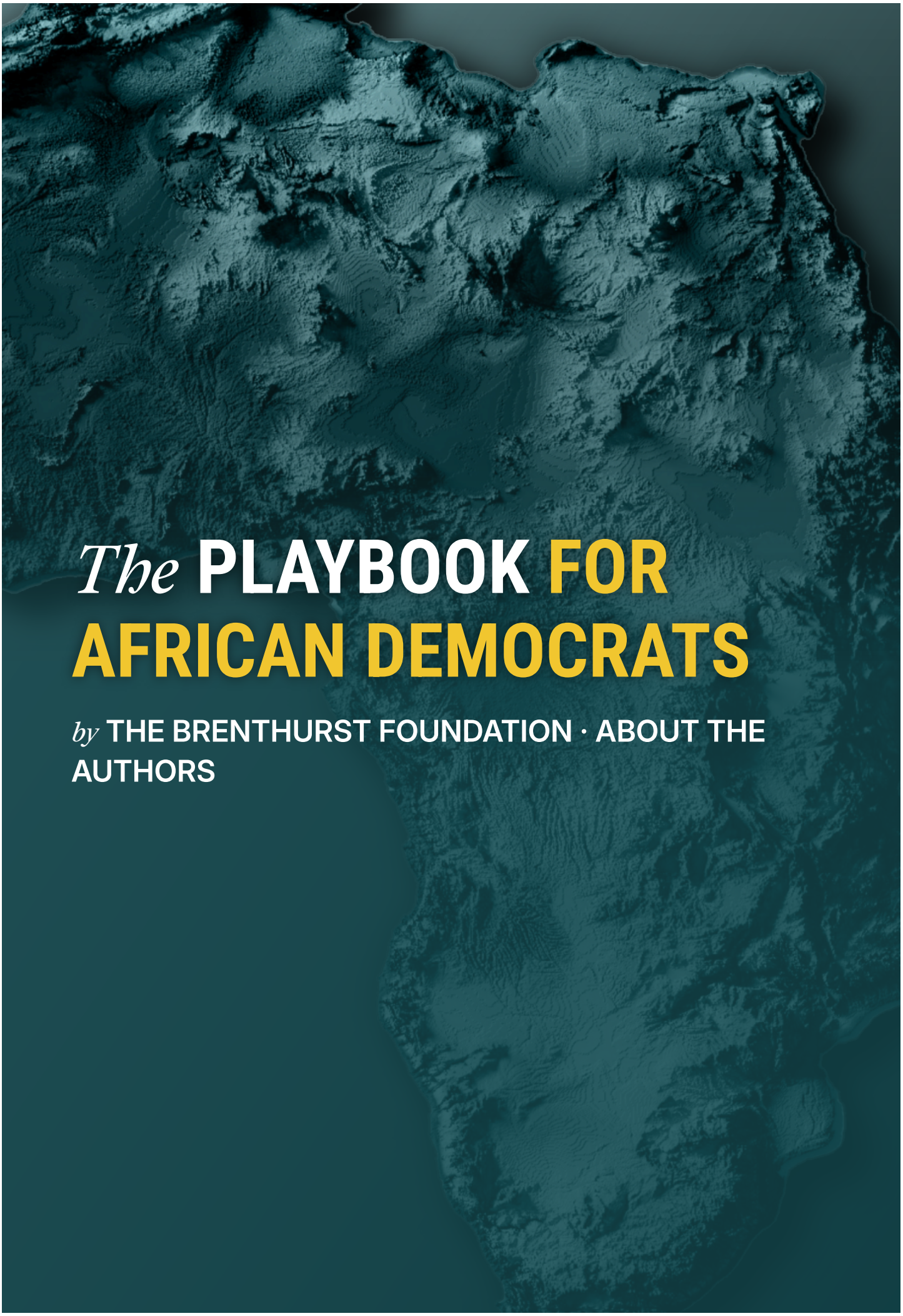


The PLAYBOOK FOR AFRICAN DEMOCRATS

by THE BRENTHURST FOUNDATION · ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The PLAYBOOK

noun

a book containing a team's plans for a game;
a set of rules, suggestions, or methods that are considered to be suitable for a particular activity, industry, job, etc.

— Cambridge Dictionary

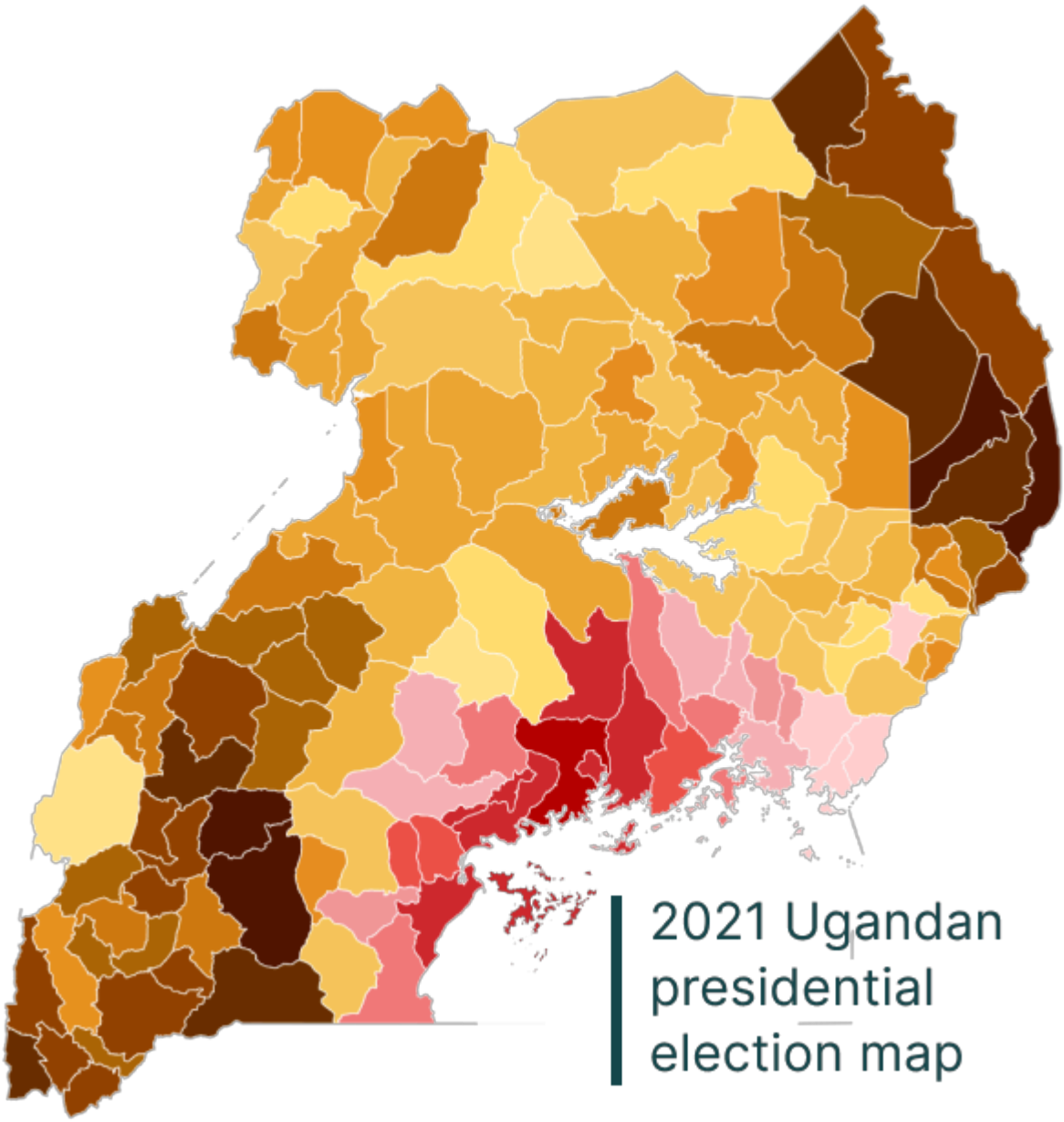
FOREWORD

by **BOBI WINE**
Former Member of the Parliament of Uganda

Robert Kyagulanyi (Bobi Wine)

VOTE RIGGING AND THE AUTHORITARIAN TOOLKIT

The 2021 general election in Uganda showcases the lengths authoritarian leaders will go to retain power. For General Yoweri Museveni, the 79-year-old leader who assumed power in Uganda through the overthrow of Idi Amin, the desire to cling to power is as great – if not greater – than his ambition to first wield it many decades ago. He has at his disposal a toolkit of crude yet effective tactics to ensure that he remains the country's commander-in-chief. A primary tactic is that of vote rigging.



Original graphic: Kingofthedead, Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 4.0)

The most recent instance of this tactic can be seen in Uganda's 2021 general elections, which was contested by myself and ten other candidates, and which saw a host of overt and covert measures used to rig the vote in favour of President Museveni.

> Video footage shared with NGOs, journalists and across social media platforms details these incidents. In Kisoro in the Western Region of Uganda a police officer can be seen at a polling station

stuffing ballots into a ballot box, while an election official observes. In a separate video, ballots with a mark against my name could be seen abandoned in a polling station and not in the ballot boxes. Meanwhile, in Bulambuli, a man in a bright yellow shirt (the colours of the Museveni campaign) is seen repeatedly marking ballots in favour of President Museveni. Egregious acts such as these took place across Uganda, with many facilitated by security and election officials.

A supporter of Ugandan musician turned politician Robert Kyagulanyi, also known as Bobi Wine, carries his poster as they protest on a street against the arrest of Kyagulanyi during his presidential rally in Kampala, Uganda, on 18 November 2020. Photo: BADRU KATUMBA/AFP via Getty Images

The counting phase also presented an opportunity for malfeasance. Following a confrontation with the *Daily Monitor*, a Ugandan newspaper, the Electoral Commission acknowledged that votes from more than 1 200 polling stations were not counted. These were from urban areas, such as Kampala, where I had polled favourably, amassing more than

75% of the vote. Counting irregularities also included instances of deceased individuals having voted.

Bobi Wine greets supporters as he sets off on his campaign trail towards eastern Uganda on 1 December 2020. Photo: SUMY SADURNI/AFP via Getty Images

> **The unfortunate reality is that vote rigging is simply one piece of a larger authoritarian toolkit, as I have come to discover, together with my supporters and family.**

In the days leading up to the election, my supporters were routinely beaten by security personnel. Their crime: voicing their support for me and carrying opposition signs. The day after the 2021 elections saw me and my wife placed under house arrest for eleven days, during which time our property was encircled by the police and military. Family, friends and even the US ambassador were all denied entry to my home. I was only allowed to consult with my lawyer once during this ordeal. This is the authoritarian toolkit in use.

Bobi Wine under house arrest, photographed with his family. Source: X/@HEBobiWine

For leaders such as Museveni the desire to retain power dictates their every action. The toolkit at their disposal, which includes vote rigging, is not only effective, but it is also transferable; it will continue to change hands from one authoritarian to the next. This has been our struggle in Uganda, but we will not concede defeat.

INTRODUCTION

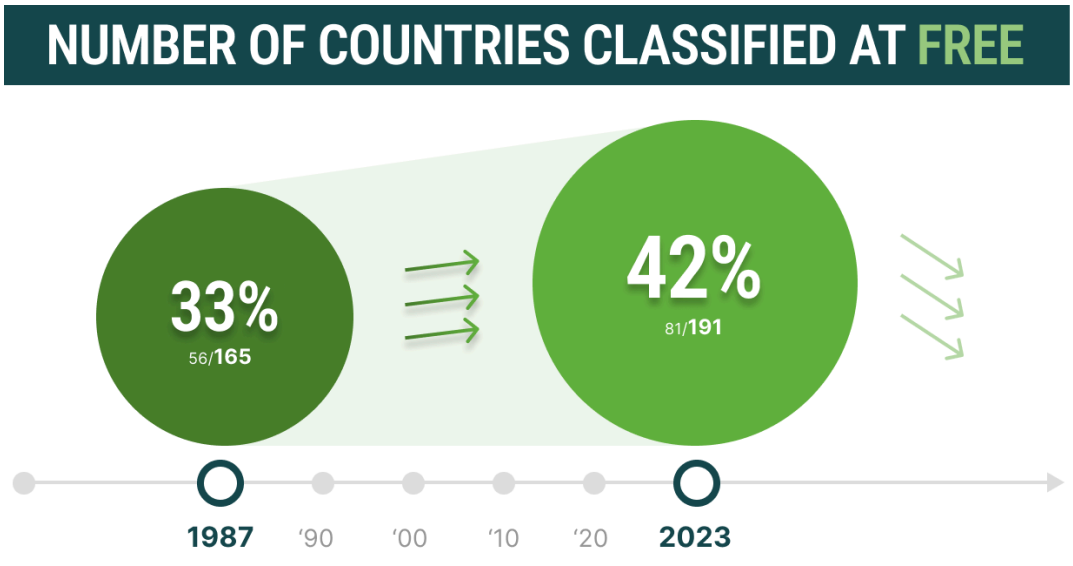
by **GREG MILLS**
Director of the Brenthurst Foundation

COUNTERING THE RISE OF AUTHORITARIANISM

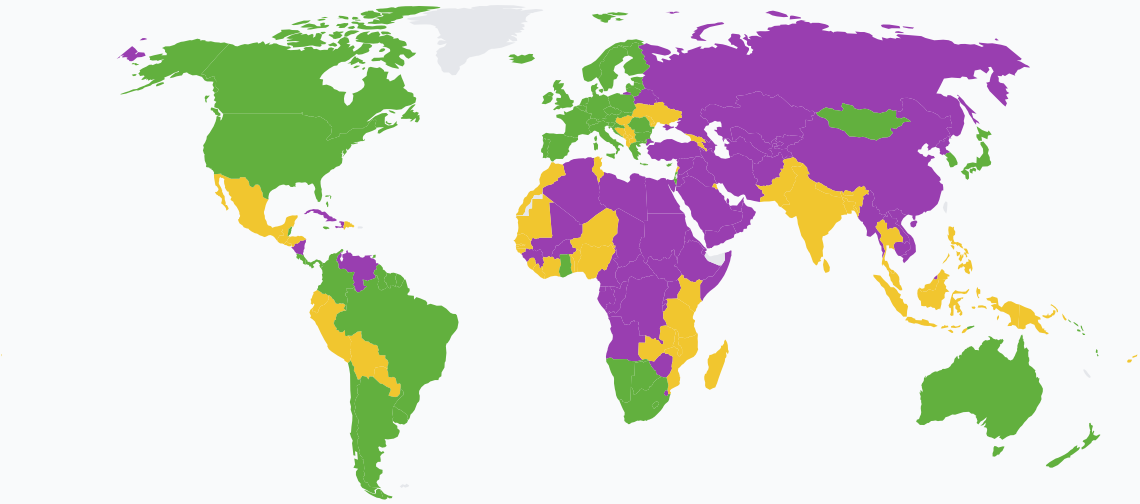
Contemporary politics is characterised globally by an ongoing struggle between autocracy and democracy. In one corner are the heroic democratic campaigns exemplified by the 'Colour revolutions', today representing just 20% of the world's eight billion citizens; and in the other, the authoritarians led by Russia, Iran and China. This is not simply a struggle about freedoms and the type of society in which people prefer to live, but about other, practical outcomes. Free, open and accountable democracy is a necessary precondition for the improvement of the lives of people, enabling inclusive economic growth, jobs, health, education and security.

Yet, just 20 years ago, autocracy appeared to be on the decline. No longer could autocrats then easily turn to violent methods and blunt weapons to keep people under their thumb, as Stalin had done in sending perhaps as many as ten million of his countrymen and women to their deaths in the gulags, through executions and engineered famines; or as Mao had done with his Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, which together cost as many as 35 million lives. The great shift towards democracy started with the Portuguese coup on 25 April 1974, which, in Samuel Huntington's words, released political forces marking the beginning of a global democratic wave, and which he termed the 'third wave'.[1] Right-wing dictatorships ended in Europe in the wake of events in Lisbon, with the collapse of the Metapolitefsi in Greece and the death of Francisco Franco in Spain, followed by junta after junta in Latin America. Then came the collapse of the Eastern bloc governments in Eastern Europe after 1989.

The world seemed set on a democratic path. The end of the Cold War saw a surge in democracies and its attendant cottage industry. The number of countries classified by Freedom House as Free increased from 56 out of 165 in 1987 to a record 81 of 191 nations,[2] the highest number recorded in the then 25-year history of the annual democratic survey.



Many of the repressive regimes lost their principal sponsor with the end of the Soviet Union and quickly (and mostly peacefully) succumbed to their people's wishes for greater openness. With the advent of social media, for a while, the costs of tyranny, notes William Dobson in The Dictator's Learning Curve, had then never been so high.[3] But autocrats quickly learnt to adapt.



NOT FREE · PARTLY FREE · FREE

Map showing Global Freedom Status. Freedom House assigns a freedom score and status to 210 countries and territories. Source: freedomhouse.org

As Freedom House put it in its report on 2021, the year 'marked the 15th consecutive year of decline in global freedom. The countries experiencing deterioration outnumbered those with improvements by the largest margin recorded since the negative trend began in 2006. The long democratic recession is deepening.[4]

THE REPORT WENT ON TO NOTE:

The ongoing decline has given rise to claims of democracy's inherent inferiority. Proponents of this idea include official Chinese and Russian commentators seeking to strengthen their international influence while escaping accountability for abuses, as well as antidemocratic actors within democratic states who see an opportunity to consolidate power. They are both cheering the breakdown of democracy and exacerbating it, pitting themselves against the brave groups and individuals who have set out to reverse the damage.

Democracy has since continued its downward trajectory. On the cusp of 2024, Freedom House summarised in its annual review: 'Global freedom declined for the 18th consecutive year in 2023. The breadth and depth of the deterioration were extensive.Political rights and civil liberties were

diminished in 52 countries, while only 21 countries made improvements. Flawed elections and armed conflict contributed to the decline, endangering freedom and causing severe human suffering.[5] While there are more elections than ever before, many of these lack open and free contestation and transparent counting. Former liberation movements are, in many instances, failing to live up to the promise of replacing oppressive systems with thriving democracies and are, instead, actively collaborating to hollow out democracy, manipulating the outcome of elections to stay in power and capture the state through the weaponisation of media, fake news, AI-assisted propaganda and other technological interventions in voting and counting. The construct of the 'Global South' is being abused by autocrats to suggest that Africans and others in the less developed world do not support democracy, while credible research clearly shows that the majority favour free elections and democracy, and there are clear correlations between development performance and the quality of democracy.

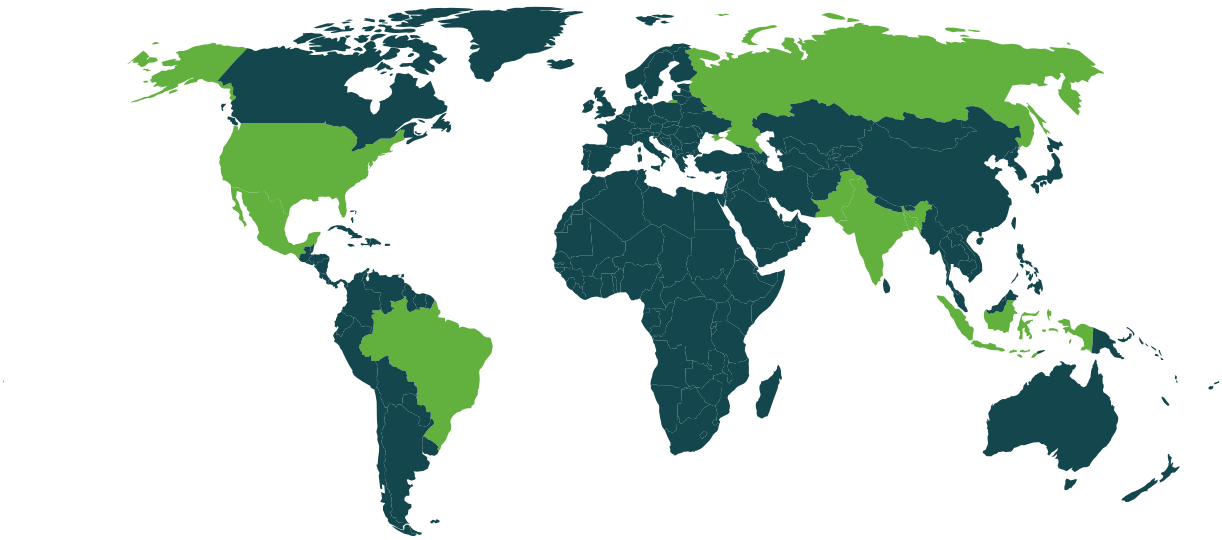
> **Even though autocrats play a malign role in support of each other, democrats can expect little help from outside.**

Even though autocrats play a malign role in support of each other, democrats can expect little help from outside. Still, attacks on democracy anywhere from Ukraine to Venzuela, in Sudan as in Myanmar, have costs for democrats everywhere. Rembering Justice Johann Kriegler's wisdom that 'only a fool rigs an election on election day', maintaining vigilance and building methods of collaboration between democrats during and between elections is now more critical than at any time since the end of the Cold War.

THE YEAR OF ELECTIONS

The year 2024 had been described as 'the year of elections' and as 'the ultimate election year'.[6] But this did not mean it would be the year of democracy. On the contrary, it may well prove to have been the year of the authoritarian.

During 2024, half the world's eligible voting population would head to the polls in 64 countries (and across the European Union), more than ever in history. The results of many of these elections could prove significant for years to come.



In 2024, eight of the world's ten most populous nations - Bangladesh, Brazil, India, the United States, Indonesia, Pakistan, Russia, Mexico - voted. Taiwan's election in January 2024, for example, which produced another Democratic People's Party victory, is likely to inform China's approach to the island, possibly increasing the level of military threat, given the DPP's more autonomous line towards Beijing. Pakistan and Indonesia, the two most populous Muslim nations worldwide, have both already hosted elections, with both processes shaping their policies towards inclusion or extraction. Iran would follow later in 2024.

Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi at an informal meeting of heads of state and government of the BRICS countries. Source: Wikimedia/The Kremlin (CC BY 4.0)

India's election, between April and May 2024, will be the world's largest. More than 900 million people registered to vote from India's population of 1.4 billion in an election in which current Prime Minister Narendra Modi hopes to be re-elected for a third five-year term.

900 MILLION REGISTERED VOTERS

from India's population of 1.4 billion

Venezuela is another country hosting elections, which are expected to be controversial and cement authoritarian rule. The Venezuelan Supreme Court ratified the fifteen-year ban imposed on opposition leader María Machado from holding public office in January. This was later confirmed by the country's electoral authority, meaning her name will not appear on the ballot. Between its revolutionary rhetoric and red berets, Venezuela is a country looked up to by many populists in South

Africa, including in the ruling African National Congress (ANC) and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF).

On Hugo Chávez's death in 2013, Julius Malema said:

> **"I join millions of progressive individuals ... in sending my heartfelt condolences to the people of Venezuela for losing a fearless, politically determined and ideologically steadfast leader in President Hugo Chávez.'[7] The Venezuelan strongman's death from cancer ended his fourteen years of rule, but not his Bolivarian movement, which remains in power ten years later. 'Despite massive resistance from rented imperialist puppets, [Chávez] was able to lead Venezuela into an era where the wealth of Venezuela, particularly oil, was returned to the ownership of the people as a whole" — Julius Malema**

The Young Communist League of South Africa, part of the ruling ANC-led alliance, said, 'Comrade Chávez was an inspiration to all progressive forces around the world .... His defiance of imperialism and his insistence that Venezuela's vast oil reserves be used to uplift the masses of the people has changed the lives of millions of people.'[8] By 2024, more than one-quarter of Venezuela's population had fled the country, making it both the greatest store of oil reserves and source of refugees worldwide.

Some elections will be more consequential than others, not least the elephant in the room, the US presidential contest. Despite all the forecasts of former President Donald Trump not being allowed to run, or running from jail, he is currently well placed, it seems, to secure a second term, reflecting if nothing else the extent of social divisions in the US and entrenched insider-outsider views about the 'system'.

Donald Trump speaking at the 2023 Turning Point Action Conference in Florida. Photo: Flickr/Gage Skidmore (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Many of these elections will not be free, but rather a means of legitimising the ruling party and/or satisfying donors and other partners.

Across Africa, elections are expected – or were scheduled – in Mauritania, Mali, Mauritius, Botswana, Chad, South Sudan, Rwanda, Mozambique, Ghana, Algeria, Togo, Namibia, Guinea-Bissau, Comoros, Tunisia, Senegal, Somaliland, Madagascar and, of course, on 29 May in South Africa. Of this number, five fall into the Not Free category, as defined by Freedom House, nine Partly Free and another five into the Free category – Ghana, Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia and South Africa.

The Malian election had already been postponed indefinitely, while the Senegalese event was delayed as a result of political interference from the president as he prevaricated in the face of a likely opposition

victory.

Africa is not uniquely affected in managing the rise of authoritarianism. Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina won a fourth consecutive term in January 2024, although the election was boycotted by the country's main opposition party in protest over a crackdown on political dissent.

Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of Bangladesh. Source: Flickr/Russel Watkins, DFID (CC BY 2.0)

Similarly, in Pakistan, even though his party was suppressed, and he was jailed on what his supporters claim are trumped-up charges, former Prime Minister Imran Khan won the most votes in the February 2024 election, but not enough to win an outright majority. March's 're-election' of Vladimir Putin also falls into this category, especially following the murder in jail just the previous month of Alexei Navalny, his most prominent domestic critic.

Of the 64 elections worldwide in 2024, 38 (59%) would be held in countries considered to be either Not Free or Partly Free by Freedom House. There are nuances to these elections, of course, not least in the extent of the true vote turnout, one indicator of a strongman's (or woman's) support, and in the character of the regime in power. It is one thing, for instance, trying to catalyse a democratic process and ensure a fair outcome in a country under military rule, another in a regime with authoritarian tendencies.

AUTHORITARIAN DEMOCRACIES

'For my friends, everything, for my enemies, the law,' said Peru's General Óscar Benavides. The general served twice as Peru's president, the second time (1933–1939) during a period termed one of 'authoritarian fascism'.

The methods by which autocratic regimes stay in power reminds us of Benavides' statement. They may, indeed, be characterised as oxymoronic 'authoritarian democrats' in the manner in which they use public institutions in undemocratic ways to turn affairs to their advantage, from removing rivals from running in elections to overturning acceptable practices. A variety of tactics are used to retain power and the illusion of democracy: local NGOs can be pressured through tax and other inspections and audits, with stringent registration procedures, and through clampdowns on foreign donor flows, while government-sponsored NGOs (known perhaps appropriately as GONGOs in Russia)

proliferate. These are countries where criticism is seen as treason, where diversity of views is seen mostly as a weakness and seldom as a strength. Leaders who discourage the study and critical scrutiny of their own situations so obviously lack a sense of irony, given that such questioning helped not only to achieve liberation from colonial authorities but has also been at the root of innovation in developed economies.

> **Leaders who discourage the study and critical scrutiny of their own situations so obviously lack a sense of irony.**

Such regimes like party lists and appointments, not direct elections. They target media outlets and independent journalists (sometimes fatally, as has been the case in Russia), while again ensuring they are front and centre of the local news outlets. They play to the need for stability, while buttering up supporters with contracts, social grants and pensions, and jobs – a recipe for widespread corruption and stagnation. The concept of a 'development state' or 'state as the agency for development' is the preferred language. State employment is kept high, along with loyalties. In South Africa, where unemployment hovers above 40%, the state is now the largest employer, at around one-quarter of the workforce.

And when it comes to elections, this is more sophisticated than simply beating up or imprisoning opponents, or even fiddling with election results. Techniques include gerrymandering districts, tampering with

voters' rolls, inventing shadow voters, delving into voting records (most infamously through the Maisanta digital database in Venezuela), redistribution of the spoils in the form of contracts and goods to supporters, strangulation of resources for opponents, including through intimidation of funders, clamping down on foreign funding to NGOs and control of media assets. Elections are a necessity to maintain legitimacy, and so they become a target of the state apparatus. As Dobson has noted about Venezuela under Chávez:

> **...a "unique paradox: with each election, the country loses more of its democracy".[9]**

The political economy is shaped by the needs of power and patronage. As Tendai Biti reminds us, 'Power retention fuels the use of the state as an arena for redistribution.' Identity is similarly weaponised as a tool of loyalty and of priviledge. Equally, 'poverty and ignorance is weaponised through the use of handouts, through food and social grants, in which dependency is used as a malign force by the rulers', according to Biti, a veteran opponent of Robert Mugabe's rule, who served as the Minister of Finance in the unity government in Zimbabwe.[10]

The temptation for leadership to steer away from liberal ideals is obvious, not least since it removes the constraints on manoeuvrability and imposes levels of transparency and accountability. Authoritarianism is thus not just about violence per se, or even whether votes count – and are counted – in domestic elections. It is about a system and the purpose of government, where elites profit disproportionately and have little (or no) accountability or chance of being evicted via the polls. This model is attractive to these elites. It offers the prospect of rapid wealth accumulation for a select few (with the 'big man' at the top of the billionaire pile, as with Vladimir Putin, for example) and of never losing

power without legal limits to personal authority and state control over all checks and balances, including the media.

This is foreign to Western countries, no matter the personal appeal to some leaders. Imagine, as Anne Applebaum writes, 'an American president who controlled not only the executive branch – including the FBI, CIA, and NSA – but also Congress and the judiciary; *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Dallas Morning News*, and all of the other newspapers; and all major businesses, including Exxon, Apple, Google, and General Motors'.[11]

> **In response to their insecurity, 'instead of democracy', Applebaum continues, Putin and his ilk 'promote autocracy; instead of unity, they try constantly to create division; instead of open societies, they promote xenophobia. Instead of letting people hope for something better, they promote nihilism and cynicism.'**

This cabal wants democracy to fail, and not just in Ukraine.

Hence the decision to again invade Ukraine, collapse its democracy and its economy, strain Western institutions to breaking point, and support authoritarians elsewhere from Syria to Sudan, all the while shrinking American influence. To parody Francis Fukuyama's line on the end of the Cold War, it's the return of history. But it is a history that is being rewritten at great risk and huge cost.

There are increasing dangers in the temptation of authoritarianism, not least in governance, accountability, transparency and human rights. But this is not a huge leap in attitude for a liberation movement steeped in faux communist ideology (the leaders all have extensive private business interests) and a struggle where the ends routinely justified the means. Added to this, living in a region surrounded by other similarly minded movements from Angola through Namibia and Zimbabwe to

Mozambique and Tanzania, all are still firmly ensconced in power since independence. Most have until now operated less through outright fear and violence than more sophisticated means, a combination of mafia-like economic schemes, control of the media, and weakening of institutions, a careful mixture of 'calibrated coercion' involving the application of some fear along with the distribution of rents, intimidation and propaganda, elaborate ideological schemes and what Sergei Guriev and Daniel Triesman refer to as 'loyalty rituals', from bribery to self-censorship.[12] These methods include the use of offshore banks and institutions to both protect their assets and bribe others to their cause. While they may (largely) stay within the bounds of the law and violence, they routinely ignore the spirit of the law.

The rise of these 'authoritarian democrats' can of course be resisted. The history of non-violent democratic activism illustrates the importance of this process of singling out the foreign supporters of regimes, not local officials, and one or two key personalities, in attempts to fragment their facade. Targeted sanctions against these individuals may also take effect, if only as a tool of ostracism, since there is nothing a political pariah usually likes more than to be loved.

Benazir Bhutto. Source: Flickr/AnneAE (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Benazir Bhutto, as one example, talked about the effectiveness of financial measures on leaders, given the pressure points. 'The first call they will get will come from their mistress shopping at Harrods when her credit card is stopped,' she told biographer Ron Suskind.[13] 'And the second one from their wife complaining why little Ahmed's fees have not been paid at Georgetown. They will soon change their ways.' There are counter-arguments, including that sanctions externalise the reasons for a country's problems, as the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) has attempted to do with targeted measures against prominent party members in Zimbabwe, and that they demand stamina

Tunisian Revolution. Source: Flickr/Chris Belsten (CC BY 2.0)

Non-violent rallies and gatherings can be useful for bringing social and political issues unobtrusively to the surface, while key slogans and symbols can be powerful, politically catalysing tools (the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia, Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution, Georgia's Rose Revolution and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine are examples). Polling is another method of resisting intimidation and attempts to play the identity card. By contacting sample groups directly, it is possible to both establish what the issues are that concern voters and play to these, in so doing altering identity stereotypes.

It is not only the ruling parties, however, that are at fault or need to be checked or changed. Oppositions, too, will have to up their game.

THE CHALLENGE OF THE FIRST LIBERATION

Another trend is in the manner in which former liberation movements quickly learn to turn power, in the style of authoritarian democrats, to their own advantage, including in the manner in which they collaborate with each other in responding to the challenges posed by democratic opposition parties and movements.

Most southern African countries have yet to experience a 'second' liberation; that is, the liberation from the liberators. Instead, the seven remaining former regional liberation movements have sought to entrench their power, working in collaboration with each other to this end against their enemies, perceived and otherwise.

THESE INCLUDE:

- **The People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola** (MPLA, in power for 48 years by 2024),
- **The Botswana Democratic Party** (BDP, 58),
- **The Front for the Liberation of Mozambique** (FRELIMO, 49),
- **The South West Africa People's Organisation of Namibia** (SWAPO, 33 years),
- **Tanzania's Chama Cha Mapinduzi** (CCM, or 'Revolutionary Party', some 63 years if one included the pre-party period between 1961 and 1977),
- **The African National Congress** (ANC) in South Africa (30), and
- **ZANU-PF**, 43.

One means of co-operation has been through the Former Liberation Movement (FLM) organisation, the most recent summit of which

occurred at Victoria Falls on 18 March 2024. All members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the FLM is a reincarnation of the Frontline States grouping that bandied together in the 1970s to fight apartheid. But the modern incarnation of this organisation is not about advancing the interests of the 216 million people who live within its members' borders, but rather in maintaining ruling party political power. According to an ANC press statement following the Victoria Falls summit, the FLM is:

> [A] crucial platform to advance the consolidation of a progressive front in the southern Africa region and the continent as a whole, more so as counter-revolutionary forces seek to divide and fragment the progressive front through splinter political forces, including funding NGOs as fronts to achieve such ends. Therefore, the counter-revolutionary agenda continues to rear its ugly head, through the support of various political opposition parties meant to fragment the popular electoral support of the FLM. The aim of these forces is to halt the advance of the revolution and keep the African continent as a supplier of natural resources to enrich the western world as it has been during the era of slavery and colonial conquest. Neo-colonialism considers the FLM as a main threat, hence the agenda to destabilise our unity by utilising elaborate processes interwoven with every sphere [of] our nationhood, to capture the minds of our people and array them against the FLMs.[14]

ANC Statement on the Handover of the Chairmanship of the Meeting of the Former Liberation Movement (FLM) Six Sister Parties from Zanu-PF (Cde Dr O.M. Mpofu) to the

This description conveniently ignores decades of poor governance and blames voter anger at the FLMs on external actors.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Frontline States faced the common enemy of apartheid. These days they are united by less noble goals. They share a new common enemy: opposition parties that dare challenge their hold on power and the sizeable rents that accrue to their elites through contracts and corruption. It is inconceivable to them that opposition parties are wholly indigenous to their countries and have strong support among most of the people. The FLM has been set up to monitor and analyse geostrategic trends, and domestic and global challenges to their rule, while generating plans to support each other.

Even the most celebrationist Western enthusiast for the liberation movements – and there are still a few fellow travellers – would have to acknowledge that this development is not in the interests of the people who live under these regimes or the cause of democracy more broadly. An earlier, 2017 FLM summit adopted the document, 'War with the West', which accused former colonial powers and the US of seeking regime change through 'colour revolutions', financing opposition challengers and even coup plots. That summit concluded that a joint political school for ideology was needed to instil vigilance against such threats. It would provide 'strong ideological grounding' for party cadres, along with a series of 'tough disciplinary measures' to be undertaken by the sister liberation movements.[15]

In tilting at windmills in search of imaginary ideological enemies, the statement of the 2024 FLM summit concludes:

‘As we approach the National and Provincial elections, we are confident that the neo-colonial forces that seek to destabilise the liberation movements will not succeed. As the ANC, we are confident of an outright electoral victory because the people who will defend the movement are the motive forces and beneficiaries for change, the masses of our people.’ The statement added, ‘We are confident that our transformation agenda speaks louder than the cheap propaganda that seek to derail the political hegemony of the FLMs.’[16]

ANC Statement on the Handover of the Chairmanship of the Meeting of the Former Liberation Movement

The FLM thereby openly expresses its aim to develop strategies for liberation movements to hold on to political power, parties that have already been in uninterrupted power in 2024 for a combined 324 years. The ends of power, put differently, justify any means, whether this be jaded caricaturing of democratic oppositions as neo-colonialist, neoliberal or ‘Western’ or the dismissal of the Colour revolutions as externally instigated plots against the people’s interest.

Democrats everywhere, and especially in the West, should shake themselves out of their stupor in believing that African liberation movements support their values or even their interests, not least since the two are interlinked. But African democrats should be even more concerned about deliberate attempts to dilute and diminish their rights.

They cannot pretend that they have not been warned, given the brazenness of the former liberation movements in this regard.

AUTHORITARIANS BRAZENLY UNITE

The Mwalimu Julius Nyerere Leadership School was set up in 2022 in Tanzania by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as a political training school, referred to in the above FLM statement as the 'apex political school for all parties member [sic] to the FLM'. This should be viewed with great concern, and not just by China's external continental competitors. Democrats everywhere, including in Africa, should catch a wake-up.

The first thing participants see when entering the leadership school is a quote by Tanzania's first leader after independence, Julius Nyerere. Photo: Mwalimu Nyerere Leadership School

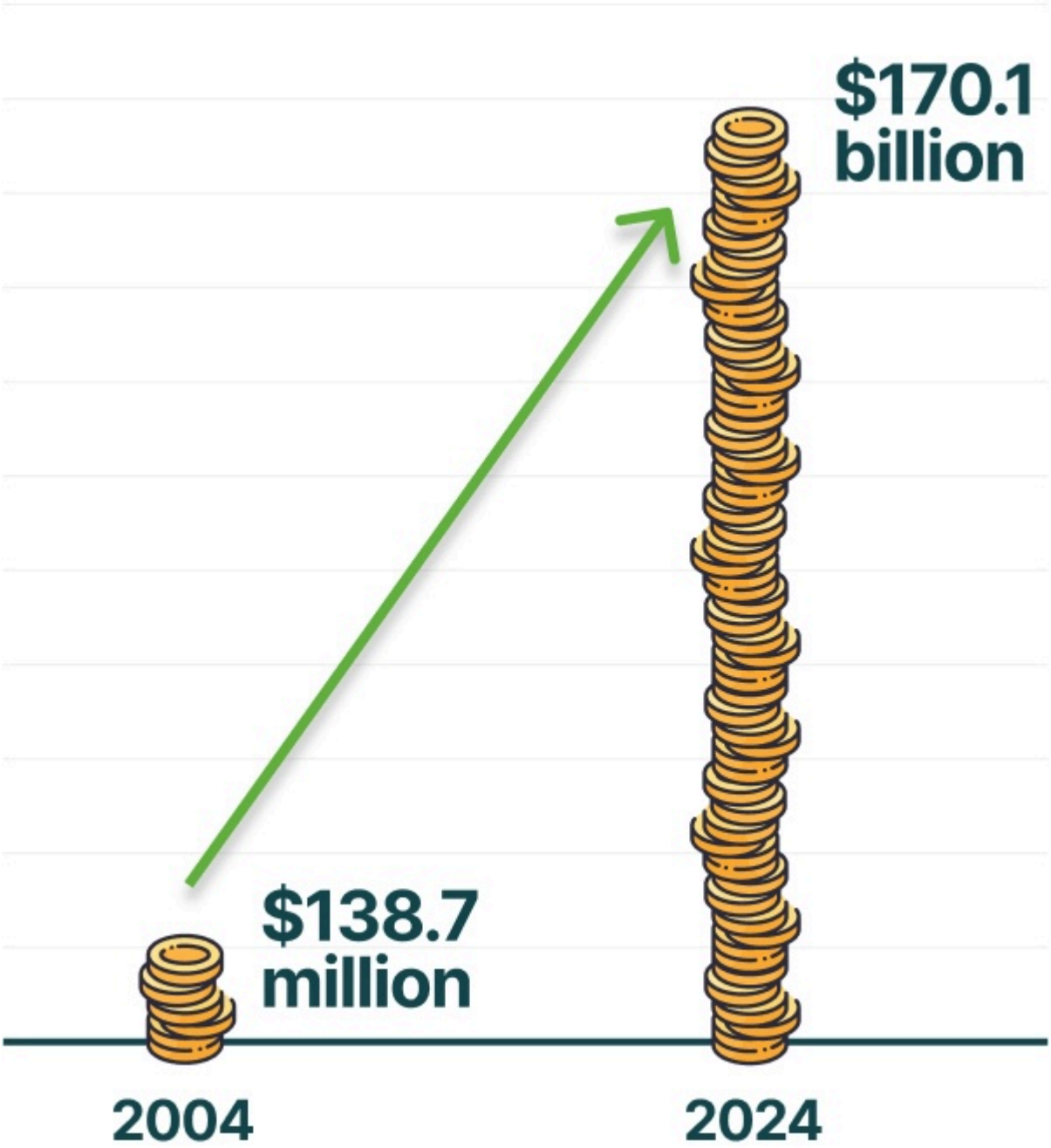
Supported by China's CCP, the Nyerere Leadership School has been established to provide ideological training and networking to cadres from six of the seven southern African liberation parties (Botswana was

not included at the outset) that have remained in power since independence: the MPLA, FRELIMO, SWAPO, CCM, ANC and ZANU-PF.

This concern about China's role does not stem from Sinophobia. The new wave of Chinese interest in Africa since 2000 has brought much positive change, investing in business and building infrastructure, and in so doing helping to change the perception of the continent as a problem to be solved to a business prospect.

But this party school does not seek to pass on the lessons of economic reform, bureaucratic efficiency or anti-corruption strategies, all of which China has some considerable experience with. None of these messages are particularly interesting to the attendees in any event.

Instead, it is a cynical geopolitical move that comes with clear strings and seeks to create leverage. The Chinese conditionality, to use a 'Western' term, is not in this case better governance – perhaps the opposite in fact – but debt, lots of it.

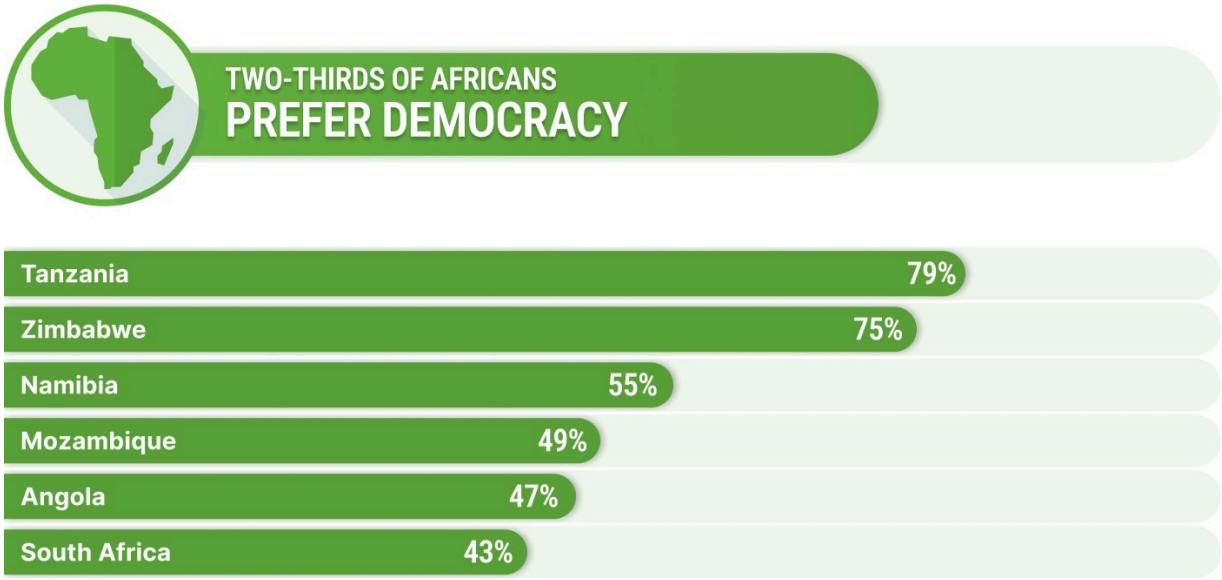


Chinese lending to African countries has risen from $138.7 million to $170.1 billion over the last 20 years. In sub-Saharan Africa, China's share of total external public debt rose from less than 2% in 2005 to nearly ten times that percentage in 2021. It is a pretty useful lever to ensure African support for China per se, and its wider goals and a firm down payment on the region's mineral and energy resources.[17]

This is a deeply concerning political development and should cast doubt as to why these liberation movements originally sought office and the means employed to do so. The Nyerere Leadership School enables the

FLM parties to collaborate systematically through shared training at facilities gifted to them by the CCP's Central Party School in Beijing through a $40 million donation.[18]

This has not been made in the interests of democracy, to the contrary, given the historic tendency among five of the six founding members of the school (South Africa exempted, for now) towards one-party rule, and the consistent manner in which they have machinated to undermine constitutionalism and democratic electoral practice. They not only share an open disdain for political opposition but have stifled and interfered with democratic threats to their rule, including imprisoning and even assassinating opposition and troublesome civil society leaders. Now they are banding together to preserve their rule, no matter what their populations might prefer.



Two-thirds of Africans polled by Afrobarometer consistently prefer democracy to other forms of government, including 43% in South Africa, 47% in Angola, 75% in Zimbabwe, 79% in Tanzania, 49% in Mozambique and 55% in Namibia.

> **It generally seems the longer you have tasted one-party rule, the more you appreciate democracy.[19]**

As the Ugandan scholar Paul Nantulya notes, the Mandarin term for this mutual help is *weiwen*, translated as ‘stability maintenance’ or ‘regime survival’ under CCP rule. Writing for the African Center for Strategic Studies, Nantulya concludes, ‘The CCP’s governance model is emerging as one of the manoeuvres being employed to rig multiparty systems to cling to power.’[20]

The Mwalimu Julius Nyerere Leadership School is a partnership between the ruling parties from Tanzania, Mozambique, Namibia, Angola, South Africa, Zimbabwe and the CCP.

Building on the legend of Tanzania’s post-colonial leader, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, the eponymous leadership school is the first political school the

CCP has built overseas. Political commissars from the CCP's Central Party School in Beijing have been deployed to the Nyerere Leadership School as instructors in forming a 'United Front' (or *tongyi zhanxian*), a CCP strategy reportedly to mobilise support to advance the party's interests and isolate its adversaries.

The first outside media outlets to report on the Nyerere Leadership School wrote: 'Behind the school's closed doors, economics takes a back seat to political training. Chinese teachers sent from Beijing train African leaders that the ruling party should sit above the government and the courts and that fierce discipline within the party can ensure adherence to party ideology.'[21]

Eight flags fly in front of the school's entrance: Tanzania's national flag and one for each ruling party of the participating African countries, as well as the CCP's flag. | Photo: Politiken/Sebastian Stryhn Kjeldtoft

The CCP emblem is included in all the Nyerere Leadership School's official communications, along with the insignia of the six FLM parties, while the CCP flag flies at its entrance. Ironically, despite Nyerere's promotion of social justice and mediation through a culture of tolerance, the Nyerere Leadership School has a vastly different focus. At the June

2023 graduation attended by CCP and FLM leaders, Richard Kasesela, formerly a senior Tanzanian official, spoke about various upcoming SADC polls. 'If we don't win them, there will be no liberation movements to talk of. For now, we should help ZANU [Zimbabwe] win its elections. [South Africa] and SWAPO [Namibia] go for elections next year [he was referring to 2024] and CCM [Tanzania] in 2025. We need to put together plans to help each other win these elections.'[22]

The manner in which Russia has lent military support to African authoritarians, and extracted mineral and other financial rewards in return, and the growing relationship of the Iranian theocracy on the African continent are similarly all reasons for concern as to the future plight of democracy. But this is not only an African challenge.

THE NEED FOR A PLAYBOOK FOR DEMOCRATS

The liberation movements once used the fight for rights for all as the means to legitimate their campaign for political power, and constrastingly to delegitimate their opponents. Since then, they have been openly willing to undermine or abrogate these rights to retain power, even in the multi-party era. What the Cambridge University Africa scholar Christopher Clapham observes about the history of liberation movements, however, is that the moment soon arrives when such a regime 'is judged not by promises but by performance, and if it has merely entrenched itself in positions of privilege reminiscent of its ousted predecessor, that judgement is likely to be a harsh one'.[23]

The rise of autocrats and 'authoritarian democrats' can be resisted, but this demands learning some critical, recent lessons.

> **First, the West is not going to come to the assistance of democrats, in Africa as elsewhere. They are too concerned with fighting their own battles, and not losing ground to China, Russia and others.**

Stability and strategic interests trump human rights. While exernal support would be helpful, there is no good recent reason to be especially hopeful. At least, however, they should, as the Ugandan opposition leader Robert Kyagulanyi – aka Bobi Wine – noted about the US, and 'not pay our oppressor'. Outsiders should do no harm if they cannot find the moral and financial wherewithal to do good.

> **Second, the liberation movements might be weak at delivering services and better economic choices and outcomes for their citizens, but they are very good at staying in power and relying on each other for assistance.**

This can only be strengthened with the involvement of other BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), the bulk of which are authoritarian states. Success has to primarily come from local ownership and organisation.

BRICS "family photo" on the sidelines of the 10th BRICS Summit in 2018. | Photo: Flickr/GovernmentZA (CC BY-ND 2.0)

> **And third, the responsibility to win elections has to fall on opposition movements themselves. While incumbents will try to steal elections in many ways, oppositions must act and avoid being passive bystanders.**

They need their own narrative, connect with voters, unify their movements and adopt best practices from the playbook for democrats. Important steps include voter registration drives and targeted advertising based on polling outcomes, a messaging strategy to deal with fake news, as well as the more mundane training (and funding) of polling agents, assiduous checking of voters' rolls (especially in removing dead voters), and the mobilisation of democrats across regions, given the centrality of African monitoring and support. Citizens, not external actors, have to win the vote well before election day comes around.

Leaders of opposition parties and civil society movements thus need to develop a 'democracy playbook' for elections. Oppositions cannot rely on the justice of running against the government. While social media provides real opportunities for the opposition, especially as it lowers the cost of campaigning, it is no panacea, because government can also take advantage of the same tools, and can 'turn off' the internet. Beyond running good campaigns, oppositions must have a vision that differentiates them. Parties have to provide citizens with a good reason to vote for them. There is a need, too, for democrats – within and without government – to establish a narrative that transcends the boundaries of identity. In all of this, the opposition has to demonstrate its own democratic credentials in delivering the promise it ran on.

These tactics and the strategies that underpin them are the subject of this playbook, which brings together a group of international specialists, all of whom are keen observers of authoritarian behaviour in Africa and abroad, and many of whom have themselves participated in elections as

candidates or observers. This book is intended as a guide for those seeking a more democratic future in turning the tables against autocracy. To ensure a different and better outcome, a dedicated and tough struggle lies ahead.

There is much at stake, more so than at any time since the end of the Cold War. Politics and the need for freedom of choice, checks and balances, and the competition of ideas is crucial for bettering governance and economic performance.[24] But, as Viktor Yushchenko, the former president of Ukraine who led that country's Orange Revolution in 2004, which saw it set on its path towards Europe rather than remain under Russia's wing, 'You can't have freedom without democracy.'[25]

[1] Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991.

[2] 'Freedom in the World Timeline', *Freedom House*, https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/50-Year-Timeline.

[3] William J. Dobson, *The Dictator's Learning Curve: Inside the Global Battle for Democracy*. New York: Anchor, 2013.

[4] 'Democracy under Siege', *Freedom House*, 2021, https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2021/democracy-under-siege.

[5] 'The Mounting Damage of Flawed Elections and Armed Conflict', *Freedom House*, 2024, https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2024/mounting-damage-flawed-elections-and-armed-conflict.

[6] Koh Ewe, 'The Ultimate Election Year: All the Elections around the World in 2024', *Time*, 28 December 2023, https://time.com/6550920/world-elections-2024/.

[7] Sapa, 'Malema Mourns Death of Anti-Imperialist Chávez', *Mail & Guardian*, 6 March 2013, https://mg.co.za/article/2013-03-06-malema-mourns-death-of-anti-imperialist-chavez/.

[8] Sapa, 'Malema Mourns Chavez', *Soweton*, 6 March 2013, https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/2013-03-06-malema-mourns-chavez/.

[9] Dobson, *The Dictator's Learning Curve*.

[10] Speaking at the launch of the Platform for African Democrats, Cape Town, 23 March 2024.

[11] Anne Applebaum, 'The Reason Putin Would Risk War', *The Atlantic*, 3 February 2022, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/02/putin-ukraine-democracy/621465/.

[12] Sergei Guriev and Daniel Triesman, *Spin Dictators: The Changing Face of Tyranny in the 21st Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022.

[13] Discussion, Bellagio, 7 May 2013.

[14] 'ANC Statement on the Handover of the Chairmanship of the Meeting of the Former Liberation Movement (FLM) Six Sister Parties from Zanu-PF (Cde Dr O.M. Mpofu) to the ANC (Cde Fikile Mbalula) at Victoria Falls, 18th March 2024', *African National Congress*, 17 March 2024, https://www.anc1912.org.za/anc-statement-on-the-handover-of-the-chairmanship-of-the-meeting-of-the-former-liberation-movement-flm-six-sister-parties-from-zanu-pf-cde-dr-o-m-mpofu-to-the-anc-cde-fikile-mbalula-at-victoria/.

[15] 'When "Democracy" Becomes "Regime Change"', *Institute for Security Studies*, 15 December 2017, https://issafrica.org/iss-today/when-democracy-becomes-regime-change.

[16] 'ANC Statement on the Handover of the Chairmanship of the Meeting of the Former Liberation Movement'.

[17] Hany Abdel-Latif, Wenjie Chen, Michele Fornino and Henry Rawlings, 'China's Slowing Economy Will Hit Sub-Saharan Africa's Growth', *International Monetary Fund*, 9 November 2023, https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2023/11/09/cf-chinas-slowing-economy-will-hit-sub-saharan-africas-growth.

[18] Jevans Nyabiage, 'China's Political Party School in Africa Takes First Students from 6 Countries', *South China Morning Post*, 21 June 2022, https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3182368/china-party-school-africa-takes-first-students-6-countries.

[19] 'Analyse Online', *Afrobarometer*, https://www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis/.

[20] Paul Nantulya, 'China's First Political School in Africa', *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, 7 November 2023, https://africacenter.org/experts/paul-nantulya/.

[21] Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, 'In Tanzania, Beijing Is Running a Training School for Authoritarianism', *Axios*, 20 August 2023, https://www.axios.com/chinese-communist-party-training-school-africa.

[22] 'Richard Atufigwege Kasesela Speech on Closing Ceremony at Mwalimu Julius Nyerere Leadership School', *YouTube*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5wNOgIQaTDw.

[23] Christopher Clapham, 'From Liberation Movement to Government', *KAS International Reports*, 1 February 2013, https://www.kas.de/documents/252038/253252/7_dokument_dok_pdf_33517_2.pdf/7434a417-9120-2bc4-62b3-e9d6ab7c9078?version=1.0&t=1539663338095.

[24] Greg Mills, *Rich State, Poor State*. Johannesburg: Penguin Random House, 2023.

[25] Speaking at the launch of the Platform for African Democrats, Cape Town, 23 March 2024.

PART 1

How to RIG AN ELECTION

by **NIC CHEESEMAN**
British Political Scientist

Over the last ten years, dictators and their allies around the world have consistently demonstrated they understand how to manipulate elections and remain in power using a wide range of increasingly sophisticated strategies. Even leaders who drive the economy into the ground and let corruption spiral out of control understand how to play divide-and-rule politics and intimidate rival supporters. The book *How to Rig an Election* (2024) identifies five main strategies that have been used over the last 30 years to prevent unpopular governments from being defeated: 'invisible rigging' strategies, such as gerrymandering and the manipulation of the electoral roll; patronage and election bribery; divide-and-rule strategies, including the use of fear and violence; digital and online tactics, including disinformation and hacking; and electoral fraud and ballot box stuffing. The combination of these strategies can make it exceptionally difficult for opposition parties to win power and helps to explain why on average authoritarian regimes that hold elections are actually more likely to survive than those that don't. In general, the quality of elections is particularly low in Africa, large parts of Asia, post-communist states and, to a lesser extent, Latin America (see Figure 1).

QUALITY OF ELECTIONS AROUND THE WORLD

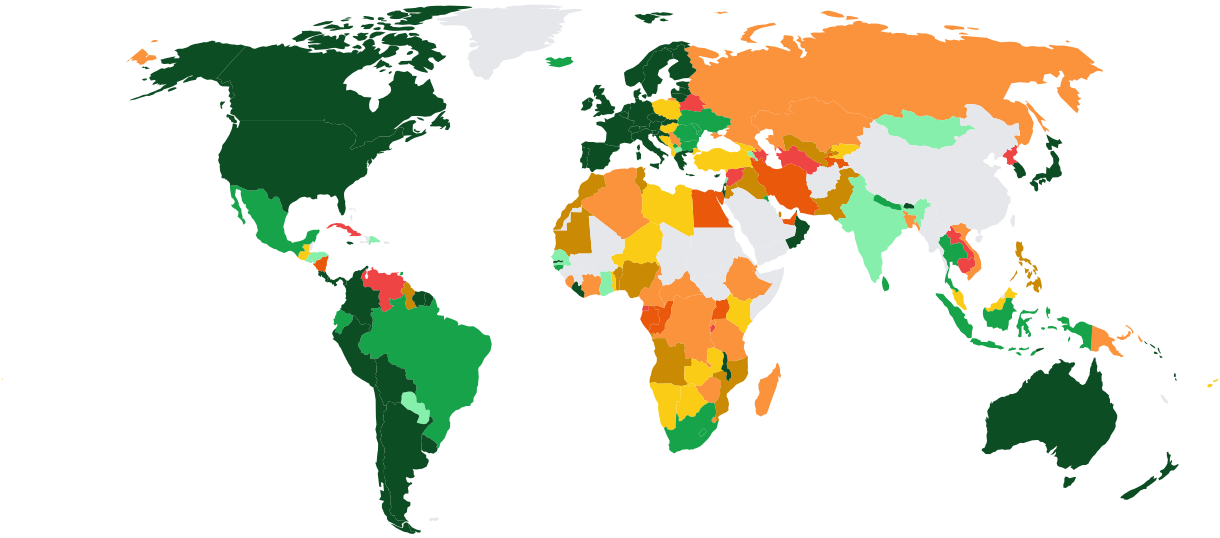


Figure 1: How free and fair elections were on a 0–4 scale, on which higher scores equals more free.
Red = 0, Green = 4. Source: V-Dem

Two recent trends in election rigging have made this difficult situation even more challenging.

FIRST,

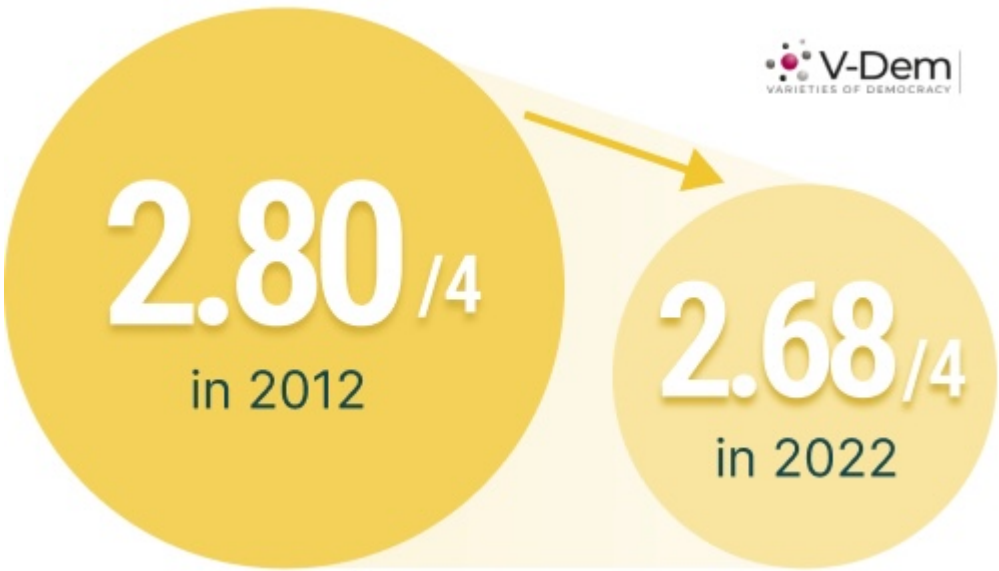
there is strong evidence of authoritarian learning, in which strategies that have been effective in one authoritarian context are quickly shared with the government's authoritarian allies in other states. As a result, we are in a dynamic game of cat and mouse, in which every time one way of manipulating elections is closed off dictators are able to deploy new ones. As one demoralised opposition leader once said,

> **The government is always thinking up new ways to rig the next election, while we are always responding to the problems we saw in the last one.**

SECOND,

election rigging is becoming more brazen. In the past, when governments were worried about being held to account for electoral manipulation by the international community, they preferred subtle strategies that were less likely to be detected. Now that international donors have become less likely to demand democracy and condemn electoral fraud, autocrats are increasingly willing to use high-profile strategies such as extreme violence and the blatant falsification of results. Think of the brutal harassment, torture and killing of the supporters of Ugandan opposition leader Bobi Wine ahead of the Ugandan elections of 2021, the arrest of opposition leaders and widespread repression of critical voices and protesters in Nicaragua during the 2021 campaign, and the obvious manipulation of the 2023 vote in Sierra Leone, which was done so blatantly it was easily exposed.

> **The average quality of elections in the world has therefore fallen in the last ten years.**



The average quality of elections in the world has therefore fallen in the last ten years. According to the V-Dem Institute, having reached a recent high of 2.8 out of 4 in 2012 (higher scores = better elections), this figure fell to 2.68 in 2022, due to an increase in government intimidation and a decline in media freedom. These trends mean that elections are now more dangerous for opposition parties and harder to win (see Figure 2).

ELECTIONS GOVERNMENT INTIMIDATION - 2023

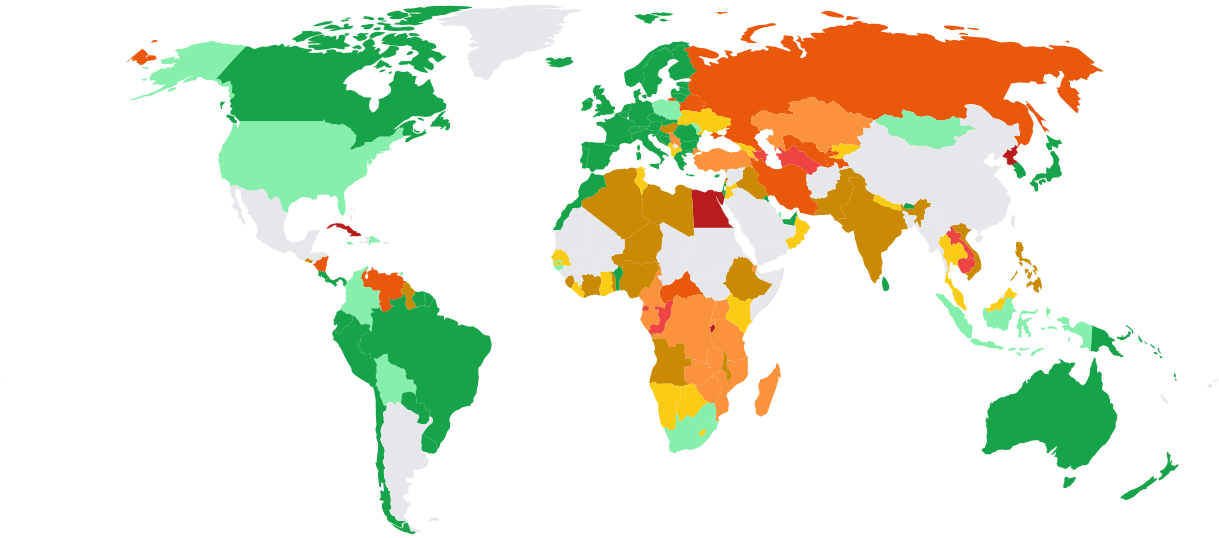


Figure 2: Extent of government intimidation during elections on a 0–4 scale, on which higher scores equal less intimidation. Red = 0; Green = 4. Source: V-Dem

> **It is therefore critical for those who care about elections and democracy – citizens, activists, opposition supporters, civil society groups, journalists and so on – to innovate as quickly and effectively as their authoritarian counterparts, and to share this information with those fighting for freedom around the world.**

This chapter sets out the ways in which repressive regimes are currently manipulating elections, focusing on the specific strategies they employ to undermine opposition parties and how these can be countered. It begins by addressing how autocrats try to undermine opposition parties and leaders and then goes on to discuss the way they dominate the media and stymie dissent, capture and intimidate the wider population, buy support and rig the outcome. Each section of the chapter sets out the latest tactics that are being used and points to important steps to take before deciding to run for office in the build-up to forming an opposition movement. A more in-depth discussion follows on the ways that authoritarian regimes seek to secure an unfair advantage and provides a set of recommendations for how to respond, based on how opposition parties have overcome them in recent elections.

HOW AUTHORITARIANS UNDERMINE OPPOSITION PARTIES AND LEADERS

One of the main strategies used by authoritarian governments is to divide and rule and to fragment opposition parties, while launching sustained attacks on the character of key opposition leaders to stigmatise and demean them. Successful opposition campaigns therefore need to find ways to resist these strategies and to present their leaders as effective unifying figures, despite the disinformation that will be spread about them.

There are two key aspects to achieving this.

FIRST,

building inclusive and stable coalitions and having clear and concrete policy proposals can boost the credibility of opposition movements.

SECOND,

avoid making basic mistakes, such as using violent or 'tribalist' language, that play into the government's hands.

Smart autocrats are constantly on the lookout for the greatest threat to their authority. In many cases, they are actively following, monitoring and bugging individuals before they have even decided to run for office. This is especially likely when it comes to the leaders of prominent civil society groups and trade unions, and the children of former opposition leaders or national founding fathers. If you are being talked about as a potential opposition leader, your phone may well be bugged, and your movements tracked. Your past tweets and posts will also be stored on social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter/X, and users may well screenshot them so that there is a record of what you have said, even if you delete your accounts.

Resisting divide-and-rule strategies therefore involves taking a long-term approach, thinking about your brand and reputation well before becoming a candidate, adopting an inclusive approach and anticipating the divisive strategies ruling parties will deploy.

Winning requires planning ahead:

- Whether you like it or not, you are effectively in an election campaign for your entire life, and what you do before you announce you will run is important.
- Think carefully about your statements and actions, and the leaders and groups you associate with at all times – they can and will be used against you.
- Be especially careful with any comments about specific groups – if these are seen to be derogatory or can be made to seem derogatory by your rivals, they

can be brought up during elections and cost you the support of entire communities.

STIGMATISING OPPOSITION LEADERS AND DIVIDE-AND-RULE POLITICS

Divide-and-rule politics has been a staple strategy of authoritarian regimes from before the colonial era to the present day. Dictators and autocrats are well aware that the greatest threat to their hold on power comes from a united opposition. Avoiding defeat therefore depends on exacerbating tensions to fragment resistance to authoritarian rule.

There are two main ways in which this is done.

THE FIRST

is to try to divide the opposition along economic, ethnic, racial, religious or regional lines. This is most effective, and hence most likely to be attempted, in countries where ethnicity, race, linguistic groups and/or regions are particularly salient, such as sub-Saharan African, or where economic identities are more pronounced, as in Latin America and Europe.

THE SECOND

is to frame key opposition leaders as traitors or sellouts and the legitimate target for state violence. This strategy has proved particularly effective in cases where external powers are salient and seen to have played a malicious role, as is the case with regards to the United States

in many Latin American countries, and former colonial powers in Africa. If governments can do this successfully, they can make rival leaders and movements appear ‘toxic’, preventing them from being able to form coalitions and alliances with other more moderate groups.

In addition to these approaches, governments often seek to brand opposition leaders as threats to national security. This may go hand in hand with the claim that they are traitors, but it can also take other forms. Depicting the opposition as particularly violent and destabilising, for example, can be used to justify using severe repression to control them. Meanwhile, accusations that a particular opposition leader supports radical social and economic policies that would threaten property and families – for example, of the middle class – has proved to be an effective way to prevent cross-class alliances from emerging.

President Edgar Lungu of Zambia | Flickr/Paul Kagame (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

In some cases, all three of these forms of stigmatisation can occur at the same time. In the 2021 general elections in Zambia, for example, President Edgar Lungu repeated two strategies frequently used by previous governments to try to block the political rise of opposition leader Hakainde Hichilema and his United Party for National Development (UPND). One was designed to restrict Hichilema to his base among the Tonga community in Southern Province by claiming that

Hichilema was a Tonga nationalist who did not care about and could not be trusted to look after the interests of the rest of the country. The other strategy was to try to stop Hichilema from mobilising Zambia's disaffected young people and urbanites by depicting him as an out-of-touch elitist who had grown rich by corruptly manipulating the flawed privatisation of copper mines at the expense of the country's mineworkers.

Senegalese opposition candidate Bassirou Diomaye Faye addresses supporters. | Photo: Bassirou Diomaye Faye Presidential Campaign

Most recently, during the Senegalese general elections of 2024, the government of President Macky Sall sought to depict opposition leader Ousmane Sonko and his African Patriots of Senegal for Work, Ethics and Fraternity (PASTEF) party as being criminal radicals whose very existence threatened the stability of the Senegalese state and nation. As part of this strategy, trumped-up charges were used to detain Sonko and other leaders such as the PASTEF secretary general, Bassirou Diomaye Faye, and keep them in jail during the start of the election campaign. At the same time, PASTEF itself was 'dissolved' after the Interior Minister signed a decree that accused PASTEF leaders of 'frequently calling on its supporters to insurrectional movements, which has led to serious

consequences, including loss of life, many wounded, as well as acts of looting of public and private property'.[1] The targeting of Sonko, and the determination of the government to prevent his name from appearing on the ballot, was so intense that he was ultimately forced to step down in favour of Diomaye.

Supporters of presidential candidate Bassirou Diomaye and opposition leader Ousmane Sonko demonstrate in Dakar on 24 February 2024. Photo: JOHN WESSELS/AFP via Getty Images

How to respond effectively to divide-and-rule strategies:

- Build inclusive campaigns and humanise opposition leaders so that they cannot be depicted as dangerous or exclusionary.
- Form broad and stable coalitions to widen your electoral appeal and reinforce the sense of inclusion.
- Carefully manage the images of key candidates to depict them as responsible leaders.
- Avoid campaign mistakes that can easily be seized upon by the ruling party.

Resisting these strategies requires making statements and taking actions that undermine the ruling party's narrative. Perhaps most importantly...

> **...inclusive coalitions have been critical to the success of opposition parties in countries such as Senegal (2000), Kenya (2002) and The Gambia (2016).**

In The Gambia, for example, President Yahya Jammeh's brutal regime was reinforced by the use of extreme force and an electoral system where voters did not have ballot papers but rather dropped marbles into the ballot box of the candidate of their choice.

A polling official counts marbles that will be used by voters at a polling station in the Tallinding district of Serekunda on 30 November 2016 on the eve of Gambia's presidential election. Photo: MARCO LONGARI/AFP via Getty Images

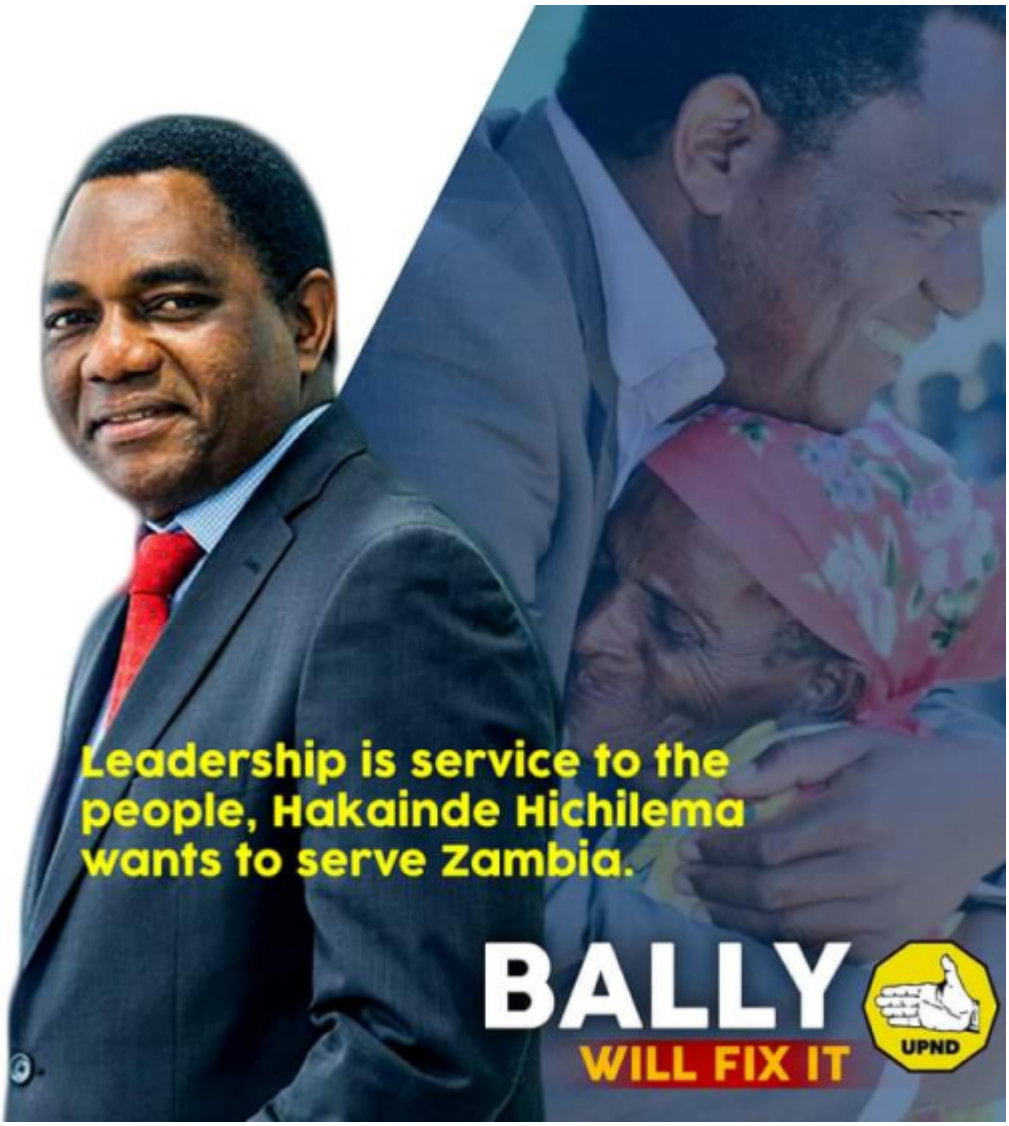
Few observers therefore gave the opposition much of a change in the 2016 general elections, especially as Jammeh won the 2011 elections with 71.5% of the vote. Despite this, a broad coalition of seven parties – the largest since independence – formed around Adama Barrow. This

concentrated the opposition vote, while also giving citizens hope that Jammeh could be defeated. Despite an unfair electoral playing field, which included internet shutdowns and widespread attempts at vote buying, Barrow won with 46% of the vote, almost 10% more than the president.

Adama Barrow at his inauguration after winning the election. Photo: Chrisroberts-192 (CC BY-SA 4.0)

Where formal coalitions are not feasible, strategies to demonstrate inclusive leadership become even more important. One useful strategy is to secure endorsements from influential political and community leaders who are not standing. For example, although the Senegalese opposition was not completely united going into the 2024 polls, with a number of minor presidential candidates standing, Diomaye was boosted by the endorsement of other political leaders. Perhaps most significantly, former president Abdoulaye Wade and his Senegalese Democratic Party gave Diomaye their endorsement after their own candidate had been disqualified.

Taking steps to build a more inclusive party with a broader representation of society can also be very effective, especially if it goes hand in hand with efforts to humanise an opposition leader and broaden their base by holding rallies in greater areas. In Zambia, for example, Hichilema's campaign team worked hard ahead of the 2021 election to change his image. On the one hand, his alliance broadened to include more prominent leaders from outside of Southern Province, and his rallies and speaking engagements were used to connect with and appeal to urban voters across the country.



Campaign poster of Hakainde Hichilema. Source: X/Hakainde Hichilema

On the other hand, the campaign picked up on the 'Bally' nickname given to Hichilema by some younger voters. In Zambia, Bally refers to a

friendly uncle who can help you get out of a jam. The success of this nickname, which was consistently used in the UPND's social media campaign, enabled Hichilema to turn his personal wealth and business success from a liability to a strength.

Instead of citizens seeing Hichilema's personal success as something that made him different and unlikely to help them, the name Bally meant it came to be seen as evidence of his ability to take care of Zambia in its hour of need.

By adopting these strategies, opposition parties contesting unfair elections can undermine the divide-and-rule strategies used by governments, broaden their support base and ultimately win power.

COUNTRY EXAMPLE

VENEZUELA

PEOPLE POWER IN VENEZUELA

by Leopoldo López

The poster image shows Venezuelan President, Nicolás Maduro. Photo: Hossein Zohrevand (CC BY 4.0)

In 2024, 28 July is poised to become a turning point for Venezuela, a day for the resilience and determination of its people in their hope to transition to democracy through the ballot box. Let's be clear, the elections to take place will be far from free or fair, but the massive will to vote for change (over 80%) will be impossible to hide.

When Hugo Chávez rose to power in 1999, he promised change and, indeed, change came, but towards an economic collapse that led to a humanitarian catastrophe, a massive migration (more than 25% of the population) and a full-blown autocracy. The National Constituent Assembly, which rewrote the Constitution, marked the start of dismantling democratic institutions in Venezuela. This dismantling was gradual and hidden under a facade of electoral processes, where elections became annual spectacles – often manipulated and rigged in favour of the regime. Electronic voting, censorship and sidelining opposing candidates eroded the democratic framework.

Chávez's regime, and subsequently Nicolás Maduro's, undermined legitimate political competition. Favoured candidates were removed from ballots; I myself was disqualified from running for the governorship of Caracas in 2008, despite strong public support. The regime even expropriated political parties, installing puppet leaders, sowing confusion and creating a false opposition.

The path to the election on 28 July began with the primary election on 22 October 2023, where María Corina Machado emerged victorious, becoming the candidate and opposition's leader. Soon after, she was also disqualified. Since then, the regime has increased censorship, made arbitrary arrests and attempted to divide the opposition. Yet, despite these obstacles, a remarkable unity has emerged.

Edmundo González, the unified candidate, initially unknown, now leads with over 65%, while Maduro's support lags below 20%. The unity between Machado and González represents a powerful alliance, mobilising an electorate with over 90% of Venezuelans eager for democratic change.

The regime's attempts to manipulate and suppress have only strengthened the people's resolve. The upcoming election is more than a contest; it's a referendum on Venezuela's future. The silent majority, over 90% of Venezuelans, are poised to vote in massive numbers, and most of them will do it for a democratic transition. Election day is set to be a day of people power, when Venezuelans reclaim their nation.

This moment is crucial not just for Venezuela, but for the world, as proof of the enduring power of people united for democracy. It will be a day that highlights the resilience of a nation determined to shape its destiny. The world will watch as Venezuelans stand together, demonstrating that even in dark times, the light of democracy and people power can shine brightly, illuminating a new path forward.

REGISTRATION BARRIERS AND POLITICAL EXCLUSION

A classic strategy of exclusion is to preclude opposition candidates and parties from actually registering for elections, preventing them from appearing on the ballot.

This is done in three main ways.

FIRST,

opposition forms can be rejected on a technicality, i.e., on the basis that one part of the form was not completed exactly as it should have been.

SECOND,

candidates can be said to be ineligible because they do not meet one of the criteria, such as being a national of the country or having a certain level of education.

THIRD,

governments try to prevent opposition candidates from being able to physically submit their papers. In all three strategies, governments do not play fair, of course, and instead manipulate the law and the evidence to justify illegitimate exclusions.

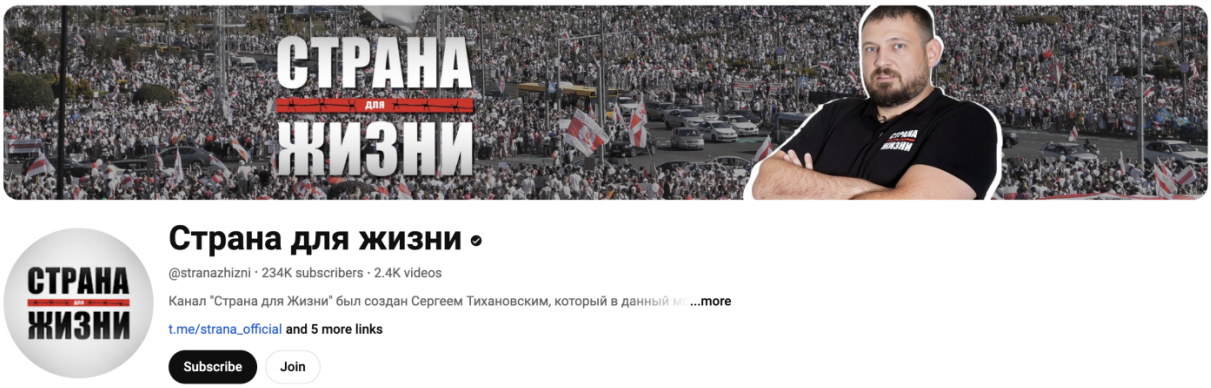
This approach can be very effective for ruling parties because it is less high profile than election violence and can be framed as a simple technical issue rather than a blatant act of political exclusion. This helps to explain why between 1989 and 2010 opposition candidates were excluded in more than one in every ten elections. Classic examples of this include Zambia, where Kenneth Kaunda was excluded from contesting the 1996 general elections by President Frederick Chiluba. Ahead of the elections, Chiluba's government had passed a law that stated that presidential candidates had to be born to two Zambian citizens, and then alleged that Kaunda's parents had not been Zambian, despite the fact that Kaunda had been the Zambian president from independence until 1991.

Other examples of exclusion abound. *How to Rig an Election* tells the story of the 2006 general elections in Madagascar, when '[Marc] Ravalomanana's re-election prospects faced a stiff challenge from Pierrot Rajaonarivelo, a former deputy prime minister'. Having been sent into exile, Rajaonarivelo had to return to the country in order to contest. 'Under Malagasy election law, candidates are only eligible to run for office if they have applied for candidacy in person – in Madagascar. As a result, Rajaonarivelo took the logical step: he booked flights home in an

effort to end his exile and run for president … Supporters turned up at the airport, ready to welcome their party leader home. Instead, they were confronted with tear gas. At the same time, President Ravalomanana unilaterally closed the Toamasina airport to all air traffic, and Rajaonarivelo's flight was turned back due to the "security risk" on board.'[2] The same thing happened repeatedly until the deadline for filing nomination papers had expired. Ultimately, Rajaonarivelo was barred from standing, and Ravalomanana won in a landslide.

Pierrot Rajaonarivelo. Photo: Mavitriky (CC BY-SA 3.0)

This strategy continues to be heavily used. In the 2020 elections in Belarus, Europe's 'last dictator', President Alexander Lukashenko, faced growing pressure from a population desperate for political freedom. Opposition to his rule had previously been fragmented by the use of many of the strategies described in this chapter, but it began to crystallise behind Syarhei Tsikhanouski, who had risen to prominence as a result of his pro-democracy content on YouTube and social media.



Syarhei Tsikhanouski's YouTube channel | Source: YouTube

Recognising that he would likely lose to Tsikhanouski in a free and fair contest, Lukashenko had Tsikhanouski and a number of other opposition leaders arrested. On this basis, Tsikhanouski was subsequently barred from contesting the presidential elections.

How to respond effectively to registration barriers and political exclusion:

- Establish a dedicated team responsible for reviewing and finalising application forms and establish evidence of key requirements, such as nationality, educational requirements and so on.
- Build in-house legal capacity to advise on registration procedures to develop expertise on how to appeal rejected registrations and to prepare the paperwork for such appeals in advance.
- Adopt flexible leadership strategies so that you can replace candidates who have been rejected with strong alternatives and still contest the elections.
- Be very careful with election boycotts as a response – they often weaken the opposition for decades and enable the ruling party to change the constitution to consolidate their rule.

Establishing effective internal procedures to ensure forms are filled out correctly and the necessary proof of eligibility is secured well in advance can help reduce the risk of electoral exclusion. But if a government is determined to ban a rival from contesting, filling in the forms perfectly

will not be enough, as the administration will find spurious reasons to ban opposition. When this happens, flexible leadership is critical. To return to the example of Senegal, when it became clear that President Sall did not intend to allow Sonko to contest the 2024 elections, as he was the best known and most charismatic opposition leader, Sonko stood aside in favour of Diomaye. This meant that the opposition could contest the polls, albeit with a different leader, and after the party itself had officially been 'disbanded' by the government.

The other main option available to the opposition was to boycott the elections on the principle that Sonko should have been allowed to stand, seeking to embarrass the ruling party into making concessions and attract the support of the international community. This was the option taken by the main opposition party in Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, ahead of the elections of January 2024, on the basis that the level of repression was so high that it was not feasible to effectively contest the polls. This decision was understandable in the context – since October 2023, more than 1 500 opposition leaders and activists have been convicted as a part of a wave of repression – but it is a risky one.[3] Not contesting legislative seats, for example, can massively increase the majority the ruling party enjoys in the legislature. This is particularly significant because in most countries a two-thirds majority is enough to be able to change the constitution, which can empower the government to pass more restrictive legislation or remove term limits on the president. At the same time, boycotts can empower new parties and leaders to emerge to fill the vacuum, making it difficult for boycotting parties to re-establish themselves afterwards. This is why Matthew Frankel's review of the evidence finds that…

> **…'electoral boycotts rarely work, and the boycotting party almost always ends up worse off than before'.[4]**

In the Senegalese case, the decision of Sonko and Diomaye to stand was clearly the right one. Sonko was able to transfer his popularity to Diomaye, who won comfortably with 54% of the vote. A ‘stand-in’ candidate was less successful in the case of Belarus, but nonetheless managed to keep the flag of democracy flying and provide hope for the future. Having found that she could not submit nomination papers for Tsikhanouski, his wife, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, decided to run in his place. President Lukashenko allowed her to stand on the misogynistic basis that a woman could be no threat to him. Proving Lukashenko wrong, Tsikhanouskaya’s bravery, and the fact that she was not a ‘normal politician’ rallied citizens to her side, leading to mass rallies and a new sense of opposition momentum. Electoral manipulation and threats of violence were ultimately used to stop her winning the presidency, but only after she had demonstrated the desire of Belarusians for political change.

Belarusian opposition leader, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, addresses MEPs in the European Parliament. Photo: Flickr/European Parliament (CC BY 2.0)

HOW AUTHORITARIANS CONTROL THE MEDIA, SILENCE OPPOSITION VOICES AND BUY VOTES

Two aspects of electoral manipulation that receive much less attention than they should is media manipulation and vote buying. The media landscape tends to be inherently biased towards ruling parties. Even in established democracies, sitting governments tend to dominate new coverage simply because the media has to cover major policy statements and speeches. In authoritarian states, the situation is much worse, with a wide range of underhand and often illegal strategies used to undermine media freedom. Given the role of the media in shaping popular attitudes towards leaders and parties – and even to whether the government is doing a good job in the first place – it is essential to have an effective media plan to outmanoeuvre these restrictions.

Ruling parties also seek to manipulate popular attitudes by using patronage, promises of new development and vote buying. In almost all elections, the government is able to outspend opposition parties due to its access to state resources and ability to use corruption to shift government revenue into its campaign budget.

Opposition parties often make two key mistakes when responding to media manipulation and vote buying.

ON THE MEDIA SIDE,

there is sometimes a temptation to give up on traditional media, such as newspapers and the radio, and to focus extensively on social media, which is easier to access. This is an understandable approach, given

how closed-off traditional media can seem and the hype around social media, but online campaigns cannot win an election on their own.

WHERE VOTE BUYING IS CONCERNED,

it can be tempting to try to compete with the ruling party by consistently giving handouts. While some distribution of funds in this way may be necessary to ensure that candidates appear to be credible and generous, however, outspending the ruling party is likely to be impossible. A more effective approach is to tell citizens that the secret ballot means they can take money from as many candidates who offer it to them and still vote for their chosen party.

Winning requires planning ahead:

- Build a dedicated media team responsible for developing key messages, keeping the campaign 'on brand' and developing the media strategy.
- Remind voters that money given to them by ruling party officials and leaders is really their money, as it has usually been stolen from government funds.
- Establish a central database of journalists' email addresses and phone numbers so you can quickly disseminate key stories and press releases to the wider media at the touch of a button.
- Forge relationships with journalists and media houses well in advance of elections so that trust is built ahead of the campaign.
- Establish different but mutually supportive online and offline media campaigns that feed into one another.

> **It is therefore critical for opposition parties to develop flexible media strategies that do not lose sight of the importance of traditional media, can operate even in restrictive environments, and remind votes that they can take ruling party money and still 'vote with their conscience'.**

COUNTRY EXAMPLE

ZIMBABWE

ELECTION RIGGING IN ZIMBABWE

by Tendai Biti

The poster image shows Emmerson Mnangagwa, President of Zimbabwe, at the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2018. Photo: Flickr/World Economic Forum (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Since independence in 1980, Zimbabwe has had fourteen major elections, all of which have been heavily contested and disputed.[1] The key instruments of electoral fraud in Zimbabwe have been violence; state capture and corruption; fraud; weaponisation of dependency, hunger and ignorance; electoral

fraud; gerrymandering; propaganda and populism; and pure daylight theft. Zimbabwe's failed elections are a playbook of a collapsing liberation project that will do anything legally and extra-legally to perpetuate its authoritarian rule.

Independent Zimbabwe was born from a struggle by millions of black Zimbabweans against a decaying colonial order, the demise of which was delayed by Ian Smith's Unilateral Declaration of Independence on 11 November 1965. While the majority of African states became independent in the 1960s, Smith's UDI prolonged white colonial rule in Zimbabwe for the next fifteen years. Regrettably in Zimbabwe, as with many of its neighbours, the main agenda of the liberation movement has been power retention, which has reduced elections to a ritual marred by violence, fraud and manipulation. The capacity to rig elections is cemented by the conflation of the state and the ruling party, where the state is effectively controlled by the military.

Not surprisingly, therefore, violence has been the maligning force in Zimbabwe's political landscape. The 1980 elections were dominated by two liberation movements: the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), led by Robert Mugabe, whose support came from the predominantly Shona-speaking people in the north of the country, and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), led by Joshua Nkomo, whose support base was mostly from the south of the country and dominated by Ndebele-speaking groups. What were sporadic instances of violence between the two groups deteriorated into full-scale genocide as Mugabe used the military to kill over 20 000 people, predominantly from the south of the country, where ZAPU was dominant. ZAPU was literally decimated as a result of the genocide, and its remnants

were forced into a unity agreement with ZANU-PF, which was concluded and signed on 22 December 1987.

The emergence of the trade union-backed Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), led by Morgan Tsvangirai, also did not escape the violence and control of the military. First, with an eminent electoral defeat in the 2001 presidential election, the military, through Commander General Vitalis Zvinavashe, openly declared that it would not salute any individual who did not have liberation credentials. The nascent MDC would then be subject to ongoing violence, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of people and the displacement of many more. ZANU-PF also instituted the violent Fast Track Land Reform Programme in 2000 after claiming that white farmers were supporting the opposition. That violence would reach its zenith in the 2008 run-off elections between Tsvangirai and Mugabe.

After 2008, the regime has moved from an era dominated by physical violence to an era where it harvests the fear from past atrocities, including the 1982–1987 genocide. An integral part of electoral theft in Zimbabwe has been the control and monopolisation of information and the media. Four decades after independence, Zimbabwe remains one of the few countries in the world that has absolute control of the public media, with a single meaningful public broadcaster, the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation, and a single meaningful national newspaper, the *Herald/Chronicle*. Independent broadcasting houses have simply not been allowed to operate.

Another issue has been the systematic abuse of traditional leaders. Zimbabwe has more than 15 000 traditional leaders, including village heads, kraal heads, chiefs and paramount chiefs. Traditional leaders are mostly paid by the state and have become an effective electoral tool of the ruling party.

Oftentimes in elections, they are forced to threaten villagers who vote for any party other than the ruling party.

Inextricably connected to traditional leaders is the weaponisation of agricultural inputs and food handouts. Zimbabwe experiences cyclic droughts and natural disasters, and the state often needs to provide food assistance to vulnerable communities. Agricultural inputs are annually handed out to communities, particularly in rural areas. The state has deliberately created dependence of marginalised communities, with the distribution of handouts being used as an electoral tool. This situation is exacerbated by a failed and declining economy.

Cronyism and clientelism have led to authoritarian consolidation in Zimbabwe. This also includes the distribution of huge contracts, tenders, mining and hunting licences and concessions. The land reform programme and the distribution of rural land without the provision of security of tenure in the form of title have led to a situation where agricultural communities are beholden to the state and to the ruling party. Thus, state capture, coercion and land distribution are key electoral tools of manipulation.

A number of serious and gross election day malpractices exist, and the voters' roll is a key instrument of electoral manipulation. Voter registration has been skewed in favour of rural areas over urban areas. In some instances, voters who are registered in particular constituencies find their names appearing in a different constituency hundreds of miles away on election day. Since 2008, opposition parties have been denied access to a copy of the voters' roll, which makes analysis of irregularities impossible. The 2013 and 2018 elections, in particular, were marred by serious cases of data

manipulation and interference. The 2013 election also saw the transportation of rural voters who came from constituencies deemed to be safe to urban constituencies. Opposition election agents and monitors are often intimidated in rural constituencies, and are sometimes chased away from polling stations, leaving the polling station at the mercy of ZANU-PF and the state. In some cases, there is deliberate withholding of voting material at polling stations, resulting in massive voter suppression.

The August 2023 harmonised elections witnessed massive voter suppression in urban areas, with ballot papers deliberately withdrawn from many polling stations resulting in voting being extended for an extra day. Constituency gerrymandering also remains a major instrument of authoritarian electoral fraud. The 2022 delimitation of constituency boundaries saw many urban areas lose seats to rural areas through manipulation of the process. So blatant was the manipulation that for the first time in many years a divided parliament united in January 2023 against the delimitation report produced by electoral authorities. The electoral malpractices committed in Zimbabwe have been well documented in many reports from local, regional and international observer missions. It is evident from these reports that coercion, capture and corruption remain the dominant modus operandi of electoral fraud in Zimbabwe.

[1] Elections were held in 1980; 1985; 1990; 1995 (parliamentary elections); 1996 (presidential elections); 2000 (parliamentary elections); 2002 (presidential elections); 2005 (senatorial elections); 2008 (harmonised presidential and parliamentary elections); 2013 (harmonised presidential and parliamentary elections); 2018 (harmonised presidential and parliamentary elections); 2023 (harmonised presidential and parliamentary elections); and by-elections for constituencies.

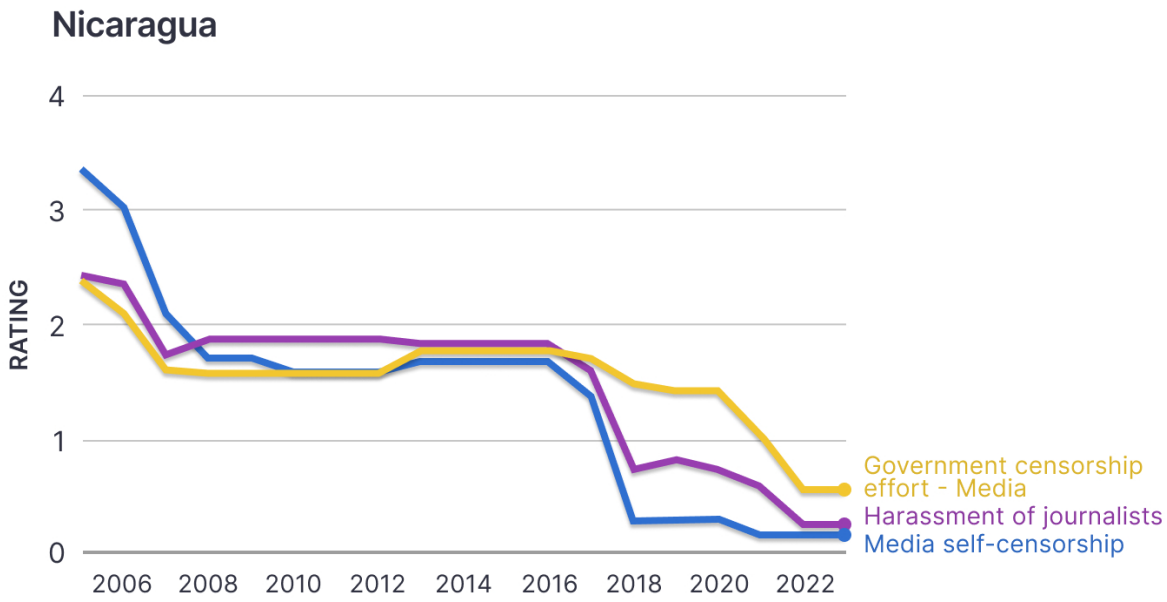
MEDIA CONTROL, CENSORSHIP AND DISINFORMATION

Governments tend to utilise five main strategies to assert control over the media landscape. They tightly censor public broadcasters, including the main radio and television stations. They use government advertising – which in some countries is worth more to newspapers than sales – to punish critics of the regime and reward loyal mouthpieces. They heavily promote their own narratives through a combination of domestic and international media, ensuring that citizens receive their communications on a daily basis. They distort social media by spreading disinformation and employing teams of ruling party supporters to pretend to be 'normal citizens' to mask how unpopular government is. And they use repressive legislation to target and arrest critical voices online, and to influence the behaviour of mobile phone and telecommunications companies to their advantage.

The full arsenal of strategies is deployed in particularly repressive regimes, making it extremely difficult for opposition groups to get their message out. In Nicaragua, for example, attacks on the press dramatically increased after Daniel Ortega returned to power in 2007.

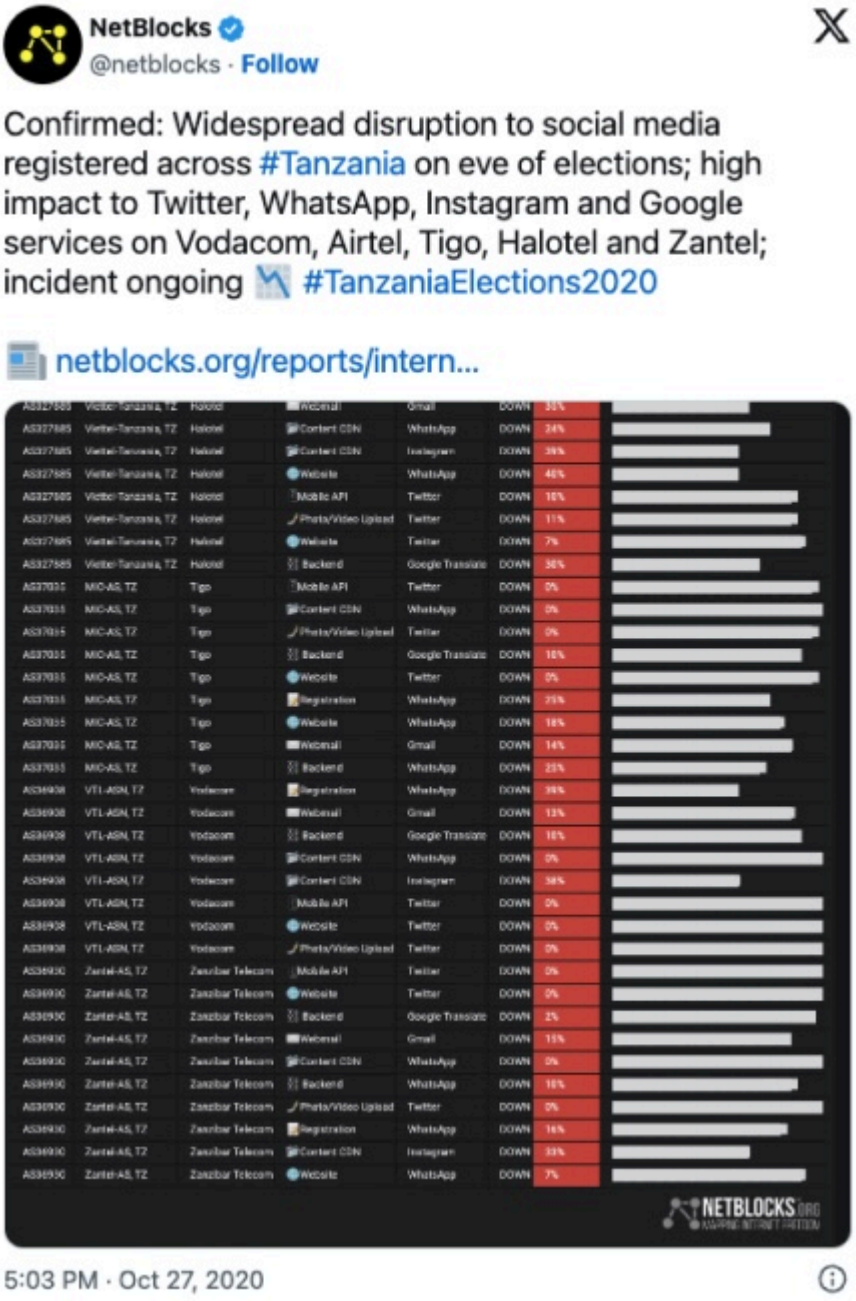
Daniel Ortega in 2012. Source: Flickr/Cancillería del Ecuador (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Since then, harassment of journalists and media censorship has ramped up, as well as media self-censorship – when journalists decide not to write things critical of the government because they know the potential risks. According to the V-Dem Institute, 'Ortega's government has closed the journalistic space over the years, passing laws that enable the criminalization of dissenting news, detaining and intimidating journalists, and revoking licenses of independent media outlets. Anti-government protests in 2018 were met with violent repression, followed by even heavier attacks on the independent press.'[5]



This graph shows how attacks on press freedom in Nicaragua have increased since Daniel Ortega's return to power in 2007. Source: V-Dem

Many of these strategies will be well known to opposition leaders, but the extent to which social media is manipulated and multinational companies can be intimidated is often underestimated.



In the 2020 Tanzanian elections, for example, the government of President John Magufuli successfully put pressure on international mobile phone companies to block messages mentioning the name of the main opposition leader, Tundu Lissu. When citizens messaged about their parents or their jobs, their messages went through – but when they sent the same people messages about their support for Lissu, the messages were never received. One of the companies that participated in this process was Vodacom Tanzania, part of the Vodafone Group, which is headquartered in the United Kingdom, and claims to promote ‘inclusion for all’, while ‘operating responsibly’.

Recent research has also demonstrated the lengths that ruling parties are going to in order to try to shape social media discussions. In Nigeria, for example, influencers have established themselves as self-styled ‘propaganda secretaries’, and they work for parties to produce information and disinformation that often includes outlandish fake news stories. At the same time, the ruling party invested a vast amount of time and energy in making sure that it could shape social media discussions to its own advantage. This is critical because while messages shared on Twitter can be read by millions of people instantly, the same is not true for platforms such as WhatsApp, where groups have been limited to 512 people. This means that to communicate to a large number of people, it is necessary to create a hierarchical system of overlapping groups.

Ahead of the 2019 general elections, the ruling party did this through the Buhari New Media Centre, collecting thousands of phone numbers and creating multiple tiers of WhatsApp groups at every level of the political

system. As a result, they could communicate with tens of thousands of supporters far more quickly and efficiently than any other party in the country. This enabled party leaders to be quickly alerted about new developments on the ground and to push out their preferred message to supporters and activists, who would subsequently post this content to Facebook and Twitter, giving it a much wider reach.

Once these networks have been established, it becomes possible to promote the kinds of divisive messages set out above, demonising opposition leaders and undermining their credibility.

> **Particularly effective strategies include using doctored images, and particularly doctored audio and deepfake videos, which are far more likely to be believed by citizens than simple text messages.**

Resisting these strategies is very challenging today, given the greater resources available to ruling parties, and the fact that social media companies have failed to invest heavily enough to keep up with the social media arms race that has taken place in many countries. To be able to debunk false messages, it is important to establish a dedicated team responsible for scanning social media platforms and issuing corrections. This team should also develop strong connections to traditional media outlets, social media companies and government ministries so that particularly problematic messages such as hate speech – which may not be circulated by the government itself – can be removed.

Beyond this, opposition parties need to learn the lesson from the Buhari New Media Centre and develop effective networks and structures to communicate their messages. This should include setting up overlapping WhatsApp and Telegram (or the like) groups and developing distinctive content for different platforms, as messages should be optimised for

either WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter and/or standard websites. Harnessing the existing reach and creativity of influencers and figures with a significant following is also a good idea, as they are often better able to tap into the public conscience and anticipate what will do well online than political leaders and advisers.

In doing so, it is important to avoid the risk of adopting an overly negative campaign that is based on making accusations against ruling party leaders and attacking government officials. This kind of negative campaigning may be necessary to an extent to highlight government failings, but it can alienate citizens if it does not go hand in hand with positive messaging about what the opposition will do better. Maintaining a positive focus is also important because the use of aggressive narratives, especially if used against leaders from certain communities and backgrounds, can undermine the ability of the opposition to appear inclusive.

How to respond effectively to media manipulation and disinformation:

- Do not expect messages to simply go viral or for social media to be effective on its own – it is essential to build a media team and to develop structures to engage in online influencing and promotion.
- Develop an effective system of overlapping WhatsApp/Telegram groups to enable messages to be quickly shared from the national to the local level and vice versa.
- Appoint designated individuals responsible for countering disinformation through the speedy correction of false information.
- Establish connections with the main media and social media companies so that you can quickly alert them about disinformation.
- Focus on positive narratives for the main part – campaigns that are overly negative can have the effect of alienating citizens.
- Tap into existing influencers and well-connected citizens who already have a significant following.

> Utilise traditional media where possible to reinforce social media messages and reach citizens who are not online.

It is also critical not to overly focus on social media. In some countries, the proportion of voters on Twitter can be as low as 10–20%. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, less than half of the population has direct access to the internet – and less than 20% have electricity in countries such as Burkina Faso, Burundi, the Central African Republic, Niger and Malawi – while 80% have access to the radio.[6] Having a strong digital campaign is therefore important, but it is essential not to lose sight of the impact of traditional media. Developing messages and adverts to communicate via radio – for example, on public broadcasters where possible, and via FM radio and community radio stations – may reach more people than an effective social media campaign. It is also worth investing in TV access and newspaper coverage, especially where the media environment is less heavily controlled. This is both because they reach different audiences and because content published through these outlets is often picked up and repeated online and via community radio. Moreover, surveys of media use in countries such as Kenya have revealed that citizens tend to trust newspapers and television much more than social media platforms, because they are aware that a lot of the information they receive through WhatsApp and Twitter is fake. A holistic media strategy emphasising positive messages and focused criticisms of government performance is therefore the most effective way to win friends and influence people.

COUNTRY EXAMPLE

UGANDA

BOBI WINE'S ACCOUNT

by Bobi Wine

The poster image shows the Ugandan flag on a flagpole. Photo: Flickr/mattlucht (CC BY 2.0)

General elections in Uganda are held after every five years. But under dictator Yoweri Museveni, who has so far spent 38 years in power, these elections are usually the culmination of a five-year, three-stage campaign of persecution, targeting his opponents and their supporters. This persecution includes extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, abduction,

detention without trial, bribery and intimidation, violence and shadow-banning of all opposition political activities. It is designed to ultimately give the dictator an unfair advantage over his opponents on the next polling day. Having contested in Uganda's 2021 presidential election, my experience follows.

At the first stage, the Museveni regime targets his political opponents and their supporters. The persecution at this stage has the dual effect of not only making opposition supporters disillusioned about elections but also preventing opposition candidates from having any meaningful engagement with voters. This effectively denies them the chance to popularise themselves and their alternative policies, and it allows Museveni to interact with the same voters unchallenged, under the guise of launching or implementing government projects across the country.

Election rigging at the second stage occurred months before, during presidential campaigns and on election day. Incidents included one where the Electoral Commission published the 'cleaned' national voters' register, reflecting that over 7 000 'voters' were aged 100 years and above. Some of these were over 150 years old! Later, using the police and the military, the state subjected me and my campaign team to a brutal military operation that was disguised as a presidential campaign.

My campaign team and I were subjected to daily beatings, pepper spray, tear gas and live bullets by police and the military, who tailed us to wherever we attempted to hold campaign meetings countrywide. Due to this brutality, we did not hold campaigns at over 70% of the venues we had previously scheduled with the Electoral Commission's approval.

Even at the few venues where we held campaigns, these campaigns were routinely disrupted by police and the military, who would fire sound bombs, tear gas and live bullets directly at me and the crowd. As a result, some members of my campaign team, as well as supporters, lost their lives. Some lost limbs, while others survived with serious physical and psychological injuries. The commander of the police guards we were assigned by the Electoral Commission at the start of the campaign period was also shot in the leg, and he was resultantly withdrawn.

During the campaigns, we were often blocked from speaking on state-owned and private media stations, whom we had already paid. The regime went as far as blocking us from accessing accommodation facilities upcountry, which forced us to literally sleep by the roadside on several occasions.

Two weeks before the closure of campaigns, we fell into a military ambush while travelling to one of the islands to campaign. My entire campaign team was then arrested and detained for the next six months.

A few days before the 14 January 2021 polling day, the regime switched off the internet countrywide, and deployed thousands of armed forces and foreign mercenaries in urban centres and other opposition strongholds. It also banned independent tally centres.

On polling day, election materials were delivered late to polling stations in opposition strongholds, despite those stations being near offices of the Electoral Commission, which was distributing the materials. At many polling stations where the materials were delivered on time, voting started late, and some voters subsequently missed it.

Most of the polling agents we had deployed to supervise the process and guard our votes at each polling station were either killed, arrested, bribed or intimidated into abandoning their beat. Mobile money services we were using to pay our agents' allowances were disabled. My telephone numbers and those of my inner circle were also deactivated.

The military raided random polling stations, especially in the countryside, chased away voters waiting in line to cast their ballot and then ticked against Museveni on all remaining ballot papers. They thereafter stuffed them into ballot boxes and declared voting 'closed'.

The third phase started with the military besieging me and my family at home less than one day after the election. We were detained at our home for the next eleven days and released after Museveni had been declared the winner. By this time, I had already lost ten days out of the fifteen-day window within which I could challenge Museveni's 'victory' in court.

My legal team used the five days to hastily compile evidence and identify witnesses, draft the petition and then file it in the Supreme Court – a court headed by Museveni's former attorney, Chief Justice Alfonse Chigamoy Owiny-Dollo.

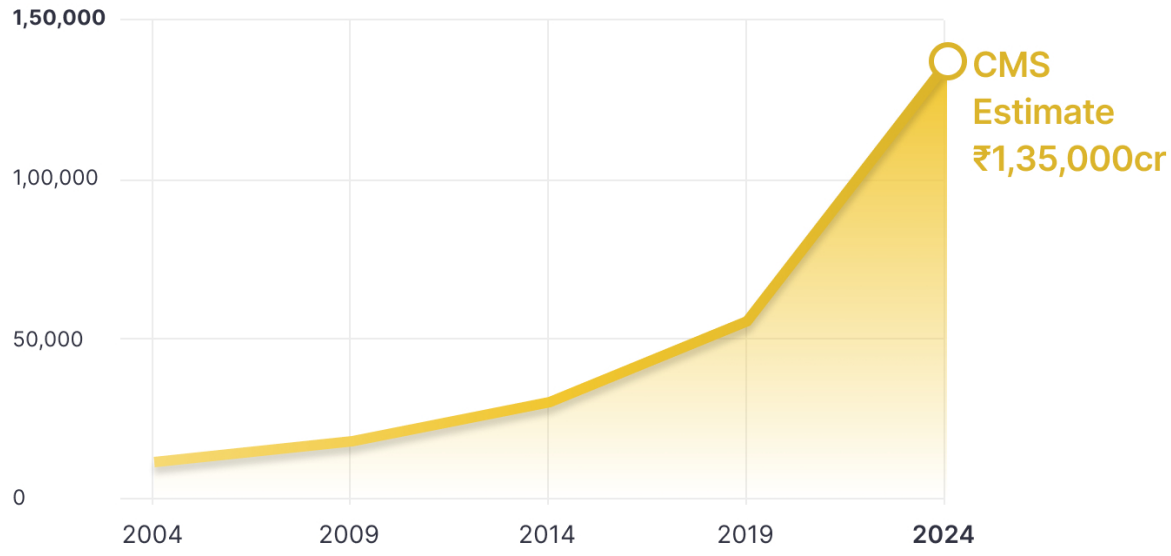
We were ultimately compelled to withdraw the petition after the court dismissed our applications to amend the petition; to file additional evidence; and to have the conflicted and biased Owiny-Dollo step aside from being among the judges who would hear the petition. In May 2021, Museveni was ultimately sworn in, completing yet another five-year cycle of the election rigging and manipulation that has come to define his oppressive reign.

VOTING BUYING AND 'MONEY POLITICS'

Governments have a natural advantage where vote buying and money politics are concerned, because they have direct access to state resources that they can use to fund their campaigns. They also know that local communities are often frustrated that members of parliament and other leaders campaign heavily in their area during elections and then spend more time in the capital once elected. Given that many campaign promises are usually broken, it is easy to see why ruling parties often resort to handing out money around campaigns in an attempt to improve their image and curry favour with voters. What is given out often varies between countries and regions. Cash is commonly distributed at rallies and street corners, with food, T-shirts and drink freely dispersed during party gatherings. This is one reason why elections are often so expensive for candidates and parties of all stripes – with 2024's election in India set to be one of the most expensive ever, at over $16 billion, according to the *Economist*.[7]

Expensive elections

Election expenditure by parties in 2024 has nearly doubled since the previous Lok Sabha election



Cost of each vote

Expenditure on election/number of voters

Handing out money and gifts fulfils a number of functions for a candidate. It can demonstrate that they are generous and willing to act as a community leader who will deal with citizens' concerns. This is particularly important in countries that lack a welfare state and where norms have developed that politicians service the basic needs of constituents, from school and hospital fees to funeral costs. It is also a way that leaders can demonstrate they are accessible, which, as Portia Roeloffs argues, is one of the main things that voters care about, especially in countries with constituency-based elections.[8]

India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, greets his supporters during a roadshow on 13 May 2024 in Varanasi, India. India's 2024 general election was the world's most expensive, with political parties and candidates spending lavishly to woo voters. Photo: Elke Scholiers/Getty Images

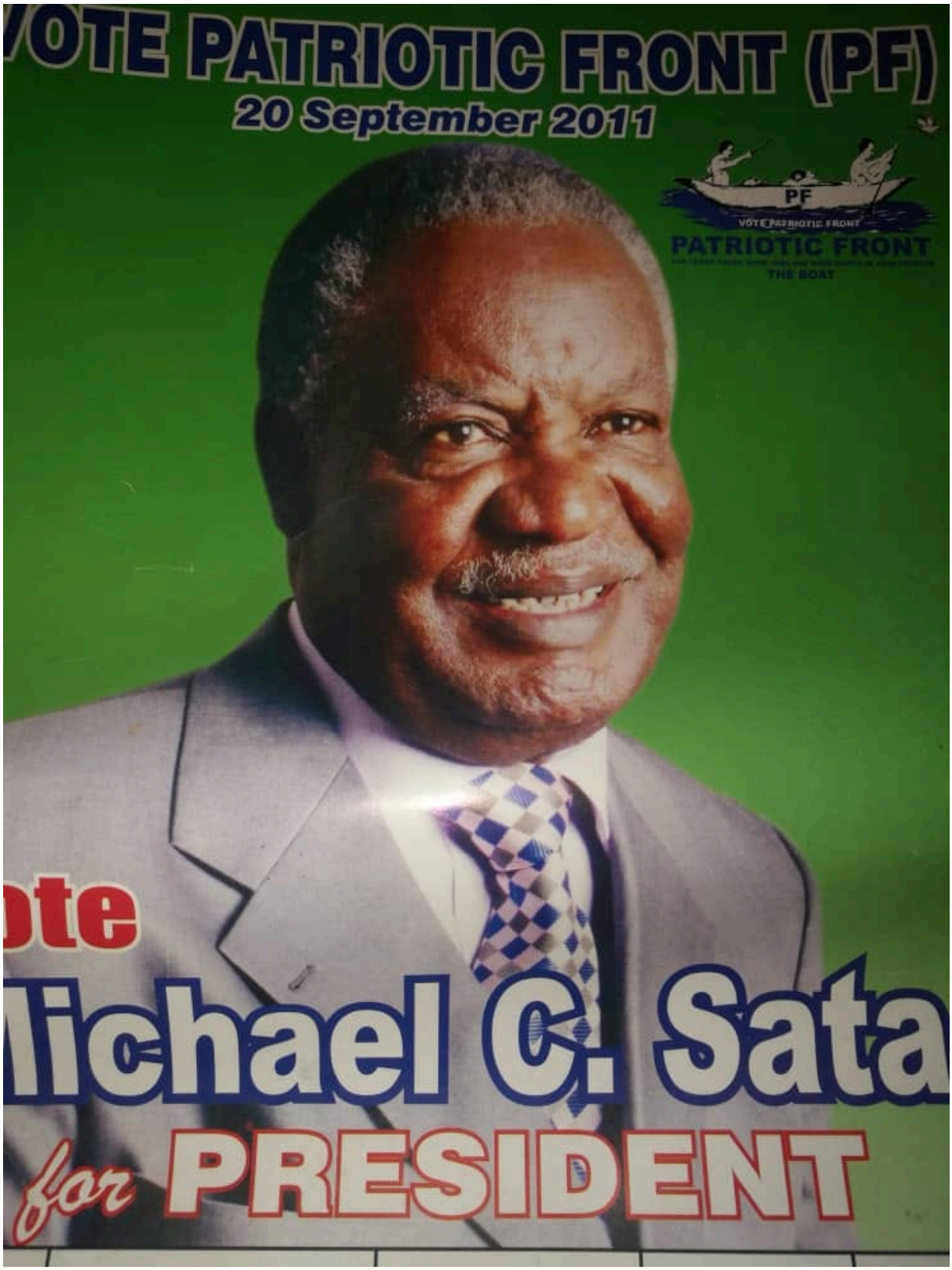
Despite the ubiquity of vote buying in many countries, and the fact that it is generally illegal, it is very rare to see prosecutions for this offence, or to see it cited as a reason that an election is flawed. One reason for this is that it is often done by a wide range of candidates from different parties. Another is that electoral commissions are generally cautious about bringing cases against government leaders and often require the support of the police to make a successful prosecution in any case. This can make it appear as if there is no way to combat vote buying, but in fact many opposition parties have found a way to undermine governments that seek to buy support, turning such practices into a powerful campaigning tool of their own.

An excellent example comes from Namibia's founding elections when the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO), which had liberated the country, came up against the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA). Towards the end of Namibia's lengthy period of minority

authoritarian rule, the DTA had engaged in talks with the apartheid government in South Africa that created a blueprint for the elections that would have left key aspects of apartheid attached. Recognising that it was unlikely to win on the basis of popularity and legitimacy, the DTA set about buying votes. In response, SWAPO leader Sam Nujoma realised that his party could not compete, given the vast amounts of money flowing to the DTA, and instead he told Namibians to take whatever they were offered but to vote in the national interest. As one of his fellow SWAPO leaders put it, 'Eat DTA, vote SWAPO'.[9]

How to respond effectively to vote buying:

- Demonstrate that your candidates are credible by being generous and accessible to local communities, but do not try to compete with the ruling party on vote buying.
- Tell citizens that they can take money from candidates if they must, but they can still vote for the best one.
- Build the confidence of voters in the secrecy of the ballot, so that they feel comfortable voting for the opposition no matter who they may have received gifts from.
- Emphasise the fact that small handouts are gone in days, while public services are worth more money and last all year round.



Michael Sata election poster. Source: Zambia News Express

A similar strategy worked for Michael Sata and the Patriotic Front (PF) opposition in Zambia in the 2011 general elections. Outspent by more than ten to one during the campaign, the PF encouraged its supporters to keep in mind that the ballot was secret, and that they could therefore 'have their cake and eat it'.[10] This led to Sata's running mate Guy Scott

coining the English/Bemba phrase, ‘Don’t Kubeba’, meaning, ‘Don’t tell them’. This strategy was extremely effective, and Sata subsequently won the election with 43% of the vote, 9% more than the ruling party’s Rupiah Banda.

Indeed, in both Namibia and Zambia, opposition leaders were able to turn the government’s use of vote buying to their own advantage, arguing that it demonstrated how corrupt the ruling party was, and how little it had really done to improve living standards for ordinary citizens. In this regard, it is important to keep in mind that research has shown that voters often do not regard a blatant attempt to ‘buy’ their support as legitimate. While gifts and financial transfers as part of a longer-term relationship are often seen as being not only acceptable but desirable in countries at low levels of economic development, their legitimacy comes from the fact that they are expressions of a deeper connection between voters and leaders. Such ties are usually rooted in regional, family, ethnic or religious connections and evolve over many years, with credible leaders investing in local development projects and acting as regional representatives in public discussions. Handing out money in the absence of such a connection can actually lose a candidate support if it is seen to be a blatant attempt to buy constituents in the absence of having actually cultivated a real relationship. Opposing parties can therefore make gains by highlighting examples of such behaviour by ruling party leaders – and ensuring that they are never guilty of it themselves.

HOW AUTHORITARIANS CONTROL THE POPULATION AND THE CAMPAIGN

Political violence is very common in elections in new democracies and more authoritarian settings. Between 2012 and 2016, a quarter of all elections saw violence against the opposition. Violence is particularly useful for the government because it serves a number of functions, demobilising opposition supporters and silencing the media, while making the idea of defecting to join the opposition less attractive for members of the ruling party. In some cases, violence is blatant and committed by the police and security forces, in which case it is obvious to observers and the international community.

In other cases, however, governments have become very good at disguising violence or blaming it on opposition parties. This has included employing non-state actors, such as vigilante groups and militias, so that clashes with opposition supporters can be framed as local, spontaneous and/or ethnic, and therefore beyond the government's control or responsibility. It has also included 'false flag' tactics, such as ruling party operatives pretending to be opposition supporters and committing acts of well-publicised violence that are then used to legitimate a crackdown on opposition supporters.

This means that opposition parties often face a dual challenge if they are to win unfair elections – protecting their supporters and activists from violence, on the one hand, while capturing evidence of abuses to hold the ruling party accountable, on the other.

Winning requires planning ahead:

- Create a dedicated team responsible for tracking violence, capturing evidence – including photographs and medical records – and presenting this to domestic and international rights groups and election observers.
- Establish a welfare team responsible for looking after those injured in violence and the families of those killed.
- Avoid responding through violence – this legitimates further government attacks and creates the impression in the media and with international

observers that the parties are ‘as bad as each other’.

THE USE OF VIOLENCE TO DISCIPLINE AND MOBILISE

Especially in cases where divide-and-rule politics and efforts to silence critical voices are not successful, authoritarian governments resort to the use of violence. It is often assumed that violence is attractive to autocrats because it intimidates opposition leaders and supporters and so makes it easier to win elections. This is only half of the story, however. Another reason dictators use violence is to scare their own allies and supporters so much that they do not consider defecting to the opposition. By demonstrating the high cost of leaving the ruling alliance, autocrats can shore up discipline within their own ranks – even in cases where some of their allies would prefer to leave. This is particularly important because in many entrenched authoritarian states, such as Uganda and Rwanda, the government is unlikely to be defeated unless there is a split within the ruling party itself. Indeed, in many countries, the first transfer of power only occurred after a faction broke away from the government. In most cases, this was triggered by the intensity of the succession battle to replace a president who had either died in office or been forced to step down by term limits, which is why ‘open-seat’ elections in which the ruling party has to stand a new presidential candidate are far more likely to result in transfers of power.[11]

The multiple uses of political violence explain why this strategy continues to be used around the world, despite the onset of mobile phone technology, which means it is far more likely that abuses will be

recorded. In Uganda's 2021 general elections, for example, there was a significant increase in the use of repression compared to the previous polls. Most notably, the main opposition leader, Bobi Wine, was continually harassed, and he was also arrested and abused.

Following protests by Wine supporters, a brutal response from the security forces resulted in hundreds of deaths, with many opposition supporters and activists detained and tortured.

Bobi Wine on the ground after having been shot. Source: X/@HEBobiWine

Once such violence has been deployed, governments may be able to invoke the memory of it to repress communities and opposition leaders for years to come by making it clear that the same thing will happen if they do not behave 'the right way'. In Zimbabwe, this is sometimes referred to as 'subtle violence' or 'shaking the matchbox' – i.e., once you have burned someone's house down once, you do not need to do it again, you just need to stand outside shaking a matchbox and people feel intense pressure to fall into line.

The benefit of this approach is that it reduces the number of physical abuses a government needs to commit, enabling intimidation to go under the radar of election observers and the mass media. Similarly covert strategies are also regularly used to intimidate journalists and key checks and balances institutions. Judges and domestic election observers, for example, regularly receive death threats in the build-up to releasing key verdicts on electoral processes.

It is rarely wise to respond to these tactics with violence for two reasons. First, this tends to legitimise the use of greater violence against the opposition, and the government has more guns. Second, many governments demonise opposition parties by claiming they are troublemakers who drive societal tension, as discussed above, and any use of violence makes this strategy easier to operationalise.

> **A better option is to try to leverage domestic and international pressure to force the government to reduce the level of repression.**

To do this, it is important to systematically collect evidence of human rights abuses so that they can be presented to domestic and international media, courts and civil society groups. This requires the development of a strong network to record violent incidents and evidence of what happened, building ties with domestic human rights and civil society groups, and communicating clearly with election observers and domestic and international media.

How to respond effectively to the use of violence:

- Develop a strong network with domestic, regional and international media and human rights groups so that evidence of abuses can be circulated in real time.
- Explain to observers and the media how violence is committed and how it is organised by the ruling party.

- Take legal cases to regional courts and international courts, such as the International Criminal Court, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, and the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights.
- Stress the opposition's commitment to non-violent inclusive approaches and avoid playing into the idea that opposition parties drive conflict.
- Utilise strategies such as 'watermelon' politics so that it is easier for party supporters to escape violence on a day-to-day basis.
- Harness public disapproval of violence to depict the ruling party as a source of instability and disorder.

Leaving supporters open to attack is likely to undermine morale, so it is important that opposition parties are seen to be proactive. One way to do this is to build an internal unit responsible for taking care of those targeted with violence and their families, while also seeking to minimise the risk of human rights abuses. Effective steps taken by some parties in the last ten years include the use of 'watermelon' politics, in which opposition supporters are encouraged to either profess no political allegiance or pretend to support the ruling party in order to safely navigate the election campaign.

"Watermelon" crowds during Sierra Leone elections campaigns. Photo: cocorioko.net

The term comes from Sierra Leone and Zambia, where it referred to citizens wearing green – the colour of the ruling party – on the outside but being ‘red’ – the colour of the main opposition party – on the inside. This tactic makes it harder for government thugs and activists to know who to target during the campaign and who to try to stop getting to the polling station in order to cast a vote.

What such strategies cannot do is to protect opposition supporters in their home areas, where the government knows that most voters will be casting ballots for rival parties. In attempts to defend supporters in such areas, some opposition politicians and leaders have formed ‘self-defence’ groups to try to protect supporters from attack when they go to the polls. This was done, for example, by some opposition leaders in the Nigerian elections of 2023. This can help to boost the confidence of opposition voters, but, again, it is crucial to avoid being seen to employ militia to commit violence, for the reasons set out above. In Nigeria, for example, the employment of militias and gangs by politicians has been a significant contributor to the spiralling violence witnessed in many parts of the country, which has left all citizens less safe and has created a security crisis that is so severe it threatens to undermine the prospects for democracy.

COUNTRY EXAMPLE

ANGOLA

THE ANGOLAN EXPERIENCE

by Paula Roque

Cover photo shows João Lourenço, president of Angola. Photo: The Kremlin (CC BY 4.0)

Elections have served many strategic purposes in Angola, beyond the functions of electing a parliament and consolidating democratic procedure. In fact, those two objectives were only residually important. Rather, elections have served to secure and reinforce the president's hegemony. They served to eliminate the opposition and allowed for the

consolidation of a securitised government. The control over the electoral process was of such strategic importance that it fell to the Presidential Security Bureau to hire, fund, direct and co-ordinate companies, institutions, budgets and mechanisms involved in the run-up to elections, during the voting and in the tabulation process.

In 2008, the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) won the elections by 81%, in 2012 it won by 71% and in 2017 it won by 61%. With every poll, the strategies to interfere with the process and the results became more brazen and sophisticated, in line with the fears of the president about his plummeting popularity. The Presidency's capacity to stabilise political relations through patrimonial, kleptocratic and nepotistic arrangements fuelled corruption, but built a system of adequate loyalty. Elections brought about legitimacy, while they destroyed the opposition and silenced their political programmes and values. Society was engineered to accept the fate of MPLA corporatism and assimilation, which hierarchised citizenship, deepened inequality, increased marginalisation and neutered pluralism.[1]

Several key strategies allowed the ruling MPLA party to achieve its desired outcome. One involved weakening the National Electoral Commission (CNE), which gradually had its powers either transferred to other organs of the executive or whose functions were shadowed by parallel organs operating in the Presidency. In 2005, the ruling party began the process of controlling the electoral register through the Council of Minister's decrees, transferring key responsibilities away from the CNE. Tampering with the voters roll allowed the ruling party to determine who could and couldn't vote. The work of the

CNE was supported by the intelligence services and controlled by the MPLA.

The MPLA's campaign for the 2008 legislative elections was centred around its slogan 'The right path for a better Angola', where the ruling party portrayed itself as a permanent requirement for national stability. During these elections, the MPLA mobilised over 30 000 party committees (*comités de acção*) across the country to campaign and prepare its victory.[2] MPLA specialist committees were also created and strengthened across different sectors of society to ensure that professionals inside and outside the state bureaucracy and the private sector were informed of the most 'patriotic' way to vote. The provinces were structured in a way that allowed for greater control of the vote and the population. Members of the church and civil society drew attention to the government's approach of conditioning the rural population's vote by inserting them into a 'framework' of intimidation and co-optation. Intimidation was widespread and people were instructed to vote for peace, meaning that if the opposition won there would be war (Roque 2008). In the capital, where control over the population was harder, 'chaos' ensued on voting day, with polling stations failing to open on time or missing registration lists. This led to 320 polling stations having to schedule a second day of voting. Behind the logistical and organisational issues in Luanda was the company Valleysoft, which was charged with distributing ballots and other materials. Valleysoft had direct links to the Presidency.[3] The company had bought 26 million ballots from the Spanish company INDRA, but only 10 million were used.[4] The remainder, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) argued, were used in ghost ballot stations, a fact verified during tabulation when results were being counted

from 50 195 voting stations when only 37 995 existed. Those extra ghost voting stations were produced by intelligence agents in an operation that was controlled by the Presidency.[5]

During the 2012 elections, the infiltration of counting centres by intelligence officers and elements of the Presidential Security Bureau replicated the system used in 2008. However, an additional structure, a parallel counting centre, functioned to shadow the CNE within this parallel vote tabulation process.[6] According to the opposition parties, the results of each of the eighteen provinces were predetermined by the government in Luanda, and the result sheets bearing the real numbers were never opened or were disregarded (Roque 2013).[7] INDRA, a Spanish company, was accused of printing 13 million ballots when only 6.1 million were used, with little accountability for what happened to the remainder. Other tactics included phantom polling stations, unaudited registration rolls, voter profiling and forced abstention. Over 37% of voters abstained during these polls, which the opposition and civil society argued pointed to a strategy of structured chaos in the cities, where voters were turned away from polling stations after being informed that their names were on a list to vote in other provinces. In Luanda alone, less than 30% managed to vote as a result of this strategy. Information leaked from the Presidency to UNITA revealed how technology experts from China were used to profile voters and disenfranchise them using their ethnicity, names and regional origins to determine if they were potential opposition supporters.

The 2017 elections replicated all the previous manoeuvres of election rigging. At the national tally centre of the CNE, no results were being processed, ‘the phones didn’t ring and

somehow the CNE was launching preliminary results from the different provinces'.[8] Members of the CNE at the provincial, local and national levels confirmed that they did not observe or participate in any tallying of results.[9] The 2022 polls were, however, the most fraudulent. The opposition coalition, the United Patriotic Front (FPU), had evidence of mass and systemic alteration of results, aimed at invalidating their victory. Nothing came of it. A majority of voters rejected the idea of another five years of João Lourenço's Presidency, voting for change and for the opposition. Yet, because of this, all institutions were instrumentalised to uphold irregularities and entrench securitised power. Angola's Constitutional Court decision on 8 September 2022 revealed itself to be a partisan instrument, perpetuating injustices and invalidating the sovereign power of the people. Forsaking the Constitution, they violated the principle of discovery rights and the pursuit of the truth by failing to ask for a verification of electoral results. More importantly, they introduced doubt on the legitimacy of Lourenço's government. Official results awarded the ruling MPLA 51% of the vote and UNITA 43.9%. The opposition FPU, led by UNITA, conducted their own parallel count of 90% of the result sheets from the 13 200 polling stations, and these revealed a difference of over 533 000 votes, placing UNITA ahead with 49.5% and the MPLA with 48.2%. Among the remarkable elements of this election was the opposition's defeat of the ruling party in the capital Luanda, which represented a third of the electorate. Urbanites, the educated youth and even MPLA supporters voted for UNITA. The MPLA lost the vote of the rank and file of the military and elements of the police, as revealed by results in the polling stations near barracks.

The next elections in 2027 will be more securitised and the ongoing clampdown of civil society and activists will accelerate ahead of the polls. Angola's path towards authoritarianism is in full gear and this tendency will worsen as the MPLA factionalises, loses more support, and fails to address the catastrophic levels of poverty and inequality.

[1] Paula Cristina Roque, Governing in the Shadows: Angola's Securitised State. London: Hurst, 2021.
[2] 'Victoria do MPLA foi preparada a Rigor', Club-K, 26 September 2008, https://club-k.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1190:vitoria-do-mpla-foi-preparada-a-rigor&lang=pt#google_vignette.
[3] 'Documentos de fraude de 2008 embaraça MPLA', Club-K, 1 July 2012.
[4] Sapa, 'Angola Vote Body Accused of Irregularities', IOL, 13 July 2012, https://www.iol.co.za/news/africa/angola-vote-body-accused-of-irregularities-1341213.
[5] 'Livro Branco sobre as Eleições de 2008', Instituto de Desenvolvimento e Democracia, 2009.
[6] Interview, CNE member from the opposition, Luanda, August 2012.
[7] Paula Cristina Roque, 'Angola's Second Post-War Elections', Institute for Security Studies Situation Report, May 2013, https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/SitRep2013_23May.pdf.
[8] Interview, journalist, Lisbon, June 2019.
[9] 'Angola: The Stolen Elections', Maka Angola, 25 August 2017, https://www.makaangola.org/2017/08/angola-the-stolen-elections/.

CAMPAIGN DISRUPTION: RALLY BANS, MOVEMENT RESTRICTIONS, INFILTRATION AND CO-OPTION

Another major challenge that opposition parties have faced in recent years is restrictions on campaigning. In general, opposition parties are far more likely to have their rallies banned and to face restrictions on campaigning. In countries with repressive or outdated colonial

legislation, this is often done by refusing to issue permits to hold elections. In the Zimbabwean elections of 2023, for example, the Citizens Coalition for Change, the main opposition party, had to cancel the launch event for its campaign after it was denied permission at the last minute by police who cited a lack of toilet provision. In other cases, spurious security concerns are often used to prevent or shut down opposition rallies, when the main threat of violence actually comes from government gangs and the security forces, rather than opposition members themselves.

Social media poster by the Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC). Photo: X/CCCZimbabwe

The use of these strategies peaked during the Covid-19 epidemic, when legitimate health concerns were used to create a highly restrictive campaign environment. In countries such as Uganda, for example, opposition parties were regularly denied the right to hold meetings and events, while the same rules were rarely applied in the same way to the government. These strategies can be particularly difficult to counter, especially when they outwardly appear to be legitimate due to health or security concerns, and when they are brutally reinforced by the security forces. During Covid-19, for example, there were numerous instances of the security forces committing serious human rights abuses, while enforcing social distancing measures, including across Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Over the last ten years, the most effective strategy to counteract these restrictions has been to find alternative ways to communicate with voters in the affected areas by using:

A.

incidents were opposition candidates are blocked from holding events to generate online support and sympathy;

B.

social media and local media, such as community radio and sympathetic regional newspapers to communicate with citizens in areas that cannot be reached physically; and

C.

spreading key opposition messages through party structures and networks that have been developed in advance of the campaign.

How to respond effectively to campaign restrictions:

- Use evidence, including video footage, if possible, to make citizens, observers and the international community aware of restrictions on the opposition and of the reason that rallies and meetings are cancelled.
- Develop targeted messages for these areas so that they do not feel left out of the campaign, stressing local concerns and opposition commitment to engaging with citizens and leaders from these areas.
- Use social media platforms, community radio and existing party structures to spread the word, going door to door where possible – the combination of personal contact and social media messages from opposition leaders can be particularly effective.

The combination of these strategies was used, for example, by the Hichilema campaign in the Zambian elections of 2021. In some cases, the government tried to undermine Hichilema's movements by preventing him from hiring aeroplanes to travel to certain locations or by having the security forces block the progress of his convoy.

Police block the Hichilema campaign on 29 July 2021. Photo: The Lusaka Times; see full article.

During some of these incidents, the UPND team took footage of Hichilema calmly and powerfully explaining to security force officials why he should be allowed to pass and the damage they were doing to Zambian democracy. This footage was then uploaded to social media, where, in some cases, it went viral. This served three purposes. First, it explained to party supporters and other citizens why their area had not seen an opposition rally – preventing the government from spinning the lack of a meeting as evidence that the area was not valued by the UPND. Second, the intelligent and reasonable tone adopted by Hichilema, in the face of the irrational reasons that were provided for blocking his path, furthered his reputation as a statesmanlike figure, while undermining the government's legitimacy. Third, widespread engagement with UPND social media posts helped to alert domestic and international observers to the unfair restrictions the opposition faced during the campaign.

At the same time, the UPND campaign used WhatsApp and other platforms to communicate messages in areas that Hichilema himself could not reach. Combining these kinds of messages with 'traditional' strategies, such as going door to door in neighbourhoods likely to be sympathetic to the opposition, can be particularly effective. Because many individuals may not see WhatsApp and Twitter messages, and because citizens particularly value candidates who are accessible and approachable, as discussed above, it is extremely impactful to reinforce regional campaigns with personal contact at the grassroots level.

HOW AUTHORITARIANS RIG BEFORE THE ELECTION

Smart autocrats don't rig on election day – that is for amateurs. The real experts manipulate the polls long in advance, away from the eyes of the international media and election observers. Two of the most effective ways to do this are gerrymandering and voter suppression. Gerrymandering is the process of manipulating the design of constituencies so that the ruling party secures more seats for the same number of votes. Voter suppression refers to the use of various strategies to prevent voters of a certain identity or party affiliation from registering to vote and/or being able to cast a ballot.

These strategies are particularly effective because they go under the radar and are rarely the sources of great election controversy. The evidence for this is that they are widely used, even in established democracies. A recent report by the Brennan Center for Justice found that in the US a remarkable 29 states have passed a total of 94 restrictive voting laws in the last 10 years.[12] In many cases, these new laws had the effect of making it less likely that non-white voters would go to the polls in states controlled by the Republican Party.

The motivation behind these changes is therefore clear:

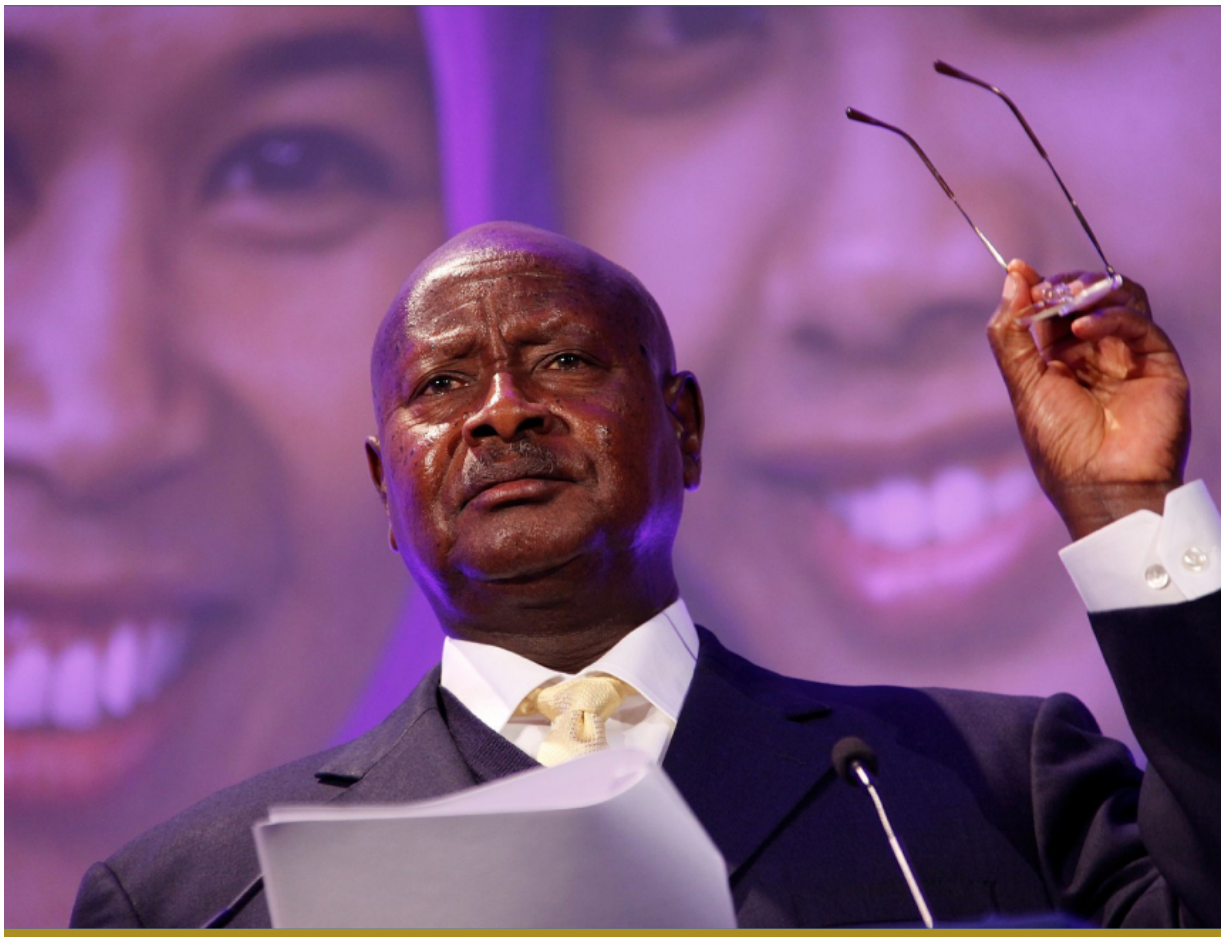
> **they are designed to prevent groups likely to vote Democrat from casting ballots.**

At the same time, there is widespread gerrymandering by both Republicans and Democrats seeking to draw constituency boundaries in a way that enables them to win more votes. This distorts the electoral map and also has a partisan effect, giving the Republicans between 10 and 20 seats that they would not win otherwise.

The fact that these practices are common and shape electoral outcomes in 'established democracies' demonstrates how important it is for opposition parties and leaders to find ways to contest them.

Winning requires planning ahead:

- Establish a unit to assist supporters to get national IDs (if necessary) and to



COUNTRY EXAMPLE

UGANDA

HOW ELECTIONS IN UGANDA HAVE BEEN RIGGED AND HOW THAT RIGGING HAS CHANGED OVER TIME

Poster image shows President Museveni. Photo: Flickr/Russell Watkins (CC BY-SA 2.0)

On 18 January 2021, Yoweri Museveni, who has been Uganda's president since 1986, claimed his sixth election victory, with 59% of the vote. The electoral process was marred by systemic harassment, intimidation and acts of violence against the country's political opposition, which was led by the

country’s most popular musician and National Unity Platform legislator Robert Kyagulanyi.

Like many long-ruling autocrats, in Africa and elsewhere, Museveni has fine-tuned his survival tactics over time. His regime is sustained by the nearly $2 billion in aid it receives annually from the United States and major global institutions like the World Bank. He has thus meticulously established himself to remain in control of a country in which the majority of its citizens were not alive when he first seized power a generation ago. He has, in fact, been a trailblazer in many regards. In 2005, for example, he orchestrated the removal of constitutionally mandated presidential term limits. And in 2018, the elimination of presidential age limits followed.

During his nearly four-decade reign, Uganda has become one of the most repressive police states not just in Africa, but arguably in the world. In the lead up to and during election periods, Museveni has established a blueprint: rely on partisan law enforcement to suppress any semblance of dissent or opposition mobilisation; threaten the local media and bar international reporters from entering the country; shut down key civic and social education groups, while jailing their leaders on trumped-up charges; and, when all else fails, use lethal force against regime opponents and peaceful protesters. Museveni seeks to justify such violence by claiming that pro-opposition demonstrators, in particular, are merely ‘agents of foreign schemes’.

While state-sponsored violence against those perceived to be, or otherwise framed by the government as, political opponents has been a mainstay, Museveni’s political machine has also exhibited a capacity to adapt with the times. Ahead of the 2021 election, for example, the regime shut down social media

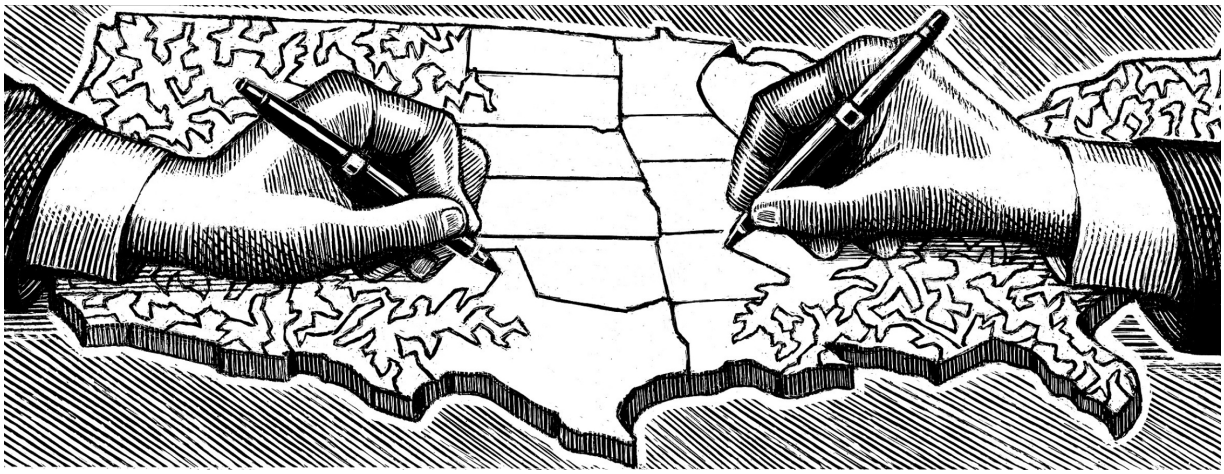
outlets, including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, which carried over to election day itself. Authorities also denied accreditation to election observers. Both of these actions were clear attempts to hinder reports of ballot-box stuffing; to conceal the bribing, beating, detention and alleged murder of poll watchers and volunteers from opposition parties; as well as to offer the regime an excuse of plausible deniability when it came to the shocking human rights abuses routinely committed by the Ugandan security forces.

Most ominously, there is now a heightened intensity to state violence as well as a mounting death toll. Prior to the last election, for example, in November 2020, citizens armed only with smartphones captured security forces shooting live bullets at civilians protesting the most recent arrest of the opposition leader, Robert Kyagulanyi. In total, 54 people were confirmed killed in broad daylight, with police arresting over 1 000 more in connection with the ensuing riots. Following the election, when Kyagulanyi returned home from voting, he found soldiers camped on his property and, for the next eleven days, he and his family remained under house arrest – a now routine occurrence each time he arrives in the country following a trip abroad.

As a result, a recent Gallup poll found that only around a third of respondents in Uganda say they are confident in the integrity of their country's elections. Having the audacity to run for political office, or supporting an opposition candidate, should not be the equivalent of a death sentence. Unfortunately for Uganda and Ugandan citizens, this certainly appears to be the case today and going forward.

GERRYMANDERING, ELECTORAL REGISTER MANIPULATION AND VOTER SUPPRESSION

The manipulation of the electoral register and voter suppression tends to involve seven main strategies designed to maximise the number of ruling party voters on the roll and exclude opposition supporters.



Gerrymandering illustration. Illustration: Brennan Centre

FIRST,

locate more registration centres and devote more time and resources to registering voters in known ruling party strongholds than in areas the opposition.

SECOND,

use violence and intimidation to sow fear among opposition communities and make it less likely they will register, and/or displace opposition supporters so that they do not have the necessary documents to register.

THIRD,

fail to process applications for national ID cards or similar documentation that is needed (in many countries, but not all) to register to vote that come from opposition areas.

FOURTH,

manipulate the electoral roll to exclude voters from certain areas or backgrounds.

FIFTH,

allow dead voters to remain on the roll so that ruling party operatives can vote on their behalf.

SIXTH,

deny civil society groups the right to conduct voter registration drives and voter education projects. Seventh, deny opposition parties, civil society groups and election observers access to the electoral roll to enable them to effectively inspect it and identify errors.

> **In some cases, a combination of all seven of these strategies are used.**

This can lead to horribly bloated electoral registers that significantly underrepresent certain groups and society, including younger voters, who are usually less likely to have the necessary documents to register because they have only recently come of age. Opposition parties hoping to benefit from a ‘youth dividend’ therefore need to take steps to make sure that young people can actually register to vote. At the same time, the presence of many dead citizens on the electoral roll facilitates ‘ghost

voting', as ruling party activists and co-opted electoral officials can post fake ballots on behalf of these individuals, safe in the knowledge that they will not turn up to vote for themselves. This strategy is particularly effective because it means that the government can stuff the ballot box without ever actually ending up with more than 100% turnout.

Voters at a voting station in Uganda. Photo: Flickr/Commonwealth Secretariat (CC BY-NC 2.0)

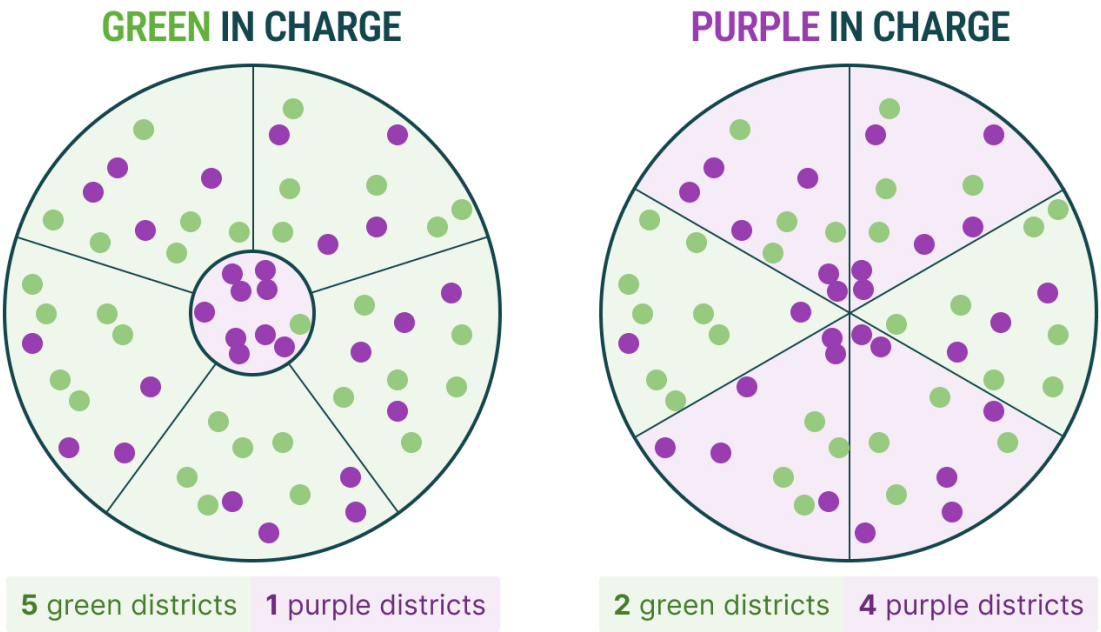
This is a strategy often used by President Yoweri Museveni in Uganda. In the 2016 general elections, 43 polling stations in Kiruhura District, part of his heartlands, saw something amazing: every single person voted, and...

> **every single person voted for Museveni. Not a single ballot was spoilt, and not a single person was too ill to go to the polls.**

The reality, of course, was that electoral and ruling party officials had colluded to add votes for those who did not turn up, and 'interpreted'

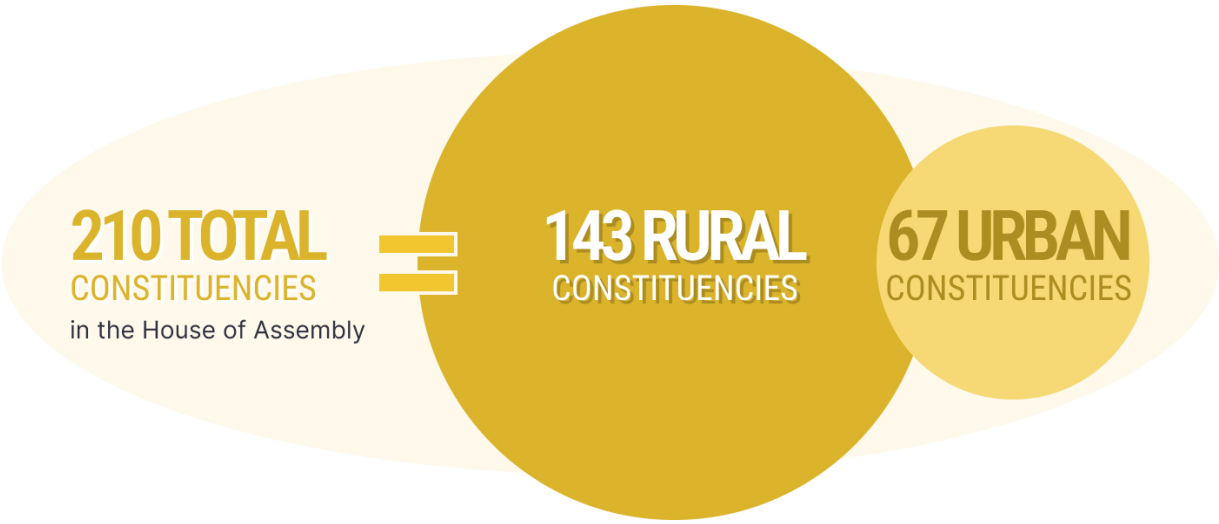
ballots that should have been rejected were counted as votes for Museveni. As a result, the president received 100% support on 100% turnout. Although it is obvious to everyone that this election was manipulated, because voter turnout never exceeded 100%, it was not an electoral offence and attracted far less attention than it should have done.

Where gerrymandering is concerned, this usually takes the form of governments increasing the number of legislative seats in their strongholds more than in opposition strongholds. This contravenes international best practice, which is that boundaries should be drawn to make sure that there are roughly the same number of people in each constituency, once issues such as natural features (rivers and mountains) and the design of other administrative units have been taken into account. In many countries, this results in distinctive regional seat distributions. For example, because opposition parties often secure greater support in urban areas, which have more access to information and are harder for governments to control, governments deliberately create more legislative seats than there should be in rural areas, and not enough in urban ones. In parliamentary political systems, this method can be used to prevent governments from losing power, because it is the largest party in parliament that selects the prime minister.



In presidential systems, gerrymandering cannot determine who leads the country because it applies to constituency-based elections, such as contests for members of parliament and local councillors, but it is nonetheless important because it can be used to undermine legislative scrutiny and enable the government to secure a big enough majority to change the constitution.

The use of gerrymandering is perfectly demonstrated by the case of Zimbabwe. Ahead of the 2008 polls, a delimitation report proposed redrawing the electoral map by increasing the number of seats from 120 to 210. The vast majority of the new seats were located in rural areas, even though Zimbabwe has large towns and an urban population of millions. According to Ian Makone, who helped run the Movement for Democratic Change's campaign in that election, 'our elections directorate has established that of the 210 constituencies in the House of Assembly, 143 are rural constituencies while just 67 are urban and peri-urban constituencies. So technically speaking ZANU-PF already has the crucial two-thirds majority in the Lower House before a single vote is cast.'[13]



It is very hard to respond effectively to these strategies. Because they are more technical and done well before elections, they tend to get less

attention from the media and the international community. They are also less high profile, and so it can be harder to mobilise citizens against them. Another challenge is that it can be dangerous to emphasise rigging too much during an election campaign because it can demoralise supporters and make them feel like there is no point in voting if the election is already rigged. It is therefore particularly important to target messages, emphasising rigging to election observers, the electoral commission and international donors but stressing how effective action by party supporters and activists will result in victory when speaking to domestic media and party supporters.

How to respond effectively to electoral roll manipulation and gerrymandering:

- Encourage an independent civil society group and/or researchers to conduct a report on constituency boundaries, their fairness and their likely impact on the electoral process.
- Demand the right to inspect and audit the electoral roll well before polling day.
- Continually conduct drives to ensure opposition supporters have the necessary ID documents and are registered to vote.
- Expose and highlight the bias in the system clearly and powerfully to the electoral commission and election observers ahead of polling day.
- Be careful not to communicate a message that is taken to imply that the election is already lost/cannot be won, as this can demoralise supporters and reduce turnout – instead, emphasise how the party and its supporters are working to overcome the challenges they face.

Although it can be particularly challenging to ensure positive change in this area, recent elections have seen considerable improvements in the quality of the electoral roll in many countries, although this has not always resulted in opposition victories. Introducing biometric voter

registration has been very effective at removing dead voters from electoral rolls.

In Nigeria, for example, ‘the introduction of biometric voter registration, complete with biometric permanent voter cards, is credited with removing as many as 10 million illegitimate registrations from the electoral roll, paving the way for better-quality elections and, ultimately, facilitating a transfer of power in 2015’.[14] In the eyes of the Commonwealth Observer Group, ‘the introduction of biometric Permanent Voter Cards is, in our view, a major factor in enhancing the integrity of the electoral process by ensuring that only eligible voters could cast ballots on polling day’.[15] Along with the formation of a strong opposition coalition, and the poor performance of President Goodluck Jonathan, this resulted in the first opposition victory since the reintroduction of multi-party politics in 1999.

An electoral officer scans the thumb of a voter using a biometric system at a Lagos polling station on 28 March 2015. Photo: EMMANUEL AREWA/AFP via Getty Images

Reducing the number of dead voters on the roll is only the first step opposition parties need to push for, however. It is also critical to make sure that once a voters' roll has been put together, it is fully audited. Ruling parties tend to want to prevent this but sometimes will agree to an audit process as part of reforms to try to re-legitimate the political system following a crisis, or because they do not fully understand the significance of what appears to be a dry and technocratic process. Following the 2007/2008 violence in Kenya, the new electoral role – generated through biometric technology – was independently audited by KPMG and was also made available to be audited by civil society groups.

Best practice in this regard is to test the roll in at least three ways:

ONE

Run a test to see how many duplicate registrations there are and whether anyone is registered who should not be (i.e., because they are too young or are not connected to a specific address).

TWO

Take a sample of the roll (e.g., 1 200 entries on the roll) and then find those people to make sure that they are real voters and their details have been captured correctly.

THREE

Take a sample of the electorate (e.g., 1 200 people who can show that they went through the registration process) and make sure that they are correctly included on the register.

Doing versions of these tests has significantly improved the roll in countries such as Kenya and Zimbabwe. While a range of other abuses

mean that ZANU-PF is still in power in Zimbabwe, Kenya experienced its second transfer of power in 2022, in part due to improvements in the fairness of the electoral system.

> **It is important to note, though, that simply running the tests does not improve the electoral register itself – for that it is essential that the findings are implemented; for example, by removing duplicate entries.**

Where voter suppression is concerned, one of the most important things that opposition parties can do is to make sure that they are constantly engaged in:

A

making sure that supporters have relevant national ID documents; and

B

making sure that supporters are registered to vote as early as possible in the cycle.

An effective way to do this is to divide areas known to be supportive of the opposition into different streets or clusters of houses and then to divide these between party activists, who can go door to door offering citizens transport (for example, a ride in their car or in a bus) to the registration centre. A similar strategy should be used for mobilising voters for elections themselves, which can dramatically increase turnout.

ridecata • Follow

ridecata Don't miss out on free rides to early voting locations through Sunday, Nov. 3, courtesy of CATA, Eatran & Clinton Transit! Plus, on Tuesday, Nov. 5, enjoy a free ride to the polls for the state general election.

Just let your driver know you're headed to vote when you hop on board. No ID needed. Trips to register to vote and ballot drop boxes also qualify for free rides.

Visit our website at the #linkinbio for more info.

#rideCATA #RegionalMobility

COUNTRY EXAMPLE

CAMEROON

PAUL BIYA'S LONGEVITY IN POWER AND ITS CONSEQUENCES FOR CAMEROON

by Felix Nkongho

Poster image shows Paul Biya, President of the Republic of Cameroon, addressing the UN General Assembly in September 2009. Photo: Flickr/United Nations Photo (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Paul Biya, the president of Cameroon, has managed to hold onto power for 42 years, defying calls for democratic change and political transition. His prolonged reign has been

characterised by various strategies and actions that have consolidated his control and weakened opposition forces.

Biya has strategically purged potential rivals within the ruling party, effectively eliminating any meaningful challenges to his leadership. By locking out dissenting voices, he established a monolithic system where opposition parties are controlled or manipulated, weakening legitimate political opposition.

The use of divide-and-rule policies has been a recurring strategy in Biya's playbook. By exploiting ethnic, regional and linguistic divisions, he has fostered cleavages among the population, thereby preventing the formation of a unified opposition front. This tactic has effectively stifled dissent and maintained a fragmented political landscape.

Biya has consistently used the military and security forces to suppress opposition voices and quell dissent. The persecution of opposition supporters, activists and journalists has created an atmosphere of fear, discouraging political opposition and public criticism of his regime.

The president has also exploited electoral mechanics to his advantage. Through the redrawing of boundaries and alleged electoral fraud, he has expanded his victories and consolidated his majority. Elections have become mere procedural inconveniences, with Biya running virtually unopposed and with minimal risk of losing power.

Biya has cultivated a rent-seeking political class that remains loyal to his regime. By creating a system where political elites benefit from their allegiance to him, Biya ensures their support and minimises resistance to his rule. This patronage system further entrenches his power and perpetuates a culture of corruption and nepotism.

The lack of a united and consolidated opposition has played into Biya's hands. Internal divisions, personal rivalries and a lack of cohesive strategies have weakened opposition forces, making it easier for Biya to maintain his grip on power.

The Anglophone conflict, characterised by tensions and violence between the government and Anglophone regions, has allowed Biya to divert attention away from his misrule. By framing the conflict as a national security issue, he has effectively shifted the focus from his own governance failures to external threats, thereby further consolidating his power.

Biya has enjoyed support from foreign powers, notably France and more recently Russia, which have provided political and economic backing. This support has bolstered his regime's stability and reduced international pressure for political reforms.

The president has centralised power, creating a system where key decisions and policies are controlled by him. This concentration of power limits checks and balances, erodes democratic institutions and undermines governance accountability.

The consequences of Biya's prolonged stay in power are significant for Cameroon. The absence of political renewal and democratic transition have stifled political participation, hindered social and economic development, and perpetuated systemic corruption. The lack of accountability and transparency has eroded trust in the government, leading to social discontent and instability.

The consequences of his prolonged rule have had profound implications for Cameroon's political landscape, hindering democratic progress and impeding the country's development.

Addressing these challenges will require concerted efforts to foster genuine democratic reforms, promote inclusivity and restore trust in governance institutions.

HOW AUTHORITARIANS RIG DURING THE ELECTION

When authoritarian governments are unpopular, elections often see high levels of manipulation of both the voting process and the counting process. These typically fall into two main categories.

FIRST,

strategies are designed to depress the opposition vote. This can include efforts to keep voters away from polling stations in opposition areas, such as violence or disruption to transport routes, efforts to intimidate voters inside polling stations, such as a heavy military presence, and attempts to undermine the secrecy of the ballot.

SECOND,

where this does not work and governments appear to be heading for defeat, we also see a range of methods being used to manipulate the vote count itself, including burning or discarding opposition votes, ballot box stuffing and the deliberate miscounting of votes.

The most effective way to detect manipulation is to build a strong structure of party agents that can monitor elections from the polling

station all the way up to the national level. This is easier said than done, however, as it is an extremely costly and challenging logistical exercise. At least two party agents are required per polling station. In a country like Nigeria, which has almost 180 000 polling stations, that means recruiting, training and paying 360 000 people. Another problem is government interference. Governments generally want to avoid blatant electoral fraud, as it is more likely to be condemned and to trigger popular protests. This means they often engage in strategies designed to co-opt and/or intimidate opposition party agents to prevent them from collecting information. Some governments have also developed ingenious strategies over the years to try to mask rigging, such as creating new mobile phone apps that are designed to make it look like modern methods are being used to safeguard the vote, while in reality the system has been preprogrammed to deliver a government victory.

If opposition parties do not respond to these strategies effectively, they are likely to end up 'losing', even if they do everything else well. In developing strategies to fight back, it is critical that the opposition does not rely on digital election technology to do their job for them. Digital technology can help protect elections, but, in many cases, it is implemented by electoral commissions whose independence is questionable at best.

> **Opposition parties should therefore use the latest mobile phone and digital technology to co-ordinate their activities in order to generate their own sources of information and results in case formal processes and digital equipment are subverted.**

Winning requires planning ahead:

- Demand that results are released at the polling station level – this is the single most important issue when it comes to being able to expose election rigging.

- Build an effective party structure that includes the polling station level and makes it easier to identify potential agents who understand the locality for every polling station.
- Identify key threats to the electoral process and what indicators party agents and others can look for to demonstrate whether they are taking place.
- Build an effective and straightforward system that enables rapid communication between party headquarters and the polling station level.
- Always ensure that party structures and monitoring strategies can operate on a 'manual' basis to insulate them from internet shutdowns.
- Establish a team of legal experts to put together election complaints and petitions in advance of the campaign.

POLLING STATION ABUSES

In the last five years, there has been a significant increase in efforts to make voters feel unsafe at polling stations. This has included putting video cameras in polling stations in Russia, turning voting booths around so that they can be seen by party agents in Zimbabwe, and locating a large security presence or group of ruling party supporters near the entrance in Uganda.

Ugandan police officers sit on a truck at a polling station in Magere, Uganda, on 14 January 2021. Ugandans began voting in a tense election on 14 January 2021 under heavy security and an internet blackout as veteran leader Yoweri Museveni pursues a sixth term against a former pop star half his age. The internet went down on the eve of the vote, with some parts of the country reporting complete disruptions or significant slowdowns, after one of the most violent election campaigns in years. Photo: SUMY SADURNI/AFP via Getty Images

In some less wealthy countries, these strategies are made easier by the fact that citizens in rural areas often vote outside, filling out their ballot by bending down and placing it in a bucket, rather than standing behind a screen in a physical polling station. Tight scrutiny of who turns out to vote by traditional leaders and ruling party officials is also common in rural constituencies. One of the developments that has made this easier in recent years is the decreasing size of polling stations, which is often motivated by a desire to reduce the length of queues, but also makes it easier to see how certain villages and groups voted.

Under these conditions, it is easier to make voters fear that their ballot is not secret. This is important because it means they may fear retribution and because, if they have taken money from ruling party candidates, they may feel unable to ‘vote with their conscience’. It is therefore critical

that opposition parties effectively mobilise to minimise polling station abuses.

How to respond effectively to polling station abuses:

- Ensure that party agents operate in pairs so that someone is always present, and they are less likely to be co-opted by the ruling party.
- Pay party agents and supply them with food so that they feel valued and do not need to leave the polling station at any time.
- Test the loyalty of party agents through an exam that asks questions about party history, policies and leaders.
- Train party agents so that they understand the electoral rules and how the election is likely to be manipulated – there is no point in having party agents if they do not know when to intervene.
- Ensure that party agents are part of a centralised network so that any abuses can be quickly relayed up the system and presented to election observers, the electoral commission and international donors.
- Develop a system that can work manually or in hard copy form in case the government brings down the internet.

Opposition parties often struggle to respond to these strategies because it is difficult to recruit enough party agents and because they prefer to invest money in rallies and media campaigns rather than party agents. This is one reason that opposition parties often fail to collect the evidence they require to be able to demonstrate electoral manipulation. When opposition parties do invest in such structures, the outcome is often dramatic, because agents can immediately challenge problematic practices, such as efforts by electoral officials to influence voters. This is critical because election observers are not allowed to directly intervene in elections – their job is to record abuses, but they do not have the right to stop such abuses. Having party agents on hand who can immediately protest to the presiding officer and escalate concerns to party and electoral officials at the national level is therefore critical.

Electoral action in Ghana in 2016. Photo: American Embassy to Ghana (PDM 1.0)

In the Ghanaian election of 2016, for example, the opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP) used its extensive party networks to recruit tens of thousands of party agents. The NPP did this by running centralised courses to teach prospective agents the electoral rules, and then testing prospective candidates on key aspects of the electoral process, as well as their history of and loyalty to the party. In addition to taking measures to ensure the loyalty and suitability of party agents, the NPP established structures to make sure that they could stay in their polling station; for example, by having party members distribute food by bicycle. This enabled party agents to challenge polling station officials when they felt that an intimidatory atmosphere had been created. For example, when a group of ruling party 'foot soldiers' had formed around the entrance and exit to a polling station, opposition party agents pointed out to polling station staff that this was in contravention of electoral guidelines. Although the polling station was in a ruling party stronghold, the officials felt compelled to request the group to disband because there were also domestic and international observers present who would have recorded the incident if this action had not been taken.[16] In addition to enabling

NPP supporters to vote with greater confidence, this enabled the opposition to generate an almost complete set of results – which, in turn, increased the pressure on the electoral commission to announce that the ruling party had been defeated.

COUNTRY EXAMPLE

SIERRA LEONE

DEMOCRATIC DECLINE IN SIERRA LEONE

by Sherif Ismail

Poster image shows President Julius Maada Bio of Sierra Leona on an official visit to Kigali in 2019. Photo: Flickr/Paul Kagame (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

After eleven years (1991 to 2002) of a violent civil war, Sierra Leone succeeded in less than a decade to make significant progress in restoring its democratic credentials and be referred to as the third most peaceful country in West Africa.[1] Given the progress that the country was making, in 2014 the United

Nations closed its mission, the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone, satisfied that the country was out of the post-conflict trajectory. The then secretary general of the UN, Ban Ki-moon, noted that 'Sierra Leone represents one of the world's most successful cases of post-conflict recovery, peacekeeping and peace building … Here we have seen great strides towards peace, stability and long-term development.'

Between 2002 and 2018, the country established institutions, systems and laws to strengthen democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Institutions such as the Anti-Corruption Commission, the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone, the Political Parties Registration Commission and the Office of National Security were established and strengthened. These developments allowed the country to hold four democratic elections without relapsing to violence. It allowed for the democratic transfer of power from the government to the opposition in 2007 and in 2018. Addressing the African Union in 2015, President Barrack Obama stated that Sierra Leone was one of the countries in West Africa where democracy had taken root.[2]

The events that followed the 2018 elections have to a large extent succeeded in undermining the democratic gains that Sierra Leone had made. On ascending the presidency, Brigadier (Rtd) Julius Maada Bio embarked on the intimidation and harassment of the leadership of the All People's Congress (APC), which became the main opposition after the elections. Bio focused on an ethno-regionalised approach to politics, which divided the country and heightened tension between the northwest, the stronghold of the APC, and the southeast, the stronghold of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP).

Furthermore, commissions of inquiry were initiated against those who served in the previous administration. The intention was to delegitimise all the work of that administration.

Of primary concern was the instrumentalisation of the institutions of state by the government, principal among which was the use of the police, the military and the judiciary to intimidate and punish members of the opposition and others who were critical of the actions of the government. There have been multiple instances of human rights abuses, including brutal repression of peaceful demonstrations in the country.[3] APC leaders and supporters, as well as media and civil society practitioners, frequently face arrest and detention. The violence was intensified during the 2023 electioneering process. Eventually, the incumbent was unable to gain the votes required to avoid a first-round victory during these elections.[4] However, the chief electoral commissioner of the Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone declared Bio the winner of the presidential elections. This was an unpopular move, condemned by both internal and external observers of the process, including the diplomatic community in the country.[5] Among the reactions was one by the US, which placed a travel ban on key government officials who were accused of undermining the democratic process in Sierra Leone.[6]

The APC rejected the results and refused to participate in government. Thus, the government and the APC had to resort to a dialogue facilitated by international actors, including the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States and the Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion. A tripartite committee has been established, consisting of the government, the APC and international actors, to look into the 2023 elections as well as

other previous electoral cycles and other concerns of the APC. It is unclear as to what the implications would be if the APC is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigations of the committee.

In the interim, the toxic political environment that exists in the country has undermined trust and the potential for constructive inter-party engagements, which are critical in democratic settings. Things have deteriorated to a point that the widely regarded former president Ernest Bai Koroma was forced out of the country following allegations of his involvement in a coup in November 2023, which he denies and many believe was politically motivated.[7] Thus, it is unclear as to what the future holds for Sierra Leone, and what can be done to reverse the current trend, and rebuild the democratic credential and prospects of the country.

[1] Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Peace Index 2015,* https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/192583/Global-Peace-Index-Report-2015_0.pdf.
[2] 'Text of President Obama's Remarks at the African Union', *Voice of America*, 28 July 2015, https://www.voanews.com/a/text-of-president-obamas-remarks-at-the-african-union-/2881236.html.
[3] Afolabi Adekaiyaoja, 'Uncertain Future for Sierra Leone's Democracy', *CDD*, 30 June 2023, https://www.cddwestafrica.org/blog/uncertain-future-for-sierra-leone-s-democracy/.
[4] Adekaiyaoja, 'Uncertain Future for Sierra Leone's Democracy'.
[5] 'Joint Statement by U.S., UK, Ireland, Germany, France and EU Delegation', *Twitter*, https://twitter.com/USEmbFreetown/status/1674075264504963073?s=20.
[6] 'Visa Restriction Policy on Undermining the Democratic Process in Sierra Leone', *U.S. Embassy in Sierra Leone*, 1 September 2023, https://sl.usembassy.gov/visa-restriction-policy-on-undermining-the-democratic-process-in-sierra-leone/.
[7] Ray Hartley and Greg Mills, 'The Smell of Vengeance: Former Sierra Leone Leader Ernest Bai Koroma Charged with Treason', *The Brenthurst Foundation*, 8 January 2024, https://www.thebrenthurstfoundation.org/news/the-smell-of-vengeance-former-sierra-leone-leader-ernest-bai-koroma-charged-with-treason/.

ELECTORAL FRAUD

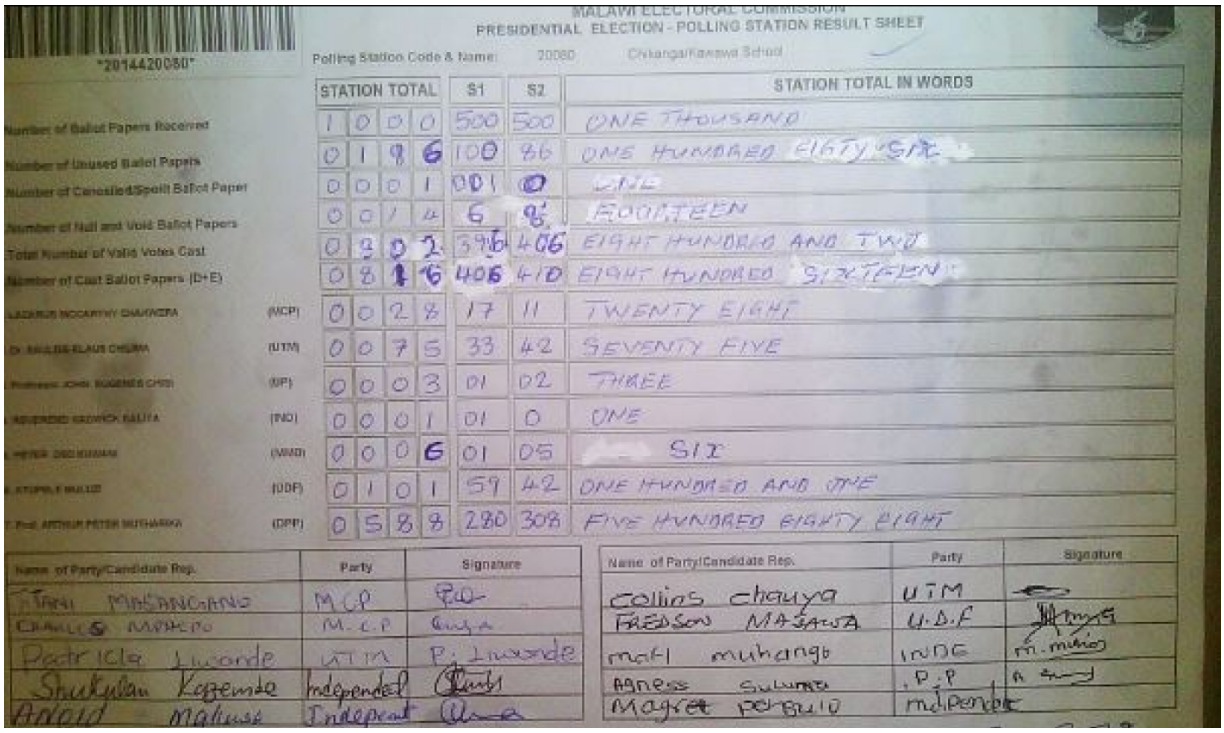
Exactly how electoral fraud is committed depends on the electoral system and the extent to which the government fears defeat. In more subtle cases, governments seek to artificially inflate their tally during the tallying process when polling station votes are aggregated at the national level. This occurred in Kenya in 2007, when votes were added to the tally of President Mwai Kibaki in two constituencies between the results being counted at that level and being formally announced at the national level, giving him just enough votes to win.

In the most egregious cases, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2018 and Belarus 2020, the real results are set aside, and a fake version is created for presentation to the public and the international community. In the DRC, for example, the 2018 election was won by opposition candidate Martin Fayulu. Having failed to effectively manipulate the polls, and having seen its own candidate perform so badly that it was unfeasible to claim he had won, the ruling party concocted an imaginative scam to retain political control. The government proceeded to offer the ‘opposition’ candidate who came second, Félix Tshisekedi, a deal: the government would fix the election in his favour in return for guarantees that senior government figures and the outgoing president, Joseph Kabila, would have their interests and influence protected under a Tshisekedi administration.

DRC opposition candidate Martin Fayulu. Photo: Mclums (CC BY-SA 4.0)

This required the widespread fasciation of the results. The DRC had utilised digital technology during the election, so the electoral commission had an accurate set of figures at its disposal, but instead invented a new set of results that were completely implausible in light of pre-election opinion polls. This was understood by those watching the elections closely but was not explicitly exposed. Although church groups had done a reasonable job of domestic observation and had collected results that demonstrated the result was fraudulent, they were too scared to release them – in part, because key international powers seemed willing to go along with the pretence, and so were unlikely to take measures to protect civic groups who spoke up. As a result, the parallel tally was never released, and a wholly flawed election outcome was allowed to stand.

How rigging is conducted also depends on how much control the government has over the electoral commission. When the entire commission is allied to the government, all forms of fraud are possible. But when the ruling party can only really control the electoral commission in its own areas, the possibilities for rigging become more localised. In these countries, we sometimes see more egregious manipulation at the polling station level than in the national tally. In Malawi and Uganda, for example, elections have often been manipulated at the polling station level, with ballots added to the tally of the president and Tipp-Ex (correction fluid) used to ‘remove’ votes for opposition candidates. A number of cases of multiple voting and underage voting have also been recorded over the past decade, as well as voting by citizens from neighbouring countries. The use of digital verification software to ensure that voters are on the electoral register – and that they only vote once – can help with this. But technology is no panacea because there are many examples in which such equipment has ‘gone down’ at crucial moments in elections, during which it often transpires that large numbers of votes were cast for the ruling party. In Kenya’s 2013 general elections, for example, domestic observers found that digital verification equipment had failed at some point during election day in more than half of all polling stations.



A results sheet from the Chiradzulu district in the southern region of the country shows signs of white-out. Photo: Malawi Election Commission

How to respond effectively to electoral fraud:

- Use WhatsApp or develop an app that party agents can use to feed results and copies of results forms into a central system, so that these can easily be tallied to create a parallel vote tally.
- Avoid making outlandish claims about what your vote tally says – especially at an early stage in the process – as this can undermine your credibility.
- Ensure that a copy of all data collected is saved securely to the cloud or outside of the country, so that it can be easily accessed and shared by party representatives outside of the country if party agents are targeted or there is an internet shutdown.
- Provide focused, credible and evidenced updates of the parallel tally and evidence of electoral fraud to international donors, observers and more friendly members of the electoral commission through private briefings to increase the cost to the government and the electoral commission of releasing fraudulent results.
- Start compiling electoral petitions over key positions well *before* polling day, as there is not enough time to do this thoroughly once ballots have been cast.

The DRC example demonstrates a number of points that are important to keep in mind when thinking about how to resist electoral fraud. One is that neither digital technology nor the presence of international observers and domestic monitors effectively safeguards the vote. Opposition parties therefore need to do it for themselves, which means using the system of party agents described above to collect a full set of results from every polling station and taking pictures of the results forms to prove that they are real. This does not mean that there is no value in pushing for the adoption of digital technology – the biometric verification of voters in polling stations can reduce the number of abuses. But it is very dangerous to rely on technology that is under the control of compromised electoral officials on election day, when the pressure on them is greatest and there is hardly any time available to rectify any errors.

> **That means that opposition parties should develop their own technology to make it possible to record and share as complete a set of results as possible.**

This strategy worked effectively for opposition parties in Ghana in 2016, as discussed above, and in Zambia in 2021. One advantage of conducting a parallel vote tabulation digitally is that it becomes easier to save a copy of the results and accompanying evidence to the cloud and with party officials in other countries. This is particularly important because otherwise the ruling party can send the security forces to raid the offices of opposition parties and domestic monitors and destroy their materials, as occurred in Zimbabwe in 2023.

It is critical to keep in mind that while digital technology can make the work of safeguarding the vote quicker and easier, it is not the technology that does the heavy lifting in these cases. Mobile phone apps are

important aides, but only if opposition parties have agents and representatives at every level of the vote counting and tallying process.

> **Defeating voter fraud is therefore just as much about forming effective party structures and recruiting party activists today as it was before the advent of digital technology.**

It is also essential to make sure that digital processes have a manual backup in case governments implement an internet shutdown, which is becoming increasingly common in parts of the world such as sub-Saharan Africa. In the 2021 election in Zambia, for example, the opposition UPND employed a manual backup process, which meant that they could still collate a full set of data even if its online processes were sabotaged.

None of this is possible, however, if results are not released at the polling station level. Without lower-level results, it is not feasible to create a parallel tally to contrast with the official national level results presented by the electoral commission. It is therefore important to push as hard as possible for results to be released at the polling station level, with copies of the signed results forms posted on the wall and given to party agents. Any attempt by the government to remove this provision ahead of an election should be resisted in the strongest possible terms, as it is some of the clearest evidence available that the regime is planning electoral fraud.

A critical final point is that most constitutions allow a very short time frame for election complaints to be filed – sometimes as little as one or two weeks. This means it can be extremely difficult to put together the necessary documentation and build a strong case. Opposition parties should therefore have their legal teams start to put together a petition for the most important contests well before polling day. When facing an authoritarian government, the assumption should always be that the

election will be manipulated, and therefore will need to be legally contested. Starting early means there is a much greater chance that the petitions that are produced will be effective. Even in cases where opposition parties have lost confidence in the ability of the courts to deliver justice, it is still worth putting this document together, because it can play a critical role in persuading observers, civil society groups, citizens and the international community that an election was flawed, building support for reform and increasing the prospect of less manipulated elections in the future.

[1] 'Senegal Dissolves Party of Opposition Leader Sonko', *Al Jazeera*, 31 July 2023, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/7/31/senegal-dissolves-party-of-opposition-leader-sonko.

[2] Nic Cheeseman and Brian Klaas, *How to Rig an Election*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018.

[3] Ali Riaz, 'What Bangladesh's Widely Boycotted Election Reveals about Its Future', *Atlantic Council*, 18 January 2024, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/what-bangladeshs-widely-boycotted-election-reveals-about-its-future/.

[4] Matthew Frankel, 'Threaten but Participate: Why Election Boycotts Are a Bad Idea', Foreign Policy at Brookings, Policy Paper Number 19, March 2010, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/02_election_boycotts_frankel.pdf.

[5] Mieke Löhrer, 'LGBTQ+ Access to Political Power', *V-Dem*, 27 June 2024, https://v-dem.net/gow.html.

[6] See https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-deep-dive-the-state-of-internet-adoption.

[7] 'Why India's Election Is the Most Expensive in the World', *The Economist*, 11 May 2024, https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2024/05/11/why-indias-election-is-the-most-expensive-in-the-world.

[8] Portia Roelofs, 'Beyond Programmatic versus Patrimonial Politics: Contested Conceptions of Legitimate Distribution in Nigeria', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 57(3): 415–436, 2019.

[9] Cheeseman and Klaas, *How to Rig an Election*.

[10] Cheeseman and Klaas, *How to Rig an Election*.

[11] Nic Cheeseman, 'African Elections as Vehicles for Change', *Journal of Democracy* 21(4): 139–153, 2010, https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/african-elections-as-vehicles-for-change/.

[12] 'Voting Laws Roundup: June 2023', *Brennan Center for Justice*, 14 June 2023, https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/voting-laws-roundup-june-2023.

[13] Cheeseman and Klaas, *How to Rig an Election*.

[14] Cheeseman and Klaas, *How to Rig an Election*.

[15] Cheeseman and Klaas, *How to Rig an Election*.

[16] Nic Cheeseman, Personal Observation, Ho, Ghana, 2016.

PART 2

How to WIN AN ELECTION

by **RAY HARTLEY**
Research Director, The Brenthurst Foundation

by **PAULA ROQUE**
Author and Senior Analyst on Southern Africa

The political analyst Jeff Greenfield said, 'There is no such thing as paranoia in politics, because they really are out to get you.'[1] This is critical to understanding election contests in Africa, where the full spectrum of rigging, violence and intimidation can be seen when the people are asked to vote.

There are very different experiences in different countries, so advice on how to approach an election contest must be read in context. In Uganda, for example, the security forces are used to kill, intimidate and harass the opposition before, during and after voting. And social media is closed down, with state control of media messaging enforced. In such an environment, as Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, the leader of the National Unity Platform, has experienced, it takes immense courage and conviction to campaign.

In Uganda and Angola, recent elections have shown that achieving a majority is not sufficient, as the outcome can be manipulated by the state to keep the ruling party in power. Strategies of mobilising international support from diplomats and human rights organisations, parallel result tabulation and intense media focus have to be adopted to counteract this.

> **In other countries such as Zambia, achieving a high voter turnout and a resounding victory made it impossible for the authorities to interfere – another vital lesson.**

What this section seeks to do is to lay out the basics of election campaigning as a guide for leaders and supporters of parties who value democracy and the sanctity of the electoral process. It includes the experiences of countries where opposition parties and movements have succeeded in trying environments.

SETTING PRIORITIES AND CONSTRUCTING A CAMPAIGN PLAN

While it is counterproductive to over-bureaucratise party structures, it is essential that there is a campaign management team that consists of senior leaders and is empowered to make decisions about events, speeches, the placement of leaders at events, advertising and the media. This campaign management team must have the seniority to make quick decisions, especially when it comes to responding to high-level events, such as acts of repression.

THE CAMPAIGN MANAGEMENT TEAM SHOULD CONSIST OF AT LEAST THE FOLLOWING:

- The party leader or his nominee with executive power;
- The head of the party's election media unit (more below);
- The party lawyer or internal legal expert;
- The party's representative on electoral commission structures, if such exist; and
- The party's events co-ordinator.

The inclusion of a legal specialist is critical, especially in environments where the courts might be called on to intervene due to repression or a breach of electoral law of the constitution, which frequently occurs when authoritarians attempt to rig elections.

This team should meet daily, and even twice daily, as the election date approaches, receiving reports from all members.

> **The emphasis should be on short, punchy inputs and quick decisions.**

You do not want your key players sitting for hours in meetings, when they should be engaged in campaigning.

The central task of this committee – well before the election – is to devise a clear campaign strategy and an implementation road map. The committee must also devise the party's key message for the election campaign and approve the party's narrative (more below).

Developing a campaign plan is not just a matter of sitting in room and brainstorming what you should do over the election. Brainstorming is valuable, and it is good to hear all the voices in the room, but it is nothing without a solid foundation in data.

Before devising a campaign, the management team needs to map the terrain.

KEY QUESTIONS FOR THE PARTY, AND FOR ITS OPPONENTS, INCLUDE:

- What is the geographic spread of support?
- What is the demographic spread of support?
- What are the 'bankable constituencies' that are loyal to the party?
- What are the 'swing constituencies' that might change their vote from another party to yours?
- Where are these swing voters and who are they in demographic terms?
- What are the key concerns of the bankable base and the swing constituencies?

Having a clear identity and message is critical to campaigning and must be the first priority when developing a campaign plan.

Every use of campaign resources – on social media, in traditional media and even with posters and T-shirts – must be targeted at reaching concentrations of voters who can be persuaded to vote for you.

Precious commodities that must be allocated efficiently include:

TIME

There are only so many hours in the day and decisions about where leaders campaign should be made to maximise impact. This is particularly so with the party leader who is likely to attract more people to rallies.

MONEY

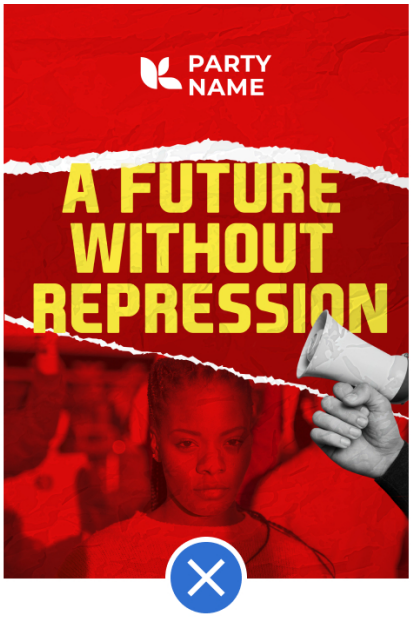
The management of often limited financial resources requires strong leadership. How money should be raised, spent and accounted for is critical to a successful targeted campaign.

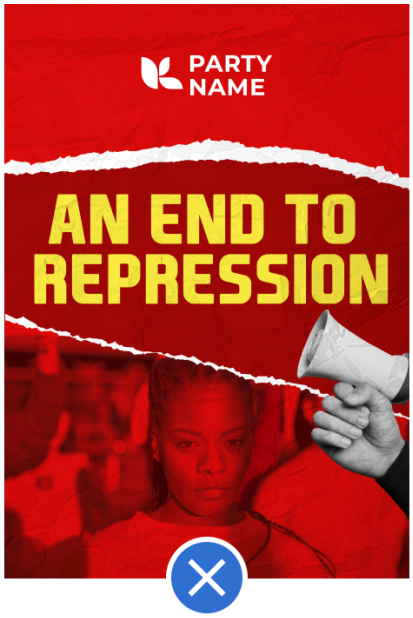
MEDIA SPACE

The presence of party leaders on social media should be built and campaigns should be driven aggressively with frequent posts. Traditional media advertising should be secured where possible.

> **A strong, clear message is essential. So, too, is a strong, clear identity.**

What is the one line that is best able to communicate what the party stands for and what resonates with voters? In general, it is best to avoid negatives (‘An End to Repression’) and to focus on positives (‘A Future without Repression’).





There is a long tradition of election sloganeering, and it is advisable to look at how parties in other countries have campaigned successfully.

Two recent messages used in US politics stand out. Barack Obama's slogan **'Yes We Can'** spoke to the possibility of making a change following a long period of Republican dominance. Donald Trump's **'Make America Great Again'** – borrowed from Ronald Reagan decades earlier – spoke to a desire by Americans to turn around the mounting perception that the country was drifting and unable to assert itself.

Although from very different personalities and with very different agendas, these two slogans have several things in common. They are both positive and hopeful, looking to the future. They both include the voter and make them part of the campaign. They would have been much weaker if they had been, for example, 'Yes I Can' or 'I Will Make America Great Again'.

They are also both brief and to the point. It is notable that Obama's real campaign slogan was 'Change We Can Believe In', but this was quickly overtaken by the 'Yes We Can' slogan used on posters. The trouble with slogans that are developed by committees is that they can often become long and unwieldy, as every party wants their point included. No one ever won an election using a laundry list. Understand that an encapsulating electoral slogan is not your full platform, it is a message that conveys a direct sense of what you are striving for and inspires hope.

The most important decision you will make in constructing a campaign plan is to identify the issues that will underpin your message to voters.

The key is to communicate around issues rather than generalisations about what your party stands for, as this makes for a more direct interaction with voters and speaks to what they are encountering in their daily experiences.

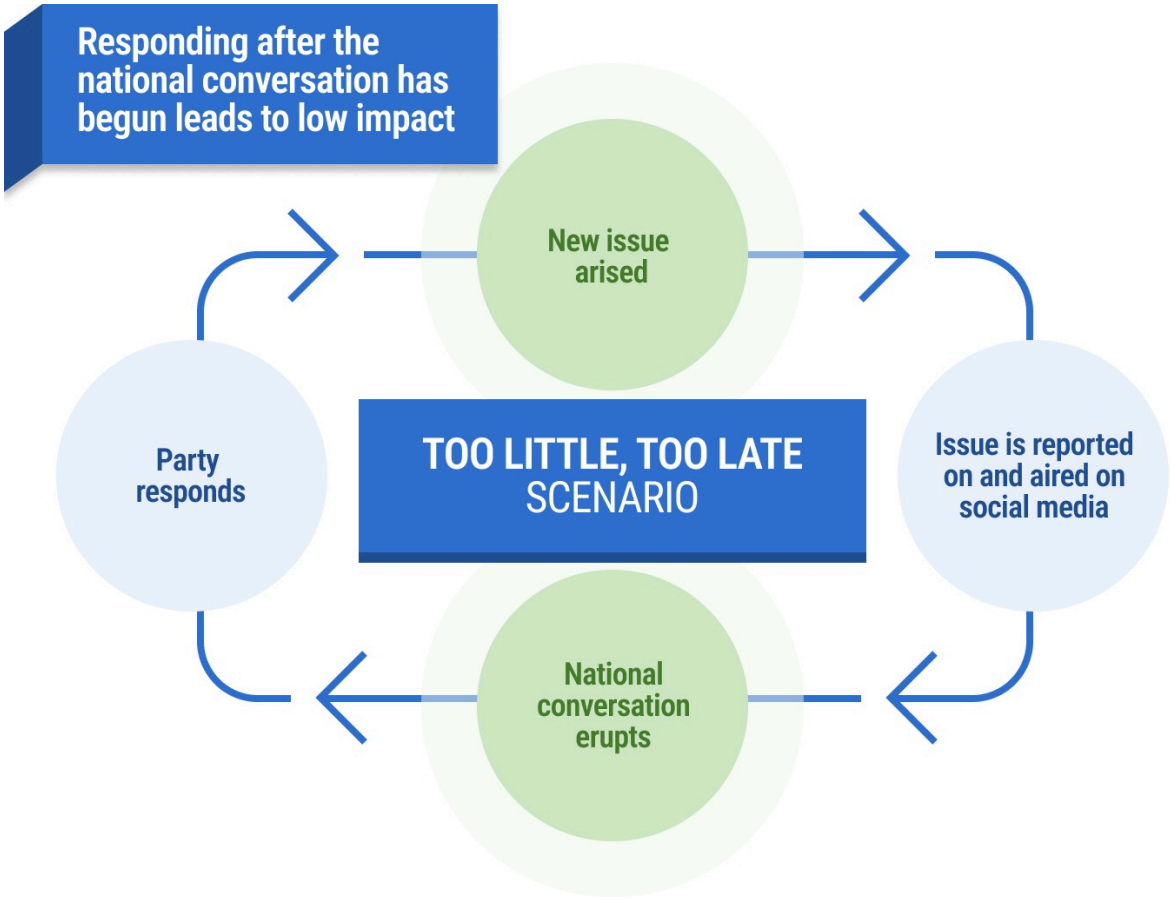
HOW ARE SUCH 'ISSUES' DEFINED?

Issues arise when events occur that impact on the lives of ordinary citizens. These range from high-profile events, such as an act of violence by the security authorities, to lower-profile events, such as the failure to provide adequately for a drought by assisting farmers.

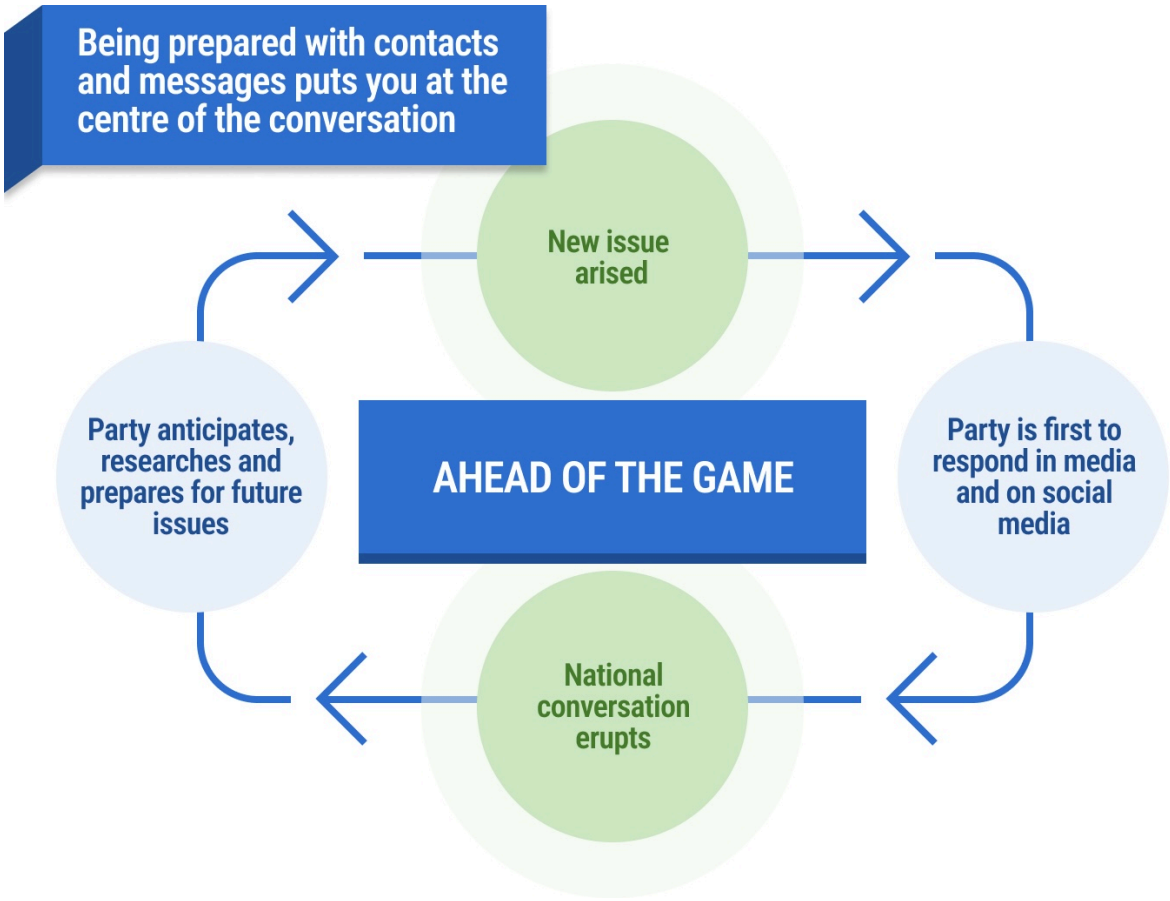
In all cases, the party must be prepared, ahead of time, to pick up on the issue and offer criticism, along with proposing an immediate solution and

a policy position that would prevent further instances of the problem.

It is vital that party communicators are well prepared in advance to handle issues as they arise with speed, so that they are able to insert the party's perspective into the public debate while it is still 'hot' in the media and on social media.



The above illustration shows how parties fail to dominate the national conversation because they are reacting to events and issues after the fact. Social media has vastly increased the rate at which issues arise in the national conversation, and responding afterwards with reactive commentary leads to a weak messaging impact.



By anticipating issues and preparing in advance, parties are able to be the first in the public domain with messages on social media and to comment in the traditional media. This enables them to help set the national conversation and get the party's messaging across.

THE PREPARATION PROCESS REQUIRES:

- A team within the party that is dedicated to anticipating which issues may arise;
- Building strong relationships with reporters and editors in the traditional media and with key influencers in the social media space; and
- Preparing media for all platforms for release ahead of time.

COUNTRY EXAMPLE

SENEGAL

YET ANOTHER CHANGEOVER AT THE BALLOT BOX IN SENEGAL

by Pape Samba Kane

The poster image shows a protest against Senegal's crackdown on the opposition, in London on 20 May 2023. Photo: Flickr/Alisdare Hickson (CC BY-SA 2.0)

On 24 March 2024, Senegal elected its fifth president, Bassirou Diomaye Faye, aged just 44 (the youngest president in the country's history). He was the candidate of the opposition party, PASTEF (African Patriots of Senegal for Work, Ethics and Fraternity).

Not since the country's independence in 1960 has Senegal experienced such a turbulent presidential election, with weeks of tension and chaos caused by the incumbent president's

attempts to postpone the vote. This successful changeover is all the more exemplary. According to some observers, it is also a message to the peoples of the sub-region, and in particular to the youth, who make up the overwhelming majority: changeover is possible through the ballot box.

PASTEF is supported by a large section of the youth, who make up the vast majority of the population, and by the Senegalese diaspora. Social media played a crucial role in that party's opening up to the masses and in the approach to political events in the last three years in Senegal by the youth.

Before the vote, PASTEF's leader, Ousmane Sonko, and his second-in-command, Diomaye, were both in prison on serious charges, including 'undermining state security' and 'contempt of court', but this did nothing to deter their support base.

On the eve of the start of the election campaign, President Macky Sall signed a decree repealing the decree that set the election date for 25 February 2024. A week later, the French Constitutional Council ruled that the decree was unconstitutional. This made it materially impossible to hold the election on 25 February.

Confusion reigned in the country, as the deadline for the end of the president's last term of office, 2 April 2024, drew closer, and no date had been set for the election.

President Sall called for a 'national dialogue' on 26 and 27 February, in order, he said, to set an 'agreed-upon' date for the election. In his speech at the end of the dialogue, the president announced that he would introduce an amnesty law for all offences and crimes related to political events that took place between 1 February 2021 and 25 February 2024. The first consequence of this law was the release from prison of his

staunch opponent, Sonko, whose candidacy had not been approved, and of Diomaye, secretary general of PASTEF, whom Sonko himself had nominated as his party's presidential candidate. Diomaye, who was in pre-trial detention and had not yet been convicted, had obtained the approval of the Constitutional Council for his candidacy.

The proposals resulting from the 'dialogue' (complete resumption of the electoral process and holding of the ballot on 2 June 2024) were being challenged before the Constitutional Council by 18 of the 19 presidential candidates. They won their case on 6 March. In the same ruling, the Council set a date for the ballot: 31 March. But the head of state, who has the exclusive prerogative to convene the electoral body, had proposed the date of 24 March.

The problem was that the electoral code provides for three weeks of campaigning, and there were only two weeks between the president's expected decree and 24 March. Despite this, the opposition did not boycott the election, and many of its leaders rallied behind the PASTEF candidate.

Despite the fears of some, on 24 March, Senegalese voters went to the polls, and Senegal experienced its third peaceful political changeover. Bassirou Diomaye Faye was elected in the first round, with over 54% of the vote (a first in the country's political history as far as an opposition candidate is concerned). The ruling party candidate obtained 35%, and the third-placed candidate came in at 3%.

With all its twists and turns, the March presidential election proved that democracy in Senegal is solid, with real institutional checks and balances; notably, the Constitutional Council; political leaders from the majority and the opposition

who accepted the verdict of the ballot box; and an army that respects the republican tradition of non-intervention in the political arena.

According to some observers, Diomaye's victory is a wake-up call for the traditional political class. The opposition had succeeded in turning the presidential election into a kind of referendum on President Sall's policies. Amadou Bâ's chances as the ruling party's candidate were very slim in the face of the opposition's determination and the Senegalese people's need for change.

During his election campaign, the new president promised to 'govern with humility and transparency, and to fight corruption at all levels'. A speech such as this certainly attracted the support of the masses, who experience daily challenges of poverty and vulnerability.

DEVELOPING A NARRATIVE

In the age of social media, narrative has become more important than ever. Narrative is the 'story' that a party tells to convince voters that its claim to governance makes sense. It is not just about saying what you will do once in power, although this is vital; it is about telling a story of how you got to where are today and how you will go forward.

A narrative demonstrates that your party is not opportunistically seizing on contradictory issues but is coherent and trustworthy and has been consistent in its approach to key issues.

> **Voters are far more likely to support a party that has a strong narrative arc, telling a convincing story of dedication, resilience and preparedness to govern.**

A NARRATIVE ARC MUST HAVE THESE ELEMENTS THAT ARE CONSISTENTLY COMMUNICATED ON ALL PLATFORMS:

- **An 'origins' story:** In the case of a party, this is the story of how and why it was formed. This can also be applied to a leader, who will say why they entered politics. Many opposition parties have a clear origins story as they were founded to fight against an oppressive system.
- **A record of struggle:** This is the story of the party's campaigns, its trials and tribulations as it engaged in struggle to bring about a free society. This should include a record of state repression and the repression experienced by leaders. This section of the narrative must include the role of past leaders and icons of the struggle for democracy who are associated with the party.
- **A record of success:** This should be the story of where the party has succeeded – grown its electoral support against all odds or perhaps governed in cities or provinces.
- **A future trajectory story:** Building on the above, this is a projection of how the party will govern, if possible, drawing on examples of where it has governed in the past. Such an account should be as specific as possible.

A detailed narrative or 'history of the party' should be written both as a public document accessible on the party website and on other public platforms such as Wikipedia. This detailed story should form the basis for storytelling at other levels, including op-eds in the traditional media and social media postings and videos. This leads to a consistent repetition of the party narrative and ensures that the message is strengthened and free of contradictions.

As important as the story is, it has to be told well to make an impact.

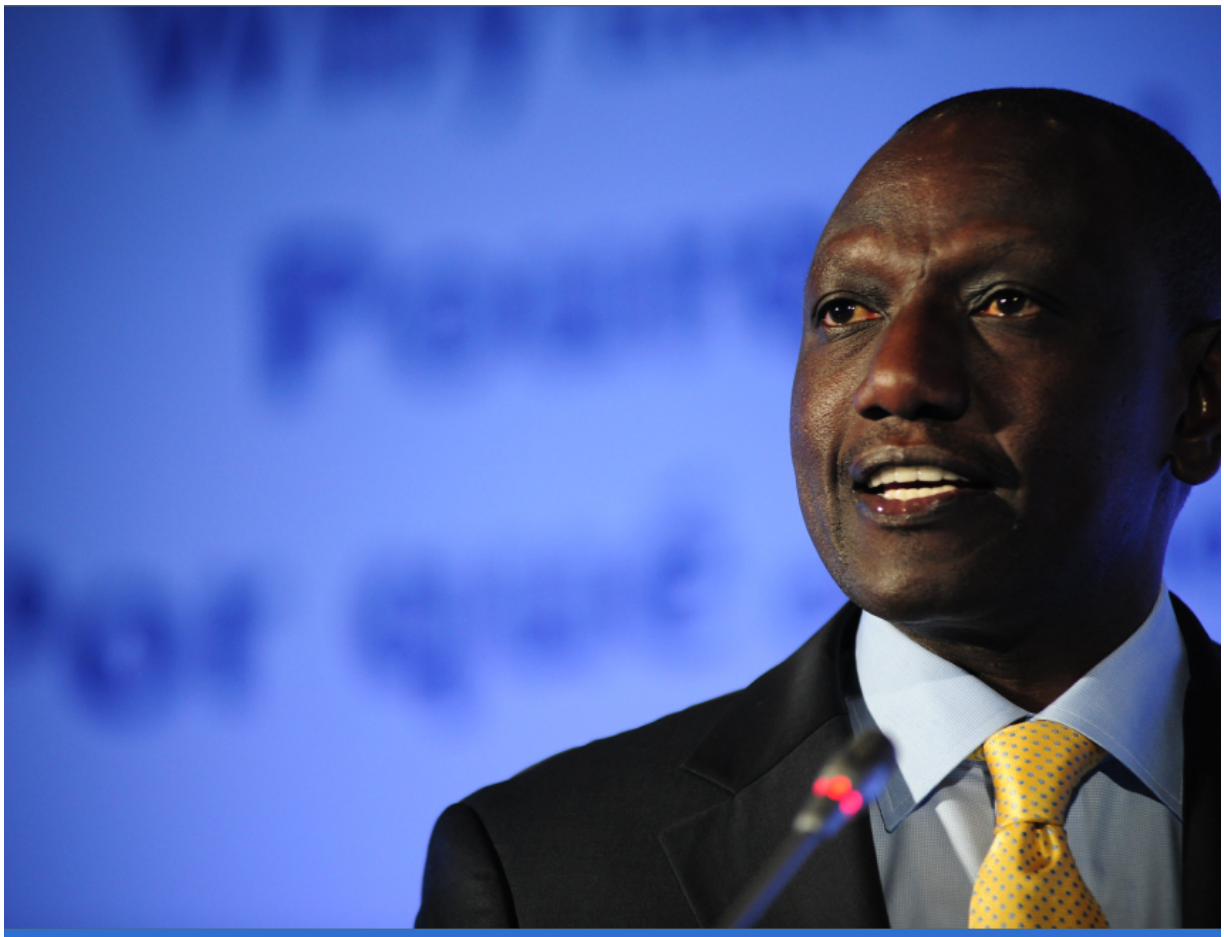
Stories are not told by committees but by individuals, whether they be speaking at an event or in an interview with the media. How these individuals understand and project the party narrative is vital to its authenticity and its credibility.

HERE ARE SOME KEY GUIDELINES:

- **Understand your audience:** Pitching your narrative correctly is vital if you are to make a connection with your audience. If you are addressing an audience before a music festival, this would not be a good time to explain how you arrived at your fiscal policy. Such an occasion calls for informality.
- **Be yourself:** Political leaders often feel the need to adopt a public persona that they believe is more effective at communicating. This can undermine the message because they become just another cardboard, cut-out politician. In this kind of messaging, the party can do no wrong and there have never been mistakes or missteps. This can turn voters. Rather be yourself, be comfortable with who you are and speak from your heart. This means including personal anecdotes and acknowledging mistakes and making sure to explain how these have been corrected. Being 'vulnerable, authentic and truthful' is key to building trust.[2]
- **Use metaphors:** Using metaphors – expressions that illustrate something with identifiable examples – makes for a more powerful story. Rather than saying: 'The opposition has fought for democracy for decades,' you could say: 'The tide of democracy has been rising for decades and soon the waves of change will wash away the old order.'

Also important is to acknowledge the counterview and the successes of those who might now be opponents in the fight for democracy and accountability. In South Africa, the African National Congress brought political freedom in 1994, but it is now plunging the country into economic decline, corruption and lawlessness. In Uganda, President Yoweri Museveni liberated the country from tyranny in 1986, but, in his fourth decade of rule, he is now imposing his own tyranny.

Acknowledging the role of Nelson Mandela and of Museveni (back then) does not weaken your narrative but adds depth and honesty and avoids the trap of propaganda.



COUNTRY EXAMPLE

KENYA

HOW TO WIN PROPERLY

by John Githongo

Poster image shows Kenya's President William Ruto in 2014. Photo: World Trade Organisation (CC BY-SA 2.0)

The reintroduction of multi-party politics in Kenya in 1992 transformed the country's politics and economy. By 2024, after seven election cycles since the polls in December 1992 and two constitutional referendums in 2005 and 2010, Kenya has seen three heads of state retire peacefully from executive

political leadership. These transitions were once the things Africans did really badly.

Elections are an efficient way to effect these critical changes. Elections in developing countries closely resemble those in more mature democracies in terms of organisation and spending at the national level. But elections play out dramatically differently among the electorate in Africa, except in rapidly growing cities where voters are more aligned with voting behaviour in the West and have more access to social media. Ironically, elections in Africa are more expensive than in most Western countries. Those who plan elections generate their initial budgets in dollars, not in the local currency. The financing of these elections is a combination of funding from the private sector and political actors mobilising resources.

There are other factors that come into play in order to win an election. The first is to avoid close elections because these are contentious due to still-developing election management and judicial systems. It helps to win an overwhelming majority of the popular vote – preferably over 60%. Close elections usually mean large sections of particular population groups have rejected the winner. These demographics are either largely urban or largely rural, or comprise ethnic, racial or other identity groups. In Africa, the youth vote is key. Rational sloganeering is not enough to attract youthful voters; they are more like to respond to something more like a free concert and retail items. A massive grassroots campaign – public meetings and rallies – must traverse the country and be as entertaining as possible.

Second, a healthy dose of populism is needed to achieve over 60% of the vote, unless you are a conglomeration of opposition parties contesting the election against a long-

serving unpopular incumbent. Even if the fight against corruption is at the heart of your agenda, the pitch is often aimed at and articulated against a specific group/s.

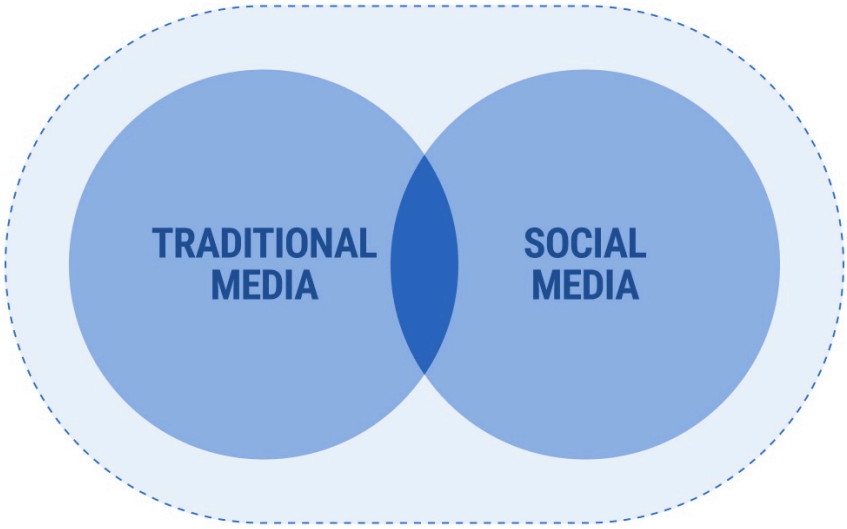
This total domination of the political narrative is key up to the point you announce that you have won. The issues that your election campaign represents must correspond with the ones the electorate believe are key to their prosperous and peaceful future. It is also important to ensure the mainstream media highlights your campaign issues in setting and dominating the national conversation regarding the election and change in general. In addition, it is essential to factor in a digital campaign ensure that urban youthful voters are also included.

EFFECTIVE USE OF THE MEDIA

A coherent and detailed strategy for dealing with the media should be developed to ensure that the party message is effectively communicated to the public at all times.

In highly repressive societies, the domestic media is likely to be state controlled through direct ownership or through laws limiting the freedom of speech. In such environments, the use of social media becomes the most effective tool.

In societies where there is some freedom of expression, traditional platforms, such as television and newspapers, should be used alongside social media.



The first rule of successful media engagement is the development of a professional, disciplined media unit within the party that is well schooled in the party narrative, and which consists of people who are suited to public engagement. Choosing the right people is critical because a lot of damage can be done by one negative intervention or one wrong message on social media. This is not a place for aggressive, confrontational people.

THIS MEDIA UNIT SHOULD, TO SIMPLIFY, BE MADE UP OF:

- A command unit that meets daily and makes decisions on releases, responses and interviews. This team should be composed of a senior party leader and a member of each of the following teams.
- A monitoring team that gathers all commentary on the party and its leaders and submits a daily report ahead of the command meeting. This team can also collect information on opponents and their commentary and alert the unit to fake news that must be contested.
- An editorial writing team that produces copy and submits this to the command unit for editing and distribution. Such copy must be produced constantly at a high tempo during an election campaign and can range from a brief statement on an issue that has arisen to an agenda-setting announcement.
- A spokesperson or persons who are assigned to engage directly with the media, again at a high tempo and with regular contact, preferably by phone

call or in person. These people must be available 24/7 and always take calls.
- A social media manager who deals with producing content from posts to videos and distributes this via social media while also building a network of influencers.

While a media unit is essential, it remains vital that leaders are accessible to and take calls from journalists, regardless of their political affiliation.

> **Building strong personal relationships with journalists at the highest level is crucial...**

...and following this up by taking their calls and devoting time to speaking with them is critical if you wish to properly communicate your message.

Include editors, news editors and political editors in this contact-building process. This also applies to those who openly oppose you. You want your message to be carried, but you also want your critics to temper their criticism.

> **In the words of Andrew Solomon: 'It is nearly impossible to hate anyone whose story you know.'**

It is vital that this committee understands and maps the news cycle. Newspapers work on deadlines, completing early pages during the day and leaving the front page and perhaps one or two others for completion in the evening. Unless you are very confident that your story is front-page news, there is no point in getting it to a journalist late in the day. Working with traditional media means that your day starts early, and you

communicate with journalists and newsrooms well before deadline, or you will be wasting your time.

This map of traditional media deadlines should be placed prominently on the wall of the media unit office. Alongside it should be the names and contact numbers of key journalists and, vitally important, of all news editors.

In an emergency late in the day, it is the news editor and sometimes, the night news editor, who will be your first port of call, as your journalist contacts might have already called it a day.

CONTESTING THE DIGITAL SPACE

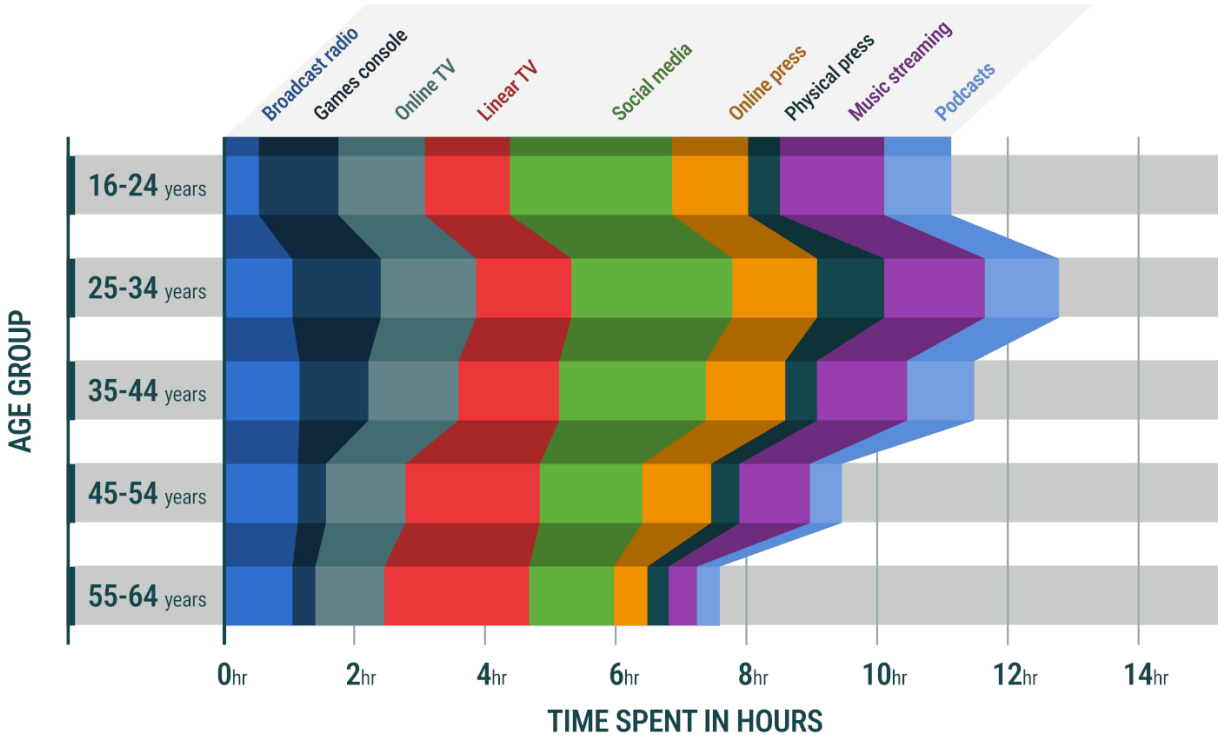
> **The social media terrain, discussed in the above section, is only one component of the digital space where fierce electoral contestation occurs.**

Unscrupulous actors and authoritarians are using fake news, AI-generated content and server attacks to undermine opponents, and these need to be detected and counteracted as early as possible.

The main terrain of the contest over the digital space occurs on digital media platforms. While the 'legacy media' – printed newspapers, television and radio – are important because they are still viewed by many as a reliable source of news, just as important is social media.

Reaching a younger audience, which is vital to those challenging an entrenched establishment, is key to a party's electability. Younger audiences consume more social media and online press, although they are also still significant consumers of printed media. Online TV is close to traditional TV with this audience.

DAILY TIME SPENT CONSUMING SELECTED MEDIA BY INTERNET USERS WORLDWIDE IN THE FIRST HALF OF 2022, BY AGE GROUP.



Data source: Statista

To engage effectively on social media, you need followers you can reach, either through party accounts, leader accounts or through the accounts of third parties with many followers.

> **The first step is to audit your internal party reach across social media.**

This can be established by checking the number of followers across all platforms that the party or its leaders have and tabulating this. Once this is done, a mechanism needs to be developed to maximise the use of this channel by creating party groups for the dissemination of releases, video and other media.

This can be done effectively by creating groups on WhatsApp, where the party's key influencers are sent media for reposting or quoting on

their accounts.

Once you have an idea of the strength of your internal following and how to get the message out via their channels, you need to take the important step of understanding and communicating the rules of social media platforms so that your content is not blocked by the social media company. While you do not control what an authoritarian government might do to block your content, you should avoid getting your content blocked by the social media channel.

Some channels have rules about portraying violence and other scenes that are classed as distressing. While you might believe that this is wrong, as it prevents you from bringing grave injustices to light, you would be better served by preparing content that gets the message across without violating the rules.

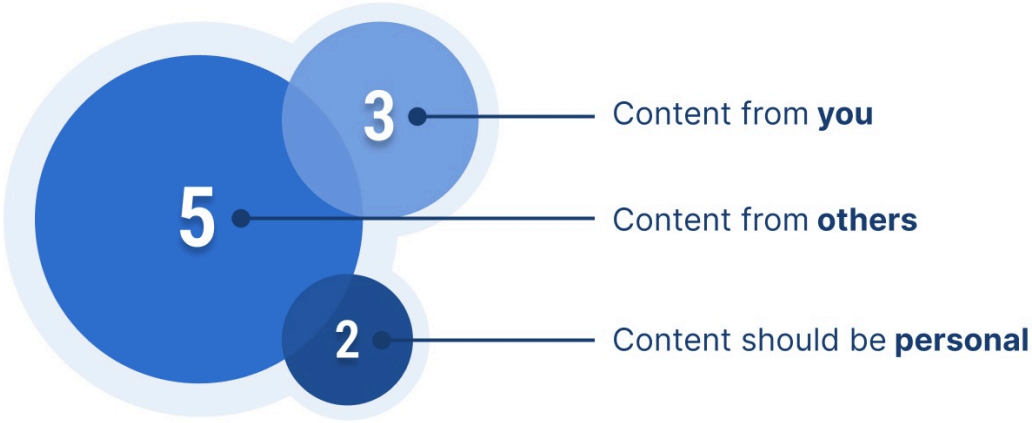
To this end, you should create an independent party web presence, where you can display content that might run afoul of these rules, and then use social media to direct traffic to this content.

> **The party website needs to be a reliable repository of all things related to the campaign and must be updated at least once a day with fresh content.**

If you release your manifesto, it must be available on your website at the time of release because this is where the audience will look for it. This is particularly the case with journalists wanting to see the source document in full. The latest content must enjoy prominence on the home page. Ensure that your website is professionally updated and does not contain errors.

Equally important is to understand what sort of content is promoted and trusted by social media networks. For instance, you might follow the '5-3-2 rule', which says that for every ten updates on social media, five

should be content from others relevant to your audience, three should by content from you relevant to your audience and two should be personal 'non-work related' posts that humanise your brand.[3] This is believed to be the most effective way to move content on LinkedIn; other social networks might take a different approach.



> **Finally, you need to measure your social media engagement by recording views, likes and reposts of your content on a regular basis.**

You will quickly see what is proving popular and deserves more airtime. If the budget allows, you can pay for promotional advertising of these posts, which means the social media network will push the content out to selected audiences. You can select these audiences through demographics and geographic location

COUNTRY EXAMPLE

POLAND

POLAND'S COALITION TURNAROUND

by Greg Mills

Poster image shows Donald Tusk, who led Poland's Civic Coalition (KO) and who was previously European Council president. Photo: Flickr/European Parliament (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

On 15 October 2023, Polish voters headed to the polls in a turnout unseen since 1919. With a voter turnout of 74.4%, it was even larger than the decisive election in June 1989 that led to the fall of communism.

Five main electoral alliances contested the election: the conservative United Right, led by the governing Law and Justice (PiS) party; the centrist Civic Coalition (KO), led by the former prime minister (and European Council president), Donald Tusk, which was composed of the Civic Platform and Modern party and the main opposition party since 2015; the Third Way (TD), consisting of the Christian-democratic Poland 2050 and the agrarian Polish People's Party (PSL); the New Left (NL), a coalition between the former post-communist Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) and other smaller leftist parties, notably Lewica Razem (Left Together), which had a strong following in Warsaw; and the far-right Confederation (KON).

In the previous 2019 Polish parliamentary election, the PiS held onto its majority in the Sejm (Lower House), with incumbent Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki forming a second government. The opposition, including the Civic Platform, secured a Senate majority.

In 2023, the United Right alliance won a plurality of seats, but, with 35.4% of the vote falling short of a Sejm majority, its share of seats (194) was well below the 231 needed to form a government. Instead, an alliance of alliances, consisting of the Civic Coalition, Third Way and The Left, achieved a combined total vote of 54%, thus forming a government. The opposition electoral alliance, Senate Pact 2023, won a plurality of the vote and a majority of seats in the Senate.

In its report on the election, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights notes the 'wide use of intolerant, xenophobic and misogynistic rhetoric' and the abuse of state resources.[1] This is seen as one consequence of the years of democratic erosion caused by the governing coalition's illiberalism. The government's decision, for instance, to

replicate Viktor Orbán's model in Hungary by organising a referendum on the same day as the election was seen as a means to only further the government's electoral agenda. In the event, however, only 40% of voters decided to participate in the referendum, which was below the level required for the results to be binding. While the referendum campaign was not bound by the same financial restrictions as the election, the PiS government, confident of its popularity, stopped short of exploiting it to the full extent.

Overall, several lessons stand out.[2] The extent of the turnout was decisive, the result of many women voters mobilising against tightening anti-abortion laws and younger voters upset by the open alliance between the PiS and Catholic clergy. A record number of women (around 30%) were elected to the Polish parliament, despite (and perhaps because of) the anti-gender campaigns of some parties. The 2023 election also illustrated that, with widespread coalitions, a proportional representation electoral system could work in the opposition's favour. The issue of European integration, where the government was virtually permanently at odds with Brussels, was a further factor in pushing support away from the PiS. Support for EU membership runs at around 85% among Poles, given that the country is a net beneficiary from EU structural funds. PiS's hostility towards the EU and its attacks on judicial independence and media freedom in Poland had upset this funding stream. While the ruling coalition attempted to mobilise support around immigration from Africa and Asia, among other 'enemies' – including the EU, the LGBT community and Germany, this paled by comparison to the economic stakes of the election. Also, the far-right Confederation, which had pro-Russian politicians in its ranks, lost support in the weeks running up to the election, following a public exposure

campaign. As a result, this complicated any attempts by the PiS to construct a parliamentary majority.

[1] OSCEPA, 'International Election Observation Mission: Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions', 15 October 2023, https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/2/4/555048.pdf.
[2] Simona Guerra and Fernando Casal Bértoa, 'What We Learned from the 2023 Polish Election', *LSE*, 24 October 2023, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2023/10/24/what-we-learned-from-the-2023-polish-election/.

REGISTRATION AND THE VOTERS' ROLL

The universe of potential voters is determined by the voters' roll. There is no point in conducting a competitive election campaign if your supporters are not registered to vote. Such registration usually occurs during registration windows set by the electoral commission.

As important as campaigning is the process of getting your supporters registered. In some cases, voting outcomes are manipulated by changes to the voters' roll due to new constituency delineation or even a change in the voting venue. This may lead to voters going to the wrong place to vote or finding that they are not on the roll despite voting in the past.

A REGISTRATION CAMPAIGN MUST THEREFORE ACCOMPLISH TWO THINGS:

1. **Register new voters:** These may be those who have attained voting age since the previous election or those who have been apathetic but now wish to vote.
2. **Get existing voters to check their registration details:** Because of possible changes in constituencies or voting venues, or due to outright manipulation,

> it is vital to get your supporters to check their registration and to establish where they will be voting.

Persuading people to vote in repressive societies is a challenge. Many may support your party but be afraid to participate in formal politics because they fear retribution or discrimination. Voter education, particularly about the secret ballot, is vital to allay such fears.

COUNTRY EXAMPLE

ZAMBIA

ZAMBIA: THE POWER OF WINNING BIG

by Bradford Machila

Poster image shows Zambia's President Hakainde Hichilema at an address to the European Parliament in 2022. Photo: European Parliament (CC BY 2.0)

Zambia's United Party for National Development (UPND) won the 2021 election with 59% of the vote in 2021. The party is likely to have polled higher than this if the poll had been truly free and fair.

The primary lesson of the campaign was the power of resilience. It was the sixth election contested by the UPND under President Hakainde Hichilema since 2006, the previous two having been lost with 46.7% of the vote (2015) and 47.7% of the vote (2016).

Hichilema lost the 2015 election – called after the death of President Michael Sata – by 27 757 votes to Edgar Lungu, in what is widely regarded as a manipulated poll. The following year, Hichilema again lost narrowly to Lungu in another controversial poll.

In 2017, Hichilema was arrested and charged with treason, which carries the death penalty in Zambia, in a move by Lungu to silence his rival. Police broke into Hichilema's compound in April 2017, damaged his home and property and beat up his workers. Money, jewellery, shoes, speakers and even blankets and carpets were stolen. One of the officers defecated in the house and urinated on his bed, and teargas was released inside his home, causing his asthmatic wife, Mutinta, to collapse. [1]

After five months in jail, Hichilema was released, and the charges were dropped following a global outcry led by the then chairperson of The Brenthurst Foundation and Nigeria's former president, Olusegun Obasanjo.

Hichilema told the BBC that during his imprisonment he had been held for eight days in solitary confinement without food, water or visitors and had been tortured.[2]

Despite a surge of public support, he was not guaranteed the presidency after the 2021 election, as Lungu initially refused to concede, despite it being abundantly clear that Hichilema had won. The Electoral Commission of Zambia chairperson, Esau

Chulu, announced that with all but one constituency counted, Hichilema got 2 810 777 votes against Lungu's 1 814 201. 'I therefore declare that the said Hichilema to be president of Zambia,' he pronounced.[3] Following an intervention by the former president of Sierra Leone, Ernest Bai Koroma, Lungu was persuaded to concede.

Hichilema's election was an illustration of how a candidate can triumph in an environment where an incumbent is determined to hold onto power.

An important lesson was the decision taken to ensure an overwhelming victory – one so large that it could not be denied or rigged after the fact. The campaign rewrote the textbook on African elections, with every aspect of the poll, from voter registration to bringing out the voters on the day, being aggressively pursued.

The campaign was based on voter mobilisation during a tour of every significant settlement in the country to hold rallies on the ground. The campaign was marked by the extensive use of social media to counteract the domination of state media by Lungu. Rallies were advertised and then live-streamed on Facebook to large audiences.

Rather than a tightly held operation at the centre, a wider campaign team was empowered to take the initiative, leading to a higher volume of activity and tempo of campaigning. Key also was the building of strong regional and international relationships with diplomats, governments and opposition leaders, ensuring that the poll was closely watched by the global community, making vote rigging more difficult.

[1] Chris Phiri, 'Cops Rob Millions of Kwacha from Hichilema's Residence in Midnight Raid', *Zambia Reports*, 12 April 2017,

https://web.archive.org/web/20211026162137/https://zambiareports.com/2017/04/12/cops-rob-millions-kwacha-hichilemas-residence-midnight-raid/.
[2] See https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/n3ct2km6.
[3] Chris Mfula, 'Zambia Opposition Leader Hichilema Wins Landslide in Presidential Election', *Reuters*, 16 August 2021, https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/zambian-opposition-leader-hichilema-heads-closer-victory-presidential-vote-2021-08-15/.

POLLING AND PARALLEL VOTER TABULATION

These days most election days are peaceful and orderly as voters queue up to cast their ballots, and observers, mostly concentrated in the urban areas, are present. This is because regimes intent on rigging the poll seldom do so on election day. They prefer to manipulate the result when no one is looking during the campaigning phase and then during the counting phase.

THE MANIPULATION OF VOTER RESULTS IN THE COUNTING STAGE CAN TAKE SEVERAL FORMS:

- **Abuse of electronic systems:** Electronic systems used to transmit results can be manipulated by accessing servers and creating algorithms that change results in favour of the ruling party. Such systems are often contracted by governments during dodgy tender processes, where the service provider is obliged to leave a 'back door' open for manipulation.
- **Interference in counting:** This can take the form of physically disrupting voting in opposition strongholds to create chaos and enable results to be nullified or manipulated. Or it can take the form of biased electoral officers who count without independent observers or party agents present, although this sort of manipulation is in decline.

- **Changing polling station results during transmission:** In these cases, officials game the system used to transmit results from polling stations to central or regional tally facilities. Of particular concern are processes where the results of several polling stations are aggregated into a 'regional count', which is then submitted for national tallying. In this system, it is difficult for a party to verify that the results from individual polling stations were accurately tallied.
- **Interference at the electoral commission level:** Ruling parties can manipulate persons who serve on election commission boards where final tallies are verified and authorised before final results are announced. Such discussions are frequently opaque and can include decisions to exclude results from certain areas due to false claims of procedural breeches.

To counteract the manipulation of results, many parties – and in some cases NGOs – use Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) to conduct an unofficial count of votes so that discrepancies between official results and the actual result may be exposed with some credibility.

PVTs conducted by independent NGOs carry more credulity than party PVTs because they are non-partisan and cannot be accused of political bias. However, it is essential that parties conduct their own PVTs so that they can alert NGOs and observers to voter counting irregularities.

PVTs are not just restricted to vote counting, important though this is. They can also be used to measure whether or not electoral materials were delivered, and whether or not party agents were allowed to freely observe voting and counting and to report on incidents.

THIS IS HOW THE PVT SHOULD TAKE PLACE:

- **A data processing facility** is established that is capable of processing messages from across the country about voter turnout and results. In some cases, bespoke software can be used to collate results.

- **Observers are recruited** and trained to understand how voting and counting is supposed to work and in how to record data and transmit it to the central data base.
- **Observers are deployed** to a sample of polling stations covering different geographies, party strongholds and urban as well as rural areas, unless it is possible to deploy observers to all polling stations, which ensures a total record.
- **Observers observe** the voting process and record whether or not due process is followed.
- **Observers photograph** the final signed-off polling station tally and transmit this to the data processing facility.
- **Reports may be sent** by coded SMS or message service or application.
- The results are compared with those submitted by electoral officials.
- **When voting is complete**, the result of the PVT is released to provide guidance on the expected electoral outcome.
- **Discrepancies with the official tally are made public.**

The illustration below was produced by the National Democratic Institute, which has assisted with PVT in several countries.[4]

While it is possible for regimes to ignore parallel vote tallies, it is essential that this tool is used to make the case where irregularities have occurred. A credible, systematic PVT may be a very useful tool in a court battle and may be used to publicly plead the case where an election has been stolen. A data-based challenge is likely to have far higher resonance than anecdotal opinions about what went wrong.

DIGITAL MANIPULATION

Cyber control and manipulation of information are rapidly becoming the next frontline of an invisible but highly destructive war on democracy. Cyberattacks by non-state actors and authoritarian regimes can influence outcomes of elections even before the vote. Mass internet surveillance, monitoring of social media accounts, trolling of activists and opposition members have become widespread during election cycles, in particular because there are no international guardrails and there is only vague legislation with significant discretionary authority to monitor citizens. Increasingly, governments are enacting national security and secrecy bills that allow for mass surveillance, the use of clearance and vetting of civil society, and broad definitions of security that covers everyone's actions. These bills are purposefully silent on judicial accountability and transparency. The use of spyware against the opposition, journalists and activists is becoming more common. The Israeli NSO Group's notorious spyware Pegasus has become the worlds most powerful cyberweapon for its ability to target devices without requiring the user to click a link to activate the malware. We now know this began years before and with other software companies, such as FinFisher over a decade ago. Companies are not restricted from selling these weapons to authoritarian governments – even if they claim to abide by the export controls of the Wassenaar Arrangements.

> Spyware is everywhere and everyone is producing it – especially the democratic north.

BELOW ARE A FEW OF THE COUNTRIES AND THE PRODUCTS THEY HAVE DEVELOPED:

- **Israel:** Cellebrite, NSO Group, Black Cube, Candiru, QuaDream, Paragon, Toka.
- **Germany:** FinFisher, Digitask.
- **Russia:** Software Oxygen, ElcomSoft.
- **United States:** AccessData, Grayshift, Passware, Sirchie, SysTools, Susteen, Black Bag, Palantir.
- **Canada:** Magnet Forensics, OpenText.
- **China:** Meiya Pico, Resonant, FiberHome, EaseUS, SalvationDATA.

New practices of election manipulation involving digital tools are becoming more common, without a clear understanding of opposition parties, election observation missions, and citizens to mitigate and reverse their effects. Below are a few identified technological interventions that have contributed towards changing election outcomes, rendering them unfree, unfair and opaque.

01

The use of social media to spread malinformation and misinformation was seen in Kenya´s 2017 and 2022 polls.

Influencers were bought, fake and automated accounts were created, and posts were made with similar key words to manipulate algorithms and make topics trend. False news went viral with fabricated newspaper front pages and photoshopped images to discredit or support a candidate. An Israeli group called Team Jorge, which claimed to have run 27 successful presidential-level campaigns, is a new type of cyber

mercenary that works to subvert the democratic process. The company is headed by Tal Hanan, a counterterrorism and cybersecurity expert. For a large amount of money (between 6 and 15 million euros) they work to disrupt the logistics of the opposition, intimidate them and make people mistrust the voting system, while using tactics as varied as forging blackmail material, spreading false intelligence, spreading disinformation and deploying targeted social media campaigns. Team Jorge created an influence platform called Advanced Impact Media Solutions that has been allegedly sold to intelligence services in ten countries, where realistic-looking avatars, or bots using stolen pictures of real people, drive disinformation campaigns (Wire report).

02

The compilation of electronic voters' rolls and their auditing process, if any, is an area where authoritarian governments may cushion numbers they fabricate with more voters than those that were actually registered.

Voters' rolls that are not properly audited may have a significant number of ghost voters that make it harder to understand the percentage of the electorate that voted and the abstention level. For example, in Angola in 2022 over 2 million voters were added to the voters' roll – with evidence of deceased and children being part of the roll. This facilitated a mass fabrication of results to annul the actual results that the opposition got. The opposition coalition, United Patriotic Front, proved (using their parallel vote count) showed that in merely three out of eighteen provinces UNITA was robbed of 500 000 votes, which would have tilted the results significantly against the ruling MPLA party.

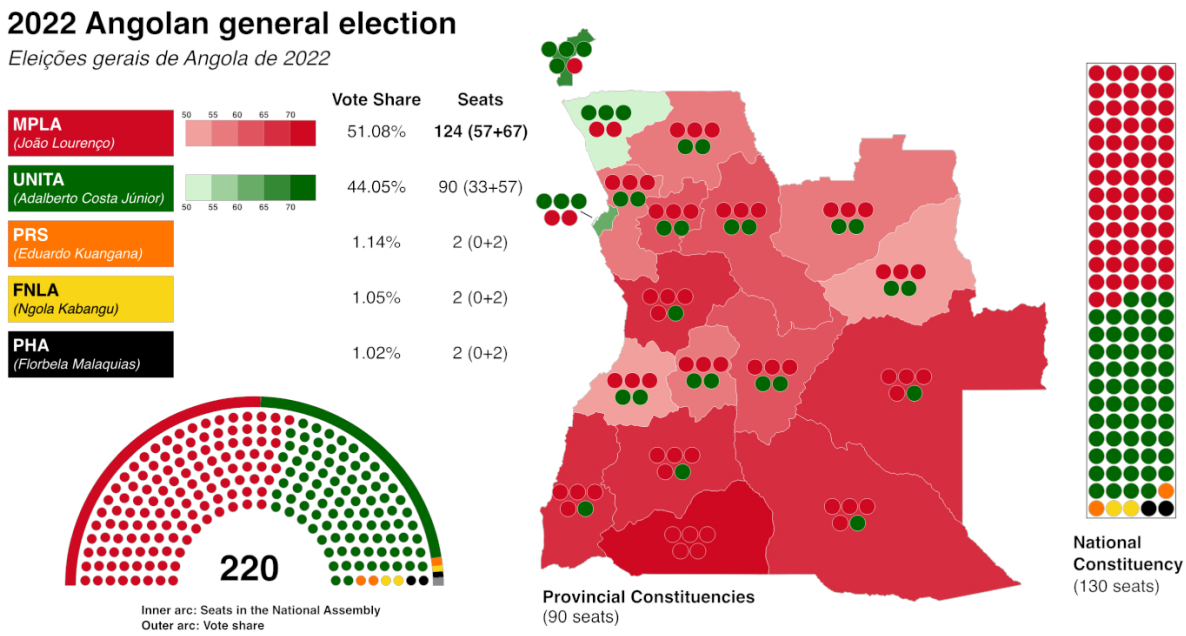


Image: Twotwofourtysix (CC BY-SA 4.0)

03

Intimidation, infiltration and surveillance by intelligence services – ahead of politically dangerous moments like elections for incumbent presidents who have gradually lost their appeal and support base – has led to the infiltration of opposition parties, youth movements and civil society organisations.

The aim is to disrupt, sabotage and gather evidence to later falsely accuse them of attempted coups, treason or instigating violence. Another tactic used is the instigation of fear with the circulation of ‘hit’ lists on social media that cannot be verified for authenticity, or the marking of houses, gates or cars of individuals who need to be silenced. Blackmail produced by deepfakes are more easily deployed against high-profile individuals with little or no recourse to proving their innocence.

04

Control of the computation process will allow for the changing of results. Electronic data management systems are more difficult to verify and monitor by international observers, who are restricted to the manual count system.

Forensic audits are required and the capacitating of election management bodies to oversee the computation system. Interference can come in the form of computer hacking or internal manipulation of the central computer systems, or the use of algorithms to change results of some polling stations. Manipulation can occur during the electronic transfer of results from the polling stations to the election commissions and the central computation process. During Ghana's 2016 presidential elections, the government reportedly manipulated the electoral commission's data systems and used a neutralising algorithm programmed to offset the doctoring of election results. The supreme court overturned the Kenyan elections of 2017, despite respected international observation missions endorsing the outcome. It was revealed that hackers using Gmail accounts logged into the electoral commission's system to alter the results sheets. Several of the forms were deleted off the system and others did not have the watermark or bear a security feature or were illegible. The University of Michigan's Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science recently developed an algorithm that easily manipulated ballot images, moving voters' marks to another candidate. The experiment was done to exemplify the dangers and ease with which computer systems can be hacked, with attackers running malicious codes that will change voting results on digital scans of ballots and other election technology devices. Their conclusion was that post-election audits have to occur with inspections of the physical paper ballots to verify results.

More than 200 students, staff and faculty members cast votes in the mock election. Photo: Levi Hutmacher/University of Michigan Engineering

05

Internet shutdowns or disabling of social media platforms during voting and counting are strategies that in the past (for example, the 2016 Gabon presidential polls) were used to prevent PVT processes by the opposition and civil society.

During the 2023 Mozambican municipal elections, there was evidence of internet interruptions. Civil society reported that in the main cities there were restrictions on energy, on the internet and on journalists during the voting and the tabulation process. When the polls closed, there was a major outage of the service provider Movitel.

06

Experts who work on psychological warfare are advising on strategies that will be deployed against civilians.

Wired magazine reported that the company Pangea IT bought a system called Sensority, which detects psychological stress in subjects and is most likely to detect if the campaigns are working.

> **Digital interference in elections will become more common.**

Opposition and civil society groups therefore need to alert international observers of tech strategies for election fraud; they need to protect their parallel count, store information on and off the cloud and have manual backups of everything. They should also have an 'army' of investigative reporters, NGOs and friendly diplomats ready to evaluate the evidence and take it outside the country.

Opposition parties, leaders of social movements and members of civil society need to implement strict holistic systems of security – both physical but also digital. Phones should always be on Lockdown Mode to protect against spyware and other hacks. Updates of iOS or other programs are key, as Apple and others are constantly patching security fragilities in their operating systems. High-risk individuals need defined security systems to mitigate the risks of becoming a target of surveillance by ensuing that communications remain private by using virtual private networks to hide their IPs, secure messaging apps (like Signal that does not store your metadata), smart phone scanning apps (like the Am I Secure app from Numbers Station) and secure email providers like Proton Mail. Very sensitive information should be kept off the cloud on external hard drives and closed systems that cannot be hacked.

MANAGING MALIGN STATE ACTORS

Geopolitically, Africa has become a battleground for multipolar actors bent on underming multilateral institutions that regulate state behaviour and allow for co-opertive global governance. The continent, in particular, has suffered tremendous democratric backsliding, with a worrying uptake in military and constitutional coups; fragmented ruling parties that purge within and without; and Western-backed autocrats that deliver on narrow foreign economic and political interests. As a result, the need to protect stakeholders and civilians that work to promote democratic values has become evermore urgent. Intelligence services play a vital role in ensuring political hegemony of repressive ruling parties. They have long been a favoured tool to suppress dissent and violently silence reform-minded groups, which has resulted in greater repression, exclusion and disenfranchisement of citizens. Autocratic regimes in Africa and elsewhere use a broad range of intelligence services to survive politically, multiplying units to guard each other and produce counter-intelligence on the elites, the army and civil society. While doing this, they also infiltrate the opposition, capture state resources, ensure patriotic obedience to the ruling party and neuter any attempts at pluralism and democratic reform. Together with the police,

paramilitary groups and praetorian specialised units, these forces have intimidated, spied and arrested suspected enemies of the state. Building a complex praetorian guard structure has provided many presidencies with assurances of political longevity. The multiple intelligence services have expanded the reach of the presidency in managing society and in extending influence over the private sector, the opposition and the ruling elites.

> **The different branches of the intelligence services have played a central role managing rivalries in internal political competition for power within and between the services and different groups that strive for power.**

Their reach gives them a sense of omnipresence, controlling, infiltrating and monitoring almost all aspects of the state, private life, civil society, private sector, government and the military. Their actions have at times become insulated from government accountability by wielding unchecked power over political elites. Today they combine upgraded surveillance systems by employing the COMINT (combined communications intelligence systems), spyware and Humnit (human collection and analysis intelligence) surveillance systems against opposition movements, political elites, economic actors and civilians. For many ruling parties with a Marxist legacy, the influence of Soviet procedure and the Cuban modus operandi continues to seep through every structure. Russian and Cuban advisers, experts and trainers helped strengthen various units, directed their activities to effectively contain ‘subversive’ actions, and ensured that command and control was tight, disciplined and patriotic.

> **There is a fragile and unregulated balance being struck between innovation and the need for policy and law to protect democracy.**

Emerging technologies are rapidly undermining democratic values and practices, with artificial intelligence generative tools spearheading mass data collection and accelerating the operations of authoritarian governments. AI is increasingly used to eliminate dissent, expand intrusive monitoring of social media and has exacerbated racial and gender discrimination, given the profiling bias. Several authoritarian actors, unethical vendors and democratic actors alike are exporting software and surveillance technologies that impact on the credibility of elections, and put at risk the safety of democratic activists and civil society. They also distort the truth, change electoral results, shrink the civic space and weaponise dissent. Digital monitoring affects online and offline spaces and fundamentally impacts on democratic values, which tilt the scales against civic actors, opposition parties and voices of reform, threatening freedom of expression, assembly and other human rights in countries that are struggling to change their political systems. Surveillance also leads to self-censorship and a decline in activism,

campaigning and civic engagement. Elections since 2017 have demonstrated the need for an increased understanding of the shadowy operations of technology mercenaries, intelligence services and their masters – authoritarian governments. Digital interference in the democratic process is now becoming an increasing pattern of electoral manipulation.

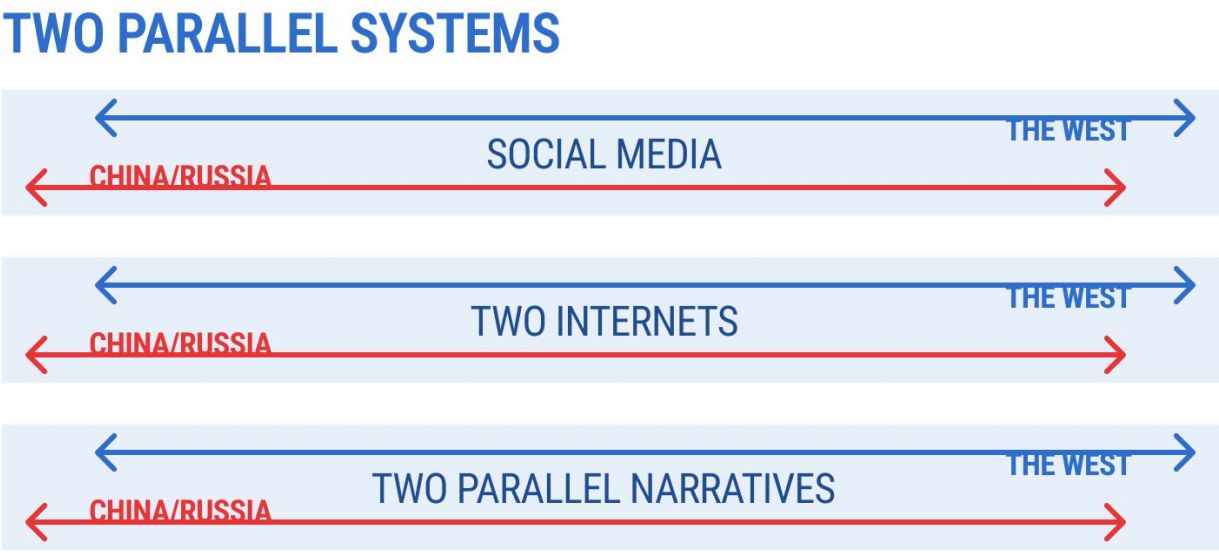
Africa held 19 elections in 2024, meaning that over a third of the continent's population voted in a setting that is rapidly changing, given past irregularities connected with technology and foreign interference. Every country would have their own strategy to interfere with election outcomes: electronic surveillance, social media monitoring, bulk and targeted interception, the use of intelligence officers to infiltrate, disrupt and threaten the opposition and civil society, the use of biometrics to confuse processes, voter profiling to disenfranchise opposition supporters, misinformation and propaganda, etc. Exposing these practices and advocating for international and regional observation missions to consider expertise in this field are important. Preparing civil society, activists and opposition parties to be able to detect these manoeuvres is key to electoral integrity. One crucial stronghold, in the defence of democracy, has been the resilience of civil society. Recent examples from Brazil, Kenya and Zambia underscore the pivotal role civil society plays in ensuring fair elections and upholding their integrity, often in collaboration with electoral authorities or constitutional courts.

Elections are used to endorse autocrats internationally, a pattern that will only increase given the realpolitik strategies of the West in relation to the

global geopolitical divides.

> **Stability has become far more important than democracy.**

Seeking allies to ethically stand on the side of truth, justice and democracy is not always easy, but policy-related work will facilitate holding difficult conversations. There is an urgent need to rethink election observation and electronic auditing of voters' rolls, tabulation processes and to establish enforceable guardrails against AI and spyware use. Much is known about foreign interference (mostly Russian) in Western elections, and the deployment of government-sponsored and private initiatives to breed misinformation and fake news. There is a risk that disinformation and fake news will distort truth to a level of malleability, resulting in two parallel systems of social media, two internets, two parallel narratives that negate each other – one China/Russia dominated and another dominated by the West.



Less is known about the impact that this has had in the Global South and the dangerous, enduring legacy that it leaves behind in sabotaging democratic reform efforts and the public trust in elections. It highlights how the antics of the misinformation mercenaries operating on Western democratic elections (Trump and Brexit, for example) are occurring in

fragile political contexts, where opposition, social movements, human rights activists, civil society and the media face significantly more challenging contexts and operate without assurance of justice, accountability, the truth being defended, and the will of the people being respected.

The War on Terror and the Patriot Act opened the way for mass surveillance and expanded government's authority to spy on citizens, with reduced judicial oversight and public accountability.

The politics of fear has become a policy for many governments. The Russian saying, 'Fear has big eyes' – which means that when you are afraid, you see the factors that cause that fear everywhere, even when they do not exist – has become a daily reality.

'Fear has big eyes'

When a securitised state organises elections, it mobilises loyalties and neutralises the opposition by instrumentalising fear. The creation of fear is a political construct that portrays elections as threats to peace, security and stability of the state. In using the logic of security, governments intimidate and limit the opposition, media and civil society, and justify tactics to manipulate the process under the guise of legitimately protecting peace and stability. Behind this is disinformation, equating the opposition with a threat to national security. When citizens feel insecure, they seek a sense of safety that has been linked to the erosion of democracy; comfortable in giving up certain freedoms. Feeling watched is also a powerful tool for social control and people conforming with desired outcomes.

COUNTRY EXAMPLE

MALAWI

MALAWI'S 'TIPP-EX' ELECTION

by Alex Vines

Cover image shows former Malawian President Arthur Peter Mutharika.

Malawi is only the second African country to annul a presidential election, after Kenya in 2017. It is the first in which

the opposition has won the re-run.

In February 2020, a landmark ruling by Malawi's Constitutional Court annulled the initial result of a May 2019 vote that had narrowly returned incumbent Peter Mutharika to the presidency. The seven judges, citing 'widespread, systematic and grave' irregularities, called for new elections within 150 days, which were held on 23 June.[1]

The court went beyond issuing a simple judgment; it determined that the election was riddled with irregularities and ordered a fresh presidential election. In addition, the court went further by providing an interpretation of the constitutional provision of the electoral system. The court recommended an amendment of electoral laws to change the electoral system from a simple majoritarian system to an absolute majoritarian system, which would result in a more inclusive electoral system for all regions of the country.

The use of white-out or correction fluid on some results sheets to alter vote tallying in the 2019 election attracted international attention, leading some to dub the polls, Malawi's 'Tipp-Ex election'.

It was Malawians, especially opposition activists and civil society and the press, that challenged the result and demanded that the Constitutional Court review the 2019 election result, as the Malawi Electoral Commission had failed to address the complaints before announcing the results.

In contrast, immediately after the May 2019 elections, international observers de facto endorsed the election results. The Commonwealth Observer Group, led by former South African president, Thabo Mbeki, in their interim statement announced that the elections were handled with

‘professionalism and dedication’. The Commonwealth Group was non-committal on the issues that would prove decisive in the court ruling. Most international observer groups, including the Southern African Development Community, the African Union and Commonwealth Group, did not to produce final reports. The European Union Election Observer Mission, on the other hand, returned to Malawi in January 2020 to present its report, but it was forced to change its decision to release the report after politicians and other stakeholders protested that this interfered with the Constitutional Court’s review. The report was quietly released after the court judgment.

The fresh polls on 23 June 2020 saw Lazarus Chakwera of the Malawi Congress Party and running mate Saulos Chilima of the United Transformation Movement uniting to head a coalition of nine opposition parties, which had fiercely competed against each other previously. Their uniting was a significant development and was incentivised by the changed electoral system.

In contrast to many other African states, Mutharika was unable to call on military support because the Malawian Defence Force protected the legal system and the right to protest.

Malawi’s institutions showed resilience when it came under immense pressure from the Mutharika government. The bravery and leadership of key individuals played an important role. At a time when standards of democratic governance are under threat, not only in Africa but in many democracies, Malawi’s Constitutional Court judges in 2020 set an example for their peers across the world by upholding the centrality of the rule of law and separation of powers. These judges successfully asserted their independence in the face of significant pressure and the power of incumbency. They have

been rightly recognised, including winning the Chatham House prize in 2020.

[1] For a more detailed analysis, see Fergus Kell, 'Malawi's Re-Run Election Is Lesson for African Opposition'. *Chatham House*, 1 July 2020, https://www.chathamhouse.org/2020/07/malawis-re-run-election-lesson-african-opposition.

BUILDING RESILIENT COALITIONS

In a post-election environment where there is no clear winner, coalitions will form to take power by amassing a majority of votes or of MPs, depending on the electoral system. This coalition negotiation period can be a time of chaos and contestation. It is very important to prepare for this environment well in advance, so that when the scenario arises, you have a clear plan built on solid foundations and do not find yourself outmanoeuvred by opportunists and abandoned by those you thought were allies.

THERE ARE THREE ESSENTIAL TYPES OF COALITIONS:

- **Pre-election consolidation** of parties into a single entity to contest the election;
- **Pre-election agreement** to co-operate in the post-election period; and
- **Post-election coalitions** formed on the basis of how the vote has been divided.

Deciding which of these approaches to take is important and must take place well in advance of election campaigning to ensure a coherent message to voters.

In pre-election consolidation, such ‘coalitions’ lead to the formation of a single, united ‘movement’, in which a range of political parties and leaders put aside their differences to make the greatest impact at the ballot box. The extent to which the parties share values and policies is vital to the success of such an approach, as the parties will, in the event of winning, govern together and have to adopt an agreed-on programme.

There are, nonetheless, two types of pre-election consolidations.

THE FIRST

…is where the parties have substantial policy and other disagreements but believe that, for the good of the country, they must unite their forces to bring about change. Such a movement requires very strong leadership and a willingness to compromise in order to present a united front to voters. The breadth of such a coalition cannot, however, be infinite and cannot include malign forces whose values are antithetical to democracy, openness and accountability. Including such forces ‘in the interests of winning’ can confuse voters and make them cynical about opportunism.

SECONDLY

It is important, then, to clearly draw the boundaries of such a consolidation in order to avoid sending poor messages to voters. Such a platform of democrats must share the vales of free and fair elections, democracy, the rule of law and transparent accountable governance, at a minimum.

A ROLE FOR OUTSIDERS?

The role of outsiders in promoting democracy has long been controversial.

Targeted regimes have rejected this role as 'neo-colonial', such as the speech made by President François Mitterand at the Franco-African summit in June 1990, when he announced that French aid would in the future be conditional upon democratic reforms.[5]

That speech positioned France's relations with Africa in a post-Cold War context. Instead of being driven by naked self-interest, the speech linked trade and aid to human rights and democracy. Until that time, France's post-colonial African policy had been characterised by a cocktail of intimate personal ties with African leadership and a close collaboration on issues such as monetary policy, development assistance, education, telecommunications and, of course, defence. During Mitterand's fourteen years in office (1981–1995), the French military intervened no less than ten times in sub-Saharan Africa.[6]

Image: newspaper print from 1990, from the New York Times archive.

The French government, long seen as a patron of the worst sort of African tyrants, was, ironically, among the first to rhetorically signal a change to such an approach. Praising those governments that had announced plans to create multi-party states, among them Gabon,

Benin, the Ivory Coast and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Mitterand said France would 'link its effort of contribution to those efforts to move toward greater liberty'.[7]

This shift, however proved more problematic in practice.

Dominique de Villepin served as the French Minister of Foreign Affairs and subsequently for two years from May 2005 as the prime minister. He gained fame in 2003 with his opposition to the invasion of Iraq.

> **'La Baule,' he says, 'was wrong and unsuccessful because democracy is a process and not a moment. We should not have cut aid as we needed a bridge between different types of regimes. And we should not judge regimes on the basis of their democracy.'[8]**

Dominique de Villepin. Photo: Maya-Anaïs Yataghène (CC BY 2.0)

More importantly, La Baule failed to acknowledge that the fate of African democracies will ultimately be determined by citizens in each country, even though there are roles that outsiders can play in promoting

democracy, not least because African countries are generally dependent on foreign assistance and because, across the region, leaders are closely attuned to international trends.

Democracy promotion is hard for outsiders in and of itself and because it competes with many other priorities, and it requires patience, nuance and a deep appreciation of local circumstances, qualities that are seldom present in European and American foreign affairs and aid bureaucracies when confronting foreign policy issues.

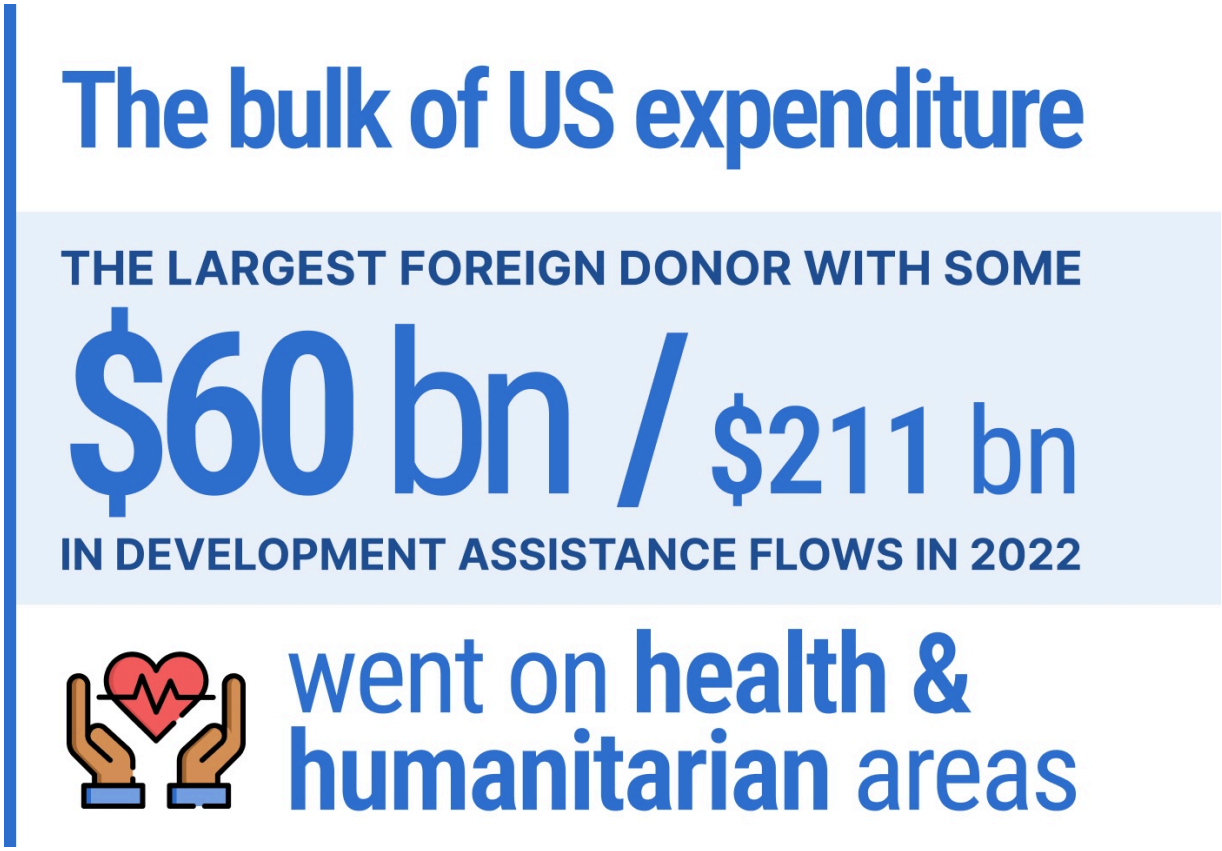
It is also difficult, as during the Cold War, when outsiders view democracy through the prism of great-power competition, when support was given to autocrats whose economic and political performances were woeful but who knew how to play to superpower rivalry. Strategic interests have consistently trumped human rights in democracy promotion. This is one reason why the relative amounts of funding allocated to the task have routinely been a fraction of overall donor funding, under 10%, compounding the weakness of these efforts. It also explains why foreign observers have regularly proclaimed elections as being free and fair when they were palpably not, given that stability rather than democracy has been their key interest. Counter-terrorism and the control of migration have been other reasons why external interests have preferred to maintain relations with ‘strong men’, where short-term stability has trumped the need to create the opportunities that give rise to both these outcomes.

But there are pressures for change resulting from the effects of internal failure, and these outcomes themselves are a result of a lack of democratic governance, since there is a clear link, especially in Africa, between the quality of democracy and historical economic performance.

This is compounded by European interest in limiting migration, given the internal political disruptions that migrants have caused within the EU.

Although aid for democracy is small in comparison with total aid expenditure at around 6% of the annual total, 'it plays a much more direct role with respect to vertical and horizontal accountability', in terms of support for media, civil society, electoral commissions, and strengthening legislatures and judiciaries. In this way, aid for democracy reinforces 'relationships of responsibility between citizens and their governments as well as between different government institutions'.[9]

Even though development theory almost universally describes rule of law and good governance as the most important factors in development, as Andrew Natsios, the former USAID head, has noted,[10] the bulk of US expenditure (the largest foreign donor with some $60 billion of a total of $211 billion in development assistance flows in 2022)[11] went on health and humanitarian areas, both the result of poor governance. More interesting is the role to be played by regional powers.



Following the transition from the Organisation of African Unity to the African Union (AU) in 2002, African leaders have strongly pushed back

against militaries that have tried to overthrow directly elected civilian governments, employing the threat of suspension against several military regimes. However, the African collective effort to promote democracy beyond this red line is still problematic, as events in the Sahel and West Africa have displayed. The greater their number, juntas are less vulnerable to external pressure.

The AU has fielded election observers that have often validated even the most problematic elections, while the role of the African Peer Review Mechanism is dubious as a democracy promotion tool. Regional bodies, including the Southern African Development Community and the Economic Community of West African States, have faced similar challenges, apparently unwilling to speak out in cases of egregious elections for various reasons, including that they do not agree on the need for democratic standards, or the fear of encouraging Western actors, or they do not want to risk displaying their paper-tiger attributes. International organisations, including the Commonwealth, are also hamstrung, both by their varied membership composition, the strength of the leadership of the various election observation delegations, and by an overriding imperative to keep members inside the tent rather than exclude them on the basis of standards. Hence, the drive to reinstate members is greater than democracy: take the example of the advocates for the re-inclusion of Emerson Mnangagwa's Zimbabwe into the Commonwealth family.

> **Democracy is about the free choices made by citizens as to their representatives, and the environment in which this is made.**

The extent of these freedoms paradoxically ensures that it is open to the influences of others who may not share such a liberal agenda, but rather may be interested in employing it to their own ends, for reasons of strategic advantage politically, commercially or even in promoting

religious interests. This not only concerns Russia, China and Iran, but the growing role of the Gulf States in Africa also has to be considered in this light, not least in terms of their own rivalries.

This reflects their own internal regime character and interest in exploiting advantages over others, including the West. They have made their lack of concern about internal governing arrangements a signature of their approach to Africa, in part, because this is attractive to African partners and, in part, because this facilitates business – although this trait paradoxically illustrates why democracy is important to Western countries and businesses.

> **Elections are the most dramatic vehicle by which the people can, at least in theory, express their preferences and therefore garner the most attention.**

While it is now obvious that free and fair elections are a necessary foundation for democracy, elections are a particularly attractive 'moment' for foreigners to monitor and express support for democratic choice. The picture of well-meaning observers reviewing polling stations on election day has become standard issue in the coverage of elections.

However, electoral contests are actually very hard to monitor, especially as cheating no longer occurs at the ballot box but in the aggregation of votes, and the fate of elections are often determined months before the actual day, when few observers are in country. Those outside election observers who have made judgements on the fairness of the process based on the need for stability rather than democracy stray outside of their mandate.

In an ideal world, foreigners would detect the obvious signs that an election or democratisation experiment was failing and try to intervene before the crisis solidified lines of conflict and made a lasting solution

improbable. In the real world of busy foreign bureaucracies, such foresight is usually sorely lacking. Thus, closer engagement with civil society bodies would serve both as an early warning mechanism and means of resolution.

South Africa under apartheid is both the major exception to the role of outsiders and a precedent for their role in pressing for change. Donors for decades promoted a transition to a non-racial order through rhetoric, sanctions and aid. While sanctions are today seen as a tool of limited utility, this is only because strategic interests result in their uneven application. South Africa shows that they work when the majority of international actors apply them. Without the involvement of China, Iran, Turkey and Russia, among others, sanctions are only of limited utility, even though the extent to which targeted leaders rail against them is an indication of their effectiveness and threat. Devising a sanctions regime – at a continental as well as an international level – against countries that deviate from democratic norms is not only in the interests of locals, but ultimately also of donors.

De Villepin has asked that ‘while we should support democracy, what should be done about those who are not democratic?’ Should,’ he poses in the same vein as his famous moment on Iraq, ‘invade them, attempt regime change?’ This presents, however, a false dichotomy. The choice is never between doing nothing and everything. Nor is it between choosing democracy now or never. It is not a black and white issue, but rather one of shades of grey, with many gradated policy steps and options on the way.

If human rights are important, if economic development is deemed critical, then the answer has to be in finding the means to support democracy, from ensuring that crooked election results do not pass international muster without comment and providing support for civil society institutions between elections, including the media.

> **For, to paraphrase President Mitterand, without transparency and the rule of law, neither democracy nor development is likely to progress.**

[1] Brian Hall, 'Strategies to Win an Election as a Challenger', *TrailBlazer*, https://www.trailblz.com/articles/strategies-to-win-an-election-as-challenger.

[2] Joe Meyler, 'The Importance of Narrative', *GPStrategies*, https://www.gpstrategies.com/blog/the-importance-of-narrative/#:~:text=Stories%20are%20a%20powerful%20and,connect%20to%20the%20bigger%20

[3] Della Cornish, 'The 5:3:2 Rule of Social Sharing', 11 May 2015, https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/532-rule-social-sharing-della-cornish/

[4] See https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/PVT_Infographic_(NDI).pdf.

[5] This section draws on Greg Mills, Olusegun Obasanjo, Jeffrey Herbst and Tendai Biti, *Democracy Works: Rewriting Politics to Africa's Advantage*. Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2019.

[6] See, for example, Greg Mills, 'French Policy-Making and Africa', *South African Journal of International Affairs* 6(1): 59–65, 1998.

[7] Alan Riding, 'France Ties Africa Aid to Democracy', *New York Times*, 22 June 1990, https://www.nytimes.com/1990/06/22/world/france-ties-africa-aid-to-democracy.html.

[8] Discussion, French Embassy, Pretoria, 14 May 2018.

[9] See https://unu.edu/publications/articles/foreign-aid-and-democracy-in-africa.html.

[10] Andrew Natsios, 'The Clash of the Counter-bureaucracy and Development', *Center for Global Development*, 1 July 2010, www.cgdev.org/content/publications/detail/1424271.

[11] See https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/official-development-assistance.htm.

PART 3

What to DO IN POWER

ADALBERTO COSTA JR.
Member of the National Assembly of Angola

LEOPOLDO LÓPEZ
Venezuelan Politician

PAULA ROQUE
Author and Senior Analyst on Southern Africa

TENDAI BITI
Former Minister of Finance of Zimbabwe

Once democrats have successfully unseated their authoritarian opponent, they commonly inherit dire economic circumstances, which are the result of a political economy geared towards supplying rents to the elite. Here they learn a difficult axiom: that the period of recovery is usually at least as long as the period of decline. Undoing the practices of many years of misrule and reforming the economy to supply goods to more than just a few takes the assiduous use of political capital and a clear, carefully prioritised and resourced plan. It also demands dealing with spoilers, especially those who remain behind from the previous regime. Just like winning the elections, it demands getting organised and not expecting any miracles.

THE ’DOS’ AND ‘DON’TS’ OF REFORMERS

SIGNS OF FAILURE	SIGNS OF SUCCESS
Retribution and redistribution, including ideological and populist solutions.	Look forward, take the best out of the past, and move on no matter how hard and unfair this seems. The difference between success and failure is how this inheritance is managed, and how much it determines the future.
Externally driven development answers, including new and ‘just’ world orders.	Local ownership of the problems, failures and thus solutions. External tools of discipline can help, such as trade and integration through NAFTA and the EU. Use the market opportunities that have developed in East Asia, for instance.

Authoritarian, ‘big-man’ rule – aimed at producing a combination of benevolence and delivery.	Democratic competition is a powerful force for positive change in getting the basic ideas and principles right. This checks the temptation for self-referentialism by governments in offering such solutions, and it helps to guard against networks of authoritarians. Today’s benevolent dictator is tomorrow’s octogenarian clinging to power.
Aid for development.	Aid that unlocks obstacles to progress. This could be humanitarian assistance, or peacekeeping, or aid that improves the flow of trade and investment by calibrating access to governance.
A single cure, a quick solution.	Understand the political economy of action and inaction – things happen for a reason but also don’t happen for a reason. The growth story is complex and is a marathon without a finishing line.
Protectionism and nationalism.	Seek closer integration, not liberation from foreign investment. Guard against protectionism and nationalism as a means of institutionalising inefficiencies and rent-seeking.
Put the state at the centre.	Liberate and arm people – through less state, fewer frictions, and market access to

	capital, technology, trade and skills. Incentivisation and instilling change are key.
Crack down on criticism and opposition, and employ divide-and-rule tactics using identity politics.	National cohesion and common purpose reflect in the way in which institutions work and are respected, particularly the judiciary and parliament.
Sweeping visions, summits and state visits.	Reinvent the growth story. Develop narratives, plan the next stage, attach resources and time. Align diplomacy with economic needs and build trust in democracy and its institutions.
Consensual and gradualist leadership – leading from behind.	Leadership should be bold and move quickly; there is a limited window for action. This is particularly true in a crisis. But be mindful of the timing, too.
Bring in Tony Blair or McKinsey: drive change through technical, topical answers.	Technical problems of the poor are a symptom of and not a cause of poverty. Governance goes hand in hand with liberty, equality, values and rights, putting the battle of political ideas and logic at the centre of development.

Stability trumps all other needs.	Stability helps, but not at the price of slowing down reforms. Political instability is a risk that reformers take.
Think big – through regional or continental integration for small states.	Small countries have done well, in part because it is easier to extend governance. The response to Ukraine reminds us that they have powerful agency.
Geography or culture or climate or religion or war to explain low growth.	Governments – and their ability to make better choices and implement them – sets state performance apart, including moving away from under foreign influences.

> **The overall difference between reformers and laggards, between rich and poor states, lies in the way in which leaders go about their task, about how their people respond and how the outside world engages.**

One notable difference between performers and the rest is in the learned the learned helplessness of decision-makers in the latter group. This increases the risk of the hole getting even deeper and undermining the democratic project.[1]

The challenges in freeing up the system to enable fresh investment into Zambia has taught that dollops of political will and even the right public noises were not going to be enough. The mindset of government has to change to one where it is a facilitator rather than simply a regulator. A

president such as Zambia’s Hakainde Hichilema (better known as HH), who wanted to do the right thing was a good and absolutely necessary element, but insufficient if the reforms were to survive contact with the ground and to continue beyond his term(s) of office.

COUNTRY EXAMPLE

GHANA

NAVIGATING GHANA'S DEMOCRATIC JOURNEY: LESSONS FOR DEMOCRATS WORLDWIDE

by Marie-Noelle Nwokolo

Cover image shows Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, President of the Republic of Ghana, speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos, 2020. Photo: Flickr/World Economic Forum (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Since its democratic transition in 1992, Ghana has been hailed as a beacon of democracy in West Africa, making significant strides towards consolidating democratic principles. Since

democratic rule was restored in 1993, the country has held seven free and fair elections, accompanied by peaceful transitions of power between opposing political entities on three occasions (in 2001, 2009 and 2016). Through its multi-party elections, improvements in human rights and the independence of key institutions like the Electoral Commission, Ghana has showcased its commitment to fostering a liberal democratic culture. However, amid these successes lie challenges that threaten to undermine the country's democratic progress.

One of the pivotal achievements in Ghana's democratic journey has been the enhancement of electoral integrity and transparency. The Electoral Commission's efforts have led to credible and peaceful elections, with voter turnouts consistently above 70%, until 2016.[1] Despite occasional irregularities, political parties' acceptance of election outcomes has solidified Ghana's democratic continuum, showcasing a commitment to the rule of law and institutional stability.

Yet, challenges persist, notably the elite capture of democratic institutions. As renowned political scientist Gyimah-Boadi points out, despite Ghana's achievements as an electoral democracy, a select cadre comprising government officials, political factions, senior bureaucrats, media moguls, influential personalities and private sector entities have methodically co-opted the benefits derived from democratic governance. For instance, political interference in the leadership of the Electoral Commission raises concerns about impartiality and undermines public trust.

For years, the Electoral Commission and its procedures gained importance in Ghanaian politics, coinciding with the populace's unequivocal endorsement of electoral participation as the sole

legitimate avenue to wield political influence. Yet, today, shadows of doubt increasingly form over its leadership. The entrenchment of partisan interests within this foundational democratic institution often commences with the incumbent president and ruling party strategically appointing loyalists and individuals deemed amenable to critical positions within the Commission.

It goes without saying that partisan manipulation of electoral processes further exacerbates the problem, risking the erosion of democratic norms and the consolidation of power in the hands of a few. To safeguard democracy, especially in a region increasingly embroiled by blatant democratic backsliding, Ghana must prioritise electoral reforms that strengthen the independence and neutrality of democratic institutions, ensuring transparency and accountability in the electoral process.

Moreover, winner-take-all politics threatens to deepen polarisation and undermine national cohesion. The dominance of two major political parties, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP) perpetuates a cycle of clientelism and patronage, sidelining smaller parties and independent voices. To mitigate this, Ghana, especially its political elites, must foster a culture of tolerance and inclusivity, promoting dialogue and collaboration among political actors. Similarly, the rise of ‘foot soldiers’ in both the NDC and the NPP, offering blind allegiance for private gain, has ushered in a dangerous era of patronage politics, where, as many witnessed in the 2016 election, control of public resources becomes a battleground between rival factions. This tribalisation and militarisation of party politics not only erodes democratic institutions and fosters corruption but

also undermines public trust in Ghana's democratic and developmental aspirations. By prioritising the common good over narrow partisan interests, Ghana can build a more resilient and inclusive democracy.

Socio-economic disparities and voter apathy also pose significant challenges to democratic consolidation. Despite modest economic growth, job creation remains inadequate, leaving many disillusioned with the political process. For the first time in the Fourth Republic, the voter turnout dropped to 69.28% in 2016,[2] lower than the 2012 figure of 80.15%. Continuing the status quo will only likely lead to worse results, especially for a population that feels like its options are limited by the de facto two-party democracy Ghana has become. Addressing these disparities requires inclusive economic policies and social welfare programmes that benefit all citizens, reducing the influence of money in politics and empowering marginalised communities.

Ghana's democratic progress offers valuable lessons for democrats across the continent. Democratic gains are not automatic, and neither are they consolidated by happenstance. Greed, partisanship and personalisation of politics can chip away at the most remarkable democratic gains. The lessons from Ghana's journey are to embrace and continue to pursue reforms that promote transparency, fairness, integrity and the common good of political institutions. Only then can democracy truly flourish, both in Ghana and beyond.

[1] Peter Arthur, 'Democratic Consolidation in Ghana: The Role and Contribution of the Media, Civil Society and State Institutions', *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 48(2), 2010.
[2] See https://democracyinafrica.org/democracy-capture-and-the-shadow-state-in-africa/.

> **‘Africa needs strong institutions,’ says the former Nigerian president, Olusegun Obasanjo, ‘and it needs strong leaders.’**

But creating those institutions and ensuring the discipline to match rhetoric with delivery and to maintain discipline and predictability is no easy task, requiring at least external and internal alignment on their focus, operations and composition. And it requires managing an elite that is constantly manoeuvring and hindering to maintain their position and flow of rents.

Olusegun Obasanjo, Former Nigerian President and Board Member of Africa's Progress Panel. Photo: Flickr/Friends of Europe (CC BY 2.0)

Africa’s patronage networks are a product of kinship and politics. They are designed to reward and strengthen this grip on power, where contracts are fed to political allies. The security forces are employed primarily to maintain rule not to ensure the rule of law. In this environment, power is largely unchallenged and only dangerously challengeable. Leaders rely on a small circle of trusted advisers.

Foreigners are tolerated only inasmuch as they provide goods or a measure of diplomatic protection, but are seldom popular, not least because of the envy that comes with their role.

> **Identifying and moving quickly against such vested interests is an essential part of successful reform.**

Latvians, for instance, acknowledge that they should have dismantled the Soviet system much faster, as the Russians were able to 'ingrain certain habits and practices culturally and institutionally'.[2] South Africa moved quickly to change the system after the end of apartheid, but only insofar as it replaced one set of (racial) elites with another. And the attempts to reform the system after the political demise of Jacob Zuma were a failure, not least since the same problems of integrity and veracity permeated the ruling African National Congress (ANC). Sudden reforms – and prosecutions – were required, and this did not happen on a sufficient scale, as it was against the ANC's constituents and sense of justice.

Indeed, the problem is that in many post-authoritarian countries the political and administrative class is completely rotten and acts according to its entrenched interests. Without fundamental institutional change to transform decision-making into actions – to turn opacity, arbitrariness, incompetence and corruption into transparency, predictably, competence and accountability – there is likely no end in sight to the failure of African (and some other) regimes to deliver against their promises and to the suffering, thus, of ordinary people.[3]

The critical public response to action and inaction on such difficult policy choices illustrates that public approval should guide only to an extent, and that using the mandate given to leaders at elections is what separates the performers from the failures.

Leadership is one component, the purpose of which is not primarily to separate an elite from the misery whence they came, but to get them to determine a sound path, display attention to detail, and inspire and lead others. When the cavalcades, blue lights and other perks become how others see the job, then the wrong expectations and incentives both follow. One leader of a very poor southern African nation who is driven in a Bentley and has someone put on his seatbelt for him personifies precisely the wrong message.

> **Much is written about what is wrong, however, and much less about how to fix things.**

A "blue light brigade" escorting a VIP. Photo: X/MDN News

POINTS OF SUCCESS

How can one create a positive cycle of opportunity, investment, growth, stability, trade, skills, health, governance and inclusion, and in the process encourage a compounding continuum of better choices?

What is the political economy of change – what political choices enable the economy to develop faster and in an inclusive fashion?

Key to answering this economic growth development puzzle is to ensure that politics enables this change, that one is in power to be able to make the changes to policy needed. There follows the need to encourage the power of the individual, spontaneous problem solvers rather than simply those who can identify the problems and preach about the solutions. Someone has to actually make things happen. This includes understanding where and how government must *not* act. It requires answering the formula for better governance, whether this lies in a highly centralised state or, in larger countries, in a devolution of authority to local government agencies – cities, municipalities and/or provinces – and in which areas, from taxation to policing.

How government devises and pursues a realistic revenue model to fund itself and its agenda is crucial to long-term development.

> **A failure to invest sufficiently in people's welfare, education and health or in physical assets, including electricity and transport, is going to shape the long-term growth trajectory.**

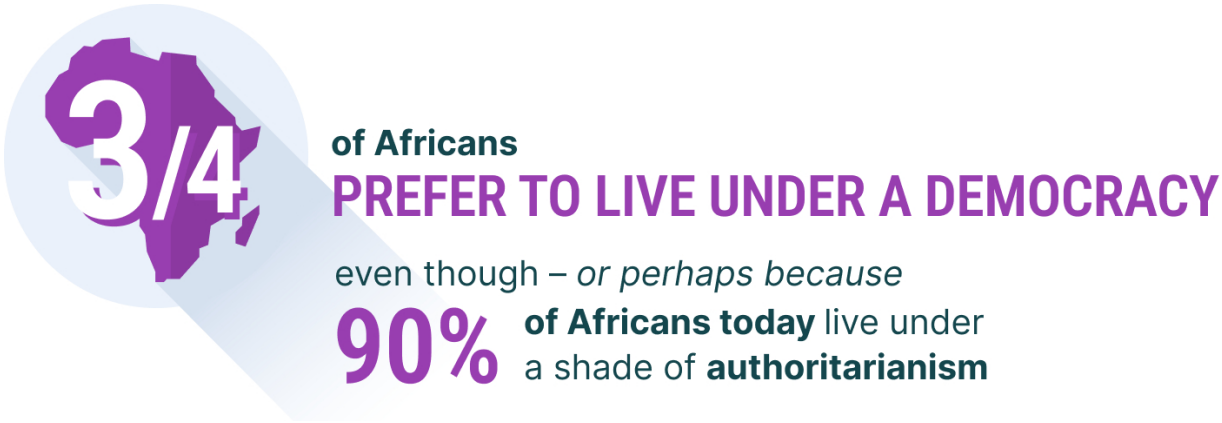
Too much expenditure on infrastructure, and political stability is likely to suffer; similarly, too much on a bureaucracy and consumption, and the failings of infrastructure will undermine the economy. But someone has to pay for the things on which the government chooses to spend money. Usually, privatisation – or at least a concessioning of state assets, if not an outright sale – offers a relatively easy technical solution to a lack of efficiencies. But, this can often backfire politically due to the perception of the loss of control of national assets and the market-pricing of services leading to an increase in costs for already stressed consumers, amplifying wealth divides and worsening difficulties of access to a modern economy. Another solution is to allow the private sector to build,

own and operate new assets for a stipulated period, permitting the power of choice by citizens. To make this model work, government has to allow relatively generous terms, without which the private sector won't invest.

Finding an appropriate formula also asks what the appropriate role for the state should be in licensing and regulating business. It asks whether and how the state should be involved with the provision of public goods, including transport, power and housing. It asks where the line should be drawn on fiscal sustainability, how to reduce debt while maintaining welfare expenditure to the most vulnerable and promoting capital investment over consumption. It asks whether politicians can become agents of change, rather than the source of the problem. It is never going to be easy to let go of the vested interests that ensure power but prevent change. This explains how a vicious cycle of poverty, high costs, low skills, limited investment, weak and expensive logistics, poor market access, low growth, violence and social exclusion pervades in many African contexts.

Very often the answer provided to the question as to what separates high performing countries from the rest comes down to 'good leadership'. That this argument is often followed by some bluster about 'benign dictators' can be ignored, if only because in Africa, there has been no such thing, and dictators have in almost every instance been even worse at governance and development than their democratically elected counterparts. As noted in the Introduction, while people might want a Lee Kuan Yew, more often than not they have instead a Jean-Bédel Bokassa, Idi Amin or another such brutal and incompetent thug. Today they might get a different, less violent version, where the rule by fear is eclipsed by the 'rule of spin', as Sergei Guriev and Daniel Treisman have coined it, but where only a pretence of (electoral, not liberal) democracy and free choice is allowed.[4]

And yet, most Africans overwhelmingly reject autocratic rule.



Source: 'Do Africans Want Democracy — and Do They Think They're Getting It?' Afrobarometer, 2 November 2021.

Nearly three-quarters of Africans surveyed prefer to live under a democracy; even though – or perhaps because – more than 90% of Africans today live under a shade of authoritarianism.[5] The absence of institutional accountability and public debate in such autocratic situations tells its own story about why development success has eluded much of Africa.

But what are the qualities that define a 'good' leader? Can leaders be made, or at least tutored and shaped into a model of efficiency and compassion? Are there useful role models that cut across geography, history, race and religion? What mixture of attention to detail and of micro-management, having one's finger on the pulse, is required, and to what extent should leaders delegate authority? Good leaders are supposed to prioritise, but what factors shape a 'priority', and what might assist a leader best in its resolution?

COUNTRY EXAMPLE

ARGENTINA

THE ARGENTINIAN EXPERIENCE

by Marcus Pena

Cover photo shows Argentinian President Javier Milei. Photo: Midia Ninja (CC BY-NC 4.0)

In 2015, Mauricio Macri won the Argentina presidential election against predictions that the ruling Peronist party would win as it had for most of the last 25 years.

He won in the run-off after a very disruptive horizontal campaign that allowed him to reach Argentine voters and convince a majority of them that it was worth the risk to

change. He had created a new political party twelve years before, and, after governing the Buenos Aires City government for eight years, he led a new coalition into power. For several years, the lack of a competitive political opposition had created a big institutional risk for the political system.

Four years later, despite governing with a minority in Congress and a very difficult economic situation, he obtained seven points more than in the first election, with over two million people taking to the streets during the campaign. Sadly, it was not enough, and the reunited Peronist Party came back to power. He was the first non-Peronist president who finished his term in 100 years, but a feeling of frustration remained, a sense of lost opportunity.

Four years after that, the Juntos por el Cambio coalition was ready to win again after a poor government performance, and after a very good mid-term election and with new leadership heading the ticket. But despite the forecasts, an outsider, Javier Milei, won the election, beating the whole political system.

There are several useful lessons from this experience. Defending a healthy, balanced and competitive democratic system is a crucial objetive, but it is not enough. You have to look beyond it and be able to represent a majority of the voters. But that also is not enough because once in office you have to be able to govern effectively. We had prepared for those challenges, but without a long-term strategy.

What that taught me is that democracy is an infinite game, one that never ends, and that very short-term objectives, no matter how important, can cause strategic problems. One of the main challenges this infinite game presents is human resources

management. It is all about people. People in leadership, in government, in Congress, in campaign teams. And that aspect is usually underestimated, since we all debate more about ideas and institutions than about how we prepare, train, support and take care of the people that integrate political teams. How we do this will determine the long-term success of a political project.

The other aspect is change – constant and very dynamic change. Adapting to it requires flexible leadership, constantly working on understanding new situations. Voters can change quickly, but the leaders usually have more difficulty changing because they are caught up in day-to-day politics and because as they gather experience, they are less willing to innovate. That is why as part of a human resources strategy, you need to have people looking outside the short-term reality, looking at trends, keeping in touch with what is happening on the ground, especially among young people.

Elaborating a long-term infinite game strategy and taking professional human resources very seriously are ways to avoid the short-term trap of the next political challenge and objective. In short, do not get angry at the voters for not voting for you, think how you can maintain your capability of representing them.

THE PREMIUM OF LEADERSHIP

We know more easily, and often at great cost, the qualities of poor leaders. Edgar Lungu's apparently dazed mode of presidential detachment, for instance, paralleled Zambia's economic slide at a time when the country should have boomed, as prices for its principal export, copper, rose, and money was cheap to borrow in international markets. Instead, the windfall was squandered, and borrowed money stolen as patronage and sycophancy became the operating system of government. Hichilema's subsequent hands-on style stands out in contrast, but the bureaucracy presents its own challenges in an environment where selfish, personal interests habitually trump much else.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Photo: Flickr/President of Ukraine (PDM 1.0)

Leadership, we also know, can make a difference. Take another example: Ukraine over Afghanistan. It has turned out that a comedian, a man known before the Russian invasion in 2022 as 'the television President',[6] Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who had a 40% approval rating before the war on account of his (lack of) governance, was a

Churchillian figure, with a 91% approval rating by the end of the second week of the conflict.

> **His ability to transmit leadership proved a key element in his initial success in resisting the Russian invasion.**

Zelenskyy seemed perfectly skilled and trained for this role, where every aspect of his appearance, actions and words have been calibrated for maximum public effect: the combat T-shirt, the unshaven sleepless look of a man working around the clock, and his soundbites. Who can forget his 'I need ammunition, not a ride' remark, in stark and obvious comparison to Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani, who fled his country when the heat was turned up?

> **'I need ammunition, not a ride'**

Zelenskyy's version of leadership instantly reinforced the sense of Ukrainian agency in the war, despite the overwhelming comparative size of its foe in Russia, with nearly four times the population and ten times the economy. By comparison, the Afghans never owned the problem and thus the solution, a weakness exhibited by the sudden and catastrophic collapse of the government of Ashraf Ghani in August 2021. The Ukrainians certainly do. They have agency of a type that President Ghani and his predecessor Ahmed Karzai could only dream about. Policy and direction stem from leadership, and the manner it presents itself and engages with the public – through the media and other institutions of state.

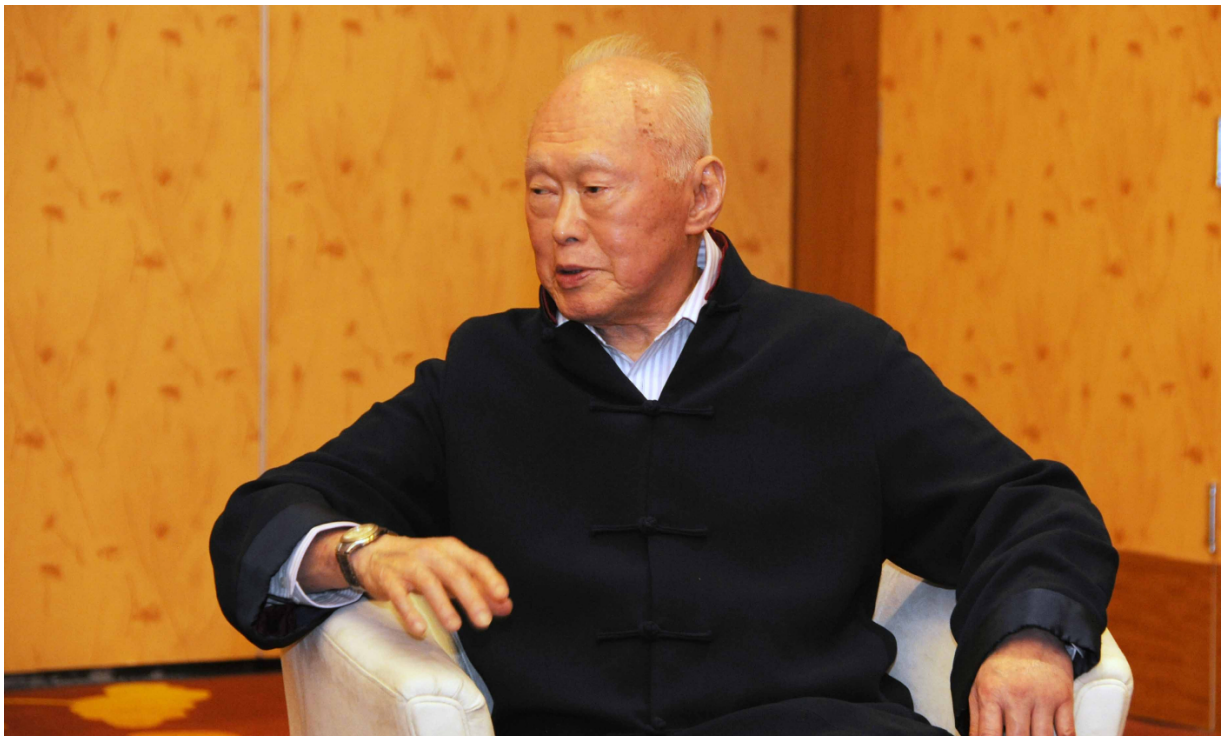
Volodymyr Zelenskyy at Bucha in the Kyiv region in 2022, where mass killings of civilians took place during the occupation by Russian troops. Photo: Flickr/President Of Ukraine (PDM 1.0)

Zelenskyy has had to put his life on the line to fight an autocratic invader. Going into combat to fight for democracy – military or otherwise – no doubt builds a proper appreciation of the difference between freedom and its absence.

For all of the differences in style and the divide between autocratic over more democratic leadership, there are several enduring traits. These generally value delegation, professional understanding, innovation and the use of technology, self-discipline, moral integrity, intellectual curiosity, and the ability to work with others, both within their own country and outside. While some might put more store in ruthlessness, iron will, political allegiance and discipline, leaders should build a powerful team of minds and competencies that complements their own skills rather than satisfies their insecurities. This requires enough humility to listen and learn so that leadership is capable of constantly adapting and adjusting in a very dynamic era.

> **Character matters, as does politeness and manners as a skill in gathering others around you.**

As Lee Kuan Yew, the founder of modern Singapore, has noted, 'You lose nothing by being polite.'



Lee Kuan Yew. Photo: Tatarstan.ru (CC BY 4.0)

This human dimension of leadership and relationships is critical since the challenges for outsiders especially is not to tell people what to do and even less to tell them what they are doing wrong. This is inevitably seen as patronising and counter-productive. Rather, the secret is to build the relationships that enable things to change.

At a personal level, showing genuine care for those led should be fundamental at every level of leadership, along with powers of delegation, professional understanding of all aspects of government, an acceptance to innovate, self-discipline, moral clarity, and an ability to work with others, inside and outside your government and country. It also depends on what phase of government one is in: whether you are looking to stop and turn around failure, initiate and carry through

reforms, or build off a base of pre-existing solid growth. Some are not so lucky with the nature of their inheritance.[7]

The ability to work with others, to maintain collegiality but also decide on a course of action and then ruthlessly pursue it is more difficult but particularly necessary in those countries beset by division, and an absence of trust, across races, religions, tribes, geographies, and between the public and private sectors.

The image cultivated by the likes of Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery or the US General George Patton, to take two examples of military types, or of the likes of Mobutu Sese Seko and Donald Trump in a political context, of a showy individual, can funnel authority in a positive way, but the peacocking has to be purposeful rather than driven by ego alone. Headlines are necessary, as Zelenskyy shows, but only in tuning in the public and turning the debate in the interests of the mission.

Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, General George Patton, Mobutu Sese Seko, and Donald Trump. Photo credits, from left to right: Flickr/Archives New Zealand (CC BY 2.0), Flickr/TXZeiss (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0), Dutch National Archives (CC BY-SA 3.0 NL), Flickr/Gage Skidmore (CC BY-SA 2.0)

There is no need to openly play the autocrat; believing that getting the best results demands autocratic methods may in fact demonstrate weakness. There is a need to get people to reach the same conclusion

through explanation and instigation, rather than coercion. Leaders have to be firm, but there is no need to be terribly rude. This speaks of an inner self-discipline in keeping the ego in check.

David Petreaus, who commanded multinational forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, and who served briefly as director of the Central Intelligence Agency, says there are four tasks of 'strategic' leadership.

THE FIRST OF THESE

is to get the big ideas right.

THE SECOND,

he says, 'is to communicate them effectively throughout the breadth and depth of the organization.'

A THIRD

is to oversee their implementation.

AND THE FOURTH

is to determine how the big ideas need to be refined, changed, augmented, and then repeating the process over again and again and again.'[8]

> **Ideas are, however, insufficient. Execution against them is critical.**

This places emphasis on those who possess the ability to reflect on their own success and failings, to assimilate all the 'under-the-hood' detail necessary to do so and also to turn ideas into action.

Gen. David Petraeus

This usually requires tempering ambition, reducing the number of tasks and allocating key people do them, completing these tasks and continually building momentum. Of course, this approach is never going to supply the need for the ambition, but it can make the difference and avoids overstretch and failure. There are strengths in having the big ideas of administration and seeing them through.

There is a constant imperative, as Nick Carter, the former Chief of Defence Staff of the British armed forces observes, ‘to think things through to the finish’. This demands the dedication of the resources sufficient to the task, including dollops of political will. In practical terms, there is a danger of announcing a project and then expecting that it is delivered. From experience, that is just a fraction of the task at hand. A lot of hustling and sweat is necessary to ensure that the job gets done, involving a lot more perspiration than inspiration.

A critical quality of leadership is accepting responsibility for defeat. If a mission – or a plan – fails, and if people have done their jobs, then the ultimate responsibility rests with the person at the top. Few political leaders are willing to do so, and most prefer passing the buck. But how

can they learn from their mistakes if their egos do not allow them to identify their mistakes? Bradley cautioned that:

> **it 'is a grave error for the leader to surround himself with "Yes men"'.**

Like Hichilema in Zambia, Zelenskyy is probably crucial to Ukrainian success, especially in gathering support in turning it from a losing to a worthy and winnable cause. But his leadership alone, while necessary, is insufficient to win the struggle.

> **Leaders are those who recognise the need, also, to build institutions to carry forward their work, and not just make this about themselves.**

But this means, too, guarding against institutional self-deception. This requires, in turn, more than having the brightest people around, but those present and engaged whose courage prevents the institutionalisation and conspiracy of optimism, where facts and feedback to leaders can commonly be tilted to suit the narrative and to define loyalty.

A careful selection of priorities, and the application of resources to them, can create another reinforcing leadership attribute: a tradition of success. This requires a can-do spirit, but, more than that, an ability to learn to identify and admit what worked and what failed, and thus what is required to win.

Being brutally honest to political leaders is precisely what the senior leadership of the US military failed to do in Vietnam, in speaking truth to power. Not only does this demand political leadership willing to recognise their own limits (which is, from experience, unusual), it also

demands outsiders possessing the courage of their convictions, as well as the personal and institutional means to construct the political context among your partners.

Absent this environment, it made little difference to hire 'the best and the brightest'. Yet, despite the pain of this reminder, political leaders continue to attempt to debunk history.

Egoism and idealism are two sides of the coin of leadership. But there are immense dangers when these two driving forces get out of kilter. An example of this would be allowing charismatic and bright neophytes at the top to believe that they know better, and that they, alone, know how to read people, gain their confidence and swing their opinions, that experts 'just read books', that history is bunk, and that if leaders get on, countries will.[9] Politicians will always interfere, since self-belief is how they rose to power in the first instance. Such personalities are not wired to listen. But this is not helped by groupthink and the weakness of leaders to see obeyance as loyalty.

Translating this into those administrative and political contexts where capacity is thin, the politics fractious and institutions threadbare, there is a need for closer integration between the components of strategy: the goals, ways and means.

> **While big vision is important, there is an imperative to focus on small deliverables, but ones that are key enough to get the ball rolling.**

The lesson of the implementation of a reset in the mining sector is one example. And from there, these changes can be consolidated, reinforced and, as reforms gain momentum, gradually expanded to other areas. As Lee Kuan Yew reminded Obasanjo of the reasons for Singapore's reform success, there were no miracles, but:

> **‘we did a few things right and well, and continued to do them right and well, widening and deepening them all the time’.**[10]

The person who manages this is the leader who can carefully prioritise their actions and marshal their resources, who has a firm grip of the detail as well as the ability to see the sweep of the bigger picture, who trusts enough people around them to get things done without losing control, who does not mind contrarian argument (at least in private) in seeing loyalty not just through the prism of agreement, who acts, like Margaret Thatcher, to achieve their mandate more than to attempt to maintain consensus, and who has a laser-like focus on implementation.

General Omar N. Bradley. Photo: The Bradley Center

Perhaps the last word on leadership should be left to Omar Bradley, a general who was aware of the immutable value of practical aspects over theory in war: ‘Amateurs talk about strategy, professionals talk about logistics.’ For Bradley, a leader needs to be an all-rounder who has to possess a plan. Leadership, he concludes, centres on confidence, ‘creating it, radiating it, and inspiring it’.[11]

One diplomatic dimension of leadership is to bring critical partners onside.

COUNTRY EXAMPLE

LESOTHO

LESOTHO'S NEED FOR A BOLD RESET

by Greg Mills

Cover image shows Chief Joseph Leabua Jonathan. Photo: Joost Evers (CC BY-SA 3.0 NL)

Since independence in 1966, Lesotho's politics can be described as fractious. Fractious politics is a function of a failing economy, and vice versa. Successive leaders have failed to strengthen the existing economy and finding new sources of growth and employment.

The political roller coaster has not helped. The leader from independence Chief Joseph Leabua Jonathan staged the first coup in 1970 against the results of that year's election, which he is commonly held to have lost. And since Major General Justin Metsing Lekhanya toppled Jonathan's government in January 1986, the mountain kingdom has experienced not fewer than seven prime ministers (three of whom have served more than one non-consecutive period in office) and two military heads of government. Elected on a sweeping victory in October 2022, the Revolution for Prosperity party of Prime Minister Sam Matekane battled to make inroads into Lesotho's challenges. A local business magnate, Matekane made his fortune in diamond mining, as well as through government-issued construction contracts.

Poverty is omnipresent in the mountain kingdom. The country's per capita GDP at $1 100 is four times less than the next poorest member of the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), eSwatini. Some 60% of rural Basotho live on less than $1.25 per day. As much as 80% of the rural population, two-thirds of the total, rely on agriculture for their livelihood, which remains almost entirely rain-fed.

Little wonder that Lesotho remains vulnerable to shifts in aid flows (some $120 million annually), rainfall patterns, the price of commodities, remittances and its share of tariff income from the SACU. Slow growth in South Africa has compounded weakening SACU revenues, which traditionally supplied nearly

half of government income, although this has fallen more recently to just one-third. As a result, the fiscal deficit has more than doubled since 2015.

This is compounded by stagnancy in investment inflows, at around $40 million annually. And those figures reflect a relative dearth of investment opportunities outside mining and the apparel sector.

It is therefore unsurprising that many of Lesotho's skilled population leave for South Africa, where as many as one-quarter live and work, including some 50 000 mineworkers. In addition, in recent years, public sector employment grew while the private sector shrunk. The public sector wage bill equals half of the national budget, the highest ratio in sub-Saharan Africa.

Largely thanks to the US African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), enacted in 2000, allowing duty-free imports into the US from Africa, Lesotho has become a southern African garment manufacturing hub. As a result, Lesotho's textile and apparel industry provides about 35 000 jobs, most of whom are women, contributing not less than 10% of GDP. But this sector has shrunk recently with a rise in labour costs and the challenges of export through South Africa's inefficient ports.

The Basotho people face a choice. They can shrug and watch their country continue its decline or they can take bold action to change this deteriorating narrative. Conversely, a failure to take decisive action, and a reversion to the fractious costly political infighting of the recent past, only locks Lesotho in decline, growing social unease and worsening its dependence on aid.

The key choice, which will unlock the ability to take action in other areas is to create a political environment where policy choices are made in the interests of the country and not in the interests of retaining power and accessing rents in the short term.

Such a reset could include the following:

- **Declaring Lesotho an SEZ:** Special Economic Zones are designed to attract investment by dealing with the investment friction in an economy, creating a climate friendly to investors and making it easy to do business. A bold decision would be to declare the entire country an SEZ, dealing with corporate tax rates, incentives and red tape on a nationwide basis rather than piecemeal in SEZs.
- **Diversifying external markets:** The reliance on the South African markets and the AGOA arrangement with the US for Lesotho exports make the country highly dependent on external variables that may prove unreliable as the South African economy falters and US law makers debate the continuation of AGOA. Lesotho could, for example, seek to negotiate Free Trade Agreements with major external markets such as the US, the European Union and the United Kingdom, which would encourage export growth and the diversification of inputs for manufacturing.
- **The de-politicisation of wages:** Inflationary wage pressures in the public sector and political interventions have resulted in unsustainable private sector wage increases, which, in turn, affect investor and business sentiment. Wages need to rise as competition increases, as more investors see Lesotho as a destination for their capital.
- **Embracing a new ethos:** All of the above has to be led by a willingness to abandon the divisive politics of the past and the fear of the role of outsiders, and to embrace change and closer integration with the markets of the world. These markets bring not just capital and trade, but richness in skills, technology and networks.

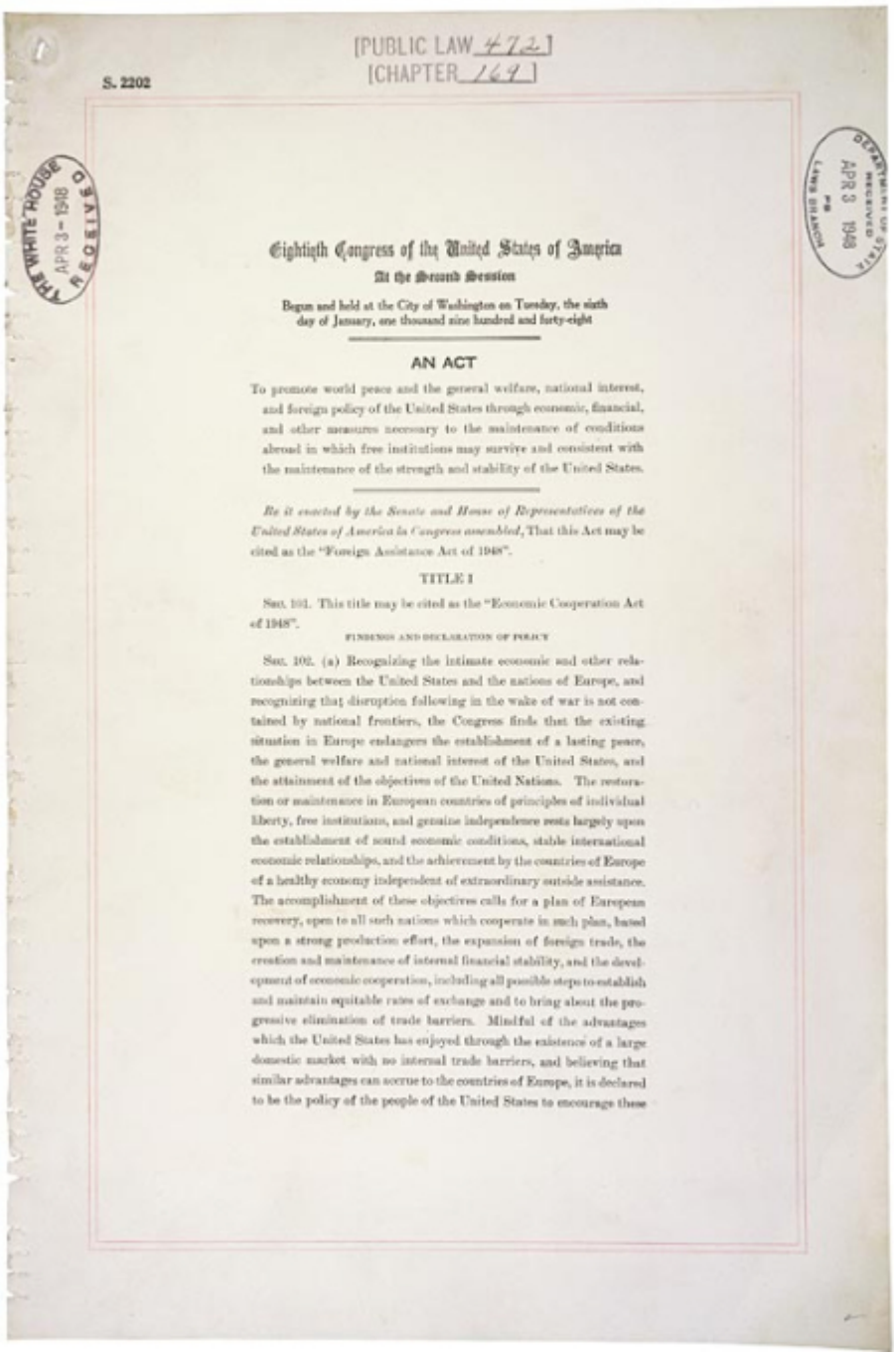
Politics is critical to getting the choices right. But leadership has to make the right set of choices and execute these

decisions with a laser-like focus. Without this, Lesotho can only descend further towards eventual failure.

CREATING A COINCIDENCE OF GLOBAL INTERESTS

In June 1947, in a speech to Harvard University, the United States Secretary of State George Marshall proposed that European nations create a plan for their economic reconstruction to which the United States would provide financial assistance.

General Marshall on the day of the famous Marshall Plan speech. Photo: Flickr/OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)



[PUBLIC LAW 472]
[CHAPTER 169]

S. 2202

THE WHITE HOUSE RECEIVED APR 3 - 1948

DEPARTMENT OF STATE RECEIVED APR 3 1948

Eightieth Congress of the United States of America

At the Second Session

Begun and held at the City of Washington on Tuesday, the sixth day of January, one thousand nine hundred and forty-eight

AN ACT

To promote world peace and the general welfare, national interest, and foreign policy of the United States through economic, financial, and other measures necessary to the maintenance of conditions abroad in which free institutions may survive and consistent with the maintenance of the strength and stability of the United States.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That this Act may be cited as the "Foreign Assistance Act of 1948".

TITLE I

SEC. 101. This title may be cited as the "Economic Cooperation Act of 1948".

FINDINGS AND DECLARATION OF POLICY

SEC. 102. (a) Recognizing the intimate economic and other relationships between the United States and the nations of Europe, and recognizing that disruption following in the wake of war is not contained by national frontiers, the Congress finds that the existing situation in Europe endangers the establishment of a lasting peace, the general welfare and national interest of the United States, and the attainment of the objectives of the United Nations. The restoration or maintenance in European countries of principles of individual liberty, free institutions, and genuine independence rests largely upon the establishment of sound economic conditions, stable international economic relationships, and the achievement by the countries of Europe of a healthy economy independent of extraordinary outside assistance. The accomplishment of these objectives calls for a plan of European recovery, open to all such nations which cooperate in such plan, based upon a strong production effort, the expansion of foreign trade, the creation and maintenance of internal financial stability, and the development of economic cooperation, including all possible steps to establish and maintain equitable rates of exchange and to bring about the progressive elimination of trade barriers. Mindful of the advantages which the United States has enjoyed through the existence of a large domestic market with no internal trade barriers, and believing that similar advantages can accrue to the countries of Europe, it is declared to be the policy of the people of the United States to encourage these

Act of April 3, 1948, European Recovery Act, also known as the Marshall Plan. Photo: National Archives and Records Administration

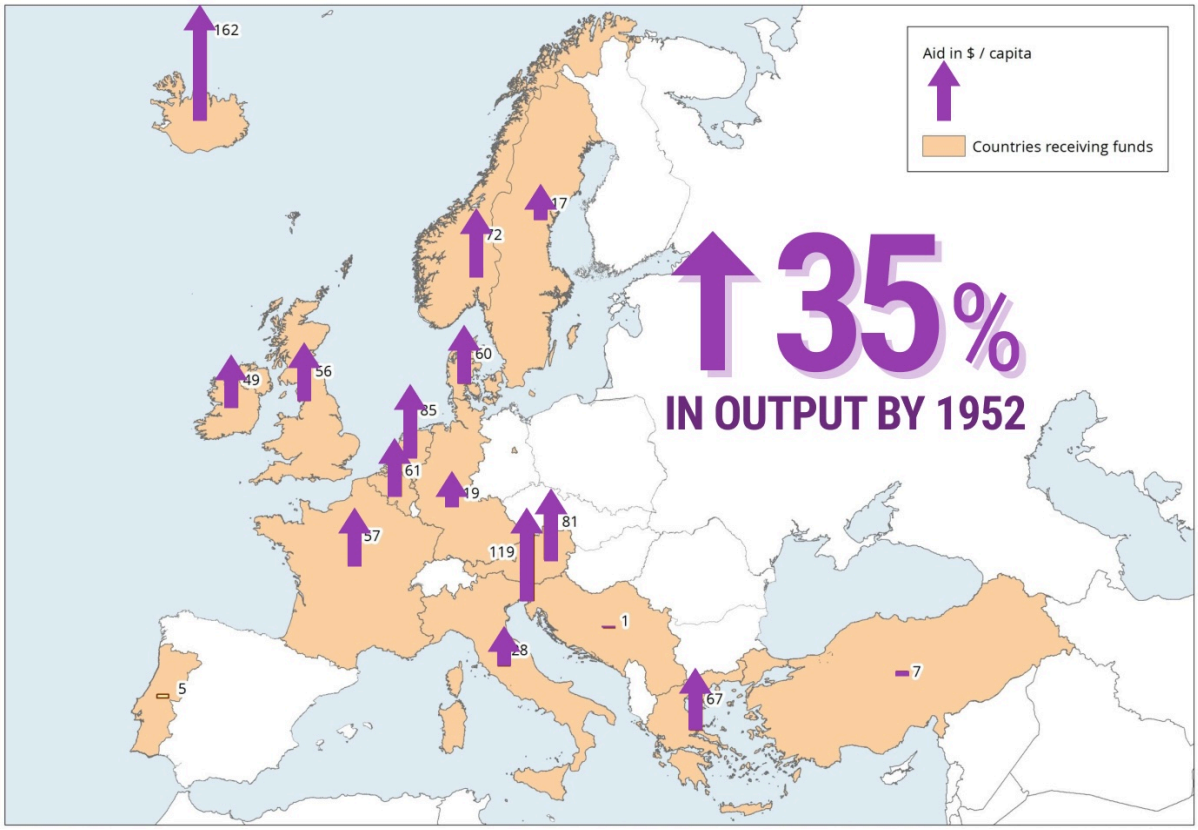
Six months later, President Harry Truman signed the Economic Recovery Act, which became known as the Marshall Plan, under the terms of which the US transferred over $13 billion – approximately $150 billion in 2023 dollars – to sixteen European nations by the time the Plan concluded in 1952.

Such was the immediate and positive impact of the Marshall Plan, Truman proposed an international development assistance programme

in 1949, which morphed into USAID in 1961. Today official development assistance – aid to developing countries by developed ones – totals $185 billion annually, this figure excluding private flows and money from non-traditional donors, including China, Turkey and the Middle East.

The Marshall Plan was very successful in terms of its objectives. The European countries involved experienced a 35% increase in output by 1952, becoming a bulwark against communist expansion in the process. In a virtuous cycle, this created growing and reliable markets for American goods (where much of the funding was spent), improving European social and political stability and enabling economic recovery.

DISTRIBUTION OF MARSHALL PLAN FUNDS IN EUROPE, 1948-1951



*Trieste: Independent territory, 1947 - 1954, ultimately divided between Yugoslavia and Italy.
Map source: USAID

The Marshall Plan worked because it built on existing human capacity, and the European partners were willing – indeed, desperate in the wake of the Second World War – to play their part. The establishment of counterpart funds in local currency provided a crucial source for industrial investment, especially in West Germany.

The success was such that the Marshall Plan has become a metaphor for dramatic, transformative large-scale development assistance projects, especially in Africa. ‘We need a Marshall Plan’ has become a rhetorical default setting for unimaginative politicians looking for a radical answer to a difficult development situation.

But herein lie three problems.

FIRST,

the Marshall Plan was built on pre-existing skills. For all the damage that the war did, there were still many highly qualified and technically proficient Germans able to pick up the pieces. The Marshall Plan provided, initially, liquidity to buy essential food, fuel and other consumables, and then capital goods along with access to markets for local production. That access already exists for Africa. What does not exist is the pool of technical and technocratic skills and a governance environment able to use them.

The relative absence of these inner stuffings of skills, governance and capacity can be seen in the peak ratio of aid to GDP to Europe under the Marshall Plan (2.5%) compared to Africa (less the two largest economies of South Africa and Nigeria) *circa* 2020 (5%).[12] More money will not address these productive shortages on its own – especially the shortage of institutional capacity and skills.

SECOND,

the Europeans were willing partners and were intent on playing their part in recovery. By comparison, aid to Africa has failed where Africans have seen it less as an incentive for reform and an investment in change, than a form of reparations. It has also failed, given that external attempts to impose conditions (which was a key aspect in the Marshall Plan) have proven impossible in Africa. This is, in part, because local politicians have proven especially adept in laying this off against colonial and racial guilt, and where Europeans have lacked the spine to apply the principles of 'take it or leave it'. The Cold War strategic imperative lessened such conditionalities, where reliability was less determined by adherence to governance norms than support for one side or another.

THIRD,

where international actors can play a useful role in development is not just in funding (which is helpful, if spent more on well-priced capital rather than consumer goods), but in cheaper market access (since more trade equals greater growth), and especially as a tool of external discipline.

It is in the latter area – as a tool of external discipline – that integration has perhaps its greatest short-term benefits, apart from the obvious need to expedite trade across borders by focusing on the removal of physical obstacles in inefficient borders more than grand, long-term tariff-reduction schemes.

One Spanish politician observed succinctly of the role of Brussels in domestic fiscal policy in the context of the spendthrift ways of the Zapatero administration (2004–2011):

> **'The EU is a vaccine against irresponsible national politicians.'**

Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. Photo: Flickr/European Parliament (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

This is correct for European policy as much as it has been true, too, for Mexico in the context of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The challenge for outsiders working with Africa and other relatively unglobalised markets is to imagine a system of reciprocal advantage beyond trade preferences based on foreign guilt and local desperation, to a system that knits together wider aspects of growth and development.

These relationships have to include the elimination of trade barriers, but also intellectual property protections, environmental and labour protections, university scholarships, visa provisions, aid for infrastructure and healthcare, and law and order collaboration.

> **The overall aim of integration processes has to be, as with Europe and Mexico, to tap into richer markets.**

That is also how Asia developed – by supplying cheap goods to richer markets initially using its labour cost differential. As 97.2% of the global economy lies outside Africa, for example, and nearly 40% in the US and EU alone,[13] the continent's aim has to be to reduce the barriers to trade with the outside world – such as Morocco has managed – at least as much as with each other.

Historically, during the imperial era, external interests towards Africa were driven by a caucus and the intersection of interests of politicians, civil servants and businessmen. During that era, policy was geared to the maintenance of law and order, the raising of taxes to pay for the administration of the colony, the stimulation of the production of raw materials for export to the colonial power, and the establishment of a consumer market to purchase manufactured goods in return. These countries represented, as Frederick Forsyth reminds us in his treatment of the callousness of the British hierarchy in the Nigerian civil war, 'not a land with a population of real people, but a market'.

> **Any threats to the market were to be discouraged, even if it involved ignoring democratic process and human rights.[14]**

Such indifference has been perpetuated in the post-colonial period. Policy is usually based not on support for local populations and their needs, but to the maintenance of outside interests through the local regime in power. This should not surprise Africa; it is not the responsibility of outsiders to be more interested in the fortunes and welfare of Africans than in maintaining their own strategic and commercial interests.

Added to this is a realisation on the part of outsiders that you can get away with only dealing with a small elite, that if you controlled (or influenced) the capital, you controlled the country. Hence, there was little interest in promoting governance, especially representative governance, and the administration that accompanies in the provinces.

In the contemporary era, optimism about externally driven schemes for development are thus seldom informed about what is best for local people. After all, this is not the principal constituency of outside powers. It is centred, instead, on securing the interests of these outside powers. That Africans, for instance, don't get screwed in the process is up to their governments to an extent, and when that safeguard fails, as it routinely does, to African civil society. The same provisos are true for the role of business; business seldom found a government it did not like. It is up to democrats to hold them to account, not least through the institutions established for this purpose: the courts, parliament and the media.

Thus, those extremes that believe that salvation is going to come from outside, or the problem lies outside the continent, are off the mark. Africa, in particular, expends too much energy on this area of policy, not least since externalising the solution (as the problem) assists in deflect attention away from the failures of domestic actors. Hence, the

disproportional expenditure of time on tax evasion and conspiracy narratives about the role of multinational companies and the externalisation of profits. Rather, attention should be focused on the things more easily changed by domestic actors, not least on improving productivity and reducing business frictions.

> **This requires aligning both policy and implementation thereof with an economic growth agenda.**

Underperformance created by incompetence and a lack of accountability has nothing (or very little) to do with external practices and actors. And squeezing outside actors for a greater share is not the way to greater prosperity; to the contrary, it will ensure greater penury. Even if corporate taxes were to be raised to 100%, tax compliance was universal and the externalisation of any profits became zero, productivity would not be improved and nor would economic growth, as 'an economy doesn't grow by taxes, it grows by production of goods and services.'[15] The political constraints, and costs, of making better choices and improving the incentives and moving away from excuses and towards a growth agenda remain, in this way, the significant impediment to development.

There are other limits to the role of outsiders. Their interests in fixing failure cannot be greater than the interests of locals if any reform process is to be sustainable.

> **In so doing, Africa, too, has to rely less on the charity of external actors than their interests in making money.**

Colonialism, which had its own routine of extraction and local disempowerment, has undoubtedly contributed to the way in which local interests see the benefits of change and the role of outsiders. Actions

that contribute to that lack of trust and perceptions of lack of respect are unlikely to assist. The fault also lies in the tendency of local elites to see the world through a lens of suspicion and conspiracy, a neo-mercantilist outlook that is the very opposite to the functioning of the global economy, as the positive case studies in this volume indicate. Either way, these vested interests and those views contrarian to reform have to be managed into relative political irrelevance through delivery on promises made.

The difference between the system of government being inclusive rather than extractive thus means learning to use politics to economic

COUNTRY EXAMPLE

SOUTH AFRICA

WHAT TO DO ONCE IN POWER

by Mayor Geordin Hill-Lewis

Cover photo shows Geordin Hill-Lewis, Mayor of the City of Cape Town in South Africa. Photo: Democratic Alliance (CC BY-SA 3.0 ZA)

A statement often repeated in my line of work is that the only thing worse than losing an election is winning it and then governing poorly. I fully support this sentiment – there is no message more powerful than that of demonstration. But I would like to add to this the critical importance of communicating well in government.

If you want your governance brand to endure in the hearts and minds of voters, then it is crucial that you find a way to clearly communicate this brand – your vision, your priorities and ultimately also your successes. This kind of strategic communication, which focuses on the repetition of a number of key messages as opposed to run-of-the-mill government announcements, is aimed at answering one simple question: what do I want residents or voters to think and feel about this government?

For our government in the City of Cape Town, our emphasis was roughly on three areas: creating a sense of optimism and pride by restoring hope in our city; reassuring residents that we will protect them from national state failures; and vowing to do more through better basic services, more innovation in government, a more caring attitude and better transparency.

Under an overarching brand promise with a very clear sense of higher purpose – 'A City of Hope for All' – we identified seven areas of priority and made a quantifiable pledge for each of these areas of delivery. These pledges became integral to our five-year Integrated Development Plan, and each one also became a stand-alone priority programme, reporting to my office.

The mantra for good strategic communication is to be *on message*, *in volume*, *over time*. Communicate only on the

things that win votes (on message), make sure this message reaches as many people as possible (in volume), and reinforce your message through frequent repetition (over time).

It is also important to connect your message to issues – in other words, a specific matter of public interest such as child hunger, community safety or water quality – as opposed to broader themes. Not only does a specific issue demonstrate clearly what you care about, it is also what the media is interested in covering. You then need to keep your issues in the news cycle for as long as you can through new angles and action steps.

It is crucial to remember that our voters or residents do not necessarily have the same interest in these issues and in our messages as we do. By the time we feel saturated by a story, they might be hearing it for the first time. That is why the ‘over time’ part of the mantra requires not only discipline but also careful media planning. You will need to manage a media grid, hold regular communication meetings, hire professionals in the field and be available and responsive at all times with your communication.

Always keep the language of your messaging plain and simple, always support this message with a short list of proof points, and always remember that you are not merely conveying information, you also want to evoke a feeling towards your government, be that of optimism, pride or a sense of being cared for.

COUNTRY EXAMPLE

SPAIN

DANCING WITH SEPARATISTS: LESSONS FROM SPAIN'S COALITION

by Greg Mills

Cover image shows Pedro Sanchez Perez-Castejon, Prime Minister of Spain. Photo: Flickr/NATO (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Spain's July 2023 general election failed to deliver a majority for any political party. Pedro Sánchez, the incumbent prime minister in power since 2018, managed to put together a coalition to remain in government. This complex assemblage had staying in power as its principal purpose, not governance.

‘This governing deal for a four-year legislative term will allow our country to continue growing in a sustainable manner and with quality employment, developing policies based on social and climate justice while broadening rights, feminist conquests and freedoms,’ the two major members of the coalition, Sánchez’s Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (PSOE) and the hard-left Sumar party said in a joint statement on the formation of the government in November 2023.

While the ire of the majority of voters who preferred the right-wing bloc, led by the conservative Popular Party (PP), was inevitably directed towards Sánchez’s political machinations, the party should rather have been asking itself why it did not win enough votes to govern.

All 350 seats in the lower house Congress of Deputies had been up for election, as well as 208 of 265 Senate seats. The PP finished first overall, winning 137 lower house seats, up from 89 in 2016, in the election, but was lacking enough votes to form a government, even with its right-wing bloc comprising the hard-right Vox (33 seats, down 19), and the Navarrese People’s Union (UPN) and Canarian Coalition (CC), which had just two seats between them. To obtain enough support to renew his term, Sánchez’s PSOE party, which had finished second in the general election with 120 seats (one more than in 2016), required the support not only of Sumar’s 31 deputies (down from 38) but also those of other parties, including those advocating for Catalan and Basque independence.

The result is a coalition for power’s sake and holding the country hostage to the parochial regional interests of Sánchez’s partners. Not only did the prime minister have to consolidate his original bloc of the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC), which went from 13 seats to 7, EH Bildu (from 5 to 6),

the Basque Nationalist Party or PNV (from 6 to 5), and the single-seat Galician Nationalist Bloc (BNG), but also Together for Catalonia (Junts), which had declined in the lower house by one seat to seven. Junts was led by former Catalan president and fugitive Carles Puigdemont, who led the region's secessionist attempt in 2017. To achieve this, Sánchez had to swallow an amnesty law for Catalan separatist politicians, including Puigdemont.

The political benefits of the cobbled-together coalition were, in the short term, obvious. This compromise meant that a repeat election was not needed for the first time since 2011.

While the PSOE is not considered populist per se, it is in bed with parties that promote a strongly populist agenda and hold the balance of power, albeit a complicated one. In a coalition within a coalition, Sumar itself includes remnants of the ultra-left populist party Unidas Podemos (United We Can).

Sánchez managed to mobilise 179 votes for his re-investiture (needing 176), thereby turning electoral defeat into parliamentary success. If the benefit of the coalition is to the politicians retaining power, the cost of the coalition will be borne, invariably, by the taxpayer. Maintaining support from populist, redistributive fellow travellers and dancing with separatists is unlikely to be a successful formula in tackling Spain's deep-seated economic and social challenges of high unemployment, high debt-to-GDP ratios and widening fiscal deficits, the latter related to pressures on social and healthcare budgets due to an ageing population and inflation-indexed pensions. The support of regional parties for Madrid demands concessions on the periphery, paradoxically at the expense of power at the centre and any reformist policy agenda.

For the left, it may be better than being out of power. But it has not been constructed in the interests of reform and governance.

Of the right, however, it should ask tough questions. The election was theirs for the taking. Sánchez had presided during a declining economy. During his term as prime minister, Spain's purchasing power fell by 5.5%,[1] a drop in the European Union second only to Germany. In two years, the average Spanish salary effectively lost €615 in purchasing power, in the process the country fell from 91% to 86% of the European average.

Sánchez may have partly been saved by higher-than-average economic growth in 2023. But the problem for the right is that the message of the need for tough reform is not going to win an election. To the contrary.

An anti-immigration sentiment enjoyed some resonance among the hard right. In 1998, there were just 1.2 million foreign-born residents; by 2020, there were more than seven million. But again, this is a paradox. While domestic conditions in Latin America and North Africa drive the flows, there are pull factors, in particular concerning Spain's looming labour shortage. With a tumbling fertility rate and unfunded pension requirements, and even with the rise in the retirement age to 67, Spain is estimated to require 250 000 workers a year from abroad for the foreseeable future.[2]

Unsurprising then, that, in the words of Iñaki Anasagasti, a veteran Basque politician, 'The right and the left in Spain know that political success is … right in the middle.'

And yet, there is some wiggle room for creative politicians, not least around connecting with youth concerns in a way that

appeals beyond crude attempts to grab support through redistribution.

A Navarra-based PP adviser, Eloy Villanueva, advises, 'The big issue for Spaniards is how your future is going to be better than that of your parents? The problem for the parties is that it is not a "nice answer", with some difficult choices behind it.'

Until then, Spain remains in political limbo, between having a government with little governance beyond horse-trading between parties. There is little the government can agree on, not even a budget, beyond who shouldn't be in the tent. 'A government without a shared vision for the country,' notes one administrator, 'is a collection of politicians continually involved a pissing competition. A government with no vision for the whole of the country is a group asking others to put up with their exhibitions of sectarism.'

The lesson from Spain's recent political turns is twofold: coalitions have to be based on more than an interest of being in government (and keeping others out) but instead on shared values. And second, there is a need to win the vote with a vision and series of ideas and not just relying on votes to keep others out of power.

[1] Instituto Juan de Mariana, 'El impacto de la inflación sobre las familias españolas', 2024, https://juandemariana.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Informe-impacto-de-la-inflacion-en-las-familias-en-Espana-B7.pdf.
[2] 'Spain Needs Immigrants. But Does It Still Want Them?' *The Economist*, 4 December 2021, https://www.economist.com/europe/2021/12/04/spain-needs-immigrants-but-does-it-still-want-them?utm_medium=cpc.adword.pd&utm_source=google&ppccampaignID=18151738051&ppcadID=&
response.anonymous&gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjwk6SwBhDPARIsAJ59GwcTRZsXhDanvU

COUNTRY EXAMPLE

MALAWI

CAN MALAWI GET ‘UNSTUCK’?

by Greg Mills

Cover photo: Silhouette of People by Keith Wako

Malawi is stuck. Among the five poorest countries at independence, in 2021 it was ranked second from the bottom globally. Its vital statistics read like a bad day on the Somme.[1]

Its per capita income is $390, a quarter of the sub-Saharan average, itself seven times less than the global average. Malawians were very poor at independence in 1964, their average income just 5% of the global average; today they have unimaginably slipped further backwards to a paltry 3.5%. Put differently, Malawians are nearly 30 times poorer than the average global citizen, an astonishing statistic when one contemplates its development advantages (a lake covering one quarter of its total area and rich agricultural land) and how well we understand development choices, challenges and options by now.

Following independence, Malawi's growth patterns initially tracked those of sub-Saharan Africa, increasing at 3.7% annually. Since 1980, however, it started to fall behind the rest of the continent, by then hardly a stellar performer. Malawi's real per capita GDP grew at an average of just 1.5%, for example, between 1995 and 2015, well below the 2.7% average in non-resource-rich African economies.

There are few countries as poor that are not in war. At least Malawi has that going for it. To add insult to injury, Malawi has remained vulnerable to episodic financial crises, characterised by balance of payment issues, forex unavailability, rising inflation, high debt levels and a collapse in growth rates. Why is Malawi so poor, and why the recurrent tendency to crisis and constant slipping further backwards?

This is a result of many factors, of course. Many Malawians emphasise a combination of the poor colonial inheritance, being land-locked, poverty and unfavourable terms of trade. Others would prefer to point to the harsh regime of Kamuzu (Hastings) Banda, the Scottish educated authoritarian who ran the country with an iron fist until the advent of multi-partyism

in 1994 – although Malawians are divided in their loyalty over the legacy of a man who referred to his own people as 'children in politics'.

Even though things started to fall apart during Banda's rule, especially by the late 1980s, forcing the arrival of the World Bank and imposition of a series of pro-market reforms, and growth was low, he was feared and, as a consequence, remains revered.

Banda's brand of big-man politics highlights a consistent element over the last six decades: the poor choices made by leadership and the corrosive nature of governance. It's not that Malawi lacks governance, but that the purpose of government is to enrich an elite at the expense of the poor. What this boils down to is the preference for a political pact among the elite to extract rents – even to the extent by driving macro-instability. According to this argument, there is no consensus to grow the pie for all. Instead, it is shared among the few. This is substantiated by the resistance to securing a proper rail network (acting in the interests of a transport mafia), the resistance to land reform (keeping the people poor, and elite interests secured), the resistance to reform fertiliser subsidies (for those who sell and distribute) and in the variety of state intermediaries in almost every area of the economy, from tobacco auction houses to buying agents for maize.

In each of these areas there are rents to be protected and constituencies to be maintained. This argument is used to explain why the government has retained the middle-man-style of state intervention in the economy when this had, even by the end of the supposedly relatively prosperous 1980s, proved unwieldly, to the point that the government had to seek assistance from the World Bank. It also clarifies why Malawi

keeps going with agriculture input subsidy schemes and bucking regional market opportunities, and why the civil service is comparatively large (at 180 000), yet guided less by performance than loyalty and a pernicious ‘per diem’ culture of allowances to augment low salaries.

The greatest achievement of the ten years of government of Bakili Muluzi was the transition to democracy in 1994. His tenure, marred by corruption allegations and a maize shortage, could at best be described as a kinder, nicer version of Banda’s three decades of harsh rule, but also absent its governance and probity. Muluzi’s hand-picked successor, Bingu wa Mutharika (born Brightson Webster Ryson Thom), may have looked like a reformer and someone who understood, at least on paper, the laws of economics, given his years as the Secretary-General of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), but he proved an erratic president. His attempts to increase food security and maize output in Malawi through subsidisation of inputs resulted in a massive increase in production, but also fuelled corruption and diverted funding from other areas. Nationwide protests in 2011, sparked by worsening fuel shortages, rising prices, government waste (including the purchase of a presidential jet) and high unemployment, saw a violent crackdown as Mutharika said he would ‘smoke out’ his enemies. This only worsened the forex and fuel shortages as the donors withheld funds. After Mutharika died of a heart attack, a palace coup, led by his brother Peter Mutharika to attempt to sideline Binu’s estranged vice president, Joyce Banda, failed, and she became president in April 2012. Impressive early reforms to stabilise the currency, normalise international relations and cut back on excessive expenditure were overtaken by the ‘Cashgate’ government corruption scandal, and she easily lost the 2014

presidential election to Peter Mutharika. In a similar pattern to his predecessors, Mutharika's term was marked by popular discontent, with food and power shortages and allegations of corruption. His victory in the May 2019 elections was widely disputed, with widespread tampering of results leading to the moniker the 'Tipp-Ex Election'. Following the application of the opposition Malawi Congress Party (MCP) and United Transformation Movement (UTM) to the High Court to have the results set aside and conduct another election, the Malawi Constitutional Court ruled to nullify the election, ordering a fresh election to be conducted in 150 days. Mutharika only obtained 40% of the vote and was defeated by the MCP's Lazarus Chakwera. However, Chakwera's term took a long time to get into its stride, with little progress on necessary key reforms and being worn down by mounting corruption scandals.

How can this repeating cycle of 'early promise followed by corruption and crushing disappointment' be broken so that Malawi progresses in a way to assist its growing ranks of people lift themselves out of poverty? Can outsiders help?

Here there are several schools of thought, dotted on a spectrum of optimism. One is that this can never happen, and that donors, among others, are simply compounding the problem. The evidence for this is that the $26 billion spent in donor funding since 1964 has failed to change the system of governance and cyclical, locked-in poverty (low income, weak public finances, poor education and health, limited infrastructure, low investment and low growth). Rather, to the contrary, it has encouraged rent-seeking behaviour and disincentivised reforms by providing a safety net. While the donors argue against this – in part because turkeys seldom

vote for Christmas, and because there are valid humanitarian concerns about cutting off aid – the evidence suggests that, at best, donor spending has made things ‘less bad’.

Another version of this ‘development through aid’ argument is that you need more donor money – that the current $1 billion annually to Malawi is too little to make a difference, and simply offers a Band-Aid for what is a sucking chest wound in developmental terms. The dangers in this approach can be seen in the catastrophic failure of projects to prove this argument, including Jeffrey Sachs’ failed Millennium Village schemes, which operated at two sites in Malawi.

A third is that change is possible, and one has to look for green shoots in Malawians themselves, in the judiciary (which held the line against the regime of President Peter Mutharika in the election re-run), in NGOs and in the private sector.

In many other areas, externally driven efforts to reform have created incentives for actors to establish the form – but not the function – of institutions, while undermining the voice of domestic reformers. External pressure has created a ‘Newtonian’ reaction on the part of domestic reformers, with them moving in the opposite direction, a tendency fuelled by populist instincts and easy answers. Managed badly, too much pressure can cut off dialogue and upset relationships – and without a trusted messenger, there can be no message.

By starting small, strengthening local voices in the places where change is needed, and by sticking with it over a long time, the most desperate and seemingly impossible of circumstances can be changed. If outsiders can do this and avoid amplifying their own voices to advance their own careers

and interests, then trust can be enhanced, and progress made.

In Malawi, this requires a leadership capable not only of pinpointing the problems, but prioritising and executing the solutions, being able to avoid self-defeating (if populist) economic choices (such as the land reform act, which effectively takes away land from foreigners, or banning the export of maize), and being willing to let go of control – or at least share in the benefits of change.

[1] This section is based on a research trip to Malawi in January 2023, during which time the interviews were conducted.

[1] This chapter is drawn from Greg Mills, *Rich State, Poor State: Why Some Countries Succeed and Others Fail*. Johannesburg: Penguin Random House, 2023.

[2] Interview, Deputy Prime Minister Artis Pabriks, Riga, October 2022.

[3] I am grateful to Tommy Koh for this point.

[4] Sergei Guriev and Daniel Treisman, *Spin Dictators: The Changing Face of Tyranny in the 21st Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022.

[5] 'Do Africans Want Democracy — and Do They Think They're Getting It?' *Afrobarometer*, 2 November 2021, https://www.afrobarometer.org/articles/do-africans-want-democracy-and-do-they-think-theyre-getting-it/.

[6] See David Remnick, 'The Weakness of the Despot: An Expert on Stalin Discusses Putin, Russia, and the West', *The New* Yorker, 11 March 2022, https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/stephen-kotkin-putin-russia-ukraine-stalin.

[7] Al Murray, *Command: How the Allies Learned to Win the Second World War*. London: Headline, 2022. See also James Holland, *Together We Stand: North Africa, 1942–1943: Turning the Tide in the West*. London: HarperCollins, 2005, esp. pp. 674–6.

[8] See https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/DavidPetraeusTranscript.pdf.

[9] With thanks to Dr James Sherr for his insights here.

[10] This was relayed by President Olusegun Obasanjo and was said during this visit with the African Leadership Forum to Singapore in November 1993.

[11] Murray, *Command*, p. 163.

[12] This comparison is highlighted in Greg Mills, *Expensive Poverty: Why Aid Fails and How It Can Work*. Johannesburg: Pan Macmillan, 2021.

[13] See https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD.

[14] Frederick Forsyth, *The Biafra Story: The Making of an African Legend*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2015.

[15] I am grateful to Sydney Matamwandi for this point.

AFTERWORD

by **ADALBERTO COSTA JR.**
Member of the National Assembly of Angola

South African Chief Justice Raymond Zondo (L) swears in John Steenhuisen as Minister of Agriculture, in a sitting of the South African Parliament on 3 July 2024 in Cape Town. South Africa's new unity government under President Cyril Ramaphosa is the first of its kind in the country after 30 years of rule by the ANC. Photo: RODGER BOSCH/AFP via Getty Images

---

The rise of democracy in Southern Africa may be painfully slow, but it is underway as recent elections have demonstrated. In 2024 in South Africa, after 30 years in power, the ANC was reduced to 40% of the vote and forced to enter into a coalition government which it describes as a "government of national unity". This sent a shockwave through the region, energizing opposition parties and voters alike.

In Mozambique in October, voters rejected Frelimo, which then attempted to stay in power by manufacturing post-election chaos and

announcing itself as the victor, with fellow liberation movements quickly endorsing the fraudulent outcome. A tally of polling station results conducted in parallel clearly found that the opposition had won. This was underscored by the large number of people who took to the streets in protest.

What followed in Botswana later the same October was remarkable. The Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), in power since 1966, was thrashed by the Umbrella for Democratic Change which pushed the ruling party into fourth place. There the drift towards authoritarianism and the unwarranted prosecution of the former President, Ian Khama, led to a democratic backlash.

Botswana's newly elected president Duma Boko (C) flanked by First Lady Kaone Boko (R) and Chief Justice Terence Rannowane (L) gestures as as he takes an oath during his inauguration at the National Stadium in Gaborone on 8 November 2024. Boko's swearing-in cements a whirlwind change of government after his landslide election victory kicking out the party in power for nearly 60 years. Photo: MONIRUL BHUIYAN/AFP via Getty Images

In Namibia in November, the ruling SWAPO party went from 86% of the vote in 2014 to just 57% of the vote in 2024, at least officially. But there are serious questions about how this result was achieved as polls stayed open for days while the ruling party sought more votes, leading to the opposition crying foul.

In Tanzania, opposition leaders, among them Tindu Lissu, were arrested on several occasions as that country went to the polls in local elections in November. The result – an astonishing 98% of seats won by the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) – has been seriously questioned, not least given the disqualification of opposition candidates and several of its members.

Also in November, in Mauritius, the people's voice was heard in general elections in which the ruling Alliance Lepep was all but wiped out by the opposition Alliance du Changement, which won all bar one of the country's 21 constituencies. In the largest margin of victory in nearly three decades, the key campaign issues centre on those which impacted the population: the cost of living, crime and corruption.

Further north, in Uganda, Yoweri Museveni is completing four decades of uninterrupted rule which has seen brutal clampdowns on the opposition and rigged elections. In November too, the opposition leader, Dr Kizza Besigye, was brought before a military court on ludicrous trumped-up charges. It is clear that in Uganda, too, the people have had enough.

In my own country, Angola, we have seen this movie before. In the last election, in August 2022, it was widely held by independent observers that the opposition had won. But following vote rigging and court rulings that lack credibility, the ruling MPLA party hung onto power, claiming 51% of the vote. We have learnt from this episode and these other coups against democracy. But there are now fresh challenges. In Angola, João Lourenço is fighting to force a constitutional change and to his own party's statutes limiting Presidential terms to two.

Several thousand Angolan opposition supporters held a peaceful march in the capital Luanda on 23 November 2024, in the first large demonstration since a disputed vote in 2022. The protest was organised by the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola party (UNITA) which lost the last general election to the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), which has ruled the country for almost five decades. Photo: JULIO PACHECO NTELA/AFP via Getty Images

Other African dictators are trying to do the same. They want to remain in power as long as possible, even if this means resorting to constitutional coups, the type of which should be a trigger for sanctions and isolation by democratic nations.

> **What is clear in all of these cases is that there is increasing brazenness by authoritarians facing a rising tide of impatience and anger among their populations at their failure to deliver a better life.**

Democracy has been used to shift power in some countries and abused to retain power in others.

A stalling of the inevitable change in leadership in Africa will not last even if some of the autocrats have strange friends in the West, which appears to place its self-interest above the concerns of ordinary people.

The great powers see Africa as a pool of multilateral votes to be pushed around a gambling table like chips. This may yield short-term gains, but when change comes, this investment of diplomatic capital in failing regimes will come back to haunt them.

When people take their lives into their hands to fight for democracy, they deserve the support of other democracies. They are on the frontline of a global struggle to return the people to the centre of power, but instead of enjoying the support of the commonwealth of democratic nations, they have to watch their backs as those who should know better befriend the autocrats they are fighting.

> **But make no mistake, we will win this fight to bring openness, transparency and democracy to governance.**

It is what most Africans want and it is the only path to accelerating badly needed growth and economic inclusion. The African record is clear: Whatever the temptation of believing in ‘Big Man’ dictatorial outcomes, the only reliable road to good governance and growth is through democracy.

This playbook outlines how to get there.

IN CLOSING

by **PETER OBI**
Former Governor, Anambra State, Nigeria

Democrats need to work together to ensure that our people get the governments they deserve and that they vote for. Our experience in Nigeria is that of absent representative government, reforms remain a distant illusion, and expectations of generations remain unfulfilled. The democratic experience in Nigeria, for example, has been disgusting to the people because their will is always discarded in governance and the leadership recruitment processes.

In West Africa, we face serious challenges to democracy. More than 10 coups have occurred through West and Central Africa over the last 15 years. Democratically elected leaders have been ousted and replaced by military rulers who are usually not accountable to the people.

The consequences for economic development and opportunities for citizens have been severe both in the military and civilian eras because of the apparent lack of accountability by leaders.

As the Nobel-Prize-Winning economist Daron Acemoglu has noted: “The evidence suggests that democracy does cause growth and that its effect is significant and sizable. Our estimates imply that a country that transits from non-democracy to democracy achieves about 20% higher GDP per capita in the next 25 years than a country that remains a non-democracy.” Democracy, provides stability, legal certainty, and accountability, which, in turn, is essential to encouraging the capital investment that is needed for critical infrastructure and industry.

But it's also necessary here to underscore that democracy we mean is where the tenets are religiously adhered to.

Achieving the inclusive growth that creates jobs and offers hope to the marginalized ought to be the goal of every African, and this is seldom achieved under authoritarian regimes where the will of the people hardly prevails and where political criminal gangs masquerading as democrats hijack power for their selfish motives.

When power is concentrated in the hands of a few who don’t answer to the electorate, the consequences are usually dismal for ordinary people. Life becomes a bitter struggle to eke out a living on the margins and when this is challenged, the answer is violent repression.

When these regimes eventually bow to pressure and hold elections, they frequently occur in an environment where the opposition is denied free

speech and where vote rigging is rife. Sadly, the international community too often looks the other way, preferring to curry favor with the devil it knows to speak out in favor of freeness and fairness.

What is critical – and it is covered well in this dynamic publication – is that Democrats don't give up. To do so is to condemn generations to poverty and oppression. Instead, they must fight to make elections free and fair and, where they fail to do so, to expose them for the fraudulent power grabs they are.

They must fight to win the popular vote as convincingly as possible to make it difficult for the result to be rigged without this being abundantly clear to the watching world.

This clarion call to action for democrats provides the analysis, the tools, and the country examples to encourage effective campaigning for just that purpose.

Africa is desperately in need of renewal. The old regimes and their old ideas have suppressed the continent's youthful energy and closed off avenues for innovation. This change is already underway but needs to be encouraged and accelerated.

There are no shortcuts. Ensuring best practices in running election campaigns is a critical element of the answer to Africa's democratic challenge. The alternative – stumbling on in poverty and failure – carries a high cost in damaged lives and lost opportunities. This vibrant playbook is a roadmap to African political renewal. Read it, and learn.

About the AUTHORS

BOBI WINE

Opposition Leader, Uganda

Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, known by his stage name H.E. Bobi Wine, is a Ugandan politician, activist, singer, actor, businessman and philanthropist. As of 11 July 2017, he serves as the member of parliament representing Kyadondo East constituency in Wakiso District, in Uganda's Central Region. He leads the People Power, Our Power movement in opposition to President Yoweri Museveni.

On 24 July 2019, Kyagulanyi formally announced his bid to run for President in the 2021 general election. On 22 July 2020, he announced that he had joined the National Unity Platform opposition political party whose spokesperson is Joel Ssenyonyi and had been elected its President and presidential flag-bearer in the upcoming February 2021 national election. He is currently the leader of a latter prominent political party, NUP, National Unity Platform in Uganda.

GREG MILLS

Director of The Brenthurst Foundation

Dr Greg Mills heads the Johannesburg-based Brenthurst Foundation, established in 2005 by the Oppenheimer family to strengthen African economic performance.

He holds degrees from the Universities of Cape Town (BA Hons) and Lancaster (MA cum laude, and PhD), and was, first, the Director of Studies and then the National Director of the SA Institute of International

Affairs from 1994-2005.

With Brenthurst he has directed numerous reform projects with African heads of state, including Rwanda (2007-8), Mozambique (2005-11), Swaziland (2010-11), Malawi (2012-14, and again 2020/1), Kenya (2012 and 2020), Lesotho (2008;2019-20), Liberia (2006/7), Zambia (2010; 2016), Zimbabwe (2009-13), Ghana (2017), Ethiopia (2019- 20), Nigeria (2017-18), and almost continuously at various levels of government in South Africa from the Foundation's outset.

He also sat on the Danish Africa Commission and on the African Development Bank's high-level panel on fragile states, and served four deployments to Afghanistan with the British Army as the adviser to the commander. He has also worked extensively in Colombia, and with a variety of African governments in both improving the conditions for peacebuilding and investment, including through the Zambezi Protocol on the natural resource sector.

A member of the advisory board of the Royal United Services Institute, he is the author of the best- selling books Why Africa Is Poor and Africa's Third Liberation, and together with President Olusegun Obasanjo Making Africa Work: A Handbook for Economic Success. In 2018 he completed a second stint as a visiting fellow at Cambridge University, in producing a book on the state of African democracy, which was published as Democracy Works in 2019. The Asian Aspiration: Why and How Africa Should Emulate Asia (again with President Obasanjo and former Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn) followed in 2020, which identifies the relevant lessons from Asia's development and growth story. His writings won him the Recht Malan Prize for Non-Fiction Work in South Africa.

His latest books – Expensive Poverty – which details the failings of aid,

and suggests several ways to improve development outcomes, was published by Pan Macmillan in October 2021; while The Ledger: Accounting for Failure in Afghanistan was published by Hurst/Oxford University Press at the start of 2022. An edited compendium on Better Choices for the South African economy was also published by Pan Macmillan in March 2022, another on Populism in August 2022; and a volume on South African scenarios The Good, the Bad and the Ugly in August 2023.

NIC CHEESEMAN

British political scientist

Nic Cheeseman (@fromagehomme) is Professor of Democracy at the University of Birmingham. Formerly the Director of the African Studies Centre at Oxford University, he is the Founding Director of Birmingham's Centre for Elections, Democracy, Accountability and Representation (CEDAR).

He mainly works on democracy, elections and development and has conducted in-country research in a range of African countries including Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, but has also published on Latin America and post-communist Europe. He is currently working on two projects: one looks at how to understand and support democratic resilience in an era of autocratization, and the other is to produce a history of African political thought.

The articles that he has published based on this research have won a number of prizes including the GIGA award for the best article in Comparative Area Studies (2013) and the Frank Cass Award for the best article in Democratization (2015). Professor Cheeseman is also the author or editor of more than ten books, including Democracy in Africa (2015), Institutions and Democracy in Africa (2017), How to Rig an Election (2018) – selected as one of the books of the year by the Spectator magazine – and Coalitional Presidentialism in Comparative Perspective (2018), Authoritarian Africa (2020), The Moral Economy of Elections in Africa (2020) and the Handbook of Kenyan Politics (2020). In addition, he is the founding editor of the Oxford Encyclopaedia of African Politics, a former editor of the journal African Affairs, and was an advisor to, and writer for, the African Progress Panel set up by Kofi Annan.

In recognition of this academic and public contribution, the Political Studies Association of the United Kingdom awarded him the prestigious Joni Lovenduski Prize for outstanding professional achievement in 2019.

In recent years he has also won the Celebrating Impact prize of the Economic and Social Research Council for “outstanding international impact” and the Josiah Mason Award for Academic Advancement.

A frequent commentator of African and global events, Professor Cheeseman has appeared on CNN's flagship global affairs show One World, while his analysis has featured in the Economist, Le Monde, Financial Times, Newsweek, the Washington Post, New York Times, BBC, and the Daily Nation, as well as his regular columns for the Mail & Guardian and The Africa Report. In total, his articles have been read over two million times. Many of his interviews and insights can be found on the website that he founded and co-edits, www.democracyinafrica.org. Most recently, Professor Cheeseman was part of the team that launched the Resistance Bureau, a new webinar and discussion space that brings together speakers from across Africa to discuss how democracy and freedom can best be strengthened and defended. Check out This is the Resistance Bureau for more details and past episodes.

RAY HARTLEY

Research Director of The Brenthurst Foundation

Ray Hartley is the Research Director of the Brenthurst Foundation. Ray has a postgraduate honours degree from Rhodes University where he studied African politics and journalism.

Ray was an anti-apartheid activist in the United Democratic Front while serving on the executive of the National Union of South African Students. He later worked for the Human Awareness Programme, an

NGO which provided training and advice to activists. He then worked as an administrator in the CODESA constitutional negotiations that ended apartheid. After a stint as the boxing correspondent of the then Weekly Mail, he joined Business Day and then the Sunday Times. He covered the Nelson Mandela presidency, travelling the world with him and witnessing the birth of the new, democratic South Africa.
He has edited several prominent South African newspapers and online publications, including the Sunday Times, The Times, Rand Daily Mail and BusinessLIVE.

Ray is the author of *Ragged Glory: The Rainbow Nation in Black and White*, which tells the story of the first two turbulent decades of democracy in South Africa. He wrote *The Big Fix: How South Africa Stole the 2010 World Cup* and *Ramaphosa: The Man Who Would be King*. Ray also authored chapters in *Better Choices* and *In The Name of the People* and is co-author of *The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly: Scenarios for South Africa's Uncertain Future*.

ADALBERTO COSTA JR.

Member of the National Assembly of Angola

President of UNITA (The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola); Vice President of the IDC-CDI (International Democrat Union - Centrist Democrat International); Member of the Pan-African Parliament.

LEOPOLDO LÓPEZ

Venezuelan Politician

Venezuelan. Father, husband. National Leader of Popular Will (Voluntad Popular). Co-founder and Secretary General of the World Liberty Congress. Committed to Venezuela's Freedom.

PAULA ROQUE

Author and Senior Analyst on Southern Africa

Paula Cristina Roque PhD is the author of Governing in the Shadows: Angola's Securitised State (African Arguments/Hurst, 2021). She has been an adviser on sub-Saharan Africa for the Crisis Management Initiative, a senior analyst on southern Africa with the International Crisis Group, and a senior researcher with the Institute for Security Studies.

TENDAI BITI

Former Minister of Finance of Zimbabwe

Tendai Biti is the Deputy President of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), Zimbabwe's main opposition party and former Finance Minister.

He has recently co-authored the book *Democracy Works*, with His Excellency Olusegun Obasanjo, Dr Greg Mills and Jeffrey Herbst. *Democracy Works* is the sequel to The Brenthurst Foundation's best-selling *Making Africa Work*. It is based on more than 300 interviews across Africa, Asia, the Americas and Europe with policy-makers, politicians and analysts, and explores how we can learn to nurture and deepen democracy in Africa to ensure economic growth and political stability. They are currently launching the book in Washington DC.

With special thanks to all our additional contributors of "Country examples": Alex Vines, Bradford Machila, Felix Nkongho, Geordin

Hill-Lewis, John Githongo, Marcus Pena, Marie-Noelle Nwokolo, Pape Samba Kane, and Sherif Ismail.