

Democracy in africa: botswana, morocco and ghana



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INTRODUCTION

Democracy is a term conversant to most people, but it is misunderstood and misused at a time when authoritarians and coup leaders assert popular support by claiming the mantle of democracy especially in Africa. Democracy has prevailed through a long and turbulent history, and democratic governments in Europe and America, notwithstanding continuing challenges, continues to progress and flourish throughout the world.

Democracy derives from a Greek word demos, or people, it is defined as government in which the supreme power is vested in the people. A democracy is a system of government in which leaders are elected in competitive elections, where many parties and candidates take part and where opposition parties can attain power if they gain widespread support (deth & Van Deth, 2005). Democracy has different forms, in some cases it can be exercised directly by the people, in large societies or by the people through their elected representatives. According to the memorable phrase of Abraham Lincoln, “ democracy is government of the people, by the people, and for the people.”

Categories of democracy

Democracy has two categories, direct and representative.

- Direct democracy

Citizens partake in making public decisions without the intermediary of elected representatives. This system is practical with rather a small number of people - in a community, tribe council, for example in the UK, New England Town Meeting residents of the town attend debates and vote directly on town policies. Some U. S. states, practice direct democracy by placing propositions and referenda to change laws. In Switzerland, vital political decisions on matters, including health, employment, are put to vote by the citizens.

- Indirect/ representative democracy

Indirect democracy is a system of government in which the public controls the government through elected representatives. The voted agents represent the people as opposed to the direct democracy whereby citizens make public policy decisions directly through polls or initiatives. An example of this type of democracy is in Kenya. The public votes in people to represent them in government institutions. The elected officials make laws, political enactments and administer public programs.

Characteristics of democracy

Democracies are different in every part of the world; people's democratic ideals are influenced by their culture and society. It is more than a set of precise government institutions (Gupta, 2013). Most democracies rest upon

a well unstated set of values, attitudes, and practices which may have diverse forms and expressions among cultures and societies around the world. However, the fundamental characteristics and principles of a democracy remain consistent (Cincotta, 2004).

A true form of democracy should include:

- Elected representative; Free and fair elections

All democracies should hold regular elections and allow adults or people of a certain age to take part in voting. The elections should be free and fair so as to encourage political competition for the good of the public. A democracy must have officials elected by the people to make laws and frame policies of the government.

- Civil liberties/ Fundamental human rights

A vital characteristic of democracy is that it gives or ensures its citizens have top civil rights or fundamental rights. Democracies allow their citizens freedom of speech and press, freedom of religion and conscience, freedom of assembly and association, right to equal protection by the law, right to due process of law and fair trial, and property rights to land goods and money.

- Rule of law

Rule of law is another characteristic of democracy. Democratic governments should ensure that there is rule of law whereby no individual is above the law and there is due process of law. This ensures emphasizes that the Law is supreme and citizens are all equal in the eyes of law.

- Separation of powers

A democracy should ensure that all institutions of the government have equal power. This ensures accountability by encouraging checks and balances between the government institutions. Democracies with separated powers ensure provisions for effective checks and balances between the executive, judiciary and the parliament are made. This makes sure that all levels of government must be as accessible and responsive to the people as possible.

Democracy in Africa

Democracy started sweeping across Africa in the early 1990s after the end of cold war. A wave of democratization was propagated all over Africa by the West. Claude Ake argues that the reforms in Eastern Europe contributed to the west advocating for democracy in Africa. Ake claims that Eastern Europe provided the West with a dramatic vindication of its own values and a sense of the historical inevitability of the triumph of democracy (Ake, 1991), a mission widely believed, would consolidate the domination of Western ideals all over the world.

Authoritarians and single party states were forced by western powers to democratize their states. Undemocratic states were expected to launch democratic reforms so that they could get international support and donors themselves started to provide democracy assistance.

Activists during the time of democratization of Africa wished for more political freedoms and strong institutions hoping that democracy would lead to more government accountability - and more effective development.

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Africans themselves have also struggled for democracy, an example of this is the Saba Saba movement whereby Kenyan political activities fighting for multiparty democracy had a violent confrontation with authorities. Ake gives examples of the popular rejection of military rule in Nigeria and also the struggle for multiparty in Cameroon (Ake, 1991).

Thomas C. Mountain argues that Western style “ democracy” is destroying Africa. Thomas insists Africans should have been allowed to practice their traditional form of democracy which was more of most arriving at a consensus where everyone got something after persuasion by council of elders (Mountain, 2012).

Democracy in Africa continues to face many challenges such as poverty, coup d'états, corruption and many other problems. However there are countries that have overcome these problems and challenges. Some of these states have enjoyed long periods of political stability but their level of democracy can be argued according to ones definition of democracy. A case study of three African states would be used to analyse democracy in Africa.

Botswana

In November 2008, Festus Gontebanye Mogae, the former president of Botswana received an award from (Sarkin & Cook, 2008) Ibrahim Prize for Achievement in African Leadership. The reason why Botswana's president won was because [Botswana's] democracy was strong, stable and rooted in the rule of law. Botswana was widely regarded as one of the more effective countries in the world in combating corruption. President Mogae's outstanding leadership has ensured Botswana's continued stability and

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prosperity in the face of an HIV/AIDS pandemic which threatened the future of his country and people. The Prize Committee believed that good governance requires an environment conducive to peace, security and development, based on the rule of law and respect for human rights.

Botswana has had to address the challenge of advancing each in a balanced way. This has been helped by the independence and integrity of its institutions which bodes well for further progress towards spreading wealth and opportunity across all sectors of Botswana society. Botswana's democracy has been characterized by:

- Uninterrupted Free Elections

Botswana is one of a few African countries that have enjoyed free and uninterrupted elections in Africa since it gained independence from Britain. Having held free elections since it gained independence, Botswana portrays an ideal democracy in Africa. Civilian rule has been uninterrupted by the military or any autocratic governments.

- Accountability and Transparency

Botswana has had a reputation for accountability and transparency. Accountability and transparency have been formalized through mechanisms such as the constitution and legislation requiring open government, accountability, and transparency. Presidents of Botswana have insisted on governments accountability mechanism and limiting corruption

- Anticorruption Powers

Botswana's government enacted a bill in 1994 that set up an anticorruption body. The anti-corruption body was vested with the powers to conduct

investigations and make arrests. (Sarkin & Cook, 2008) In Botswana, there are laws that establish civilian supervision over the police and a process, through a supervisory body, for civilians to lodge complaints against police abuses and other human rights violations.

- Fundamental human rights

The constitution of Botswana guarantees the freedoms of speech and the press, association, religion and right to equal protection by the law. The right of the citizens is protected by the constitution which is the supreme law of Botswana.

There are many reasons for Botswana's democratic success. Some reasons are due to Botswana's unique history and context, a few are coincidental, but several are as a result of efforts put in by the country's leaders (Sarkin & Cook, 2008). (Hazan, 2006) Scholars have debated these achievements, resulting in many assessments applauding Botswana and a handful that note Botswana's success story is not without significant flaws. Some of these flaws include oppression of the minority San tribe, expulsion of foreign reports and scholars, and limitations on access to information.

Morocco

- Authoritarian Monarchy

The kingdom of Morocco is an example of an authoritarian state. After its independence, Mohammed V assumed the title of king after imposing a constitutional monarchy and establishing a one-party state. Morocco has been characterized by oppression of opposition, forced disappearance, extrajudicial killings, and imprisonment of political opponents. (Hazan, 2006)
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- Reforming Monarchs

Remarkably for an authoritarian leader, King Hassan II's last, initiated a reform and reconciliation process, in which he freed political prisoners, enacted constitutional amendments in 1996, which established a bicameral parliament with extended powers, and launched an independent commission of inquiry to start investigative human rights abuses.

Hassan invited exiled political opposition to return and after the 1997 legislative elections, which despite irregularities brought many previously banned parties and opposition members to the Chamber of Representatives. Unusually for an authoritarian leader, Hassan 2 initiated a reform and reconciliation process.

When Mohammed VI, the son of Hassan 2 assumed the throne in 1999, he continued with his father's political reforms. The King gave out two amnesties, resulting in the release of thousands of political prisoners. By the election in 2002, the elections were deemed free and fair by international observers. In 2004, a new law was passed and it placed restrictions on polygamy, divorce and improved women's right.

- Reconciliation and Justice

Mohammed VI's established the Equity and Reconciliation Commission (IER) in 2004 with a mandate to examine human rights abuses that occurred from 1956 to 1999. Driss Benzekri, a former political prisoner was appointed as its head. The nature of the commission assessment of compensation brought about changes in government's support for international human rights agreements previously unsupported. (Hazan, 2006)

Although Hassan II and Mohammed VI introduced reforms, they were outwardly impressive. They made sure that no real changes to the constitutional monarchy were made to date. .

- Freedom of Expression

Morocco is extensively condemned for its lack of freedom of expression. The government exercises control over the media and punishes a few independent newspapers that exist. Most broadcast media in Morocco are entirely or partially owned by the state. Self-censorship is common due to punishment for coverage that is deemed inappropriate by the government. Newspapers such as Le Journal have been shut down or penalized, and editors arrested. Le Journal came under government condemnation for its political coverage, and also coverage of corruption of government officials.

The Moroccan government has failed to respect human rights since independence, and its constitutional monarchy does not tolerate any serious checks and balances on the king's powers or actions. No democracy movement has been able to press for the resignation of the king or to fight for reforms. (Hazan, 2006)

The recent resolutions have failed to create a genuine accountability or justice for the victims or their families. Due process and rights expression and association remain curtailed.

Ghana

Ghana is rated highly on most of basic measures of democracies. This includes protection of fundamental civil liberties and human rights. Ghana

has been successful in holding free and fair elections over the past two decades, and reducing poverty. Ghanaian democracy has not been as much successful in participation of most political actors in the country's governance processes and institutions beyond elections. (Anebo, 2001)

Actual participation drafting and implementation of public policy has been restricted to a number of political elite who have succeeded in capturing the presidency although through fairly competitive elections.

The president has more powers than the other branches of government. He enjoys vast political and economic resources that he can use to get political support.

Elections are the only real check and balance on the executive. Although major political parties, the New Patriotic Party (NPP), and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) have accepted the legitimacy of the guidelines that govern politics in Ghana, these guidelines have serious flaws. (Bratton, Michael, Lewis, & Boadi., 2001)The elite accord among partisan parties is an agreement to uphold the status quo, regardless of its negative impact on good governance and democratic practice.

Ghanaians expect economic and social benefits (Anebo, 2001) of democracy than the government appears to produce through existing institutional arrangements.

The 1992 Constitution of Ghana guarantees the Human Rights of all individuals found within the territorial boundaries of the Republic of Ghana. Chapter 5 of 1992 Constitution, Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms

ensures rights such as right to life, economic rights and women's right are adhered to. The entire chapter 5 can only be amended by the people of Ghana through voting at a referendum. Ghanaians enjoy freedom of press and information thus making it one of the countries in Africa that does not oppress the media. (Arthur, 2010)

Conclusion

Africa has a long way to go to attain full democratic status with them being welfare states. There a lot of limitations those hinder the full initiation of democracy in many African countries. Ethnicity, poor leadership, poverty, corruption have been significant in preventing democratization in Africa. I strongly agree with Akes arguments that the trail of democracy would not feed or shelter the needy. (Ake, 1991) If Africa is to achieve democracy, people must first be enlightened and kick out the anti-democracy forces. Some African countries are still under authoritative and corrupt rulers. These leaders pretend to be practicing democracy; they hold elections full of deceit and thus cling on to power.

Democracy must be considered African context most pressing needs and people must first be educated to accept and appreciate democracy as Ake argues. (Ake, 1991)

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