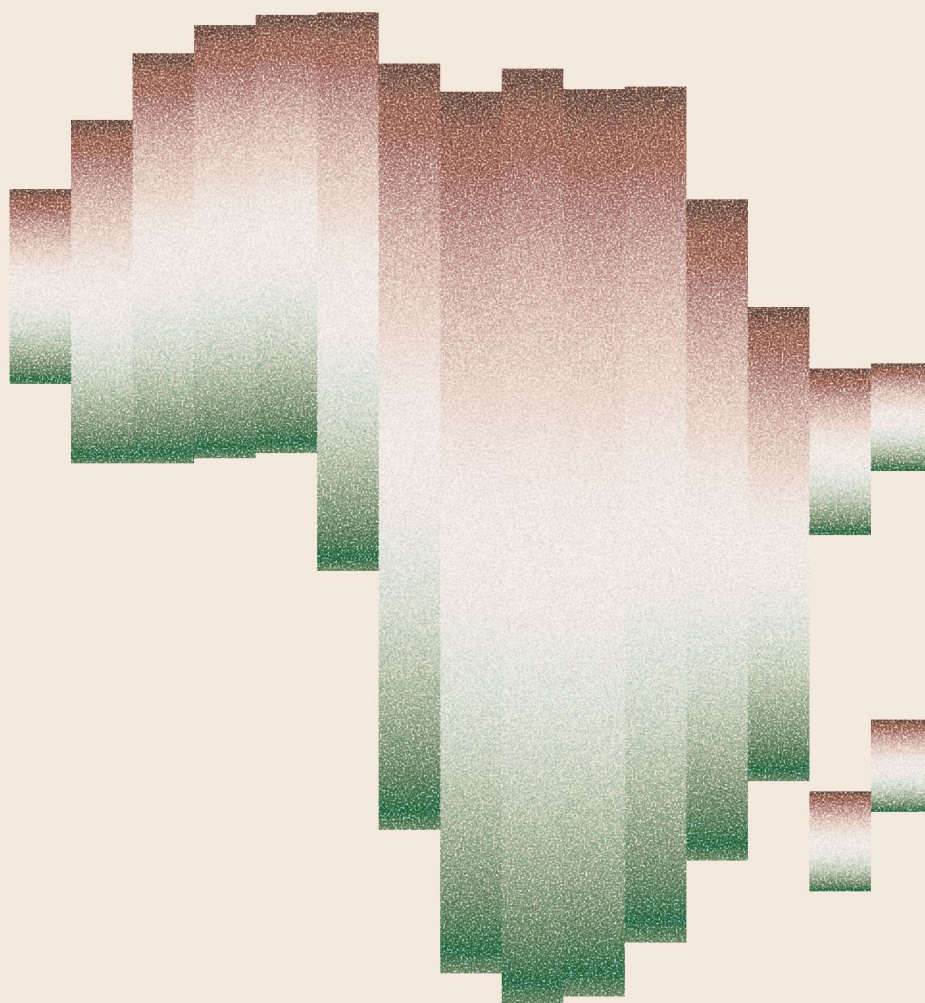

ANALYSIS OF THE NEXUS BETWEEN DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE IN AFRICA

**OPEN SOCIETY
FOUNDATIONS**



SYNTHESIS OF THE REPORT

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This report provides an analysis of the nexus between economic justice and democratic governance in Africa by surveying relevant literature and exploiting various statistical sources. It is organized in four parts and concludes with some policy recommendations.

Part I establishes the conceptual ground for the rest of the study. It discusses the notion of economic justice and various approaches to it—namely, those advocating a distribution of economic burdens and rewards based on contributions, as opposed to those favoring sacrifice and need as alternative principles.

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.

Whether economic justice is also compatible with democracy depends on how the latter is defined. The argument in this study is that democracy, provided that we rid it of its modern distortions, has an intrinsic value and is entirely compatible with economic justice.

Indeed, as the study shows, our current understanding of democracy is highly problematic and is an obstacle to understanding the world.

While one cannot argue that liberal democracy is a sufficient and/or necessary condition for economic development, as the most impressive historical experiences of economic transformation and poverty eradication in the non-Western world took place under authoritarian regimes, it would also be a mistake to think that authoritarianism per se delivers better economic outcomes.

Part II continues the discussion already started by anchoring it in the African context. It makes the following points:

1. Political liberalization, the move away from single-party rule to multiparty competitive elections, went hand in hand with the imposition of neoliberal policies which constrained transformative economic possibilities of African countries. The resulting “choiceless democracies” are feeding a growing popular disenchantment towards democracy and elections and a certain tolerance towards military rule in circumstances where people have lost trust in civilian leadership to solve the pressing socioeconomic issues.
2. The openness to military rule among the young, especially in countries situated in the Sahel, is reflective of political and economic marginalization. Indeed, Africa has the singularity of being a young continent, yet one where most countries have increasingly elderly leaders who maintain their grip on state power through the removal of constitutional terms and age limits, electoral frauds, etc.
3. Despite the widespread and popular concern about a “return” of coups in Africa, a careful interpretation of the evidence shows otherwise. Even if their immediate causes are context-specific, the military putsches observed since 2012, in general, reflect the consequences of foreign interference and military interventions and, specifically, the crisis of French imperialism. Eight out of nine military coups since 2020 occurred in France’s former colonies.

4. In the search for alternatives to the current political and economic impasse beyond liberal democracy, Africa's long and rich history is undoubtedly a source of inspiration, as it offers many hopeful lessons about popular participation—including from women, accountability of the leadership, and deliberative practices.
5. Based on a distinction between three different understandings of democracy, and therefore, of the democracy–economic justice nexus, this study argues that “substantive democracy” is the way forward for the continent.

Part III examines the connection 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 study makes the case that for African countries to move towards substantive democracy, i.e., societies marked by high levels of popular participation and economic justice, efforts should be devoted to the following six key areas:

1. Tackling neocolonial structures that impede African countries' control over policy instruments and decisions: the French-controlled CFA franc currency in West and Central Africa is given as an illustration.
2. Addressing unfair land distribution: The most economically unequal countries in Africa happen to be those where land distribution is also the most unequal.
3. Counteracting the influence of money on electoral processes: Wherever electoral processes are money driven, in the sense that campaigns with the largest budgets stand the best chance of winning, democracy exists only by name at best while economic justice is compromised by the class interests of the elected representatives and their sponsors.
4. Creating institutionalized spaces of popular participation as decision-making: This allows better accountability and transparency while empowering citizens and the organizations that speak on their behalf to participate in policy decisions, including rejecting measures they consider illegitimate or harmful to national interest.
5. Increasing national control over economic resources, especially the extractive sectors, is a *sine qua non*, if African countries are to avoid debt crises, and consequently, face externally imposed austerity policies that generally weaken their economies and contribute to increased foreign control over them.
6. Contesting 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.

Part IV suggests fruitful policy avenues and proposals that are not often on the radar of civil society organizations yet are critical for achieving the goal of substantive democracy, that is, to strengthen both democracy and economic justice. The following recommendations are made:

- **Civic inclusion:** All people living in Africa should have a valid ID and universal access to the financial system.
- **Voter empowerment:** Electoral systems must be rethought so they empower voters and allow them to better evaluate electoral candidates.
- **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 deliberative democracy tools such as selecting representatives by lottery (sortition).
- **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.

- **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.

Finally, the report concludes with recommendations to the Open Society Foundations on how they could contribute to strengthening the nexus between democracy and economic justice in Africa.

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