

2009

Political Oppression in Sub-Saharan Africa

Alayna Hamilton

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/hrhw>

 Part of the [African Studies Commons](#), [Economic Policy Commons](#), [Human Rights Law Commons](#), [International Humanitarian Law Commons](#), [International Law Commons](#), [International Relations Commons](#), [Public Policy Commons](#), and the [Social Policy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hamilton, Alayna (2009) "Political Oppression in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Human Rights & Human Welfare*: Vol. 9: Iss. 1, Article 56.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/hrhw/vol9/iss1/56>



All Rights Reserved.

This Topical Research Digest 3 is brought to you for free and open access by the Josef Korbel School of International Studies at Digital Commons @ DU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Human Rights & Human Welfare by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ DU. For more information, please contact jennifer.cox@du.edu, dig-commons@du.edu.

Political Oppression in Sub-Saharan Africa

Abstract

Relative to social and economic rights, there is little discourse on the issue of political rights in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). This fact is attributable to the pressing problems of lack of access to food and healthcare that plague millions of people in the region. However, without the observance of political (and civil) rights, economic development, wealth redistribution, and basic social order may be compromised. Contrary to arguments that insist that economic growth and social stability often require the limitation of political rights, political rights are a necessary requisite for promoting civilian support of governmental policies. Without political rights, equitable policies for development and growth may be undermined. Of course, even where political rights (or lack thereof) do not interfere with economic development, they are still important for ensuring the worth and dignity of the individual.

Keywords

Human rights, Sub-Saharan Africa, Political rights, Civil rights, Economic development

Copyright Statement / License for Reuse



All Rights Reserved.

Publication Statement

Copyright is held by the Josef Korbel School of International Studies, University of Denver. User is responsible for all copyright compliance.

Political Oppression in Sub-Saharan Africa

By Alayna Hamilton

Relative to social and economic rights, there is little discourse on the issue of political rights in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). This fact is attributable to the pressing problems of lack of access to food and healthcare that plague millions of people in the region. However, without the observance of political (and civil) rights, economic development, wealth redistribution, and basic social order may be compromised. Contrary to arguments that insist that economic growth and social stability often require the limitation of political rights, political rights are a necessary requisite for promoting civilian support of governmental policies. Without political rights, equitable policies for development and growth may be undermined. Of course, even where political rights (or lack thereof) do not interfere with economic development, they are still important for ensuring the worth and dignity of the individual.

Across SSA, many groups are excluded from political participation because of their ethnicity, religion, gender or region. They often face violence, threats, neglect, and exploitation. The political oppression of these groups is systematic and primarily state-driven. Although many approaches may be used to assess the problem of political oppression in SSA, political institutions provide a useful framework for examining rights violations. Numerous institutions may be looked at to examine political oppression; among these are judicial systems, civil society groups, and elections. By focusing on these institutions, it will be possible to assess some of the different ways in which political oppression manifests itself and affects citizens' quality of life. A look at the efforts of the international community and non-governmental organizations to abate political oppression in SSA will provide perspective on efforts and obstacles to addressing violations of political and civil rights.

Judicial Systems

Before European colonists arrived, Africa was divided into several thousand kingdoms and chieftancies whose systems of government had evolved over centuries. These societies included informal judicial systems, which filled the role of preventing and responding to crime. By the time the Europeans left, they had squeezed all of the former societies into a few dozen nation-states, whose borders split apart some tribes and forced others to live together regardless of inter-tribal dynamics. The resulting state structures were arbitrary and unsuitable for Western governance structures and judicial systems. Judiciaries were often fused with the executive branch and were denied legitimate power. Today judicial systems in SSA are still intimately linked to the executive—this negates their ability to serve as a check on executive power.

Among the many factors that undermine African judiciaries is the problem of unqualified staff. Not only are judicial representatives often appointed through personal ties, they are rarely held to high educational standards. In states where the judiciary is comprised of the government's cronies, groups that differ from the executive's ethnic demographic, especially those in rural areas, frequently face discrimination. For those groups, there are rarely any available routes for filing complaints against the state for human rights infringement. Instead, these ethnically marginalized groups

become trapped in cycles of abuse—unable to advocate for their own rights. As a consequence, they are inclined to distrust and resent their governments and other, more privileged communities. Deeply entrenched resentment increases the risk of conflict which may greatly impact development efforts.

Ethnically marginalized groups and individuals who reside in rural regions also suffer the most from lack of access to legal assistance. In Liberia, for instance, functioning courts are largely absent in rural regions; this is partly attributable to lawyers' reluctance to work there. Lack of legal representation for rural Liberians amounts to systemic oppression as individuals and whole communities in these areas are denied means for legal recourse when their rights are violated. Further, they are excluded from participation in the judicial system, which leaves them powerless against the centrally-imposed rule of law.

Prisons

Carceral punishment, an institution introduced to Africa by the Europeans, is another conduit of political oppression. During colonization, the penal system was introduced as an instrument of social control and repression. Today, the function of many penal systems in SSA parallels that of colonial times. These systems use prisons primarily to incarcerate social deviants and political dissidents. Most of the individuals held as political dissidents are forced to endure long sentences without recourse to law and some are subjected to torture.

The Gambia is one such place where political dissidents are subjected to arbitrary prison confinement. Gambian human rights lawyers and activists are particularly at risk. As recently as 2006, the Gambian government initiated a wave of arrests after a foiled coup. Among those who were arrested and imprisoned were journalists, politicians, and human rights activists. Most of them were detained under horrific conditions and tortures. States like Gambia that exercise torture and unlawful detention seek to negate the dignity of political opponents. In doing so, they compromise the integrity of social order.

Civil Society and Political Oppression

The capacity to foster political participation is an important attribute of civil society organizations (CSOs). CSOs empower communities in many ways, including by accessing and disseminating policy information. In order to perform these functions, CSOs require some degree of autonomy from the government, i.e., political space. Authoritarian and single-party democracies pose ominous impediments to the development of CSOs' political autonomy. Restricting political autonomy of non-state actors is achieved by prohibiting the development of civil groups through bans or intimidation, and by controlling access of information to the populace. These are, perhaps, the most incapacitating mechanisms used by states to prevent ideological opposition. An informed and empowered populace can serve as a check against corruption and general mismanagement. To prevent the development of strong civil society, many SSA states adopt policies to control civilian access to information and to narrow political space.

In Uganda, for example, the government under Yoweri Museveni limits the spread of policy information to marginalized areas, and refuses to recognize organizations deemed overly critical of the government. These actions persist despite constitutional revisions, purporting to support independent citizen action. Political oppression of Uganda's North has hindered that region's ability to participate in the making of policies expressly devised to affect its environment and people. Denied political participation and access to policy information, the North is hindered from contributing to its own development.

Despite a seemingly bleak outlook, CSOs are becoming more accepted and widespread across SSA—thanks, in part, to internationally-exerted pressure as well as to the gradual spread of human-rights norms. This is even the case in Uganda, where media outlets, which began to flourish in the early 2000s, have become an increasingly important venue for civil groups and citizens' critique of government policy. CSOs will likely continue to grow in numbers and power as democracy becomes entrenched in SSA.

Elections

Election processes provide a useful lens for examining the extent of political oppression within states. They are a critical indicator of a nation's relative level of democracy and political oppression because they reflect, in part, the extent of political participation that civilians enjoy. Of course, elections do not always represent true democracy, nor do they negate political oppression; quality of elections also matters. Unregulated elections allow candidates to manipulate voter turnout and to use violence and corruption to alter voting behavior. Truly participatory elections are rigorously regulated to ensure individuals' equal access to information and polling centers, as well as to provide equal rights to political parties.

Elections are largely unregulated in several states within SSA. For instance, millions of people are denied the ability to participate in elections. Furthermore, in those states where elites compete for control over scarce resources, poorly regulated election processes often lead to surges in violence. This has been the case in Angola, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe. In Zimbabwe, for instance, election processes have never been regarded as free and fair. Not only have thousands of voters been turned away from the polls, there are often serious discrepancies between initially tallied votes and later-announced results. Moreover, Robert Mugabe's regime has been marked by high levels of threatened and actual violence throughout the process. Opposition parties and civilian dissenters of Mugabe's government bear the brunt of this violence resulting in a population that is reluctant to speak out against its ominous leader.

Not only may the use of threats and violence condition political passivity, it also has the capacity to incite political violence among citizens themselves. For instance, patterns of violence during elections may cultivate coup mentalities in power-hungry individuals. In an environment of violent political oppression, such individuals may be motivated to insurrection, perceiving it as the only means for gaining power. In this way, political oppression may increase a state's risk of violent conflict.

On a more positive note, quality of elections has improved since independence in those countries practicing multi-party elections. The efficiency of electoral administrations has improved in many cases and the number of elections per year regarded as “free and fair” has increased. Moreover, opposition candidates and parties have more freedom to campaign, suffering less from intimidation from incumbents.

International Response to Political Oppression in Africa

The international community has been trying for decades to advance political stability and equality in Africa. Such efforts have included military interventions, economic sanctions, and conditional aid. The effects of these efforts have ranged from counter-effective to highly effective. Although the international community has many tools for encouraging sound governance, its power to actually affect political behavior is limited.

Since the end of the Cold War, the most prominent approach for combating political oppression has been to promote democracy. In SSA, attempts to democratize nations have resulted in moderate success and, although the majority of African states today hold regular elections, political participation of traditionally marginalized groups is relatively limited. By and large, political rights are mostly enjoyed by supporters of political incumbents. Dissidents, on the other hand, are still frequently subject to intimidation and violence. Also, little progress has been made to ensure political representation and participation of rural populations. Nonetheless, democratic ideologies continue to spread, and as of 2009, roughly 90 percent of SSA countries have begun to hold regular elections. The international community’s most powerful tool may lie in its ability to spread democratic norms.

The Role of NGOs in the Fight against Political Oppression

Recent literature indicates that NGOs play an important role in fighting political oppression. Human-rights NGOs, for instance, are well placed to mobilize local and international pressure against authoritarian governments. They are often the only agencies on the ground, which gives them a unique vantage point for observing rights abuses and building close relationships with local populations.

Although NGOs play a significant role in reporting on and confronting oppressive regimes, they lack necessary leverage to persuade governments to alter their practices. In some cases, NGOs may actually impede policy transformation in authoritarian regimes. One reason for this is that once significant political reforms are under way, NGOs often lack necessary tools to effectively support further reforms. When shortcomings in capacity become evident, local populations tend to lose confidence in those agencies. Ruling elites frame the activities of NGOs and other agencies to their advantage by depicting external interventions as “neo-colonial” or by accusing supporters and beneficiaries of those agencies as being unpatriotic.

In many cases, NGOs are constrained by national laws that aim to limit their work. Authoritarian governments frequently refuse to allow pro-democracy activities to occur within their

territory. This is perhaps the most common impediment to NGO activity in African states. In Kenya, for instance, NGOs that seek to help torture victims to sue their perpetrators are generally denied approval to operate by the Ministry of Social Affairs—on the grounds that such activism would threaten public order. Not only are NGOs frequently denied permission to work with oppressed populations, they are often the targets of threatened or actual state violence. Still, there are thousands of NGOs in SSA working to improve the livelihood of millions of people. Their work will surely continue to play a vital role in abating political oppression.

Conclusion

Personalistic politics followed the oppressive footsteps of European colonists in Africa. Left to their own devices, many rulers within SSA doled out governmental and judicial positions to close personal contacts. This practice has not only tended to negate civilian participation in government life, it has also left many states vulnerable to violent overthrows by individuals and groups who see no alternative for exercising political agency. Even elections held under the guise of democracy have not been free from incumbent manipulation and violence. Moreover, many governments across SSA continue to impede the development of a strong civil society for fear of impact on the ruling elites.

On the bright side, democratic ideology has been gaining traction in SSA since the early 1990s. Today, the majority of countries in this region hold multi-party elections. In addition, civil society groups, advocating for rights to political participation and freedom of association, are becoming more prevalent across the African sub-continent and less encumbered by heavy-handed elites. As democratic ideologies become more pervasive in Africa, political oppression is likely to be challenged and even diminished but it is a very hard and long process.

Annotations

Ahmed, A.G.M. and Samia E.H El Nagar. 2003. “When Political Parties Fail: Sudan’s Democratic Conundrum.” In African Political Parties: Evolution, Institutionalism and Governance. Edited by M. A. M. Salih. London: Pluto Press.

Annotation: In this section, Ahmed and El Nagar address the failure of Sudan to establish democracy. The authors focus primarily on the development of Sudanese nationalism and the emergence of political parties. According to the authors, a major cause of political instability, corruption and violence in Sudan is the colonial legacy, which centralized the government in the North through educated elites, collectively neglected the South, and promoted fragmentation along clan lines. While the authors assert the importance of civil society organizations in fostering harmony across ethnic divides, they refrain from lending confidence to the capacity of such groups to improve Sudan’s toxic political environment. In sum, this section may be useful for individuals interested in learning about various challenges that undermine political stability in Sudan, but it may not be useful for those interested in researching ways to address those challenges.

Akin, Wanda M. 2005. "Justice on the Cheap." *Thomas Jefferson Law Review* 28 (1):19-28.

Annotation: In this brief paper, Akin discusses the troubled relationship between economy and justice in Sierra Leone. Her primary contention is that too many resources have been and continue to be spent on costly trials of human rights violators instead of being used to alleviate poverty. Akin questions whether the Special Court for Sierra Leone is part of a broader international effort to promote social justice and also what constitutes the Court's "quality of justice." She concludes that the legitimacy and integrity of the Special Court of Sierra Leone are dubious and thus expenditures toward the entire justice system of the country should be reassessed. From her perspective, national and international funds would be better spent towards economic development and anti-corruption programs. Were this to occur, crime would likely diminish. Akin makes several intriguing points in this paper but fails to organize her ideas in a cohesive manner.

Alexander, Jocelyn. 2006. "Legacies of Violence in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe." In Violence, Political Culture, and Development in Africa. Edited by P. Kaarsholm. Oxford: James Currey, Ltd.

Annotation: In this chapter, Alexander explores the relationship between politics and civilians' memory of past violence and oppression in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe. Using her own field research, she demonstrates the plight of Zimbabweans to confront their memories of violence and to become part of their nation's historical narrative. Through her discussions of elections in Matabeleland, Alexander demonstrates the influence of collective narratives on the political environment. This short, but compelling piece is very important to discourse on peacemaking and peacebuilding in fragmented societies. Firstly, it lends needed recognition and honor to the experiences of those who have been marginalized and abused by their governments. Secondly, it demonstrates the importance of bringing local concerns to national and regional attention.

Anglin, Douglass G. 2006. "The African Peer Review of Political Governance: Precedence, Problematics, and Prospects." In Democratic Reform in Africa: Its Impact on Governance and Poverty Alleviation. Edited by M. Ndulo. Oxford: James Currey, Ltd.

Annotation: The author of this chapter examines the merits and problems of the program for peer reviews of governance practices administered by the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). In his lengthy essay, Anglin discusses the concerns of social critics that NEPAD was neither inspired by Africans themselves, nor developmentally oriented. In order to comparatively evaluate NEPAD, Anglin describes peer review mechanisms engineered by both the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the African Commission in Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR). After describing the difficulties involved in implementing the "monumental" program, Anglin concludes that although NEPAD aims to advance high standards for good governance, it contains numerous ambiguities and funding problems. However, its main constraint is the lack of confidence from regional leaders who are reluctant to both criticize their neighbors and to subject themselves to scrutiny. Overall, this chapter is rich in useful

information for addressing issues of governance monitoring in Africa.

Armah, Ayi Kwei. 2009. "African elections, ending the violence." *New African* (February): 32-37.

Annotation: In this short article, Armah argues that election violence is a systemic problem, requiring deep analyses and reorganization. According to his analysis of elections in Africa, established political institutions tend to perpetuate violence because of self-reinforcing mechanisms. What is needed are new mechanisms constructed to ensure statistical accuracy of votes. Armah proposes removing political figures from vote counting and replacing them with skilled, Pan-African professionals. While Armah makes a strong case for revising procedures for vote-counting in African elections, he fails to explain how his proposed vote-counting procedures would actually abate violence.

Barkan, Joel D. 2006. "Democracy in Africa: What Future?" In Democratic Reform in Africa: Its Impact on Governance and Poverty Alleviation. Edited by M. Ndulo. Oxford: James Currey, Ltd.

Annotation: The author discusses implications for the future of democratic reform in Africa with a focus on impediments to democracy. Barkan briefly describes Africa's process of liberalization from the end of colonial rule until the 21st century. He then provides perspectives on this process from the points of view of optimists and realists. Optimists urge that important strides have been made in advancing civil society, free press, and oversight mechanisms. Realists maintain that African civil societies are still relatively weak, press freedom and political access have not made their way to rural areas, and legislative oversight for maintaining checks on central government is grossly inadequate. Barkan suggests that future prospects for further democracy in Africa will vary across the continent due to the many differences between the polities of Africa's many nations. He expects that more African states will emerge as aspiring democracies, while authoritarian states that are mired in conflict will face highly protracted transitions. Overall, this essay is a simple snapshot of the discourse on the extent of democratization in Africa.

Bratton, Michael. 1989. "Review: Beyond the State: Civil Society and Associational Life in Africa." *World Politics* 41 (3): 407-430.

Annotation: In an effort to explore various frameworks for analyzing and facilitating the emergence of associational groups, Bratton reviews five books that analyze state-society relations in Africa. His approach is to interact with the frameworks presented in each of these books and to show how they fail to appreciate the various and important roles played by associational groups (i.e. civil society). Bratton suggests that even though African political elites lack commitment to civil liberties and democracy, lack of strong governance may widen political spaces in which associational groups can grow. He concludes that more attention should be paid to the nuanced effects of civil society on economy, governance and the state in general. Instead of asserting his claims and supporting them with other research and literature, he discusses the

inadequacies of existing ideas and frameworks. Though he makes a strong case, it is possible that Bratton merely presented a highly skewed representation of each book in order to support his arguments.

Carayannis, Tatiana. 2008. "Elections in the DRC: The Bemba Surprise." Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace.

Annotation: In this article, Carayannis discusses the 2006 elections in the DRC in which a notorious rebel leader, Jean-Pierre Bemba nearly clinched the presidency. Bemba, who claimed that his campaign was motivated by Kinshasa's disregard for human rights, became the leader of the Congolese Liberation Movement (MLC). This party aimed to fight nepotism and political corruption, as well as to cultivate civilian administrations within the territories it captured. Carayannis highlights both the characteristics of Bemba and the alleged criminal activities of Bemba's MLC, which included murder, rape, and cannibalism. According to Carayannis, the MLC gained political legitimacy despite its apparent human rights violations because it had the most well-articulated political and economic program of all opposition parties running against the incumbent, Joseph Kabila. However, Bemba's military force compromised both the legitimacy of his own party and that of opposition parties in general when it sparked a massacre in 2006. Carayannis concludes her article recommending that the international community work to normalize the political system in the DRC and protect against the demise of opposition politics.

Casper, Gretchen and Michelle M. Taylor. 1996. Negotiating Democracy: Transitions from Authoritarian Rule. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Annotation: In this book, Casper and Taylor employ case-study analyses to explore various components that either inhibit or support the transition from authoritarianism to democracy. Countries were selected for study across the regions of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Southern and East-Central Europe. The authors investigate various driving factors behind relative levels of democracy emphasizing the importance of inter-actor relationships (e.g. elites vis-à-vis the general public). A major strength of the book is its methodological framework for addressing what occurs in both successful and failed attempts of states to transition to democracies. Perhaps the most pervasive weakness of the book is its insistence on using a game-theoretical approach to explain why various nations fail to consolidate democracy. That is, by adhering to game-theory, the authors unwittingly generalize motivations of actors across their specific case-studies.

Coldham, Simon. 2000. "Criminal Justice Policies in Commonwealth Africa: Trends and Prospects." *Journal of African Law* 44 (2): 218-238.

Annotation: In this article, the author explores ways in which Commonwealth African states address crime. He notes that penal policies in these states have tended to follow antiquated policies inherited from colonization, which were based on retribution and deterrence. However,

the Commonwealth states have been forced to confront new kinds of crime such as money laundering to which they have manifested a variety of policy responses. The author finds a consensus among the Commonwealth African governments on the issue of punishment, who regard punishment as the core feature of preventing and addressing crime. These governments have instituted punishments, exceeding those inherited from the colonial period, and have neglected to pursue alternative strategies to combat crime. The article ends abruptly with a short discussion on the problems of corrupt governments and weak states, which themselves are perpetrators and facilitators of crime. In short, the article provides an informative survey on the issues confronting Commonwealth African states in addressing crime, but lacks a deep analysis of the problem.

Coltart, David. 2008. "A Decade of Suffering in Zimbabwe: Economic Collapse and Political Repression under Robert Mugabe." *Development Policy Analysis*. Washington, DC: Cato Institute, Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity.

Annotation: Robert Mugabe's repressive regime is the subject of this stark and pithy report. The author describes how economic mismanagement and political oppression have crippled the population of Zimbabwe, turning it into one of Africa's most impoverished nations. Zimbabwe is a place where neither freedom of speech nor freedom of assembly exists and where the ruler is notorious for using violence against his opponents. Coltart employs a historical approach to describe how Mugabe systematically brought his country to a state of ruins. He describes the demise of the manufacturing and mining industries as well as Mugabe's racist policies against whites, the latter of which has caused the tourism industry to decay. The article is a descriptive account of the nature of Mugabe's regime and does not provide much analysis. It would be more useful for those who are unfamiliar with the history of Mugabe's regime and less useful for those who are interested in a deep analysis of political corruption in Zimbabwe.

Dunn, Kevin C. 2009. "'Sons of the Soil' and Contemporary State Making: Autochthony, Uncertainty and Political Violence in Africa." *Third World Quarterly* 30 (1): 113-127.

Annotation: This article offers a fascinating look into the political manifestations of autochthony. Dunn describes autochthony as an ideology by which individuals are convinced of their indigeneity to particular land and that this indigeneity represents an intrinsic right to rule their land. Dunn explores particular cases of political violence (e.g. Rwanda genocide) in Africa through the conduit of this framework. In doing so, he effectively argues that autochthonous ideologies tend to underpin xenophobic violence in Africa. His article ties directly to Neocosmos' analysis of xenophobic violence in South Africa. At the same time, Dunn points out that Africa has experienced a flux of peoples across its land, making claims to indigeneity impossible to prove. What is most useful about this article is Dunn's assertion that autochthonous violence is increasing as a result of contemporary trends in globalization and state-making. Dunn does not examine how to address this issue, rather he presents his arguments objectively, leaving the issue open for further debate.

El-Khawas, Mohamed A., and Ndumbe, J. Anyu. 2006. Democracy, Diamonds and Oil: Politics in Today's Africa. New York: Nova Science Publishers.

Annotation: Through several candid case studies, this book examines the causes behind African leaders' failure to establish political stability and economic development. Specifically, the authors consider corruption, governmental organization, economic deterioration vis-à-vis social order, and civil war. The main conclusion is that authoritarian governments tend to squander resources and ignore economic development. Such governments lead to high unemployment, political chaos, and ethnic conflicts. In order to ameliorate the effects of corruption, the authors emphasize the need for democratic reform, namely in the form of multi-party governance. Overall, this well-resourced book is both rich in relevant information and cogent. For those who are interested in learning about the political underpinning of economics and valuable resources in Africa, this book is an excellent source.

Fombad, Charles Manga. 2002. "The Protection of Freedom of Expression in the Public Service Media in Southern Africa: a Botswana Perspective." *The Modern Law Review* 65 (5): 649-675.

Annotation: Fombad critically examines the public service media (PSM) in Southern Africa and particularly in Botswana. He begins with a historical look at the evolution and extent of freedom of expression in southern Africa, noting that nearly all states in the region recognize the right within their constitutions. He then focuses his discussion on the concept and evolution of the PSM, which, he proclaims, is an important tool for disseminating information, education, and entertainment in the region. He identifies six critical features of PSM, among which are independence from the state, impartiality, and accessibility. At the time the article was written in 2002, the PSM in Botswana was controlled by the National Broadcasting Board (NBB)—a proxy of the government. Fombad warns that government control of media outlets, such as the PSM, may pose serious threats to the integrity of democracy. Rather than suggesting ways in which the government might relinquish control over the media or external actors might influence government behavior, Fombad essentially leaves the issue up for question.

Hyden, Goran. 2006. African Politics in Perspective. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Annotation: This book represents fifty years of research on African politics, examining the place of African politics in the broader discipline of comparative politics. In this work, Hyden explores various issues such as the legacy of movement approaches to political change, the "big man rule," and gender. Regarding best practices for advancing political viability in Africa, Hyden breaks from the descriptive approach of the first ten chapters and offers his own opinions (Chapters 11-12). Specifically, he emphasizes the role of donor communities in effecting positive political change. Ultimately, the book is best described as a survey on politics in Africa, ergo, its breadth is far greater than its depth, rendering it a useful tool for newcomers to discourse on African politics and a mere review for others.

Human Rights Watch. 1994. "Prison Conditions in South Africa." In *Africa Watch Prison Project*. New York: Human Rights Watch.

Annotation: Research for this report was conducted following a series of political reforms that emerged at the end of apartheid in South Africa. Among the many issues addressed were overcrowding, racial discrimination, unauthorized disciplinary measures, and information access between prisoners and the outside world (including the press). The primary recommendation of Human Rights Watch (HRW) for the South African government and Department of Correctional Services was to implement systems for monitoring the behavior and practices in prisons in order to enforce new policies of prison reform. Representative of the nature of the work of HRW, this report is objective, descriptive, and succinct. Even though this report is over a decade old, it provides a useful account of the extent of systemic oppression of alleged criminals. It may also be a useful tool for comparing more recent reports on South African prison conditions apropos of tracking the success or failure of prison reform policies.

Human Rights Watch. 2009. "Uganda: End Torture by Anti-Terror Unit." (April 8). Available online: <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/04/08/uganda-end-torture-anti-terror-unit>.

Annotation: In this report, Human Rights Watch implores the Ugandan government to cease unlawful arrest, detention and torture by its anti-terrorism unit. Suspects arrested by the unit (called JATT) are Muslims, many of which have been accused of being linked to al-Qaeda. HRW points out in this largely descriptive article that the Ugandan government has responsibilities under international law to investigate allegations of abuses by its forces and to hold those found guilty accountable. The organization recognizes the culture of impunity that characterizes the Ugandan government as well as the gross lack of oversight in its judicial system. Unfortunately, HRW does not include any measures for recourse available to those who have been victimized by JATT, nor does the article lay out any plan to pressure the Ugandan government to honor its responsibilities under international law.

Ibelema, Minabere. 2008. "The African Press, Civic Cynicism, and Democracy." Edited by P. Seib, Palgrave Macmillan Series in International Political Communication. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Annotation: Stressing the mutually reinforcing relationship between political structures and civic values, Ibelema argues that civil society is the mechanism by which corruption can be reduced. From the author's perspective, political corruption is not specific to elites; rather it permeates into and arises from all levels of society. Audaciously, Ibelema calls for cultural change in many African societies. The media, he argues is an aptly placed vehicle for promoting the transformation of civic values. While Ibelema makes a strong and well-supported argument for the potential for the media to advance democratic ideologies he pays insufficient attention to marginalized populations of rural Africa whom have relatively little access to media outlets.

Kaarsholm, Preben. 2006. "Violence as Signifier: Politics and Generational Struggle in KwaZulu-Natal." In Violence, Political Culture and Development in Africa. Edited by P. Kaarsholm. Oxford: James Currey, Ltd.

Annotation: In this chapter, Kaarsholm examines the ways in which violence has unfolded and has been used within a particular slum settlement in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Prior to stating his own arguments, Kaarsholm first discusses previous research performed by two other authors in an effort to develop the context of violence in Africa on which he builds his own statements. The author uses his own field data from questionnaires and interviews conducted in KwaZulu-Natal to support his contention that contemporary violence amongst the youth in that area is symbolic of a decay of respect for authority. According to the author, the violence he studies is a reactionary manifestation to the experience of social marginalization and unemployment. Surprisingly, Kaarsholm refrains from holding the South African government accountable for either failing to attend to the needs of the people of KwaZulu-Natal or to address the violence there. The chapter concludes without any case for action being made.

Kayizzi-Mugerwa, Steve (ed.). 2003. Reforming Africa's Institutions: Ownership, Incentives, and Capabilities. New York: United Nations University Press.

Annotation: This book provides an examination of the relative efficacy of institutional reform in Sub-Saharan Africa. As an edited book comprised of thirteen authors, this work offers expert-guided analyses of attempts at institutional reform across Africa, as well as suggestions for improvement. Civil society and local governance capacities weigh heavily in most of the sections of this book. Surprisingly, the book pays little attention to the root causes that hinder institutional reform (e.g. inter-ethnic hostility). Thus, the book would likely be more useful for policymakers and individuals interested in a quantitative analysis of institutional reform in Africa than those interested in root causes of reform failure.

Levy, Brian. 2006. "Are Africa's Economic Reforms Sustainable?: Bringing Governance Back In." In Democratic Reform in Africa: Its Impact on Governance and Poverty Alleviation. Edited by M. Ndulo. Oxford: James Currey, Ltd.

Annotation: In this section, Levy analyzes the viability of Africa's economic reforms vis-à-vis democratization and governance. Levy divides his analysis into four components: a framework for analyzing governance-economy interactions; a review of neopatrimonialism and subsequent structural adjustment; an empirical overview of the impact of reform; and, an assessment of the sustainability of the governance underpinnings in the reforming economies. He then focuses his analysis on the extent and adjustments of market and macroeconomic reforms of twenty-one African countries. The criteria by which reform-success/failure are determined include: GDP, agricultural value, industrial value, and business-government relations. From his information-dense, yet, concise analysis, Levy concludes that decentralizing reforms that rapidly provide resources to and empower communities and expenditure accountability reforms, both show high

potential for improving governance.

Lindberg, Staffan I. 2006. Democracy and Elections in Africa. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.

Annotation: This book provides a comprehensive analysis of how and why political systems within Africa come to manifest various levels of democracy and authoritarianism. In this book, Lindberg looks specifically at elections process, analyzing participation, competition and legitimacy. Elections processes are taken to embody many of the components that characterize one or another African state as democratic or undemocratic. This highly readable book guides the reader through the fundamental nature and process of elections, including an operationalization of democratic qualities of elections. From this basis, the book considers the features of elections over time, suggesting various causal mechanisms inherent in elections processes which undermine democracy in Africa. While Lindberg provides readers with a fairly succinct and useful analysis of African elections, he overstates the power of elections to “breed democracy,” and fails to fully address the capacity of some election processes to undermine democratic values.

Mattes, Robert and Michael Bratton. 2007. “Learning About Democracy in Africa: Awareness, Performance, and Experience.” *American Journal of Political Science* 51 (1): 191-217.

Annotation: In this article, Mattes and Bratton assess several indicators of popular demand for democracy in Africa, emphasizing the importance of civilian perceptions of the “supply” of democracy. The authors point out that popular preference for democracy as opposed to other forms of government is highly dependent upon Africans’ perceptions of democracy and their experience of it vis-à-vis their values. For instance, if an individual or a particular group of people experiences exclusion from political participation under a purported democracy, they will be disinclined to support actual democracy. Confidence in democracy is also affected by the behaviors of elected officials. Those who experience oppression at the hands of elected leaders are likely to denounce democratic election processes. This article provides an incisive look into why African civilians might or might not demand democracy in their nations. The findings of the authors would be useful to both policy makers and institutions who wish to promote the acceptance of democracy in undemocratic African nations.

Mbaku, John M. 2008. “Corruption Cleanups in Africa: Lessons from Public Choice Theory.” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 43 (4): 427-456.

Annotation: In response to the apparent inability of current development models to effectively reduce poverty and corruption in Africa, Mbaku suggests that new approaches are urgently needed. Mbaku assumes a strictly economic, public-choice theoretical approach, arguing that the dissolution of corruption in Africa must start with a modification of the incentives faced by market participants. Adhering steadfastly to this approach, Mbaku fails to address the role of ethnocentricity and other ideologies in corruption. Mbaku makes a strong argument for altering

incentive structures, but the usefulness of his analysis is much to limited to readers who are interested in a holistic approach to fighting corruption in Africa.

Monitola, Gabriella R., and Robert W. Jackman. 2002. "Sources of Corruption: A Cross-Country Study." *British Journal of Political Science* 32 (1): 147-170.

Annotation: This purpose of this article is to examine why government corruption is more pervasive in some societies than in others. The authors spend the first third of the paper assessing various approaches and models for examining corruption. This section is thick with statistics-phraseology, which may make it difficult for readers to sift out essential arguments. After an abstract account of the various mechanisms used to analyze corruption variables, the authors present the following key findings: Political competitiveness associated with democracy inhibits corruption as does economic development; and the size of government is unrelated to political corruption. This article may be more useful for readers who are suited for deciphering highly statistical presentations of information. For others, the article may be a frustrating read as the authors avoided translating their work into clear and cogent paragraphs.

Munro, William A. 2001. "The Political Consequences of Local Electoral Systems: Democratic Change and the Politics of Differential Citizenship in South Africa." *Comparative Politics* 33 (3): 295-313.

Annotation: Munro examines the construction of a local electoral system in KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa. One of Munro's primary contentions is that local electoral institutions in this region were designed to entrench "differential citizenship rights and meanings of citizenship" for rural and urban populations. What resulted was a fragile democracy that afforded rural citizens little associational autonomy to advocate for their human rights as well as a perpetuating cycle of political participation based on clientelism. Thus, citizens of the KwaZulu-Natal province suffer from systemically limited civil and political rights. Though this article lacks concision, it provides an excellent example of how differential actualization and protection of civil and political rights can impede both economic development and democratic consolidation.

Muriaas, Ragnhild L. 2009. "Local Perspectives on the 'Neutrality' of Traditional Authorities in Malawi, South Africa and Uganda." *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 41 (1): 28-51.

Annotation: In this article, Muriaas examines how local actors in Malawi, Uganda and South Africa interpret claims of non-partisanship among the traditional leaders of their respective countries. In his examination, he points out the relationship between pre-colonial leadership and post-colonial authoritarianism. According to his argument, the tenacity of deeply personalistic relations in politics among the three countries contributes to the pervasiveness of patron-client dynamics between traditional leaders and incumbent parties and thus, to partisan politics. Muriaas concludes that the lack of neutrality among traditional leaders is caused by the dependence of these leaders on the government to provide needed resources. This article

provides an intriguing look at the relationship between traditional African leaders and central governments. It does not, however, provide possible solutions to address the issue of partisan politics in Africa, nor any means of recourse for marginalized civilians who are most affected by such political systems.

Nagel, Mechthild. 2008. "‘I Write What I Like’: African Prison Intellectuals and the Struggle for Freedom." *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 2 (3): 68-80.

Annotation: In this article, Nagel presents a view of African penal systems from the perspective of famous former prisoners such as Nelson Mandela and Ngugi wa Thiong’o. Through various narratives of these former prisoners, Nagel discusses the ironies of African judicial systems in general and penal codes in particular. His predominant argument is that African states as they exist today were unsuited for European forms of justice-administration. Pre-colonial Africa consisted of hundreds of kingdoms and chieftancies, each of which had developed its own form of meting out justice. Nagel depicts European-imposed penal codes as an ironic form of injustice on Africans. Having been conditioned to apply non-native mechanisms of justice, present-day African states are notorious for administering disproportionate sentences and fines on alleged criminals. Nagel concludes his short piece on an optimistic note, describing how some African states are pushing to revive traditional judicial systems and noting that several former and infamous African prisons have been shut down.

Neocosmos, Michael. 2008. "The Politics of Fear and the Fear of Politics: Reflections on Xenophobic Violence in South Africa." *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 43 (6): 586-594.

Annotation: In this article, Neocosmos offers an insightful and cogent examination of xenophobic violence in South Africa. While many scholars insist that poverty is the sole cause of this violence, Neocosmos suggests that the poverty explanation fails to explain why certain groups are the targets of violence in South Africa. Departing from a strictly economic approach to explaining violence in South Africa, Neocosmos employs a political-hegemonic approach. He argues that the state has promoted politics of fear by convincing indigenous South Africans that their country is being invaded by illegal immigrants who threaten their way of life. The South African state, according to the author, is using its indigenous population as an apparatus of abuse against immigrants. Thus, South Africa is promoting a culture of impunity and xenophobia, both of which are more appropriate explanations of the country’s violence than mere economic accounts. Neocosmos’ position as director of Global Movements Research in South Africa lends much credibility to his arguments.

Opoku, Darko K. 2008. "Political Dilemmas of Indigenous Capitalist Development in Africa: Ghana Under the Provisional National Defense Council." *Africa Today* 55 (2): 25-50.

Annotation: Using Ghana as a case study, this article highlights the political obstacles to capitalism in Africa. During the era of its Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC), Ghana emerged as an exemplar of governmental reform. Yet, the Ghanaian economy soon experienced

decline due, in part, to state antagonism toward indigenous capitalists and disregard for property rights—both of which deterred investment. Opoku asserts that short-sighted policymakers erroneously mistook the effects of statism as effects of flaws inherent within the capitalist system of distribution. As the economy fell, anyone with relative wealth was deemed suspicious and was ostracized. Based on his intensive research, Opoku reports that capitalism, which is widely regarded as inextricably linked with exploitative colonial policies, has failed to achieve ideological legitimacy across much of Africa. His detailed and multidimensional report is illuminating to the debate on the inability of capitalism to gain traction in Africa.

Press, Robert M. 2009. “Candles in the Wind: Resisting Repression in Liberia (1979-2003).” *Africa Today* 55 (3): 3-22.

Annotation: In this article, Press examines a Liberian social movement in which people advocated for human rights and democratic freedom despite the absence of external help or favorable circumstances. In an effort to understand the conditions that facilitated the social movement, Press conducted approximately fifty interviews with key Liberian activists and other “knowledgeable observers” and conducted numerous archival and literature reviews. From his research, Press posits that the Liberian social movement endured with some success over twenty years because of strong commitment on the part of many courageous human rights activists and well-crafted use of media outlets to communicate with the international community. Unfortunately, Press neglects to discuss possible reasons why Liberia’s social movement maintained traction and movements elsewhere in Africa did not. His article leaves the reader to question what was special about Liberians and how they managed to make use of the media despite the government control of the local media.

Reno, William. 1998. Warlord Politics and African States. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Annotation: In contrast to the focus of several works on the need for institutional reform in Africa, Reno looks at the particular circumstances in which corrupt African leaders are driven to manage external challenges and promote old “patronage politics.” A common pattern that Reno observes in his four case-studies is the inclination of corrupt leaders to construct various reform plans as a means to improve relations with powerful and wealthy external actors and to refrain from following through with the plans. The bulk of the book is spent on the analysis of four particular “warlord states”: Sierra Leone, Liberia, Nigeria, and DR Congo. Reno concludes the book with a brief suggestion that international energies should be directed towards building civil society capacity as a means to mitigate warlord politics and political corruption in general. Unfortunately, Reno does little more than offer this mere suggestion in his conclusion, leaving the work of considering possible solutions to the reader.

_____. 2006. “Insurgencies in the Shadow of State Collapse.” In Violence, Political Culture and Development in Africa. Edited by P. Kaarsholm. Oxford: James Currey, Ltd.

Annotation: In this section, Reno attempts to explain the ideologies that lead individuals to form opportunistic militant groups following state collapse. He points out that, faced with similar circumstances, multiple groups develop in the same place but evince different goals and strategies. Reno suggests that a common cause for variation between militant groups can be linked to incumbent rulers' desire to avoid centralizing military command in their countries. Such rulers may manipulate factional conflicts within security forces, such as by creating multiple "anti-crime" or tax-enforcement units. Concluding his essay, Reno suggests that the nature of fragmentation of incumbent patronage networks plays a key role in inhibiting the rise of revolutionary groups. In sum, Reno's theoretical arguments are both well organized and supported. One constraint on the usefulness of his essay is its focus on one particular explanation for explaining incidence of militant opportunism, rather than examining alternative explanations.

Rosenblum, Peter. 1994. "Prison Conditions in Zaire." *Africa Watch/Prison Project*. New York: Human Rights Watch.

Annotation: For this report, Human Rights Watch conducted investigations of four prisons in Zaire (DR Congo) in order to assess security mechanisms, physical components, and to investigate crises such as prison deaths. In its investigation, HRW found that none of the prison magistrates had been paid in four months, the condition of most prison cells was deplorable, and many of the prisoners were malnourished, in need of medical attention, and in some cases, abused. After addressing general findings, the report provides a detailed assessment of each visited prison. One of the most interesting sections of the report describes the culture of Zaire's prisons. In this section, HRW discusses the involvement of prisoners in overseeing institutional functioning of the prisons. Finally, several useful appendices are provided in the back of the report, which provide maps and lists of standards for the treatment of prisoners per the UN. Overall, the report is well-organized, reasonably descriptive and highly informative.

Schmitz, Hans Peter. 2006. Transnational Mobilization and Domestic Regime Change: Africa in Perspective. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Annotation: Schmitz examines various effects of external promotion of human rights and democracy on the political regimes of Kenya and Uganda. He is primarily concerned with the inability of international institutions to support transitional processes towards democracy past initial phases. A major hindrance of international capacity in promoting transparent and democratic governance in Africa, the author argues, is the myopic focus of international entities on elites. He argues that NGOs are better placed to support later transitional phases in regime change because of their roles grassroots efforts to support democracy. Schmitz's longitudinal analysis of the relationship between transnational actors on political oppression and regime change in Kenya and Uganda is highly systematic and reasonably thorough. Schmitz is very precise in laying out his arguments and ends each chapter with a cogent conclusion. This book would be useful to policymakers, international organizations, and NGOs who are interested in revising best practices for promoting successful regime change in historically corrupt African

governments.

Schonteich, Martin. 2008. "Pre-Trial Detention and Human Rights in Africa." In Human Rights in African Prisons. Edited by J. Sarkin. Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council.

Annotation: In this section, Shoenteich points out gaps between African states' *de jure* and *de facto* compliance with international standards relating to pre-trial detention. While Africa does not exhibit statistically high numbers of pre-trial detainees, the relative depravity of Africa's prisons presents egregious implications for the rights and general wellbeing of detainees. Shoenteich spends the first part of the section describing the primary mechanisms in place for protecting prisoner's rights (e.g. ICCPR and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights). The strongest points made by Shoenteich include the following: excessively long pre-trial detention of the breadwinners of poor families may force the families to sell off their assets, deepening their poverty and, squalid prison conditions encourage the spread of disease. However, he does not include mortality statistics to support his contention that sub-optimal prison conditions significantly increase the risk of disease. In addition, he iterates that Africa has relatively low rates of incarceration. Though readers may assume that African prison conditions are in need of improvement, Shoenteich fails to provide a strong case for this.

Szeftel, Morris. 2000. "Governance and Underdevelopment: Accumulation and Africa's 'Catastrophic Corruption.'" *Review of African Political Economy* 27 (84): 287-306.

Annotation: In this article, Szeftel explores the tension that exists between the efforts of international creditors and donors to abate corruption in poor states and the tendency of corrupt governments in poor states to exploit the aid of those creditors and donors. Szeftel begins by informing the reader of the post-colonial progression of political corruption in Africa, asserting that the international community has begun to develop a tolerance for it. He then takes an unexpected turn by suggesting that discourse on political corruption in Africa and approaches of the world's major aid agencies have been inappropriately focused on the consequences of corruption rather than its causes. He points out that there are misconceptions about the legitimacy of power in capitalist societies as well as the relationship between perceived levels of corruption and patterns of capital accumulation. Such misconceptions are, according to Szeftel, perpetuating cycles of corruption in Africa. Szeftel's insights into the problematic nature of the anti-corruption strategies employed by the international community are both fascinating and provocative.

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. 2005. "African Governance Report." Addis Ababa: Economic Commission for Africa.

Annotation: The information gathered for this report is based on data and analyses from the National Country Reports on governance, contracted by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). This fairly thorough report assesses democratization, public financial management, private sector development, institutional attributes, and human rights enforcement within

twenty-seven countries as part of a broad effort to assess monitoring progress towards good governance. What is special about the report is its empirical focus on citizen perceptions of the state of governance in their countries while simultaneously seeking to identify major capacity deficits in governance practices. The format and organization of the report is similar to a text book, making it easy to read. It also provides an abundance of qualitative and quantitative data in the form of simple charts and graphs. In addition to being an excellent source of information for anyone interested in African governance practices, it would also be a useful tool for African leaders and national and foreign policy makers.

Van Arsdale, Peter. 2006. "Ethiopia and the Issue of Terror." In Forced to Flee: Human Rights and Human Wrongs in Refugee Homelands. Oxford: Lexington Books.

Annotation: In this highly narrative and descriptive book-chapter, Van Arsdale describes the role of terror in the forced relocation of Ethiopia's Tigrayans. Van Arsdale discusses the ideology and consequences of the "Red Terror," that is, the famine-marked regime of Mengistu Haile-Mariam as well as the Meles Zanawi regime that overthrew it in the early 1990s. Among other things, Van Arsdale also discusses how inter-ethnic hostilities have undermined political transition and reform in Ethiopia and, ultimately, peace. Van Arsdale concludes the chapter by emphasizing the importance of protecting the legal rights of those who have been accused of even the most pernicious human rights violations. The chapter presents a fascinating and rather personal account of political corruption and terror in Ethiopia. However, it is neither comprehensive in its scope, nor cohesive in its organization.

Williams, Robert. 1987. Political Corruption in Africa. Hampshire: Gower Publishing Co. Ltd.

Annotation: In this book, Williams provides a succinct explanation of the pervasiveness of political corruption in Africa. Williams prudently refrains from utilizing or developing a general theory for political corruption in Africa. Instead, he addresses the major impediments to the development of comprehensive theories and emphasizes the importance of analytical diversity. Williams appropriately divides his analysis across the genesis, mechanisms and patterns of political corruption in Africa and employs a case-studies approach. Following his analysis, he submits options for curtailing corruption, with an emphasis on inconspicuous, systemic patterns of corruption. Abating corruption, according to Williams, depends on the political will of Africa's leaders. Surprisingly, he makes no mention of international institutions and their role in reducing African political corruption. Of course, the absence of discussion of international institutions may be related to the fact that the book was written during the Cold War period. Nonetheless, despite the fact that this book was written in the 1980s, its arguments are highly pertinent to present day discourse on political corruption in Africa.