
Democratization in Africa: Progress and Retreat

Second Edition

Edited by
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A Journal of Democracy Book



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although this is the second edition of *Democratization in Africa*—the first was published in 1999—all the material that it contains is entirely new. Hence we have given it the subtitle *Progress and Retreat*, both to distinguish it from the earlier edition and to indicate the complex developments that have taken place in recent years. The first edition had appeared about a decade after the third wave of democratization reached Africa's shores in 1990, and it focused on the continent's experience during the immediate post-Cold War period. It is now more than ten years since the publication of that volume. A more up-to-date account was clearly needed, and the appearance of a profusion of recent articles on Africa in the *Journal of Democracy* provided ample material for this wholly new edition.

The volume you hold in your hands significantly expands on the first edition in terms of both the number of chapters and the range of African countries addressed: It includes 21 essays that appeared in the pages of the *Journal of Democracy* between 2007 and 2009, along with previously unpublished essays by Kate Baldwin, Kenneth Good, and Dave Peterson, and a new introduction by Larry Diamond. In addition to fresh treatments of countries covered in the first edition—Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, and Uganda—the second edition includes chapters on Angola, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somaliland, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Even with the considerable expansion in the number of themes and countries included here, there remain regrettable gaps in our coverage of a continent as large and as varied as Africa. Nonetheless, some selectivity was essential in order to keep this volume to a manageable size and cost, and we believe that, despite its inevitable limitations, it succeeds in presenting readers with the information and analysis critical to understanding the varied fortunes of democracy in the countries of Africa.

As with the previous books in the *Journal of Democracy* series, this volume would not have been possible without the assistance of a number of organizations and individuals. We are very thankful for our longstanding

partnership with the Johns Hopkins University Press, the publisher of the *Journal* and now of more than twenty of our books. Henry Tom in the Books Division has played an essential role since the beginning in developing and guiding our book series, and Bill Breichner and Carol Hamblen in the Journals Division have been unfailingly helpful colleagues.

The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation has provided essential financial assistance to the *Journal* since its inception, and we are immensely grateful for its continuing support. We are also deeply indebted to our parent organization, the National Endowment for Democracy. The Endowment's president Carl Gershman and its Board of Directors, now chaired by former House majority leader Richard A. Gephardt, have never faltered in their support of the *Journal*, while at the same time wholly respecting our editorial independence and integrity. Other members of the NED staff have helped us in many ways large and small. We consider ourselves extremely fortunate to function within such an admirable and open-minded institution.

Whatever success we have achieved is in large part due to the efforts of the *Journal* staff. Executive editor Phil Costopoulos and associate editor Tracy Brown worked tirelessly to give the essays collected here the unique mix of accessibility and depth that has always been the aim and—we hope—the hallmark of the *Journal of Democracy*. Managing editor Brent Kallmer ably took charge of the volume's layout and production, and assistant editor Marta Kalabinski juggled an ever-growing array of editorial responsibilities with characteristic competence and flexibility.

Finally, we are pleased to acknowledge the contribution of Dorothy Warner, who, aside from compiling the index with her usual efficiency, provided extremely useful help to Larry Diamond in drafting parts of the Introduction.

INTRODUCTION

Larry Diamond

Over the past two decades, sub-Saharan Africa (hereafter simply “Africa”) has been partly transformed by the winds of democratic change. In 1989, the year the Africa volume of *Democracy in Developing Countries* first appeared, there were only three countries in the region that had sustained multiparty democracy for a significant stretch of time: Botswana, the Gambia, and Mauritius, and the Gambia’s electoral regime (which had known only one president for nearly thirty years) was swept aside by a military coup in 1994.¹ Most of that book had to be devoted to explaining why the high hopes for democracy that attended the popular movements for independence in the 1950s and 1960s had crashed and burned, and why it had proven so difficult to develop and sustain democracy subsequently.

Through the first three decades of Africa’s independence, the story was one of repeated collapses of democracy in countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, and Sudan, and of the noteworthy variety of authoritarian regimes: military, one-party, socialist, and personal dictatorships.² By comparison, the controlled political pluralism of Senegal—which at the time was often called “semidemocratic” but which would now be termed less charitably “competitive authoritarian”—looked quite liberal. In fact, Senegal in the 1980s was one of the more democratic countries in Africa, even though it was quite clearly not a democracy. The same was true for Zimbabwe, which was sometimes mistakenly labeled a democracy in that period. Indeed, back in the 1980s, democracies were so thin on the ground in Africa that some observers tried to stretch the term to apply to the one-party Kenyan and Tanzanian regimes, of which one could at least say that a significant number of legislators lost their bids for reelection.

By the time the first edition of this book (much more limited in scope) was published in 1999, the situation had changed dramatically.³ In fact, it was the events of 1989—the fall of the Berlin Wall and the implosion of the socialist model—that provided the catalyst. Two events in February 1990—the seizure of governing power by civil society from the one-party dictatorship of Mathieu Kérékou in Benin,

and the release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of the African National Congress in South Africa—marked the beginning of a “second liberation” in Africa (though as Crawford Young noted, it was actually the third wave of efforts to inaugurate democracy in Africa).⁴ Coincidentally, in that same month, as South Africa was finally beginning to turn away from repression and racial exclusion in favor of a negotiated transition to democracy, the Constituent Assembly of Namibia (which as South West Africa had been ruled for seven decades by the white minority regime in South Africa) approved a liberal-democratic constitution under which the country gained independence the following month. Nearly two decades later, Benin, Namibia, and South Africa all remain comparatively stable and free democracies.

The democratic wave of the 1990s left few African states untouched. As Michael Bratton noted in the first edition of this book, by 1997’s end only four of sub-Saharan Africa’s four-dozen states had failed to hold a competitive multiparty national election.⁵ Two of those four, Nigeria and Zaire (later redubbed the Democratic Republic of Congo or DRC), did so in 1999 and 2006, respectively. This left Somalia and Swaziland as the only holdouts. Of course, as the essays in this volume (and those in our first edition) note, many of Africa’s new competitive elections were deeply flawed and even blatantly rigged. But the mere fact that dictators felt compelled to legalize opposition parties and permit at least a semblance of multiparty competition represented a sea change in the postindependence politics of Africa. Moreover, as Staffan Lindberg has shown, repeated competitive elections in Africa improved democracy’s prospects *even when the electoral process was less than free and fair*. Even flawed elections worked as a force for democracy, Lindberg argues, by extending the scope for freedom, enhancing democratic values and awareness among citizens, and stimulating the growth of civic organizations and independent media organs.⁶

At the time of this writing in late 2009, a glance at Africa’s political landscape brings to view both democracy on the march and democracy in retreat. On the hopeful side, there are three more electoral democracies in Africa (making a current total of twenty) than there were when the first edition of this book was published a decade ago. Levels of freedom have also continued to improve. Back in 1974, the average score on political rights and civil liberties across Africa was 5.5 on the Freedom House scale (where a score of 1 indicates most free and 7 most repressive). By 2000, that score had improved substantially to 4.4, and eight years later it had further improved to 4.2. Moreover, democracy has either held its own or improved in a number of African countries, as symbolized by the second alternation of power in Ghana at the end of 2008, following a closely fought presidential election. Ghana is one of eight African countries whose scores on political rights and civil liberties identify them as relatively liberal democracies (see Table on page xxvi). Perhaps most remarkable is

the continuation of democracy in Sierra Leone and Liberia despite the immense devastation—physical, political, and psychological—wrought by brutal civil wars in those small West African countries.

Recent years, however, have also seen negative trends, including five outright reversals of democracy. In Nigeria and Kenya, ruling parties have brazenly rigged national elections—in the latter case plunging the country into paroxysms of postelectoral violence. Similarly, democracy was strangled in 2009 by the elected president in Niger, Mamadou Tandja, when he shut down parliament and arrested political opponents in order to extend his term in office. A military coup overthrew a weak, fledgling democracy in Mauritania, while a military-backed popular rebellion displaced an elected government in Madagascar. And in many more African countries that are classified by Freedom House as electoral democracies, the electoral playing field is so tilted and civil liberties are so severely restricted that the accuracy of the “democratic” label falls into question. Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way argue that the systematic electoral advantages in access to resources and the mass media enjoyed by ruling parties in Botswana, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Senegal, and Zambia mean that all are misclassified when referred to as democracies.⁷ Although most moderately knowledgeable observers of African politics and development would be surprised to learn that Botswana is not a democracy, that is in fact what Kenneth Good suggests in his chapter here, which documents a striking deterioration in civil liberties and the rule of law in that country. If we were to eliminate from the “democratic” category all the regimes that Levitsky and Way regard as examples of competitive authoritarianism, the share of regimes in Africa that are rightly classed as belonging to the ranks of the world’s democracies would fall from 42 percent to barely a quarter.

Even if we hold to the classification scheme in the Table, many African democracies are of low quality, with political competition, freedom, and the rule of law all degraded by widespread corruption and clientelism as well as the underlying syndrome of “big man” politics. Comparative experience from around the globe tells us that unless effective institutions arise to bring these problems gradually under control, democracies will remain fragile and liable to reversal, whether by soldiers, ruling parties, or presidents themselves. Although conditions placed on aid by the established democracies as well as international pressures of a more general sort do tend to limit the scope for blatant authoritarian reversals—as evidenced in the virtual disappearance of formal military rule as a regime type in Africa—such restraining factors are far less effective at discouraging even slightly subtler manipulations of the democratic form. Moreover, as Richard Joseph notes in our opening chapter, the arrival of China as a major aid donor, investor, and geopolitical player in Africa has given a new lease on life to authoritarian regimes that now have in Beijing an alternative political patron whom they can play off against the West.

Thus, two decades after competitive politics swept the continent, Africa witnesses contradictory political trends: democratic progress and retreat. As we see in the pages that follow, there are important (and, for Africa, historic) positive trends. As Daniel Posner and Daniel Young show in chapter 5, Africa's politics have grown less violent and more institutionalized since 1990, with elections becoming a much more frequent vehicle for changes of government, and more presidents abiding by term limits than eviscerating them. Even where elections remain unfair and rulers abusive, African civil societies are becoming more vigorous, experienced, and committed to democratic norms, challenging constitutional violations and demanding political accountability. Perhaps most significant, as Michael Bratton shows in chapter 9, a large share of the citizenry in country after country across Africa has come to demand democracy. Moreover, about half of all Africans surveyed also reject all feasible authoritarian options. The problem is that these democratic citizens quite correctly perceive their respective governments' failures to supply as much democracy as the people want.

A "Frontier" and Its Discontents

In the opening essay to this volume, Richard Joseph sets the tone for many of our contributors by depicting sub-Saharan Africa as a "frontier" region. Despite centuries of contact with the more developed world, Africa still features not only the great opportunities of a newly "discovered" region, but also the very considerable risks. Africa is attracting growing equity investment, heightened economic interest from China, and global capital institutions seeking to foster entrepreneurship in hopes of generating new wealth. On the side of the ledger where risks are tallied, however, appear many factors that give investors and other observers pause. The ongoing tension in African nations between personal rule and democracy—Joseph calls this a "struggle between two rival types of institutions"—has left the continent in a state of uncertainty. A few promising exceptions aside, Joseph (like a number of our other contributors) sees personal rule as a lurking danger that lies perennially in wait for nearly all African regimes. Although Joseph notes some encouraging trends toward more respect for the rule of law, he concludes that "the struggle to cross the frontier from personal rule to rule-based governance is still far from over in much of Africa." Then too, even in Africa's more successful democracies, the threat posed by corruption looms large. The firm consolidation of democracy's key institutional bulwarks—reliable electoral systems, a free press, an independent judiciary, strong legislatures, and a vibrant civil society—continues to prove elusive across much of the continent. Yet Joseph remains confident that these very institutions, helped by donors and aided by new technologies and advances in communication, may yet blossom even under harsh conditions.

In chapter 2, H. Kwasi Prempeh cautions that despite some evidence of increased checks on the executive (for instance, 33 African states now have presidential term limits), Africa's imperial presidencies survive, "term-limited but not tamed." Though conditions "on the ground" may appear less repressive, "power in the African state . . . continues to rest with the president." More often than not, the president, not the legislature, introduces new laws simply by proclamation. This system, once defended by many observers as necessary in postcolonial nations beset by ethnic or regional tensions, has nevertheless been a failure, and resulted in "strong presidents atop weak states." Yet paradoxically, even those who have dared to challenge the continent's strong presidents have made few true changes. Instead of reforming the system, challengers such as Zambia's Frederick Chiluba have merely "re-formed" a new authoritarian regime. The solution, Prempeh insists, lies only in the development of stronger countervailing institutions, particularly legislatures, to thwart presidential ambitions. While acknowledging the uphill struggle for legislatures, weakened not only by traditions of deference to the president but also by a lack of fiscal authority and rampant patronage and corruption, Prempeh recommends constitutional remedies. With as much precision as possible, written constitutions must place limits on cabinet posts, appointment criteria, and the prosecutorial powers of presidents. Additionally, urges Prempeh, political parties should become more democratic with respect to their own internal procedures, including their methods of nominating candidates for office. As for the third branch of government, he points again to constitutional innovations that will strengthen the judiciary as a means of kicking the props out from beneath the edifice of African authoritarianism.

If Africa's legislatures are the best hope for providing the needed check on Africa's "big men," it is worth examining those among the continent's lawmaking bodies that have become, in Joel Barkan's words, "significant institutions of countervailing power." Looking at the track record of six nations (Benin, Ghana, Kenya, Senegal, South Africa, and Uganda), chapter 3 considers the future of legislatures in Africa. The unique functions of any true legislature—representative decision making, writing and passing laws, overseeing the executive branch, and constituent service—are, at best, in tension with one another. In agrarian and rural societies, the last function looms largest, because local interests often determine whether a legislator is reelected. Hence Barkan suggests changing the incentives facing African lawmakers so that they spend more time on national and not just local questions. Years of one-party rule have left most African legislatures hollow and dysfunctional. Legislators too often seek office solely for power or patronage opportunities, or are so poorly paid that they become ripe for corruption. As the rules in some countries have evolved toward allowing multiparty competition and granting legislators adequate resources, "coalitions for

change” have begun to emerge. These coalitions, comprising reformers and opportunists alike, have begun to use technology and private-sector entrepreneurial skills to alter the system. The goal is to make constitutional changes that “tip the balance” away from the president toward a more balanced government. Such gains as there have been on behalf of this laudable effort have been uneven and highly qualified, however, as well as limited thus far mostly to Kenya, South Africa, and Uganda.

Across Africa, the chief obstacle to an assertive parliament is a powerful president. In chapter 4, Larry Diamond examines the ongoing pull of two trends in African societies. One trend leads toward democratization, while the other points to personal rule. Although the number of African democracies has risen dramatically in the past two decades, only one of Africa’s larger countries (South Africa) is a democracy. But if one considers how unlikely democracy had seemed in some of the smaller, poorer nations, and in countries such as Burundi, where violence had been rampant, even incremental progress can appear remarkable. Despite its persistence in some states, one-party rule is on the decline. Here Diamond credits international donors and African publics with pushing for greater accountability in the form of free, regular, and genuinely contested elections. Still more significant than elections, says Diamond, are indicators that point to the growth of civil society. With the help of foreign donors, Africa is developing a core of civic associations that are not only helping their members to build the skills and patience needed for democracy, but are also helping other associations to advance the cause of democracy itself. Helped by digital and cellular technology, independent media are emerging. Surveys show that more Africans than ever want democracy and are willing to be patient in awaiting its results.

Sadly, however, the glacial pace at which those results are arriving may try that patience sorely. Surveys that measure the quality of governance still put Africa (South Africa excepted) below even the Middle East and South Asia. Despite appearances to the contrary, Africa’s neo-patrimonial systems are alive and well, characterized by personalized, unaccountable power concentrated in the executive. Several of Africa’s “big men” have been in power for decades. Only steady empowerment of civil society will, over the long term, lead to the kind of countervailing institutions that can sustain self-government. In this effort, Diamond encourages international donors to provide support and encouragement for these vital, though fledgling, institutions.

Since independence, democratic rules and institutions have often been formally in place in Africa, but they have been largely ignored. In chapter 5, Posner and Young cite the example of Nigeria’s recent denial of a third term to President Olusegun Obasanjo as evidence that “the formal rules of the game [in Africa] are beginning to matter.” These rules have “displaced violence as the primary source of constraints on

executive behavior.” Increasingly, it is not coups but elections or term limits that have sent presidents packing. Posner and Young acknowledge the corruption and violence that still too often surround African elections, but they draw encouragement from evidence that these same elections are becoming more intensely contested and harder to rig. The new rules have not made it less likely that incumbents will win, but the rules have made it more likely that incumbents will at least have to stand the test of a fairly free election. When the end of their allotted two consecutive terms arrived, half the presidents in Posner and Young’s study chose to step down, while the other half attempted to change the rules to permit themselves another term. Some of them succeeded, including Uganda’s Yoweri Museveni and the late Omar Bongo of Gabon, who died of natural causes in mid-2009 while in the midst of his forty-second straight year in office. Those who failed to overcome term limits included Zambia’s President Chiluba as well as Bakili Muzuli of Malawi. Thus, though the pattern of long-serving executives in Africa is alive and well, the means of retaining executive power are clearly changing.

With the “big men” now holding power more or less “by the rules,” can it be that the military coup is on the decline in Africa? John F. Clark takes up this question in chapter 6. More pointedly, Clark asks, given the powerful incentives for military leaders to seek political control by violent means, why do coups *not* happen more often in many African states? Clark ponders whether the apparent decline in military coups since the 1990s is a function of a change in the external constraints on military leaders, or should be ascribed instead to a change in the political consciousness of the leaders themselves. His analysis leads him to emphasize the latter explanation. Drawing on Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle’s work on democratic transitions and using Freedom House data, Clark identifies a liberalization trajectory for 21 African states during the 1990s and early 2000s. He then examines whether or not those states experienced military interventions. Clark concludes that democratic legitimacy makes military coups less likely, but by no means serves as perfect insulation. Military coups appear likely “in states that start down a path of liberalization but then give way to ‘democratic backsliding’” (especially when they have a history of military rule). In seeking to improve legitimacy, it is as important for regimes to make some economic progress and retain public order as it is to hold free elections.

In chapter 7, Peter Lewis takes up the thorny problem of the relationship between political reform and economic regeneration. Hopes that the democratic revolutions in the 1990s would revive Africa’s economies have so far been disappointed. Though some macroeconomic indicators have been on the rise, most people in most countries have not seen their own living standards improve. Examining the data, Lewis finds some evidence that, over the past decade, Africa’s democracies have recorded faster economic growth than their autocratic neighbors. He notes as well

that “Africa’s democracies attain better Human Development scores than the region’s nondemocratic countries.” This advantage erodes when looking at change over time, however, and his key finding emphasizes “the limited progress in popular welfare among all African countries.” Sounding a common theme of this book, Lewis stresses that the depth of democracy matters. Nations that combine democratic forms with an everyday political mire of neopatrimonialism have little incentive to improve the lot of individual citizens. In particular, when the ruling party stays in power over many legislative terms—as has been the case in Nigeria, South Africa, and Tanzania, for example—the opposition can do little to change deep-seated patterns of clientelism. The weakness of both civil society and the state and the pervasiveness of corruption also impede progress. Africa, Lewis concludes, needs better-trained government leaders who care more about reform, stronger oppositions and civic organizations, and more effective corruption-fighting institutions. Still, Lewis cites the Afrobarometer measures of citizen patience, both with democracy and with sluggish economic improvements, as hopeful signs that Africans will not turn away from democracy.

Democracy, one could say, is still making its own case on the African continent. In chapter 8, Michael Bratton addresses the success of that case as measured through the public-opinion polling data compiled by the Afrobarometer. His aim is to determine whether it is the formal (legal and constitutional) or the informal (actual power relations as experienced by most citizens) institutions that most shape the perception of democracy. Chief among the informal institutions in Africa are the classic three pillars of neopatrimonial rule: corruption, clientelism, and presidentialism. Bratton acknowledges that both formal and informal institutions shape the people’s outlook toward political matters, but he asks which matters more to most people.

The Afrobarometer data show that the proportion of Africans who favor democracy is growing. In countries where elections have brought about a change in the ruling group (Ghana, Kenya, and Senegal), support is the highest, but overall 62 percent of Africans prefer democracy to any other kind of government, and nearly 75 percent reject military rule. Slightly more than half reject all three authoritarian alternatives when these are put to them. The survey shows, promisingly, that most Africans are willing to accept democracy even with some flaws, though in most of the surveys the share of citizens who profess themselves satisfied with the way that democracy works in their own country has been declining. Democracy as an idea is doing well in Africa—there is sufficient *demand*; it is the *supply* that remains uncertain. Although an overwhelming majority of Africans prefer competitive elections, only minorities believe that elections will actually remove leaders from office. Nigerians’ experience with President Obasanjo’s attempt to over-throw term limits was so sour that their expressed unhappiness with

democracy's working in their country acted as a downward drag on the whole continent's average democratic-satisfaction score. Yet in nearby (but much smaller) Ghana, an improving electoral commission has likewise made citizens feel more satisfied with their country's democracy. And Africans, the survey shows, are demanding more than free and fair elections; they also want their leaders to be responsive to citizens' needs as well as accountable for both behavior in office and policy outcomes. Corruption in particular is "clearly corrosive to democracy," especially when "political elites monopolize available resources." Despite the unevenness of their experience, however, Africans still express hope for the future of democracy in their own countries.

West Africa: Many Countries, Many Paths

The remainder of this volume examines the strengths and weaknesses of democracy in individual countries, starting with those in West Africa. In chapter 9, Rotimi Suberu takes up the troubling case of Nigeria and its deeply flawed April 2007 national elections. Having failed to extend his limited term of office, President Obasanjo tried other means to retain power: first, by handpicking his party's next candidate, the frail Umaru Yar'Adua; by using police and security forces to intimidate the opposition; and then by politicizing the Independent National Election Commission. Add armed party thugs to the police and security forces, and it is hardly surprising that nearly three-hundred Nigerians lost their lives to election-related violence. Suberu laments the corruption of the electoral process and the missed opportunity that this represented for Nigeria, which had seen and encouraged elections in other African nations. Echoing Peter Lewis, Suberu notes that despite rising national wealth due to rising prices for petroleum exports, average Nigerians are still very poor, and that this, coupled with disgust at the electoral process, has somewhat soured the country on democracy. Although there are a few bright spots—local elections that ended in wins for the opposition, hope for judicial review of election travesties, and some evidence of power-sharing—overall, this election was a setback not only for Nigeria but for the larger cause of democracy in Africa. Still, Suberu notes, challenges to the election results have remained largely peaceful and followed institutional channels, while the new president has at least said all the right things about correcting the institutional side of the electoral process. The hope is that legal and administrative reforms might make this kind of electoral disaster less likely to happen again.

From Ghana, the news for democracy is more encouraging. In chapter 10, E. Gyimah-Boadi recounts the December 2008 national elections and the peaceful January 2009 handoff of power from defeated incumbents to a victorious opposition. The voting ushered in the second rotation of power between ruling parties in eight years, thereby securing

Ghana's status as a beacon of democracy in Africa. But even in Ghana, a smooth election cannot be taken for granted. Both the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) had their difficulties: The former appeared to many to be corrupt and elitist, while the latter was hampered by a lackluster presidential candidate and a lack of funds. The parties competed against each other on a more or less level playing field, and by African standards this was a contest of issues, not personalities, at least through the first round of voting. Voter intimidation and outright violence marred the December 7 first round, however, and escalated in the second round three weeks later. The tense days between the end of the voting and the announcement of the results saw more violent clashes. In the end, the NPP's Nana Akufo-Addo conceded to the NDC's John Atta Mills after an extremely close race. Despite all the challenges they faced, the institutions in Ghana held up well. In contrast to Nigeria, it was the independence of the Election Commission that saved the day. Ghana's civil society also held up well and was supported by the international community.

Gyimah-Boadi's hope is that the 2008 election experience will spur Ghana to redouble its efforts to build a truly democratic culture by solidifying key institutions and closing gaps in accountability. Ghana's presidency is still too powerful an office, and as such remains too easily subject to abuse for purposes of patronage and even outright corruption. There are no regulations on campaign spending, and there is little or no transparency in the management of public assets. Public support for democracy remains very high, but a citizenry with poor civic education is still too passive to participate fully in the political process. Gyimah-Boadi cautions the new Mills administration to be mindful of the narrow margin of its victory, which revealed a nearly evenly divided electorate, and to work hard to calm the ethnic and regional tensions that lay behind the razor-thin result. Lastly, the work of election administration too needs ongoing attention, so that the democratic project begun in Ghana may continue to grow.

One need look no further than Senegal for an example of a peaceful transition away from one-party hegemony that has failed to deliver on its promise. In chapter 11, Penda Mbow describes the disappointment of international observers who had hoped that the 2000 victory of long-time oppositionist Abdoulaye Wade, which marked the end of twenty years in power for Abdou Diouf, would be a win for democracy as well. Instead, Senegal has been slouching toward electoral authoritarianism. Wade may have led the opposition for decades, but the political culture that formed him was highly authoritarian, and he has held to that model. Efforts to tame corruption and reform the constitution have largely been symbolic. Wade has manipulated various sources of social influence—labor unions, women's organizations, even religious leaders—to his advantage. He has discouraged what secularism there was in Senegal, and

has exaggerated the religious divisions among the largely Sunni Muslim population. Mbow contends that these efforts “hold back the deepening of democracy” by encouraging a heightened religious identity at the expense of citizenship. The deterioration is accelerated by the usual autocratic efforts to weaken civil society, erode civil liberties, constrain the press, corrupt the judiciary, concentrate power in the executive, grab state assets, and coopt or punish opposition. Increasingly, the defeat of Diouf’s Socialist Party in 2000 appears not as a genuine political breakthrough to a new type of regime, but a blip on the radar screen, trading one version of single-party hegemony for another, and this time with a hereditary succession looming as the President Wade’s son, Karim, amasses ever more power and resources.

In Sierra Leone, by contrast, a once nearly hopeless situation of civil war and political collapse has been transformed, giving that benighted country a new opportunity for democracy, stability, and decent governance. In chapter 12, Christopher Wyrod calls the 2007 vote in Sierra Leone “the freest and most participatory in its history,” generating a remarkable number of candidates and impressive voter turnout. A lesson for the rest of Africa may be gleaned from the fact that, after problems with interim elections in 2004, a new and independent National Election Commission was established. By 2007, with UN peacekeepers gone, Sierra Leone ran its own electoral process, redrew district borders, and moved from a proportional to a single-member system. The number of splinter parties fell. In the end, a free and lawful transition saw power pass in orderly fashion from one set of elected civilian leaders to another.

Important challenges linger, of course. First among them is corruption. Sierra Leone remains the world’s poorest country, and many of its new leaders have corrupt pasts. President Ernest Bai Koroma has pledged a zero-tolerance policy, but it remains to be seen if he will apply this policy evenly or use it only to punish political opponents. Second, with the national courts still clogged with war-crimes cases and the lower courts in the pockets of local chiefs, access to justice remains unavailable to most citizens. Third, there is little effective press freedom. Unless these grievances are addressed, Sierra Leone may relapse into violence. Thus Wyrod urges that the 2007 election be seen as “a foundation upon which to build, rather than as a set of laurels on which to rest.”

The turnaround from bloody conflict to fledgling democracy is perhaps even more extraordinary in Liberia, as Dave Peterson explains in chapter 13. When long-dormant ethnic tensions erupted into civil war in the 1990s, it took international intervention, in the form of a UN-sponsored transitional government and elections, to bring peace back to Liberia. Today, thanks in part to continued international support, Liberia has a freely elected president, a fairly healthy legislature, and a high degree of trans-