



African elections: plus ça change

A record seventeen African countries are gearing up for elections from local, legislative to presidential this year after a couple of decades of multi-party democracy on the continent. Is it time to re-look at democratic practice in Africa and the ‘democratic dividends’?
asks ***Cornelius Adedze.**



Prez Ramaphosa (South Africa), Prez Mutharika (Malawi), Prez Geingob (Namibia) : some leaders facing elections this year

Elections, largely, regarded earlier as signposts of deepening democracy and development in Africa are beginning to be questioned over their integrity especially with respect to the processes leading to them and the conduct of the elections themselves. The re-emergence of political instability in some countries, a thing more associated with dictatorships, is a worrying situation.

The overall governance picture across Africa over the last ten years has seen some improvement though, according to the 2018 Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG). “3 out of 4 African citizens”, the report says “live in a country where public governance has improved over the past 10 years”. This according

to the report is indexed to, “performance of the provision of political, social and economic public goods and services that every citizen has the right to expect from the state”. These achievements especially, the increase in the number of “free and fair executive elections does not necessarily translate into a better participatory environment”.

The list of elections (some presidential and legislative, others just legislative) this year is quite a long one, from Algeria, through Botswana, Cameroun, Chad, Comoros Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Tunisia. Nigeria and Senegal have just had theirs not without contro-

versies though. Nigeria’s election apart from being marred by violence resulting in the deaths of a reported 600 people is alleged to be fraught with irregularities. The main opposition candidate, former Vice-President Atiku has rejected the results and is headed for the Constitutional Court for redress.

Last December, the DRC held presidential elections, which had been on hold for a couple of years, and was marred by violence both during the chaotic pre-election campaign and the election itself. Cameroun a month earlier was embroiled in violence that characterised the re-election bid of Paul Biya, who at 85, and in power for 36 years was seeking a seventh term. In the end, he



Kabila (left) puts the presidential sash on Tshisekedi

got re-elected with official results putting him at winning 71.2 percent of the votes cast. The running battle with Anglophone Cameroun separatists and the accompanying violence which has characterized political activity over the years persist and are likely to increase the instability and insecurity in the country. Legislative elections which involve a lot more candidates and individual campaign crisscrossing constituencies are likely to be more violence-prone and no wonder no date has been fixed for it yet.

Meanwhile in Algeria after weeks of demonstrations across the country 82-year old incumbent Abdelaziz Bouteflika, finally agreed not to go for a fifth term in elections initially fixed for April. That has however, not stopped the demonstrations as there are now calls for a transitional government to oversee new elections and not the incumbent government.

Togo has also been embroiled in turmoil since the death of former strongman Gnassingbe Eyadema in 2005 and his succession by his son, Faure Gnassingbe who has gone on to win “disputed” elections since then. In December, the mainstream opposition parties boycotted legislative elections in reaction

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to alleged various irregularities prior to the elections, which mediators from the Economic Committee of West African States (ECOWAS), according to them, failed to address. These included opposition complaints of refusal to implement constitutional amendments, alleged killing, harassment, and imprisonment of its members on trumped up charges and arbitrary judicial processes which have not ceased since the days of late President Gnassingbe Eyadema. President Faure

Gnassingbe’s ruling party, UNIR, won 59 of the 91 seats at stake with a number of its close allies winning most of the rest 31 in the December elections assuring it of absolute majority in parliament.

Meanwhile, Ghana, a poster boy for ‘free and fair elections’, just witnessed a by-election in which masked, heavily armed, ‘official’ security details were for the first time involved in elections even to the extent of shooting at people and beating up an opposition Member of Parliament whilst other known security details looked on. A local election observer group, CODEO (Coalition of Domestic Election Observers) described the elections as being undermined by the unusual numbers of heavily armed security operatives at polling stations which could have resulted in intimidation leading to the unheard of (in Ghana) very low turnout of 19 percent. The Electoral Commission however, declared the elections as free and fair and disagreed with CODEO’s observations. A presidential commission set up to look into the issues has revealed many contradictions in the accounts by various security capos. The looming spectre of the escalation of vigilante groups organized by the two main political parties, the governing New Patriotic



Senegale's Macky Sall

Party, NPP, and the opposition, National Democratic Congress, NDC can not be ruled out.

Elections have not yet snuffed out violence in politics across Africa and have indeed, in some cases, fueled it. Kenya suffered two such unfortunate situations in 2007 and 2015. Guinea-Bissau has been in political turmoil for years now despite elections and abortive/postponed ones. Egypt has not been left off the hook as Hosni Mubarak's departure has not changed much the democratic credentials of the country.

Senegal, generally seen as an oasis of peace and democracy in a largely, hitherto 'undemocratic' Francophone Africa, has had a shock as clashes in Tambacounda, between the opposition and government supporters a couple of weeks prior to the February 24 elections resulted in one death. The stakes may be getting higher in Senegal this time round. Hours after incumbent Macky Sall was declared winner with 58.27 percent, one of the opposition leaders, Idrissa Seck, speaking on behalf of the opposition at a joint press conference rejected the result saying it was "a confiscation of the popular will of the people" and that the opposition, "will not validate calculated elections and prefabricated results", and will not have any recourse to the Constitutional Court but warned the country to be ready for the consequences of their 'stolen victory'. Offshore natural gas deposits in an

area close to the Senegal/Mauritania border, Grand Tortue Ahmeyim, reportedly, with 35 years production lifespan beginning 2021 has been sighted by some as the prize at stake in the elections.

The presence of election observers and monitors in the electoral process in Africa, have raised eyebrows in some quarters. Conflicting reports on elections by observers is at the centre of this. In the 2002 Zimbabwean presidential elections, which then incumbent President Mugabe won by 54 percent, the African Union mission passed it to be free and fair. The Commonwealth Observer Mission said, "the election was marred by a high level of politically motivated violence". In the DRC's last December elections, the African Union, SADC and other observers pointed to noticeable irregularities but in the end, both gave in and the declared winner, Felix Tshisekedi, was sworn in as new president. The AU had earlier expressed "serious doubts" about the results and called for the suspension of the declaration of results. Observers from France, Germany and the US as well as the local Catholic Church disputed the results. The DRC's electoral debacle from delayed elections to the declaration of Tshisekedi as winner despite the reservations expressed by some observers are likely to raise the political temperature of the country.

Meanwhile, the fears expressed by some analysts about a collusion between

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outgoing President Kabila and Tshisekedi, resulting in the latter being declared winner of the elections appear to have been confirmed by the announcement of a coalition government by the two parties. A joint statement by Tshisekedi's party, CACH and Kabila's, FCC has declared "their common will to govern together as part of a coalition government." Others however, dispute any 'arrangements' between the two parties arguing it is purely a marriage of convenience as Kabila's FCC party hold the majority in the Legislature.

Invariably, elections and democracy in Africa have come to be seen by some as a gimmick by the elite, an intra-elite power play for state capture, with the support and influence of foreign powers who have an interest in who takes charge and is pliable to them. In the recent Madagascar presidential elections as many as four former presidents, Didier Ratsiraka, Marc Ravalomanana, Andriy Rajoelina and the outgoing Hery Rajaonarimampianina stood for election. In Kenya, the battle has over the years been between in and out ministers, vice-presidents in all kinds of coalitions. The last-two elections were between President Kenyatta and Raila Odinga, whose 'rivalries' are perceived as a continuation of their parents', Jomo Kenyatta, (Kenya's first post-independence leader) and Oginga Odinga, his one-time partner and later fierce opponent. However, the current differences between President Uhuru Kenyatta and

Vice-President Ruto and the rapprochement between him and Raila Odinga have been interpreted as a preparation to hand over power to him in the next elections leaving Ruto in the cold.

The Comoros, go to the polls to elect a new president on March 24th. Incumbent Azali Assoumani is seeking re-election. Cries of foul play by his 11 other contestants already cloud the event. The Electoral Commission, some argue is not able to guarantee fair play as it does not have civil society or opposition membership. In Benin, legislative elections scheduled for April 28, are facing challenges as some opposition parties head to the courts to reverse their disqualification. 7 parties, 5 of which are in alliance with the ruling party have been cleared so far to contest. Former President Yayi Boni's party has been disqualified and is among those disputing the disqualification.

South Africa also heads to the polls in May under challenging times for the incumbent ANC party, as corruption, unemployment, and worsening socio-economic conditions and inequality are issues that are likely to determine the outcome of the elections. The ANC is particularly accused of not having delivered on the post-Apartheid promise of delivering the majority black population from poverty but are instead pandering to the interests of the few black elite who have partnered with the minority whites to continue the status quo. A report published last year in *Africa Focus* says inequality has increased drastically in South Africa with poverty levels alarming. Possibly alarmed by trends suggesting more losses by the ANC, former President Zuma has called on the parties "not to punish the ANC because you don't like me".

Mali is also preparing for legislative elections in April. The elections were postponed from November/December 2018. The country has been engulfed in insecurity mostly in the North as jihadist groups commit attack after attack in spite of the presence of international peace-keepers. The influx of arms from Libya into the hands of the jihadists has strengthened their hands. Mali in recent years has been touted as a likely mem-

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ber of "Africa's petroleum club" due to as some 700,000 sq kms in the Taodeni Basin, an area known as "the El Dorado of petroleum reserves" which has been carved up into 29 blocks and given as 'shared concessions' to 15 foreign petroleum companies from, Australia, Canada, the US, Ireland, United Arab Emirates (UAE), France, Spain, Italy and Qatar. Control of natural resources may also play a key role in Mali's electoral debacle.

Malawi which goes to the polls in May has seen heightened tension as candidates criss-cross the country for votes. Former President Joyce Banda, and incumbent Peter Mutharika are seen as the frontrunners in a race seen as not just a re-run of the 2014 elections which Banda as incumbent lost to Mutharika but also a choice between two leaders who were formerly members of the same party, the Democratic Peoples' Party, DPP. Banda formed the People's Party after she split from the DPP in 2011. Corruption accusation against both candidates is likely to play a major role in who wins as both candidates have been accused of corruption whilst in office with Banda going into exile soon after losing the 2014 elections because of what is referred to as the 'Cashgate' scandal.

Elections in some countries like Cameroun, Egypt, Togo, Chad and Algeria over the years have seen the strangle hold on to power by individuals, families or political parties resulting in regime perpetuation. Corruption, foreign power influence, unfair electoral practices that

undermine free and fair elections have come to be associated with the democratic dispensation churned out on a regular basis. Another question on the lips of many is whether these electoral activities that are supposedly, 'entrenching' democracy are giving 'dividends' to the citizens. Are they contributing to improved socio-economic development? Are they leading to set out objectives like national and regional integration and security? Or they are just mere machinations that allow for 'state capture' by powerful elites, demagogues and dictators to hold on to power and enjoy the spoils thereof?

Inequality continues to deepen as the gulf widens between the few elite, political class and their economic allies to the detriment of the majority population that remains worse off. According to World Data Lab estimates, 70 percent of the world's poor can be found in Africa, majority of them in Nigeria and the DRC, which have just held elections. Same report says by 2030, 13 African countries will have an increase in the number of those living in extreme poverty. Unemployment is another major challenge and with the large numbers of unemployed youth forming a readily available pool to be used for all manner of political violence, the countries have become very fragile, likely to go up in flames with the lightest spark.

Africa's democracy has not stopped the bleeding of the countries resources by foreign interests. Apart from legal but bad agreements signed with multinationals, illicit financial flows aided by "democratic laws" make Africa lose some \$35 billion annually as well as \$46 billion as profits that multinational companies 'spirit' away from the continent. Could this be possible under a democratic dispensation that allows for transparency, freedom of expression, freedom of association, anti-corruption laws, rule of law, an independent judiciary and legislature among others? As pointed out elsewhere, Africa needs to replace "the façade of freedom with real liberty and economic development" to achieve a better lease of life for its teeming populations.

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Africa's Democracy Log

Based on Democracy Index, 9 African countries are considered democratic :

- **Full Democracy:** Mauritius
- **Flawed Democracy:** Botswana, Cape Verde, Ghana, Lesotho, Namibia, Senegal, South Africa, Tunisia

The index was determined by the following factors:

- **Electoral process and pluralism**
- **Functioning of government**
- **Political participation**
- **Political culture**
- **Civil liberties**

Top 10 Most Democratic Countries in Africa, 2018 (Source: Economic Intelligence Unit)

African Rank	Country	Global Rank	Score
1	Mauritius	16	8.22
2	Cabo Verde	23	7.88
3	Botswana	28	7.81
4	South Africa	41	7.24
5	Ghana	52	6.69
6	Lesotho	56	6.64
7	Tunisia	69	6.32
8	Namibia	71	6.31
9	Senegal	74	6.15
10	Zambia	85	5.68

Ibrahim Index of African Governance (2018)

Top 5 in Safety and Rule of Law

Ranking	Country	Score (out of 100)
1	Mauritius	81.3
2	Botswana	79.6
3	Namibia	77.1
4	Cabo Verde	75.3
5	Seychelles	74.8