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**DEMOCRATIZATION,
EQUITY AND STABILITY
AFRICAN POLITICS AND SOCIETIES
IN THE 1990s**

by Yusuf Bangura

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◆ Preface

The 1990s have witnessed remarkable changes in the way African societies are governed. A large number of military and one-party dictatorships have collapsed in the face of mass civil protests, and a new wave of democratization is sweeping the continent. One of the most interesting aspects of this process is the increasing attention granted to crafting political systems that reflect the plural character of African societies. But democratization has not followed a uniform pattern, and there have been major setbacks in some countries. Problems of political instability and violence have given rise to regional security initiatives that have ambiguous implications for democratization.

This Discussion Paper focuses on actual political reforms in various African countries. In it, the author stresses the need to analyse concrete political processes, rather than relying on broader discussion of the socio-economic preconditions for democracy in the region. According to Bangura, differences among countries in levels of industrialization, types of state formation, methods of public administration and the development of modern social classes do not seem to have been significant determinants of real patterns of political change. Instead, he argues, democratization has been the outgrowth of political phenomena — a function of the strength of opposition parties and groups in society to force incumbent governments to honour basic rules of political contestation, and to uphold the rule of law.

The first part of the paper discusses conceptual issues of democracy and representation, the second provides an overview of patterns of authoritarian rule, the third analyses the main issues of political reform, and the fourth focuses on patterns of democratization. The final section explores the problem of military security as perceived both by external powers and by African governments during their quest for stable political transitions.

The paper was prepared as a contribution to **Renewing Social and Economic Progress in Africa: Essays in Honour of Philip Ndegwa**, edited by Dharam Ghai, to be published by Macmillan. The author, Yusuf Bangura, is a Project Leader at UNRISD. He co-ordinated the Institute's research on **Crisis, Adjustment and Social Change** in Africa and is currently working on **Public Sector Reform and Crisis-Ridden States**, a new project that considers socio-economic and political constraints that affect public sector performance in countries that have experienced prolonged economic recession and ethnic conflict.

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◆ Contents

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>DEMOCRACY AND EQUITY: CONCEPTUAL ISSUES</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>THE DISCOURSE AND PATTERNS OF AUTHORITARIAN RULE</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>ISSUES IN POLITICAL REFORM</u>	<u>9</u>
◆ Constitutionality and Political Pluralism	11
◆ Political Pluralism	12
◆ Electoral Reform	14
◆ Decentralization and Power Sharing	17
<u>PATTERNS OF DEMOCRATIZATION</u>	<u>19</u>
<u>RESPONSES TO INSTABILITY</u>	<u>24</u>
<u>CONCLUSION</u>	<u>28</u>
◆ References	29

◆ Abbreviations and Acronyms

BV	block vote
ECOMOG	ECOWAS Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FPTP	first-past-the-post
IMF	International Monetary Fund
PNDC	Provisional National Defence Council (Ghana)
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
TRS	two round system
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

INTRODUCTION

The 1990s have witnessed remarkable changes in the way African societies are governed. What Samuel Huntington (1991) has described as "the third wave of democratization"¹ in the world system has been strongly felt in most African countries since 1990. A large number of military and one-party dictatorships have collapsed in the face of mass civil protests and demands for political change. An interesting aspect of the new wave of democratization is the increasing recognition of political equity as an important aspect of institution building. Significant steps have been taken to craft political systems that reflect the plural character of African societies. But democratization has not followed a uniform pattern and there have been major setbacks in some countries, which have raised questions about the viability of the democratic experiments. Problems of instability have thus forced issues of regional and political stability onto the agenda of democratic change.

This paper seeks to examine recent patterns of democratization by focusing on actual political reforms that have emerged in various countries. It stresses the need to analyse concrete political processes, rather than relying on standard socio-economic determinants of, or preconditions for, democracy, in order to understand the nature of the reforms that have been underway in the region. Standard theories of democratization, which often focus on levels of economic development, the nature of economic enterprises, formation of modern classes, civic values and social structures, are surely relevant in studying the experiences of individual countries, but they do not account for the location of countries in the patterns that have emerged.

African societies share many socio-economic and historical experiences: they are largely multi-ethnic and agrarian, with traditional smallholding family farms and informal economic enterprises providing the dominant forms of employment and livelihood for most people. As former European colonies, these societies are also heavily dependent upon the world economy for trade and financial capital. The differences that have emerged among countries in levels of industrialization, state formation, methods of public administration and the development of modern social classes have not been significant in determining the patterns of political change. Democratization should, largely, be seen as a political phenomenon: a function of the strength of opposition parties and groups in society to force incumbent governments to honour basic rules of political contestation and uphold the rule of law. The paper emphasizes the need for empirical studies of the political dynamics of each country in order to make sense of current trends in democratization. Such studies may help stimulate new ways of theorizing patterns of democratization in Africa.

The first part of the paper discusses conceptual issues of democracy and equity; the second provides an overview of the discourse and patterns of authoritarian rule; the third analyses the main issues of political reform; the fourth focuses on

¹ The first wave refers to the pressures for democratization that started with the French and American revolutions of the eighteenth century. The second wave is associated with the decolonization and democratization movements that emerged after the Second World War.

patterns of democratization; and the fifth explores the different types of responses to the question of military security by both external powers and African governments in their quest for stable political transitions.

DEMOCRACY AND EQUITY: CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

In its most fundamental sense, democracy is concerned with people's rule, or popular control and management of power in the public sphere. In short, it is a form or method of rule that embodies the popular will, or "people's power". In small city-state, pre-modern Athenian conditions or in pre-colonial African village republics, such power was exercised directly by free adult males. Direct democracy was possible under such conditions because of the homogeneity of the societies, the smallness of their population size, their limited division of labour, common patterns of time use and overlapping interests. Participation rates were thus likely to be high, and problems of "free riding"² and authoritarian rule, which may occur in more complex societies, minimized.

In contrast, large modern-day societies that are highly differentiated require the principle of representation to make democracy or "people's power" feasible. Not everyone may have the time, resources or interest to participate actively in public affairs. In other words, the "people" must delegate their power to professional politicians or interested élites if public policies are to be formulated and implemented. However, the principle of representation may approximate "people's power" when it is linked to another important principle — that of accountability. In short, a modern democratic system is one in which the "people" are able to hold their representatives accountable for the policies they pursue or the decisions they make in the public sphere.

Most students of modern democratic theory would agree that a representative and accountable government must have four important elements to qualify as a democratic polity. The first is the organization of *periodic, free and fair elections* in which all parties or candidates enjoy relatively equal access to the rules. The second is the existence of a *plural civic and political culture*. This refers to competitive political parties and civic or community organizations, which enjoy some degree of autonomy. A legislative organ that is made up of multiple parties, in which the leading party does not have a large majority, can be an important indicator of political plurality. The third element is the *separation of the state from ruling political parties*. In other words, the institutions of the state — parliament, the judiciary, the military and the civil service — should be relatively separate from the programmes and activities of the political parties in power. Such institutions must serve the governments in power in ways that do not make it difficult for them to relate constructively to the wider public and opposition parties.

The fourth element is the constitutional *guarantee of basic human and political rights*. This includes the protection of the fundamental rights of expression,

² This refers to people not taking an interest in public policy issues (like voting, or petitioning public officials, for instance), but enjoying the benefits that may be associated with effective civic vigilance and activism from others.

assembly and organization — necessary for holding political representatives accountable. One may wish to add a fifth element, which may be important for countries that are in transition from authoritarian to democratic rule: the principle of *the alternation of power*. In order to preserve or develop the neutrality of the state in the exercise of public authority, as well as prevent the abuse of power by incumbent governments, it is important for power to alternate regularly between contending political parties. Indeed, respect for the principle of the alternation of power helps the development of three additional values that are central to the consolidation of democracy: the necessity for political parties to recognize *the limits of power*, including readiness to surrender power to democratically elected opponents without fear of the consequences; acceptance of the principle of *moderation and compromise* in political bargaining; and a commitment to live with and support *plurality* in social and political life.

These five elements deal essentially with the *forms* of a democratic polity. They do not directly address distributional issues, i.e., how power is allocated among groups in society. Formal democratic governance may indeed reproduce, even create, social and economic inequalities — in class, ethnic, racial or gender terms, for instance — and it may not necessarily produce the best leaders. The policies and programmes of political representatives may reflect the interests of ruling élites or powerful business oligarchies — which have more resources, networks and capacity to influence public policies — than those of workers, petty traders, artisans or smallholders, which may occupy the lower rungs of society. Similarly, in situations where a single ethnic or racial group enjoys an absolute demographic majority, it is very possible for formal democracy to produce all, or a disproportionate number, of its political representatives from the dominant ethnic or racial group (Horowitz, 1985). In such situations, the votes of minority groups may not carry the same weight as those of the majority. In other words, formal democratic systems of government, like markets, though non-discriminatory in the juridical sense, are not necessarily just or equitable.

Non-equity outcomes may affect the cohesion and stability of formal democracies, especially in developing countries that do not have the economic strength or state capacity to manage or control social differences and dissent. Excluded groups may opt out of the democratic process and seek redress through non-constitutional or violent means. These limitations explain why Marxists, or revolutionary movements, and minority rights groups often question the *democratic* character of formal democratic institutions: to the former, formal democracy appears as “bourgeois democracy”; and to the latter, democracy is seen as ethnic hegemony, racism or patriarchy. How to improve the institutions of representation and accountability by introducing equity issues in political systems has, therefore, been central to the concerns of societies whose democracies have been troubled by problems of socio-economic and political exclusion.³

The social class exclusion aspect of the democratic debate has been most systematically addressed, especially in Western societies, by the institutions of state welfare provisioning. By providing relatively “free” and reliable education,

³ In communist societies, the problem was addressed by nationalizing economic enterprises, setting up central planning systems, and providing universal welfare programmes. Political democracy in the sense used here was seen as a trade-off for the wide-ranging economic welfare programmes enjoyed by the population.

health services, income support, unemployment benefits, subsidized housing and food security to disadvantaged groups, the revolutionary pressures that threatened to sweep much of Europe between the late nineteenth century and the immediate post-Second World War period were contained. Excluded groups that were dependent on the state for their welfare could, in theory at least, defend their interests through the evolving democratic institutions. Political inequality issues, on the other hand, such as those based on ethnicity and race, were addressed by reforming the formal political systems themselves. These included changes in electoral rules to allow for more proportional representational outcomes; the introduction of special rules of equity or social balance in the formation of political parties and governments; formal power-sharing arrangements in legislative and executive organs of government; rotational presidencies; decentralization; special seats for minorities or disadvantaged groups; and constitutional provisions to protect minority rights.

Across the world, the record of crafting democratic institutions that reflect the ethnic, racial or religious makeup of societies has been uneven. It is instructive that in this area, the experiences of the leading Western societies, the pioneers of modern democratic rule, have not been helpful, since their democratic arrangements have been largely guided by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ideologies of the nation state. Such states are assumed to be homogenous in language, culture, history, religion and race. Most, therefore, are not tailored to handle the equity problems that arise in heterogeneous social settings. Only multi-ethnic societies like Switzerland and Belgium have been sensitive to political equity issues in crafting their democratic institutions. In most developing countries, which received their democratic institutions from European colonial powers, issues of political equity were not central to their decolonization programmes; they are only now being addressed in order to contain the problems of instability that have accompanied democratization.

THE DISCOURSE AND PATTERNS OF AUTHORITARIAN RULE

An understanding of the ways in which African countries have responded to the issues of equity in their current democratization programmes requires analysis of the discourse and patterns of rule that preceded the democratic transitions of the 1990s. Equity issues did not feature prominently in the constitutional arrangements of the independent states in the early 1960s. Although the departing colonial powers were already making significant advances in the promotion of welfare programmes in their own countries, only limited welfare systems were introduced in the colonies at the terminal stage of colonial rule. These included subsidized education, health and pensions for a small, largely urban, élite — but not basic income support and unemployment benefits. The new states not only retained this conservative approach to social policy, but copied the colonial powers' centralized nation state institutions and majoritarian first-past-the-post (FPTP) and two round systems (TRS) of electoral rules⁴. These proved unsuitable for the ethnically plural, largely agrarian and underdeveloped societies of the new

⁴ FPTP was British-inspired, and TRS was French.

democracies. Although most independent governments reflected the ethnic diversity of the respective societies, they were mostly formed on an *ad hoc* basis and depended mainly on the preferences of those in power rather than on any rational and objective set of principles that recognized plurality and equity as institutional imperatives. Political outcomes thus tended to be volatile and open to abuse, as individuals competed through ethnic group networks for hegemony.⁵

Much of the debate about the democratic potentials of Africa in the 1960s focused on the unsuitability of its socio-economic structure and low levels of economic development. Authoritarian rule was justified or rationalized as a necessary option for rapid development and nation building. The debate highlighted three main issues. The first two were often merged into a single argument that established a virtuous linkage between modernization and democratization: that democracy is a product of market-based industrialization, secularism, mass education and the development of professional middle classes. Market-based industrialization fosters competition and helps the growth of autonomous groups in civil society. And democratic values, such as respect for the rule of law, personal accountability and tolerance, are assumed to be essentially middle class-derived. It was argued that democracy has prospered in Western societies because of their high levels of market industrialization and well-entrenched professional middle classes (Dahl, 1971; Lipset, 1960; Cnudde and Neubauer, 1969).

In contrast, except for countries of European settlement — such as Kenya, Rhodesia and South Africa — African economies were largely agrarian, with traditional smallholding agriculture accounting for the dominant form of land tenure. Although much of the output from agriculture was marketed domestically and externally, a substantial proportion was for immediate household consumption. What is more, many of the markets were either oligopolistic, like the export-oriented commodity boards, or clientelistic, as in many of the domestic food markets and informal petty trade and artisanal activities. Traditional agrarian societies hardly provided the right economic and social conditions, it was believed, for the exercise of autonomous individual choice and the development of a secular-libertarian civil society (Apter, 1965; Huntington, 1968; Bauer, 1981). The limited industrialization that existed was largely concentrated in the mining sector, with foreign firms the leading investors. It was argued, especially by neo-Marxists, that the expansion of capitalism on a world scale created socio-economic polarization, which made it impossible for democracy to grow in the peripheral economies of the Third World (Amin, 1987; 1991; Baran, 1957). Some theorists within this framework even postulated that a national entrepreneurial or bourgeois class was needed for the growth of democratic institutions.⁶ Since Africa was economically dependent on the world market and its local business enterprises were dominated by foreign corporations, critics contended that it was impossible for any democratic or bourgeois form of development to take place.

⁵ It is important to note, however, that despite the problems of ethnicity, most countries succeeded in creating a sense of nationhood among the different ethnic groups. This explains why movements for national self-determination were relatively few. Only Biafra (in Nigeria), Eritrea (in Ethiopia), Katanga, now Shaba (in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) and Southern Sudan (in the Sudan) produced ethnic movements which called for autonomy or independence. In the rest of Africa, ethnic competition and conflicts focused on improving access to the state's resources and public offices within a unified state.

⁶ Beckman (1992b) provides a powerful critique of this linkage.

A related issue in the debate was the route which the burgeoning local business classes were said to have adopted to extend their grip on the national economies; this was largely done through the state by lobbying for contracts, import licenses, subsidies, loans and preferential treatment, thereby encouraging large-scale corruption and inefficiency. On this score, both neo-Marxist and neo-liberal writings on the subject were in agreement: the overwhelming dependence of the business classes and ruling élites on the state led to an overextended state and fierce, often bloody minded, competition for the control of the state and the stifling of opposition groups and civil liberties (Ake, 1987; Diamond, 1988; Sandbrook, 1985; Joseph, 1987; Osoba, 1978). Professional middle classes did not grow rapidly enough to impose on the emerging societies their assumed values of accountability, tolerance and respect for the law. Instead, these classes, where they emerged, grew up in, and helped foster, the dominant culture of patronage and authoritarianism.

The third argument focused on the assumed authoritarian culture and ethnic cleavages of African states — the point being that democracy requires a high degree of individual autonomy and civic, not primordial, values to function (Pye and Verba, 1965). Given the low level of the development of markets and the social division of labour, African societies were said to be largely collectivist, or tribal; individual initiative was not fully rewarded; and individuals were only able to pursue their self interests when they followed, or structured their interests through, communal or group norms and practices. Relations of affection, rather than those based on individual rational calculation, were said to be the defining features of such societies (Nyerere, 1967; Hyden, 1985). This meant that Africans were unable to exercise one of the most fundamental principles of democratic rights and obligations: individual political choice and personal accountability. A related point is the view that African societies contained too many ethnic groups to allow for the development of a coherent national identity. Instead, individuals were likely to support ethnic parties and pressure groups rather than those based on cross-cutting socio-economic interests. Ethnically driven or primordial politics, when fully ignited, could threaten social cohesion and political stability. The dominant forms of political behaviour that were likely to emerge out of these two experiences were said to be clientelism and neo-patrimonialism — not democracy.⁸

There is much to be said for the three arguments in capturing aspects of African social realities, which pose serious constraints to the development of democracy on the continent. Socio-economic conditions, historical processes and forms of accumulation are important in understanding the constraints on and opportunities for stable long-term democratization in Africa and elsewhere. It seems, however, that many of the points about Africa's unsuitability for democratic governance were overplayed by the critics. At bottom, it would seem that an idealized Western experience was used as the yardstick to evaluate the democratic potentials of African countries. It is a method of analysis that Mamdani has described in a different context as "history by analogy rather than history as process" (Mamdani, 1996:12). Standard socio-economic theories of democracy point to the long-term structural constraints on democratic rule, but offer little help in understanding the

⁷ This argument was largely made by modernization theorists.

⁸ This is the dominant perspective of a large number of theorists who write about African societies and politics. See, for instance, Sandbrook, 1985; Callaghy, 1987; Joseph, 1987.

concrete types of rule, democratic or otherwise, that have emerged in Africa and other developing countries. Why, for instance, were Mauritius, Senegal, Botswana and the Gambia able to practice some form of pluralist politics in the pre-1990 period when the rest of Africa was mired in one-party or military forms of authoritarian rule? And what accounts for the renewed interest in democratic rule across Africa in the 1990s?

To start with, there is no incontrovertible reason why agrarian societies should not support variants of democratic government, especially as the link between democracy and industrialization has not been a unilinear one even in the history of democracy in Western societies: much of the US was agrarian when it embarked on its democratic route; and democracy did not emerge in Western Europe only after it had attained a high level of industrialization (Therborn, 1977). Indeed, in a recently published, well researched book on Italian democracy, Putnam (1993) has shown that the civic traditions of the northern regions, which could be traced to the country's pre-industrial past — not economic development — were central in explaining the strength of democratic governance in those regions when compared with those of the south, which did not have similar civic traditions. Civic consciousness was a very powerful factor in the push for economic development in the north. Indeed, there is much to be said for the democratic potential of traditional smallholding African agriculture and informal economies, with their relatively egalitarian distribution of assets and incomes and absence of oligarchic landlords (Nyerere, 1967).⁹

One can also question the argument that posits a positive correlation between national entrepreneurial autonomy and democracy. This link can hardly be defended with any degree of seriousness today, especially when one takes into account current processes of economic globalization and the democratization experiences of countries in Latin America and parts of East Asia that are heavily dependent upon global economic processes. The critics also failed to take into account the emergence of vigorous professional middle classes and industrial labour movements in Africa — two developments which tended to undermine clientelistic arrangements and patrimonialism in African politics and which kept alive the democratic alternative on the continent. Indeed, the history of trade unions and professional groups in several parts of Africa suggests that these groups played leading roles in the burgeoning democratic projects at the time of independence and have continued to do so in the democratization wave of the 1990s (Damachi et al., 1979; Sandbrook and Cohen, 1975; Bangura and Beckman, 1991; Olukoshi, 1989; 1993; Hashim, 1994; Jega, 1994).

One should also add that although communal bonds and ethnicity are important factors that shape social behaviour and choice in Africa (and, indeed, elsewhere), it is unhelpful to ignore the wide-ranging socio-economic differentiation that has occurred, including the significance of individual choices in large areas of social life even when these are made within the context of broadly shared norms.

⁹ There are, of course, authoritarian relations in African rural power structures as expressed through the rule of chiefs, rural money-lenders, colonial trading companies and parastatal enterprises (Mamdani, 1996). Mamdani's recent study on citizenship has shown the imperative of locating democratization at the local rural level in order to draw the peasantry into the mainstream of African life, and convert them from subjects into citizens — the latter seen as a status long enjoyed by social classes in the city, and a critical factor in democratic rule.

Households are relatively independent agents in the acquisition and disposal of incomes, commodities and non-land assets. They also, in the main, take personal responsibility for their actions, although kinship-based social bonding can be very strong in more traditional settings. However, group bonding for the pursuit of political objectives exists even in highly individualistic Western societies. People vote along ethnic lines in Belgium, Northern Ireland and Spain; and racial bonding plays a key role in US elections, especially at the state and city level, and is significant in debates on burning public issues. And clientelism does not always prevent the growth of democracy (as the case of Italy so clearly demonstrates), even though it can act as a constraint on its full realization (Putnam, 1993).¹⁰

The politics of the Cold War and rabid élite competition for control of the state undervalued the latent democratic impulse that was associated with decolonization and ultimately led to authoritarian forms of rule. With hindsight, it seems that the views of the professional theorists and the actions of the political actors fed each other to create a mutually fulfilling prophesy: the democratic experiments failed because the political actors learned from the professional theorists that democracy would not work in Africa; and the theories were vindicated because the political actors behaved the way the theories said they would. Almost everywhere, ruling élites became more concerned about promoting "nation building" and "economic development" than building democracy.

Two main patterns of authoritarian rule emerged out of the nation-building and national development processes — military dictatorship and one-party government. The two were often influenced by the dominant global ideologies of the time — "socialist-inspired populist politics" and "free-market capitalism". These produced two additional subsets of authoritarian rule, bringing the number to four. In the first type of military dictatorships — such as those of Mathieu Kerekou in Benin, Denis Sassou-Nguesso in the Congo, Haile Mengistu in Ethiopia, and Sankara/Compaoré in Burkina Faso — attempts were made to fashion political systems along Soviet-style institutional arrangements, although they did not incorporate the additional elements of central economic planning and the universal provision of social welfare that were central to the Soviet model. In such countries, political parties were created by the military to subordinate, control and suppress civic groups and opposition parties. In the second type of military rule, as in Nigeria, Mali, Niger, Ghana,¹¹ Lesotho and Uganda, rulers simply governed by decree, without the trappings of "popular" civic institutions. The same bifurcated experience occurred in one-party régimes: those of Mozambique, Angola, Somalia, Tanzania, Zambia and Guinea experimented with grassroots structures that were integrated with those of the ruling political parties; while other one-party régimes, like those of Kenya, Sierra Leone, Malawi, Côte d'Ivoire and Cameroon, failed to incorporate in a systematic way most civic groups and associations into the ruling party structures.

¹⁰ See also Bangura (1992) for an analysis of clientelistic types of democracy in Africa. This article also questions received doctrine on the inevitability of authoritarian rule. It identifies several forms of countervailing processes for democratization that are embedded in each type of economic organization and wealth creation in Africa.

¹¹ Ghana, under Rawlings, established a number of populist organizations in society, although the PNDC itself remained a military institution throughout the period that preceded multi-party rule.

Interestingly, if one adjusts for prior historical advantages, performance rates in economic and social development have not been very different among countries in the four groups. And if countries are placed in a two dimensional figure of authoritarian rule (i.e., using the four subsets or variables of "military-populist"; "military-non-populist"; "one-party-populist"; and "one-party-non-populist"), no clear or consistent pattern will emerge. Standard variables, such as colonial experience, regional location, state dependence on mineral rents or agrarian export surpluses, distribution of ethnic groups and formation of professional classes or labour unions, are not significant in determining the location of régimes in the four authoritarian slots.

Authoritarian rule had several attributes: political power was monopolized by the army or the single party, with the leader enjoying near-absolute authority; there were no freely competitive and fair elections; no separation of powers existed between the governing military councils, ruling political parties and other arms of the state; civic organizations and opposition parties were either controlled or not allowed to canvass for alternative forms of government; basic freedoms of expression, association and assembly were circumscribed, although this varied across régimes; and the principle of alternation of power was non-existent — indeed, governments were removed from power largely by military means. It is instructive to note that 61 military coups occurred in Africa between 1963 and 1989. Only four leaders of one-party régimes died in office (Sekou Touré, Jomo Kenyatta, Siaka Stevens and Augustino Neto); and three gave up power voluntarily (Julius Nyerere, Leopold Senghor and Amadu Ahidjo) and were succeeded by members of their ruling parties.

ISSUES IN POLITICAL REFORM

Authoritarian rule came under considerable strain during the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s. And by 1990, most countries were in the throes of major social and political upheavals, which ushered in various movements for democratization and changes in governments. These upheavals were linked to the long-running economic recessions in the 1970s and 1980s, and the adoption of deflationary stabilization and adjustment programmes that increased, at least initially, the economic downturn of countries. Recession and restructuring meant that the limited resources available at independence for state-led development, when these economies showed positive, if lopsided, rates of growth, became further squeezed — affecting incomes and livelihoods, social provision in education and health, public sector administration, the building of infrastructure and the development of classes in the formal sector (Mosely and Weeks, 1993; Bangura, 1994; UNDP, 1997). The social and political networks that had held together the authoritarian régimes became highly unstable and ungovernable. Increased poverty and weak performance rates in the macro-economy rendered all four varieties of authoritarian rule illegitimate. In much of Africa, the early 1990s were a period of mass industrial strikes, extensive street demonstrations, urban economic and political riots, and armed conflicts (Bratton and van de Walle, 1992; Rudebeck, 1992).

It is interesting to note that the pendulum of the discourse on authoritarianism and democracy has swung in favour of the latter as a result of these economic and

political developments. Most theorists now argue the case for democracy in Africa even though the socio-economic conditions supporting democratic rule were much worse in the early 1990s than they were in the 1960s. Three virtuous linkages can be identified in the debate. The first states that Africa can only get out of its economic crisis if it is ready to embrace democracy — this is often referred to as the development and democracy linkage (Anyang' Nyong'o, 1988; Mkandawire, 1988; Gutto, 1988; Ake, 1996; Chalker, 1991; Woodward, 1994; Leftwich, 1996). The second posits that the wave of instability in the 1990s can only be stabilized — and the decaying political institutions revived, properly managed, and made to respond to the needs and aspirations of the populace — if African countries become fully democratized — this is the democracy, stability and good governance debate (Joseph, 1990; Hyden and Bratton, 1992; World Bank, 1992; Ibrahim, 1993). And the third linkage is that which posits that democracy is only possible in Africa if it can dismantle its statist approach to economic management and embrace the neo-liberal or market policies of structural adjustment recommended by the World Bank and the IMF — this is the democracy and structural adjustment debate (Diamond, 1988; Chazan, 1988; Bratton, 1989; World Bank, 1989; 1992; Beckman, 1992b; Bangura and Gibbon, 1992). All three debates have tended to coalesce into a single framework that celebrates economic and political liberalization, or "good governance", although there are significant dissenting voices in each sub-set of the discourse.

Like the early post-independence debate on the inevitability of authoritarianism, the post-1990 debate on the potentials of democracy tells only a partial story. On the first linkage of democracy and development, the most current statistical analysis (for all it is worth), which reviews nine previous quantitative studies on the subject, does not find a stable, long-term relation between democracy and economic growth or between democracy and economic inequality. However, Errson and Lane (1996), the authors of the study, do find a strong relationship between democracy and human development or quality of life for more than a hundred countries, including some in Africa. There have not been any systematic statistical studies on the other two linkages. In relation to the democracy, good governance and stability linkage, it is worth noting that the enthusiasm that greeted the democratic upheavals of the early 1990s has given way to much scepticism among theorists and international donors about the stabilizing, peace-yielding and good governance properties of current forms of democracy. The occurrence of many large-scale wars and democratic reversals in the 1990s has led policy makers to place more emphasis on stability as an independent variable that needs to be pursued in its own right. We take up this issue in the last section of this paper. And the linkage between democracy and structural adjustment has been challenged by a host of authors who have argued that it is the resistance to structural adjustment, rather than adjustment itself, that is responsible for the democratization wave of the 1990s (for the most robust argument on this issue, see Beckman, 1992a).

If any strong conclusion can be deduced from these swings in theorization on democracy, it is this: the trends and patterns of democratization and authoritarian rule have not always conformed to the assumptions and postulations of mainstream theorists and policy makers. This conclusion calls for an intimate

understanding of the *political* processes of democratization.¹² Democratization has not been the project of any single social group, nor has it been more successfully pursued in countries with higher levels of market liberalization or economic development. And different colonial experiences have very little, if anything, to do with the outcomes — except, of course, for the institutional forms used to structure the reforms. Countries have responded to the agenda of political reforms differently. There have been gains and losses, advances and setbacks — even breakdowns. The real political reforms have focused on five main issues: constitutionality, electoral reform, civil liberties and political pluralism, power sharing, and decentralization. They help to throw light on the relevance and applicability in Africa of the five elements of democratization highlighted in section one.

◆ Constitutionality and Political Pluralism

The quest for *constitutionality* and *political pluralism* is at the core of the political reform processes. The two deal with attempts to subject African political processes to constitutional rules. The four types of military and one-party régimes either operated outside of constitutional legality, as could be seen in the constant recourse to military decrees, or paid limited attention to constitutional procedures, as was the case with the one-party administrations. Pressures for constitutionality have assumed two forms. The first has been a top-down process, i.e., cases where incumbent military or one-party régimes have been strong enough to preside over revisions of existing constitutions or the writing of new ones. Examples in this category include Tanzania, Nigeria, Zaire, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Kenya. Representatives may be appointed or elected into specially created constitutional assemblies (as in Nigeria, Ghana and Zaire), or governments may simply form broad based committees with mandates to write new constitutions or revise existing ones. Such committees would receive petitions from the general public, publicize their work, stimulate debates and gauge citizen preferences. The end of the exercise has often been accompanied by referenda, whose outcomes incumbent governments have been expected to respect. However, in practice, governments have enjoyed much leeway in influencing the final results.

The second process has assumed a more bottom-up approach: cases where autonomous national conferences have been held with the explicit objective of reforming existing constitutions or writing new ones. The national conferences have been established after long periods of militant political demonstrations in which the powers of incumbent governments to maintain public order and trust have been thoroughly weakened. The conferences or assemblies have, therefore, been given autonomous powers to deliberate on new constitutional directions, which the incumbent governments have not been able to veto. This bottom-up approach has been largely followed in the Francophone countries — although Sierra Leone also copied some aspects of it in its celebrated Bintumani Conferences in 1996, when the military changed its top leadership and tried to obstruct the elections that an earlier Bintumani Conference had slated for 26 February 1996 (Abraham, 1997). The military was forced to respect the verdict of the conference, which took place in the context of mass, nationwide

¹² Leftwich arrives at a similar conclusion in his "On the primacy of politics in development" (see Leftwich, 1996). His main focus was, however, on the politics of donor governments.

demonstrations. The Republic of Benin has been the torch-bearer in the use of autonomous conferences to change the authoritarian régimes of Francophone countries (Diop, 1991; Allen, 1992; Decalo, 1997). However, the practice has not been uniformly successful in these countries: in a number of cases (for instance, Zaire, Togo, Cameroon, Gabon and Côte d'Ivoire), opposition movements have not been strong enough to impose their will on the incumbent régimes.

The key issues in constitutionality relate to the demilitarization of the institutions of government, the return to legality and the rule of law, and the removal of pre-existing provisions that granted ruling parties the sole right to form parties and governments. The links between ruling political parties and organized interest groups, such as trade unions, professional associations and community organizations, are often terminated to allow for the autonomous development of such groups, and to give competing political parties equal chances to relate to groups in civil society. Constitutionality also deals with the distribution of power between the various institutions of the state, the forms and responsibilities of government, and the provision of basic human and civic rights. Most constitutions call for clear divisions of power between the legislative, executive and judicial arms of the state; the existence of plural political parties; and the separation of the interests of the state from those of incumbent governments. Undoubtedly, much progress has been made in the formulation of new constitutions and in getting leaders to respect them, but in a large number of cases what Okoth-Ogendo (1993) refers to as the paradox of a high incidence of "constitution-making without constitutionality" remains a serious problem.

◆ Political Pluralism

Political pluralism deals with efforts to create a relatively autonomous civil society and political culture. There has been a proliferation of autonomous interest group organizations, political parties, civic associations, non-governmental organizations and a plural press in virtually every country. Although these developments remain distinctly urban in most countries, with varying degrees of participation, African societies have made a lot more progress in this area of political reform than in others. In the absence of good comparable quantitative data on the development of "civicness", I use two proxy indicators to measure the extent of political pluralism across countries: the percentage share of seats enjoyed by political parties other than the largest party in a legislative assembly; and the number of political parties that are represented in such an assembly. The first measures what can be called the *intensity of plurality* and the second measures *absolute plurality*. Taken together they give some indication of the nature and extent of political pluralism in Africa today.

Table 1 provides data for 36 countries which have had competitive party elections in the 1990s.¹³ Plurality is much more pronounced for the indicator on parties in parliament than for the one that measures the relative strength of the opposition parties. The average number of parties in Africa's 36 parliaments is 6.4. In four parliaments — those of Madagascar, Benin, Chad and the Central African

¹³ Data are for the most recent elections and current parliaments. Where there are two chambers, the data for the popular representative chamber have been used.

Table 1		
Political plurality in Africa's multi-party parliaments		
Country	Intensity of plurality (percentage share of seats held by parties other than the largest party)	Absolute plurality (number of parties in parliament)
Benin	74.7	17
Madagascar	66.7	17
Sierra Leone*	63.9	6
Central African Republic	60.0	13
Chad	66.0	15**
Togo	55.6	5
Malawi	52.0	3
Sao Tome and Principe	50.2	3
Mozambique	48.4	3
Mauritius	47.0	6
Kenya	46.8	7
Angola	41.4	12
Cameroon	39.5	7
Guinea-Bissau	38.0	5
Guinea	37.8	9
South Africa	37.4	7
Niger	35.0	10
Ghana	34.0	4
Botswana	32.5	3
Cape Verde	30.6	3
Senegal	30.0	6
Gabon	29.2	5
Gambia	26.7	4
Namibia	26.4	5
Liberia	23.5	6
Djibouti	23.3	2
Tanzania	22.3	5
Burundi*	19.8	2
Seychelles	18.2	3
Côte d'Ivoire	15.5	3
Equatorial Guinea	15.0	4
Comoros	14.5	3
Mali	13.1	8
Mauritania	10.9	3
Burkina Faso	9.1	4
Lesotho	0.0	1
Averages (Intensity of plurality; Absolute plurality)	34.8	6.4

Source: Raw data obtained from Wilfred Derksen Political Websites, *Elections around the World*; <http://www.geocities.com/derksen/election/country/lt.htm>; **Europa World Year Book**; and Klipsan Press, **Recent Election Results**, <http://www.klipsan.com>

Notes: *The governments and parliaments of these countries have been overthrown by the military. **This is a rough estimate; there are four large parties in parliament, and an assortment of smaller ones share a total of 24 seats.

Republic — party representation ranged from 13 to 17. Not surprisingly, these are also among the countries in which the leading parties received less than 50 per cent of the seats in parliament. Only Lesotho, Djibouti and Burundi have had parliaments in which party representation has been two and below. In the case of Lesotho, which has only one party in parliament, the result reflects the distortion that is inherent in that country's first-past-the-post electoral system. Although the

leading party scored only 54 per cent of the votes, it ended up winning all the seats. And in Burundi, whose parliament had two parties, the outcome reflected the country's two-tier ethnic social structure. However, the intensity of plurality, which is arguably the more powerful of the two indicators, or the percentage share of seats held by parties other than the largest party, seems to be a lot more limited. The average intensity of plurality for the 36 countries is only 34.8 per cent. This is very close to the critical threshold of a minimum of one third of parliamentary seats plus one (the opposite of a two thirds majority) that is often required to prevent a ruling party from changing fundamental clauses of a constitution. Seventeen, or almost half, of the countries have parliaments in which the largest party enjoys more than a two thirds majority. In only eight, or 22.8 per cent, of the countries, the ruling party does not control the majority of seats in parliament.

When compared with other regions of the world that have multi-party parliaments, the African average turns out to be the lowest for both indicators on intensity of plurality and absolute plurality. The interesting thing about Table 2 is that performance tends to correspond to conventional, indeed specialist, knowledge of the state of democratization in the five regions: Western democracies lead, followed by Latin America and East and Central Europe, and then South and East Asia. It is important to note that the absolute plurality measure can sometimes distort parliamentary realities. A party can command an overwhelming majority of the seats in a parliament that may still boast a high result for party representation. This has been the case, for example, in Mali, with a mere 13.1 per cent score on intensity of plurality, but a high absolute plurality score of 8. Despite Africa's relatively low scores in the table, a few countries have shown levels of plurality that are comparable to those of the other regions with high scores.

Table 2		
Political plurality by region (average figures)		
Region	Intensity of plurality (percentage share of seats held by parties other than the largest party)	Absolute plurality (number of parties in parliament)
Sub-Saharan Africa	34.8	6.4
South and East Asia	46.3	8.7
Latin America	56.9	9.4
East and Central Europe	56.7	9.4
Western Democracies	59.8	8.5

Source: Raw data for countries in each region were obtained from Wilfred Derksen Political Websites, Elections around the World; <http://www.geocities.com/derksen/election/country/lt.htm>; *Europa World Year Book*; and Klipsan Press, *Recent Election Results*, <http://www.klipsan.com>

Note: Sub-Saharan Africa, N = 36; South and East Asia, N = 13; Latin America, N = 16; East and Central Europe, N = 20; Western Democracies, N = 22

◆ Electoral Reform

Electoral reform has been high on the agenda of political reforms, and deals with two main issues. The first relates to the efforts of opposition parties and groups in civil society to eliminate the advantages which incumbent governments have enjoyed in the use of state institutions and public resources, as well as the application of discriminatory or oppressive laws, to influence electoral outcomes. Top on the agenda is the question of the neutrality of the electoral office, the right

to appoint party officers as polling agents to oversee the electoral process and the creation of a credible electoral register. In countries where autonomous conferences were held and allowed to influence the content of the electoral system, such as Benin, the Congo, Mali, Burundi and Niger¹⁴, there was some success in producing fairly neutral electoral régimes during the transitions. The same applies to Sierra Leone, where the military was largely discredited and the electoral office was headed by a well-respected ex-UN bureaucrat who was determined to ensure that the elections were free and fair. Where national conferences failed to impose their will on incumbents — Cameroon, Togo, Gabon, Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, for instance — the electoral systems were compromised. The results were thus militantly challenged, sometimes violently, by opposition groups. The same applies to the top-down régimes of constitutional change — Tanzania, Kenya and Ghana, for instance.

Indeed, in Ghana and Kenya, struggles to make the electoral systems fair and autonomous have been at the centre of national politics since the democratic transitions started in the early 1990s. The Ghanaian opposition boycotted the 1992 parliamentary elections on the grounds that the rules for the presidential elections, which preceded the parliamentary ones, were biased in favour of the incumbent: complaints were made about the bloated character of the electoral register and the composition and partiality of the electoral officers. Despite an initial uncompromising stand by the ruling party of ex-military ruler Jerry Rawlings, some progress was made in correcting the lopsidedness of the electoral régime to give opponents a relatively fair chance in the 1996 elections. And Kenya has witnessed some of the most violent pro-electoral reform protests in recent years. In this case, the opposition parties and civic groups were concerned about not only the composition and neutrality of the electoral office, but also gerrymandering — changing electoral boundaries to give the incumbent party an advantage. They were also concerned about the government's use of archaic laws on public order, rights of assembly and demonstrations to intimidate and harass opposition parties and critical individuals. The government was forced to concede to many of the demands for electoral reform in anticipation of the general elections of December 1997, although several problems remained unresolved.

The second issue relates to the types of electoral systems chosen to express representation in parliamentary and presidential organs. Both deal with the question of political equity. With regard to parliamentary representation, the electoral reforms produced five systems, which are summarized in Table 3. Under the *first-past-the-post* electoral rules, an electorate is divided into constituencies, and the candidate with the largest number of votes in each constituency wins, even if he/she does not have the majority of the votes. In the *two round system*, if a candidate fails to win an overall majority in the first round, a second round is held, in which candidates who score less than a stipulated percentage of the votes are excluded. The *block vote* system is similar to the first-past-the-post rule, except that in the former, constituencies are much larger and more than one candidate is eligible to be elected. The number of ballots (the block) given to a voter is equal to the number of candidates to be elected in each constituency. Voters are free to choose candidates across party lists. However, if party loyalties are strong, and voters choose candidates from a single party, the system can produce an extreme

¹⁴ This applies only to the national conference that produced the first multi-party government.

form of disproportionality. The *list proportional representational* system seeks to ensure that popular votes gained are proportional to the seats allocated in parliament. The country is divided into one single constituency or very large electoral districts. The electorate votes for parties and not for individuals. The parties draw up a list of ranked candidates, corresponding to the number of seats to be filled. Seats are allocated according to the proportion of votes gained by each party and are filled by the candidates in a descending order of preference in each list. The *parallel* voting scheme combines the first-past-the-post system and the list proportional representational system.

As Table 3 shows, 11 countries adopted the first-past-the-post majoritarian rule (FPTP) system; two adopted the block vote system (BV); eight adopted the two round system (TRS); four adopted the FPTP/PR (parallel) systems; and 14 adopted the list proportional system (list PR). The first two can produce serious discrepancies between the proportion of votes won and the number of seats gained; and the second can give larger parties an unfair advantage in the second round of voting since smaller parties are likely to be eliminated. Significantly, about a third of the countries opted for an electoral system that was explicitly aimed at providing proportional outcomes. And just over 40 per cent had systems with some degree of proportionality. Thus, as far as the legislative organ is concerned, there is clearly a trend away from the colonially-bequeathed majoritarian electoral schemes in favour of proportionality.

But the majority of countries (21 out of 39) still preferred the majoritarian FPTP, TRS and BV systems. It is important to note, however, that because of the very large number of ethnic groups in most African countries and the tendency of many voters to vote along ethnic lines, most majoritarian systems produced very plural parliamentary outcomes, although the proportion of seats enjoyed by different political parties did not reflect their relative voting strengths. There were at least 11 countries where the proportion of seats gained by leading parties was much higher than the proportion of votes won. The list PR system was efficient in ensuring that total votes cast were roughly equal to the proportion of seats obtained in the parliaments where the system was used. But it did not always produce a high degree of plurality, as demonstrated by elections in Liberia. In Liberia, voters largely ignored ethnic factors and voted overwhelmingly (75.3 per cent) for the party that they thought was likely to ensure non-renewal of the war — the party of the strongest warlord, Charles Taylor. In one exceptional FPTP case, Malawi, where the electorate voted along ethnic lines and produced three main political parties, the proportion of votes cast was roughly equal to the proportion of seats gained in parliament.

In the case of presidential elections, most countries have opted for electoral systems that would produce a president with a majority of the national votes. In this regard, the TRS, parallel and list PR systems converged as elections for presidents in all three systems required a second round to produce a winner with the majority of the votes. This is not a requirement for the FPTP countries. In Kenya, for instance, Daniel Arap Moi was returned to power in 1992 with 36.4 per cent of the popular votes. Thus, none of the five electoral systems was structured to produce proportional outcomes in the executive branch of government. It may be argued that the attempt to produce majoritarian outcomes in the presidential organs of government is a major limitation in the current efforts to introduce

political equity issues in the governance of African countries. Except in a few cases where coalition governments have been formed to help with the passage of government bills in parliament, majoritarianism in the executive organ has given substantial powers to leading parties, which in most cases did not enjoy the confidence of the majority of the voters as parties of first choice. Ministerial, top-level parastatal and ambassadorial appointments have tended to reflect the majoritarian outcomes of the second rounds of presidential elections. This has been a major source of instability in the fledgling political systems. Only South Africa's electoral system has been sensitive to the issue of proportionality in the executive organ of government.¹⁵

Table 3				
Electoral systems in Africa				
First past the post	Block vote	Two round system	Parallel	List PR
Botswana	Djibouti	Central African Republic	Cameroon	Angola
Zambia	Mauritius	Chad	Niger	Berlin
Gambia		Congo	Senegal	Burkina Faso
Ghana		Gabon	Seychelles	Burundi
Guinea		Mali		Cape Verde
Côte d'Ivoire*		Mauritania		Equatorial Guinea
Kenya		Comoros		Guinea Bissau
Lesotho		Togo		Liberia
Malawi				Madagascar
Tanzania				Mozambique
Zimbabwe				Namibia
				Sao Tome and Principe
				Sierra Leone
				South Africa
11	2	8	4	14

Source: Adapted from IDEA, *The International IDEA Handbook of Electoral System Design*; International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance; Stockholm, Sweden, Handbook Series 1/97, 1997.

Note: *Côte d'Ivoire's FPTP is combined with a block vote system.

◆ Decentralization and Power Sharing

Reforms that are aimed at *decentralization* and *power sharing* represent additional attempts to broaden the plurality of politics and prevent the concentration of power in a few hands or regions. Much of the decentralization that has taken place has been carried out as part of wider programmes of public sector reforms — which enjoy World Bank, UNDP and other principal donor support. Decentralization involves the creation or reactivation of local governments, the devolution of the powers of central ministries to regional and local areas, attempts at the devolution of fiscal or tax-raising powers in certain areas of governance, and establishment of formulae for sharing centrally derived revenues between various levels of government. In most cases, decentralization has not led to real transfer of power and autonomy to regions, municipalities and local rural authorities. This is the case

¹⁵ The National Party, the party of apartheid, later pulled out of the national government — to provide an effective opposition to the ANC-dominated government, according to National Party leader F.W. de Klerk.

even in the bold decentralization programme of Ethiopia, in which power was devolved to ethnically defined regions within a federal structure and a constitutional principle was affirmed that respected the rights of nationalities to secede from the federation. But a strong centralization impulse has informed all decentralization programmes that have been attempted in Africa. Governments are often more willing to decentralize line ministries, which they may still be able to control, than to devolve real tax-raising powers and political authority to regions and local areas.

Reforms aimed at power sharing have largely been promoted by countries that have been racked by civil war or long-running conflicts. Such wars and conflicts have often been inconclusive, and have thus required the interventions of outside powers or agencies to create agreements for peaceful coexistence between parties. Agreements often focus on the creation of new armies and internal security systems that reflect the relative powers and interests of the main combatants; joint representation in national electoral bodies; and formation of broad-based governments that will also reflect the electoral strengths of the contending parties. The latter represents an extension of the principle of plurality to the executive arm of government.

A key example of power sharing is the Lusaka Accord for peace and governance in Angola. This accord gave a number of cabinet seats, parastatal directorships, ambassadorial appointments and regional governorships to Jonas Savimbi's rebel UNITA movement, which lost the elections to the ruling MPLA government.¹⁶ Mozambique, another war-torn country, also practices a modified form of power sharing, especially on issues dealing with national security. But contrary to Angola, the losing armed opposition, Diakama's RENAMO, is not represented in government. However, it controls about 44.8 per cent of the seats in the national parliament and a good number of regional governments, although not the critical offices of the governors, which have been a bone of contention between the two parties. Under the Abidjan Accord of November 1996, some kind of power-sharing mechanism was also recommended as a solution to the six-year war in Sierra Leone. Power sharing in this case was limited to participation of the rebel Revolutionary United Front in newly created institutions dealing with the management of peace, the reconstruction of the army and the police, and the formation of a new national electoral commission. The peace treaty was signed in the context of a new constitution, which ushered in a new multi-party government and parliament in which the rebel movement did not participate (Bangura, 1997). In South Africa and Nigeria, the new power-sharing régimes were not facilitated by outside powers, no doubt because of the relative capacities of the two governments to oversee their respective transitions — even though the Nigerian transition happens to be deeply flawed. In South Africa, parties that scored 5 per cent of the votes were expected to be part of the national government; and in Nigeria, a rotational principle was introduced as an effort to break the stalemate which had dogged that country's politics since the annulment of the elections of 12 June 1993.

As Bayo Adekanye (1996) has noted, power-sharing arrangements born out of wars seek largely to solve short-term problems of security. They do not always

¹⁶ This agreement has stalled because of the reluctance of Savimbi's UNITA movement to hand back to the central government the territories that it controls. These territories are very rich in diamonds.

succeed in promoting the goals of democracy. Although they have opened up political systems to new actors, they have often tended to create new state-centred "power-sharing" oligarchies. More importantly, most such reforms have proved to be very unstable: actors guided by the logic of war and zero-sum calculations, rather than the logic of compromise that the power-sharing régimes seek to cultivate. This has led to a manipulation of the rules of power sharing by both government and opposition parties and the collapse of several power-sharing agreements.

PATTERNS OF DEMOCRATIZATION

In this section, I discuss five patterns of democratization that have emerged out of the experiences of political reform. The first represents the small number of countries that practised some form of multi-party rule even before the democratization pressures of the 1990s: Botswana, Mauritius, Senegal, the Gambia and Zimbabwe. This is a mixed set of countries, with different colonial histories, levels of development and social structures. Botswana and Mauritius are among the African countries that have grown rapidly since independence and have largely avoided the painful stabilization programmes of the IMF because of their respectable macro-economic performance records. Traditional smallholding agriculture is still prevalent in most of the countries, although large-scale commercial agriculture and ranching are very prominent in Zimbabwe and Botswana respectively. Botswana's development has also largely been driven by its diamond sector; and Mauritius is noted for its successful manufacturing export zones and tourist industry.

All five countries have very small populations: the Gambia, Mauritius and Botswana have populations of roughly one million, and Zimbabwe and Senegal about nine million. All five countries are multi-ethnic, although Zimbabwe and Botswana have a smaller number of ethnic groups. Before the transitions of the 1990s, these countries held competitive multi-party elections; key interest groups in society were not tied to the reigning political parties, although civil society itself was poorly developed; and civil liberties were reasonably protected, even if not comprehensively. Of course, not all five countries' elections can be said to have been free and fair — those of Senegal, the Gambia and Zimbabwe were often hotly contested by the losers. Mauritius was the only country in this group which experienced a change of government during the pre-1990 period: a coalition of opposition parties defeated the incumbent government in elections in 1982. However, due to the long tenure of the government parties there was hardly any separation of powers between the state and ruling parties in this set of countries.

In the post-1990 period, Mauritius has continued to enjoy competitive politics and periodic alternation of power between parties. Electoral plurality has increased in Botswana, with the opposition parties now enjoying a much higher representation in parliament than hitherto. Others have not made much progress. Elections in Senegal have consistently been challenged by the opposition parties and groups in society, leading to very serious levels of street violence (Diop, 1994). The government also has to contend with a growing civil war in one of its regions — the Casamance. The Gambia came under military rule in 1994 and its new ruler, Yahaya Jammeh, quickly consolidated his régime by organizing flawed elections

(Kandeh, 1996). Zimbabwe was well on its way to becoming a one-party state in the early 1990s, if it were not for the resistance of civic groups and the difficulties which the president, Robert Mugabe, faced in making a case for one-party rule against the tide of democratization that was sweeping Africa and the rest of the world (Sachikonye, 1995).

A second set of countries were able to change incumbent governments in the post-1990 period through successful multi-party elections. These were Zambia, Benin, Malawi, the Congo, Burundi, Mali, Cape Verde, Niger, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, Madagascar, Burundi, Sierra Leone and Liberia. Again, this is a rather mixed group of countries, which do not lend themselves to any general set of explanations for the similar outcomes. Each country may have to be analysed separately to understand the dynamics at play. Like the first group, they scored high on electoral competitiveness, the separation of ruling political parties from organized interest groups and — in some countries — the promotion of civil liberties. Winning parties continue, however, to exercise the tradition of party domination of the state. Four countries — Zambia, Benin, Mali and Cape Verde — have held second elections after those that ushered in the multi-party changes. The Zambian elections were boycotted by the leading opposition parties because of constitutional changes introduced by the new government that undermined the nationality and political rights of one of the leading opponents,¹⁷ as well as complaints about electoral malpractice. In the second election for the presidency in Cape Verde, which was held in February 1996, the new incumbent president was returned unopposed. In Mali, there were very serious allegations of electoral malpractice against the government, which led to the boycott of the elections by the main opposition parties. The new president was re-elected by an incredible 95.9 per cent of the popular vote in 1997. Benin had a successful second election in 1996, which the incumbent, Soglo, a former World Bank official, lost to Mathieu Kerekou, a former military ruler who himself had lost the first multi-party elections in 1991.

Indeed, Benin is the only other country in Africa — after Mauritius — that has experienced an alternation of power between political parties without the intervention of the military or a constitutional crisis. In the case of Madagascar, which has also changed its government twice during the current transition, the democratically elected president, Albert Zafi, was impeached in 1996 by parliament over allegations of constitutional violations relating to his dismissal of the prime minister. The supreme court upheld the impeachment; and in the elections held in 1997, Zafi lost the presidency to Didier Ratsiraka in a closely fought contest. Sierra Leone, Burundi and Niger lapsed back into military rule, although in Niger the new military leader organized very flawed elections, which his party won; the government of the Congo was overthrown after a four-month civil war in which the military government of the former ruler, Denis Sassou-Nguesso, was reinstated; soldiers briefly took power in Lesotho in 1994 before they were prevailed upon by regional leaders to hand it back; and Zambia experienced an abortive coup in October 1997. Liberia's elections took place only in July 1997 after seven years of a viciously fought civil war.

¹⁷ This was the country's first president, Kenneth Kaunda.

The third pattern of democratization refers to cases where pre-1990 ruling régimes still retain control of the state, even though many of the elements of formal democratization — such as multi-party elections, non-homogenous legislatures, growth of independent interest groups in society and a relatively free press — are discernible. These countries are Mauritania, Guinea Bissau, Guinea-Conakry, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Gabon, Djibouti, Tanzania, Kenya, Mozambique and Angola. In this set of countries the principle of free and fair elections still remains a highly contested issue; opposition parties and civic organizations have been unable to wrest power from the governing parties through the medium of elections; and the activities of ruling parties are still very much inseparable from governmental practices. This means that governments enjoy considerable powers to limit the scope of participation, representation, organization and expression. As a result, extra-judicial forms of protest, such as politically-inspired riots, are very prevalent in many of these countries.

The fourth pattern of democratization deals with cases where military régimes are still in place or have recently been installed following the overthrow of newly elected governments; it also includes countries that have been stateless or that are governed by armed militias. These are Nigeria, Burundi, the Sudan, Sierra Leone and Somalia. In this set of countries, national legislatures are largely non-existent; régimes rule by decree or the personal dicta of leaders; and arbitrariness and state- or militia-sponsored violence are rife. The Sudan has a "non-party" parliament, which was elected in 1996 by a combination of direct and indirect methods. Islamist parties loyal to the régime dominate the parliament. As is the norm in most transitions to democratization, however, an independent media has grown in this set of countries even though it works under extremely hazardous conditions. Newspaper closures and harassment of journalists, politicians and social activists are routine. Despite their authoritarian character, these régimes continue to face persistent demands from the populace to democratize (Ibrahim, 1992; Mustapha, 1993). Some, like Nigeria, have even set up elaborate, though tightly controlled, processes of democratization (Othman and Williams, forthcoming). In the case of Sierra Leone, the ousted government and the mass public have led a very effective campaign to restore constitutional legality and democratic institutions. The military rulers of Burundi have also faced isolation and sanctions from neighbouring countries, including calls for the return of constitutional rule.

The fifth pattern refers to the new populist régimes — Uganda, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Eritrea and the Democratic Republic of the Congo — which came to power through armed struggle and civil wars. They have refused to organize multi-party elections although other elements of democratization are discernible: a relatively free press (especially in Uganda); existence of several autonomous organizations in civil society despite the impulse to regulate them through old-style single party structures; the organization of elections, although these are either non-party competitive or tightly controlled by the ruling parties; and varying commitments to the protection of human rights. These countries, especially Uganda and Ethiopia, have attempted to set up very elaborate decentralization programmes and what they have called "grassroots" or "cell-based" systems of rule. The power of the central administration and ruling parties is, however, still unquestionable. Alternative parties are not allowed to contest elections for state power under the "grassroots" or populist systems of rule. In Uganda's "non-party" elections-

derived parliament, 39 seats were reserved for women, 10 for the army, five for youth, three for trade unions and five for the disabled. Ethiopia's two-chamber parliament, formed on the basis of nationwide elections, provides for some form of ethnic representation, in addition to the popular mandates of individuals who are mostly allied to the ruling party. Eritrea's parliament is made up largely of appointed and indirectly elected members. Rwanda also has an appointed parliament, although in this case members were chosen from previously existing political parties.

Table 4				
Patterns of democratization in Africa				
Pre-1990 multi-party political systems	Post-1990 multi-party political systems with new governments	Post-1990 multi-party political systems with pre-1990 governments	Post-1990 military régimes	Post-1990 populist political systems formed through wars
Botswana Mauritius Senegal Zimbabwe Gambia*	Benin Zambia Malawi Namibia Mali Congo* Burundi* Madagascar Sierra Leone* Niger* Cape Verde South Africa Liberia Lesotho Central African Republic* Comoros*	Mauritania Guinea-Bissau Côte d'Ivoire Togo Cameroon Burkina Faso Seychelles Kenya Djibouti Tanzania Mozambique Gabon Ghana Sao Tome and Principe Equatorial Guinea Chad Angola	Nigeria Sudan Burundi Sierra Leone Somalia	Uganda Ethiopia Eritrea Rwanda Democratic Republic of the Congo
5	16	17	5	5

Notes: *Later relapsed into military rule. The military rulers of the Gambia and Niger later organized elections, which they "won".

Some countries appear in more than one group because of their different experiences in democratization. It is useful to include them in multiple groups to show the details of the trends that have been under way.

Swaziland, the only Sub-Saharan African country not included, is run by an executive monarchy. Its national assembly, the Libandla, is composed of individuals elected by traditional councils or appointed by the monarch.

What comes out of this review is a mixed picture of democratization. Contrary to popular belief, there is no single pattern of democratization in Africa, but several. If one can draw any general conclusion from the review, it is this: most countries in Africa now have budding pluralist political systems; and much progress has been made in the area of civil and political rights. The latter can be discerned from the rapid expansion of independently controlled newspapers in most countries — staffed by an equally rapidly growing university graduate population, which has gone into journalism because of the limited opportunities for employment in the wider economy and public sector. There is still much arbitrary rule in many parts

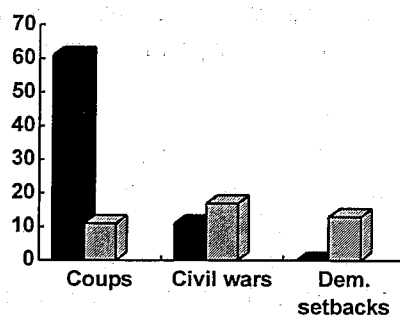
of Africa, including in countries that have made significant progress in instituting the rule of law as a cardinal principle of statecraft. But a good deal of the arbitrariness is conducted in a context of legitimate political competition and an independent press — an outcome that is different from the pre-1990 period. Much remains to be done in the crucial area of separating ruling parties from the institutions of the state, the organization of free and fair elections, and the alternation of governmental power by the political parties.

Despite this evidence of the growth of political pluralism, one other significant trend is also visible across Africa: the problem of political instability and important reversals in several of the programmes of democratization. In general, as Table 4 shows, a large number of incumbent régimes of the pre-1990 period are still in power and continue to face tough, sometimes violent, opposition from sections of the public for a fairer application of the rules of political contestation; several countries that held successful elections have reverted to military rule, or have experienced aborted military uprisings; and civil wars are a major feature of the political landscape of many countries in the region. Figure 1 provides a comparative picture of the problems of instability in the pre-1990 and post-1990 periods. The indicators used are numbers of military coups, civil wars and setbacks in democratization. There were 11 military coups between 1990 and 1997, or approximately 1.6 per year, lower than the 2.1 average for the pre-1990 period. Twenty-one (or 42.5 per cent) of Africa's current 47 leaders first came to power by means of a military coup d'état. An additional nine came to power through civil wars or armed struggles. This means that 63.8 per cent of current African leaders have strong links with the military.

An interesting development in African politics has been the use of elections by both old and new military rulers to legitimize their grip on politics. Democratization has not checked the impulse for coup-making among the military; instead, the latter has adjusted its political strategies to accommodate popular demands and donor pressures for democratization. In addition to the continued occurrence of military coups, there have been 17 civil wars in the 1990s as opposed to 11 before 1990 (the figure for post-1990 includes some of the wars that started before 1990). And 13 countries have experienced setbacks in their democratic programmes. We may conclude from this analysis that if the 1990s can be described as the decade of democratization, it would also be accurate to call it the decade of political instability. In other words, democratization and political instability have been products of the same processes of change.

Figure 1

**Trends in military coups, civil wars and democratic setbacks,
1960-1989 and 1990-1997**



Note: The dark shade represents the period 1960-1989; the light shade represents the period 1990-1997. **Coups:** 1960-89 (Number: 61); 1990-97 (Number: 11). Some of the civil wars in the post-1990 period are carryovers from the pre-1990 period. Only those which were still unresolved when the wave of democratization started in 1990 are included. Many of these wars, both pre- and post-1990, have, at least for now, been resolved. **Civil wars:** 1960-89 (Number: 11); 1990-97 (Number: 17). **Democratic setbacks:** 1990-97 (Number: 13). Democratic setbacks include successful military coups and those that were subsequently reversed; they also include cases where second post-1990 elections were either boycotted by the opposition parties or an incumbent president was returned unopposed.

Source: *Africa Contemporary Record*; *Africa South of the Sahara*, country reports of the Economist Intelligence Unit; as well as Reuters and Agence-France news agency reports have been used as primary data sources to calculate the number of coups, civil wars and democratic setbacks.

RESPONSES TO INSTABILITY

Political instability has led to population displacement, acute personal insecurity and considerable human misery in several countries. Not surprisingly, there has been intense debate, both within and outside Africa, about ways of responding to the humanitarian crisis that has emerged in the context of democratization and political change. The responses have been twofold and emphasize the primacy of security in regulating the processes of change. The first is external and deals mainly with the policy initiatives of the United States, France and Britain — the main foreign powers that have influenced economic and political events in Africa. In the early 1990s, these powers signalled an intention to make democracy and human rights cardinal principles of their foreign aid programmes. Working in conjunction with other major bilateral donors and, to some extent, the Bretton Woods institutions, they sought to tie aid flows to progress made in democratization. François Mitterrand announced at the Franco-African summit at La Baule in 1990 that French aid would henceforth be linked to democratization (O'Toole, 1997). Indeed, Douglas Hurd, the British Foreign Minister, and Linda Chalker, the Minister for Overseas Development, also made similar pronouncements in the United Kingdom during the same period (Leftwich, 1996). In a new empirically grounded book, William Robinson analyses the rise of "political aid" in US foreign policy as a tool in the promotion of a particular form of democratization in developing countries (Robinson, 1996).

During the early 1990s, these three powers intervened directly at critical junctures to force the hands of incumbent governments to concede to popular domestic demands for elections. The most celebrated cases were those of Kenya and Malawi in 1992, and the Central African Republic in 1993. In Kenya and Malawi, the Western aid consortium suspended aid negotiations and eventually forced the incumbent governments to heed the demands for elections and political reforms. In the Central African Republic, French officials were withdrawn from the special security organ of the president, André Kolingba, in order to force him to hold elections; and the French government further threatened to withdraw aid when he tried to cancel the elections which he had lost (O'Toole, 1997).

This unqualified enthusiasm for democratization in Africa did not last more than four years. As instability deepened, external powers expressed interest in military intervention schemes as solutions to the problems of democratization. France, which has 9,000 troops in, and a series of bilateral military agreements with, its ex-colonies, reverted to its earlier policy of intervention in Francophone Africa. However, its failure to prevent the fall of the Hutu-dominated régime in Rwanda, its inability to influence the events leading to the overthrow of Mobutu's régime in Zaire, and the problems it has experienced in policing the peace in the Central African Republic, where a number of French soldiers have been killed, have forced a rethink in policy. The new policy seeks to reduce the number of French troops in Africa as part of a wider programme, which emphasizes the development of peace-keeping equipment at French bases and the recruitment of a multinational African peace-keeping force to maintain order in troubled spots. In the Central African Republic, where this new policy is being tested, an 800-strong African force, under a Malian commander, is helping to protect the democratically elected government of Patassé against sections of the military that mutinied three times in 1996, plunging the capital city of Bangui into chaos. The programme is administered by France, including the payment of the salaries of the peace-keeping force (*The Economist*, 1997).

Similarly, the failure of the American intervention force in Somalia in 1993, and the abortive effort to put together a Western-led intervention force for the Great Lakes region in 1996, have produced a new policy initiative from the United States. This is the African Crisis-Response Force, which was launched in 1996 — and renamed African Crisis-Response Initiative when it was criticized by African leaders as a disguised form of neo-colonialism. Under the programme, the United States, United Kingdom and France train 10 battalions from several African countries; the troops remain with their national armies but may be called upon to participate in humanitarian interventions when the peace and security of specific countries are threatened. Preliminary training, which has been largely provided by the United States, has been conducted in Senegal, Uganda and Malawi.

This new focus on "African" solutions to the continent's troubled democratization programmes has received a major boost, in the form of three autonomous regional initiatives, within Africa itself. They partly reflect what Ali Mazrui has called a new impulse for a *pax-Africana* (Mazrui, 1997). The first concerns the major effort which the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has made in restoring order and organizing successful elections in war-torn Liberia; as well as its intervention in Sierra Leone in May 1997 to overturn the violent and

unstable military coup that ousted the democratically elected government of Ahmed Tejan Kabbah. ECOMOG (ECOWAS's Monitoring Group), the organ responsible for the regional operations, was first deployed in Liberia in 1990 as a humanitarian force, but it increasingly took on the functions of a peace-enforcement or peace-making force — coercing the various warring factions to heed the call for a cease-fire and the organization of elections. The driving force of ECOMOG is the regional power, Nigeria, which accounts for about 55 per cent of the West African population and supplies at least 60 per cent of the troops and a much higher percentage of the cost of the operation. Acting under Chapter VII (enforcement) and Chapter VIII (regional arrangements) of the United Nations Charter, ECOMOG has been able to get the approval of the United Nations Security Council for a comprehensive sanctions régime against the junta in Sierra Leone. It signed a peace agreement with the junta on 23 October 1997, in which the latter agreed to restore the ousted government to power in April 1998, following a comprehensive disarmament programme (Gberie, 1997). An ECOWAS meeting in Lomé on 17 and 18 December 1997, agreed to transform ECOMOG into a permanent institution.

The second initiative has come from Southern Africa, which also boasts a regional economic organization, the Southern African Development Community (SADC). This region has experienced two long-running wars in Angola and Mozambique, wars of national liberation in Zimbabwe and Namibia, and an oppressive racist régime in South Africa. White settler colonialism in much of Southern Africa encouraged the formation of an informal system of military co-operation among the liberated front-line states. Some of these states, such as Tanzania, Zambia and Mozambique, provided military bases for the training of liberation fighters and sanctuary during the general struggle against white rule. As in other regions of the continent, democratization in the 1990s has been uneven, with threats of, and actual, military interventions to reverse the political reforms, as in Lesotho and Zambia; and there are real dangers of renewed wars in Angola and Mozambique. Regional security has emerged, therefore, as an important issue in the democratic evolution of SADC (Mandaza, 1994; Goncalves, 1995), although the organization has yet to intervene in any country in the region. The coup in Lesotho, in 1994, was reversed by informal pressures exerted by regional leaders, rather than by the use of force. However, in 1996, the organization established the SADC Organ for Politics, Defence and Security, which seeks to respond to the problems of peace and security in the sub-region (Campbell, 1997).

The third initiative has emerged in East and Central Africa. However, in this case, there is no clearly recognized regional power or economic organization that deals with common problems of economic integration and security. Responses have, therefore, tended to be *ad hoc*. Interestingly, it is war-torn Uganda¹⁸ that has played a central role in the security dynamics in the region. What may be called the "Tutsi phenomenon" helps explain the Ugandan initiative. Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, believed to be half Tutsi, had cordial relations with Tutsi exiles in Uganda, who had fled their country in 1959 after the bloody anti-Tutsi, Hutu-led military coup. These Tutsi exiles played an important role in Museveni's armed campaigns and eventual seizure of power in Uganda in 1985. In return, Museveni offered support for their struggles to oust the Hutu-dominated Rwandan

¹⁸ Uganda now boasts the highest growth rate in Africa and stability in most parts of the country. But war still rages in the north of the country.

government, which culminated in the genocide of 1994 and their final takeover of power. A massive refugee crisis was created on the borders of Rwanda, Zaire, Burundi and Tanzania. More than a million Hutus, who had fled Rwanda in anticipation of revenge by the advancing Tutsi army, were scattered in several camps where members of the Interahamwe, who had carried out the genocide, were also found. The new Tutsi-led Rwandan government felt threatened by the activities of the Interahamwe in the refugee camps and the Zairean dictator's stridently anti-Tutsi position, especially in eastern Zaire, where Tutsis (the Bayamulenge) have been resident for centuries. Rwanda and Uganda armed the Bayamulenge Tutsis, who later teamed up with Laurent Kabila, a long-standing opponent of Mobutu, to take over the reins of power in Zaire. This initiative later had the backing of some of the regional governments, such as Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa.

A similar *ad hoc* response to crisis was also evident during the four-month civil war in the Congo in 1997. In the Congo, the democratically elected government of Pascal Lissouba was challenged by armed militias loyal to the ex-military ruler, Denis Sassou-Nguesso, when the former tried to disarm the latter in anticipation of general elections slated for July 1997. The capital city, Brazzaville, was devastated by the four-month stand-off between the two armies. The regional governments were powerless. Through the initiative of France and the Organisation for African Unity, an attempt was made to deploy to the country an African-led United Nations peace keeping force, with troops from eight African countries. The initiative stalled in the Security Council. Angola, whose leaders were worried about Pascal Lissouba's links with their own country's rebel leader, Jonas Savimbi, and secessionist tendencies in one of the oil enclaves, Cabinda, decided to intervene decisively on the side of the former military ruler, Nguesso. In this case, intervention led not to the protection of democratic reform, but to its reversal.

Regional initiatives are likely to become prominent in the quest for stability in Africa's troubled democratization programme. Their effectiveness depends, however, upon the presence of regional powers that are ready to take risks. A regional power clearly exists in West Africa, although French influence in the region is likely to act against a proper institutionalization of the ECOMOG initiative. It must be stressed that ECOMOG is the first truly autonomous regional security force in the developing world. Improving its technical, logistical and institutional capacity should go a long way in helping to stabilize the conflict-ridden West African societies. The democratization and stability of the regional power, Nigeria, are also essential if it is to continue to provide effective and credible leadership in the region. In the long run, SADC should be able to provide real regional security in Southern Africa, given the democratic character of the leading regional power, South Africa, and its high technical, industrial and administrative capacities. The real challenge in this case is the deracialization of the South African military, which is necessary if it is to play the kind of interventionist, peace enforcement, role that the Nigerian military has been able to play in West Africa. East and Central Africa lag behind in the institutionalization of regional security initiatives, yet two of Africa's most serious and intractable conflicts are located there — Rwanda and Burundi. If the new Democratic Republic of the Congo stabilizes, and links up with other countries like Ethiopia, Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, more long-term solutions could be found to that

region's security problems. A regional force is an absolute necessity in efforts to check the continued large-scale massacre of innocent civilians in both Rwanda and Burundi and to encourage a restructuring of the political and economic institutions in the two countries, and in the region generally.¹⁹

CONCLUSION

Democratization will continue to be an uneven enterprise in Africa. There is not likely to be a uniform pattern of change, but several. Conventional theories on the socio-economic determinants of democracy may be useful for explaining political dynamics and outcomes in individual countries, but not for classifying countries and analysing group patterns of change. Rather than treat democratization as an abstraction, this paper has shown that theorists and practitioners can make progress in understanding and advancing the phenomenon by focusing on the core elements of political reform as they have been articulated in different countries. These are the issues of constitutionality, civic and political plurality, electoral reform, decentralization and power sharing. As we have seen, these issues have been central to current efforts in Africa to introduce political equity issues in the way societies are governed.

We have not attempted to assess the degree of accountability and quality of governance in the different countries. This requires analysis of group or community level demands for effective governance and public policy issues that affect the welfare of citizens. The policies of economic adjustment that have underpinned the democratization programmes have not given sufficient weight to the other important aspect of equity that has been discussed — that of social welfare provisioning. African societies that are interested in consolidating their political reforms need to pay more attention to this issue than they have thus far. They also need to invest time and resources in deepening and broadening political reforms, which seek to provide equitable representational systems that will allow the populace to hold leaders accountable for their public policies. Such reforms should be buttressed by appropriate regional security institutions to police the difficult transitions. In the final analysis, it is the political dynamics in each country — not theoretical arguments about whether Africa is ripe for democracy — that will determine the growth or stagnation of democratization.

¹⁹ It is significant to note that the potential power in Central Africa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, has been admitted into SADC.

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