of both given issues such as the colonial history in African context as well as the fact that the one has an African flavour inherent in it and the other is Western brewed. Regardless of that, African democracy is influenced by western mores to a certain extent, whereas the opposite is not true since Western democracy is not influenced by anything which is African. For example, in its practice, African presidents tend to hold on to power and seek to be lifetime presidents, a peculiarity reminiscent of traditional African leadership based on heredity. On the contrary, in the United States of America (USA), presidential power has almost equal chances of oscillating between the Democrats and Republicans. The ‘big men’ of some Africa’s post-independence understand their democracy on the basis of consensus to one-party rule as opposed to liberal democracy which emphasises regular competitive elections among political parties/movements. Uwizeyinama (2010:140) posits that in order to make a distinction between *African democracy* from the term *liberal democracy*, it is imperative to consider the view point of African leaders of post-independent Africa. Some of the African leaders of post-independence Africa (big men) such as Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Nkrumah of Ghana, and Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya repudiate the notion of multi-party democracy which is a *sine qua non* for Western democracy, as not being compatible with African mores. They maintained that a one-party government was relevant to Africa and an indispensable part of the African tradition.²⁵

Accordingly, the African big men’s understanding, *African democracy* is a form of governance regime based on one-party rule while the other political parties exist nominally without a freedom to organize political activities in opposition to the ruling party.^{23,26} In all cases, this ‘one-party’ domination normally favors the liberation movement that happened to be at the forefront of the struggle for liberation. One fundamental truth across all democracies is that there is no single movement/political party that will freely relinquish power to opposition movements without a fight or even bloodshed in some instances, therefore, once a particular movement/person is in power, they would never want to step down.^{27–29} This is the case even in some well-established social democracies that are considered the best in the

world and ranked as top five (5) such as Norway, Sweden, Iceland, New Zealand, and Denmark.³⁰

The big men of African post-independence rebuff democracy as a Western construct that is foreign to Africa. Their argument is that the elements of liberal democracy do not in any way accommodate some of the distinct aspects that are peculiar to Africa, and as such Africans should think of a way to customise their own democracy in order to fit their African context since in its current form it is actually not for Africa and it is not faring well in Africa.^{22,23,26} It is alleged for example that the former head of state of the erstwhile Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo–DRC) made a claim that “democracy is not for Africa”.¹ Aboa-Bradwell⁷ also argues that many African leaders repudiate democracy as a Western construct that is alien to Africa, and he considers Africans that have adopted Western liberal democracies as saboteurs of the hard-fought independence. Larok³¹ posits that if democracy is the way of life, the fact that various societies have various traditions and cultures that shape their myriad ways of life should be considered the same way as democracy is, that being so, African histories, beliefs, and cultures should shape its way of life, therefore “... it is important that Africa negotiates a form of democracy that most suits its context... otherwise, Africa does not have to struggle to meet standards of liberal democracy because that has its own history and logic. Instead we should invest time modelling democracy in a fashion that builds on our realities”. The argument by Larok³¹ above summarises why there is reluctance in African countries to adopt ideal liberal democracy. The perception that was strongly held by the big men of Africa (especially those that were debut heads of state after independence) that liberal democracy least suit the African realities is also strongly held by prominent African scholars such as Mafeje, Francis Nyamnjor, Claude Ake, George Ayittey, Cyril Obi, Eboh, just to mention but a few.^{2,31}

The subsequent class of the African heads of state that ascended presidency after the immediate post-independence class was sort of divided since there were some presidents who appeared to be not in complete agreement with the ideals of liberal democracy and there were some who were in agreement with the ideals of the liberal democracy.²⁰ For example, Rwekaza Mukandala²² argues that the overthrow of Mobutu Sese Seko by Kabila and his allies in Rwanda and Uganda led to a new crop of African leaders that stretched from the Southern part of Africa through Central and West Africa which eschewed old politics of the immediate post-independence presidents which were characterised by authoritarian rule, domination, and dictatorship; the new crop embraced democracy.²² These newly crowned African heads of state wanted a new governance regime that would not resemble the dictatorship and authoritarian rule of their predecessors, thus the politics of the big men were gradually out phased by democracy (Stephens 2011:40). However, some of the subsequently crowned African presidents that did not completely consent to the ideals of democracy accepted the introduction of democracy with a differentiated approach to it, which gave rise to irregular implementation of their democracies. That serves as one among the reasons that account for the adoption of democracies in many African countries such as South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Botswana,^{1,14,23} although there are challenges relative to each country which make the application of democracy an uphill battle in Africa since there was never a common ground for understanding democracy across Africa.

There is a notion that Africans are attempting to implement

democracy in a way that the Western countries have designed it to suit their Western contexts. This becomes a challenge since Western Democracy is imposed to be implemented in Africa, thus it becomes democracy in Africa as opposed to democracy for Africa. Thus Wamba dia Wamba²⁶ argues that there is a difference between democracy in Africa and democracy for Africa especially on the major aspect of elections and maintenance of power processes. In practice, Western democracy has fewer casualties as compared to African democracy. During the electioneering process, a lot of comrades in political parties that are contesting for power die in Africa whereas in the Western counterparts it is not necessarily the case. Western democracies have relatively grown to a state where ruling parties are able to accept defeat to opposition parties whereas in African democracies civil wars emerge as a result of such defeat from opposition parties. Africans have been found to be fostering the customs of consuming what the Western countries have designed for them (Westerners) as democracy.²

Challenges of african democracies

Before looking into the challenges of democracy in Africa, it will be helpful to note upfront that democracy is not the only regime existing in Africa today. Countries such as Morocco, Swaziland, Libya have monarchical regimes where heads of state ascend the top seat through heredity, where rulers tend to stay in power for a prolonged period of time like the ‘iron fisted’ Muammar Gaddafi who stayed in power for almost forty two (42) years.²³ However, as seen earlier, democracy appears to be the most favourable regime in Africa, regardless of the challenges that are discussed in the following paragraphs.

As argued before, African democracies were adopted on lopsided grounds of understanding and this serves as the fundamental challenge to the implementation thereof. The problem with democratic practice in Africa stems from a fundamental misconception that democracy as a form of governance system can be successfully imported as it is from one country to another regardless of material dynamics and cultural differences of those countries.⁹ There would be different conceptions of the adopted democracies that will be guided by distinct conditions in various countries which will in turn make democracy to be understood and practiced differently. As it stands and as argued above, African countries understand democracy differently. However and notwithstanding their different understandings, one common overarching challenge among them is that they display an absence of the basic essentials of democracy governance with a remarkable degree of similarity.¹⁴ For example, thirty (30) years after acquiring independence, most African countries are characterised by the sceptre of one-party states, “presidents for life” and violence usurpations of power either through assassination and/or military coups.^{1,22}

Another challenge that blights African democracy relates to the ineffectiveness of civil societies. In their optimum operation, civil society organizations should play an important role in the reinforcement of democracy, however, relatively little is commonly known about their effectiveness and impact (Robinson and Friedman 2005:2). Civil societies are important structures towards the implementation of genuine democracy, however, it is most unfortunate, as noted overtime that civil societies are being suppressed in African states, and they became weaker and weaker. Compared to other continents, Africa has the weakest civil society and this adversely affects the quality of transparency of the states and institutions.^{1,32} There is a wide gap between states, institutions, and citizens. This *hiatus* is caused by the weakening and ineffectiveness of civil societies in Africa.

Another challenge that is salient in African democracies is caused by the Western Hegemony. Yilzman³³ and Barrett³⁴ who utilises Antonio Gramsci's conception of hegemony clarify hegemony as the status of dominance by the most powerful nation in the international systems over other regions. Riley³⁵ argues for example that there is a negative relationship between democracy and hegemony. According to him, hegemony is a rationalized intellectual and moral leadership which depends on liberal democratic institutions for its existence. In this case, this rationalized hegemony is disguised as a form of foreign aid. Mazrui & Schweitzer³⁶ argue that "*Aid totally without strings is an insult to human dignity.*" He maintains that foreign aid comes with attached strings and the problem is on the exposition of what the strings are, because absolute aid between governments without any expectations is an insult from the giver to the receiver. With the exposure of the intentions of the Western countries, it is discovered that they would like to advance their agendas in Africa through manipulating African democracy.^{20,36} Africa demonstrates reliance on the Western countries, and "It is not difficult to understand why Africa seeks and accepts foreign assistance. The continent has been a victim of political victimization, economic exploitation, racial humiliation and ecological damage for centuries".³⁶ Notwithstanding the fact of Western Aid in Africa, Eastern influence in terms of trade and technology, among other aspects has been noted in Africa. Gill & Huang,³⁷ as well as analyse China's dominance in Africa. This maximizes the chances of Eastern regimes of governance over Africa. As such, Africa's impoverished status makes it vulnerable to both Western and Eastern hegemonic dominance. This is a serious challenge that plagues African democracies since they can be manipulated by other continents because of their reliance on them.

Another notable challenge in African democracy is corruption exercised by some of the African heads of state. The simple logic in this case is that once people utilise corruption in order to be in power, they will have to utilise corruption to maintain and sustain their power. Aboa-Bradwell⁷ and Fayeni³ charge that for them (African leaders) to have achieved power using corrupt, undemocratic, and atrocious ways is because they knew that they lack legitimacy to be in power, and could only rule through corruption and brutal repression in order to sustain their power. As it stands, Africa is considered the worst with regards to the issue of corruption. Considering the Annual Corruption Perceptions of the Transparency International Index which rates countries on a measurement scale ranging from 0 to 10, where the lower number signifies higher corruption level, of the total number of 175 countries measured, only three (3) African countries are in the top fifty (50) and these are Botswana, Cape Verde, and Mauritius, while South Africa is ranked number sixty seven (67).³⁸ Therefore, even when it comes to conducting elections, it becomes clear that elections are held as a formality since whoever wants to rule will corrupt the system in order to remain in power.^{20,22}

There is also a challenge regarding the class of black elites in African democracies. This is a powerful cluster of people that violate national constitutions at the expense of socioeconomic and political development in Africa.²⁰ These are animals that are 'more equal than others', 'the holy cows'. The masses suffer social injustice while those who enjoy the benefits of the government are few elites who constantly ensure that popular participation in the political and economic spheres is kept minimal and enjoyed by only those who are cog wheels of the illegitimate and corrupt governments. These elites have co modified social and political landscape by manipulating government systems.^{20,39} African democracies are utterly unable to

thrive as long as this class of people prevails. They are a cancer to the African democracy.

Overall, there are inherent built-in systemic challenges for African countries to practice democracy which to an extent the authenticity of their democracies is severely questioned, and as such, Dominique Uwizeyimana²³ regards them as "pretend democracies" as opposed to "genuine democracies". He looked at some of these African democracies and discovered that an extreme glaring distinction exists between fake democracies and genuine democracy, although the significant number of African countries demonstrate dysfunctional democracies. Regardless of the bad picture demonstrated by African countries, African democracies that may be considered somewhat positively better are Botswana, South Africa, and Mauritius which are the countries that can serve as African better practices of democracy in Africa.^{1,23,40} a view that is contested by Diamond's¹⁴ serious reservations about the state and status of democracy in Africa. To put it more succinctly, Diamond¹⁴ declares that 'there is not a single country on the African continent where democracy is firmly consolidated and secure'. The three (3) countries are considered better when compared to the rest of African countries that claim to be democratic countries. The evident anti-democratic aspects make them pretend/fake democracies. Among the three (3), that are considered better African democracies in this paper, critiques that flaw their democracies are noted in South Africa and Botswana. For example, Botswana's democratic example is skeptic considering President Khama's latest tendencies as argues above and South Africa is said to be gravitating towards a dictatorship considering the extract from Justin Cartwright in the Conversation.^{41,42} He argued that 'South Africa is a G20 country, but its administration is in tatters; contempt for the excellent constitution is widespread and understanding of the importance of the rule of law is minimal. Both Presidents Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma flouted the Constitution when it suited them' (<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/south-africa-is-a-failed-state-under-zuma-the-illiterate>).

South africa's democratic transition

According to Maree,⁴³ Leon¹ and Awuzeyimana (2009) and as noted above, South Africa is one of the few countries in Africa that can be considered democratic. South African democracy has some unique features that are distinctly different to other democracies, and as such, it can be considered to be a "democracy of a special type" in this paper. For a phenomenon to be considered 'special', such a phenomenon should be an atypical case with distinctive features that are barely common among its contemporaries. Unique and rare cases are considered special to a certain extent in their own ways, and this is the case for the South African democracy. As a starting point, it is worth noting that some authors contributed to the uniqueness of South African democracy subject by discussing the country's transition from apartheid to democracy.⁴⁴⁻⁴⁶ These authors charge that the democratic transition in South Africa was about compromises and institutional choices,⁴⁴ enriching economic elites and ensuring redistributive public services,⁴⁵ and a shift from redistribution to neoliberalism.⁴⁶ Mixed feelings on the democratic transition were expressed not only by the few scholars mentioned above, and this gives a sense that the understanding of this novel democratic regime was different from person to person. Beall & Gelb⁴⁷ argue that the 'non-racial' South Africa's democracy was born subsequent to the protracted negotiations unlike in other 'democratic' countries where such transitions are characterised by internecine violence. The South African transition eschewed civil war among races, military coup, and

mutiny. The expectation was that the introduction of democracy in South Africa as well as the consensus that it represented among the white and black races would build a common future and bring about growth and development.⁴⁸

The South African transition to democracy was an exceptional case facilitated through negotiation as opposed to military coup or 'guerrilla take-over,' and as such, it is considered a peaceful transition.^{49,50} Transitions largely occur through armed struggles or negotiations, both of which have their advantages and disadvantages. The hallmark of military coups is that the winner invariably takes all and takes control of everything in a country. However, the disadvantage with this 'winner takes all' is that many people become casualties. A lot of citizens, activists, civilians, comrades, and soldiers die in the process. In the case of a negotiated settlement such as what happened in South Africa, is that there are 'less' physical casualties and peoples' lives were at minimum risk. However, negotiations in their nature are about compromising between parties and keeping part of the agreement. This is what makes this negotiation arrangement very complicated. Besides that, the results of the South African democracy is that it created more black economic casualties while the minority whites became economic beneficiaries of the system. After a decade of a new political dispensation, one still finds unacceptably high levels of inequality and poverty wearing more black faces than before.

According to the South African History Online⁵¹ in 1991, while the National Party (NP) was in power, the multi-party negotiations started, and the first meeting of the political parties in South Africa was named the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA). Following that meeting, working groups were formed to deal with issues such as the organization of CODESA, declaration of CODESA's intentions, and the negotiation process. The declaration of CODESA intent was adopted by the multi-party agreement and the CODESA established five (5) working groups. This was the beginning of the process that resulted negotiations that yielded the Transitional Constitution. The South African Transitional Constitution was adopted in 1993 to guide the transitional process towards the 1994 general elections. In 1994, the first inclusive general elections were held, and Mandela became the first democratic President of the so called 'new' South Africa. What was important for this first political term of government was the time political stability, reconciliation, development of overarching policy frameworks, and consolidation of the newly introduced democratic regime. It was during this first-term that the ANC-led government adopted the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) which was a partial implementation of the socialist inclined Freedom Charter; and the democratic Constitution in 1994 and 1996, respectively. This was the first major ideological contradiction of the new government. As it could be expected, a lot of pressure was put on the new government by the IMF and World Bank to adopt a new macro economic framework and policy. The end result of this pressure was that the RDP was eventually abandoned in favour of (GEAR) Growth, Employment and Redistribution strategy) which was seen as a structural adjustment programme.^{52,53}

The first five (5) years of freedom was important for the Government of National Unity in the sense that the country needed to stabilise politically. Reconciliation and the newly adopted democracy had to be consolidated. The government had to adopt new political, social, and economic policies for transformation according to the framework of the Constitution. The NP prematurely left the Government of National Unity in 1997 which gave the ANC a political space to adopt policies

on its own which it did at the Mafikeng ANC Conference of 1997. There were challenges regarding the manner in which some of the policies developed were received across other political parties, civil society, organized labour movements, and private sector. According to Leon,¹ some of those 'mistaken' policies included the one regarding the imposition of labour-market rigidities that were mandated by the Ruling Party and its alliance and the diversion of national resources into policies of wealth transfers to those oppressed by apartheid. He also argued that the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) policy created rent-seeking that had a corrupting effect on the ANC.¹ These policy issues were already setting South Africa's democracy as a unique case.

According to Natrass,⁵⁴ the operations of South Africa's democracy is unique in the sense that the Ruling Party is in a tripartite alliance with COSATU and SACP, and this arrangement favours some part of the business community such as the politically connected black elites over other groups. As a result, these extra-parliamentary relations centred around state-labour and state-business have affected the economic policy and the institutional context that shapes business operations, as a result, the arrangement created by the tripartite alliance promoted corruption, clientelism, and policy incoherence at the centre of a democratic state.⁵⁴ However, this does not make the relationship between the government and trade unions any better. Jotia²⁰ argues that trade unions in South Africa and Ghana, amongst other countries, continue to challenge governments on pertinent bread and butter issues affecting the civil society. Therefore, political relationships are played at the expense of the citizens.

Conclusion

Conclusively, it is important to take note that Africa is not worse off when it comes to democracy, meaning that there is hope that democracy can improve for the better especially because it is the most popular form of governance regime in Africa. Regardless of how long it takes for African countries to reach the desired levels in the world's democratic ranking, what is important is that the continent is on the path towards improved governance. It has been ascertained that the well-established democratic countries in the world are also struggling in mastering some of the elements of democracy. It becomes important for African countries to take it one step at a time. Developing and consolidating a theory of African democracy will be very instrumental in the quest for improving governance in the continent. The paper argued that the African theory for democracy should take cognizance of practical context and realities of African countries. While it is clear that the immediate presidents of the post-independence held a strongly opposed view to democracy, their successors accepted democracy as a conducive governance regime towards African development, and as such, attempts have been made in a number of African countries to render them democratic. For those countries that consider themselves as democratic, there notable challenges that are inherent to the prevailing circumstances in those countries, and those challenges are caused mainly by the fact that democracy is understood and adopted differently in different parts of Africa.

In the case of South Africa, it was argued that the negotiation to transition which was peculiar to South African context resulted in challenges that are unique to South Africa. What becomes important is a compromise on some of the important issues in the interest of peace. This is the point where economic freedom was compromised for the majority of the blacks in the interest of political freedom. While

political freedom is as important as economic freedom, however, economic freedom has an upper hand since economic freedom is able to drive political interest in a society.⁵⁵

Indeed, South Africa may be labeled a democracy *par excellence* and *sui generis* on the African continent. Besides the country having achieved independence through a ‘bloodless’ transition, there are also other positive signs of South Africa becoming a mature democracy. Notable among these are strong civil society movements which keep government on its toes. Coupled with that is the existence of Chapter 9 institutions, such as the Office of the Public Protector which has steadfastly resisted the government’s slide to wanton corruption and aversion to the rule of law.

Recommendations

According to Aboa-Bradwell,⁷ what can be recommended as the way forward is simply the promotion of African democratic systems. The picture of African democracy is not as dismal as some authors have argued it to be. There is hope, although it will take centuries. There are number of issues that can be considered by the African Union, academia, and analysts in the quest for improving African democracy and in the debates around African democracy.

Having noted how African democracies have suffered in the hands of some African heads of state, it becomes important to revisit some of the powers vested on them in order to rationalize such powers accordingly. Leon,¹ puts it as restriction in presidential powers. A popular platitude was uttered by Sir John Dalberg-Acton who warned about the repercussions of institutional power responding to Pope Pius IX’s declaration of papal infallibility, and said “All power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely”.⁵⁶ African parliaments, civil societies, institutions, and citizens should be empowered to assist as opposed to keeping them at bay while heads of state wield and hold absolute power. Excessive presidential powers alter states from being democratic states to autocratic states.

Elections, as one important element of democracy should not be held as a formality only. It is discouraging for citizens to suddenly realize that exercising their votes is good for nothing since a particular political party is going to deliberately flaw the electoral system and win. This can be addressed through the continuation of international supervision of elections.¹ It is clear that if there is some form of reluctance among African countries to permit the external supervision of elections, something is wrong about the election process. All countries that are considered democratic in Africa should allow for the supervision of their elections without a hassle.

Another important aspect is to give democracy an African taste. There is nothing wrong in customising democracy to suit the African context. Eboh⁵⁷ notes that the solution to the problem of governance can be achieved by giving democracy an African flair. The best way that can serve as a starting point is what is suggested by Feyeni² regarding the development of a consolidated theory for African democracy. He indicates that an African theory of democracy must not only reflect traditional and contemporary African socio-cultural and ontological realities, but must also avoid some of the misconceptions and inadequacies of liberal democratic theory. Communalism in an African democratic theory would revise the concept of *development* and align its significance to *collective well being*, instead of euro-centric notion of development. Putting people at the centre of development and seeking their welfare would promote shared material and nonmaterial benefits, trust, citizen participation, and the accountability of state/government officials to the public.^{2,58}

Jotia²⁰ argues that democratization in Africa will only become a reality if African leaders can start to think about service delivery towards citizens. The imperialist and capitalist principles which are cherished by liberal democracy in Africa will continue to be a blow for Africa’s development, therefore instead of pursuing liberal democracy, it will be important to develop and consolidate African democracy. The elites and the bourgeoisie should stop formulating policies and rules whose goal is to gratify their economic thirst at the expense of human rights and freedoms.²⁰ Various reasons have been fronted as explanations for why democracy seems not to be fairing well in Africa. Offor⁹ blames this on the refusal to accept the fact that democracy differs from one society to another and due to this, African democracy should not be practiced in strict adherence to those attributes that define it in Western conception, but have a pragmatic taste of African realities.

Acknowledgments

None.

Conflicts of interest

Author declares that there is none of the conflicts.

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