

Interrogating the Credibility of Elections in Africa: Implications for Democracy, Good Governance and Peace?

by

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Abstract

This paper interrogates the credibility of elections going into the third decade since the third wave of democracy swept across Africa, particularly against the background of post-election conflicts in several countries and the recent uprisings in North Africa. It argues that enough attention has not been paid to the ethical, moral and philosophical dimensions of the role of elections as a critical component of the democratic project, and draws attention to some of the gaps and challenges embedded in approaches that leverage the certification of elections as being “free and fair” as a one-size-fits-all formula for deciding who governs. Using survey and secondary data, as well as drawing on the experiences of a number of Africa’s democracies particularly Nigeria, the paper also raises critical questions about the relationship between the nature of elections and the quality of democracy, and the lessons learned so far. It also suggests ways of addressing those aspects of the electoral process that have been manipulated to fuel democratic deficits in Africa, as a basis for suggesting options that will likely deepen inclusive political participation, good governance and peace in the continent of Africa.

Key Words: Elections, Democracy, Good Governance, Peace, Africa

Introduction

Elections remain the most acceptable means of choosing leaders and on it rest the concept and practice of democracy. On paper, elections are straightforward and simple. But in reality, various factors come to play and determine whether election is free, fair and/or credible. Since the replacement of direct democracy with representative democracy and its attendant benefits to those elected and obvious shortcomings to those being represented (electors/electorate) - as it is the aggregation of their opinions that the representative would defend,- more and more problems are becoming apparent with representative democratic elections. This is true of both developed and developing democracies/countries. But more acute is the problem of integrity and credibility of elections in Africa. The seemingly political economy of poverty resulting in sit tight syndrome, winning at all cost and do-or-die politics as well as the bogus allowances attached to representatives seats are all parts of the problem of credibility of elections. The huge salaries and allowances of the elected and non-elected officials relative to the low pay/salaries available to the generality of the people are part of why Africa is ranked low on electoral and governance scale (IIAG, 2016; Freedom House, 2015).

The different waves of democratization that has swept through Africa going past the third decade has not eradicated the problems of credibility of elections in Africa. Popular uprisings resulting in a 'more open' democratic and electoral process especially in North Africa and elsewhere in Africa, has not mitigated nor eradicated the problem of credibility of elections in Africa. Rather, more states are regressing into more problems and the electoral democratic space is getting constricted. Examples of such states include Burundi, Burkina Faso, Zambia and Uganda (Crisis Group Report, 2015). In each case/country sited, attacks on constitutionalism (lack of respect for the constitution), rule of law, restrictions on electoral choice and human/individual rights are rampant and without disguise. The high index of the problems of credibility of elections is what has been captured in literature and data and is raising serious concerns among scholars and policy makers within and outside the continent (Ham and Lindberg, 2015; Election Integrity Project, 2015; Norris, 2014).

It is certain that issues of credibility of elections has many implications including low participation of African people in the political process, resort to self-help and electoral violence, arbitrariness in the management of national resources and poignant absence of good governance as well as recourse to, in some instances, civil war between the warring parties. Thus, the presence of fraud and malpractices are certain to impinge on and raise questions about the credibility and integrity of elections. Of course, embedded in the credibility and integrity problems are moral, ethical and legal issues relating to elections. Inevitably, any empirical diagnosis of the conduct of elections and electoral performance/integrity would raise five basic questions. How free and fair have the electoral process and rules (electoral system) been in relation to how credible are the elections? Is the entire electoral process free and fair and is seen to be so?

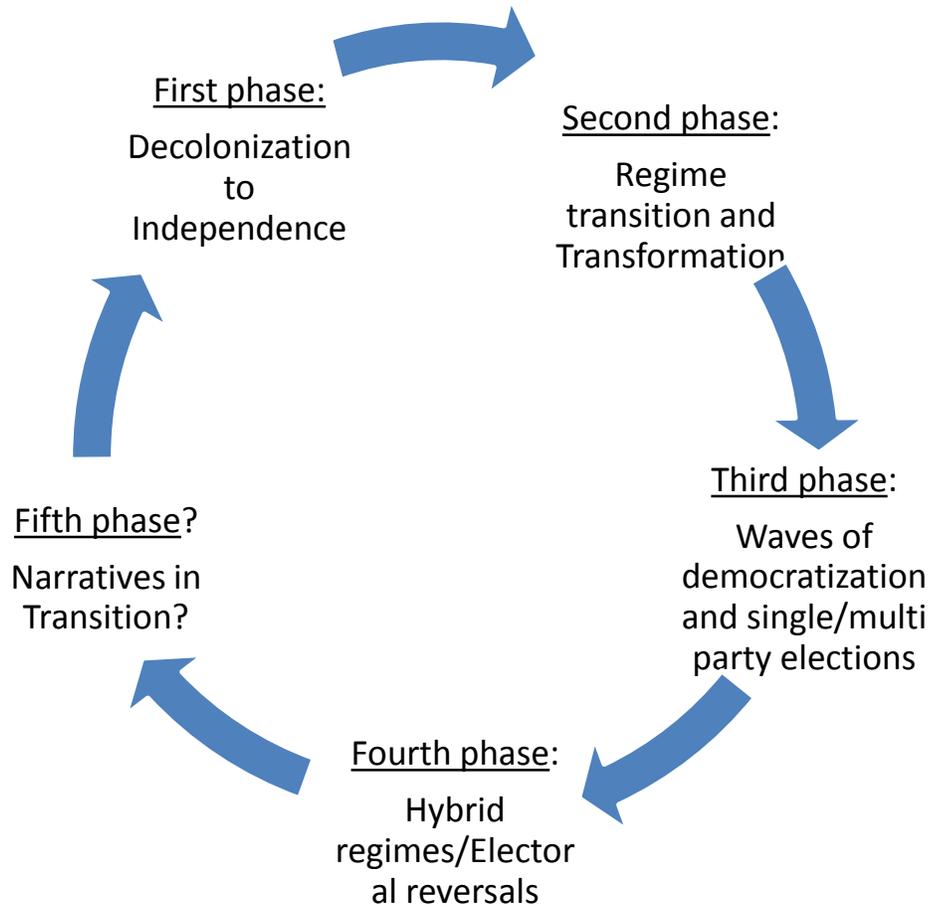
Is the Election Management Body (EMB) impartial and independent? Are oppositions/opposing parties allowed in the process? Is the security and sanctity of the voter and the vote protected and guaranteed? These questions raise important theoretical and practical issues. It goes without saying that when electoral system and rules are cumbersome and restrictive, then the tendency is for low political and electoral participation with negative implication for peace and inclusion by various segments of the population.

This paper therefore, responds to these questions and issues by discussing and examining electoral movements in Africa, as well as the legal, moral and ethical issues of elections in terms of theoretical, philosophical and practical dimensions. This is followed by a discussion of the misconceptions about and realities of the meaning of elections in Africa, problems of measuring the credibility of elections in Africa in-terms of conceptual issues, data sources, and practical challenges. The paper then engages in a comparative analysis of African democratic and electoral situations, examines key facts and features of the African scene, data presentation and analysis, and conclude with an exposition on elections in Africa with an agenda for peace, democracy and good governance.

The Study of Electoral Movements In Africa

Elections remains part and parcel of many groups, and nations in the world from time immemorial. Human beings have always engaged in decision making as well as in the expression of choice about what they want. Pericles, (cited in Held, 1996), in his submission on Athenian democracy argued that “each man has the right to choose who to led them and present himself for elections”. This position was also amplified by Plato who maintained that election has always been associated with people (Plato, 1974). Yet the issue and presence of choice and elections has not been problem free as is with all human endeavors. Choice in itself is influenced by many factors and is fundamental to the conception of individuality and expression of human rights. As has been argued elsewhere, choice and elections are part of African culture and not imported to Africa (Sarbah, 1968; Hayford, 1970; Afolabi, 2015). Elections in Africa at the initial stages, especially the pre-colonial era was based on various factors including family headship, social status, matured age groups, and adulthood. But instead of developing with time, elections and electoral process was distorted by the crude interventions by Europeans who colonized most of African countries. This led to the ‘arrested development’ of the continent in all spheres of life, especially in fostering identity crisis, distortion of memory, establishment and maintenance of puppet ruling class and docile serving class as well as introducing the economic basis of choice, vote and elections. For example in Nigeria, only adult males were allowed to vote on the basis of economic wealth with the possession of one pound and landed property (Crowder, 1970). This pattern was noticeable across Africa and was even worse in Franco countries with the policy of assimilation where France seek to make Black people whites. The electoral movements in Africa is captured with fig 1 showing the past, present and linking it with the future.

Fig.1 The study of electoral movement in Africa



But the large presence of infractions in elections that was established and maintained since the colonial era as alluded to above, have not abated but rather on the increase. Attempts by Western observers and local collaborators to label most elections in Africa as “free and fair” is a one-size-fits-all formula for deciding who governs in Africa, is underpinned by liberal ideological reasoning and the need to maintain continuous dominance of the African countries, the continent, its economy and people. Even though infractions and infelicities occur in all elections in every country of the world, but the preponderance and large nature of infractions and fraud evident in African elections, no matter the labelling by Western election observers, could be traced to historical conditioning, moral, ethical and legal laxities within the continent.

It is necessary to trace the movements of electoral movements in Africa to understand why Africa have these laxities. In particular, Africa, three distinct periods marked the introduction of competitive elections based on universal adult suffrage. In the 1950s and 1960s, elections were held in a number of countries following decolonization, although many of them later gave in to military rule and authoritarianism as shown in Fig 1. The second period was in the 1970s when elections were introduced in a number of countries following the departure of the military in Ghana and Nigeria (West Africa) and other countries in Southern Africa due to the decolonization and full independence (Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Angola). The third phase began in 1990s after the end of the cold war and the inevitable reduction in economic and military aid from developed countries to sit-tight leaders, whether military or civilian. The third period marked and brought about increased democratization and competitive elections in most African countries including South Africa, Benin, Zambia and Mali, among others (Diamond 1993, Joseph, 1990).

Thus, electoral movements across the African continent was not all at once nor was it sudden. Most often, it was from place to place, with peoples' demand for incorporation and prodding by Western patrons, the driving force for these movements. But towards the end of 1990s, the optimism earlier expressed gave way to skepticism and the future of peace, credible elections and electoral democracy in Africa appeared bleak (Joseph, 1998; Kieh, 1996; Chole and Ibrahim ed., 1995). What was common and remain arguably so, is the little credibility of these elections in Africa. Of course, these credibility problems have negative implications for peace, democratic sustainability and good governance.

Elections: Theoretical, Philosophical and Practical Dimensions

Human choice, which is the basis of elections, has always been the focus of philosophers and individuals from medieval times. The right of individuals to choose, choice and determine what they want is the basis of the best form of government and how to achieve it. Received literature from Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Machiavelli to Weber, shows that seeking the best form of government for their society and humankind was their main concern. Even though these philosophers agreed that the best form of government may be in the realm of utopia; but necessary for its actualization is the need for the participation of the people in the affairs of the state, no matter how limited. Thus, such participation basically is through elections. "Elections may not in themselves be a sufficient condition for political representation, but there is little doubt that they are a necessary condition" (Heywood, 1997:211). As noted earlier, elections have always been about choice and part of human history. But it is not about choice alone, but also the environment of the choice which consist principally of liberty and equality. These twin values are also determinants of a vote. What is the value of a vote? How free is the individual able to make his choice and cast his vote? Are individual votes equal? Trying to answer this questions, most scholars agreed that equality of one individual, one vote, as well as the liberty to choose from among the options before the individual in the community, is of utmost importance.

For Plato, elections are linked with democracy which he defined as a “form of society which treats all individuals (men) as equal whether they are equal or not and ensures that every individual (man) is free to do as he likes” (Plato, 1974:375-6). Therefore, liberty and equality were the most important variables in elections for Plato. The interest of all individuals was in the participation in the affairs of the state through voting and being voted into public office. Following in the same footsteps, Aristotle viewed elections as being one of the pillars of democracy. It was democracy in its classical sense. According to him:

The following are features of democracy: (a) elections to office by all from among all. (b) Rule of all over each and of each by turns over al. (c) Offices filled by lot, either all or at any rate those not calling for experience or skill. (d) No tenure of office dependent on the possession of a property qualification, or only on the lowest possible. (e) The same man not to hold the same office twice, or only rarely, or only a few apart from those connected with warfare. (f) Short term for all offices or for as many as possible. (g) All to sit on juries, chosen from all and adjudicating on all or most matters (Aristotle, The Politics, 36-4; Held, 2006:16).

Therefore, from the Aristotelian conception, elections would be seen as free, fair and credible if it follows the above criteria. Thus, elections are tied to two basic criteria, namely, equality and liberty. These two criteria guarantee the art of ruling and being ruled in turn. To rule is to be voted for and to have rulers necessitates having to vote. Without equality of individuals and by extension quality of the individual vote, elections cannot be said to be fair. Same way, if the individual is hampered from voting or is unable exercise his/her franchise due to restrictions placed on his/her freedom, then elections cannot be said to be free nor fair. Indeed, when citizens in principle have equal voting power and equal access to state/public offices, then the basis of the elections being credible is established. Issues of vote buying and selling therefore reduces the value of a vote and raises questions of credibility of elections.

However, from another viewpoint, Thomas Hobbes (1651) argued that the lack or absence of elections resulted in a ‘state of nature’ where life was solitary, brutish, nasty and short. This was so because, individuals lived as it pleased them without the benefit of a ‘higher authority’ who could adjudicate in their pursuits. Being naturally egoistic and self-centered, individuals rule by force and individuals were against individuals as there was neither election of nor agreement as to who should be the ruler. It was a ‘state’ dedicated to self, where the powerful rule over the weak resulting in unending crisis. This system would have continued unabated but for individual’s reason and the fear of violent death thus, necessitating the formation of a political order. The political order was established by the Leviathan through which individuals surrendering their rights to self-government, and authorizing the Leviathan to act on their behalf as a result of their consent given (through election), and by implication creating an obligation between the ruled and the ruler.

In Hobbes' thesis, the ruler or sovereign is not a party to the contract but a beneficiary of the agreement. Even with this, the sovereign is expected to act in their primary interest, namely, life preservation. Thereafter, people moved from the chaotic state of nature to a civil political society regulated by elections between the rulers and the ruled. It was a social contract (Sabine and Thorson, 1973).

From similar social contract premise but from a different outlook, John Locke (1689), see election as being closely linked with a political order. For Locke, there was a 'state of nature' where life was not brutish and violent in the Hobbesian sense. The Lockean state of nature was one in which peace and reason prevail. It was not pre-social but pre-political and not lawless since individuals lived under natural law. Locke defines natural laws as a body of rules determined by reason, for guidance of humans in their natural condition. All humans were equal under the law of nature and had or possessed equal natural rights. He clarified the natural right as the right to life, liberty and property. Out of the three, property came first and is most important. Locke believed that the right to property included the right of an individual to his person and this is the basis of rights to life and liberty. All these rights, especially the economic right, laid the foundation for modern elections to be free and fair. This was, arguably the beginning of the economic interpretation of choice and vote. However, if all these rights are present in this 'state of nature'; the issue is, why the need for government through elections?

The answer for Locke is that the absence of any agreement as to what constitutes the law of nature and/or who to arbitrate in case of disputes and the inability of an individual to maintain his/her natural rights against injustice, gradually lead to uncertainties which become intolerable. These uncertainties led the people to enter first into a social contract among themselves to set up a civil society and thereafter, this was followed by another contract to set up the political apparatus or government. The government, unlike in Hobbes' sense, is a party to the contract and is under legal obligation to abide by the terms of the contract. Of course, the consent given in entering into the social contract is akin to vote cast during elections as a condition for the acceptance of the rulers (Held, 1996:80-81; Plamenatz, 1963:228).

Even though Locke's writings were hypothetical, this was European thinking and reflected social realities of Europe of that period. As earlier noted, the role and place of economic right, or what Locke called private property, cannot be over emphasized in elections in order to be free, fair and credible. Locke's argument is very important to our analysis because of the prevalent poverty in most African countries where vote selling and buying is common, thus affecting negatively, the integrity and credibility of elections and its attendant effects on peace and good governance. This scenario is certainly true of elections in Nigeria and most parts of Africa (Diamond, 2002; Aloysius-Michaels O, 2009).

Yet elections is not only theoretical or philosophical but also practical (Ake, 2000). At the beginning, the Greeks vigorously engaged in elections by voting and standing for elections. Likewise in precolonial Africa, discussion and elections were common and used especially in state matters. According to Sarbah:

He who serves and is bound to obey must have a voice in the election of the Person who is to command (Sarbah, 1968:22)

Continuing Sarbah asserted that:

In public deliberations of any matter affecting the country; each family, through its headmen and elders had a right to be present and be heard through well-defined channels (Sarbah, 1968:87).

It was a case of direct democracy at work. Then society was small and people could rule themselves in turns. Issues of poverty and wealth was not pronounced and there was relative equality and freedom among people in Africa. But the advent of Protestantism and industrialization in Europe, created inequality and disparity among people and social relations. Thus, the idea and practice of direct rule, through elections, became impracticable and impossible (Lijphart, 1994; Held, 1996). This was the beginning of representative democracy. It was not as such a natural consequence but a necessity engineered by elites to maintain their hold and power in the society so created. Elections thus was seen as a rubber stamp and seal of legitimacy for those who rule in Europe. What obtains now in the modern world is indirect rule, manifesting through representatives elected by the people to act on their behalf. It was a version of elections and democracy (representative democracy) that supplanted classical people oriented democracy and elections. It was assiduously developed and refined by the best brains in Europe (Weber, 1971; Schumpeter, 1976; Dunn, 1992; Held, 1996; Shapiro, 2003).

For Ake, the idea and practice of representative democracy was and is vigorously practiced by the Americans as its chief proponent (Ake, 2000:6). This version of democracy is what has been imported to Africa since the colonial era and left behind as relics of colonial heritage. Part of the debate over democracy is the controversy over whether there is alternative to direct or indirect democracy and its relevance especially in emerging democracies (Held, 1996; Acemoglu, 2006; Conteh-Morgan, 1997). However, it is instructive to note that problems of representative democracy which has rendered Western people powerless in governance is gaining currency and scholarship attention (Wiersma, Stetter and Schulach ed. 2014; Holmberg and Rothstein ed. 2012).

However in Africa, direct democracy with meaningful elections was developing before the process was ruptured. The advent of colonialism put paid to the evolutionary development of elections and direct democracy in Africa. The colonial adventurers altered the structure, memory and identity of those colonized. Most worryingly was the alteration of the thought process of Africans and production process. This was also the beginning of subjugation and immersion of African economies into Western (International) capitalist economy (Onimode, 1968). African economies were charged with primary goods and used as experiment to test and sell finished products/policies and services.

This trend has continued till date with policy recommendations from IMF, World Bank and other organizations charged with overseeing Africa economic and political process, of which elections and democracy is an integral part. It was a case of arrested development of socio-political and economic structures in Africa, including democracy, elections and good local governance. With colonialization, elections were suspended, individual rights curtailed, and social structures and relations modified to reflect existing realities of Europe when it was at its base level. Wealth and poverty became known and pronounced and it affected individual choice, liberty and freedom. This issues has been noted in other works (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1964; Ihonvbere, 2000). Creation of the state, without taking cognizance of existing boundaries; promotion of ethnic consciousness, as well as creation of super class consisting of those who work with the colonizers and educated Africans, laid the foundation of the problems of credibility of elections in Africa. The problems include issues of nationhood, identity crisis, as well as weak and subjugated political and economic institutions. It is arguable that much has changed post-independence, and in the post-cold war era in Africa, contrary to some arguments (Olaitan, 2004; 2005; Alavi, 1972).

Elections in Africa: Misconceptions and Realities

Given the background describe in the preceding section, a lot of misconceptions abound about elections in Africa. There is the tendency to see elections as the panacea to all problems of governance in the developing world, given the belief that representatives elected by the mass of the people are accountable to them and as such responsive to the needs of the people (Dahl, 1971). In other words, elections for such adherents and scholars, represent the best means for the people to get the best deal from those who rule over them. In theory, it was representative democracy at its best. But in reality, experience in Africa has not borne this out. Rulers from Nigeria, Zambia, Togo Kenya, Burundi and most of Africa has not been responsive to the needs of the African demos. The belief that elections would also help solve ethnic and social problems, given the large groupings in each African country, have not proved to be true. Rather in most cases, electoral disputes and manipulation of votes has engendered violence and recourse to low warfare in some African countries like Burundi, Angola, Mozambique and Burkina Faso among others (Crisis Group Report, 2015a).

The kernel of our discussion so far is that elections, even though cardinal to individuality, human right and choice, has not bridged the gap in terms of the ideological, cultural, and political differences in many states in Africa. Rather, the contestations and violence it engenders among political actors in each African state has made democratic dividend elusive.

However, while elections are important and occur in everyday life experiences, the reality is that it serves certain purposes and helps to guarantee, *ceteris paribus*, democratic values of equality of individuals and freedom to decide a course of action or who to vote for. Therefore, elections could be said to have both *instrumentalist* and *functionalist* interpretations. In the instrumentalist interpretation, elections serve as a means to an end. In this wise, elections serve to put certain individuals in power and legitimize state authority as well as give psychological satisfaction to voters. This in turn is expected to galvanize individual so-elected and voting public towards development and progress. For the functionalist interpretation, election is seen as playing a critical role in maintaining public confidence in the system. In other words, election is said to have the social function of guaranteeing peace, selection of certain individuals for public offices, rejection and renewal of public mandates as well as ensure political representation. Of course, election is an end in itself because human beings, who by nature are *homo politicus*, prefer to exercise their right to vote and be voted for than some other persons making such important decisions for them. Elections, for this group of people, are not about issues, candidates, manifestoes but the exercise of their franchise and fundamental human rights. Elections also vary in significance depending on the office being contested for and the importance of that particular election to the electorate. Above all, each vote, in a 'normal' democratic state, carries equal weight in law and practice. This therefore, contributes to an election being credible and provides psychological satisfaction to the voter.

Therefore, credible elections matters and contains many aspects which could be divided into Pre-Election stage, Election Day activities and Post-Election stage. Each stage, though separate, is joined together to form the electoral process and determines whether an election is credible or not. Accordingly, National Democratic Institute (2015) believes credible elections requires an open pre-election environment in which citizens can participate without fear or obstruction; political parties, candidates and the media can operate freely; an independent judiciary functions fairly and expeditiously; and electoral authorities operate impartially.

In the same vein, ACE Electoral Knowledge Network (2015) defines credible elections as:

The right and the opportunity for every citizen to vote and be elected, free from discrimination, in regular, genuine and competitive elections, that uphold fundamental human rights, including universal and equal suffrage, security of the person and the right to a timely and effective remedy. Fundamental electoral rights cannot be divorced from election processes, procedures and institutions.

How well this has been achieved in Africa is open to debate. But what is clear from practical politics is that each state, in the international system, devise its own electoral laws and rules through legal channels and/or through negotiated/non negotiated political commitments. This is why the Election Integrity Project, to further increase understanding of what credible election is, adopted a 4 period division of the electoral process, and 11 dimensions to address questions relating to the integrity and credibility of elections (Pippa Norris, Ferran Martínez i Coma and Richard W. Frank, 2013). Therefore, because of the normative and controversial nature of what credible election is, some commentators talk of ‘international standard’ in determining which election is credible and which is not (Meyer Ohlendorf N, 2010).

Methodology

The article is an exploratory study that seeks to divulge the role of credible elections in fostering democracy, good governance and peace in Africa. Therefore to achieve this objective, a critical analysis of relevant data was gathered for the study. Therefore, data for the study was drawn and thoroughly examined from a wide range of secondary sources, including online survey data from V-Dem, Election Integrity project, Freedom House, textbooks, journals, articles, magazines, newspapers, occasional papers and internet publications. Finally, data for the study was collected between March and November, 2015.

Measuring Credibility of Elections in Africa

Elections has been undertaken in most of countries in Africa. Nigeria has had more than five general elections since 1999 and recently in 2015. Togo came up too in 2015 as is Burundi, which is presently stuck with an unwilling president who wants to remain perpetually in office. Zambia and Ghana elections are slated for late 2016 and Liberia is warming up for general elections in 2017 to mention a few. But what has been common to these elections and the upcoming ones are the hues and cries about the lack of integrity and credibility of the elections and the process leading to it (Nigeria, Zambia, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Togo, and Burkina Faso among others). This therefore raises the question; how do we measure and determine the extent of the Africa’s electoral integrity and credibility? What are the measuring instruments to capture these issues? To what level or threshold can we say a given election pass the integrity or credibility test after measurement? Embedded in these issues and questions are problems of how to describe different democracies in the world, especially in Africa. That is why we have terms such as ‘developed democracies’ ‘developing democracies’, ‘emerging democracies’ and/or semi/half democracies or other diminished subtypes to connote different categorizations of democracy and its practice (Diamond et al. 1997; Schedler 2002a; 2002b; Lindberg 2006: 125). Of course, Schedler (2002a) has realized that the lines of categorization tend to be foggy, blurry and controversial.

But one underlying problem with the measurement and credibility of elections in Africa is the issue of conceptualization and its applicability. This has been eloquently noted by Sartori thesis on 'ladder of abstraction/conceptualization', while Collier and Levitsky's 'democracy with adjectives', Goertz's Social Sciences Concepts and Lindberg 'democratization by elections' attempts to address and rectify the conceptual and measure challenges have not fully addressed the challenges of measuring credibility of elections in Africa (Sartori, 1970; Collier and Levitsky, 1997; Goertz, 2006; Lindberg, 2009). Others issues with measuring the credibility of elections in Africa include; prejudices in what is being measured, social, ethnic and cultural differences in what is being measured, collection of data where sampling is difficult, survey data may be superficial and analysis is measured with mainstream concepts. All these cases raises questions and issues of validity, relevance and applicability.

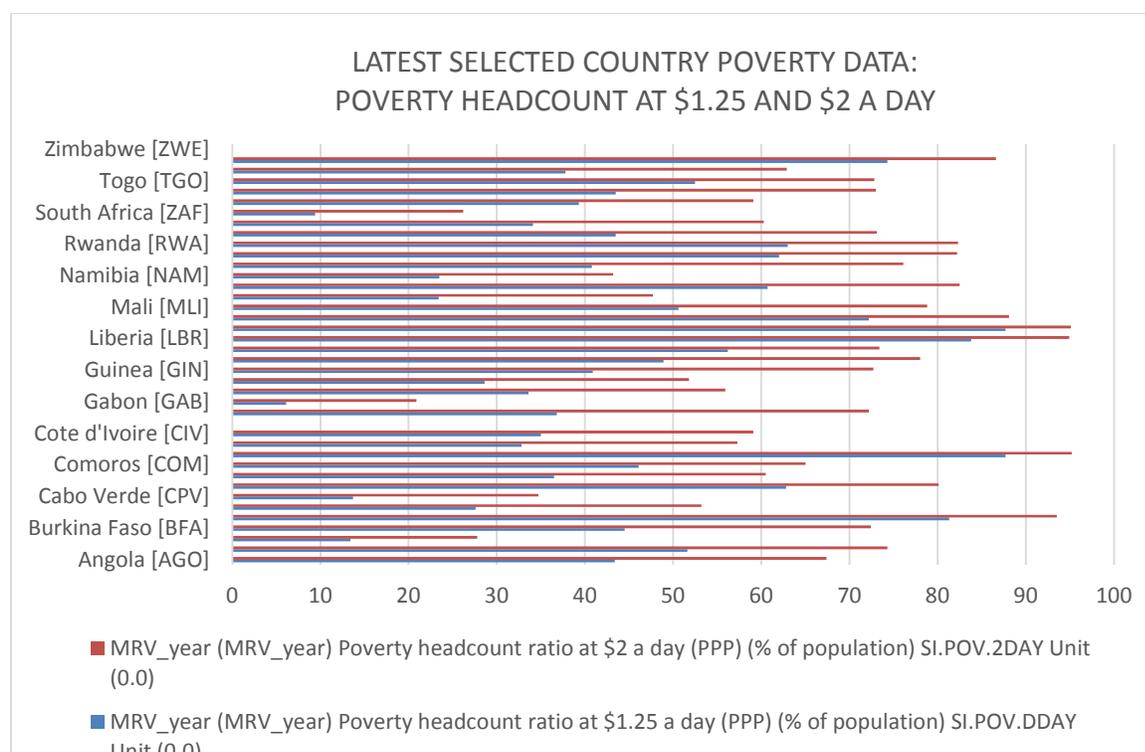
However, multiple sources of data on credibility of elections in Africa exist but most commonly used are Freedom House Index, Polity Press Index, World Bank Governance Indicators, Afrobarometer, Mo Ibrahim Index and lately, Election Integrity and V-dem indicators. Of course, all but two are Western based with collaboration from scholars in Africa.

Africa in Comparative Perspective

A historiography of Africa's democratic and electoral systems reveals that the fight for independence did not translate into electoral democracy, only in national sovereignty (Fig.1). Wars of independence in North Africa and Southern Africa, constitutional development conferences in West Africa countries and Eastern Africa did not empower African people with the ultimate power to determine who rule over them at the initial stage but only institute and vest educated elites associated with the colonists with power. There were sporadic fights to involve the people of Africa in political process but they were ultimately disenfranchised and shut of the democratic process at independence. Many, including females, were not allowed to vote; even males that were allowed was on elitist and economic basis. Thus, struggles for independence did not result in electoral democracy but nominal national independence. This was worse in Francophone countries due the policy of assimilation.

It instructive to note that further attempts at electoral democracy again failed after national independence in Africa due to military intervention/rule. The military coups in Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Benin, Zambia, Congo, Mozambique, Uganda, and internal guerilla warfare in Mozambique, Burundi, Angola and Rwanda shortly after independence, put paid to the aspirations of African people to become engaged in the decision making process of their countries. While some countries like Ghana, South Africa and possibly Nigeria are now put up as models of democracy, given their recent continuous democratic transitions, yet underlying these success stories are cries of denials of rights, manipulation of votes and marginalization of individuals, groups and associations from contributing to and engaging in electoral democracy.

In the same breath, governance and quality of life has not fared better (Chazan, 1992a; 1992b). Furthermore, noted as a hindrance to electoral democracy in Africa, is associational life, which is rudimentary and suffocated by state (Obadare, 2014; Diamond et al, 1996, Obadare and Adebani, 2013). Due to the high level of poverty, economic constraints and low associational life, most Africans are isolated and are not members of civil society organizations. Therefore, access to critical information, knowledge sharing and awareness of human rights are little or non-existent. Where such associational springs up, the state is quick to suppress such groups. Examples of such countries where suppression takes place include Malawi, Liberia and Nigeria under military regimes. Thus, this affects the effective functioning of electoral democracy in Africa. In addition, class consciousness and ethnicity still forms the backbone of social structure in Africa. As well, ethnic identity in politics still predominate. This has been the basis of most electoral violence in Africa, given the examples of Nigeria, Burundi, Ivory Coast, Rwanda, Kenya, Congo, and Central Africa Republic (CAR) among others. Lastly, low educational level and high poverty is also a significant factor hindering electoral democracy and cut across African continent. (World Bank, 2015). The figure below shows a graphic picture of why electoral integrity and freedom might continue to be a mirage given the poverty level.



Discussing Credible Elections in Africa: Survey Data Presentation and Analysis

Given the multiplicity of sources of data on measuring credibility of elections, governance and freedom to participate in the political process and elections, the following are the ten best and worst countries from some of the data on offer:

Table 1: Electoral Integrity in Africa by PEI sub-dimension

PEI sub-dimension	Best Performance		African Mean	Worst Performance
Laws	84 (Ghana)	59	31 (Equatorial Guinea)	
Procedures	92 (Mauritius)	63	32 (Djibouti)	
Boundaries	79 (South Africa)	58	36 (Burkina Faso)	
Voter registration	84 (Rwanda)	49	24 (Equatorial Guinea)	
Party registration	80 (Ghana)	62	31 (Djibouti)	
Media	80 (Burkina Faso)	55	27 (Equatorial Guinea)	
Finance	64 (Rwanda)	40	27 (Congo, Rep.)	
Voting	72 (Botswana)	56	30 (Equatorial Guinea)	
Count	89 (Mauritius)	67	34 (Djibouti)	
Results	83 (Botswana)	64	46 (Djibouti)	
Electoral authorities	87 (Mauritius)	61	30 (Equatorial Guinea)	

Source: Electoral Integrity Report 2015

Table.1 Ten Best and Worst in countries on Issues of Credible Elections in Africa

The Best

Botswana
Cape Verde
Ghana
Lesotho
Mauritius
Namibia
Senegal
Seychelles
South Africa
Tunisia

The Worst

Angola
Chad
Central Africa Republic
Democratic Republic of Congo
Equatorial Guinea
Eritrea
Guinea
Somali
Sudan
Zimbabwe

Source: Freedom House Index, Mo Ibrahim Governance Indicators (2015)

A little explanation and analysis is appropriate here. It should be noted that generally, electoral democracy in Africa is now better after some hiccups in the 1990s and a shaky recovery after 2000s. As earlier mentioned, there are few performers as shown on the table and noted in preceding section, but major differences exist among countries on the level of credibility of elections in Africa (Norris, 2014). In the same vein, the number 'good' ones with improving credible elections are slowly growing, along with a very long number of weak or bad ones. Comparing situation now with the recent past, governance and peace is improving but many bad cases still abound. The very good ones are listed above as well as the very bad ones. But the recourse to rampant violence and terrible looting of the national treasuries are diminishing but a revert to them through non-credible conduct of election and elections itself may push some countries to bad governance in view of the need for such rulers to maintain themselves in power and the losers to resort to self help and violence. Examples are of such countries are Burundi, Angola, Congo and Barkina Faso among other countries (Crisis Group Report, 2015b). Table 2 below gives further information about the trends and movements pertaining to the values of freedom of choice as a central indicator of credible elections in Africa.

Table 2 Trends and Consistency towards Credible Elections in Africa

2008

Benin
Boswana
Ghana
Lesotho
Mali
Mauritius
Namibia
Sao Tome and Principe
South Africa

Cape Verde

2015

Benin
Boswana
Cape Verde
Ghana
Lesotho
Namibia
Senegal
South Africa
Tanzania
Tunisia

Sources: Freedom House Index, Mo Ibrahim Governance Indicators (2015)

A cursory look at the table shows the best performers since 2008. However, while most have retained their post, a few others have fall of the table either as a result of laxity in electoral system, legal hitches and moral infelicities. Therefore, in view Africa's primordial ties, it can be argued that electoral politics encourages clientelism, vote buying and tendency towards violence. Colonialism has a large role to play in this.

At the moment, disconnect between the rulers and ruled that is prevalent. While African leaders live in unimaginable wealth and opulence, large segment of the population live in abject poverty. Feelings of being cheated and common resources being plundered and mismanaged by those 'elected' by electoral representative democracy leaves a bitter taste in the mouth of those outside the ruling class. This is one of the reasons for the cut throat nature of African politics, often referred to as 'do-or-die' politics.

Added to this is the ambiguous nature of pressure by donors and western world aids, which instead of ensuring credible elections, is about maintaining spheres of influence. In many cases, once a corrupt government is supportive of Western ideas and policies, such government(s) is left alone, flushed with money and is supported or propped up to continue in office (Moyo, 2009). This does not help democratization, credible elections, inclusive governance and peace within Africa. However, it is comforting that tendency to resort to self-help (violence) is diminishing in most cases, though few still do. Ability to peer review each other through African Union platform, particularly through the African Governance Architecture (AGA) is a welcome development. To what extent and how effective is the AGA and peer review mechanism is debatable.

In the same vein, clamour for state reformation and insistence for inclusion by African people is helping credibility of election and good governance. Protests across Africa starting with the Arab springs in North Africa with demand for change and inclusion, to cases in Burundi, Togo, Angola and Burkina Faso's resistance to illegal change of constitutions; more and more segments of Africans are demanding accountability, inclusion, good governance and the chance to make their choice and vote to count. This is what can lead to and guarantee peace.

Conclusion

The paper has attempted a discourse of the problem of credibility of elections in Africa with its implication on democratization, good governance and peace in the continent. The paper has noted that moral (values), ethical issues (colonialism) and its effects as well as the lack of respect for constitutionalism and rule of law constitute acts that has engendered democratic and electoral deficits within the African continent. The paper has noted that some facts that are encouraging but whose gains could be reversed if efforts are not geared towards making elections in Africa credible. But certain facts are becoming obvious in a comparative analysis of credible elections in the world to round up our discourse and situate Africa within the global context.

First is that Africa is still lagging behind Latin America and Central & Eastern Europe. On this count, much work and concerted efforts from the rulers and ruled is needed. Inclusive engagement and participation by the state and people respectively would serve to redress some of these shortcomings.

Second, ethnicity, high level of poverty and sharp social stratification has not helped free, fair and credible elections in Africa. Recourse to ethnicity and class consciousness as a way out of grinding poverty, fostered by disarticulation of self, identity and memory of Africans through decades of colonial rule, and presently sustained by the politics and structure of the international system, has not and will not, help the credibility of elections in Africa.

Third, as noted in the body of the paper, the post -colonial African State remains undeveloped and unable to lead the charge towards public integrity and credible elections. Dismantling and restructuring of the post-colonial African state is mandatory in finding answers to the problems of credible elections in the continent.

Fourth, it clear that most regimes remain hybrid, somewhere between democracy and dictatorship in Africa and this has attracted diverse names such as undeveloped democracy, half democracy, developing democracy and/or demo-dictatorship. Lastly, it is conceded that progress is being made but it is slow and steady.

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