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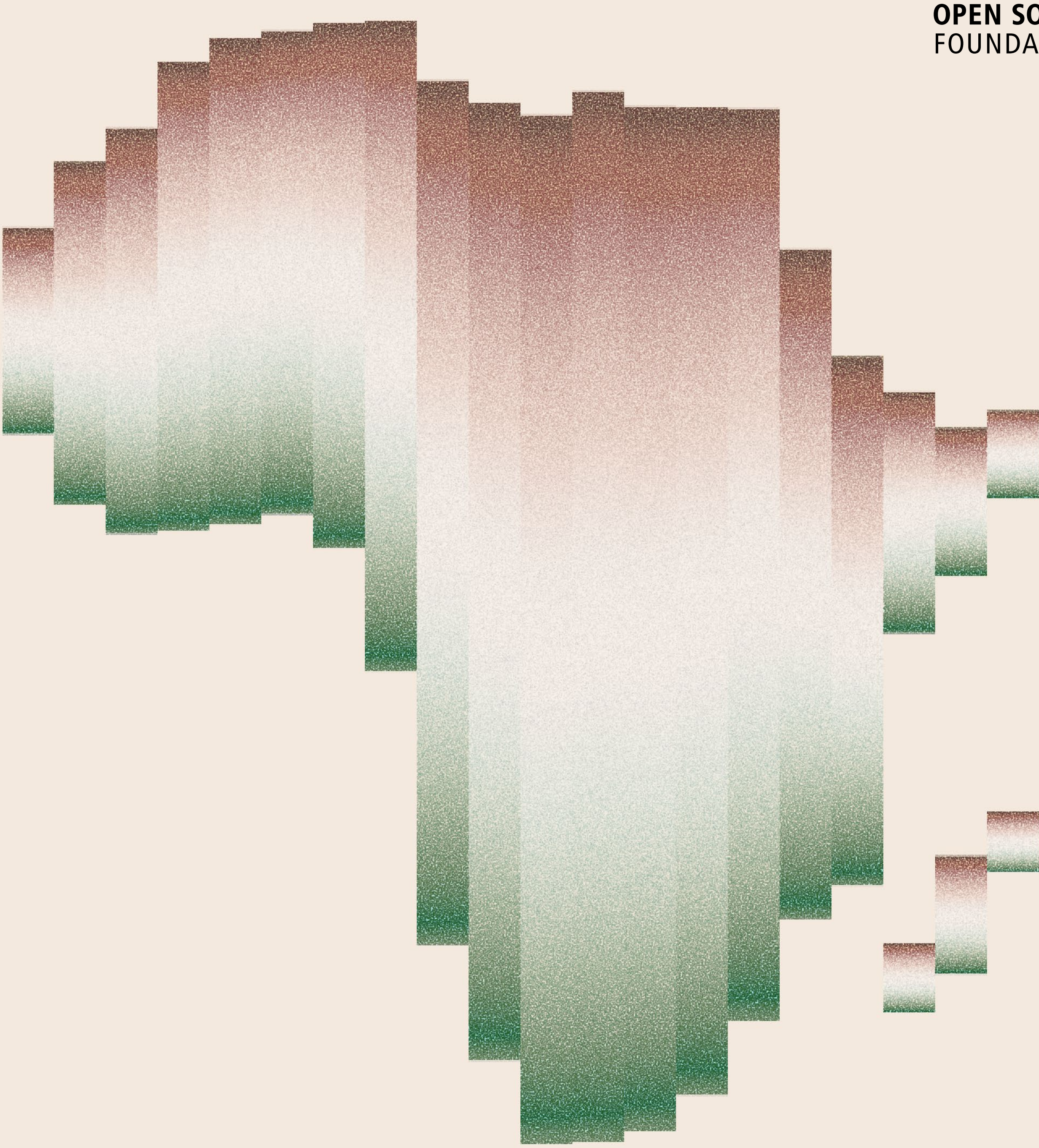

ANALYSIS OF THE NEXUS BETWEEN DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE IN AFRICA

Ndongo Samba Sylla, PhD

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ndongo Samba Sylla, PhD, is a Senegalese development economist and a former technical advisor in the presidency of the Republic of Senegal. His research covers topics such as fair trade, labor markets, democracy, money, and finance. He has authored, coauthored, and edited many books, including *La Démocratie contre la République: L'autre histoire du gouvernement du peuple*; *Liberalism and its Discontents: Social Movements in West Africa*; *Africa's Last Colonial Currency: The CFA Franc Story*; *Economic and Monetary Sovereignty for 21st Century Africa*; and *Revolutionary Movements in Africa: An Untold Story*. Sylla tweets at @nssylla.

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INTRODUCTION

The goal of this report is to unpack the relationships between economic justice and democracy in Africa. It is structured around the specifications and expectations set out in the related terms of reference described below.

Background and Context

The Open Society Foundations, through its Democratic Futures in Africa opportunity team, issued the terms of reference of an assignment entitled Analysis of the Nexus between Economic Justice and Democratic Governance in Africa. The document highlights recent trends observed in some parts of the continent such as the unconstitutional developments (military coups, removal of presidential term limits, etc.), the strong aspirations for change expressed by youth amid a growing disenchantment towards the democratic process and elections, etc. The terms of reference also noted how these trends are correlated with enduring patterns of economic and financial dependence further compounded by the implementation of neoliberal policies.

The major issues to be addressed are:

- The impact of the dominant—neoliberal/austerity—policies on democracy
- How current social trends—demographic growth, high youth unemployment, social discontent, pan-African protests such as those against the Communauté Financière Africaine (CFA) franc, etc.—facilitate or not the establishment of resilient and socially just democracies
- Identifying groups that are usually excluded from political decision-making and recommend measures to promote their inclusion
- Identifying feasible economic policies that promote both democracy and economic justice

Main Argument of the Report

The report investigates the relationships between economic justice and democracy in Africa by surveying relevant literature and exploiting various statistical sources. It stresses the need to decolonize and liberate our understanding of democracy, which must be reconceptualized as a set of reflexive practices and norms informed by the principle of political equality that (i) institutionally empower ordinary citizens and the organizations they form, and (ii) help deliver political stability and economic well-being for all by strengthening socioeconomic rights.

The premise of such an approach is that democracy should be understood substantively and not merely as a formal process. It should be posited as not only an indispensable institutional and material foundation for economic justice but also one of its essential outcomes. Only then will we arrive at more nuanced and accurate descriptions of current developments on the continent and at policy recommendations that could work for its peoples.

Structure of the Report

The report is structured around four core parts in addition to the introduction and the concluding recommendations.

Part I deals with the meanings of the terms "economic justice" and "democracy" and argues that they are compatible, provided that the latter concept is reconstructed to recover its original and more intuitive signification: government of the people by the people themselves. After a brief discussion of the relationship between (representative) democracy and development, Part I ends with the observation that democratization should be grounded in—and understood as—a project of liberation.

Part II offers a brief assessment of the democratization trends across the continent, from the 1990s to today, by focusing on how neoliberalism emptied the promise of democratization as well as the significance of the wave of military putsches since 2020. The argument is made that African countries can learn from their rich political history to build original institutions that will favor accountability, participation, and economic justice. Part II ends with the distinction between three concepts of democracy (and the economic justice nexus).

Part III takes a deeper look at the nexus between democracy and economic justice from different angles, using various indicators and mobilizing different examples across the African continent. Concrete illustrations are offered on the institutional requirements that allow democracy to deliver economic justice—and, reciprocally, economic justice to be grounded in popular participation.

Part IV focuses on specific policy avenues and proposals aiming at advancing the African countries towards substantive democracy, i.e., societies where economic justice is a material reality and grounded in popular participation. Policy suggestions are made with regards to universal civic and financial inclusion, voter empowerment, popular political participation, citizens' socio-economic rights, and civic education on money and finance.

Finally, the conclusion makes specific recommendations for the Open Society Foundations.

PART I:
ON ECONOMIC JUSTICE AND DEMOCRACY—CONCEPTUAL AND HISTORICAL ASPECTS

This first section clears the conceptual ground for the rest of the report. Section 1 discusses the notion of "economic justice" and various approaches to it. Section 2 offers a short history of "democracy" while section 3 quickly revisits the pressing issue of the relationship between liberal democracy and development. The overall thrust is to show that the nexus between economic justice and democracy can only be properly studied in the African context once this latter concept is liberated from its modern distortions.

1.1. On Economic Justice

The concept of economic justice comes from a lexicon of radical political economy. As observed by Robin Hahnel, the author of *Economic Justice and Democracy: From Competition to Cooperation*, "Few radical economists can define economic justice, but almost all believe they know economic injustice when they see it" (Hahnel 2005,19).

Insofar as it deals with justice, this concept refers to the principles that should govern the distribution of economic burdens and benefits. According to Hahnel (2005), conservative and liberal approaches tend to link economic justice with contribution: those whose contribution, based on their capital and/or their human capital, is greater than that of others should receive more, and vice versa. This point of view is contested by progressive economists, such as Hahnel himself, who rather insist that economic rewards should be proportional to sacrifice and should also take into account objective needs.

In everyday language, this philosophical background does not inform the uses of the concept of economic justice. The usual line of reasoning is based on the observation that the economic system does not work for everyone, because it tends to exclude or disadvantage certain social groups, and thus to give rise to major inequalities or amplify those existing in other spheres. The economic justice claim is built on the recognition of the need for corrective measures and safeguards against the "spontaneous" functioning of markets.

Economic justice differs from "economic democracy," even if the two notions are close and compatible. Economic democracy is about applying the democratic principle to a heavily hierarchical economic sphere governed by capitalists' private decisions. Self-management of companies by workers' cooperatives or trade unions is an important element of the agenda of economic democracy. This perspective is distinct from that of economic justice, which, for example, could consist in mobilizing state instruments to reduce economic inequalities and to meet the needs of the most vulnerable. In other words, while the economic justice agenda articulates the ultimate aim of building an economic structure that delivers equitable outcomes, it does not necessarily presuppose a significant degree of ownership, control, and management of the economy by the population themselves.

Today, demands for economic justice cover a wide range of areas and social groups, from the local to the global. The concept is used in relation to issues such as taxation, trade, climate, etc. There is also talk of achieving economic justice for women, racial minorities, migrants, the disabled, etc. There are a growing number of movements advocating for global justice: climate justice, tax justice, reforming the governance of international financial institutions, reparations for the crimes linked to slavery and colonialism, etc. (see Table 1.1).

Many civil society organizations operating in Africa have "economic justice programs" that cover some of these topics and other topics.[1] For example, sometimes climate is included, and occasionally it is dealt with separately. But what they all have in common is that the concept of economic justice is the mainstay in the quest for a new world that is decent, equitable, non-discriminatory, and respectful of ecological limits (see Box 1.1). Aware of the complexities of these challenges—and the fact that progress made at global and local levels are mutually dependent—all these organizations have various scales of intervention and targets.

Table 1.1: Dimensions of Economic Justice

Scale	Topics	Groups
Global, Continental, Regional, National, Local	Tax, Trade, Climate, Energy, Labor, etc.	Gender, Racial, Indigenous Peoples, Migrants, Refugees, Disabled, etc.

One major issue is the extent to which economic justice, as described above, is compatible with democracy. The answer depends on what is meant by democracy, and on the geographical scale at which the question is

1 In the Global North, some "economic justice programs" target their support to categories such as victims of domestic and sexual violence, marginalized workers who are provided with training opportunities, etc.

considered. For a number of philosophers, democracy, insofar as it is based on the principle of majority rule, cannot guarantee justice in all circumstances, "Democracy is not intrinsically just" (Arneson 2004). In a liberal democracy, the majority of citizens may vote for leaders who implement policies that are unfair to certain groups. Drawing on the case of migrants and the hostility they generally arouse in liberal-democratic countries, philosopher and economist Philip van Parijs argued that, "[w]orld justice and democracy will always be incompatible" (van Parijs 1996, 116). While it is hard to disagree with him about the possibility of global justice, especially in light of the unequal international relationships of the last five centuries, one might challenge the dominant views about democracy, including his own.

However, the more general issue is the following: Can capitalism, as a global system based on private property, private and hierarchical planning of economic resources, and endless capital accumulation, deliver economic justice? For capitalists and the wealthy, the answer is generally positive, since for them economic justice means being rewarded in proportion to one's contribution.

In contrast, for most people on the democratic left, and those who articulate a different understanding of economic justice, capitalism is seen as intrinsically unjust as it means labor exploitation, high inequalities, high levels of unemployment, financial crises, imperialist wars, ecological devastation, etc. For example, Hahnel, one the leading scholars who investigated these issues most deeply, holds, "Capitalism triumphed in the 20th century despite the fact that it is grossly unfair, undermines economic democracy, is terribly inefficient, and is destined to destroy the natural environment" (Hahnel 2005, 2).

So, the policy implications of an economic justice agenda will likely be dependent on the view one has about the progressive potential of 21st century capitalism. However, as the desired systemic changes will not happen overnight, there is a need to work towards reforms that can become the building blocks for a better world.

In that vein, the premise of this work is that democracy, provided that we rid it of its modern distortions, has an intrinsic value and is compatible with economic justice. Indeed, democracy, understood substantively, is a prerequisite for an economic system that delivers fair outcomes by empowering the usually marginalized and vulnerable. A new concept of wealth premised on the eradication of poverty, full employment, more leisure time, ecological sustainability, and economic equality can happen only on the fertile ground of democracy understood as political equality between all.

BOX 1.1: SELECTED CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR ECONOMIC JUSTICE PROGRAMS IN AFRICA

The Africa Network for Environment and Economic Justice (ANEEJ) aims "to amplify the voice of the weak, the less privileged and the marginalized groups in society including women, youths, and people living with disabilities in order to increase their participation in the democratic decision-making process." Specifically, ANEEJ implements projects relating to governance and democracy, human rights (including migration and development issues), and anti-corruption, peace building, and conflict resolution, development effectiveness, environment including water, sanitation, and hygiene among others.[2]

The Economic Justice Network works on food security, climate justice, trade justice, and advocacy towards the Southern Africa development community.[3]

The African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) states, "Our economic justice work seeks to create a future in which economies prioritize the well-being of people and planet and where states act as a principal and fair broker of economic redistribution. We strive for a world in which economic power is more evenly balanced, the fruits of economic gain are more equitably distributed, and ownership, control, and decision-making are more equitably shared across society."[4] Topics of interest include tax justice, the care economy, debt justice, feminist trade policy, natural resource governance, and extractives.[5]

Institute for Economic Justice works towards "[a] just society where an equitable distribution of resources, the democratization of economic decision making, and systemic change are secured and entrenched for the realization of rights and planetary wellbeing."[6]

Oxfam's Economic Justice Program "encompasses interventions targeting extractive industries, agriculture, and climate justice, the Grow campaign [food sustainability], the Even It Up inequality campaign ["Fight inequality, beat poverty"], and our work in financing for development."[7]

The Open Society Foundation's economic and climate prosperity program focuses on supporting "the development of green industrial policies that contribute to economic growth in the Global South—significantly scaling up their support of economic development."

2 https://www.aneej.org/
3 https://ejn.org.za/en/
4 https://www.femnet.org/thematic-areas/economic-justice-and-rights/
5 https://www.femnet.org/thematic-areas/economic-justice-and-rights/
6 https://www.iej.org.za/about/
7 https://panafrica.oxfam.org/what-we-do/economic-justice

1.2. A Brief Story of the Word Democracy

"When any modern state claims to be a democracy, it necessarily misdescribes itself," wrote political scientist John Dunn (2019, xxii). Indeed, our current understanding of democracy is very different from the meaning that prevailed when the concept appeared 2,500 years ago.

"Democracy," as a word, comes from the Greek *demokratia*, which itself is composed of *demos* and *kratos*. *Demos* refers to poor citizens, i.e., people with civil and political rights who do not belong to the richest or the more educated groups. *Kratos* refers to "brute force." *Demokratia* began as a polemical term. It was an insult uttered by aristocrats to castigate political regimes in which ordinary people themselves sat on sovereign bodies they controlled—the courts, the legislature, administrative functions, etc. (Canfora 2006).

In his *Politics*, Aristotle stressed that "majority rule" does not define democracy because every political system, including oligarchy, revolves around an institutionalized political majority. What distinguishes one form of rule from another is which social class is politically sovereign and has the political majority:

> Oligarchy is [observed] when men of property have the government in their hands; democracy, the opposite, when the indigent, and not the men of property, are the rulers...[T]he real difference between democracy and oligarchy is poverty and wealth. Wherever men rule by reason of their wealth, whether they be few or many, that is an oligarchy, and where the poor rule, that is a democracy (Aristotle, *Politics*, Book III, VIII).

From its appearance in the 5th century BC to the end of the 18th century, the word democracy has more or less meant what we now call "direct democracy." To enable every Athenian citizen to exercise his "right to govern," most public positions that did not require special skills, such as administrative tasks and deliberative functions, were filled by drawing lots. Only a limited proportion of offices—notably executive and military ones—were subject to elections.

But the idea of the government of the people, by the people, for the people has always seemed unnatural to writers and philosophers, who have strongly condemned it. "They passed their judgment down to succeeding generations of thinkers, with such success that democracy carried a bad odor for over 2,000 years," wrote philosopher and classicist Paul Woodruff (2005, 5). This is how democracy, as a word and idea referring to political equality, came to be one of the most hated concepts in the history of Western political thought, from Plato to the Enlightenment philosophers (Sylla 2015).

Building on this intellectual heritage, the most important political figures of the American (1776) and French (1789) revolutions sought to establish a new type of political regime that, while moving away from absolute monarchy and aristocracy based on birth, would be an antidote to democracy as the word had been understood until then. They named their preferred political system, "representative government," also known as "bourgeois government" and "elective aristocracy." One of the first legal treatises published in 1795 by a judge at the Connecticut Supreme Court confirmed that view:

> Nothing can be more erroneous than the opinion that the government of the United States is a democracy. It has not a single feature of that form of that government. The people have no power but that of electing the representatives, which they have not in a democracy; they cannot do a single act in framing the laws or administering the government, any more than they can in the most despotic government on the globe...[F]or democracy signifies a government by the people themselves, and a representative government is where the government is not by the people, but by representatives for that purpose elected by the people, and to whom they have delegated the power of administering the government (Swift 1795, 21).

Indeed, some of the members of the 1787 U.S. Constituent Assembly argued that "democracy is the worst of all political evils."[8] Their hatred of the "government of the people" is revealed by an eloquent "omission": the words "democracy" and "democratic" are still absent from the U.S. Federal Constitution. In the 1827 edition of the *Dictionnaire Classique de la Langue Française*, the word "democracy" was defined as "the subdivision of tyranny among several citizens." Under representative government, elections, which were subject to property requirements until universal suffrage was achieved, were supposed to enable the emergence of the "natural aristocracy" (the bourgeoisie) as opposed to the aristocracy based on birth.

In a curious twist of historical proportions, "representative government" was gradually renamed "representative democracy" and then, over the course of the 20th century, "democracy" for short.

1.3. On the Relationship between Liberal Democracy and Development

The belief that democracy (in the sense of representative government) is the only legitimate and, therefore, most desirable, form of government informs much of the literature that seeks to study its relationship with development. Unsurprisingly, these works tend to conclude that democracy

8 Madison (1787), notes on M. Gerry, 17 September 1987.

promotes development (Diamond 1992) or, at least, economic growth (Acemoglu et al. 2019).

A look at the experiences of structural economic transformation in the Global South leads to different results. When it comes to "developmental states" and successful industrialization policies, Southeast Asian countries are generally the paragons. Yet the Asian "economic miracle" happened under "authoritarian" regimes.

South Korea's GDP per capita increased nearly fourfold during the bloody reign of General Park Chung-Hee (1961–1979). After his assassination, the country returned to military rule after a brief civilian transition. The first genuine presidential election under universal suffrage was held in 1987. Taiwan, a historic Kuomintang stronghold, was under martial law between 1949 and 1987, a long period marked by repression and massacres of dissidents and Communist sympathizers, known as the White Terror. The first opposition party was authorized in 1986. China has undergone arguably the most impressive economic transformation in the history of capitalism. It has been a one-party regime since 1949. Under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, the country has lifted more than 800 million people out of poverty over the last four decades, according to a recent World Bank estimates (World Bank et al. 2022).[9] To nuance this overall picture, the case of Japan, a liberal democracy, could be pointed out as an exception or counterexample. Although Japan has not been a one-party regime, it is well known that the right-wing Liberal Democratic Party ruled the country almost without interruption between 1955 and 2009.

Moreover, as Ashutosh Varshney points out, while "authoritarian" regimes in Taiwan, Hong Kong and South Korea succeeded in eradicating extreme poverty, democracies, such as India, Costa Rica, Jamaica, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and even Botswana, despite its high rates of economic growth, have failed to do so (Varshney 2000, 2005).

This type of comparison undermines the idea that "authoritarian" regimes are necessarily less concerned with the well-being of their populations than "democracies." It also points to a paradox. In a developing country context, democracy should, in principle, be the ideal political system. Since the lower-income groups are the statistical majority, they could use their numbers to put pressure on their governments to implement policies that benefit them. But this has often not been the case for a variety of reasons. As a matter of fact, democratic regimes in the low- and middle-income

9 See also https://progressive.international/blueprint/16a350d7-9d05-49d6-b855-5de756f52963-pro-poor-development-how-china-eradicated-poverty/en

countries have performed poorly in eradicating poverty, while authoritarian regimes have had more mixed results: some have been disasters, while others have achieved “miracles” (Varshney 2000, 2005). Under Gaddafi, Libya, which nobody ever considered a liberal democracy, has long had the highest level of “human development” in the continent, as measured by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2011). Conversely, Senegal, which has long enjoyed the reputation of a model democracy, had roughly the same level of real GDP per capita in 2014 as it did in 1961.[10]

The general conclusion to be drawn from this brief survey is that it is simplistic to assume that democracy (representative government) is the best system for creating economic performance. Indeed, the adoption of liberal democracy is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for generating the material progress that people hope for. As Joseph Schumpeter once pointed out in his classic *Capitalism, Socialism & Democracy*, “both the will and the good of the people may be, and in many historical instances have been, served just as well or better by governments that cannot be described as democratic according to any accepted usage of the term” (Schumpeter 2003, 269–270).[11] Conversely, it is equally questionable to postulate that authoritarianism as such has developmental virtues. If this were the case, regimes as odious as Mobutu’s Zaire would have been economic heavyweights. In sum, it is highly problematic to think that a particular type of political arrangement must always, in all circumstances, deliver the best leaders and the best decisions, resulting in the best outcomes.

It is important to stress that studying the relationship between democracy and development is too narrow a focus. For formerly colonized territories, the challenge has always been how to simultaneously achieve: (i) political stability, (ii) enjoyment of extensive rights by the citizens, and (iii) an economic transformation that hopefully delivers fairer social outcomes.

It is difficult to name a formerly colonized territory that achieved this latter feature starting from the first two. The most successful countries in terms of developmentalism, as we saw, usually curtailed political participation and the citizens’ rights.

The reason for this situation has to be found in the imperialist character of the modern world. Capitalism, as a global system where powerful states and transnational actors decide the fate of weaker nations through their relatively autonomous political and economic decisions, has so far been

10 According to the World Bank International development indicators.

11 Another quote in the same vein: “The democratic method does not necessarily guarantee a greater amount of individual freedom than another political method would permit in similar circumstances. It may well be the other way round. But there is still a relation between the two.” (Schumpeter 2003, 271-272).

antithetical with national self-determination (no external domination) and "popular will" in the peripheral states (the former colonial world). A world where the sovereignty of weaker nations is not respected cannot be favorable to democracy, in any substantive sense. Likewise, countries which possess resources coveted by the most powerful ones or countries which are located in strategic zones cannot be truly independent. Their internal politics and the fate of their governments will often be shaped by external developments (see Box 1.2).

All these considerations explain that democratization risks being a hollow pursuit in Africa if it is not grounded in—and understood as—a liberation project from imperialism and various forms of domination based on class, gender, ethnicity, etc.

BOX 1.2: SECURITY PRECEDES BOTH DEVELOPMENT AND DEMOCRACY

Comprising 54 sovereign countries plus the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, Africa is a vast continent. Although there are similarities and common issues, countries differ from one another in terms of population, land size, political system, level of economic development, etc. Any discussion of the relationship between democracy and economic justice must take this heterogeneity into account. The priorities and urgencies of each are not necessarily the same.

In the case of countries in conflict, democracy and economic justice are undoubtedly important objectives, as is reparatory justice for victims, as an important tool of conflict resolution. But the priority is the achievement of peace and political stability, while the emergency is, unfortunately, the diligent delivery of humanitarian aid.

The Senegalese scholar Cheikh Anta Diop once maintained that security precedes development.[12] One could even add that security precedes both democracy and development. A state that fails to maintain peace and political stability can hardly guarantee the conditions for consistent popular participation and shared and sustainable prosperity.

According to the *Armed Conflict Survey 2023*, 15 countries in sub-Saharan Africa are located in the main conflict hotbeds: the Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin, the Great Lakes Region and Eastern Africa, the Central African Republic, and Mozambique. Most of these conflicts are both internal and international, due to the involvement of foreign actors (International Institute of Strategic Studies 2023). At the end of 2022, according to data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there were 6.8 million refugees and 27.5 million internally displaced people in sub-Saharan Africa (ibid., 150).

Peace and political stability are regional and global public goods. No single country can guarantee them for itself, and at the same time it is problematic to rely on non-African (military) actors to achieve these goals. Hence the importance of a pan-African approach to security and conflict management.

12 https://www.seneplus.com/opinions/cheikh-anta-diop-savant-et-politique

PART II: BEYOND LIBERAL DEMOCRACY: IN SEARCH OF AFRICAN ALTERNATIVES

This part of the report continues the discussion already started by anchoring it in the African context. Section 2.1 briefly discusses the transition from single-party rule to multi-party competitive elections and the limitations imposed by neoliberalism. Section 2.2 tackles the situation of a continent where youth is the majority but is economically and politically marginalized. Section 2.3 critically rejects the widespread claim that there is a "return" of coups in the continent and that these events signal a democratic "backsliding." Section 2.4 argues that the discussion of the relationship between democracy and economic justice could usefully take inspiration from the rich political history of the African continent. From there, section 2.5 introduces a distinction between three different understandings of democracy, and therefore, of the democracy–economic justice nexus. The argument is made that "substantive democracy" is the direction the continent should take.

2.1. From "Choiceless Elections" to "Choiceless Democracies"

When people talk about democratization trends in Africa, they often have in mind the political changes associated with the switch from single-party rule to multiparty electoral competition.

Indeed, following the independence wave of the 1960s, in the Cold War context, single-party rule became the institutional norm across the continent and most lower and lower-middle income countries. African leaders, whatever their professed ideology, found justifications for the elimination of multipartyism.

Competitive party politics was accused of nurturing cleavages along regional and ethnic lines and, therefore, of working against the goal of nation-building (Keita 1960). Some leaders even argued that the class divisions around which the party system emerged in the West do not exist in Africa while others held the view that there is a specific pattern of African democracy, as in Ancient Greece, which does not require party politics and the institutionalization of a formal political opposition (Nyerere 1961). More fundamentally, there was the widespread belief that economic planification under authoritarian rule was more conducive to rapid industrial growth and modernization. This influential view was dubbed the “romance of economic development” (Engerman 2004).

While single-party rule was the norm for communist countries, Western governments would often argue that the African soil was culturally not favorable for democracy or that democracy as a luxury good was only reachable to developed countries. From 1960 to the early 1990s, except for some countries, most elections were “choiceless” when they were held. Elections were a ritual to legitimize single-party rule (Hermet et al. 1978). Only military coups allowed a handover of political power.

This configuration started to change when the U.S. decided to focus its foreign policy on “democracy promotion.” In 1982, seven years before the collapse of the Berlin Wall, Ronald Reagan, the U.S. president and an important architect of global neoliberalism, announced that his country would lead a “crusade for liberty” and a worldwide “campaign…to foster the infrastructure of democracy” (Reagan 1982).

The end of the Cold War would allow the reestablishment of multipartyism, public liberties, and more political participation in Africa. The democratization process was the outcome of popular revolts against the single-party regime, its arbitrariness, its failure to bring positive economic outcomes, and the consequences of austerity policies implemented by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank in debt-distressed countries. It created more space for civil society organizations and led in some circumstances to peaceful political transitions. However, the promise associated with political liberalization was somehow being hijacked by the parallel economic liberalization agenda and its socially regressive outcomes (Sylla 2014). Following Western governments, the IMF and World Bank pushed for democratization, as they viewed it as a condition for the success of their neoliberal policies (Gills & Rocamora 1992).

With the unfolding of global neoliberalism, electoral politics everywhere have become increasingly alien to people’s aspirations in terms of an improved quality of life. This phenomenon has been rendered in as “low intensity democracy” (Gills & Rocamora 1992). With reference to the African continent, economist Thandika Mkandawire (1999) elaborated on what he called “choiceless democracies”: You are more or less free to vote for whomever you want but your elected government cannot afford to take a departure from the standard neoliberal economic blueprint. Cameroonian humanist philosopher Fabien Eboussi Boulaga summed up this situation by arguing with a dose of humor that “Multipartyism is the highest stage of single party rule” (Boulaga 2009, 88).

This evolution has created a growing popular frustration expressed through protests and less enthusiasm for democracy.[13] According to the latest surveys of the Afrobarometer, an increasing proportion of voters express declining support for democracy and elections, especially in the most established democracies in the continent. Between 2011 and 2023, satisfaction with democracy has decreased by 40 points in Mauritius, 40 points in Botswana and 35 points in South Africa. This growing voter frustration certainly explains the declining electoral weight of previously dominant political parties such as the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, which did not manage to secure a majority during the end of May 2024 parliamentary elections, and Botswana, which witnessed its first political transition since its independence in October 2024. The election of Duma Boko as the new president put an end to six decades of uninterrupted rule by the Botswana Democratic Party (formerly Bechuanaland Democratic Party).

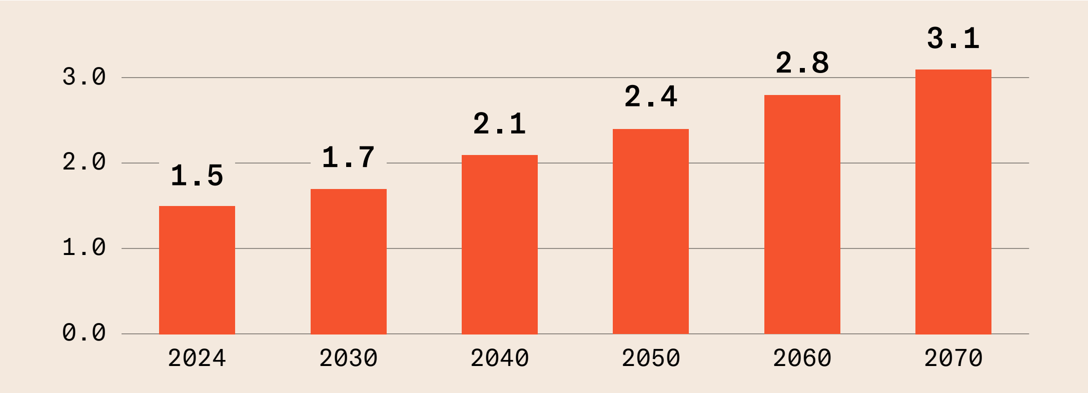
While very few citizens would approve of one-party, one-man military rule, the latest Afrobarometer surveys show that 53 percent of interviewees consider a military takeover to be legitimate when elected leaders “abuse power for their own ends.” Over time, the share of people opposing military rule has decreased in 30 countries out of 39 covered, especially in those facing security issues like Mali and Burkina. The Youth is the social group more open to a military takeover (Afrobarometer 2024).

2.2. A Young Continent Ruled by Old Men

Despite many challenges it faces, such as security problems and climate change, the continent needs to achieve a level of economic development that will enable it to meet the needs of a growing population. In the 21st century, most of the world’s demographic growth is expected to take place in Africa. The current population of 1.5 billion will double by 2070, according to United Nations (UN) projections. Over this period, the median age of 19 is set to gradually increase up to 30 (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2).

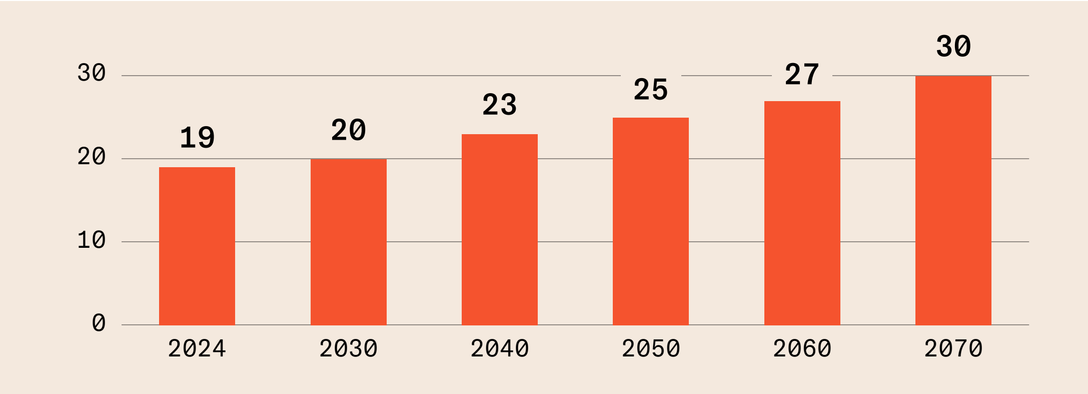
13 Survey opinions on democracy have contributed in their way to the internationalization of the idea that democracy equals liberal democracy and that there is no decent alternative to it. However, they are plagued with methodological issues, including the fact that surveyors tend to translate and code the “thick descriptions” of interviewees according to their own views and prejudices. Indeed, many communities across the world do not have in their own languages an exact word encompassing what democracy is supposed to mean in the West. So, “democracy” as coded by surveys can mean different things not necessarily related to politics per se (see Schaffer 2014).

Figure 2.1: Population of Africa: projected trends 2024–2070 (billions)



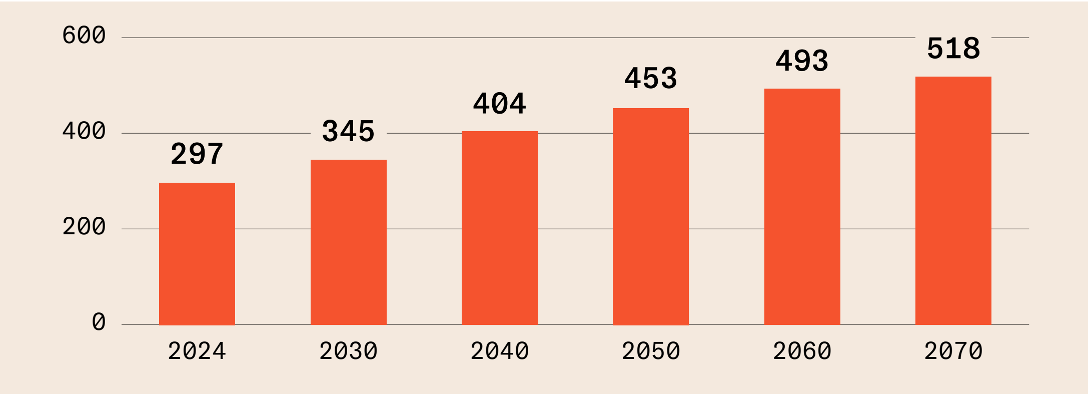
Source: United Nations Population Division

Figure 2.2: Median Age Across the Continent: Projected Trends 2024–2070



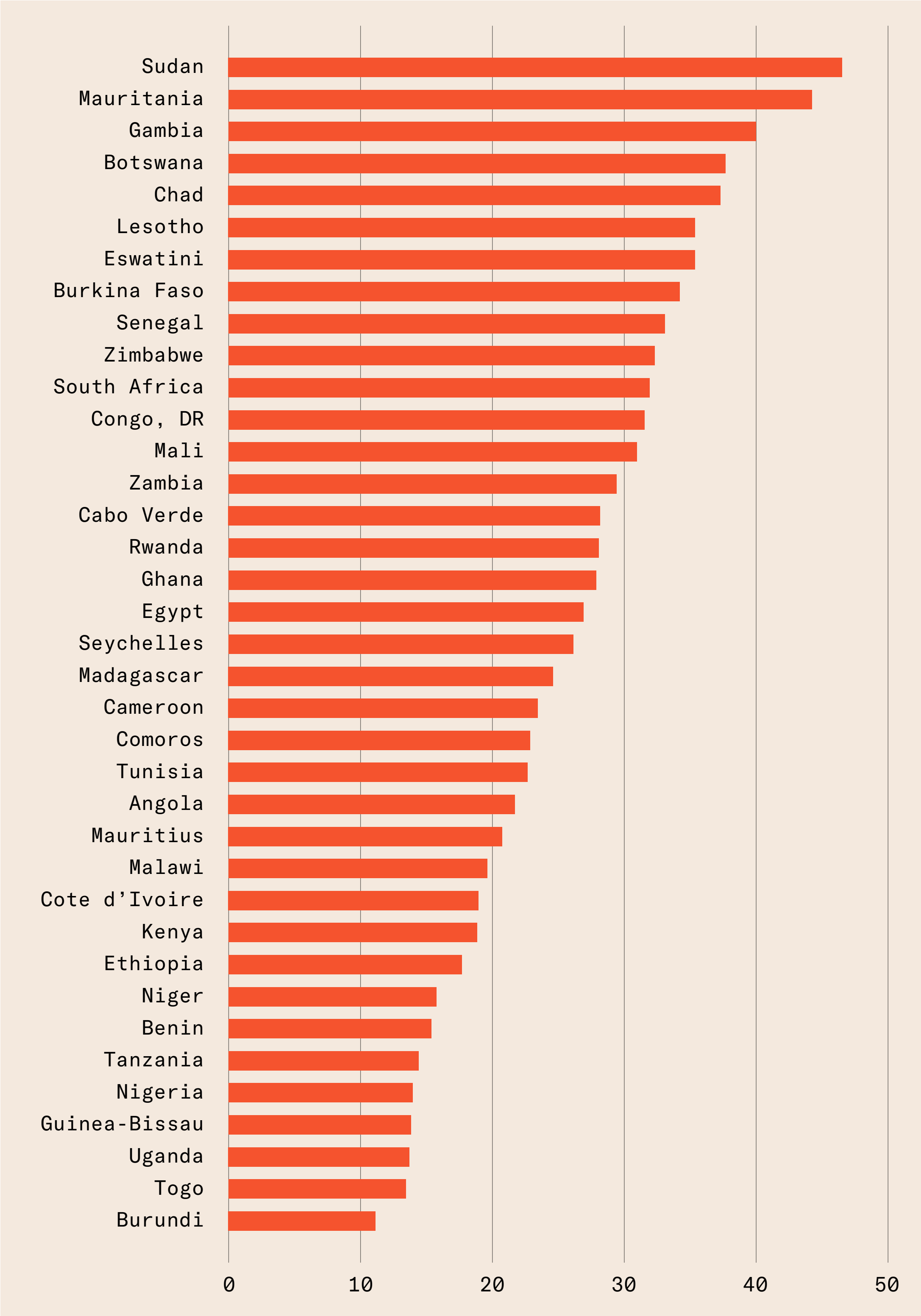
Source: United Nations Population Division

Figure 2.3: Population of Africa Aged Between 15 and 24: Projected Trends 2024–2070 (millions)



Source: United Nations Population Division

Figure 2.4: **Share of Youth Not in Education, Employment, or Training, Total (% of youth population)**



Source: World Bank Development Indicators, accessed 17 August 2024

The future of the continent will therefore depend on how it treats its youth, i.e., the dominant component of the *demos*. Despite the progress made in raising education and training levels, the situation of youth, particularly those aged 15–24, remains highly precarious. The World Bank publishes statistics on the proportion of this age group Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET). This data is, of course, imperfect due to numerous methodological issues, in addition to the fact that they are not always available on an annual basis, but it does give a rough idea of the socioeconomic condition of the 297 million Africans in the 15–24 age group (see Figure 2.3). In at least 25 countries out of a total of 37 covered between 2018 and 2023, the proportion of NEETs is higher than 20 percent, and even reaches a maximum of 47 percent in Sudan, a country currently ravaged by conflict (see Figure 2.4).

Faced with a lack of economic prospects, more and more young people, particularly in West Africa, are taking the dangerous route of clandestine emigration via the Sahel and the Mediterranean. Those who remain in their own countries may join protest movements against government abuses, high living costs, austerity policies, insecurity, and more. From the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria, in the midst of the pandemic, to the June–July 2024 demonstrations in Kenya against the Finance Bill and the mobilization against French military bases in the Sahel, young people are increasingly emerging as major players on the African political scene.

The challenge for governments is not only to create better opportunities for their youth, but also to ensure their meaningful involvement in the governance of their countries. Africa stands out as a young continent governed largely by ageing leaders who maintain their grip on state power through “civil coups”: Removal of constitutional terms and age limits, electoral frauds, etc.

In 2024, 12 African countries were ruled by a head of state who had stayed in power for at least 10 consecutive years (see Table 2.1). The record is held by Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo. He has been the president of Equatorial Guinea since he seized power through a military putsch in 1979. He is followed by Paul Biya, president of Cameroon since 1982. This strong French ally is the oldest African president at 91 years old. Denis Sassou Nguesso led the Republic of Congo between 1979 and 1992 and again since 1997, a total of 40 years’ rule. All three countries belong to the CFA zone (see section 3.1). The youngest of this list are Eswatini monarch Mswati III and Faure Gnassingbé, who took the reins of the Republic of Togo in 2005 after his father’s bloody 38-year rule.

Table 2.1: **Longest Current Uninterrupted Reigns as Head of State (as of 2024)**

Country	Leader	Year of birth	Year of arrival to power	Military	Length in power	Current age
Equatorial Guinea	Teodoro O. N. Mbasogo	1942	1979	Yes	45	82
Cameroon	Paul Biya	1933	1982	No	42	91
Eswatini	Mswati III	1968	1986	No	38	56
Uganda	Yoweri Museveni	1944	1986	Yes	38	80
Eritrea	Isaias Afwerki	1946	1993	Yes	31	78
Congo	Denis Sassou Nguesso	1943	1997	Yes	27	81
Djibouti	Ismaïl Omar Guelleh	1947	1999	No	25	77
Rwanda	Paul Kagame	1957	2000	Yes	24	67
Togo	Faure Gnassingbé	1966	2005	No	19	58
South Sudan	Salva Kiir Mayardit	1951	2011	Yes	13	73
Côte d'Ivoire	Alassane Ouattara	1942	2011	No	13	82
Egypt, Arab Rep.	Abdel Fattah al-Sissi	1954	2014	Yes	10	70

Source: Author's own compilation based on online sources.

Overall, for this sample of 12 heads of state, the median and average ages are the same, 77.5, i.e., four times the median age of the continent. Of note, seven out of the 12 are former military officers who continued in power despite the transition to multiparty elections. If we divide the remaining list of 42 heads of state in two parts, we observe that the sample of seven military officers who have seized power since 2020 have average and median ages of respectively 47 and 44.4 years as opposed to 65.4 and 65 years for the sample comprising the 35 others.[14] In contrast, the so-called African founding fathers were relatively "young" by the contemporary standards when they became heads of state. In 1960, Kenyatta was 69, Nkrumah 51, Nyerere 38, and David Dacko 30. In other words, the recent military coups have represented a reversal of the phenomenon of aging presidents. In French-speaking Africa, with the exception of Senegal, this

14 The seven countries are: Burkina Faso, Chad, Gabon, Guinea, Mali, Niger and Sudan.

trend is particularly manifest: People under 50 who can expect to become president one day are those who bear arms (Sylla 2024).

2.3. Return of Military Coups and Democratic Backsliding (2020–now)?

Between 2020 and 2023, the African continent witnessed a series of nine military coups. According to many media commentators and analysts, these developments mark the return of coups on the continent, as well as a retreat from democracy. Although widespread, this interpretation is superficial and misleading.

Obviously, any successful coup has a story of its own. Immediate causes are likely to be specific and to be shaped by domestic factors. However, looking at coups in isolation might not be the way to understand them or to assess broad political trends across the continent. Coups have to be tackled holistically and from a long-term historical perspective.

Based on the existing data, the evolution of successful coups in Africa can be interpreted as the result of three structural determinants this study respectively calls: (i) an epochal effect, (ii) a neocolonial effect, and (iii) an institutional search effect.

The "epochal effect" refers to the fact some historical periods have been more conducive to coups than others while the "neocolonial effect" describes the link between the occurrence of coups and foreign influence or interventions for given geographies. As for the "institutional search effect," it alludes to the fact that military coups are a "normal" phenomenon, in the statistical sense, in the life of states, especially at the early stages in the life cycle of a state. Take Spain, for example. From 1833, when it became a constitutional monarchy, it embarked on its first and longest parliamentary experiment, lasting until 1874. During this period, there were 30 attempted coups, 11 of which were successful (Sabaté, Espuelas & Herranz-Loncán 2022, 11). From the 19th century, however, it was the newly independent states of Latin America that were the worldwide coups champions. According to Curvale (2023, 4), "Between 1815 and 1849 Latin America experienced 26 coups (out of [a world total of] 39), 102 (out of 129) for the next 50 years, 82 (out of 141) in the first half of the twentieth century, and 51 (out of 236) for the period 1950–1999."

The now prevalent view that coups are "pathological" and that political stability should always be the statistical norm is entirely ahistorical. It evades the obvious and general fact that countries need a period of incubation—which can be of varying lengths—to build institutions capable of preventing coups and eventually establishing governmental and constitutional stability. To take again the case of Latin America in the 19th century, Curvale (2023, 15–16) observed that “Building stable institutions, when at least two consecutive terms could be completed, was possible only after an average 46 years of turmoil. The efforts to adopt some kind of a legal framework are evidenced by the 166 constitutions that were in effect through the nineteen hundreds. And frequent executive turnover characterized that period.”

Against this historical background, one can realize that there is nothing specific to Africa when it comes to military putsches. The continent has more or less followed the path taken by nations emerging from colonialism—the institutional search effect. They also suffered from the epochal and neocolonial effects, owing to the Cold War, which was conducive to coups and foreign military interventions. According to the Coup d’ État Project, 317 successful coups were recorded across the world between 1960 and 1999, an average of 79 per decade, as opposed to 43 for the period 2000–2019, an average of 21 per decade (see Table 2.2).

In spite of objective handicaps inherited from colonialism—such as problematic borders and the secessionist and separatist demands they gave rise to, the culture of authoritarianism and the Cold War context—16 countries on the continent never recorded a successful putsch (see Box 2.1), while majority of the others have managed to close this page after “only” four decades. Of the 160 coups recorded in Africa between 1960 and 2023, 128 took place between 1960 and 2000, an average of 32 per decade.

To account for recent coups, analysts tend to emphasize aspects such as bad governance, authoritarian excesses, unemployment, and lack of economic prospects, etc. These explanations lack specificity, as the realities they evoke can be observed in most countries on the continent. Actually, military coups since 2010 reflect mostly a neocolonial effect.

If we look at the map of the continent, we see that coups that have happened since 2020, with the exception of Guinea and Gabon, have taken place in countries located in the Sahelian strip: Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, and Sudan. In fact, since NATO’s destructive intervention in Libya in March 2011, the continent has recorded 19 coups. Only four of these have taken place outside the Sahel and North Africa.[15] The link between external military interventions, the expansion of terrorist and separatist groups and regional political destabilization could not be clearer.

15 Since 2012, according to the Coup d’État Project, coups were recorded in Algeria (1), Burkina Faso (5), Chad (1), Egypt (1), Mali (3), Niger (1), Sudan (2), Tunisia (1). Gabon (1), Guinea (1), Guinea-Bissau (1), and Zimbabwe (1) are the four countries located outside North Africa and the Sahel.

In addition to being in a zone militarized by foreign powers, the second major predictive factor for the recent coups is being a former French colony. Eight of the nine military coups since 2020 have taken place in the historical franc zone, i.e., former French colonies that use or have used the CFA franc (see Table 2.2).

Table 2.2: **Coups in the Historical Franc Zone by Country and Decade**

Countries	1960–9	1970–9	1980–9	1990–9	2000–9	2010–19	2020–23	Total
Benin	5	1						**6**
Burkina Faso	1	1	4			3	2	**11**
Cameroon								**0**
Central African Republic	1	1	1		2			**5**
Chad		2	1	1			1	**5**
Comoros		2	1	3				**6**
Congo, Republic	4	2		1				**7**
Côte d’Ivoire				1				**1**
Gabon	2						1	**3**
Guinea			1		1		1	**3**
Madagascar		3			1			**4**
Mali	1			1		1	2	**5**
Mauritania		2	2		2			**6**
Niger		1		2		1	1	**5**
Senegal								**0**
Togo	3				1			**4**
Total – Historical Franc Zone	**17**	**15**	**10**	**9**	**7**	**5**	**8**	**71**
Total – Africa	**36**	**32**	**24**	**36**	**9**	**13**	**10**	**160**
Total – World	**98**	**93**	**65**	**62**	**23**	**20**	**14**	**375**

Source: Cline Data Center, February 2024 version (https://clinecenter.illinois.edu/project/research-themes/democracy-and-development/coup-detat-project); the author added the coup in Guinea in 2022, as it is not recorded by this source. The author omitted the episode recorded as a coup in Côte d’Ivoire in 2000. There were 10 coups in Africa between 2020 and 2023, including one non-military coup (Tunisia).

BOX 2.1: AVOIDING MILITARY COUPS IS NOT AN INDICATOR OF DEMOCRATIC STRENGTH

According to the Coup d'État Project dataset, no successful coup was recorded for these 16 African countries: Botswana, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Djibouti, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania, Zambia, Eritrea, Namibia, South Africa, South Sudan. The last four countries became sovereign states and freed from apartheid (in the case of South Africa) from the 1990s.

While the absence of a coup indicates a certain political resilience, it does not necessarily imply respect for elementary democratic principles. So far, Cameroon has recorded just one unsuccessful coup attempt, in 1984. Yet it is far from being an exemplary country. A bastion of French influence in Africa, it has been ruled since 1982 by the 91-year-old Paul Biya. Since its independence and secession from Ethiopia, Eritrea has not experienced a single coup. Yet, it is probably the most closed state on the continent. With an estimated military strength of 250,000 plus 130,000 reservists, it is one of the most militarized states in the world, given its small size (117,600 sq. km.).[16] Other countries such as Kenya and South Africa have escaped military coups. But, in correlation with their high levels of socioeconomic inequality, daily life is highly militarized, as revealed by the prevalence of private security companies, for example (Higate & Utas 2017; Reinders 2019).

All of this demonstrates why it is misleading to speak of a "return" of coups. Such a view projects onto the entire African continent a reality that primarily concerns the so-called French-speaking Africa, where the problem of coups is persistent. It also hides the fact these coups are first and foremost an indicator of the crisis of French imperialism in Africa. While some of them, Gabon, for example, focus on bringing new life to the system of domination known as *Françafrique*, others, like Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, aspire to get rid of the system of French control (Sylla 2024).

There are three reasons why the countries of the historic franc zone are the continent's coups champions. Firstly, France's permanent interventionism in many of its former colonies has weakened their institutions, including the army. It has therefore often been easier to organize successful coups there than elsewhere.

Secondly, given the monopolization of state power by elderly presidents, who cling on by dint of constitutional manipulation and electoral fraud, military coups have in fact been the only means of achieving generational transitions in contexts where young people are the bulk of the population.

16 https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country_id=eritrea

Finally, as France has never allowed its former colonies to freely choose their presidents, most civilian leaders have been its loyal allies. This has resulted in the fact that the few heads of state who resolutely opposed French neo-colonialism were pan-Africanist officers, such as Marien Ngouabi in the Congo Republic and Thomas Sankara in Burkina Faso (Pigeaud & Sylla 2024, 328–331). The exception to this long and tragic record is the electoral victory of Bassirou Diomaye Faye at the end of March 2024 in Senegal. Faye, a former tax inspector, became the first civilian candidate openly critical of French domination who managed to win a free and fair presidential election in the historical franc zone since 1960 (Sylla 2024).

Two implications are drawn from this alternative interpretation of the evidence. Firstly, in order to turn the page on military coups, there is the urgent need to put an end to the militarization of the continent by foreign powers and to the neo-colonial relations between France and its former colonies, the CFA franc being the most enduring symbol of this control (see section 3.1). Secondly, to the extent that military coups as well as civil ones are also broader manifestations of the impasse reached by choiceless democracies, it is certainly high time to put to rest the thesis of the "end of history" (Fukuyama 1989), the view that liberal democracy is the best (or the least bad) form of government that humankind can envisage. As long as this view prevails, African countries and their populations will struggle to escape their current deadlock while civil society organizations, despite their best will, will face a Sisyphean rock. More than ever, political, economic, and cultural imagination is needed to deliver on both democracy and economic justice.

2.4. Rediscovering and Taking Inspiration from Africa's Rich Political History

Because Africa lost the historical initiative—it is no longer the major driver of its own history—it is often portrayed in unflattering terms. Africa is said to be struggling to rid itself of oppressive "traditions" that justify various hierarchies, authoritarianism, lack of accountability and so on. Yet, on closer inspection, these traditions themselves have often been a legacy of colonialism.

Similarly, the image of a continent "learning" democracy belongs to clichés and propaganda and has no role in serious investigation and analysis. "Good" in politics has no single name. It is only by an accident of history and due to hegemonic considerations that the word democracy has come to universally symbolize the ultimate good in politics. It is clear, however, that each community, in its own language, has its own way of expressing what it considers to be politically valuable.

Africa's multi-millennial history is certainly not rosy, but it does have its virtues, its strengths and specificities that could undoubtedly provide the inspiration the continent needs to reinvent itself in the 21st century. From the Manden Charter in the 13th century to the Torodo revolution in 1776 (Sy 2021), respect for the rights of each individual, in a balanced relationship with the community and the natural environment, the demand for justice and fairness, and the accountability of leaders are principles that can be found in many pre-colonial African societies.[17] Some authors such as Lenkabula (2008) emphasize that the Ubuntu philosophy lays the foundations for societies committed to economic and ecological justice. In everyday life, relationships between African peoples in certain communities were organized according to the principle of the "social contract," which European thinkers from Thomas Hobbes onwards could only imagine, as anthropologist David Graeber (2007, 13) revealed, "oddly enough, at the moment when Hobbes was writing his famous theory of the social contract (1651), he seems to have been entirely unaware that, in Africa, social contracts not so different from the sort he imagined were still being made, on a regular basis."

The continent had been home to theocracies, monarchies, and oligarchic republics, as well as stateless societies that articulated democratic principles. In Nigeria, among the Tiv, people who wished to have more power and govern others, were marginalized by the accusation that they were witches, soul eaters (Graeber 2004). Among the Igbo, also in Nigeria, the management of community affairs was based on a tradition of popular deliberation that valued the political participation of women (Segun & Oni 2013). In most societies, even those with monarchical governments, leadership was accountable to the people through mechanisms of power sharing and collective deliberation. In his book *Precolonial Black Africa*, which traces the economic, political, and cultural organization of African social formations, the Senegalese scholar Cheikh Anta Diop contrasted the constitution of the Mossi, an ethnic group in Burkina Faso, with European monarchies in the Middle Ages. In order to appreciate the originality of the Mossi constitution, according to him,

> we would have to imagine, at midpoint of the Middle Ages (1352-53) ... not just some provincial lord, but the King of France or England, giving a share of his power, with voice in decisions, to the rural serfs, bound to the soil, the free peasants, the town guildsmen, and the merchants. And beyond all that, imagine the existence of a tradition according to which, the king, within the framework, of an already constitutional monarchy, cannot reign, cannot have moral and political authority, in the eyes of the people, unless he is invested by

17 https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/manden-charter-proclaimed-in-kurukan-fuga-00290

> a bourgeois who is also chosen from among one or few traditionally determined families. Neither the bourgeoisie nor the peasantry of the West would then had have had the revolutionary virulence that once imbued them, and the course of Western European history would probably have been different (Diop 1987a, 45).

In another classic work, Diop argued that a true pan-Africanist project must restore to women the political decision-making powers they lost with European colonialism. He noted that the predominance of matriarchy had given women a privileged political status observable in some societies through a gendered bicameralism:

> Thanks to the matriarchal system, our ancestors prior to any foreign influence had given woman a choice place. They saw her not as a sex object but as mother. This has been true from the Egypt of the Pharaohs until our time. Women participated in running public affairs within the framework of a feminine assembly, sitting separately but having the same prerogatives as the male assembly. These facts remained unchanged until the colonial conquest, especially in such non-Islamized states as the Yoruban and Dahomean. Behanzin's military resistance to the French Army under Colonel Dodds is said to have resulted from a decision of the women assembly of the kingdom, meeting at night after the men had met during the day and reversing them by ordering mobilization and war—after which, the men ratified the decision (Diop 1987b, 33).

For many African researchers who have studied the political structures of pre-colonial Africa, the authoritarianism and lack of accountability of post-independence leadership are due to the legacies of colonial rule, the import of foreign institutional constructs with no sensitivity to cultural practices and the weakening of pre-colonial intermediate and deliberative bodies (Segun & Oni 2013). In this respect, liberal democracy itself is part of the problem. The graft would not have taken on culturally. Hence the need for an African approach to democracy as government of the people by the people themselves that makes sense culturally, that is strengthened by the plurality of ethnic groups and other social identities observable on the continent, and that responds to the ideals of peace, transparency, accountability and justice.

Authors such as the Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu advocated a consensus-based democracy, where the different political sensibilities are obliged to sit down at the table to find a good compromise, in place of the multiparty model based on fierce electoral competition, which condemns the defeated to languish in opposition with no real decision-making power. "We need to re-learn the ways of consensus, both conceptually and existentially," (Wiredu 2007, 170) recommended. While Ibanga (2024) agrees that democracy should not be imposed from abroad on Africans but has to reflect African cultural practices, he doubts that "consensus" politics could work in multiethnic societies. He instead proposes what he calls "rotational democracy."

In summary, there is the need to revisit Africa's rich political history in order to (re)build African-centered theoretical frameworks and knowledge systems in a multidisciplinary spirit away from the Eurocentric constructs.

2.5. Three Concepts of Democracy

The preceding discussions allow us to construct three different concepts of democracy and, therefore, ways of looking at the democracy and economic justice nexus.

The first one is what, following Mészáros (2022), I would call "substantive democracy." It is premised on political equality and economic fairness. Political equality is probably the most fundamental democratic principle (*isonomia*) and goes hand in hand with the right to express oneself and be heard (*isegoria*) in sovereign deliberative bodies. It refers to the direct and meaningful political participation of the working classes, ordinary citizens, and so on. Political participation in substantive democracy implies that ordinary people enjoy institutionalized powers of legislation and control. This is political participation as sovereign decision-making in contrast to political participation as consultation and influence, and political participation as bargaining and protestation.

1 **Democracy = political equality × economic justice**

The second one corresponds to "liberal democracy," or representative government, or representative democracy. It is actually a liberal oligarchy premised on "negative freedom," (declining) socioeconomic performance and imperialist domination.

2 **Western liberal democracy = negative freedom × (declining) socioeconomic performance × imperialist domination**

The concept of "negative freedom" comes from the philosopher Isaiah Berlin (1958) who contrasted it with "positive freedom." Liberal democracies favor negative freedom, i.e., freedom conceived as the absence of constraint, as non-interference (freedom of conscience, freedom to demonstrate, etc.), rather than freedom understood substantially as the ability to participate in the affairs of the city (Skinner 1998).

In liberal democracies, apart from elections and referendums, ordinary people have virtually no means of participating directly in institutional politics.[18] This means that political decisions are often taken by members of the property-owning classes, not by ordinary people. Political participation here means people and intermediary bodies (such as associations, civil society organizations, trade unions, etc.) are eventually consulted and allowed to exercise some influence over the management of public affairs. They can also protest with the expectation that they will not suffer from censorship, suppression, or violent retaliation.

This negative freedom concerns not only individuals, but also the expansion of capital. Negative freedom in the case of capital is freedom from democratic control or restriction.

Finally, the high level of material well-being enjoyed by the majority of the population in the West (the socioeconomic performance), although declining over the last 40 years, has depended to no small extent on the domination and exploitation of other parts of the world and their ecological systems (Hickel, Hanbury Lemos & Barbour 2024; Hickel et al. 2021), to the degree of resistance of the labor movement and the “threat” of communism.

The third concept of democracy is the one that the West conceives of for the non-Western world, including Africa.

3 Democracy in Africa = negative freedom × acceptance of the global imperialist order

In the case of Africa, democracy, as the West generally speaks of and promotes it, essentially boils down to negative freedom and submission to the global imperialist order. Negative freedom is subsumed by realities such as reduced repression and censorship, peaceful transfers of power, etc. Submission to the global imperialist order is manifested in the fact that African countries occupy a place in the international division of labor that maintains them in poverty. Africa is supposed to serve as: (i) a source of cheap raw materials, (ii) an outlet for foreign products and expertise, and (iii) lucrative investment opportunities for international capital. In the 21st century, African countries are being given the roles of subcontractors to Western powers in their fights against: (iv) “terrorism”, and (v) the circulation

18 James Madison, fourth US president and one of the architects of the US Federal Constitution remarked in Federalist 63 that “the true distinction” between ancient democracies and the American republic “lies in the total exclusion of the people, in their collective capacity, from any share in the latter [government]” (see https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed63.asp).

of the victims of contemporary globalization ("migrants"). Insofar as African states "accept" this division of labor, whether they are considered democratic or not, they make it impossible for themselves to positively and significantly transform the living conditions of their populations.

In this context, democracy refers to elections, peaceful transfers of power, the existence of a free press, and so on. It is minimally equated with the retreat of open violence, repression, censorship, etc., with limited consideration for the question of people's material well-being. The degree of democracy of societies is assessed according to the practices of governments, and not according to the extra-institutional practices of ordinary citizens and social movements. For example, Mali was considered by Western countries to be one of the most mature democracies in Africa between 1991, the supposed start of its "democratic transition," and 2012,[19] despite the fact that voter turnout at elections never reached the 50% mark during this period.[20] In contrast, countries that contest Western imperialism are often portrayed as non-democracies.

This study argues that substantive democracy is the path that the African continent should take. Democracy, as a regime based on political equality and the political participation as decision-making, is the only possible foundation of an economy able to deliver shared, equitable, and sustainable prosperity. As Nigerian political economist Claude Ake observed:

> Even at its best, liberal democracy is inimical to the idea of the people having effective decision-making power. The essence of liberal democracy is precisely the abolition of popular power and the replacement of popular sovereignty with the rule of law (Ake 1996, 129).

Yet,

> if people are the end of development, then their well-being is the supreme law of development. But the well-being of the people will only be the supreme law of development if they have some decision making power. It is possible of course that someone can exercise public decision making power to the benefit of others. But the only way to ensure that social transformation is not dissociated from the well-being of the people is to institute democracy (*ibid*., 127).

19 The Democracy Index published by the Economist Intelligent Unit (2011) ranked Mali as the fifth best democracy in Africa after Mauritius, Cape Verde, South Africa, and Botswana.

20 https://africanelections.tripod.com/

PART III: EXPLORING THE NEXUS BETWEEN DEMOCRACY AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Part III examines the nexus between democracy, as a form of government based on "popular will" and participation, and economic justice, as the basic outcome of an economic system that works for all by reducing inequalities and empowering the marginalized and the vulnerable. The focus is put here on six critical aspects, listed below:

- National control over policy instruments and decisions: Countries under neocolonial domination cannot be genuinely democratic even if they claim so and cannot either deliver any substantial progress for their people, as their decisions and policies are shaped from outside (see section 3.1).
- Land distribution: The most economically unequal countries in Africa happen to be those where land distribution is also the most unequal (see section 3.2).
- The influence of money on the electoral process: Wherever electoral processes are money driven, in the sense that the largest budget campaigns stand a chance to win, democracy exists only by name at best while economic justice is compromised by the class interests of the elected representatives and their sponsors (see section 3.3).
- The existence of institutionalized spaces of popular participation as decision-making: When ordinary people, through the associations they create or that speak on their behalf, are not allowed spaces where they can deliberate in a sovereign manner, there is no genuine accountability from the rulers. When the latter take major policy decisions that go against public purpose, people are either obliged to accept it or to contest it by often enduring state repression (see section 3.4).
- National control over economic resources: As most African countries are exporters of commodities, a technical and fiscal control over their extractive sectors is a *sine qua non* if they want to avoid debt crises and imposed austerity policies that generally weaken their economies and contribute to increased foreign control over them (see section 3.5).

- Prevalence of conservative economic theories: When conservative economic theories dominate research, teaching and policies, democracies become choiceless and serve mostly the agenda of the rich and powerful (*see section 3.6*).

3.1. National Control Over Policy Instruments and Decisions

Colonialism, as it has been experienced in most of the territories we now call "developing countries," has certainly been the most brutal example of the denial of democracy and economic justice. In a colonial regime, the voice of the dominated populations and their well-being count for nothing. Dehumanized, colonial subjects are reduced to the rank of beasts of labor in the service of capitalist accumulation. In his famous *Discourse on Colonialism*, Martinique poet and politician Aimé Césaire posited "colonization = thingification."

The same denial of democracy and economic justice is at work in a neo-colonial setting. As Kwame Nkrumah once wrote, "The essence of neo-colonialism is that the state which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside" (Nkrumah 1966, ix).

To understand why a country under neo-colonial domination is incapable of ensuring a minimum of democracy and a shared prosperity for its people, the relations between France and its former colonies in West and Central Africa are an edifying case. As neo-colonialism can manifest itself in many ways, the focus here will be on the monetary aspect, and in particular the question of the CFA franc (Pigeaud & Sylla 2021).

At its inception, the CFA franc stood for "*franc des colonies françaises d'Afrique*." It was created by the French provisional government on December 26, 1945. With independence, each African state adopted a national currency and broke from the colonial currency zones (i.e., sterling area, escudo zone, peso zone, Belgian monetary zone), each becoming gradually obsolete. Of them all, only the franc zone continues to survive. After a long struggle to keep its ex-colonies south of the Sahara within its republic, France finally opted for conditional independence. With the exception of Guinea and Togo, France succeeded everywhere in installing its trusted men (Bancel 2002; Pigeaud & Sylla 2024). For many of them, it had them sign "cooperation agreements" in sovereign areas such as foreign affairs, foreign trade, the sale of raw materials, military bases, currency and so on. By signing these agreements, Paris recognized the independence of its former colonies and at the same time obtained confirmation of the continuity of its sovereignty in these areas. Thus, remaining in the franc zone was one of the conditions for national independence.

Today, the CFA franc is the common acronym for two currencies. The first is the "African financial community" franc issued by the Banque Centrale des États de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (BCEAO) on behalf of the eight member states of the West African Monetary Union (WAMU): Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Togo, and Guinea-Bissau, a former Portuguese colony which joined the group in 1997. The second is the Central African "financial cooperation" franc issued by the Banque des États d'Afrique Centrale (BEAC) on behalf of the six states of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC): Cameroon, Chad, Republic of Congo, Gabon, Central African Republic, and Equatorial Guinea, a former Spanish colony which acquired membership in 1985.

Since its origins, the CFA franc has been governed by three principles:

- Fixed parity with the French currency (the franc and, since 1999, the euro)
- Free transfer of capital and income within CEMAC and WAMU, and between each of these two blocs and France
- Convertibility guarantee: the French Treasury's (rarely effective) promise to lend euros (francs until 1999) to the BCEAO and BEAC if they ever run out of foreign currency

This last principle implies two "counterparts":

- Centralization of foreign exchange reserves: the obligation for BCEAO and BEAC to each deposit a proportion of their foreign exchange reserves (their international means of payment, dollars, euros, yen, yuan, etc.) with the French Treasury
- Representation of the French Treasury on BCEAO's and BEAC's technical bodies, with an implicit veto power. In other words, the CFA franc's monetary and exchange rate policy operates under the control of the French Treasury

France originally created the CFA franc in order to make its African colonies contribute to rebuilding its shattered economy. From independence to the present day, it used this monetary system as an instrument to protect its economic interests in its backyard against international competition. As a secret 1963 report by U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk to President John F. Kennedy remarked, "This legacy from prior French colonial relationship implies a degree of external control over a country's financial and economic policies that would be unacceptable under other circumstances" (Rusk 1963, 1).

Beyond this economic function, the CFA franc can be used as a disciplinary mechanism by France against dissident leaders. This was the case in Côte d'Ivoire (in 2011), Mali (between January and July 2022), and Niger (July 2023 until at least end of February 2024). In each case, with the support of WAMU member states, Paris asked the BCEAO to deny the dissident government access to its own accounts, foreign exchange reserves and the regional financial market. These sanctions are illegal and can be only implemented against governments that belong to a monetary union under foreign control.

Since the mid-2010s, more and more pan-Africanist movements and intellectuals have mobilized to denounce the CFA franc, citing aspects such as:

- The name CFA franc, which still evokes its original colonial imprint
- The fact that banknotes and coins are manufactured by the Banque de France (secretly, without competitive bidding, one might add)
- The fact that France has representatives on the BCEAO and BEAC
- The fact that the French Treasury controls the foreign exchange reserves of these two central banks[21]

Among economists, the debate pits those who insist on the "monetary stability"—low inflation and fixed parity with the euro—that the CFA franc apparently brings, against those who argue that this monetary system is an infringement on the sovereignty of states and a handicap to development.

Whatever the case, it is clear that the CFA franc has failed to achieve any of the goals that monetary unions are supposed to facilitate. Countries using the CFA franc are: (i) poorly integrated commercially, (ii) have a low level of financial development, and (iii) are unattractive to foreign direct investment.

Over the long term, most of them have either stagnated or declined economically. Côte d'Ivoire is the largest franc zone country in terms of economic size. It is the only one of the eight WAMU countries not classified as a Least Developed Country (LDC). In 2022, its real GDP per capita was 19.5 percent lower than its best level in 1978. Niger recorded its highest level of real GDP per capita in 1965, which is still 37 percent higher than its 2022 level. Guinea-Bissau's real GDP per capita in 2022 was 20 percent below

21 On December 2019, French President Emmanuel Macron and his Ivorian counterpart, Alassane Ouattara, announced a reform of the CFA franc in West Africa without even consulting the BCEAO, which was taken by surprise. This reform remained 'cosmetic' to the extent that it did not alter the functioning of the currency system and did not remove the French tutelage over it (Pigeaud and Sylla 2021b; Sylla 2023, 23).

its 1997 peak, the year it joined the franc zone. The same trends can be observed in Central Africa, in Cameroon, Gabon, and Congo (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: **Evolution of Real GDP Per Capita (in Constant U.S. $ 2015) in the Current Franc Zone**

	Best level of real GDP per capita (in constant 2015 $) (A)	Year when the best level of real GDP per capita was achieved	Real GDP per capita in 2022 (in constant 2015 $) (B)	Gap (B-A)/A (%)
Equatorial Guinea	14,223	2008	5,945	-58.2
Gabon	14,801	1976	6,637	-55.2
Congo. Rep.	2,891	1984	1,704	-41.0
Central African Republic	611	1978	365	-40.3
Niger	867	1965	545	-37.1
Chad	778	2014	590	-24.1
Cameroon	1,833	1986	1,442	-21.4
Guinea-Bissau	779	1997	622	-20.2
Cote d'Ivoire	3,017	1978	2,430	-19.5
Mali	779	2019	749	-3.9
Comoros	1,383	2018	1,363	-1.5
Burkina Faso	738	2021	733	-0.8
Togo	893	1980	888	-0.5
Benin	1,256	2022	1,256	0.0
Senegal	1,465	2022	1,465	0.0

Source: World Bank Development indicators, accessed on 16 June 2024, https://databank.worldbank.org/.

Given these facts, it is hardly surprising that countries using the CFA franc are among the world's worst performers in terms of the Human Development Index developed by the UNDP. In 2022, 11 CFA franc countries belonged to the "low human development" category while the three remaining—Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon—were ranked among "medium human development."

Clearly, the CFA franc is not the only factor responsible for the underdevelopment of the countries that use it. But, given the loss of political and policy sovereignty it implies, it is a major obstacle to the right of African peoples to self-determination. The CFA franc could never serve any serious developmentalist agenda.

There are several reasons for the longevity of the CFA franc. Firstly, France has nothing to lose financially or economically by keeping the CFA franc even if, symbolically, its image is increasingly tarnished on the continent. Secondly, the middle and upper classes in franc zone countries benefit from an overvalued currency—an artificial international purchasing power that allows them access to cheap imports, including luxury items. Thirdly, the overwhelming majority of the population, economists first and foremost, have an erroneous understanding of money and its importance. Finally, and most fundamentally, the majority of incumbent leaders have no incentive to leave the CFA franc, as such a move would be perceived by Paris as a lack of loyalty, and would certainly jeopardize their hold on power. Similarly, as most of these leaders have poor internal legitimacy, they remain dependent on Paris and external allies to ensure their longevity in power.

In a nutshell, the former French colonies using the CFA franc show how a deficit of political independence due to external domination constrains policy decisions and instruments, and ultimately works to prevent both democracy and economic justice.

3.2. Land Distribution

Countries such as South Africa and Namibia are considered among the most established liberal democratic regimes on the continent (Mo Ibrahim Foundation 2023). They are also among the most economically unequal countries in the world. According to the World Inequality Database, in 2022, the richest 10 percent in South Africa controlled 65.4 percent of the country's pre-tax income and 85.6 percent of national wealth. By contrast, the poorest 50 percent accounted for just 13.3 percent of pre-tax income and "hold" negative wealth. In Namibia, the richest 10 percent received 64.2 percent of the country's pre-tax income and national wealth. The respective shares of the poorest 50 percent were 6.6 percent and -1.1 percent. Close behind them is Botswana, another highly unequal liberal democracy (see Table 3.2). The level of economic inequality in all these countries exceeds those observed in Angola and Equatorial Guinea, hydrocarbon-rich countries considered by some authors to be "kleptocracies" (Barrington et al. 2022).

Table 3.2: **Income and Wealth Inequality in Selected African Countries in 2022 (%)**

	Pre-tax Income			Wealth		
	Bottom 50%	Top 1%	Top 10%	Bottom 50%	Top 1%	Top 10%
Botswana	8.1	22.7	59.3	-0.4	45.6	78.5
Eswatini	7.9	19.3	59.9	-0.4	53.3	81.7
Lesotho	11.3	14.5	49.5	3.9	30.3	63.7
Namibia	6.6	21.6	64.2	-1.1	47.4	80.4
South Africa	13.3	10.1	65.4	-2.5	54.9	85.6
Angola	9	26	58	-0.1	44.7	77.6
Equatorial Guinea	11.6	17.4	51.4	3	34.4	67.5

Source: World Inequality Database, https://wid.world/

In fact, the Southern Africa Custom Union, the trading bloc that brings together these three countries plus Lesotho and Eswatini, is the most unequal zone on the globe. More worryingly, little progress has been made recently in tackling economic inequalities (Sulla, Zikhali & Facundo 2022). Inequalities inherited from colonialism and apartheid in terms of access to and ownership of land are the main reason for this state of affairs. Like the monetary and financial question in French-speaking African countries, the land question is another domain where decolonization has not yet been implemented (Chitonge 2019).

Beyond its cultural and communal uses, land has a special economic status and importance. It is the basis of social reproduction and the survival of rural populations. It is also a privileged mechanism for wealth accumulation, as a source of rents and as an asset that can be accepted as collateral by financial institutions. Such properties explain why inequalities in land distribution can amplify other forms of economic inequality and persist over time (Frankema 2010; Galli & Rönnbäck 2021).

A 2017 land audit in South Africa revealed that 97 percent of the land was owned by 7 percent of landowners. In terms of legal status, companies and trusts owned 51 percent of land versus 29 percent for individuals and 4 percent for rural farms. White South Africans owned 72 percent of the total farms and agricultural holdings owned by individual owners.[22] In Namibia, the same configuration prevails. In 2018, Black people owned 16 percent of the land, compared with 70 percent for the population of European origin (Sulla, Zikhali & Facundo 2022, 61).

22 https://www.gov.za/issues/land-reform ; for a critique, see IRR (2018)

In Africa, inequalities in access to land are not just racial. Women tend to be excluded by discriminatory land tenure systems. In Kenya, for example, although women make up the overwhelming majority of the rural workforce, only 1 percent of them hold a registered land title in their own name, while 5–6 percent hold a registered land title in more than one name (KLA 2021).

While the question of land inequality undoubtedly arises in specific terms in former settler colonies, it is increasingly manifested in land grabbing practices by local elites and foreign companies in countries where it was initially less prevalent (Moyo, Tsikata & Diop 2015; Moyo, Jha & and Yeros 2019). As European countries race for renewable energies, such as green hydrogen, fears rise of "green colonialism," that is the reproduction of the colonial patterns of land dispossession, and eviction of populations under noble "green" motives (Hamouchene & Sandwell 2023; Gabor & Sylla 2023).

Without progressive income and wealth taxation as well as large-scale redistribution of land to Black rural populations, Southern Africa's glaring economic inequalities are likely to persist. Therefore, we ask: Is far-reaching agrarian reform possible in a liberal-democratic regime? According to political scientist Michel Albertus, land redistributions are not isolated events. They have been observed in over a third of countries since the end of the 19th century. The major and equally troubling result is that in 80 percent of cases, the countries concerned were dictatorships. On the rare occasions when liberal-democratic countries have tried to implement land redistribution, the scale has been small, sometimes dramatically so.

Albertus explains this situation by arguing that a liberal-democratic regime is built on checks and balances that powerful landowners can instrumentalize to maintain the status quo: "[I]nstitutional constraints in most of the world's new democracies have given elites more than just a foothold in government to slow or water-down land redistribution; they have given them a platform on which to strangle it" (Albertus 2015, 306). Moreover, as he observes, when the country is a liberal democracy dependent on foreign aid, land reform is likely to be timid as negotiations will have to be conducted with the World Bank and bilateral partners.

This conclusion, which is depressing to say the least, confirms once again the simplicity of the thesis that liberal democracy remains the best form of government and always leads to better results than other rival political formations. It also underlines another point made above: It is important to renew and enrich our concept of democracy if we wish to escape the alternative between so-called authoritarian and potentially developmentalist regimes on the one hand, and liberal democracies that are mediocre in terms of socioeconomic performance on the other.

3.3. The Influence of Money in the Electoral Process

A long-standing criticism of the representative system is that representatives, usually chosen in open and competitive elections, are not sociologically representative of the mass of the population. As such, representatives may have agendas of their own that are not necessarily aligned with the general interest. In such a case, instead of a democracy, we would actually be dealing with an oligarchic regime from which it is problematic to expect any genuine commitment to a popular agenda.

There is some grain of truth in this criticism. Surveys carried out by the Cost of Politics, a project supported by the Netherlands Institute of Multiparty Democracy, show that parliamentary elections in most African countries tend to favor candidates who can mobilize large campaign budgets. They also show a trend towards inflation in campaign budgets.[23]

These observations are not specific to the African continent. In northern countries, notably the United States, it has been shown that the success of an electoral campaign depends on the ability to mobilize substantial funding from the economic and financial interests in place (Ferguson 1995; Schnurr 2022). In contexts where income and wealth inequalities are substantial, the most powerful will want to maintain their hold on society by financially supporting the candidates they prefer. Elections then tend to function like auctions, with the lowest bidders quickly excluded.

For most candidates, participation in parliamentary elections is an investment driven by the prospective economic gains, as the salary and benefits associated with the status of member of parliament are usually very high compared to average wages. An equally important motivation is to gain access to a position of political influence. Because of the decisive role that money plays in elections, there is no equality of opportunity between candidates for parliamentary office. Poorer candidates, or those without significant financial support, often have little chance of being elected. This is particularly true of younger candidates and women. In Liberia, for example, the average annual income per adult is around $1,600. In the 2023 general elections, according to data published by Cost of Politics, winning candidates spent an average of $243,000, compared with $118,000 for those who lost. One unsuccessful candidate declared in an interview, "[T]he only thing that stopped me from winning is money, that is why in 2029 if I don't have up to U.S.$50,000 to campaign, I will not contest" (Nyei, Karley & Massallay 2024).

23 See: https://www.costofpolitics.net/

Another important finding is that the campaign budgets mobilized by candidates in parliamentary elections are often higher than the annual parliamentary salary (including benefits). In Nigeria, in 2016, a candidate spent an average of $526,000, while an MP's annual salary was $449,000. In a country where the average income per adult at the time was around $4,290, it's clear that very few citizens can hope to mobilize such sums. In Mali, in 2019, the average campaign budget was around $67,000, while the annual salary of a member of parliament was no more than $26,400. The average income per adult was around $1,700 (see Table 3.3).

Table 3.3: **Cost of Politics in Selected West African Countries**

Country (study year)	Average cost to seek legislature (in $) (A)	Annual salary of an MP (in $) (B)	GDP per adult for the year of the study (current $) (C)	A/C	B/C
Nigeria (2016)	526,000	449,000	4,290	123	105
Liberia (successful candidates) (2023)	243,125	n.a.	1,599	152	
Liberia (unsuccessful candidates) (2023)	118,000	n.a.	1,599	74	
Ghana (2020)	68,125	40,775	4,353	16	9
Mali (2019)	66,956	26,397	1,680	40	16
Niger (2019)	46,500	33,390	1,100	42	30
Senegal (2017)	36,700	28,597	2,925	13	10
Sierra Leone (2017–2024)*	20,000	13,100	1,013	20	13
Burkina Faso (2019)	12,700	19,800	1,530	8	13

Source: Cost of Politics, https://www.costofpolitics.net; data on GDP per capita comes from the World Bank development indicators, databank.worldbank.org, accessed 24 July 2024. GDP per adult was obtained by multiplying GDP per capita by a factor of two (i.e. assuming that the adult population is 50% the total population).

*The US$20,000 is a lower estimate while the annual salary of an MP does not include benefits.

Finally, it's worth noting that election campaigns tend to foster corruption through numerous channels. Many candidates are financed by companies and wealthy businesspeople. Once elected, they return the favor to their sponsors via "policy concessions, direct budget support, 'favorable' procurement auctions (bid-rigging), and various forms of state capture," as demonstrated in a country like Benin (Ch, Hounkpe & Wantchekon 2019, 1). Alongside buying voters' consciences (see Amaechi & Stockemer 2022, in the case of Nigeria), corruption practices include bargaining to secure nominations within given political parties or coalitions. Electoral campaigns are also a privileged ground for laundered money.[24]

All of these considerations certainly help explain why "fewer than half of Africans think their countries' elections ensure that Members of Parliament (MPs) represent the views of voters (42 percent) or enable voters to remove leaders who fail to do what the people want (45 percent)" (Afrobaromater 2024, 19).

In the modern world, elections are considered the preferred means of devolving sovereign power. They are thus linked to political legitimacy. This explains why even in regimes where competition between political parties is non-existent or severely limited, leaders still adhere to the electoral ritual. For most African countries, it is apparent that elections enshrine the political and economic domination of the elite over the rest of society and the prioritization of private interests over public purpose and the demands of the most vulnerable. Owing to the influence of money and clientelist networks, elected officials may end up being more loyal and accountable to their sponsors and political parties than to ordinary citizens. Due to their high costs, elections mobilize considerable financial resources that could have been invested in priority sectors (see Box 3.1).

It is therefore urgent to reflect on the need for African countries to find peaceful and consensual ways of devolving sovereign power that (i) promote the equality of candidates by reducing the power of money and corruption, (ii) encourage popular participation, and (iii) minimize financial costs. It is unlikely that those who benefit from the electoral system, and who find themselves in the position of lawmakers, will be able to take effective action against such defects. To do so would be to undermine their own power base. The initiative will undoubtedly have to come from the governed and civil society organizations.

24 Transparency International (2019), "in whose interest, political integrity and corruption in Africa", 11 July, https://www.transparency.org/en/news/political-corruption-and-political-integrity-in-africa

BOX 3.1: DRC'S DECEMBER 2023 ELECTIONS

The Democratic Republic of Congo held presidential, legislative, and local elections in December 2023. The outcome was a foregone conclusion. The incumbent president, Félix Tshisekedi, emerged victorious. Due to the lack of infrastructure and security problems, not all candidates could afford flying their campaign teams across this vast country. The budget for organizing this election was estimated at $1.2 billion, more than the budget for health or education,[25] and approximately 7.5 percent of the overall 2023 budget.[26] The Independent National Electoral Commission came under fire for alleged corruption[27] and lack of financial transparency.[28] Perhaps most dismayingly, many polling stations were not electrified. As a result, votes were counted using torches. During the same period, floods had claimed over 300 lives, destroyed almost 98,000 homes and affected 2.1 million people.[29]

3.4. The Existence of Institutionalized Spaces of Popular Participation as Decision-making

As we have just seen, the fact that elections often lead to parliamentary representation dominated by the wealthiest and/or those who have benefited from the support of wealthy sponsors is a major political problem. But this is only one aspect of a more general problem: there is generally no way of opposing successfully policy decisions taken by the rulers (government and parliament) that are harmful to their countries or to the people, except for massive protests which are often heavily suppressed.

In most African countries, aside from the usual subordination of the legislative sphere to the executive, parliamentarians often fail to meet the following three criteria: (i) technical competence in the subjects on which they are to deliberate, especially economic ones; (ii) independence from partisan or illegitimate interests; (iii) ability to deliberate in a timely fashion/when required by circumstances. Moreover, when ordinary people disagree with government decisions or policies, they can generally expect no help from the legislative sphere. All of this shows that parliaments, despite the best will of some of their members, cannot be trusted to safeguard the public interest over the long run. Here are two examples.

25 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-67833216

26 https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/congo-increases-budget-46-2023-boosted-by-taxes-2022-12-16/

27 https://www.dw.com/fr/rdc-politique-ceni-elections-budget/a-68001319

28 https://www.crefdl-asbl.org/index.php/documents-crefdl/rapport-d-etudes

29 https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/republique-democratique-du-congo-flash-update-1-de- graves-inondations-affectent-18-provinces-24-janvier-2024

The Economic Partnership Agreements[30]

The transition from the General Agreements on Tariffs and Trade to the World Trade Organization (WTO) took place with the Marrakesh Agreements in 1994.[31] Most African parliaments ratified these agreements without any real debate, and without fully understanding what was at stake and the likely consequences. The WTO asked European countries to put an end to non-reciprocal trade preferences, which benefited some developing countries located in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific but discriminated against Latin American countries. In this vein, the EU drafted Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), agreements aimed at external trade liberalization, and pushed African countries to sign them individually rather than as regional blocs, regardless of their development status, even though the WTO itself exempted countries classified as LDCs.

In the case of West African countries, existing studies, including those commissioned by the European Commission itself, showed that these agreements would have harmful economic consequences: Subsidized European agricultural products risked destroying African agriculture, wiping out industrialization efforts, worsening their balance-of-payments deficits, and sabotaging the dynamics of regional economic integration. Despite the empirical evidence available, LDCs such as Senegal have agreed to sign the EPAs and have encouraged the rest of the region to do likewise.

Throughout this process, African parliaments have been absent or, at best, unconcerned, despite the international mobilization of highly reputable organizations such as the South Center and the Southern and Eastern Africa Trade Information and Negotiations Institute (SEATINI). West Africa's "salvation" came from Nigeria, the biggest "pie" targeted by the EU, which was not interested in becoming a signatory to EPAs. But the signing of interim EPAs by Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire created a stumbling block to the implementation of the regional common external tariff.

Eurobond Issuances and Debt Management

In 2018, Senegal issued two Eurobonds with the official aim of financing development projects, one worth €1 billion offering a yield of 4.75 percent for a 10-year term and the other worth $1 billion at a rate of 6.75 percent for a 30-year maturity. The cumulative interest payments over 30 years for this second Eurobond amounts to more than $2 billion. In other words, the Senegalese government has borrowed a principal of $1 billion, payable in

30 This section draws on the work of Berthelot (2018) and the author's personal experience as an anti-EPA activist.

31 https://www.wto.org/english/docs_e/legal_e/04-wto_e.htm?ref=genevapolicyoutlook.ch

2048, but will have to service more than $2 billion in cumulated interest payments by then.

Like Senegal, Kenya issued two Eurobonds in 2018, one worth $1 billion at a rate of 7.25 percent for a term of 10 years and another worth $1 billion at a rate of 8.25 percent for 30 years. For the latter Eurobond, the Kenyan government will have to pay cumulated interests of just under $2.5 billion by 2048.

By 2048, it is clear in both cases that the governments and legislatures that agreed to issue these bonds will no longer be in place. Yet, in comparison to debt denominated in domestic currency, which is in principle under the control of fiscal and monetary authorities, debt in foreign currency poses more complex issues. Any debt in foreign currency is a bet on the future that the economy will be able to generate enough foreign earnings—through the sale of goods, services and assets—to service it.

The question, therefore, must be posed: Should important decisions like these that affect a country's future be left to a parliament and a president under the pretext that they were democratically elected? It could be argued that, in such matters, the voice of the people is essential. Through the organizations they form and by soliciting all relevant expertise, citizens should be able to judge the appropriateness of such debt issuances and the allocation of the resulting external financing.[32] The need to involve the people can also be justified by the fact that it is they who suffer most from austerity policies when foreign debt becomes unpayable or acts as a drain on government budgets. This is illustrated by the popular protests that erupted in Kenya from the middle of June 2024, spearheaded by young people, the so-called Gen Z.

Against a backdrop of the debt crisis, and following IMF recommendations, the Kenyan government introduced a Finance Bill providing for increased taxes, including on everyday consumer goods such as bread. These measures would have the effect of worsening purchasing power and living conditions of people who are already economically compromised. Youth, in particular, mobilized vigorously to demand the withdrawal of the Finance Bill. By July 16, 50 people had been killed, 59 persons were abducted or missing with 682 arbitrary arrests, according to the Kenyan National Commission on Human Rights.[33]

32 We might remember that Ghana is currently in debt crisis. Yet, in 2018, President Nana Akufo-Addo contemplated issuing a centenary US$50 billion Eurobond. Luckily for the country, this did not materialize. https://www.reuters.com/article/markets/ghana-considering-50-bln-century-bond-president-says-idUSL8N1VP1BJ/

33 https://www.knchr.org/Articles/ArtMID/2432/ArticleID/1201/Statement-on-Mukuru-Murders-and-Updates-on-the-Anti-Finance-Bill-Protests

Like Senegal, Kenya is reputed to be a democracy but neither country allows ordinary people (i) to become genuinely involved in budgeting and public finance management or (ii) to successfully oppose in a peaceful way major (economic) decisions they consider illegitimate or unwise.

3.5. National Control over National Resources/Natural Wealth

With the developments induced by the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, most African countries are experiencing a new cycle of debt crisis. Some countries,such as Zambia and Ghana, have already defaulted on their foreign currency debts. Others that have not yet defaulted are devoting a significant proportion of their budgets to debt servicing, often in excess of education or health spending.

Though there may be aggravating factors at the national level—such as mismanagement and corruption—the current debt crisis has structural causes: It is first and foremost a reflection of a dysfunctional international monetary and financial system.

African countries face a number of risks—their status as producers of raw materials with volatile prices, climatic risks, etc.—which are not adequately addressed by international financial institutions. At the same time, they are penalized by the lack of long-term, low-cost development financing. To circumvent these constraints, some of them have turned to the international financial markets to sell Eurobonds—bonds denominated in foreign currencies—which offer longer maturities and higher amounts, unfortunately at prohibitive costs (Olabisi & Stein 2015). Indeed, the credit risk of African governments is often exaggerated by credit rating agencies. Negative "perception premiums" result in high interest rates, and thus in high external debt servicing costs (Fofack 2021; UNDP 2023).

Similarly, there is no functional sovereign debt restructuring mechanism that includes all creditors and gives priority to preserving economic growth and employment. When they become insolvent, African governments find themselves before the Bretton Woods institutions, which impose punitive conditions—policies of austerity and denationalization of their economies—that only temporarily postpone the problem while eroding their political sovereignty. As has often been observed throughout the Global South, it is the most vulnerable groups, particularly women, who suffer from these policies, which also undermine the future of the younger generations.

Despite this unfavorable international context, some African countries have managed to avoid debt distress; examples include diamond exporter Botswana and hydrocarbon exporter Algeria (UNCTAD 2023). What they have in common and what sets them apart from other commodity-producing African countries is that they have succeeded in exercising technical and fiscal control over their extractive resources. By technical and fiscal control, it is meant a greater national ability to monitor the exploitation of—or even to exploit—these resources and, through adequate taxation, to appropriate a significant share of the income they generate.

Botswana and Algeria have been able to capture a significant portion of the foreign earnings respectively associated with their diamonds and gas exports, thus accumulating substantial dollar reserves. Because of their creditor position vis-à-vis the rest of the world, both countries did not need to issue much sovereign debt in foreign currency. In 2022, Botswana's external debt stock/Gross National Income (GNI) ratio stood at 22 percent, compared with 4 percent for Algeria. Another distinctive feature of these two countries is that they have avoided issuing debt to private creditors. Their external debt is owed to official creditors—bilateral partners and multilateral banks. Due to their relatively low stock of external debt and its creditor composition, their debt servicing is relatively low as a proportion of export revenues. This ratio represented 1.7 percent for the period 2000–2022 for Botswana and 0.6 percent for Algeria between 2007 and 2022.

In contrast, in the case of countries that have defaulted on their debt, a lack of technical and fiscal control over extractive resources is visible through high levels of profits and dividends repatriations and illicit financial flows, and this takes place amid a significant influx of external capital—Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and foreign currency debt—seen during the 2010s (Sylla 2024).

There are three lessons to be learned here. Firstly, most African countries could reduce their need to issue foreign currency debt if they had better control over their extractive resources. Take Zambia, for example. After a significant foreign debt cancellation in 2006, it defaulted on a $40 million coupon payment in November 2020. Yet, the IMF noted in one its recent country report that over the period 2018 to 2023 Zambia suffered outflows representing one-third of copper exports, approximately 20% of Zambian GDP (IMF 2023, 56). As this case makes clear, efforts to curb illicit financial flows and to achieve a fairer global tax system should be encouraged on top of domestic measures such as capital controls.

Secondly, African governments' external debt servicing will sooner or later prove unsustainable if their export revenues grow less rapidly than the stock of external capital (debt and FDI). Table 3.4 shows that countries in debt crisis such as Kenya, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Zambia all saw a quick deterioration of their external solvency indicators: The export performance and accumulated official foreign exchanges lagged behind the increase in the foreign currency liabilities. So it is not just a question of investing foreign debt money appropriately. To be sustainable, all other things being equal, external financing must be allocated to projects that will generate hard currency (dollars) that accrue to government accounts for a significant share (Sylla 2024).

Finally, while greater national control over economic resources is a critical requirement for economic self-determination, it might not necessarily translate into more equalitarian polities. While Botswana and Algeria have been able to avoid a debt crisis thanks to their international creditor position, they have not yet used their full economic potential to create shared prosperity. As a recent United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) report (2023, 1) on Botswana points out:

> The share of the population living in extreme poverty stands at 13.5 per cent and is over four times higher than predicted by Botswana's GDP per capita and compared to countries with similar income levels. The pace of poverty reduction has stagnated in recent years, with economic growth not translating into improvements in household wealth, thereby contributing to Botswana's status as one of the most unequal countries in the world....

For matters related to public spending, debt issuance, taxation, and extractive resources management, there is the need to institutionalize forms of popular control that will allow the participation in decision making of the people and (civil society) organizations they form. From a legal point of view, there is a strong case for civil society organizations and policymakers to review, for example, the existing bilateral investment treaties, tax conventions with transnational corporations, etc. African governments collectively should also consider withdrawing from the Investor–State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) mechanisms to the extent that this can undermine their regulatory frameworks, involve a lack of transparency and accountability, expose them to unforeseen liabilities and prevent them from adopting measures that would be more beneficial for their economy and populations. For example, taking a critical inspiration from South Africa's Protection of Investment Act in 2015, African governments should establish partnerships with foreign investors that are more balanced and respectful of their sovereignty (Mhlongo 2019).

Table 3.4: **External Solvency Indicators for Selected African Countries (%)**

	External debt stocks to exports ratio		External debt service to exports ratio		Official FX reserves to external debt stocks	
	2010	2020	2010	2020	2010	2020
Kenya	97	390	4	29	49	22
Ethiopia	157	393	4	26	31	10
Ghana	88	140	3	12	57	23
Zambia	53	311	2	22	49	5
Algeria	11	20	1	1	2,242	944
Botswana	32	32	1	4	436	309

Source: World Bank International Debt Statistics database.

3.6. Prevalence of Conservative Economic Theories

A context in which economic issues are either removed from democratic debate or treated primarily from the point of view of the rich and the powerful clearly cannot serve the cause of economic justice.

As historians of the hard sciences have shown, dominant paradigms (or research programs) do not necessarily owe their privileged status to their greater scientific character, but more often to extra-scientific factors such as propaganda and their alignment with the interests of the powerful (Kuhn 1962). Economics, as a social science, is no exception to this rule. During the last four decades in Africa as almost everywhere else in the world, the neoclassical approach reigned almost unchallenged in teaching, research, and the formulation of public policy. This is no surprise. Neoclassical economics, since its beginnings in the last quarter of the 19th century, was born as the science of the dominant, for the dominant. But it took new vigor with the neoliberal revolution that succeeded the postwar dirigiste period.

"Fakeconomics" is the name given to the "current mainstream of the economics profession" by John Weeks. According to him,

> fakeconomics, faithfully serves the rich and the powerful. Even those among the econfakers of good will and good intentions do so. Perhaps even more than self-interest, the theoretical method of fakeconomics dictates an antisocial worldview .... Fakeconomics, the current mainstream, carries a simple message: dog eat dog, and the 1% hound far outweighs the 99% mutt (Weeks 2013, 189–90).

Owing to this apologetic character, which somehow justifies the unrealism of the models used, the failure of the neoclassical approach to give a satisfactory account of economic realities, to predict economic and financial crises and to provide solutions to the problems that people and nations encounter is no mystery. Some currents of thought have denounced its flawed analysis of the institutions of a capitalist economy—the state, the market, money, etc., while others have criticized its distorted theorizing of hierarchies as well as its erasure or mutilation of the lived experiences of dominated groups—colonized peoples, women, racial minorities, the working classes, etc. Calls to make mainstream economics more relevant, or even to decolonize the discipline, have multiplied, but have not yet been enough to shake the edifice.

It is doubtful that an economic approach that is basically a caricature of reality in countries of the North can be of much use in countries on the periphery of the global capitalist system (Dasah 1994; Komlos 2022). Usually mischaracterized, erased or underrepresented in mainstream economics literature (Chelwa 2021), Africa, more than any other region of the world, needs an economics of liberation, i.e., a research program that helps to better understand the continent's political economy, in contrast to Western-centric views and myths, and to act effectively to free it from the legacies of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism, with a view to driving a transformation that benefits the people.

The economics of liberation tradition was alive and vigorous during the struggles for decolonization and in the early post-independence period. It was visible in the pan-Africanist movement, African variants of dependency theory, (neo)Marxist approaches, development economics, and sociology, reflections on African socialisms, feminist political economy and so on. Despite the difficulties living under single-party regimes, the universities themselves were intellectual cauldrons where real pluralism was observed. The "canonical" debates at the University of Dar-Es-Salaam are testament to that (Nabolsy 2024). But with the neoliberal revolution, African universities, and in particular their economics departments, have become mere shadows of their former selves.

By weakening African states through their structural adjustment programs, the Bretton Woods institutions have dealt a heavy blow to African education systems. In a move reminiscent of the conservative view that having too many university graduates is a source of political instability, the World Bank has long defended the idea that the economic returns to primary education are greater than those to university-level education. Consequently, African states had to devote their "scarce" resources to primary education rather than university studies. At the same time, the Bretton Woods institutions helped to reroute the economic research agenda on the continent to reflect their priorities and give resonance to their preferred political and programmatic options. As meticulously described by heterodox economist Howard Stein, they provided funding that enabled the constitution of epistemic communities that in turn worked towards a gradual erasure from university curricula of the major traditions of heterodox economics (institutionalism, Keynesianism, Marxism, etc.) and African political economy (Stein 2021).

The consolidation of this economic monoculture has had the desired effect of making the neoclassical approach the paradigmatic framework guiding conversations on the continent's macroeconomic and development issues (Mkandawire 2014). At national, regional, and continental levels, it informs the various economic, trade, and monetary integration initiatives and projects, as well as the solutions envisaged for issues such as debt crises, development financing, unemployment and underemployment, the challenges posed by climate change, economic inequality, and so on. The groupthink syndrome is hence ubiquitous in African economic policy circles—ministries of finance, presidential cabinets, central banks, regional and continental institutions, etc.

The intellectual and political dominance of the neoclassical approach has undoubtedly contributed to the retreat of the pan-Africanist project, which seems to be insidiously reborn in the form of Afro-liberalism, i.e., a mode of integration based on competition and market expansion rather than political federalism and the pooling of resources among African countries (Sylla 2021). It also justifies the persistence and even aggravation of economic inequalities across the continent. South Africa is a case in point. Admittedly, it has become a liberal, multiracial democracy. But economic inequalities are still as glaring, or even more so, than during the apartheid era, due to the adherence of the ANC elite to neoliberalism. According to Fourie (2024, 824), in the post-apartheid period, "The influence of neoliberalist policies, as a normative political rationality and as a political economic ideology, contributed to the escalation of economic inequality."

To sum up, the dominance of neoclassical economics as the intellectual foundation of neoliberal policies poses the following problems:

- The uncritical transposition to the continent of frameworks of economic thought and policy of limited relevance
- The prevalence of myths and problematic assumptions that hinder a proper understanding of economic realities and justify policies with disastrous consequences

- The under-investment in priority research areas for the continent as the consequence of an over-investment in areas favored by international financial institutions
- The impoverishment of economic debates and the prevalence of groupthink
- The use of the mask of science to legitimate the interests of the rich and powerful

In Africa, the end of single-party rule and Apartheid consolidated neoliberalism which itself made illusory the shared prosperity expected from the democratic transition. Whichever leadership is elected, there is no substantive challenge against neoliberal policies that cement the power of the most powerful within countries and at the global level. It has become fashionable to talk about the “end” of neoliberalism in the Global North, as is evidenced by the growing efforts of some Northern governments to revive industrial policy to address climate change through the transition away from fossil fuels. However, whatever the merit of this view, for most of the countries in Africa, neoliberalism still reigns supreme, as they are copping with a new debt crisis cycle handled by the IMF with its pro-creditor and austerity mindset. Eventual developmentalist ambitions such as in Namibia, with the green hydrogen projects, are strongly shaped by the logic of “derisking”—minimizing various risks—favored by global private finance (Gabor & Sylla 2023).

Turning the page on choiceless democracies and highly unequal economies in Africa will require the promotion of policy proposals coming from the diverse paradigms of heterodox economics, including the various African political economy traditions.

PART IV:
TOWARDS SUBSTANTIVE DEMOCRACY

Civil society organizations on the continent have worked extensively on issues of accountability, transparency, and improved governance in public finance, extractive sectors, electoral management, etc. In addition to these efforts, this section indicates fruitful policy avenues and proposals that are not often on their radar and that are as critical to achieve the goal of substantive democracy; that is, to strengthen both democracy and economic justice. This study identified the five areas below as deserving policy consideration:

- **Civic inclusion:** All people living in Africa should have a valid ID and universal access to the financial system. This is a prerequisite for civic participation and economic agency (see sections 4.1 and 4.2).
- **Voter empowerment:** Electoral systems must be rethought in a way to empower voters and to allow them to better evaluate electoral candidates. The scientific literature on the topic and current opportunities opened by information and communication technologies could be usefully mobilized to that effect (see section 4.3).
- **Promotion of political participation as sovereign decision-making:** To halt the growing disenchantment towards liberal democracy and elections, it is important to rediscover and exploit the potential of instruments of deliberative democracy like lot (or sortition) through policy experiments (see section 4.4).
- **Advocacy of a program of universal public services:** Democracy risks losing legitimacy if it does not deliver on socioeconomic demands while a true environment of economic justice requires that all goods and services necessary for a free and dignified life are available to everyone (see section 4.5).
- **Civic education on money and finance:** To understand the economic possibilities of each country, to allow a democratic debate on how the economy should be organized, and to increase the continent's financial independence, it is important that citizens, civil society organizations and policymakers are equipped with relevant knowledge on how the monetary and financial system works (see section 4.6).

In summary, with these recommendations, the goal is to work on renewed concepts of democracy and social wealth. The wealth being created under the current global economic system is compatible with high inequalities and limited popular participation. In contrast, for the perspective adopted here, the process of social wealth creation should be based on political and economic inclusion of all.

4.1. Materializing Legal Citizenship through Modernized, Functional, and Non-Discriminatory Civil Status Registration Systems

The possession of documents such as a birth certificate and a national identity card is what "materially manifests" citizenship in any given country. Indeed, without this material prerequisite, it is generally not possible to enjoy full civic and political rights or simply live a normal life (enter into contracts, have a driver's license, etc.). For example, the right to vote remains theoretical for all those who do not appear on civil status rolls.

Despite some progress, most African countries continue to face major challenges in compiling vital statistics and registering people's civil status. According to a United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) report (2017, 1), "Only four countries (Egypt, Mauritius, Seychelles, and South Africa) have managed to maintain a compulsory and universal registration system that meets international standards, including a satisfactory level of registration coverage and completeness of recording vital events and information on cause of death."

In 2021, according to the World Bank, 231.9 million children (aged under 15–18) and 240 million adults (aged over 15–18) living in sub-Saharan Africa did not have a valid identity document, i.e., 56 percent of the world total (Clark, Metz & Casher 2022, 19). According to other estimates, around 120 million children (under five), i.e., around six out of ten, have no birth certificate. Four unregistered children (under five) out of ten live in East Africa, the region that lags behind the others in this respect (UNECA & UNICEF 2022).

While the situation might be different from one country to another, some common characteristics stand out. Under-recording of civil status events (births, marriages, deaths) particularly affects rural areas, due to factors such as weak state capacities at local levels, the prevalence of illiteracy, the economic costs involved (fees, fines for late registration, transportation costs, etc.), and so on. Girls are often more at risk than boys. Conflict-induced international migration and internal displacement of populations contribute to increasing the “uncounted” or “invisible.”[34]

The lack of inclusive and reliable civil registration systems does not facilitate harmonization with other administrative rolls, particularly those relating to social policy (cash transfers, family allowances, retirement benefits, etc.) It also has repercussions on electoral statistics. On the one hand, electoral rolls tend to exclude that part of the population without ID. This is an obstacle to the right to vote and its free exercise. On the other hand, the failure to remove dead persons from electoral rolls inflates the size of the electorate and leads to lower turnout rates.[35] In Ghana, for example, the electoral roll in 2020 included over a million dead voters.[36]

Universal civil registration is among the targets (i.e., target 16.9) of the Sustainable Development Goals to “provide legal identity for all including free birth registrations.” Achieving such a goal is a prerequisite for civic participation and economic justice. As recommended in the UNECA report (2017, vii), African countries need to place greater emphasis in five areas: budgeting and human resources; coordination and monitoring; use of information and communications technology and digitization; recording of cause-of-death; and producing vital statistics from civil registration.

4.2. Cementing Digital Citizenship by Promoting Financial Inclusion

Economic agency requires legal, institutional, and technical conditions enabling people to make and receive payments, to have access to safe savings options and to benefit from affordable loans. In our current era marked by a growing digitalization of economies, including payments and financial services, financial inclusion has become more than ever an important dimension of citizenship. The World Bank defines financial inclusion as “ownership of an individual or jointly owned account at a regulated institution, such as a bank, credit union, microfinance institution, post office, or mobile money service provider” (Demirgüç-Kunt et al. 2022, 15). A more expansive definition could have also included the access to credit.

34 “Proving who you are: addressing the plight of those with no legal identity”, 14 January 2023, https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/01/1132397

35 “Why we can’t remove dead persons from voter register – INEC”, 1 January 2022, https://punchng.com/why-we-cant-remove-dead-persons-from-voter-register-inec/ (accessed 26 June 2024)

36 “1 million dead people still on electoral roll - Jean Mensa”, 15 June 2020, Ghana Web, https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/1-million-dead-people-still-on-electoral-roll-Jean-Mensa-980266 (accessed 26 June 2024)

During the colonial period, the establishment of banks and financial institutions in colonized territories responded to the imperatives of capitalist accumulation. Monetization was more advanced in coastal areas and in certain pockets of the hinterland that were home to extractive activities. The degree of financial inclusion reflected this spatial logic, as well as the racial discrimination suffered by colonized populations (poverty, illiteracy, etc.). In the post-independence period, the proportion of adults having access to a bank account has remained low in most of the continent's countries. However, over the past two decades, the development of microfinance institutions and, above all, the mobile payments sector, have accelerated financial inclusion in absolute and relative terms.

According to the World Bank's Global Findex (Demirgüç-Kunt et al. 2022), more than half of the adult population in sub-Saharan Africa was financially included in 2021. The proportion of those with a mobile money account (one in three adults) is the highest in the world (on average one in ten for the rest of the world). Countries like Kenya have been among the continent's and world's most dynamic and innovative.

Financially excluded populations are often poor, young, with a low level of schooling, and located in rural areas. Women are often less financially included than men. Though the Fintech industry is not immune to exploitative practices (like predatory lending, i.e., charging high interest rates on short-term loans),[37] women's access to mobile money accounts has been shown to be correlated with improved development outcomes, higher living standards, and reduced social vulnerability (Demirgüç-Kunt et al. 2022, 10).

The main reasons people give for their financial exclusion are, in order of importance: (i) poverty, (ii) lack of a cell phone, and (iii) lack of an ID.

Alongside efforts to improve the living conditions and productive capacities of the vulnerable populations, notably through a program of universal public services (see below), financial literacy campaigns are critical to the achievement of universal financial inclusion. Indeed, it appears that most unbanked persons would need help to set up and run a mobile money account. Facilitating people's access to ID documents could also contribute to raising financial inclusion rates. In 2021, according to Global Findex, 105 million people living in sub-Saharan Africa had neither an ID nor an account with a formal institution. In the case of Sudan, 83 percent of the unbanked do not have a valid ID (ibid., 38).

37 Achieng, R. (2023) 'How Fintech Became the Gateway to Predatory Lending in Sub-Saharan Africa', 29 August, https://botpopuli.net/how-fintech-became-the-gateway-to-predatory-lending-in-sub-saharan-africa/

Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs) are an avenue worth exploring. Although they have their detractors (Náñez Alonso et al. 2020), CBDCs offer many advantages, including the possibility for governments to achieve universal financial inclusion and implement effective and efficient cash transfers targeting the most vulnerable (Vuković 2021).

According to a recent survey, 14 African countries have publicly expressed their interest in a CBDC but only 4 have the payment infrastructure required to set up one (Ozili 2023). The experience of Nigeria, the only African country to have launched a CBDC so far, the eNaira, will certainly provide useful lessons (Obiora 2023).

Universal financial inclusion is as important as the goal to provide a legal ID document to all. They are both prerequisites and enablers of economic justice.

4.3. Rethinking Voting Systems

In practice, in most countries in Africa and across the world, democracy is premised on elections which themselves are reduced to a very specific voting system: the "majority voting system." As a result, democracy is unfortunately equated with elections based on majority voting.[38]

Social choice theory is the name given to an established and highly instructive mathematical literature on the properties—advantages and shortcomings—of different voting systems (see for example Szpiro 2010). The results of this work are often unknown on the continent both to academics (political scientists, jurists, etc.) and to civil society organizations active in governance issues.

Social choice theory shows that the "verdict of the ballot box" is strongly influenced by the nature of the voting system. The "will of the people" is often the expression of the particularities of the chosen voting system. Each kind of voting system tends to create its own type of politicians and possible winners. "Choose your voting system and you can choose your winner!" concludes an introductory book (Aubin & Rolland 2022, 79).

Another important finding of this research field is that there is no such thing as an ideal voting system, i.e., one that is superior to others in every respect. However, some of them do have notorious drawbacks. This is the case of the majority system, with one or two rounds, used in most African countries. With this voting system, a candidate who beats his or her opponents in one on ones ("Condorcet winner") may not be

38 The "majority system" does not derive its name from the fact that adult people are allowed to vote but rather from the obligation for candidates to secure the majority of votes in order to claim victory.

elected. Similarly, a candidate who loses all his or her duels with his or her opponents (“Condorcet loser”) could be elected.

Another shortcoming of the majority voting system is that it tends to bring out and elect “divisive” and poor-to-average candidates to the detriment of more consensual candidates who are generally better appreciated by the public. This is due to the fact that majority voting requires very little information from voters (Balinski & Laraki 2010). Let us assume that five candidates run for presidential elections. The majority voting system will ask voters to choose just one candidate out of the five. It does not give voters the opportunity to give their opinion on the “value” of each of the five candidates. Experience has shown that when the voting system allows voters to rate all the candidates, the verdict of the ballot box is often different from that of a majority voting system (Balinski & Laraki 2010; Aubin & Rolland 2022).

For example, in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump emerged victorious from their respective primaries—Democrat, Republican—despite being the two candidates least liked by voters. Indeed, pollsters asked voters to rate all Republican and Democrat presidential candidates by choosing one option among the following: “Great president”, “Good president,” “Average president,” “Poor president,” “Terrible president,” and “Never heard of.” Regarding Donald Trump, 44 percent considered him to be a “terrible president,” 15 percent a “poor president,” and 12 percent an “average president” while 3 percent never heard of him. In the end, the least liked of them all, Donald Trump, prevailed (Balinski & Laraki 2016).

The question of the choice of the voting system still evades the realm of democratic debate in Africa. Yet, there is a pressing need to rethink African voting systems in light of the scientific results accumulated on them and the current technical possibilities. Given the limitations of majority voting, it might be time to look at alternative options which actually empower voters.

4.4. Promoting Deliberative Democracy: The Role of Lot (Sortition)

To encourage popular participation, a number of proposals exist, such as giving citizens the legal capacity to initiate legislative proposals (legislative initiatives) and call a referendum (popular initiative referendum) on given topics. Others, like the “liquid democracy” proposal, suggest that more direct forms of democratic expression can be envisaged thanks to progress achieved in information and communication technologies (Blum & Zuber 2016; Valsangiacomo 2022; Nida-Rümelin & Weidenfeld 2022).

While these initiatives are to be encouraged, they do not necessarily go beyond the perimeter of a representative system based on a radical separation between the rulers (the politicians) and the people (the majority) who are usually excluded from sovereign decision-making bodies. Even when people are allowed to vote for a range of issues, that does not necessarily translate into actual participation and the availability of spaces for genuine popular deliberations.

Yet, it is important to reinforce the power of citizens through the creation of institutional spaces where they can meaningfully participate in lawmaking.

As we have seen, African parliaments present a number of shortcomings, including (i) the commodification of parliamentary seats, (ii) the lack of social representativeness of elected representatives, (iii) the fact that elected representatives can be captured by partisan or illegitimate interests, (iv) their lack of competence on most of the subjects they are supposed to debate, and (v) the fact that they do not necessarily deliberate on urgent matters in a timely fashion.

Moreover, given that parliaments tend to be subordinate to the executive, they rarely constitute a bulwark against government measures that are unpopular or deemed illegitimate by the vast majority. The popular demonstrations against President Macky Sall's anti-democratic measures in Senegal from March 2021 to June 2023, and those against Kenya's Finance Bill project in June–July 2024, show, unfortunately, that street violence and the deadly repression it provokes on the part of the forces of law and order are often a necessary step in the withdrawal of unpopular government decisions or choices. This is what usually happens when people are deprived of the power to say no by peaceful and legal means, with a reasonable chance of being heard.

To guard against these different aspects, while maximizing popular participation, the drawing of lots for deliberative positions, i.e., MP and municipal councilor, is a prospect to be considered for the medium and long term.

The principle of elections is based on differences in ability, or even quality, between individuals. For 19th century advocates of the representative system, elections enable the emergence of a "natural aristocracy" (as opposed to the nobility acquired through birth). In contrast, the drawing of lots (or sortition) is a procedure that manifests political equality between all. When citizens are all deemed equal, it is only natural that they should have an equal opportunity to "govern," i.e., to participate directly in the management of public affairs (Sylla 2015, 203–204, 245–248).

Insofar as it is based on the belief that everyone is capable of rational deliberation, political equality (*isonomia*), as a fundamental democratic principle, has as its corollary the right to express oneself and be heard (*isegoria*) in deliberative bodies.

The idea of drawing lots for deliberative positions may seem far-fetched, but this is far from the case. There is a growing body of literature examining how this might work, and the pros and cons of such a system. “Multibody sortition” (see Box 4.1) is one of a number of proposals to give a greater role to the drawing of lots (Dowlen 2008; Delannoi & Dowlen 2010; Sintomer & Rabatel 2020; Revel 2023). It can be implemented at different scales: local, national, federal. It has elective affinities with citizens’ assemblies and deliberative polls, i.e., the constitution of representative samples of the population drawn by lot. Following sortition, citizens meet to deliberate on matters of public interest (Fishkin 2009).

A parliamentary system other than that based on electoral competition between political parties is therefore self-evidently possible. Thanks to the drawing of lots, political models can be envisaged that have the virtue of involving people in the running of their own country and protecting them from the disadvantages of the electoral-parliamentary system noted above. Interest panels, for example, could provide a space where the contributions of civil society organizations are debated more widely and intensively. Statistically speaking, women, minorities, and other vulnerable groups could be better represented.

Using sortition as an instrument to promote popular participation and political inclusiveness, the African continent can creatively revive its celebrated tradition of collective deliberation practices. “A radical change in democratic political practice is required if democracy is to be saved from itself” wrote Southall (2017, 14) with reference to South Africa, a country, he observed, that “possesses a radical democratic tradition” that “might provide fertile soil into which to plant the seeds of sortition to allow it to flourish and multiply” (*ibid.*).

BOX 4.1: MULTI-BODY SORTITION

Terrill Bouricius, a former member of the U.S. Vermont House of Representatives, is the advocate of a proposal he calls "multi-body sortition." Instead of an "all-purpose" parliament with elected members, he suggests setting up a set of bodies to deal with specific tasks of the classic parliamentary process (Bouricius 2013, 2018). Members would be chosen by lot for most of the bodies. Three bodies would be responsible for drawing up the rules, ensuring their application, and setting the legislative agenda.

A *rules council* "would establish rules and procedures for all of the other Panels and Councils, such as the lottery process, quorum requirements, means for soliciting expert testimony, procedures to be used in deliberation, etc. Members would have limited terms and could not know how the rules might hurt or help any particular piece of future legislation. Their natural interest would be to assure the fairest and best functioning of all of the bodies" (Bouricius 2013, 14).

An *oversight council* "chosen by lot, which deals exclusively with staff performance and fairness, rather than the policy issues themselves. In addition to evaluating the general performance of the staff, they would rule on complaints about biased or unfair presentations given by staff. They should probably have the power to hire and fire staff serving the other sortition bodies" (*ibid.*).

An *agenda council* is responsible for setting the agendas, but it does not draft bills or vote on them. It can receive petitions from citizens. Such a council is a "meta-legislative body, because it legislates about legislation" (*ibid.*, 8).

These three bodies would exist alongside three others, each dealing with a particular aspect of the legislative process as such.

Drafting stage: *Interest panels* are groups of around 12 persons formed on a voluntary basis with the aim to generate legislative proposals without having the authority to adopt them.

Review stage: *Review panels* are tasked with "holding hearings, inviting and listening to expert witnesses, utilizing professional staff for research and drafting, and amending or combining elements from the proposals submitted by Interest Panels to produce a final bill. Review Panels might also set goals or criteria for final bills and refer drafts back to Interest Panels for revision" (*ibid.*, 11). Their members are selected by lot and they cannot choose for themselves the legislative proposal they want to review, a precaution against "special interest distortion".

Voting stage: *Policy juries* vote on the adoption or rejection of bills. These juries "would listen to pro and con presentations on the proposed legislation, and without further debate, vote by secret ballot" (*ibid.*, 12). Policy juries are also selected through lot and their numbers can be in the hundreds or thousands, depending on circumstances.

One objection to the use of sortition is the low educational level of the population. To raise the average intellectual quality of samples drawn by lot, education clauses could be introduced for certain bodies. To ensure that such clauses are not discriminatory, educational or schooling opportunities should be open and guaranteed to all those who request them.

In Africa, the monopolization of legislative power by political parties has become an anachronism justified neither by the quality of their elected members nor by the state of scientific and technological development. Popular sovereignty is only truly effective when the people themselves make the laws, without going through “representatives.”

When they have this capacity, they can protect themselves against measures that are not in the general interest, without resorting to violence or having to pay with their lives.

Institutionalizing deliberative democracy will not be an easy feat. For that to happen, there is the need to create spaces for democratic experiment and innovation. In a spirit of “prefigurative politics,” this will be a way to test and refine at lower scales democracy-enhancing proposals that seem desirable. At the same time, this approach has the potential to broaden African political imagination and boldness. Indeed, it is to be regretted that political transitions in African countries marked by political instability have not yet been an opportunity to test new models. Often, the roadmap of the transition consists in a return to the status quo ante: Organizing new elections to share the spoils between the least compromised of the political establishment.

4.5. Advocating a Universal Public Services Program for Every African Country

A society where economic justice is a living reality—i.e. is no longer an aspiration—requires that the basic needs of everyone are met, regardless of age, gender, race, nationality, location, etc. For that to happen, survival should be decommodified, i.e., it should not be exposed to the vagaries of market logic (Hickel 2023). All humans should be guaranteed access to a number of (public) services that ensure them a decent and dignified living. For example, access to quality healthcare, decent education, nutritious food and safe drinking water, a decent job, and social protection (Patnaik 2023; Hickel 2023).

In the context of African countries, advocating a program of universal public services, as discussed by Hickel (2023), runs against the objection that their governments do not have the money: Their tax receipts do not match their spending needs, and they are likely to be heavily indebted.

The issue of how to finance this type of program will be addressed in the section below. Suffice to say that given the resource wealth of the continent, and the possibilities associated with the status of sovereign currency-issuer, a program of universal public services can be envisaged in every country across the continent as an autonomous national objective. Current development goals defined at the multilateral level would be seen as entirely complementary.

Implementing such an ambitious agenda will require eco-democratic planning, i.e., a planning of real resources (labor, land, raw materials, technologies, knowledge systems, etc.) with a view to ensuring that all necessary societal needs are met, having full employment (see Box 4.2 on the job guarantee proposal), and ecological sustainability. This eco-democratic planning supposes that ordinary people are the agents (procedural democracy) and the targets (substantive democracy) of the desired societal changes.

Technical studies should be conducted to assess the costs, requirements (legal, administrative, technical, etc.), and economic impacts of a universal public services program.

BOX 4.2: THE JOB GUARANTEE PROPOSAL

On the different components of a program of universal public services, it matters to insist on the job guarantee proposal (Tcherneva 2020). As Sylla (2023, 3) explains: “A Job Guarantee (JG) program (or employer of last resort program) is an essential component of any domestic resource mobilization strategy…The idea is that the government would guarantee a job paying the minimum wage to any working-age person who wants to work at that rate. Those interested would be hired as they are (with the productive characteristics they have) and where they live. They would be entitled to job training opportunities and benefits. In principle, the jobs offered should not compete with the private sector. They would be targeted around activities that would enhance productive capacity and community services. The communities themselves, in each locality, in an inclusive framework, would determine needs in terms of job creation. The government would intervene primarily to provide the necessary funding and technical supervision. Unlike other public employment schemes—such as temporary recruitment for public works and direct job creation programs—the JG creates a legally binding right for eligible individuals.”

So far, African governments have been clueless about the means to create decent job program en masse for a growing labor force. Given a dependence on commodity exports, higher rates of economic growth induced by better terms of trade have not been the panacea expected. Growth has often been jobless. Industrialization might help create more decent jobs but it will not necessarily deliver full employment. While China has recorded impressive and unprecedented industrial development, unemployment remains a thorny issue, despite a labor force growth slower than Africa’s (Sylla 2023).

In fact, the establishment of a job guarantee is the only way to ensure full employment and materialize the “right to work” enshrined in most constitutions. What must be understood is that (i) the growth of existing domestic capacities cannot generate full employment; (ii) unemployment in Africa is not due to a lack of “employability” by job seekers; but rather (iii) reveals a lack of appropriate domestic demand. Businesses cannot hire more workers because they face weak domestic demand, which itself results from the fact that most of the labor force has a low purchasing power, as they receive low wages or are underemployed. By establishing a job guarantee, the government can improve domestic demand conditions (i.e., most people have a decent income and therefore more purchasing power), which stimulates job creation by the private sector and facilitates the production of useful goods and services.

In the case of the job guarantee, the main issue is not its desirability but rather how to make it work.

4.6. Institutionalizing Civic Education on Money and Finance

Economic justice requires that the broader public has an informed understanding about how the economy works, and especially money and finance. Without this knowledge, ordinary citizens are not really equipped to discuss policy choices. Worse, they may fall victims of the orthodox economic views which help cement the power of the powerful.

Unfortunately, the views of neoclassical economics on money and banking continue to wreak havoc on policy approaches within the continent. Well-meaning African civil society organizations and policymakers subscribe to such views which are scientifically false, as evidenced by a growing literature, including publications from leading central banks, such as the Bank of England (McLeay, Radia & Thomas 2014). To be fair, ignorance of matters related to money and finance is not specific to the continent. In the U.K., a poll by the advocacy group Positive Money showed that 90 percent of the British Members of Parliament, i.e., those who are supposed to make laws and approve the Finance Bill, have an inaccurate understanding of how money is created.[39]

Narratives of African countries lacking money and finance have had the effect of disempowering the continent and maintaining the pattern of economic extraversion that has failed to create any shared prosperity.

To counter these narratives, it is paramount to teach the broader public, policymakers, and civil society organizations what money is (not a commodity, but a debt issued by the government to provision itself; a debt that is redeemed when taxes are paid by corporations, households, and other economic agents), and why money can never be a constraint for a sovereign currency-issuing government that grounds its country's development on locally available (or "developable") real resources.

As the government is the sole issuer of the currency ("high-powered money"), it could never lack its own currency. The government has to spend first before the private sector agents can pay their taxes. When the government spends, it makes its currency available to the private sector through the banking system. Taxes paid by the private sector can only be settled by the banking system using currency deposits (high-powered money) that only the central bank can create. Like capital controls, progressive taxation is an important tool for economic justice. However, reality should not be inverted: Monetarily sovereign governments need taxation for a number of reasons, for example, ensuring a fair income and wealth distribution, and not for spending purposes.

39 Positive Money, "Poll results: Only 1 out of 10 MPs understand that banks create money", https://positivemoney.org/2014/08/7-10-mps-dont-know-creates-money-uk/

Likewise, contrary to neoclassical views, banks are not intermediaries between savers and loan applicants. So banks do not need to collect prior savings in order to lend to customers. Rather they create new money (bank deposits) whenever they extend a loan. As an influential publication by the Bank of England acknowledged,

"Saving does not by itself increase the deposits or 'funds available' for banks to lend ... rather than banks lending out deposits that are placed with them, the act of lending creates deposits—the reverse of the sequence typically described in textbooks" (McLeay, Radia & Thomas 2014, 15). The implication here is that a government that manages to build a national banking system can adopt policies to channel credit to the sectors that are supportive of long-term economic development and sovereignty.

The general point here is the following: There is no financial constraint in the national domestic currency for everything that is technically and materially feasible at the national level. In other words, African countries will always be able to finance any project that essentially requires the mobilization of their own domestic capacities and creativity (Sylla 2004a, 2004b).

When talking about development projects or goals, the guiding question should always be "How do you resource it (what kind of real resources, i.e., labor, equipment, organizational know-how, etc., will be mobilized)?" rather than "How do you finance it?" The financing needs are always conditional on the specificities of the real resources mobilized. Hence, a universal public services program will likely be more affordable to African countries if it is based first and foremost on the mobilization of their domestic capacities and creativity.

The considerations above do not imply that African countries have no significant constraints. They have. They are often highly reliant on foreign real resources which they must purchase in foreign currency. In principle, given their natural resource wealth, if they had better fiscal and technical control over their export/extractive sectors, they would be in a position of creditor vis-à-vis the rest of the world, with reduced need to issue debts in foreign currencies. Efforts to address illicit financial flows and to develop higher domestic capacities in the extractive sectors are critical for African financial independence.

The current multipolar world offers opportunities to ease the constraint resulting from the obligation for African countries to pay their imports in foreign currencies (Mayer 2024; Tyson 2023). Trade in national currencies or through other payments arrangements (like swap lines) are growing between Global South countries. To increase their policy space, African countries might find ways to trade with each other by bypassing the dominant currencies (dollar, euro). As a bloc or sets of blocs, they might also contemplate trade relationships with the rest of the world that circumvent the need to accumulate hard currencies. In this context, the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS) by Afreximbank is an experimental step in the right direction.[40]

In a nutshell, a correct understanding of the workings of the monetary system helps to

- make a distinction between genuine constraints and false ones (like the idea of states lacking money);
- avoid the adoption of detrimental policies based on the lack of money and finance myths (privatization of public companies, financial liberalization, derisking practices for the benefit of global private finance, etc.);
- design tailor-made development policies that would lead to fairer economic outcomes which, in the current context, must include environmental justice considerations;
- open a discussion on what type of development model should be pursued (more reliance on domestic resources and creativity vs. a model based on technical and financial dependence);
- hold governments accountable, whenever they pretext a lack of money to justify their failure to spend in critical areas—as well as their central banks—which, under neoliberalism, are mostly concerned with inflation, a phenomenon they usually fight by maintaining high levels of under-use of human resources (unemployment and underemployment);
- frame civil society campaigns (like the ones we have seen on sovereign debt, the global tax system, illicit financial flows, etc.) with stronger technical arguments;
- contemplate the institutionalization of public—and even community-run—banking/financial systems.

For all these reasons, a program of education on money and public finance should be institutionalized in all countries and should concern everyone, including Members of Parliament and government officials.

Though there exist good references that could be used as education material, it will be important to commission baseline studies that describe the fiscal-monetary nexus—the relationships between fiscal (treasury) and monetary (central bank) operations—for various African countries.

40 https://papss.com/

Such studies will help the broader public, policymakers, and civil society organizations to understand the details of government spending, taxation, and bond issuances. This will be a myth-busting exercise as most people will realize (i) the extent of the artificial constraints that African governments usually impose on themselves, (ii) the actual constraints they face, and (iii) the alternative and promising policy alternatives they could have chosen.

Unfortunately, literature along these lines only exists for now in some rich and emerging countries. The basic result is that most of their governments are “self-financing” (Berkeley et al. 2022; Ehnst 2020; Rezende 2009; Tymoigne 2014, 2020). They have no intrinsic financial constraint. This finding applies to some extent to African governments having their own national currency despite their lower levels of monetary sovereignty.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This concluding section elaborates on ways for the Open Society Foundations and other philanthropies to support African countries and citizens pushing for strengthening of African political economy at the national, multilateral, regional, and continental levels.

The suggested areas of action below are essentially targeted at the national and local levels. This focus is premised on the belief that, despite the constraints of the global economic and financial system, (i) significant progress can still be made at the national level in matters of democracy and economic justice, (ii) progressive reforms are more likely to take place domestically than at the regional and global levels, and (iii) no international reform could be beneficial to African countries if they do not have their own house in order. It is also likely that far-reaching global reforms will not happen without the continent managing to speak and act in unity. Hence the inclusion of some guidelines regarding the need for Pan-Africanist collective action in certain key areas.

Civic and Financial Inclusion

- Promote efforts to build networks working with local communities and authorities whose mission is to ensure that all inhabitants have a valid ID and that their vital statistics are recorded.
- Promote advocacy campaigns to commit governments to achieve universal ID registration.
- Promote research in matters of financial inclusion, including the potential of CBDCs and advocacy efforts in that direction, including financial literacy campaigns.

Epistemologies of Liberation

- Promote research on African political and philosophical doctrines and political experiments that could inspire current struggles and aspirations for democracy and economic justice.

- Promote initiatives and platforms dedicated to the promotion of pluralism in economic research, training, journalism, and policy.
- Promote research and initiatives highlighting inspirational practices in terms of public finances, economic resource management, land (re)distribution, etc.

Policy Experiments to Reinvent Democracy and Strengthen Popular Participation

- Promote survey opinion research on how citizens would like democracy to be deepened.
- Stimulate discussion about the voting systems and how they could be designed in a way to empower ordinary citizens, for example, by allowing them to rate every electoral candidate.
- Promote the creation of spaces for experiments in deliberative democracy—such as deliberative polls, multi-body sortition, and other similar proposals.
- Promote discussions and research on constitutional reforms that will allow ordinary citizens and the organizations that speak on their behalf to be institutionally empowered to initiate laws and eventually oppose policy decisions from their governments and parliaments that they consider as harmful to the countries' interests, especially in areas such as public finance and the management of economic resources (land, natural resources, etc.).

Advocacy of a Program of Universal Public Services

- Promote research on the technical feasibility, institutional requirements, and costs of a universal public services program in selected African countries.
- Promote the building of advocacy networks in favor of a universal public services program at local, national, and regional levels that include civil society organizations, trade unions, grassroots communities, experts, etc.

Civic Education on Money and Finance

- Promote research surveying the knowledge of relevant targets (policymakers, civil society organizations, etc.) about money and finance, taking inspiration for example from the study done by Positive Money.

- Promote research that describes the fiscal-monetary nexus—the relationships between fiscal (treasury) and monetary (central bank) authorities. The objective will be to produce educational materials at the disposal of the relevant targets (civil society organizations, policymakers, journalists, and the broader public) to help them understand how public finances really work and what are the real constraints on government spending capacity in contrast to artificial and ideological ones.
- Promote popular education initiatives—including media outlets—on money and finance.
- Vital to promote and publicize original projects that foster African creativity and technical innovation and, ultimately, reduce African technological dependency. One example are the schools and health facilities built in rural Burkina Faso with exclusively locally sourced materials by the architect Francis Kéré.

Pan-Africanist Collective Action

- Promote regional and continental initiatives aiming at (i) ending conflicts across the continent, (ii) making the African continent the solution and major actor of its own security problems, and (iii) removing all foreign military bases on African soil.
- Promote research and initiatives on how African countries could individually and collectively achieve more monetary sovereignty and monetary cooperation, especially in a context where alternative payments systems are being tested across the Global South and within Africa itself.
- Promote research and initiatives on how African countries could work in alliance with other countries across the Global South, to create a "debtors' club" (as proposed by Thomas Sankara in 1987 at the Organization of the African Unity).
- Promote research and initiatives on how African countries could implement a common "selling policy" for their raw materials (as advocated by Kwame Nkrumah in 1963 in his book *Africa Must Unite*) to leverage their critical raw materials needed for the global ecological transition and coordinate a green industrial policy initiative for the continent.

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