

# AFRICAN DEMOCRACY AND THE DILEMMA OF CREDIBLE ELECTIONS

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“... we have trivialized democracy to the extent that it is no longer threatening to those in power... Democracy spreads because it has been rendered meaningless and innocuous without losing its symbolic value. While it spreads out world is more repressive...”

(Ake, 1996)

## ***Introduction***

Since the momentous events of the early 1990's which sounded the death knell of several authoritarian regimes in Africa including the termination of apartheid rule in South Africa, the number of democracies on the continent has dramatically increased. Prior to this period of democratic revolution, Africa could boast of only three democracies: Mauritius, Botswana and Gambia, albeit only Mauritius witnessed an alternation of regime in power (Diamond, 1999).

In spite of threats to the democratization enterprise in some countries and actual democratic reversal in others (such as occurred in Nigeria in 1993) the number of democracies increased through the late 1990s and today virtually all the countries in Africa are democracies if one accepts the minimalist conception of democracy as a system of political rule established with the consent of the people given through election; and if one ignores the quality of such election and the contents/substance of the entire electoral process.

The future of democracy on the Africa continent appears to be in jeopardy despite the fact that election which represents the heart of representative democracy now holds regularly on the continent. Although there is a sense in which one can argue that African democracy has been able to answer Claude Ake's (1992) poser: “Is Democracy Feasible in Africa?” in the affirmative at least through

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“successfully” organizing consecutive elections, yet there are no reasons to suggest that these elections advance the cause of democracy by deepening the democratic process and ensuring the accountability of the governors by the governed. Even if it is conceded that Africa has made substantial progress in its democracy quest through organizing regular elections, it is also true that the domestic political (and to some extent external) context of these elections considerably vitiates the quality of the elections and this has implications for democratic consolidation.

The quality of elections in Africa today is not only declining but getting worse. The chances of alternation of power are increasingly becoming slim as political incumbency is brazenly exploited to manipulate electoral process in favour of the ruling party particularly in countries where the ruling party enjoys parliamentary majority. Thus, election in Africa has become a “mere ritualization of the grip on power by an incumbent regime” (Young and Kante, 1992,). For Africa’s power elite, particularly the political incumbents, election is like a war which must be won by all means- fair or foul. In their desperate bid to remain in power or to install their favoured successors, they spare no effort. They deploy state administrative resources including electoral management bodies (the rhetoric of being independent institutions notwithstanding) and the security services in a manner that gives them or their party a headstart advantage over the opposition. Strategies such as disqualification of electorally strong opposition candidates based on phoney charges, denial of opposition access to state media resources as well as intimidation and harassment of the opposition are some of the weapons that have been adopted in the last and a half decades to electorally injure the opposition candidates.

What pervades Africa’s electoral space today is electoral dictatorship where the consent of the people commands, if any, little premium. The guided transition projects of African regimes are only mounted to legitimize their unpopular and authoritarian rule domestically and to “satisfy prevailing international norms of presentability” (Joseph, 1999). The crisis of electoral democracy in

Africa is aptly captured by Geatano Mosca's classic critique of electoral politics on the continent that "the representative is not elected by the voters but, as a rule, has himself elected by them" (Mosca, 1964).

Another troubling dimension of the crisis of electoral democracy in Africa is the tendency of opposition elements who won elections on the strength of popular pressures for the expansion of the democratic space to return after capturing power to the authoritarian path of the old order. This tendency is typified by the desperate move by Zambian President Friedrich Chiluba against former President Kenneth Kaunda, whom he had defeated in the 1992 elections, to prevent him (Kaunda) from competing in the 1996 presidential elections. Chiluba also clamped on journalists, arrested civil society activists and opposition elements (Joseph, 1999) . The authoritarian character of the Chiluba government got to a head on March 8, 1993 when he declared a state of emergency and assumed extra-ordinary powers citing a plot to unseat him. Thus, President Chiluba who was once 'the symbol of democratic revolution' became a means of disempowerment" (Ave, 2001).

This paper investigates the conundrum of credible elections in African democracy focusing on presidential elections in five African democracies: Cameroun, Kenya, Nigeria, Togo and Zimbabwe. This investigation is justifiable against the backdrop of the fact that the administration of the last presidential polls organized in these countries was heavily criticized by the civil society and in some cases by election observer groups while the official results of the elections were disputed by the main opposition parties. Why has credible election remained an albatross to African democracy in spite of African regimes' stated commitment to democracy and good governance? What are the challenges of organizing credible and acceptable elections in Africa? This article shall attempt to provide answers to these questions.

#### ***Africa and the Third Wave of Democratization***

The early 1990s witnessed a profound expansion of democratization in Africa. This democratic expansion which was a

fallout of the democratic tide sweeping across the globe led to the collapse of several authoritarian regimes on the continent as attempts were made to institutionalize accountable and responsive democratic governance.

The third wave of democratization in Africa, bolstered as it were by domestic pressures from civil society, extracted decisive concessions from Africa's dictatorships which eventually led to the expansion of the political space through transition from one party to multi party democracy and a regime of respect for and preservation of civil and political liberties of the African people which was a radical departure from the pre-third wave authoritarian context.

However, it is tragic that the expectations raised by the political liberalization of the 1990s have since been dashed. Though one may concede the fact that the modest democratic gains of the 1990s are yet to be completely eroded, the governance records of African regimes in the post-third wave period have betrayed the initial hopes elicited by the democratic wave (Animashaun, 2006).

On the one hand, election which represents a mechanism of conferring legitimacy on democratic regimes is being used to disempower African voters and legitimize illegitimate regimes. On the other hand, political leadership succession has either been privatized (as evident in Senegalese President Abdullahi Wade's plan to foist his son as his successor; and the veiled desire of Cameroun's Paul Biya to contest 2011 elections through an orchestrated constitutional amendment) or criminalized (as evident in the travails of Jacob Zuma who recently beat South African President Thabo Mbeki to the leadership of African National Congress making the former the standard bearer of ANC in 2009 presidential elections. Thus, while formal liberal democracy has grown in terms of regular election and universal suffrage, substantive and popular democracy continues to elude the African people.

***Africa Regimes and Commitment to Democracy and Good Governance: NEPAD and APRM***

If abiding faith in democracy and good governance were to be measured by intention, African regimes will be awarded pass mark..

African rulers have not disappointed in designing elaborate mechanisms to address governance crisis on the continent. In other words, the crisis of electoral democracy in Africa can not be explained in terms of absence of legal and institutional framework for regulating electoral politics. As will be demonstrated later in this story, the real problem is the understandable inability of Africa's rulers to muster the required political will to allow electoral competition run according to the rules of the game.

New Partnership for Africa's Development (**NEPAD**) and African Peer Review Mechanism (**APRM**) are the latest regional initiatives by African leaders to address the crisis of governance rocking the continent. For African leaders, these two instruments demonstrate their determination to individually and collectively rid Africa of illegitimate and unresponsive government.

**NEPAD** is a product of the merger of the Omega plan and the Millennium Partnership for African Recovery Programme (MARP). It was initially tagged the New African Initiative while the new name, NEPAD, was adopted at the inaugural meeting of the 15-member Implementation Committee of Heads of State and Government headed by Nigerian former President, Olusegun Obasanjo on October 23, 2001. NEPAD has as its major objective the consolidation of democracy and promotion of sound economic management on the continent. The NEPAD document pledges African leaders' determination to respect the global standards of democracy, the core components of which include political pluralism, multipartyism, free and fair elections, independent press and the rule of law (NEPAD document, paragraph 79) The Democracy and Political Governance Initiative, a sub-component of NEPAD, seeks to strengthen the political and administrative frameworks of member states of NEPAD in conformity with the principles of democracy, transparency, accountability, respect for human rights and promotion of the rule of law.

The Democracy and Political Governance Initiative consists of the following elements: a series of commitment by participating countries to create or consolidate basic governance process and

practices, an undertaking by participating countries to take the lead in supporting initiatives that foster good governance; and an undertaking by participating countries to commit themselves to meeting basic standards of good governance and democratic behaviour (NEPAD document, paragraph 81).

African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), originated from NEPAD, is a voluntary instrument acceded to by the African Union member states. APRM has a mandate of ensuring the conformity of participating states to the agreed political, economic and corporate governance values, codes and standards contained in the Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance (See APRM Base Document, Paragraph 1 & 2). The goal of the APRM mechanism is to ensure that participating states in the mechanism increase the pace of their efforts to adopt and implement the priorities and, programmes of NEPAD with the aim of “achieving the mutually agreed objectives and compliance with best practice in respect of each of the areas of governance and development” (See NEPAD, Objectives, Standards, Criteria and Indicators for APRM, 2003: paragraph 1-3). 27 African countries are now participating in APRM (<http://www.nepad.org/aprm>).

This represents an improvement over 23 countries that acceded to the mechanism in 2006.

In other democratic climes where democratic culture is routinized and entrenched, NEPAD and APRM are sufficient enough to ensure accountable, responsible and responsive governance which in turn confers legitimacy on the state and its institutions. But in Africa, it is a huge challenge to make African leaders respect and have abiding faith in the basic principles of NEPAD and APRM even as many of them have acceded to the two instruments. Nigeria represents a classic example of the gap between stated commitment to and actual implementation of NEPAD and APRM core principles. Despite the fact that the administration of former President Olusegun Obasanjo enlisted Nigeria in the APRM in 2005, the administration in April 2007 organized what has been widely acclaimed as the worst elections in the political history of Nigeria on account of the

magnitude of irregularities and manipulation that attended the elections. Many observers of Nigeria's fourth republic politics are eagerly awaiting the report of the APR panel that recently visited the country on governance assessment mission. It is widely believed that the report of the panel on its Nigerian assignment will have impact on the credibility of the APRM.

***Futility of Election in African Choiceless Democracy***

It is universally acknowledged that election is central to bourgeois democracy be it presidential or Westminster model. Without election, representative democracy loses its essence as a system of rule. It is however also true that competitive election, though crucial, is not a sufficient condition for guaranteeing democracy. This section of the paper will focus on the analysis of the most recent presidential election in Kenya, Togo, Nigeria, Cameroun and Zimbabwe. It will attempt to bring to the fore why the extant political and institutional contexts of elections in these countries cannot engender credible elections and therefore can hardly produce alternation of power / regime. As a matter of fact, election has lost its capacity to compel accountability in African governance because political incumbents hardly feel any threat of defeat at the polls since they heavily control the machinery of election administration.

***Kenya***

The current political impasse in Kenya arguably represents the most severe governance crisis since party pluralism emerged in the east African country in the early 1990s. Kenya was thrown into political crisis following the announcement of official results of the December 27, 2007 presidential polls. At the heart of the crisis which later assumed ethnic character was the alleged irregularities in the collation of votes in respect of the incumbent President Mwai Kibaki of the Party of National Unity (PNU) and the main opposition candidate Raila Odinga of Orange Democratic Party (ODM). The allegation that the election was manipulated was to be strengthened by the dissenting voices of five of the twenty-member Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK) to the results announced by the Commission. Indeed, the chairman of ECK came to say he doubted

Kibaki's victory at the polls (Adamolekun, 2008). The official results announced by ECK credited the 76 year old Kibaki with 4.5 million votes and Raila, son of Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, Kenya's first post independence Vice President, with 4.3 million votes. Violence that greeted the announcement of the result left 1,000 people dead and over 600,000 socially dislocated.

In the build up to the election, President Kibaki unilaterally appointed 19 new electoral commissioners in clear violation of the 1997 accord which empowered the opposition to nominate 50% of the electoral commissioners (Odinga, 2008). There were also several allegations of plans to rig the elections leveled by the ODM but Nairobi authorities dismissed them as cries of impending defeat of the opposition.

It is instructive to note that Kibaki and Odinga were leading figures in the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) that wrested power from former President Daniel arap Moi's Kenya African National Union (KANU) in the 2002 presidential election after four decades of KANU'S authoritarian rule. Moi, ineligible to run for presidency due to the two-term limit introduced by the 1992 constitutional amendments, had foisted Uhuru Kenyatta on KANU as its presidential candidate in the 2002 polls. Kenyatta was heavily defeated at the polls by Mwai Kibaki who ran on the ticket of NARC, the opposition alliance comprising the Democratic Party, FORD-Kenya, the National Party of Kenya, the Social Democratic Party and later the Rainbow Alliance made up of a splinter group from KANU led by Raila Odinga (Anyang-Nyong'o 2004). Misunderstanding however broke out between Kibaki and Odinga as a result of the refusal of the former to implement the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed in 2002 by NARC on power sharing and constitutional reform. Part of the agreement in the MOU was that the office of the prime minister would be created and that Odinga would occupy the office (Badejo, 2006). After two months of violence, peace is gradually returning to Kenya following the intervention of a team of eminent Africans under the headship of Kofi Annan former world's number one bureaucrat after earlier failed



attempts by some mediators including President John Kuffur of Ghana in his capacity as Chair of African Union. Major highlights of the peace agreement brokered by Annan are the creation of the post of prime minister and creation of the post of 2 deputy prime ministers. While the office of the prime minister is to be occupied by an elected legislator who is parliamentary leader of the largest party in the National Assembly or of a coalition of parties (in the event of no party having parliamentary majority), the two positions of deputy prime ministers are to be filled each by PNU and ODM.

### ***Togo***

The “victory” of the current Togolese President, Faure Eyadema in the April 2005 presidential elections did not come to many observers as a surprise given a certain constitutional absurdity that preceded the election which could to a large extent explain the non credibility of the entire process and the outcome of the presidential contest. Shortly after the death of the then incumbent President Gnassingbe Eyadema, Chief of Togolese Army, Zakary Nandja proclaimed Faure Eyadema, son of Gnassingbe, as the successor to his father. That the Togolese Armed forces (FAT) threw its weight behind the Faure project is not surprising given the structure of the ethnic profile of FAT.

Faure’s father, Gnassuigbe, during his authoritarian rule transformed FAT from a national to an ethnic military establishment which largely ensured his long stay in power (Nwokedi, 2003). Through a deliberate recruitment policy, which tilted heavily in favour of Eyadamea’s Kabye ethnic extraction, out of the 12,000 men in the FAT by 1991, 7,000 of them were of Kabye ethnic group while out of the 300 officers in the FAT in the same period, 200 were of Kabye ethnic stock (Ajavon, 1992). This ethnic profile of the Togolese military explains why influential personnel of the armed forces owed personal loyalty to Gnassuigbe and this was practically extended to his son upon the former’s death.

It took pressures from within and outside Africa before Faure “slipped aside” on February 25, 2005. He was replaced by Bonfoh Abbass, the first deputy parliament speaker until presidential elections

were held in April of the same year. In the official results of the election released by the Togolese election authorities, Faure Eyadema of Rally for the Togolese People polled 60.15% of the total votes cast while his closest rival Emmanuel Bob-Ak9tani of Union of Forces for Change scored 38.25% in an election in which the main opposition leader, Gilchrist Olympio was barred from contesting owing to a constitutional provision that a presidential candidate must have lived in the country for at least 12 months.

### ***Nigeria***

For the scholars on Nigeria's democratization project, 2007 general elections represented an opportunity for both the authors of the transition programme and the election oversight body, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as the institutional manager of the transition process to restore public confidence in the electoral process. Not few voters were disappointed by the unsatisfactory manner by which 2003 elections were conducted. This opportunity was however squandered by the Obasanjo presidency and INEC. While the Obasanjo government deployed state administrative resources including anti-graft agencies and even the court in some cases to truncate the ambition of many opposition candidates, INEC exploited rather brazenly its regulatory powers to exclude certain candidates from the ballot. All in a bid to boost the electoral fortunes of the ruling Peoples Democratic party (PDP). When General Obasanjo during a PDP rally in Akure, capital of South Western State of Ondo said the 2007 election would be a "do or die affair" for the PDP, he was apparently sending a message to all election- related agencies particularly INEC and security agencies to deliver victory to PDP at any cost in the elections which have gone down in the troubled electoral history of Nigeria as the worst ever elections conducted in the country. This was achieved as PDP "swept" the polls winning 28 states in the governorship elections, majority seats in the National Assembly and in over 20 state Houses of Assembly and winning the presidential contest with its candidate, Umar Musa Yar'adua credited with 24 million votes. His closest challenger, General Muhammadu Buhari of the All Nigerian Peoples

Party polled 6 million votes while former Vice President Atiku Abubakar of the Action Congress, who eventually contested the election after successfully crushing all the hurdles put against his presidential ambition by the Obasanjo presidency and the INEC, scored 2 million votes.

Local and foreign election monitors who documented their various reports that the elections did not meet minimum international standards have been vindicated by the spate of election reversals coming out from tribunals across the country. Contrary to the position of Nigeria's election oversight body that the 2007 elections were "successful, free and fair" (INEC, 2007), there was a consensus among the election observer groups that the elections were massively flawed. So far, governorship elections in 6 states and several State and National Assembly elections including that of the President of the upper chamber of Nigeria's bicameral federal legislature, the Senate, have been voided by the tribunals. What could have been an embarrassing situation for the country was averted by an apparent "political judgment" given by the presidential election tribunal which upheld the election of Musa Yar'adua. Had the judgment gone in favour of the petitioners, General Buhari and Alhaji Abubakar and affirmed by Nigeria's Supreme Court which is the final arbiter in presidential election, Nigeria would have been thrown in to serious governance crisis. With the voiding of the election of Senate President and ineligibility of the Speaker of Federal House of Representatives to assume office as the Acting President on the ground of age requirement, the consequence would have been a "national embarrassment" to Africa's largest democracy.

With the reports of election observers documenting the irregularities, manipulation and absurdities that attended the 2007 polls coupled with the spate of election reversals by the tribunals citing irregularities and connivance of INEC to subvert electoral justice, one is at a loss how to justify INEC's claims that the 2007 polls "was successful... and its outcome reflects the intent of the Nigerian electorate" (INEC, 2007).

### ***Cameroun***

The current President of Cameroun Paul Biya has dominated the politics of the Francophone country for almost three decades. He assumed Camerounian presidency in 1982 succeeding Alhaji Ahmadu Ahidjo who ruled the country from 1958-1982. Ahidjo's 24 year authoritarian rule was sustained through a combination of repression and highly centralized political system which concentrated political and economic power in the president (Delancey, 1987). Political liberalization of the early 1990s and its accompanying regime of party pluralism did not significantly change the character of state inherited by Biya from Ahidjo. Rather, the former deepened the centralist character of the Camerounian state under his presidency and this, in addition to corporatism, patronage and repression, became the instruments of sustaining power for the ruling party and President Paul Biya. In the October 2004 Presidential election, the candidate of Cameroun Peoples Democratic Movement, the incumbent president, Paul Biya scored 2,665,359 or 70.92% of the total 3,758,221 votes pushing John Fru Ndi of Social Democratic Front to a distant second with a meagre 654,066 or 17.4% of the total votes cast. The election was widely condemned locally and outside Cameroun as not meeting the most elementary less of transparency and therefore its outcome could not by any standard be regard as the true preference of Cameroun voting public. Indeed, the official result annouced by Camerounian election authorities represented a contradiction and an evidence to the declining legitimacy and unpopularity of the Biya presidency.

### ***Zimbabwe***

Like his Camerounian counterpart, President Robert Mugabe has remained the dominant figure in the political economy of Zimbabwe since independence 28 years ago. Mugabe became Zimbabwe's first black Prime Minister in 1980 following the victory of his party, Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) over its major rival Zimbabwe African Peoples Union in an election organised by the white dominated government of Prime Minister, Ian Smith (Ayittey, 1992). Since this electoral feat of 1980, Mugabe who later transformed himself into an executive president and his party have

won virtually all elections conducted in former Rhodesia. This fact is not however a product of Mugabe's popularity but a function of the total domination of the Zimbabwean polity by Mugabe. In the last presidential election held on March 11 2002, Mugabe according to official results polled 54% of the total votes while his main opponent, Morgan Tsvangirai polled 40% in an election characterized by allegation of irregularities, denial of media access to opposition and intimidation of voters which disenfranchised many eligible voters. The non transparent manner in which the election was conducted coupled with the poor human rights record of President Mugabe earned him sanctions from some Western countries and international development organizations. Mugabe, now 84 makes his sixth attempt at presidency in this month presidential election with Morgan Tsvangirai of the Movement for Democratic Change and Simba Makoni, Mugabe's former minister of finance as his main challengers. Makoni was expelled from ZANU following his declared intention to contest the presidential election. With Mugabe's insistence on conducting presidential polls against the opposition's demands that election reform should precede election, it is easy to predict the winner of the presidential contest ante election.

The foregoing demonstrates the political environment of electoral democracy in Africa. In this kind of environment, elections can not guarantee popular democracy. At best what this environment produces is "choiceless democracy" in which African voters continue to vote without making any choice. Without a pro-active reform of the electoral system in Africa, elections will continue to legitimize illegitimate governments.

### ***Challenges of Credible Multiparty Elections in Africa***

From our analysis so far, certain challenges to transparent election administration in Africa became apparent. This section will briefly examine some of these challenges.

One of the potent challenges to credible election in Africa is political incumbency. This has become a political capital in the hands of sitting rulers to promote their political ambitions or that of their favoured power contestants. The use of political incumbency to

disempower opposition parties in Africa manifests in the ways political incumbents appoint partisans into so-called independent election management bodies, denial of access to state media by the opposition, use of state resources to fund their campaigns in violation of campaign finance laws, manufacturing of new electoral rules and eligibility requirements to exclude opposition elements as well as deployment of state instruments of coercion to intimidate the opposition and its supporters (Osaghae, 1999).

Partisanship of the election oversight bodies is another challenge to credible elections in Africa. The process of appointing the membership of these bodies is heavily influenced/dominated by the ruling regimes which undermines their independence. Many African electoral bodies discharge their duties as though they are departments of government ministries. Their funding is also serviced by the executive branch of government. With the infrastructure of elections firmly in the grip of the incumbent governments, the possibility of the election bodies carrying out their functions without bias is very remote.

Vulnerability of the sanctity of vote is yet another challenge of election administration on the continent. Contrary to a widely held belief, the voters on their own can hardly protect their votes. The onus of protecting the vote rests on the electoral body as the regulator of electoral process. However, with the partisanship of election management bodies, the connivance of security agencies and limited influence of election observer groups, the sanctity of the vote cannot be guaranteed and result of election can hardly be regarded as the true wishes of voters.

Finally, credible elections and even democratization on the continent will continue to be challenged by economic, military and commercial interests of the Western countries. Amuwo (1992) has perceptively observed that “where the interests of the West are best served by authoritarian regimes, democracy cannot be on the agenda. Regimes in this group qualify, ipso facto, for more and more aid and loans”. While it is true that the internal pressures mounted by non-state constituencies such as social movement and other mass based

organizations including labour and professional groups shook the foundation of authoritarian regimes in Africa, these were significantly strengthened by pressures from international community particularly from the West, following the collapse of the Soviet Union and subsequent end of the Cold War. Since that period, the West and the Brettonwoods twins-the Bank and the Fund became “stakeholders” in the democratization project in Africa. But there is a contradiction between the interests of the West and the democracy enterprise on the continent. The motivation of the West for supporting democratization is no more than advancement of capitalism through globalization and economic liberalism. An African regime with dubious democratic credentials and poor human rights records but which is committed to the entrenchment of capitalism is assured of the support of the West. This scenario has engendered a structure of accountability in which African rulers are now accountable to the West rather than to the domestic constituencies. If one adds this to the fact that it is the international community (the West) that determines the success or otherwise of the democratization process, and will better appreciate how African voters have been disempowered and Africa democracy reduced to choice less democracy. In spite of the cries of irregularity and fraud that greeted 2007 general elections in Nigeria, some Western countries were among the first to congratulate Musa Yar’adua and paid him solidarity visits.

***Achieving Credible Elections and Alternation of Regime in Africa***

If authoritarianism in Africa was so discredited in the late 1980s and early 1990s that the third wave of democratization was inevitable, the electoral dictatorship currently pervading the continent legitimizes an urgent reform of the election context in Africa with a view to ensuring that only popular candidates are produced by free, fair and transparently managed elections. Our analysis in this study has demonstrated that the patterns and structure of challenges/obstacles to credible elections in Africa are the same across the continent. This then suggests that a one-for-all therapy can be applied to cure election disease in the region although with some country-specific

prescriptions to cater for individual country peculiarities. Below are some proposals capable of ensuring credible elections in Africa.

The point of departure for any meaningful attempt at sanitizing electoral democracy in African should be a reform of election administration. There are two dominant models of organizing election in Africa: elections are organized by ministries, departments of government (this model was popular in Francophone African countries) and elections are organized by supposedly independent election bodies. This is the practice in Anglophone countries such as Nigeria, Kenya and Ghana. These two models have proved disastrous to the sanctity of votes in African democracy. Under the two regimes, election officials betray public trust by manipulating election process in favour of the ruling party. The case of Nigeria's election oversight body INEC, during the much pilloried 2007 elections deserves a mention here. INEC practically became an interested party in the electoral process through its measured actions and inactions. It became so obsessed with its determination to deliver victory to the ruling PDP that it unlawfully excluded some opposition candidates perceived to be electoral threats to PDP from the election. The reforms that are needed in this area are the ones that will give meaningful structural, financial and administrative autonomy to the election authorities in a manner that protects them from the executive irresponsibility of the ruling governments.

Joseph (1990) has rightly observed that "the renewal of African governance will require the re-invigoration of the non-state sectors of society". The civil society in Africa should intensify its pro-democracy efforts in two major areas namely the empowerment of the citizenry to compel accountability from the political leadership and the checkmating of the excesses of African rulers. Democratic rule does not flourish only with constitutional safeguards but with "...the organized measure of social and political movements which need democratic freedoms for their very existence and which therefore struggle to defend them" (Mandani, 1995). Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS), troubled by electoral insanity in the sub-region, recently came up with an initiative to set up a sub-



regional coalition to ensure transparent management of elections with a view to achieving credible elections in the member states of the sub-regional organization. Civil society activists including media practitioners should form the nucleus of the proposed network. There is a need to reform Africa's military establishment. The reform efforts should particularly target the pattern of recruitment into Africa's armed forces and the restoration of pure professionalism to the forces. A review of the structure of enlistment in the armed forces is imperative to give the military a national outlook while regeneration and entrenchment of culture of professionalism in the military will dissuade its personnel from political governance.

African judiciary also has a role to play in promoting the health of electoral democracy on the continent. They should discharge their official responsibilities without fear or favour and in a manner that inspires the hope of the African people in the judiciary as the defender of justice.

Finally, there is a need for the opposition parties in African democracy to bury their ideological and/or ethnic differences in order to form strong coalition to wrest power from authoritarian African incumbencies. Experience has shown that one of the major reasons why opposition parties do not have realistic chance of winning elections against the incumbents is the fact that the opposition parties are both weak and deeply divided. Any disagreement within the opposition coalition results in to disadvantaged/marginalized faction forming opposition party which not only proliferates opposition parties but also divides opposition votes during election to the electoral advantage of the incumbent regimes in spite of their declining legitimacy. For instance, in the presidential elections of 1997 in Kenya, KANU's Daniel arap Moi won with 40.1% of the total votes while opposition candidates Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga recorded 31.1% and 10.9% of the presidential votes respectively. If the opposition parties had fielded one candidate for the election, they would probably have ousted Moi from power. Kenya's opposition however learnt a bitter lesson from that

experience and it took a sort of grand opposition coalition by the opposition parties to defeat KANU in the presidential polls of 2002.

### **Conclusion**

The current health of democratic rule in Africa is not only poor but deteriorating. The dominant rein of electoral dictatorship unleashed on the electorate across the continent makes the prospect of enthroning popular democracy on the continent very bleak. This paper has attempted to investigate the crisis of electoral democracy in Africa with particular emphasis on why credible and acceptable election has continued to elude African democracy. The paper argues that in spite of their stated commitment to democracy and good governance, Africa's rulers have failed to demonstrate their commitment in action by allowing election to run according to the rules of the game. With the infrastructure of election administration at their feet, they deploy this to disempower African electorate and thus turn election into a weapon against democracy. This therefore calls for urgent measures to reverse this ugly trend and put Africa on the path of popular and enduring democracy.

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