

Why Democracy and Good Governance in Africa after Independence: Critical analyses!

T I Mokgopo¹

Abstract: *The gaining of independence by many African countries meant the transition from years of repression and slavery to a democratic era in Africa. Unfortunately, the concept of democracy is perceived by many African scholars and leaders to be foreign to African culture. However, this study provides that democracy and good governance should prevail in Africa after her independence: the main reason being that both these concepts can help in curtailing developmental challenges in Africa. Furthermore, the main reason behind this conclusion as to why the concept of democracy and good governance need to be quantified and explored in Africa is because some African countries are experiencing bad governance as opposed to good governance. As such this study provides that there is a strong linkages between democracy and good governance: one cannot speak of democracy without including the principles of equity, fairness, accountability, transparency, rule of laws and public participation.*

Keywords: democracy, Africa, good governance, national affairs, transparency, fairness and accountability

Introduction

There is a robust debate among scholars that the concept of democracy and good governance is foreign to African culture. The same statement was uttered by then Gambian president providing that the concept of human rights is an illegitimate sons of Africa that should be sent six feet under and defining democracy as being foreign (Nigel, 2010). The statement or debate which suggest that autocrats is a way to build the African continent. However, the transition that took place in South Africa in 1990 during the negotiation stages proved that it is possible to build a democratic country where rulers or those in authority can be held accountable by their subjects. There is also a fear of coup d'etat among Africans, however democracy cannot be destroyed by coup d'etat. It will survive every legal assault upon political liberty.

Though being regarded as foreign in African context it should also be understood that democracy in Africa is atan experimental stage but up to so far it has proved to be working in countries like Botswana; andthough still fragile and yet to be tried it proved to be working also in South Africa. Having seen how democracy is working in other countries, there is a thirstiness and longing among African people for the breath of democracy in their countries because by it countries can modernize their economies. This includes ameliorating social conditions and integrate with the outside world

¹ University of Limpopo

(Talbot 199:50). This paper advocates for democracy in Africa because democracy has the ability to give birth to representative government where members of the public including minority groups and other ethnic groups are represented equally at the national, provincial, regional and local government level.

Some African countries are experiencing civil wars due to unequal sharing or balance of power between the political parties and levels (sphere) of government. This is not how African people want to describe and remember this precious continent after having fought so hard against colonialism to gain independence. While other African countries claim to be democratic on paper, practically it is not so. A democratic country should have a representative system of government, which will ensure that leaders become accountable to their people.

However, many African leaders of the movement of democracy provides that democracy is largely a strategy for power, not a vehicle for popular empowerment and it is a major cause of chronic underdevelopment in Africa (Ake 1993:240). That statement can be dangerous because there is enough evidence and literature that proves that democracy brought government closer to the people in South Africa after the abolishment of the apartheid era. Furthermore, the African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation (1990) notes that:

Nations cannot be built without popular support and full participation of the people, nor can the economic crisis be resolved and the human and economic conditions improved without the full and effective contribution, creativity and popular enthusiasm of the vast majority of the people.

Therefore, African countries need to realize that their greatest resource is their people because it is through their active and meaningful participation in the economic and political life of their country that Africa can surmount the difficulties that lie ahead. This means that should democracy be the founding principle or foundation of every state in Africa, regional integration can be achieved. Resources will be fairly distributed between different ethnic communities: by so doing ethnic tensions and division can be minimized.

It is worth noting that African people are seeking democracy not only as a condition of survival, but also from the realization that they must fend for themselves because in most cases ethnic minorities are neglected in the distribution of resources by the ruling majority. However in a democratic dispensation all people are equal irrespective of which ethnic or political affiliation they form part of.

The cry of democracy in Africa is to ensure that all ethnic groups are represented both at the local and national level. The categorization of democracy as a foreign concept in Africa led to Africa as a whole becoming marginalized in the world affairs both politically and economically. Based on that African democracy cannot afford to go down a different path because it must reflect the vital interests of its social base

For the sake of clarity on the concept of democracy its definition will be of great assistance in this study because it will provide clarity on what is meant by it. This will also marry the concept of democracy and good governance and examine the relationship between the two.

Methodology

The methodology to be explored in this study is based on literature reviews, journal articles, as well as library and internet sources. This study will also rely on the observations by the author as well as what is and was reported in the media.

Defining democracy

In order to examine the relationship between democracy and good governance, it is necessary to start by clarifying what is meant by 'democracy'. Customarily, the concept of democracy is often understood as a political regime that protects the freedom of individuals and expresses the will of the majority through free and fair elections, which includes the protection of minority rights and respect for basic human rights (Trebilcock and Prado, 2011). Schumpeter (1947:269) define the concept of democracy as a system 'for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote'.

According to Robert (2000:26) democracy is both descriptive and prescriptive tool. By prescriptive, democracy can be a descriptive concept that set out what countries should aspire to become. Democracy can also be a descriptive concept that measures the degree to which a country has democratized. This means that the status of a country's democracy is now being viewed as falling along a continuum.

The Centre for Political and related Terminology in the Southern African Language(2015)define democracy as a form of government where the power to form a government and to make decisions by legitimate representatives lies with the voters, in most cases referred to as 'the people'. While on the other hand Thornhill et al (2014:413) adduce democracy as a political system, in which decision-making power is widely shared among members of the society as a whole.

This is to say that democracy in general means having a constitution that ensures full participation by members of the community including civil society organization in the affairs of the government and in holding officials accountable. This means that the concept of democracy should also exhibit free and fair election, freedom of expression, right to vote, freedom of press and freedom of association as well as the principle of equality before the law in building an effective democratic nation and ensuring democratic governance in Africa. However, there are some difficulties in defining the concept of democracy as there is no consensus among scholars on how precisely the concept of democracy should be measured and defined. This proves that there are varying definition and degrees of democracy.

However, for the purpose of this study, democracy from African context can be defined as the country's ability to emerge from irreconcilable repressions and conflicts of the past which includes segregation, ethnic exclusions in government's affairs by colonial or apartheid government in build a free multi party (system) government where the rights of all citizens are protected fairly and equally

while service deliveries are being provided to all members of the community in an equitable manner including the previously marginalized. This includes the electorate's ability to hold those in authority accountable while participating in a fair and free elections with one common goal of overcoming developmental challenges faced by the country before and after independence.

In other words, democracy in Africa means freedom from autocratic rule and the adherence of the rules of law to combat corruption and looting of public resources in the public procurement. It also includes a system of political will in handing over power to the successor after the elections to avoid civil wars while building one goal of creating a common nation.

To achieve all these, civil society organizations as well as members of the community (citizens) should be equipped from the grassroots levels to enable a smooth transition of moving from colonial era to independence era. Which will in turn lead to the emergence of democracy that has the ability to build a multiparty government or nation with political institutions that are predictable to be supportive in culture to the affairs and economic growth of the country.

Building a democratic nation

Building a democratic country takes not just a few years but decades with the passing of a generation or more. This study therefore provides that the quality of development in every country depends on the quality of the democracy of that particular country. This study further provides that democracy includes choosing one's own government; choosing one's own socio-cultural activities and political institutions as well as having the right to self-determination by different ethnic groups in the country. In the words of Newman and Rich (2004) democracy is understood to be a critical precondition for ending the scourge of wars. This means that there should be a will (either societal or political will) among the leaders and members of the society to build a strong and accountable nation where members of the society are free from repression and free to voice their opinions and dissatisfaction without any fear of being judged or imprisoned Talbott (1996).

Therefore, to build a democratic nation, countries need to understand that democratic governance relies on three conditions:

- a) Firstly, countries need to have a set of good institutions and understanding of democracy and good governance;
- b) Secondly, citizens need to be equipped to have a good and thorough understanding of the principles of democracy. This will help them to develop a character that is consistent with the democratic way of life;
- c) Finally, countries need to have a high quality of leadership that displays honesty and transparency while performing their day to day duties.

As such, in order to build a democratic country the above conditions should be met. This is because democracy promotes free markets, independent labour movements and the formation of political

parties by minorities groups without the domination by majority. Democracy also ensures that countries experiences fair elections because fair elections trump everything in as far as promoting democracy and building a democratic nation.

According to Zakaria (1997:40) the absence of free and fair elections should be viewed as one flaw, not the definitions of tyranny. However this statement can be dangerous because many dictators or tyranny rigged the elections to stay in power and continued to loot state resources and oppressing other political parties and other ethnic groups. By so saying, there is no existence of democracy without fair and free elections. However, Collier (2009:45) highlights that elections are not a sufficient proxy for democracy since using elections as a proxy results in classifying countries as full democracies even though they have only nominally fulfilled election requirements. This therefore led us in this study to discuss and analyse what is meant by democracy and elections.

What should a democratic country depict!

Diamond (2008:22) points out that a system is a democracy only if it depicts ethnic freedom, religious, racial and other minority groups to participate in their religion and culture and also to participate equally in political and social life. This includes substantial individual freedom of belief, speech, opinion, discussion, petition, publication, assembly, broadcast, demonstration.

Citizens should be afforded the right to vote and to run for office only if they meet certain minimum age and competency requirements. There should also be genuine openness and competition in the electoral arena by all people and enabling any group that adheres to constitutional principles for form a party and contest for office to make sure that all ethnic groups are represented in government's decision making on matters that affect the country. This will require an independent judiciary to apply the law neutrally, consistently without biasness while protecting individual and group rights.

Diamond (2008) provide that democracy include due process of law and freedom of individuals from torture, terror and unjustified detention, exile, or interference in their personal lives by the state or non-state actors. This means that there is a need to have institutional checks on the power of elected officials and autonomous independent legislature and court system.

There is also a need to have uncaptured military and state security apparatus. This means that the control for military and state security should be in the hands of certain individuals as this will led to abuse of power and the rebirth of Hitler ruler-ship which will in turn led to the development and the assurance of democracy being undermined in Africa.

Democracy and elections

The post-Cold War period witnessed several positive changes with respect to democratization in Africa and saw participatory politics growing in the 1990s and 2010s as the percentage of African countries holding democratic elections increasing from 7 to 40 percent and in 2010(International Peace Institute, 2011). This saw the Freedom House classifying eighteen countries on the continent

as electoral democracies. However, during the past two decades, the general trend has been toward greater accountability of political leaders whose domestic legitimacy is largely linked to the means through which they attain and maintain power.

It is not a secret that elections in Africa facilitated the emergence of democratic governments in Benin, Cape Verde, Ghana, Mali, Senegal and South Africa. Following autocratic regimes and protracted civil wars, more stable societies have emerged in Guinea, Liberia, Niger and Sierra Leone. However, in some cases, elections have been manipulated to legitimate autocratic regimes or to ensure dynastic successions on the continent (International Peace Institute 2011:1).

The re-introduction of multiparty systems in Africa in the early 1990s led to electoral competition for state power. The process has now become a norm and has seen many African states managing to hold more than three successive elections, with South Africa preparing its sixth national elections in 2019.

Though the rising of independence was mostly celebrated by many African countries, some countries experienced a worrying trend of election-related violent conflict that threatens democracy, stability, peace and sustainable human development in Africa. Some of the factors that propel such violence are multifaceted, ranging from flawed or failed elections to structural issues such as poor governance and exclusionary political practices, to name but a few (Motsamai, 2010:1). For example, in the past ten to fifteen years there has been serious violent election-related conflicts in the following countries: Togo (2005), Zanzibar (2005), the Democratic Republic of Congo (2006), Lesotho (2007), Nigeria (2007), Guinea Bissau (2008), Kenya 2007-2008) and Zimbabwe (2002 and 2008) Cote d'Ivoire (2010-2011). These are some of high profile electoral crises that led to at least four thousand deaths and hundreds thousands displaced.

Unfortunately in Africa elections did not project democracy as expected. This is because some African leaders can still influence and manipulate the outcomes on the national elections. This seems to be the culture that is being followed by most African leaders. Sometimes after losing the elections fair and square they refuse to step down and hand over power to their successors. This study therefore finds that elections in Africa did not bring the long awaited democracy after independence in some countries. According to Tshiyoyo (2012) elections in Africa brought tensions that have divided the continent and members of the community in some countries. This is because elections are used by African leaders as a means of holding power (not as a means of building a democratic nation) even when governments have not been able to implement any single policy towards enhancing the living conditions of citizens

According to Adejumobi (2000:66) the dominant practice in Africa is that most rulers organize an electoral "coup d'état" which ensures their selection and appointment in the name of a popular electoral process. The tactics they employ include stifling opposition parties and reducing them to docility, covertly corrupting the electoral process or embarking on outright election rigging. However, countries such as Gambia, Ghana, Niger, Cameroon, Togo, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal serves as a good literature of African countries where regimes came into

power through popular elections yet they have since relapsed into autocratic rule. In Zimbabwe, it has been very difficult to transform the psychology of liberation struggles into democratic consciousness. This is because opposition parties remain very weak and depreciated, while President Robert Mugabe and his party, have remained in power ever since 1980.

One would say that Africa has over the last few decades seen and experienced good and bad elections which have put different African countries on different trajectories in as far as democracy and good governance is concerned. This is due to the fact that a number of elections have managed to produce expected results and had also managed to place several countries on a firm path of recovery and peaceful transition following years of oppression, repression and civil conflicts. This is evident from the elections in Namibia which led to independence in 1989; South Africa and Mozambique in 1994 to end decades of apartheid and civil conflicts, as well as in Sierra Leone and Liberia in the 2000s. However, elections in some African countries have remained problematic even after independence because winning election is seen as an opportunity and a process of capturing the state and monopolizing access to resources to certain ethnic groups.

Rukambe (2010) write that the use of violence and intimidation has become a common feature in African elections and this is used by both ruling party and opposition leaders and supporters to advance their chances to win elections. This process led to electoral violence in Africa because religious and ethnic cleavages are also mobilized as a basis for electioneering. All these process have had serious catastrophic consequences in several countries such as Kenya, Zimbabwe and Nigeria. This study highlights that the increasing prevalence of electoral violence in Africa projects the challenges faced by many African nations in conducting fair and free elections while building democratic nation. This shows that democracy will never prevails were citizens are being oppressed, threatened, forced and influenced to elect certain leaders with the fear of being marginalized and excluded in the allocation of resources by the dominating majority.

This study therefore provides that some of the challenges of conducting democratic and peaceful elections in Africa can be identified as:

- ❖ the entrenchment of a dominant-party system and the absence of tolerant political culture among political parties;
- ❖ the election process is very competitive and uncertain: in most cases violence ensues when there is a strong possibility of changing power or existing government and in such situations the incumbents are no willing to cede power;
- ❖ the administration and management of votes and elections: elections should be administered or management by an independent body that is impartial because should such body be suspected to be lacking credibility the entire electoral system (process) will be diminished; and might results in serious violence. The lack of credible and independent body to manage elections in African has collapsed the electoral system in many African countries.
- ❖ The way the electoral system is designed can also de-escalate or exacerbate electoral conflicts. According to Motsamai (2010:3)

“the extent to which a system is regarded as fair and inclusive may determine the possibility of post-electoral conflict. Violence often occurs when elections are ‘zero-sum’ events and ‘losers’ are excluded from participation in governance”.

Motsamai(2010:2) point out that the restoration and establishment of multiparty systems in most of Africa in what has been termed the ‘third wave of democratisation’ saw an opening up of political space and the formation or reemergence of opposition political parties. This saw almost all African countries adopting new constitutions which reflected these developments, including the principle of regular legislative/parliamentary and presidential elections. However, the violence which ensued after an apparently peaceful presidential poll in Kenya in December 2007 and the circumstances that surrounded the 2008 presidential election in Zimbabwe have recently ignited debates about the challenges to the democratic process in Africa.

The concept of democracy and elections is captured and articulated very well in the writings of Mostamai (2010) when it was stated that:

The post-election political impasses and their devastating consequences in both Kenya and Zimbabwe have compelled analysts and policy-makers alike to ponder the complex question of whether elections in Africa are a curse on or a cure for democratic advancement. This is because many keen observers of Africa’s political scene have pointed to these and other events, particularly the unconstitutional changes in governance, as a manifestation of the regression of the democratisation process on the continent, inferring that democracy is either at a standstill or is backsliding.

African elections have become more robust and competitive, yet in the same vein they are increasingly challenging given the increasing level of sophistication in their rigging and manipulation especially in some countries (Rukambe, 2010:1). However, there is no doubt that Africa has made some advances in electoral democracy since the reintroduction of multiparty politics in the early 1990s. Evidence suggests that the transition to electoral democracy was easier than the process of building and sustaining democracy. This is partly so because elections are only one aspect of a larger process of democratisation and democracy building (Motsamai 2010:6). According to Rukambe (2010), the year 2010 has been dubbed the biggest year in Africa given the quite unprecedented high number of countries on the continent having elections and the increasingly higher population of Africans ready to vote. By democracy and elections we mean the ability and willingness by majority of African voters to hold their leaders accountable through elections and also requiring their elected leaders to translate election promises into public policies which engender democratic governance and development (Sklar, 1983).

Although elections provide opportunities for improved governance and conflict management, they continue to pose challenges to African political systems as observed in Gambia in 2016 where President Jammeh refused to step down after losing the presidential elections. This was also observed in the Democratic Republic of Congo where elections were moved to an unknown date allowing President Joseph Kabila to stay in power even after his term came to an end, making him an unelected president who still occupied the presidential office in Africa.

Electoral-democracy is one of many options of choosing leadership and deposing old governments in a political system (Holm and Molutsi, 1990; Gyeke-Jandoh, 2014). Elections are regarded as core

institution of representative democracy whereby elections are used as the only means to decide who holds legislative and executive power respectively (Linberg, 2006; Bogaards, 2007; Menoal, 2013). This means that individuals who so wish, should also be able and allowed to form their political party and contests in elections on the same conditions as everyone else. Furthermore, all citizens of age and mental sanity should be able to cast their vote based on the principles of one person, one vote (Lindberg, 2004:29).

This therefore led us to discuss the concept of good governance in building a democratic nation. This study finds that one of the main reasons why many African countries failed to develop even after gaining their independence is because the principle of good governance is left out by many African leaders when coming into power, the process which crippled democracy in many countries in the continent. There is a need to explore the application of the principles of good governance in Africa (Gisselquis, 2012). This is the study that needs to be explored and quantified adequately because majority of existing literature in this area focuses on the linkage between democracy and quality of government or corruption. There is a need for good governance in ensuring that democracy prevails in many African counties because of the following observed practices:

- a) Many officials are serving their own interests without being held accountable;
- b) There is a reliance on personal networks for survival by members of the society including excluded minorities rather than holding the state accountable in providing adequate services to citizens;
- c) Personalised politics and patronage
- d) Forced and Illegitimate leadership; and
- e) Excessive control of information and freedom of associations

The concept of governance is not new; it is as old as human civilization (Mafeje, 1998; Makumbe, 1998; Khan, 2009). By it we simply mean 'the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented or not implemented' (Carothers, 1997; Besancon, 2003; Norris, 2005; Collier, 2009). Government is one of the main actors in governance while other actors involved in governance vary depending on the level of government. Good governance has 8 major characteristics which are: participatory, consensus oriented, transparency, accountability, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and the rules of law. Good governance ensures that corruption is minimized and that the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. It is also responsive to the present and future demands and needs of society (Gallie, 1959; Pillay, 2004; Nanda, 2006).

According to De la Harpe et al (2008:6)

Good governance refers to the realization of the fundamental values of democracy, rule of law, human rights and social justice by all governmental or non-governmental authorities whose legal acts or activities affect the position of citizens in the process of the formulation, the creation and the implementation of binding and non-binding legal norms.

There are eight major principles of good governance that is adhered to, democracy can prevail in Africa. These principles are known as: Participation, Rule of law, Transparency, responsiveness, consensus oriented, equity and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency and accountability (Eyasu, 2005; De la Harpe et al, 2008). The main reason why democracy and good governance need to be explored in an African context is because democracy protects the freedom of individuals which includes the minority rights while promoting compliances and respect for basic rights. On the otherhand,good governance ensures that the principles of accountability, transparency and participation in building a democratic country are upheld.

Eight major principles of good governance in enforcing democracy in Africa

From the above provided principles what need to be done in ensuring that democracy and good governance prevails in Africa.

a) Participation

Participation refers to a process or the act of taking part in the activities or events of government. Participation by both men and women (citizens) in the affairs and the decision making of government is a key cornerstone of good governance and democracy. Participation governance can be either direct or through legitimate intermediate instructions or representatives. It is paramount to highlight that representative democracy does not necessary mean that the concerns of the most vulnerable in society would be taken into consideration in decision making. According to United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (2006:2) Participation needs to be informed and organized. This means freedom of association and expression on the one hand and an organized civil society on the other hand. Such participation can take different forms, participation could either be through civil society organisations, political parties, and public meetings as well as through voting processes.

b) Rule of law

To ensure that democracy prevails against all odds there should be fair legal frameworks that are enforced impartially. This is to say good governance requires full protection of human rights, particularly those of minorities. This includes impartial enforcement of laws which requires an independent judiciary and an incorruptible and impartial police force.

c) Transparency

Transparency mean that decisions taken and their enforcement are done in a manner that follows rules and regulations. It also means that information regarding the affairs of the country is freely available and directly accessible to those who will be affected by such decision and their enforcement.

Is also means that enough information is provided to citizens and that it is provided in easily understandable forms and media.

d) Responsiveness

Good governance requires government, institution and processes to try to serve members of the community and all stakeholders within a reasonable timeframe. In an African context, this means that the provision of services to members of society within the states available resources should be on time.

e) Consensus oriented

There are several actors and as many view points in a given society, this is to say that good governance requires mediation of the different interests in society to reach a broad consensus in society on what is in the best interest of the whole community and how this can be achieved. It also requires a broad and long-term perspective on what is needed for sustainable human development and how to achieve the goals of such development. All this can only achieved if there is a thorough understanding of cultural, historical and social context of a given society or community.

f) Equity and inclusiveness

A society's well-being depends on ensuring that all its members feel that they have a stake in it and do not feel excluded from the mainstream of society. This requires all groups, but particularly the most vulnerable, have opportunities to improve or maintain their well-being.

g) Effectiveness and efficiency

Good governance means that processes and institutions produce results that meet the needs of society while making the best use of resources at their disposal. The concept of efficiency in the context of good governance also covers the sustainable use of natural resources and the protection of the environment.

h) Accountability

Accountability is a key requirement of good governance of building a free and accountable democratic government/nation in Africa. Accountability means the ability of the electorate to hold those in power accountable. The issue of accountability need to be understood that it does not refer only to government and governmental institutions but also the private sector and civil society organisations.

All these institutions must be accountable to the public and to their institutional stakeholders. It is worth noting that who is accountable to whom varies depending on whether decisions or actions taken. In short, government or any public organization is accountable to those who will be affected by its decisions or actions. Therefore accountability cannot be enforced without transparency and the rule of law.

Conclusion

The fight for democracy in Africa exposed that the entire electoral process in many African countries is vulnerable and fraudulent, the process which crippled the emergence of good governance in building accountable and democratic country. As such, those who seek democracy in their country must fight with full force against practices that seek to undermine it. This also requires state parties to commit themselves to promote democracy in ensuring that good governance prevails to overcome developmental challenges in Africa. African countries should promote good governance by ensuring transparent and accountable administration.

This also means strengthening political institutions to entrench a culture of democracy and peace. When democracy prevails, good governance also prevails and public institutions are established to promote and support democracy and constitutional order. This will help African countries to re-affirm their commitment to regularly holding transparent, free and fair elections in accordance with the Unions Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa.

This study concludes that democracy will never prevail were citizens are being oppressed, threatened, forced and influenced to elect certain leaders with the fear of being marginalized and excluded in the allocation of resources by the dominating majority.

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