Democracy and Development in Africa since the 1960s

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1. Introduction

African countries often make world news when presidents refuse to leave office after their term limits. In 2019, six out of ten living longest ruling heads of states were from sub-Saharan Africa. How has Cameroon's President Paul Biya managed to stay in office since 1975 and Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni since 1986? Elsewhere, the President of Iran Ali Khamenei has been in power since 1979 and Cambodia's President Hun Sen since 1984. Presidents in semi-democratic and non-democratic countries often try to bend the rules so that they can stay in office for one or more additional terms. In the case of Uganda, Museveni removed age limits by amending the Constitution of Uganda so that he could run for president past the age of 75. His move faced opposition in both Parliament and in the Supreme Court. However, the constitutional amendment was ultimately approved by Parliament and upheld in the Supreme Court, paving the way for his potentially indefinite reelection.

Violations of presidential term limits are the tip of the iceberg: they constitute an important and visible example of democratic shortcomings in Africa and beyond that include corruption, clientelism, and limited respect for the rule of law. The Afrobarometer surveys reveal that African citizens often see these problems as among the most important ones their country is facing. This is the result of valuing democratic norms and of suspecting that not respecting these norms may hurt their civil rights, their political rights, and their welfare. Politics and economics are deeply intertwined, and this chapter pays attention to some of their links to better understand democracy and development in Africa since the 1960s.

In the remainder of the chapter, we begin by defining democracy and discussing its relationship with economic development in Section 2. Section 3 provides a chronology of the three democratic phases in Africa since independence. The continent has been democratizing rapidly since the 1990s, yet bad governance underpins the limited economic development facing many African societies since independence in the 1960s (Section 4). We focus on three political hindrances to further democratization and development that I term "the three Cs of bad governance": corruption, clientelism, and conflict. While outlining general patterns is important, examining differences between African countries is key because the extent to which they are democratic and developed diverges widely. Finally, we contrast two countries commonly hailed as political and economic success stories (Botswana and Mauritius) with two others (Benin and Uganda) that endured decades of political instability and are comparatively less developed.

2. Democracy and development: can we have one without the other?

One of the most important questions in political economy concerns the relationship between political and economic development. Almost all developed countries in the world are democratic. Likewise, more democratic countries tend to be more developed. We restrict economic development here to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, although economic development can also be understood more broadly to consider poverty reduction and economic inequality.

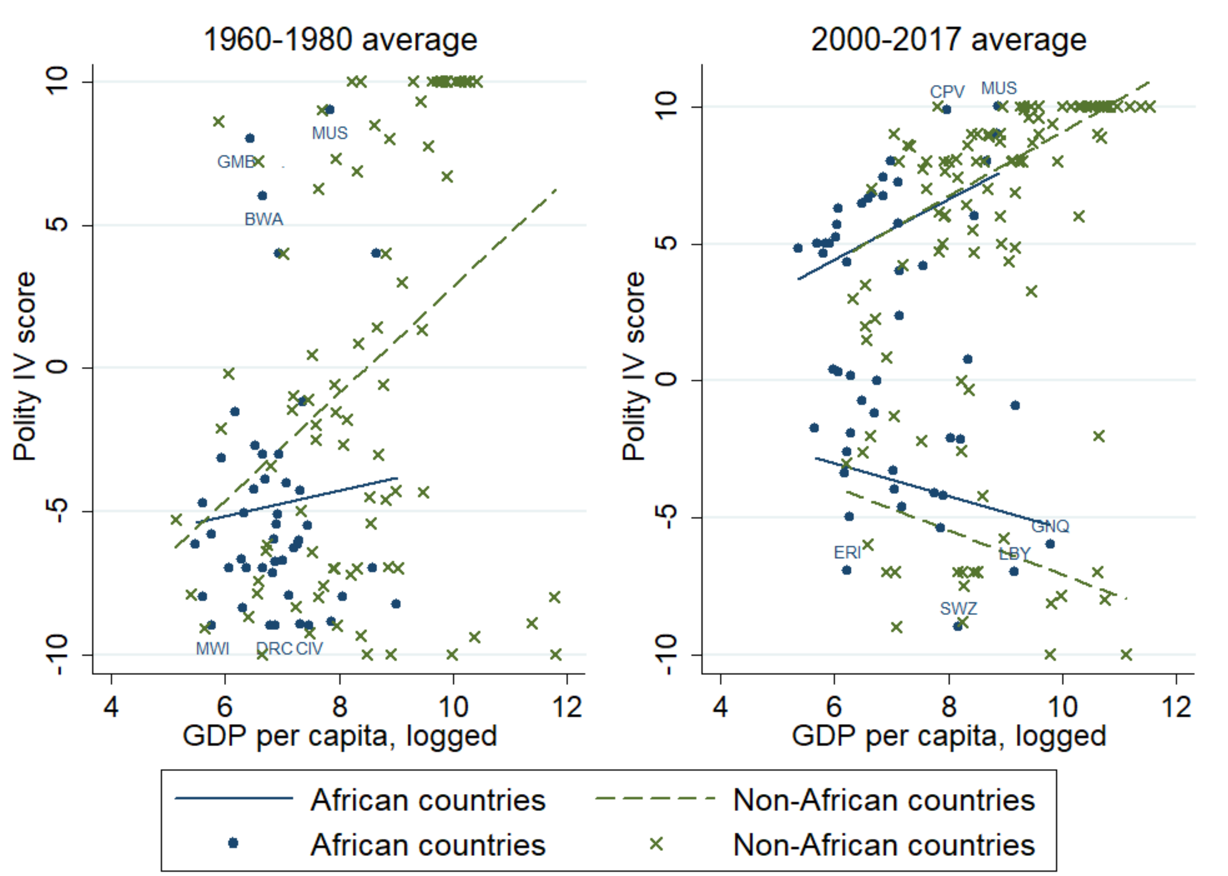
Democracy in the Greek language literally means *rule by the people* because "demos" means *people* and "kratos" means *rule*. Robert Dahl, one of the most prominent democratic theorists, argued that even very democratic countries are closer to "polyarchy" (etymologically, *rule by many*), than rule by the people. Dahl argued that *political contestation* and *political participation* are two key components of democracy: institutions in some countries are more "liberal" (i.e. there is more political contestation via, for instance, alternative media sources) and more "inclusive" (i.e. there is more political participation in public affairs) than in others. By institutions we mean, following the 1993 Nobel Prize winner Douglass North, "the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction" such as a country's constitution, laws, and informal rules that may not be written on paper.

Further, democratic institutions in some countries protect freedom of association, private property, or the right to a free trial better than others. Research has shown that specific institutions common to democratic societies improve governance and foster development. For example, colonial institutions were mainly designed to maximize the extraction of resources, from diamonds in British-ruled Sierra Leone to rubber in the Belgian Congo. These institutions are hostile to economic development because they are usually associated with a disregard of property rights and a non-democratically elected executive power (e.g. president) that is not constrained by the rule of law. By contrast, democratic institutions ensure fair elections and constrain leaders to follow the rule of law while also ensuring citizen rights. Mauritius since the 1980s is a clear example of such institutions, but the early post-colonial period in multiple countries, including Uganda, was also characterized by largely fair and competitive elections—even if those countries often became non-democratic in the 1970s.

Democratic institutions do not come out of thin air. Modernization theorists have argued that urbanization, education, technological change, and other developmental processes are conducive to democratization. For instance, as a society modernizes, the emerging middle class will often demand to participate in the political process (i.e. to be included) and thus contribute to democratization. Many political economists agree that democracy and development reinforce each other, and existing literature has provided evidence for both directions of causality.

What is the relationship between democracy and development in African and non-African countries since the 1960s, when most African countries gained independence? Figure 1 presents average values of GDP per capita in constant 2005 US Dollars ($) on the x-axis and average Polity IV scores in two different time periods on the y-axis: the first two independent decades for much of the continent (1960-1980) on the left-hand-side and the two most recent ones (2000-2017) on the right-hand-side. The GDP per capita measure is presented as a natural logarithm to reduce the influence of extreme outliers (very rich countries). For example, the GDP per capita of Malawi for the 1960-1980 period was around $330. The corresponding natural log is $5.8.

Figure 1: Economic development and democracy in Africa after independence and today



Note: GDP per capita in constant 2005 USD. The Polity IV score ranges between -10 (most autocratic) and 10 (most democratic). The figure highlights highly democratic and highly autocratic African countries. Acronyms: BWA (Botswana), CIV (Cote d'Ivoire), CPV (Cape Verde), DRC (Democratic Republic of the Congo), ERI (Eritrea), GMB (Gambia), GNQ (Equatorial Guinea), LBY (Libya), MUS (Mauritius), MWI (Malawi), SWZ (Swaziland).

The Polity IV score measures the extent to which a country is democratic and ranges from -10 (full autocracies) to +10 (full democracies). The score is a composite index of variables that measure political contestation and political participation. For example, a democracy with constitutional and stable constraints on the executive power (i.e. the government) will score up to 4 points just on that dimension. An autocracy where the government does not have legal constraints will score -4. Other measures of democracy are binary: democratic or autocratic. In those measures, a country is considered democratic if its Polity IV is around 6 or higher. This means that even countries between 0 and 5 in the Polity IV score have important shortcomings in political inclusion, contestation, or both.

Figure 1 on the left shows that there is a cluster of rich and democratic non-African countries (crosses) in the top right corner in both periods. Those are mostly European countries. Overall, non-African countries range from autocratic to democratic in both periods. Figure 1 also shows that African countries (dots) are clustered towards the bottom left corner during the 1960-1980 period because they were both poorer and less democratic than most non-African countries (crosses). Exceptions include Mauritius, Gambia, and Botswana, which score equally democratic as the group of European countries in the top right corner. However, by the 2000-2017 period (right figure) we observe much more variation in the African Polity IV scores. Many African countries have become more democratic, climbing up the y-axis. In the 21st century, African countries range from democratic (Cape Verde and Mauritius) or mostly democratic (e.g. Botswana and South Africa) to highly autocratic (e.g. Eritrea, Swaziland, Equatorial Guinea).

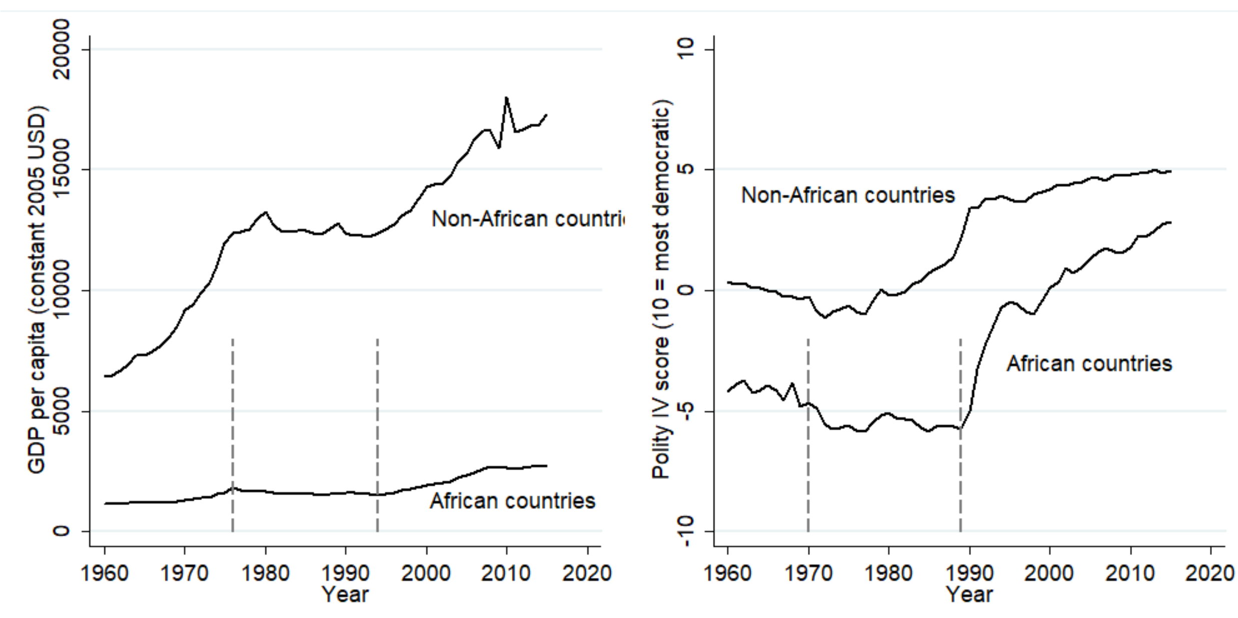
The linear trend lines in Figure 1 indicate that the relationship between democracy and economic development is positive for both African and non-African countries during 1960-1980. However, for the 2000-2017 period the relationship appears conditional: the relationship between democracy and development is positive for more democratic countries (Polity IV score higher than 0) but negative for more autocratic countries (Polity IV score lower than 0). What explains those two different patterns? Scholars Robert Bates, Ghada Fayad, and Anke Hoeffler argue that this negative relationship is in part driven by autocratic countries that are rich in natural resources. The "resource curse" is the idea that non-renewable natural resources, like minerals or oil, can make a country poorer and less democratic because such resources are susceptible to elite capture and are finite, thereby hindering *sustained* economic development even if the country may become richer in the short-run due to its natural resource exports. Libya and Equatorial Guinea, both well-endowed with crude oil, are rich compared to most African countries but at the same time they are also among the least democratic and most economically unequal.

Elites in natural resource-rich states have often managed to exploit their country's wealth without democratizing, and hence have generated a high level of wealth inequality between the political elite (e.g. those proximate to Muammar Gaddafi in Libya and Teodoro Obiang in Equatorial Guinea, respectively) and the rest of the population. However, countries that are already relatively democratic at the time of resource discovery have tended to manage their natural resources better by combining sustained growth with economic redistribution stemming from democratic accountability. Examples include Norway, rich in oil and gas, and Botswana, rich in diamonds since the 1970s. In general, Figure 1 reveals that the relationship between democracy and development remains positive in both African and non-African countries when revenue is not derived from natural resources (e.g. Cape Verde, Ghana, Mauritius). This is consistent both with modernization theory and with the idea that democratic institutions favor economic growth.

3. Main political phases since independence

Figure 2 reveals an important pattern of economic development and democratization over time. Africa is in fact democratizing despite limited economic growth. The left graph shows GDP per capita in constant 2005 US Dollars ($) on the y-axis from 1960 to 2017. The right graph shows average Polity IV scores on the y-axis also from 1960 to 2017. Africa's modest economic growth since 1960, shown in the left graph, runs against the thesis of economists, such as Robert Solow, who expected poorer countries to "catch-up" or converge in GDP per capita to richer ones as long as poorer countries could replicate the savings rate and the technologies of richer ones. In fact, the economic gap between African and non-African countries has actually increased, consistent with domestic factors such as human capital and political institutions affecting development as emphasized by endogenous growth theory. At the same time, however, we have witnessed an impressive reduction of Africa's democratic gap since 1990. The right graph shows that African societies have become more democratic since then and that these gains are more pronounced in African than in non-African countries. We now explain these historical trends in more detail.

Figure 2: Democracy and economic development in Africa from 1960 to 2017



Political scientists generally divide the post-independence period into three phases: (i) the first post-colonial decade (1960s), (ii) the so-called "lost decades" (1970-1989), and (iii) the post-Cold War period (1990-present). The Cold War (1945-1990), during which the United States and the Soviet Union confronted each other, led to instability and conflict in Africa and elsewhere because these two countries fought for the geopolitical control of what was then termed as the Third World, mainly the developing countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In Africa, political independence from colonial rule in the 1960s generated high expectations amidst a wave of pan-Africanist sentiment, especially among the urban elites. However, as shown in the left graph of Figure 2, both economic development and democratization levels were comparatively low in the 1960s. Some early post-independence elections were contested and participatory, but many countries soon became either single-party civilian governments (e.g. Julius Nyerere's Tanganyika African National Union, Léopold Sédar Senghor's Senegalese Progressive Union) or outright military dictatorships (e.g. Gowon in Nigeria, Kérékou in Benin). The weak states and regionally unequal societies that Africans inherited from colonial rule did not favor democratization and development. The poor governance that ensued led to the so-called economic "lost decades" of Africa because real GDP per capita in the continent slightly decreased between 1975 and 1995 (the period between the gray dashed lines in the left graph in Figure 2). Politically, the lost decades began around 1970 and ended around 1990, when the political situation changed drastically for domestic and international reasons.

Domestically, the dismal economic performance of many African countries during the lost decades led to civilian protests that toppled dictatorial regimes. Internationally, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990-91 meant the end of the Cold War and led to a liberal hegemony by the United States. It also meant that African countries were no longer the battleground of proxy wars between the United States and the former Soviet Union. Marxist African governments such as the People's Republic of the Congo, Mozambique, Angola, and Benin no longer received the support of the Soviet Union and became increasingly democratic in the 1990s. This so-called "wave of democratization" starting in 1990 meant that there were more and more democratic elections across Africa. In the 1985-1989 period, only nine out of 47 sub-Saharan African countries held contested elections. In all other countries, opposition parties either were irrelevant or illegal. However, the number and intensity of political protests rose dramatically around 1990, and by 1994 the number of countries holding at least somewhat contested elections rose to 38. Consequently, the share of opposition seats in African legislatures increased from only 10 percent in 1989 to 31 percent by 1994. Governments facing political protests allowed or were forced a swift expansion of the right of all adults, male and female, to vote. This right, known as universal suffrage, contributed to the increased political inclusion in that period. This is an important reason why we observe an upward spike in democratization in the right graph of Figure 2 for African countries in the 1990s.

From the 1990s onwards, African democracy scores surged and considerably converged to the global non-African average. More contested and inclusive elections since the 1990s have even led some to consider African countries "democratic overachievers" in the sense that they are more democratic than their level of economic development would predict. The democratic norm of universal suffrage—and hence of at least nominal political inclusion—is widely spread across Africa. According to political scientist Staffan Lindberg, repeated elections, *even when flawed*, make countries more democratic over time. This is because free elections enable democratic behavior and, with it, the consolidation of democratic values. On the one hand, then, increased political inclusion and contestation meant that Africa is much more democratic today than before 1990. On the other hand, important governance shortcomings explored hereunder hinder further democratization and development.

4. Political hindrances to development: the three C's of bad governance

There are many reasons why a country's economy may be underdeveloped, including low levels of human capital, of technological innovation, and of international trade. We focus instead on three *political explanations* that tend to erode the democratic institutions of a country: (i) corruption (vs. accountability and the rule of law), (ii) clientelism (vs. programmatic policy-making), and (iii) conflict (vs. political stability and peace). The terms in parentheses are their respective good governance counterparts. These three factors help explain why the political and economic gaps still exist in Africa in spite of the impressive "political catch-up" discussed above.

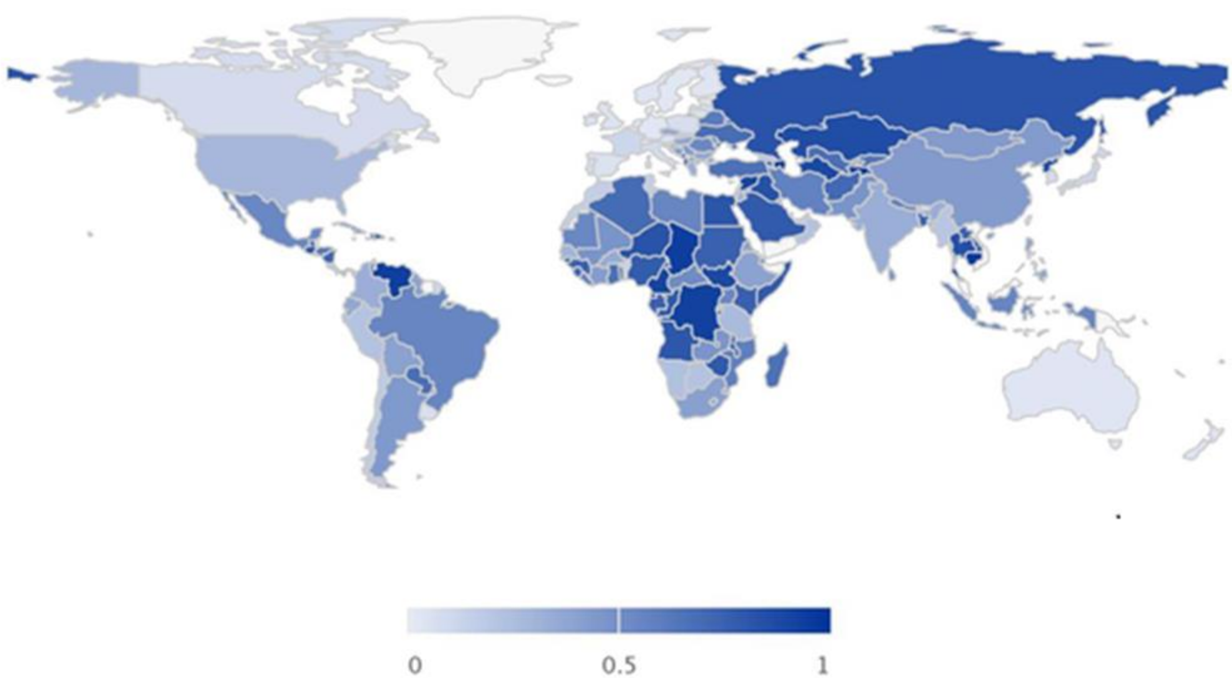
4.1 Corruption

Corruption tends to be harmful to society as few people benefit except for those engaged in practices such as bribery, theft, and embezzlement of public funds. In the public sector, corruption usually implies the illegal or deceitful pursuit of personal gain by a politician or a public sector employee (e.g. a civil servant, a judge), typically by leveraging his or her professional position. Privately benefiting from one's official position is costly for development because efforts that the politician could have otherwise allocated to improve social welfare are allocated instead to increase his/her own private gains. No country is totally free from corruption, but more democratic governments are less corrupt because the citizenry can more easily hold public officials accountable. Data from the Varieties of Democracy Project (V-Dem) shown in Figure 3 indicate the level of government corruption across countries in 2017. The most corrupt (darker shaded) are autocratic governments in countries of the former Soviet Union (Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan), the Middle East, and Africa. Levels of corruption vary widely within Africa, however. Governments are very corrupt in some cases (e.g. Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo) but not in others (e.g. Benin, Botswana).

Some public sector corruption is ostentatious and hence easy to detect. For example, Mobutu Sese Seko (1965-1997), the ruler of former Zaire, currently the DRC, became a stark example of "big man" politics, a term used to refer to corrupt and dictatorial leaders. The natural resource curse has favored the persistence of other corrupt elites such as President Teodoro Obiang (1979-present) in Equatorial Guinea, Omar Bongo in Gabon (1967-2009), and Denis Sassou Nguesso (1979-1992, 1997-present) in the Republic of the Congo and their families. All three countries have been top-50 oil producers in the world in recent years. All three families made headlines in 2013 for possessing multimillion-dollar properties in Paris.

Less ostentatious corruption, such as the syphoning of public funds into private pockets or the embezzlement of foreign aid by public officials, can be more insidious because it is harder to detect. Non-governmental organizations and donor organizations such as the World Bank have investigated this type of corruption, but its true extent is very difficult to ascertain. Unlike the violation of presidential term limits, most corrupt behavior is easier to conceal. Finally, "petty corruption" is also hard to observe but, in some ways, more pervasive. For instance, recent research has shown that policemen in Kinshasa systematically charge "informal tolls" to drivers in order to achieve the subsistence-level wage the state fails to provide. From heads of state motivated by greed to poor policemen motivated by subsistence, research shows that corruption leads to the erosion of interpersonal trust, social capital, and ultimately economic development.

Figure 3: Corruption index in the executive branch (2017)



Note: The data come from the V-Dem project and are available online. The corruption index ranges from 0 (no corruption) to 1 (extreme corruption). This graph shows levels of corruption in the government, but V-Dem data shows that government corruption is highly correlated with public sector corruption more generally in both African (ρ = 0.86) and non-African countries (ρ = 0.93).

4.2 Clientelism

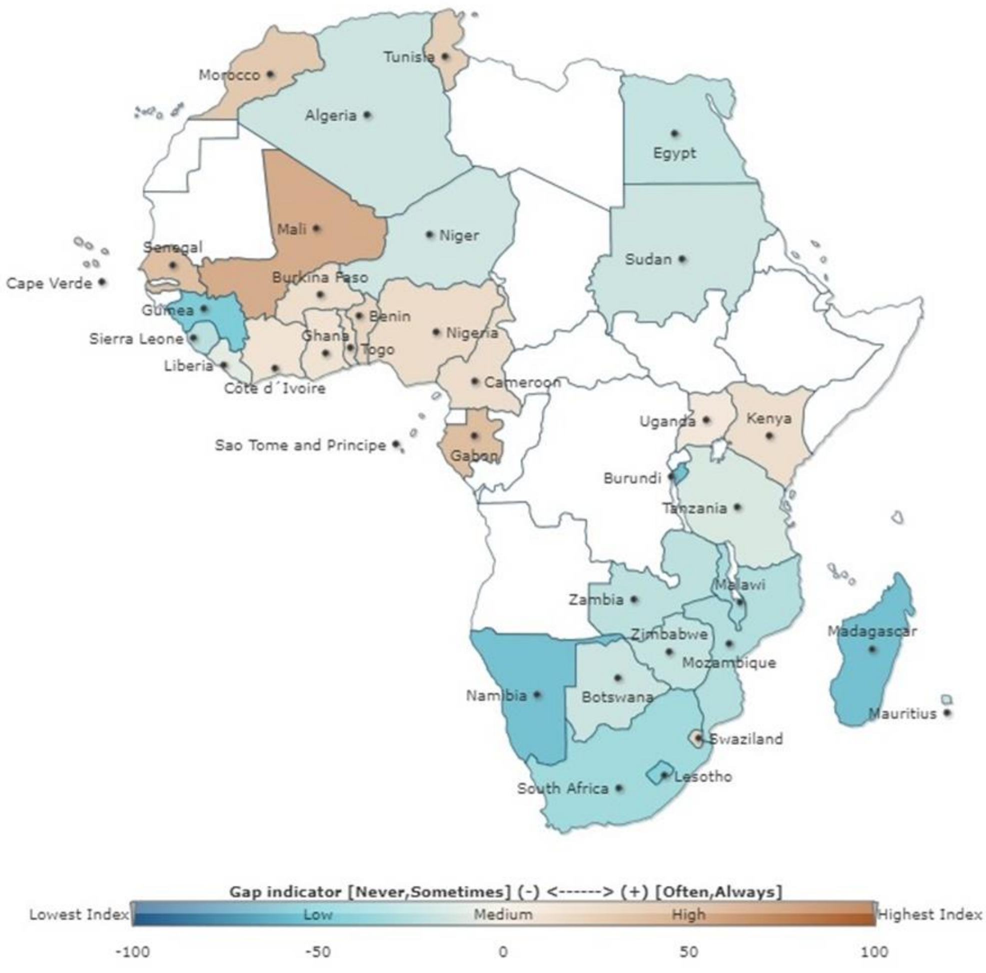
Governments in countries where clientelism is pervasive tend to underprovide public goods, such as infrastructure, that would contribute to the country's development. *Clientelism* can be defined as the iterated exchange of benefits between a politician (the patron) and a voter (the client). For example, a politician may offer cash or food only to those voters in the constituency who he or she believes will vote for him or her in the election. This practice is called vote-buying, which is an illegal and undemocratic practice. Clientelism relies on a mutual promise between the politician and the voter. When ballot secrecy holds, this mutual promise results from an iterated rather than a one-off exchange because, in a one-off exchange, the politician would have no reason to believe that the voter would reciprocate. Political parties can rarely monitor individual votes, so some reasonably argue that clientelist politicians have long engaged in "turnout-buying", whereby the politician distributes goods before the election to a targeted set of voters in the hope that voters will reciprocate with votes.

Programmatic policies are often contraposed to clientelism because the resources are disbursed according to clear rules that do not depend on partisan characteristics or on one's voting record. Consider a job training program designed to reduce unemployment. A programmatic policy would consider being unemployed as the only criterion for eligibility. A clientelist approach may favor participants or region that supported the politician or party, not because that participant or region would benefit the most from the program but because it would help the politician's or party's chances of reelection. This contraposition makes clear the economic inefficiencies of clientelism. Clientelism is different from, and potentially worse for, democracy and development than, *distributive politics*. Distributive politics concerns policies or benefits that target the politician's constituents or a particular group of citizens along for example region, ethnic, or religious lines. Democracies in Africa and elsewhere are not immune to distributive politics. An incumbent politician may allocate more resources to a constituency that voted more in favor of his or her reelection. For example, since the 1960s, co-ethnics of the minister of education in Kenya have been more schooled than children from other ethnic groups. This suggests that education ministers have favored their own ethnic group over others when allocating educational investments. Clientelism goes one step further by requiring a direct *exchange* between the politician and the voter of the sort "I will only provide more schools if you vote for me in the next election."

Among Afrobarometer survey respondents in 2014 and 2015, 43 percent believed that bribes in exchange for votes are common ("often or always happen") while 48 percent believed that they are uncommon ("never or sometimes happen"). Figure 4 maps the percentage of Afrobarometer respondents in each country who say clientelism is common minus those who say it is uncommon. Thus, the larger the (positive) percentage gap, the more prevalent is vote-buying as perceived by a country's population. The map shows that the perceived prevalence of clientelism varies widely. In Mali, most believed it is common (78 percent) and few believed it is rare (21 percent), hence the gap indicator equals +57 percent. In neighboring Guinea, few stated it is common (20 percent) and most stated it is rare (71 percent), hence the gap equals -51 percent.

Research shows that the appeal of clientelist offers is lower in richer countries and among richer voters in any given country. Richer countries tend to suffer less clientelism, but development efforts in recent decades have also sought to tackle the other direction of causality, i.e. to reduce clientelism in order to foster programmatic policies and development. For example, an accountable but politically independent civil service is important both to limit clientelism and to implement public policies effectively. These efforts are important because democratization alone does not guarantee the demise of clientelism. For instance, Figure 4 shows that it persists in Ghana, a mostly democratic country since 2004.

Figure 4: Prevalence of vote-buying across African countries (2014-2015)



Note: There was no data available for white-shaded countries. The data come from the round 6 of the Afrobarometer survey and are available online. The question reads: "In your opinion, how often are voters bribed in this country's elections?" The answer ranges from "never" (0) to always (4).

4.3 Conflict

Non-violent political conflict is commonplace in any polity because individuals and groups have diverse preferences and interests. Politicians devise institutions to allocate scarce resources that can only partially satisfy limitless wants. Therefore, democratic polities in Africa and elsewhere regularly engage in intense debates over policy and the allocation of resources. *Violent conflict*, however, replaces ballots with batons and guns. It refers to instances in which actors use force to influence political outcomes. Besides wars between countries, conflict can take various forms within countries, such as civil wars, armed rebellions, and coups d'état. Violent conflict is the most devastating for society and the economy of the three C's of bad governance because it destroys physical capital, human capital, social capital, and undermines a country's political institutions. A society cannot properly function—much less grow and become democratic—if political stability is lacking.

Over 30 out of 54 countries in Africa have experienced one or more episodes of violent conflict since 1960. Violent political conflict can range from the 1994 Rwanda genocide, where hundreds of thousands were killed, to bloodless and swift coups d'état in Mauritania in 1984 and 2005. In the 2005 coup, the leaders even organized democratic elections that took place two years later.

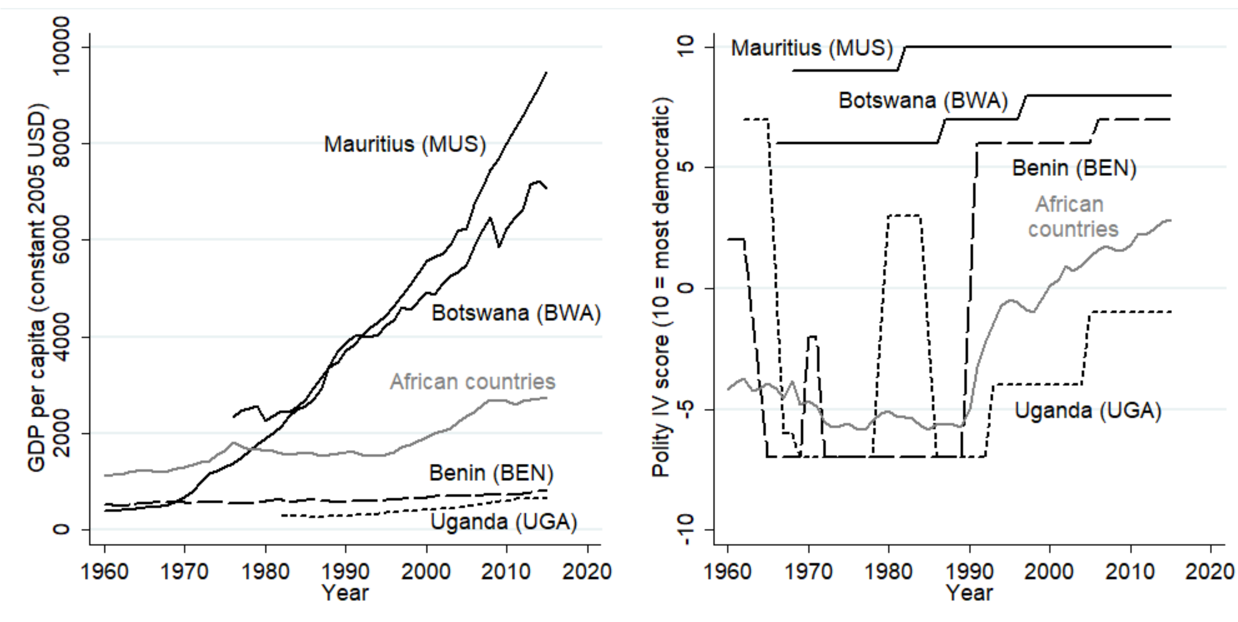
Nonetheless, a few countries, including Botswana, Mauritius, Senegal, and Tanzania, have not experienced any military coups or civil wars since independence. They have at most suffered from low levels of civil conflict, such as in the conflict between Senegal and Casamance in southern Senegal. Senegal and Tanzania were long ruled by authoritarian single-party governments, but those governments managed to keep the army in the barracks and to retain political stability and undemocratic but functioning political institutions.

5. Political and economic development since the 1960s in four African countries

The last section showed three ways in which bad governance hinders democracy and development across Africa. In this section, we zoom into the four African countries of Benin, Botswana, Mauritius and Uganda. Country case studies can help us to better understand how the three C's encountered in Section 4 and their good governance counterparts—accountability, programmatic policies, and political stability—have impacted political and economic development. Benin, Botswana, Mauritius, and Uganda all gained independence from colonial rule during the 1960s, but their political and economic trajectories since then have been very different. Botswana and Mauritius are widely held as economic and political success stories since independence. Benin underwent rapid democratization in the 1990s accompanied by only modest growth. Uganda also experienced only modest growth and remains largely undemocratic.

As in previous figures, Figure 5 shows GDP per capita on the left and the democracy score on the right, both over time. The gray lines show the levels of GDP per capita and democracy for the average African country in the left and right graphs, respectively. They are identical to the lines in Figure 2. In addition, Figure 5 now also includes the trajectories of four African countries that we will study in more depth now. We can see that the GDP per capita of Botswana and Mauritius was similar to the African country average (gray line) in the 1960s but by the 2000s have established themselves as upper-middle income countries (left graph), with incomes per capita above $6,000. The contrast with the very modest growth of Benin and Uganda is stark. Benin's GDP per capita was estimated at $520 in 1960 and $805 in 2015, while Uganda's was estimated at $303 in 1982 and $673 in 2015. The right graph shows that Mauritius, Botswana, Uganda, and to some extent Benin were mostly democratic at the time of independence during the 1960s. All initially organized multiparty elections with universal suffrage upon independence. However, Botswana and Mauritius further democratized while the political history of Benin and Uganda was akin to the roller-coaster that the right graph suggests.

Figure 5: Democratic trends in four African countries from independence to 2017



Note: The World Development Indicators (World Bank) do not include the GDP per capita for Uganda before 1982. The Polity IV scores begin with a country's independence (1968 in Mauritius and 1966 in Botswana).

Understanding these diverging patterns is complex and the result of *proximate* or short-term factors as well as deeper *historical* or long-term factors. For instance, Uganda's political instability in the late 1960s is a proximate cause for the military coup of Idi Amin in 1971 and his subsequent dictatorial regime (1971-1979). The deeper causes for Idi Amin's coup, partly lie in the colonial period. The British colonial government recruited soldiers heavily from Northern Uganda, where

Amin came from, creating a regionally and ethnically imbalanced army with many Northerners but few Baganda, the largest ethnic group.

As many other African countries, Benin and Uganda faced two challenges at independence that undermined their political institutions and stability: (i) regional inequality and (ii) low state capacity. Regional and ethnic inequality was pervasive in both colonies. While military recruits came mostly from Northern Uganda, most economic activity including cash crop cultivation (cotton and coffee) was centered mainly around Lake Victoria in Buganda, the Central Region, which was the political and economic center. Similarly, in Benin, the South remained the center of trade and of cash crop cultivation (palm oil) after the slave trade came to an end. The North was historically more isolated from coastal trade and remained poorer and less populated during colonialism and until the present-day. In both countries, regional economic inequality heightened political conflict over the distribution of resources after independence.

A second important historical factor is low state capacity. *State capacity* is defined as the government's ability to accomplish its intended policy goals, such as tax collection, public goods provision, and enforcement of law and order. Some refer to low capacity states as “weak states” and to high capacity states as “strong states.” Benin and Uganda but also Botswana and other colonial states in Africa were “thin on the ground”, meaning that formal state institutions did not extend much beyond the capital because European colonizers tried to keep costs at bay. How could post-colonial political elites promote economic development while using state resources to satisfy clientelistic demands at the same time? That is no easy feat for any state, let alone weak a state with a colonial legacy of extraction and ethnic division. Beninese and Ugandans inherited weak colonial states that were expected to suddenly serve all their people as citizens as opposed to colonial subjects. Severe resource constraints led the first presidents, Hubert Maga in Benin and Milton Obote in Uganda, to favor core supporters—usually co-ethnics—at the expense of the rest of the population. To make sense of these patterns, political scientist Nicolas van de Walle has defined *neopatrimonial states* as states that “combine an external facade of modern rational-legal administration with an internal patrimonial logic of dyadic exchange [clientelism], prebendalism, and the private appropriation of public resources by state elites.”

Low state capacity, combined with regional inequality inherited from colonial rule, fostered regional and ethnic tensions in Benin and Uganda that culminated in a series of coups that began soon after independence, in the late 1960s, and continued through the 1980s. In the case of Uganda, the 1980-1986 Civil War brought the rebels led by current President Museveni to power in 1986. Rebel movements may be more prevalent in Africa than elsewhere because it is easy to rebel against weak states. In brief, these two historical and structural factors help explain why good governance and development have proven difficult in Benin, Uganda, and other African countries. Nevertheless, Benin and Uganda entered periods of relative democratization and political stability since the early 1990s, following the broader trend in Africa that we discussed. In the case of Benin, pro-democracy protests forced out President Kérékou and his single-party regime in 1990 following two decades rife with corruption, clientelism, and economic stagnation. Benin held contested multi-party elections in 1991 that led to the victory of the opposition candidate. Clientelism and corruption still exist but are less prevalent than before 1990. Since then, Benin has held contested and inclusive elections, which is reflected in Figure 5 with democratic score well above the African average. Unlike Benin, in 1990 Uganda had just come out of a civil war. For most, returning to a normal life was more pressing than organizing mass pro-democracy protests. President Museveni governed since 1986 as a military leader and since 2005 as the leader of a multi-party system. While Ugandans enjoy universal suffrage and hence some political inclusion, political contestation is limited. The opposition faces an uneven playing field because the government uses public resources for corrupt and clientelistic purposes. This confers President Museveni an important incumbency advantage.

Botswana and Mauritius remained democratic and their economies developed quickly after independence. Both are usually described as African success stories even though the two countries are very different from each other in many respects, including geography, natural resources, demographics, and culture. Mauritius is an island in the Indian Ocean and is among the 50 smallest countries in the world, while Botswana is a landlocked country in Southern Africa 285 times larger in size than Mauritius. Botswana's economic growth, visible in Figure 5, has been fueled by diamonds since the late 1960s. In contrast, Mauritius has no exploitable natural resources. Moreover, the population density of Mauritius is the highest in Africa (620 inhabitants per km^2) while Botswana's is one of the lowest (4 inhabitants per km^2). Ethnic diversity is low in both cases when compared to the average African country. In Mauritius, over 60 percent of the population is of Indian descent, although Indo-Mauritians are a diverse group; a large minority are of African descent; and others are Creoles that combine African, Arab, Indian, and European ancestry. Botswana is rather homogeneous because about 80 percent of the population are Tswana.

Was regional economic and ethnic inequality particularly low, or state capacity particularly high, already during colonial rule? Neither country enjoyed high state capacity and the history of Mauritius is one of inequality. Mauritius was first colonized by the French and then the British. The economy revolved around sugar plantations owned by European planters. As in many Caribbean islands that grew sugar, Africans were imported as slaves. When slavery was abolished in the 1830s, planters brought South Asians as indentured servants. Mauritius gradually developed politically in the 1900s before independence (political rights for people of mixed race, extension of the suffrage), but the colony remained poor and wealth concentrated in the European minority for a long time. The colonial legacy of Botswana was not benign either, but the British footprint was relatively small. The British took control of Botswana only for geopolitical reasons, namely to connect their Southern and Eastern African colonies and to contain the German expansion in south-western Africa. Some have argued that British disregard of Botswana was perhaps a blessing. Because colonial public investments were dismally low (Botswana had almost no paved roads and only two high schools in the 1960s), and perhaps the population had been mostly Tswana for some time, Botswana did not experience the same regional and ethnic inequality of Benin, Uganda, and even Mauritius. Botswana was more uniformly poor than any of the other three. In sum, Benin and Uganda's colonial legacy might have been more harmful, but the history of Botswana and Mauritius was not particularly auspicious either.

For all their differences, Botswana and Mauritius are more ethnically homogeneous than most African countries and both undertook multiple programmatic economic policies. Both factors have likely contributed to their post-independence success. Many have argued that economic and status inequalities between ethnic groups increase conflict and lower public goods provision in Africa and elsewhere. Hence, Botswana in particular may have benefitted from being rather homogenous. Of course, this explanation is far from deterministic: some ethnically homogeneous countries such as Lesotho or Burundi remain underdeveloped, while some ethnically diverse countries such as Ghana and South Africa are quite developed.

Good governance is a central reason for the high levels of democracy and development in Botswana and Mauritius. The political elites designed and implemented programmatic policies—as opposed to clientelism—that strategically favored long-term development. Both countries have also enjoyed political stability (no coups or large-scale violence), and low levels of corruption. The first two presidents of Botswana, Seretse Khama (1966-1980) and Quett Masire (1980-1998), exercised farsighted leadership by investing early revenues from diamonds—discovered in 1967, a year after independence—in education and health. Since 1994, the government has also invested these revenues in a sovereign wealth fund. In other words, the government turned the usual resource curse into a blessing. The pre-colonial political organization of the Tswana, which included deliberative norms and a popular assembly, may have facilitated Khama's and Masire's programmatic policies. The government was active in managing the economy while largely respecting property rights and the rule of law more generally. Because human capital was low at independence, some civil servants were foreigners who were progressively phased out as more Botswanans completed higher education.

Botswana's governance success was achieved despite limited political contestation: the Botswana Democratic Party has won all elections in the country since independence in 1966. The lack of an opposition victory in Botswana to date suggests an only moderately competitive political system. Accumulation of power in the hands of recent presidents, notably Ian Khama (2008-2018), is also a cause for concern. Botswana suffers from high reliance on diamond revenues and its economy has not diversified, leading to limited economic opportunity outside the public sector and to high unemployment (15-20% in 2008-2018). While growth since independence has been spectacular, these are important concerns that are likely related to Botswana's economic slowdown since 2014. Finally, Mauritius presents a fascinating and complex case. Lacking natural resources, in recent decades the government has tried hard and managed to diversify the economy. Sugar and agriculture remain important exports, but fishing and textile industries gained some ground after independence. More recently, the government has fostered tourism and the information and technology sector. The government has also combined low taxes and secure property rights to attract foreign direct investment and even offshore banking. To tamper inequality, the government developed a welfare state. The Mauritius Labor Party pushed for an incipient welfare state in the latter years of colonial rule. After independence, at a time when international financial institutions were pushing for privatization, the government expanded the welfare state to include a National Pensions Fund, universal healthcare, and free education through university.

Political conflict in Mauritius has at times been heated but never turned violent, leading to sustained levels of high political contestation. Multiple political parties and ideologies have governed Mauritius since independence in 1968. Recurrent coalition governments have been able to manage the country's religious and ethnic diversity in spite of a political crisis in the 1980s. Compared to Botswana, Mauritius enjoys higher economic dynamism and diversification, lower unemployment, higher political accountability (i.e. lower corruption), and higher political contestation. In short, it is more democratic and developed. For all these reasons, many have argued in recent years that Mauritius is a more inspiring success story than Botswana.

6. Conclusion

African countries range from mostly developed and democratic, such as Botswana and Mauritius, to comparatively underdeveloped and non-democratic, such as Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. History teaches us that democratization and development tend to go together. However, in recent decades some African countries, typically resource-rich countries such as Equatorial Guinea and Gabon, have become richer but remained autocratic. Wealth is very unequally distributed in these countries because of the large economic rents generated by the corrupt management of natural resource revenues and because political elites engage in short-term rent seeking rather than long-term programmatic policy-making, as Botswana and Mauritius did.

More surprisingly, a democratic gap between African and non-African countries still exists but it has been closing since 1990 even though the economic gap has widened. Dismal economic performance in the 1980s and the end of the Cold War led to protests that toppled authoritarian governments in the 1990s and some countries, like Benin, democratized. Of course, there remain challenges ahead. The most obvious one is that countries like Benin democratized but did not experience high growth rates despite institutional changes. The impressive "political catch-up" of African countries has so far not translated into an "economic catch-up." To figure out why is and should remain a central concern of scholars and policy-makers alike.

Study questions

1. Are more developed countries more democratic? If so, explain. If not, discuss under what conditions democracy and development may not go hand in hand.

2. What is the "resource curse"? Is it always a curse, or can natural resources foster development and democratization under some conditions? Contrast the case of Botswana to another African resource-rich country.

3. Name and describe the three C's of bad governance? What are their good governance counterparts?

4. How is clientelism different from distributive politics and from programmatic policies?

5. Select an African country you are particularly interested in or care about. Given what you have learned from the cases of Botswana and Mauritius, what might that country do to democratize and develop further?

Suggested readings

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Databases used

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