

Democratization Theorists and Transitional West African States

Democratization theorists provide vital insights into the ideals, institutions, and procedures necessary for ensuring good governance. However, the theoreticians must also be evaluated in light of the experiences of recently democratized countries in order to test the continued relevancy of their work. Applying selected writings from Robert Dahl, Laurence Whitehead, and Claude Ake to three recently democratized West African states allows for reflection on the relevancy of the three theorists. Generally, the three studies make several assumptions about democracy. First, the nation-state is the basic level of analysis. Second, a representative democracy is preferable to the two alternative forms of government: authoritarianism or anarchy. Finally, some states exhibit relatively more democratic qualities than other states, rendering states comparable.

To narrow the number of possibilities, the Freedom House typology dividing states into “free, partially free, and not free” was consulted.¹ The West African states regarded as “partially free,” indicating they are at least partial democracies, are Burkina Faso, Cote D’Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Sierra Leone. The “partially free” standard denotes countries where democracy is not entirely institutionalized. These states provide test cases for the three democratization theorists.

To narrow the list of case studies, any country experiencing recent turmoil and failing to hold elections was eliminated: Cote D’Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, and Sierra Leone are all ineligible. Niger has undergone one election cycle since writing a new constitution in 1999 but has also seen some recent military unrest. Senegal, on the other hand, experienced one-party rule until March 2000 and has never had a coup attempt. Because of this, Senegal is a regional outlier. The remaining countries--Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Nigeria--present the best alternative for case studies.

The paper begins by analyzing the work of each theorist under consideration. From their work, three distinct sets of variables describing democracy emerge: institutional accountability; liberty, citizen security, and civil society; and economy. These variables and the insights of each

¹ For a complete discussion of the methodology of the Freedom House country ratings system, consult <http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/freeworld/2000/methodology.htm>

theoretician explicate democracy in Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Nigeria. The paper concludes by examining the collective theoretical deficiencies based on the case studies.

Democratization Theorists

Robert A. Dahl

The volume, *On Democracy*, describes democracy as a set of pluralistic institutions based on a set of ideologies. Using democratic experience as a guide, Robert Dahl constructs an ideal framework meant as a model for aspiration. Specific to recently democratized states, Dahl suggests that “the challenge is whether and how the new democratic practices and institutions can be strengthened, or as some political scientists say, *consolidated*, so that they will withstand the test of time, political conflict, and crisis [original emphasis].”² Democratic decline often begins with economic hardship, political corruption, and business oligarchies, and terminates in conflict and authoritarian rule.³ Dahl’s volume begins by exploring democratic ideals and then describes democratic institutional functions and constitutional structure. Dahl concludes by briefly discussing the implications of a free market economy for democracy.

Dahl argues that democracies must aspire to fulfill five ideals.⁴ These ideals serve as a guide for designing an institutional framework but may never fully actualize. The first is “effective participation,” meaning persons have an equal opportunity to express their interpretations of a particular policy. The second ideal, “equality in voting,” guarantees each person an equal vote in determining policy. “Gaining enlightened understanding,” the third ideal, implies each member had an equal opportunity to study the policy and its alternatives before voting. Fourth, “exercising final control over the agenda” stipulates the policies under discussion, and those neglected, are collectively determined by a vote. Finally, democracy must strive for “inclusion of all adults” in the policy process. Following these ideals serves as a basis for measuring the extent of democratization. That is, comparing the ideals with reality in a specific democracy reveals certain deficiencies within the government.

Based on these principles, Dahl suggests six features democratic institutions must adopt.⁵ Unlike the ideal features of democracy, if these institutions are absent the government is undemocratic. To begin with, since individuals cannot all logistically participate in modern

² Robert A. Dahl, *On Democracy* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1998), 2.

³ Dahl, 16.

⁴ The principles considered here never actualize fully but provide an ideal model. Ibid., 37.

⁵ Dahl, 85-86.

government, democracies are representative. Nevertheless, each citizen is equally qualified to serve as a representative and those selected are to consider the interests of their constituents. Secondly, representatives are selected in “free, fair, and frequent elections.” Dahl argues a proportional representation system (PR) of vote counting, as used in France, Germany, and much of the world, is more representative than the first-past-the-post (FPTP) single-member districts used in the United States and Great Britain.⁶ The third feature of institutional design is “freedom of expression,” whereby citizens may express themselves politically without fear of retribution so long as they observe legal boundaries. The fourth feature, “alternative sources of information,” demands an independent media protected by law. Additionally, state institutions must permit citizens “associational autonomy” in the form of parties, interest groups, and civic organizations. Finally, the state must practice “inclusive citizenship” whereby each citizen in a nation receives the same basic rights to vote, express their views, access media, and publicly organize. The state must recognize the equality of each citizen; that is, their “intrinsic equality.” If the institutional structure of a state observes these six stipulations, the state is a polyarchy.⁷

Based on democratic ideals, institutions guarantee certain rights and privileges, exercise neutrality, allow accountability and fair representation, and create opportunities for public debate.⁸ Roughly four constitutional templates exist, designed to include these institutional features: a parliament with a proportional representation electoral system as in continental Europe; a Westminster parliamentary model like in Great Britain, Canada, and Australia; the United States’ model, and a presidential system with parliament elected by proportional representation, common in Latin America.⁹ While the United States’ model is the most complicated and unstable, the other models are roughly equal.¹⁰

One final institutional feature characterizes democracies: the existence of a free market economy. From an historical standpoint, democracies only endure in market economies. Moreover, capitalism creates “a large middling stratum of property owners who typically seek

⁶ Although there are numerous PR systems, each allocates legislative seats or executive position to political parties based on a mathematical determinant of the ratio of votes for the party to number of seats. Ibid., 134-135.

⁷ Dahl first used the term *polyarchy*, meaning “many rule” in 1953, although the concept existed prior to this date. Australia, Canada, France, Israel, Japan, and the United Kingdom are all polyarchies. The United States does not qualify because former convicted felons are not permitted to vote. Dahl, 90.

⁸ Ibid, 124-126.

⁹ Dahl, 136-138.

¹⁰ The United States model, Dahl reasons, should not be copied because it operates well only due to the relative size of U.S. and historical development of American political institutions and culture. Ibid, 140.

education, autonomy, personal freedom, property rights, the rule of law, and participation in government.”¹¹ The values sought by the middle class under a capitalist system are the same values democratic institutions should uphold. However, the state must regulate market activity to alleviate violations of democratic rights that sometimes occurs within a capitalist economy: “in no democratic country does a market-capitalist society exist...without extensive government regulation and intervention to alter its harmful effects.”¹² Economic inequalities created by the market causes political inequalities the state must rectify, or at least seek to rectify.

The conditions most favorable to democracy, Dahl concludes, are those where liberty and rule of law balance one another, intrinsic equality of all citizens is assured, and the political process is open to public debate and influence. In regards to newly democratized countries, conditions for democracy are favorable when the police and military defer to elected officials; a democratic political culture exists; no foreign or domestic conflict threatens that state; and a market economy prospers.¹³ Each of these conditions is self-explanatory other than democratic political culture, a condition when “citizens and leaders strongly support democratic ideas, values, and practices.”¹⁴ If citizens continue supporting democratic institutions and concepts despite inept leadership, the political culture is strongly democratic.

In conclusion, successful democracies internalize ideals supporting participation and popular policymaking, granting individual liberty, recognizing the equality of all citizens, and conferring equal burdens on each citizen within institutions. Democratic institutions must allow for representation, elections, expression and sharing of ideas, association, and inclusiveness. The state must rectify the potentially harmful effects of a market economy. Despite potential drawbacks, only capitalist economic systems engender the same values as democratic political systems. Democracy is most successful in countries where there is no internal or external conflict and the populace supports democratic ideals.

Laurence Whitehead

As opposed to Dahl’s institutional description of democracy, Laurence Whitehead offers an interpretivist explanation in his volume, *Democratization: Theory and Experience*. In many

¹¹ Ibid., 168.

¹² Ibid., 176-177.

¹³ Ibid., 149-157.

¹⁴ Dahl, 157.

ways, Whitehead's account is a direct response to Dahl. Using Dahl's six institutional suggestions as a basis, Whitehead rejects the notion of a minimum set of standards:

Democracy precludes conceptual closure concerning its own identity, and hence democratization must be understood as an open-ended process. Democracy is 'essentially contestable' not just because our values may differ, or because our political concepts may lack ultimate logical or empirical validation, but also because our political cognition is inherently critical and reflexive.¹⁵

Whitehead argues the ideals espoused by democracy differ according to a group's values, ability to methodically evaluate the extent of democratization, and the extent of political learning and reflection. As opposed to Dahl's description of ideals and institutions, Whitehead argues democracy continually progresses as the interaction of personal introspection and public deliberation form a "deliberative filter" responsible for shaping the meaning of democracy to a particular culture.¹⁶

The "deliberative filter" prevents a fixed definition of democracy because democracy must, by design, incorporate public discourse as an agent of changing the institutional framework. Whitehead writes, "Democratization is best understood as a complex, long-term, dynamic, and open-ended process. It consists of progress towards a more rule-based, more consensual, and more participatory type of politics."¹⁷ Rather than defining minimum ideological and institutional standards like Dahl, Whitehead bases his descriptive account on the assumption that democracy only progressively develops in a context sensitive to historical and cultural traditions within a forum of public debate. Ultimately, democracy only exists within individual consciousness and the public debate inspired by it because these are sources of meaning and functionality.

Whitehead describes democracy in terms of political leadership, civil society, accountability and institutional design, political corruption, monetary authority, and citizen security. Progress on these particular themes, or at least perceived progress, strengthens democracy. In regards to political leadership, Whitehead believes politicians must be persuasive and inspirational: "The most essential aspect of political leadership is the capacity to persuade –

¹⁵ Laurence Whitehead. Democratization: Theory and Experience. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002), 18.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

and perhaps inspire – others... leadership requires a mastery of a range of performance arts.”¹⁸ The acceptance of democracy partially depends on the publicly expressed ideals of politicians coalescing with those of the public.

In addition to strong leaders, a democracy requires an active civil society. Whitehead defines civil society as the area of association outside of the state but independent of private entities. Civil society is the forum for public discourse. This definition implies citizens must sacrifice an amount of liberty to create an environment conducive to collective association.¹⁹ This is similar to Dahl’s notion of “inclusive citizenship” in that the state must guarantee liberty while ensuring order. On the other hand, to Dahl civil society is an abstract ideal; Whitehead conceives of civil society as a concrete sphere of association. Civil society members must not threaten their fellow members in actuality and intent, a point Dahl overlooks. Often this is a problem in newly democratized states: “In post-authoritarian... settings, efforts at democratization are frequently overshadowed by antisocial forms of individualism and group organization that substitute for, or even seek to subvert... civil associationalism.”²⁰ In some cases, remnants of the former regime persist and threaten to undermine civil relations from either fear of revenge, want of compensation, or quest for power. Other threats, real or perceived, to civil society come from high unemployment, poverty, crime, and the inability to extend the national authority into regional areas.²¹ If a new democracy cannot confront these issues, the state has a greater chance of returning to authoritarianism.

Accountability and institutional design are important guarantors of democracy. Accountability is both vertical and horizontal.²² Elections are the primary form of vertical accountability since candidates stand based on merit and explain their policies to the public. Horizontal accountability is the checks and balances between political institutions. An independent judicial system, self-regulating media, and impeachment proceedings are the most important examples of the latter type. Importantly, institutions must be adaptable and legitimate to correlate with the notion that democracy develops progressively. For example, Whitehead notes newly democratized countries must balance the need for retroactive sanctions against

¹⁸ Ibid., 43.

¹⁹ Ibid., 70-73.

²⁰ Ibid., 76.

²¹ At times, states exert localized control around the capital but cannot consolidate their authority. In this case, non-state actors sometimes fulfill the role of the state in regions where the state is absent. Ibid., 79-80.

²² Ibid., 93-95.

authoritarian regime with leniency in the interest of self-preservation. Leniency towards former dictators does not “necessarily prevent agreement in the establishment of a new democratic order under which hence-forth office-holders will be reliably held accountable for their actions.”²³

Beyond institutions, accountability is a public ethic of responsibility and support for democracy. A strong civil society is an important accountability mechanism: “Strengthening accountability needs to be understood in terms of the promotion of democratic values--as a product of resocialization as much as of institutional design.”²⁴ Accountability involves breaking authoritarian institutions, laws, and practices and beginning dialogue between civil society members and politicians.

Accountability of political elites is important given they have opportunities to engage in corruption and exercise monetary authority. On the first point, Whitehead defines corruption as “deviations in public policy attributable to bribery, or to the direct exchange of money for covert political advantage.”²⁵ If the public perceives corruption as rampant they may be more willing to replace a democratic system with an authoritarian government. Corruption undermines the state but does not directly cause democratic deterioration unless a “significant proportion” of corruption threatens the sustainability of new democracies.²⁶ On the second point, “monetary authority is a complex and long-term process that involves striking a ‘delicate balance’ between the requirements of efficiency and the need for legitimacy.”²⁷ Capitalist economies are the basis of Whitehead’s analysis and he writes of the need for a central bank, the inevitable process of globalization, and the importance for adhering to a liberal economic model.

In addition to shunning corruption and exercising monetary authority, the state must provide security for its citizens. Returning to the themes concerning civil society, Whitehead defines citizen security in terms of rights and responsibilities democratic governance gives to its citizens.²⁸ Whitehead’s notion of citizen security is similar to Dahl’s description of liberty and inclusion. Each of the approaches describes security in legal and social terms: the rule of law guarantees security but must permit peaceful public mobilization and party formation. To Whitehead, authoritarian rule is “associated with personal insecurity – the risk of arbitrary arrest,

²³ Ibid., 108.

²⁴ Ibid., 113.

²⁵ Ibid., 133.

²⁶ Ibid., 134.

²⁷ Ibid., 163.

²⁸ Ibid., 165.

absence of stable rights of association, denial of the information necessary to evaluate public affairs, and more general failings to promote or uphold democratic standards of ‘citizenship.’”²⁹ In many new democracies these threats may persist or the public may still perceive these threats. Creating the relative perception of widespread citizen security is the surest way to strengthen a new democracy. If the state appears to ensure security, citizens are more likely to limit uncivil behavior.

To summarize Whitehead, democracy progressively develops according to specific cultural conditionalities in an atmosphere of citizen introspection and public discourse. Positive perceptions, Whitehead claims, are important in the democratization process. However, emphasizing perception is internally incongruent with Whitehead’s notion of democracy developing progressively in the public sphere. For example, Whitehead states that political leaders must appear inspirational. The implication is that public perception of their rhetoric is more important than actual democratic debate. Civil society must remain civil, but again the perception of civility is as important as achieving stability itself. Similarly, the perception of citizen security is the most effective method of ensuring stability. However, concerning institutional and socialized accountability, function is more important than perception. For example, the judiciary must truly be an independent entity and the public must perceive it as such. Additionally, perception directs the development of democracy by assuring confidence in the system. Perception should not detract from Whitehead’s ideal notion of democracy as introspective, public, and progressive.

Claude Ake

Democracy and Development in Africa differs in approach from the previous authors. Dahl and Whitehead in their assessments of democratization examine the totality of global democratic experience. Claude Ake takes a structural-functionalist approach.³⁰ That is, colonial and post-colonial economic structures determined the function of politics in society. Colonial authority was “absolute but arbitrary” and colonial administrators determined allocation of state resources: labor regulation, taxation, education, infrastructure, and commodity boards, for

²⁹ Ibid., 171.

³⁰ “Structural functionalism seeks out the ‘structural’ impacts of the social system under consideration and the studies the processes which function to maintain social structures.” In this instance Ake suggests colonialism and current forms of international assistance compel the African state to be structurally dependent on Western donations. As a result of this, politics functions as control of power rather than distribution of resources. Ian McLean. Oxford Dictionary of Politics. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996), 480.

instance.³¹ Not surprisingly, independent post-colonial governments used a statist economic model. Absent from colonial regimes were concepts of “constitutional constraints and accountability,” concepts also missing after independence.³² When nationalist movements sought independence they were often divided along ethnic and community lines against one another. Based on precedents set by colonial administrators and independence movements, African politics focused on attaining and maintaining power. As a result, all political competition became a power struggle: “Political power was everything; it was not only the access to wealth but also the means to security and the guarantor of general well-being.”³³ Those groups without political power wanted to replace the dominant group with their own. Meanwhile, the political elite used state resources to remain dominant.

According to the African political elite, development required submission to state policies. Ake writes, “the ideology of development was exploited as a means for reproducing political hegemony.”³⁴ In actuality, since politics was a constant power struggle between groups, African governments delegated development to Western nations. The West used this opportunity to detach itself from underdevelopment in their former colonies by removing historical, political, and cultural context. The *Accelerated Development* plan, a 1981 study by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), recommended decreasing duties on imports, limiting government subsidies to new industries, floating exchange rates, eliminating parastatals, and targeting public assistance. This structural adjustment program (SAP) focused on commodity production and “was perceived to be reinforcing Africa’s dependence on markets that were becoming increasingly hostile and protectionist.”³⁵ The compliance rate among African states to SAPs was an impressive 69.0%.³⁶ However, Western states failed to adequately fund the programs and the SAPs were only theoretical constructs without consideration for historical and cultural context. As a result, African nations continued producing primary products and remained underdeveloped.

Ake suggests another approach. A March 1989 study by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) titled *The Lagos Plan for the Implementation of the Monrovia Strategy for the*

³¹ Claude Ake. *Democracy and Development in Africa*. (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute, 1996), 2.

³² *Ibid.*, 5.

³³ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

Economic Development of Africa called for “self-reliance (national and collective) and self-sustaining development.”³⁷ Stressing agricultural and industrial production, the *Lagos Plan* focused on increasing manufactured goods, developing internal capital, adopting better technology, and trading on a regional basis. Similarly, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) wrote the *African Alternative Framework for Structural Adjustment Programs for Socio-Economic Recovery and Transformation* in March 1989. Acknowledging the colonial origins of underdevelopment, this plan advocated “strengthening and diversifying productive capacity in Africa, improving the level and distribution of income, satisfying basic human needs, and giving institutional support for adjustment with transformation.”³⁸ Ake argues development policies must understand the needs of particular African states in regards to agriculture, industrialization, and export promotion.

Rejecting this advice, most post-colonial states attempted to control agricultural production with “an obsessive concern with the control of what the peasant produces, how he or she produces it, and how the product is disposed of.”³⁹ Land reform, settlement schemes, development plans, and marketing boards reflected statist control. These policies encouraged peasants to produce commodities needed for inputs in “local capital needs” or for export, not for personal consumption and sale of surplus. As a result, the agricultural industry production lags behind population growth.⁴⁰

Conversely, in regards to industry, the aforementioned OAU and UNECA plans essentially advocated import-substitution industrialization (ISI). Utilizing this economic policy, African states produced consumer goods like textiles, beverages, and food instead of importing these items. Domestic markets were unable to absorb the excess goods and these items were not internationally competitive. Additionally, production of consumer goods increased dependency on intermediary and capital goods from the West.⁴¹

³⁷ Ibid., 23.

³⁸ Ibid., 37.

³⁹ Ibid., 43.

⁴⁰ **Agricultural and Population Growth Rates**

	1970-1980	1980-1982
Agricultural output	1.6%	1.7%
Population growth	2.8%	3.0%

Ibid., 65.

⁴¹ Ibid., 75.

Unable to develop agricultural and industrial productive sectors, African states relied on foreign assistance. Since the end of the Cold War, the West was politically less interested in Africa. From 1990 to 1992 official development assistance from the developed world to Africa fell from \$19.7 billion to \$12.1 billion.⁴² Decreasing amounts of aid accompanied a change in the global economic order. New technology made the developed world less dependent on commodities. Consequently, the debt of developing countries climbed, reaching 69.0% of GDP for all of sub-Saharan Africa in 1987.⁴³ Although some Western governments offered debt relief, most states owe debt to private banks unlikely to cancel the burden. Based on this evidence, Ake recognizes the development concerns of Africa are marginal to the West and unlikely to receive adequate attention.

Based on historical experience, Ake suggests development should be “an open-ended democratic process, determined by the will of the people, drawing on their energy, and serving their interest.”⁴⁴ Ake’s conception of public driven, progressive development echoes Whitehead’s definition of democracy. SAPs were unrepresentative and assumed development was purely based on economic growth. Ake contends development is an endogenous process of attaining a higher plane of civilization reflective of particular cultural values and public choices. Based on this notion of development, Ake defines democracy on four ideals. First, democracy must involve popular decision-making beyond elections, including an effective legislature, decentralized authority, and civil society institutions. Second, African democracies should follow social democratic models rather than the liberal democratic example--substantive rights to health care, education, and participation ought to be constitutional provisions. Third, African democracies must particularly emphasize collective rights by recognizing nationalities and sub-nationalities, ethnicities, and communities. A second legislative chamber might represent these groups and the electoral system must employ proportional representation. Finally, democracy must assure the rights of civil society groups, especially those persons marginalized by development, such as women, labor, and youth.

Development, according to Ake, must take a market-based approach in the context of a political democracy and focus on collective decisions that will make individual Africans economically independent. Practically speaking, development must focus on smallholder

⁴² Ibid., 113.

⁴³ Ibid., 105.

agriculture and introduce intermediate technology rather than mechanized technology. Industrialization should focus on production of agricultural tools, like ox-driven plows. The government must build infrastructure, impose tariffs, and fund export commodities. All government assistance must be targeted at better performing industries and firms. Ultimately, Ake argues Africa must create its own industry. The process can only result from democratic politics. The failure of development and the persistence of authoritarianism in pseudo-democratic states are interdependent concerns. Development never actually began in Africa because development is a democratic process. These problems may only be overcome when a democratic government promotes endogenous growth.

Discussion

Each of the three writers uses a different approach to defining democracy. Dahl provides a general description of institutional constructs enshrining a set of ideals. Whitehead's work is in many ways a response to Dahl's focus on institutional design and ideals and emphasizes the importance of introspection and debate in bringing meaning to democracy. Whitehead's discussion of perception detracts somewhat from this stance. Nevertheless, the points discussed by Whitehead are more specific and relevant to recently democratized countries than Dahl's work. Ake's approach describes the current state of politics in Africa in terms of underdevelopment. To Ake, development can only occur within a democracy.

Despite varied conceptions of democracy, several similarities between the writers emerge. Each stresses the importance of institutional accountability. Both Dahl and Whitehead specifically recognize the need for a constitutional structure including an independent legislature and judiciary. Ake expands on the constitutional notion by arguing a social democratic model is superior to a liberal democratic model. All three reject the cultural transferability of the American political system. Dahl and Ake recognize the advantages of an electoral systems using proportional representation, a point neglected by Whitehead.

Also important in each discussion are notions of liberty, citizen security, and civil society. Each mentions the need for a subordinate, professional military and the absence of either internal or external conflict. Citizens must sacrifice some personal freedoms for collective security. The state ensures individual liberties and maintains the rule of law. The state must also curtail corruption; although Whitehead is the only author to explicitly discuss the topic at length,

⁴⁴ Ibid., 119.

he does not believe corruption alone can reverse a democratic state. Ake's notion of politics as a power struggle between groups understands corruption as a potentially undermining force. However, power struggles exceed mere corruption and verge on institutional destruction. Civil society groups devoted to improving the quality of life while observing legal bounds and remaining committed to equity is an important part of each description of democracy.

Finally, each theorist assumes democracy is compatible with a liberal market economy where state policies repair inequalities amongst citizens. Dahl argues that democracies must coexist with market economies. The principles encouraged by market competition are the same principles of liberal democracy. Whitehead is unwilling to make this claim, but he affirms that democracies, so far, have coexisted with capitalist economies. Ake, on the other hand, recognizes the need of African states to develop their own market economies. Ake would argue development never truly brought capitalism to Africa. African nations must develop their economies internally, especially through agricultural production. These three broad areas of agreement--institutional accountability; liberty, citizen security, and civil society; and economics--serve as the basis for comparison across three case studies.

Case Studies

The standard reporting units selected for these case studies were based on the collective themes of Dahl, Whitehead, and Ake. Considering the first theme, institutional accountability is measured by constitutional type, electoral system, and degree of autonomy of the judiciary. None of the authors approves of an American style democracy, and Dahl and Ake argue for proportional representation. All three recognize the importance of an independent judicial system. When assessing liberty, citizen security, and civil society, the variables under consideration are conflict and corruption, civil society activity, and voter turnout. Each author recognizes the danger of conflict and corruption in a democratic nation. Moreover, each believes in the need for a strong civil society. All three writers discuss democratic political culture responsible for generating civil society activity in the abstract, but none defines the term specifically.⁴⁵ Voter turnout is a crude but effective method of measuring support for democracy and the strength of the political culture. In relationship to the third theme, previous structural adjustment policies and poverty statistics are considered to test Ake's hypothesis concerning

development. Also included is type of employment (agricultural, industrial, and service). The three case studies are evaluated in light of each of these variables within particular historical context. Refer to the table 1 for a comparison of the variables under consideration.

Burkina Faso

Since gaining independence from France in 1960, Burkina Faso had five successive dictatorships until writing a constitution and establishing a parliamentary republic in 1991. Rhetorically, each of the authoritarian regimes committed to democracy. Only the last, led by Captain Blaise Compaore, succeeded. Currently, the state is led by a president, a prime minister, and a bicameral legislature. Since 1991, there were two municipal election cycles, three legislative election cycles, and two presidential election cycles. Refer to the table for a summation of the indicators.

Concerning institutional accountability, in 1991 and 1998 Compaore was elected president to seven-year terms. Subsequently, the constitution was altered to limit each president to a five-year term, renewable only once. Unfortunately, Compaore may stand again for election because the stipulation is not retroactive. Nevertheless, in the 2002 legislative elections opposition parties received 51.5% of the vote compared to 49.5% for Compaore's party.⁴⁶ Since eleven opposition parties gained seats, Compaore's party maintained a plurality of seats. An independent electoral commission deemed the elections legitimate and "the share of votes and seats are now congruent" due to the proportional representation system.⁴⁷ In order to hold onto power, Compaore had to maintain a democratic façade. To that end, a relatively independent judiciary and electoral commission certified the results of the last election. As a result, "by conceding limited political reforms, Compaore allowed for democratic governance to be strengthened."⁴⁸ Interestingly, the electoral commission appears more autonomous from the government than the judiciary.

In regards to liberty, citizen security, and civil society, the Zongo affair deserves mention. Journalist Norbert Zongo and three of his colleagues died under questionable circumstances in December 1998, one month after Compaore's reelection. Zongo died in the

⁴⁵ Political culture is "the attitudes, beliefs, and values which underpin the operation of a particular political system. These were seen as including knowledge and skills about the operation of the political system, positive and negative emotional feelings towards it, and evaluative judgments about the system." MacLean, 379.

⁴⁶ Carlos Santiso and Augustin Loada. "Explaining the unexpected: electoral reform and democratic governance in Burkina Faso." *Journal of Modern African Studies*. 41.3 (2003), 405.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 406.

midst of investigating charges of murder against Compaore's bodyguards. After the incident, "civil society organizations and opposition political parties coalesced...demanding a swift resolution of the case and an end to impunity."⁴⁹ The case remains unresolved and the incident testifies to Compaore's authoritarian persistence in the face of democratic politics. However, the fact that political parties and civil society protested without government interference indicates their growing strength. The voter turnout in the 1998 elections was lower than in Ghana and Nigeria; however, turnout in the 2002 legislative elections was nearly 65.0% of registered voters.⁵⁰ Based on this evidence, civil society groups are becoming more active and a democratic political culture is taking hold.

Considering economic variables, Burkina Faso began a structural adjustment program in 1991, gained some debt relief from the International Monetary Fund, and began a poverty reduction program with the World Bank. Agricultural subsistence and ISI industries like cotton lint, beverages, agricultural processing, soap, cigarettes, textiles, and gold dominate the production sector.⁵¹ Most industries remain state-owned. Forty-five percent of the population is below the poverty line.

The example of Burkina Faso validates the importance Dahl places on institutions. The independent electoral commission led to further democratization in the previous two elections. Likewise, Whitehead recognizes the importance of vertical and horizontal accountability. Although the process remains incomplete, the relative gains in autonomy made by the judiciary and the electoral commission amount to horizontal accountability. Unfortunately, politics in Burkina Faso resembles the power struggle described by Ake. A political reform commission changed the constitution to limit the presidency, but Compaore may exploit the alteration and win another two terms in office. As a result, the energies of civil society concentrate on monitoring and limiting the government. Members of the press are not secure, as exemplified by the Zongo affair. The economy is largely statist, and structural adjustment programs have not stemmed poverty or improved the welfare of those confined to subsistence lifestyles. Burkina Faso only meets the institutional set of variables for democratization.

Ghana

⁴⁸ Ibid., 413.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 400.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 406.

⁵¹ CIA World Factbook.

A parliamentary democracy, introduced in 1960, was Ghana's first government after gaining independence from Great Britain in 1957. By 1964 Ghana was a one-party state and a military coup in 1966 facilitated a return to party competition in 1969. Ghanaian political history followed this pattern of nominal democracy, military overthrow, and a return to nominal democracy until 1992. Between 1960 and 1992 there were three civilian governments and seven distinct authoritarian regimes. Even though despots ruled much of the time, political violence was limited prior to Jerry Rawlings's 1979 coup. Both as a dictator and elected president, Rawlings prevented peaceful demonstration and trade union organization, and engaged in corrupt practices. The constitution enacted in January 1993 provides for a presidency with four-year terms, a Council of State serving as a cabinet, a unicameral parliament, and an independent judiciary. Three national election cycles in Ghana occurred since that date. Rawlings was elected in 1993 and 1996. In the 2000 presidential election, opposition party candidate John A. Kufuor defeated Rawling's vice president with 56.7% of the vote. The peaceful transfer of power in Ghana is evidence of the growing strength of democracy.

Applying the institutional set of variables, Ghana meets the constitutional standard but does not use a proportional representation system; consequently, allocations of parliamentary seats are unrepresentative of smaller parties. In Burkina Faso successful small parties lead democratic progress. Nevertheless, the Ghanaian Electoral Commission assured voters that polling irregularities only averaged 2.5% for the entire nation during the 2000 presidential elections.⁵² In Ghana, the Electoral Commission "was viewed by virtually all stakeholders as a credible independent agency that operated autonomously from the...government."⁵³ Similarly, the judicial system is considered largely independent of the government.⁵⁴

After taking office, Kufuor recommitted to the rule of law, observing human rights, and fighting corruption. Civil cases prosecuting journalists for political reasons were abandoned and laws stifling freedom of speech were repealed. Some government officials are currently under investigation for corrupt acts. Additionally, on September 3, 2002, Kufuor's government established the National Reconciliation Commission to investigate crimes committed by former military regimes. At 59.7%, voter turnout in the last political election was greater in Ghana than

⁵² Smith, Daniel A. "Consolidating democracy? The structural underpinnings of Ghana's 2000 elections." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 40.4 (2002), 635.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 645.

⁵⁴ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of African Affairs: *Ghana*.

any other case under consideration (refer to the chart). For the time being, Ghana is free from oppression like that exerted by the Rawlings government. The Kufuor government made relative gains in guaranteeing liberty, providing citizen security, and promoting civil society.

During the 1980s, the Ghanaian government received several loans from the IMF reserves and grants from the World Bank totaling nearly \$1.1 billion. Like Burkina Faso, Ghana was designated a Heavily Indebted Poor Country and cited for debt reduction. The IMF and the World Bank cooperated with the government as late as February 2002 on this initiative. Even though fewer persons are impoverished in Ghana than in either Burkina Faso or Nigeria, most work in subsistence level agriculture. Nevertheless, Ghana has a comparatively large services industry (refer to the chart). Export commodities include gold, timber, and cocoa. Mining, lumbering, and light manufacturing are the biggest industries.

Based on the first two sets of variables, institutional accountability and liberty, citizen security, and civil society, Ghana meets the standards of the three democratization theorists. The 2000 presidential elections, overseen by the Electoral Commission, saw a change in political power and contributed greatly to the democratization process. Similarly, human rights progressed significantly since Kufuor took office in 2000. Working to establish the rule of law, Kufuor's policies allowed civil rights groups to exercise their liberties in a relatively secure environment. Ghana falls short on the economic set of variables. While meeting the minimum standard of a market economy, Ghana is subject to the same developmental constraints described by Ake. In relative terms, Ghana is more economically successful than Burkina Faso. Regardless, debt burdens persist and the economy is largely composed of small landholders functioning at the subsistence level.

Nigeria

The most populous country in Africa, Nigeria became independent from Great Britain in 1960 with a federalist republican constitution. The first army coup occurred in 1966, followed by the Biafran secession wars from 1967 to 1970. After the wars, two military coups preceded four years of an electoral democracy. In 1978, General Olusegun Obasanjo peacefully and unequivocally relinquished power to an elected government. He was the only authoritarian ruler to do so. Claiming widespread corruption and electoral fraud, two more military regimes dominated politics in the 1980s. Popular pressure forced local elections in 1991. National elections in 1993 were annulled by the military regime that led to its overthrow in a coup by Sani

Abacha, a violent oppressor, in 1993. Abacha's death in 1998 brought General Abdulsalami Abubakar, a moderate, to power.

All the while, the public clamored for democratic reform and institutional accountability. Abubakar released some political prisoners and established the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Two election cycles occurred since instituting a new constitution in 1999. Obasanjo won each of these elections. Obasanjo "was admired for his stand against the Abacha dictatorship, his record of returning the federal government to civilian rule in 1979, and his claim to represent all Nigerians regardless of religion."⁵⁵ Parliamentary elections coincided with the presidential election in 1999. The electoral commission allocated seats based on a proportional representation system with a 5.0% minimum vote from each region for a party to qualify. Consequently, parties had to gain national, broad-based support, averting the threat of a regional faction emerging. In regards to the judiciary, the introduction of Shariah law in some northern areas indicates the judiciary is almost too independent of the central government. Shariah may not always operate according to internationally accepted human rights standards.

Despite the use of an electoral mechanism encouraging liberty and citizen security, ethnic and religious communal violence continues in Nigeria. While conflict between ethnic groups is not inherent, politically marginalized groups tend to unite members around ethnic, religious, or communal identity in order to compete for political power. This process undermines democracy; that is, "the proliferation of conflicts in the post military period engenders propositions that link ethno-religious conflict to democracy or implicate regimes in democratic transition as being unable to manage such conflict."⁵⁶ The Nigerian government is unable to provide security to its citizens because the state cannot control political violence. In some cases, the state favors some groups over others: "the lack of neutrality results in double standards, which denude the emaciated government. Powerless groups tend to suffer more."⁵⁷ Many of Nigeria's 250 ethnic groups remain politically unrepresented, and violence continues between Christians and Muslims. Despite continuing internal conflict, voter turnout was nearly 58.0% in the last presidential election, indicating the citizens of Nigeria desire a democracy. If Obasanjo is unable

⁵⁵ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of African Affairs, *Nigeria*.

⁵⁶ Ukoha Ukiwo. "Politics, ethno-religious conflicts and democratic consolidation in Nigeria." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 41.1 (2003), 116.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 129.

to deliver on reforms, the public may begin to lose its support for democracy.⁵⁸ In short, the Nigerian government does not ensure liberty, citizen security, or promote civil society.

Economically, poverty in Nigeria is the worst among the three cases. At the same time, the Nigerian economy is almost as diversified as the Ghanaian economy (refer to the chart). Nigeria first adopted a structural adjustment plan between 1986 and 1996. A recent agreement signed with the IMF gave Nigeria nearly \$1 billion in loans and debt relief. The agreement was not revived after it expired in 2002. Structural adjustment has not improved the Nigerian economy: once a net exporter of food products, Nigeria now imports most of its food. Dependence on oil as a primary export limited growth of the remainder of the production sector. The “informal sector” may compose 75.0% of the economy.⁵⁹ Under these circumstances, liberal markets cannot operate.

Superficially, Nigeria meets the institutional criteria discussed by Dahl, Whitehead, and Ake. The judiciary is too independent and uses Shariah law in some regional areas.⁶⁰ The rule of law does not always apply, the government cannot guarantee the security of all citizens, and many civil society members compete against politicians for power. Internal conflict threatens the security of the state. The Nigerian economy does not function effectively.

Conclusion

The theorists offer a sound basis for analysis of recently democratized governments. Of the case studies, Ghana is the most democratic because a transition of power took place in a peaceful manner. The new government has begun correcting human rights abuses and corruption scandals of past governments. Nigeria is the least democratized due to internal ethnic and religious conflict. Burkina Faso enjoys relative peace, but the next presidential elections may threaten institutional accountability. Each of the three democracies contains authoritarian elements from former regimes. These countries are pseudo-democracies eclipsed by authoritarian histories. Nevertheless, the successes and failures of the pseudo-democracies point to deficiencies in the democratization theories.

To begin with, none of the theories mentions the concept of an electoral commission. However, in each case study the electoral commission was an important institutional actor, responsible for compiling voter registration, administering elections, and verifying results.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 134.

⁵⁹ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of African Affairs, *Nigeria*.

Indeed, political observers in Burkina Faso claim the electoral commission is more independent of the state than the judiciary. In Ghana the electoral commission assured the smooth transfer of democratic power from a violent dictator to an elected opposition president. Even though conflict plagues Nigerian politics, an independent electoral commission assures election results. Dahl and Ake should incorporate the concept of an electoral commission into their respective institutional recommendations. Whitehead's analysis of horizontal accountability needs to mention this essential institution.

Secondly, the theoreticians do not stipulate whether a regularized change of political parties characterizes democracy. Dahl considers and dismisses this point because it would limit obviously democratic states like Japan. Whitehead and Ake do not even mention the idea of party alternation. However, omitting this stipulation defines states like Burkina Faso and Nigeria as institutional democracies even though former authoritarian rulers head the state. "Free, fair, and frequent" elections as Dahl describes them are not enough to compensate. Elections are about choosing between credible alternatives. The advances made by Ghana were largely due to the peaceful transition of power. Burkina Faso may have the same president for another ten years due to constitutional changes. If no viable alternative candidate runs for office, then the quality of democracy suffers. Electorally viable opposition parties able to alternate in power are a prerequisite for democracy. Exceptions can certainly be made for states like Japan. Otherwise, states with overtly authoritarian tendencies may be included.

Finally, any description of democracy must define citizen security with very specific limitations on both the state and citizens. Dahl and Whitehead discuss citizen security as a compromise between sacrificing some individual liberties for collective good. The absence of conflict and the neutrality of state security forces are essential. However, neither of these judgments pertains to the competency of the forces. Security should be defined as the ability of the state to ensure peace within a politically defined and recognized territory while allowing political opposition and observing the constitutionally guaranteed liberties of the populace. Specifically, the neutrality of state security forces is important. The major democratic failure in Nigeria today arises from the state's inability to police every region in the country with neutrality while observing human rights standards and remaining apolitical.

⁶⁰ Ukiwo, 124-125.

Dahl, Whitehead, and Ake provide three comprehensive democratic theories. Although diverging on specific issues, commonalities arise concerning institutional accountability, the definition of liberty, citizen security, and civil society, and the structure of the economy. Applying their findings to recently democratized nations highlights certain limitations within these theories. The theoreticians fail to recognize the importance of electoral commissions, the need for electorally viable political parties, and state control over finite territory. Incorporating these concepts into democratization studies improves on the theoretical framework.

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