



## Who Killed democracy in Africa? Clues of the past, concerns of the future

In analyzing the prospects of democracy in Africa it may be necessary to distinguish between ultimate goals and necessary instruments for achieving them. It would make sense for Africa to distinguish between fundamental rights and instrumental rights.

The right to vote, for example, is an instrumental right designed to help us achieve the fundamental right of government by consent. The right to a free press is an instrumental right designed to help us achieve the open society and freedom of information.

1. By the same token we can distinguish between democracy as means and democracy as goals. The most fundamental of the goals of democracy are probably four in number. Firstly, to make the rulers accountable and answerable for their actions and policies. Secondly to make the citizens effective participants in choosing those rulers and in regulating their actions. Thirdly, to make the society as open and the economy as transparent as possible; and fourthly to make the social order fundamentally just and equitable to the greatest number possible. Accountable rulers, actively participating citizens, open society and social justice - those are the four fundamental ends of democracy.
2. How to achieve these goals has elicited different means. In making the rulers more accountable some democracies (like the United States) have chosen separation of powers and checks and balances, while other democracies (like the United Kingdom) have chosen the more concentrated notion of sovereignty of parliament. These are different means towards making the executive branch more accountable and answerable in its use of power. On the open society, freedom of the press and speech, there is also a difference in how the United States and Great Britain regulate it. The United States has a highly permissive legal system on freedom of speech, but more restrictive public opinion. The United Kingdom has a more restrictive legal system on freedom of the press, but a more tolerant public opinion.
3. Looking back after the initial burst of patriotism, op-ed columnist and Slate Editor Michael Kinsley has expressed a similar view in a Washington Post article: The United States political system protects freedom of speech from formal suppression better than any other nation on earth. But American culture is less tolerant of aberrant views and behavior than



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many others, and that tolerance has eroded further since Sept. 11. And as conservative culture warriors like to point out — or, indeed, complain (as in the political correctness debate) — a society's norms are set by the culture as much as by the political system. In a country such as Great Britain, the legal protections for free speech are weaker than ours, but the social protections are stronger. They lack a First Amendment, but they have thicker skin and a greater acceptance of eccentricity of all sorts.

4. When in my television series THE AFRICANS: A TRIPLE HERITAGE I accused Kaiser Aluminum of having exploited Ghana, the multinational corporation threatened legal action unless the accusation was deleted from the TV series. We consulted the lawyers of my television producers and my own lawyers in the United States as to whether Kaiser Aluminum could stop me accusing them of the exploitation of Ghana. All the American lawyers were unanimous. Kaiser Aluminum did not stand a chance under U.S. law. We therefore went ahead and showed the TV series in the United States without deleting my accusation. Kaiser decided discretion was the better part of valor. They did not take legal action. In the United States the law was on the side of the open society.
5. In Africa, on the other hand, the law of libel can be used to stop the flow of information, rather than to facilitate it. Libel law in Africa can be an ally of censorship rather than a partner of the open society. In a single week in August 2001 the courts of Kenya, for example, intervened twice on the side of interrupting the flow of information - the case of allegations against President Moi's son and the serialization of Smith Hempstone's memoirs. Smith Hempstone was a former U.S. Ambassador to Kenya who was critical of the Moi regime.
6. Does the future Constitution of Kenya need a Freedom of Information Clause? Or are there alternative democratic means of promoting the democratic goal of the open society? If the goals of democracy are the same while the means for achieving them differ, are there African means of achieving those same four goals of accountability of rulers, participation of the citizens, openness of the society and greater social justice? That is the challenge facing constitution makers in Africa - how to keep the democratic goals constant while looking for democratic



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means more appropriate to Africa. Towards Democratizing Development :The second big issue about democracy in Africa concerns its relationship to development. On this relationship between democracy and development in Africa, one crucial question has persisted. Is Africa underdeveloped because it is primarily undemocratic? Or is Africa undemocratic because it is primarily underdeveloped? Which is cause and which is effect? There is a third dimension which is often treated either as part of the package of development or as part of the package of democracy, when in fact it should be treated as a kind of independent variable. The third dimension is stability – a social-political precondition for both sustainable development and durable democracy. Africa's three greatest needs are development, democracy and stability – but not necessarily in that order. Alleviation of poverty is one of the fruits of democratized development. Alleviation of poverty is one of the gains when democracy and development are jointly stabilized and truly humanized. How has Africa been faring in these areas of development, democratization, stabilization and the fruit of alleviation of poverty? First let us explore what these words mean. What does development mean, for example? Economists naturally focus on issues like resource flows, levels of economic diversification, domestic mobilization of savings and investment, national productivity and per capita income.

7. And yet high levels of performance in those areas are achieved only after other measurements of development have already taken place. The most crucial may be partly cultural rather than purely economic. Development in promoting performance and mobilization of domestic savings and investment capital may need to be preceded by development in the following areas:
  1. Enhancement of managerial skills
  2. Transformation of Gender-Relations between men and women as producers.
  3. A redefinition of the work-ethic as a discipline of the education system. Colonialism damaged the work ethic among African males much more than among African females.
  4. A redefinition of the laws and rules about corruption to make them more culturally viable. For example, certain forms of



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ethic nepotism should be treated with greater understanding than certain forms of bribery. Lighter penalties for nepotism and tougher penalties for bribery may be needed. Ethnic favoritism should be regulated rather than outlawed.

5. Reforms of Africa's schools and universities to make them more skill-relevant and more culturally-relevant.
8. The primary economic problem in Africa has never been structural adjustment. The problem has always been how to carry out cultural re-adjustment. The re-adjustment would not be a demotion of African culture. The re-adjustment which is needed in culture is a better balance between the continuities of African culture and Africa's borrowing from Western culture. Until now African has borrowed Western tastes without Western skills, Western consumption patterns without Western production techniques, urbanization without industrialization, secularization (erosion of religion) without scientification. Would Africa have been better off if it had retained its own tastes while borrowing Western skills - instead of absorbing Western tastes and retaining its own lower levels of skills? Would Africa have been better off with African consumption patterns and Western production techniques instead of the other round?
9. The Japanese after the Meiji Restoration in 1868 asked themselves: "Can we economically modernize without culturally Westernizing?" The Japanese said "YES - we shall seek Western techniques and maintain the Japanese spirit." They retained Japanese tastes; and expanded their Western skills. Following the Second World War, they economically interlocked specifically with the American economy, even displacing American dominance in areas like the automobile industry - without giving up their Japanese spirit. The Turks abolished the fez, replaced the Arabic alphabet, discouraged the hijab, and attempted to become European. They have tried to combine Western tastes with Western skills. Unlike both the Japanese and the Turks, post-colonial Africans decided to culturally Westernize without economically modernizing. Ours has been the worst of both worlds. That is why Africa needs a cultural rather than a structural adjustment - to create a new equilibrium between tastes, values and skills. Let us now return to the fate of



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democracy in Africa. Who killed democracy in Africa? This has been the supreme political “Who-Done it” of the first 50 years of Africa’s postcolonial era.

10. Democra-cide: The Murder of Democracy A string of suspects have merged from history. Let me personify the forces at work. The Magician who came in from the North: This suspect symbolizes the first phase of democratization when we brought into Africa from the temperate zone of the Northern hemisphere magic models of governance. In former British Africa this meant the adoption in Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya and elsewhere the Westminster magic model of parliamentary government.
11. The magic which came in from the North was the fascination, the spell cast by Western ways. We were mesmerized into uncritical importation of an alien paradigm. This was the phase of high political imitativeness as Africans imitated Western forms but not Western democratic substance. There was a major disconnect between the imported institutions and the cultural realities of Africa. While former British Africa tried to imitate the Westminster model, French Africa actually voted in 1958 for continuing colonization by France of their territories. The 1958 referendum gave birth to the Fifth Republic of France, which attracted some imitation from the former colonies. The imported paradigm did not work. The drift started towards either anarchy or tyranny. Anarchy was too little control; tyranny was too much. Did the magician who came in from the North turn out to be not an instructor of democracy for Africa, but perhaps a suspect in the murder of African democracy? But there were other suspects behind the mystery of who killed African democracy? The soldier who came in from the barracks. On the eve of independence African soldiers had been grossly under-estimated as a political force. Even after military mutinies had occurred in 1960 in former Belgian Congo, African elites were slow to recognize the short distance from an army mutiny to an army coup. By 1963 Togo had not only a coup but Africa’s first Presidential assassination – the murder of Sylvanus Olympio. It was the year of the birth of the Organization of African Unity and the charter condemned “political assassination in all its forms.” By January 1966 Nigeria, Africa’s giant, had its first coup. A month later Kwame Nkrumah, the Icon of Pan-Africanism, was over



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thrown in Ghana. A string of other coups followed.

12. Who killed African Democracy? The Spy who came in from the Cold. This was the period when Western powers and Western business permitted their African favorites to be corrupt and repressive for as long as they were anti-communist. The litmus test of legitimacy was taking the right side in the Cold War between the Atlantic Alliance and the Warsaw Pact.
13. Dictators like Mobutu Sese Seko lasted from the 1960s to the 1990s. Mobutu was defended by the West even against internal civil disobedience. The Soviet side also played its part in the ideological spying and subversion which helped to kill democracy in countries which ranged from Ethiopia to Mozambique, from Somalia to Angola. There were echoes from John le Carres novel of the above title.
14. Who killed African Democracy? The cultural half-caste who came in from Western Schools and did not adequately respect African ancestors. Institutions were inaugurated without reference to cultural compatibilities, and new processes were introduced without respect for continuities. Ancestral standards of property, propriety and legitimacy were ignored. When writing up a new constitution for Africa these elites would ask themselves “How does the House of Representatives in the United States structure its agenda? How do the Swiss cantons handle their referendum? I wonder how the Canadian federation would handle such an issue?”
15. On the other hand, these African elites almost never ask “How did the Banyoro, the Wolof, the Igbo or the Kikuyu govern themselves before colonization?” In the words of the Western philosopher, Edmund Burke, “People will not look forward to posterity who never look backward to their ancestors.”
16. Who killed African democracy? Perhaps the angry spirits of the ancestors themselves. Have the ancestors cursed the first two or three generations of postcolonial Africans because of our apparent contempt for the legacy of the ancestors? Many Africans are ashamed of indigenous religions. For example, they have no public space in the curriculum of schools, there is no celebration of special indigenous sacred days. Africa celebrates festivals like Christmas and Eid el Fitr every year – but almost no African country has set aside a special holiday to celebrate traditional



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indigenous religions. Have the ancestors responded with an all-powering curse upon our generations? “Your roads will decay, your railways will rust, your factories will grind to a standstill, your schools will stink with overcrowding and crumble with incompetence, your soil will fight so-called desertification and your economies suffocate under your new globalization. You democracy will smolder like a dying bush fire, after a drizzle of hate.” In this murder story who is truly guilty of the assassination of African democracy? As in the case of Agatha Christiés famous novel MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS, there was not just one murderer. Every suspect on the Orient Express did have a hand in the murder after all. Similarly, all the suspects in Africa’s democracide (as in genocide or homicide) did indeed contribute to the death of democracy. The magician who came in from the North [False foreign start in democratization]; The soldier who came in from the Barracks [Power from the means of destruction]; The subversive Spy who came in from the Cold [Africa’s ideological perversion under Cold War conditions]; The cultural half-caste from Western schools [The Westernized elites]; and The angry spirits of the ancestors [the curse of the ancestors] But democracy can have a kiss of life – a kind of Prince Charming who brings it back to life. Democracy needs miracle workers of resuscitation. Indeed is African democracy really dead? There are signs of life already in evidence. Is African democracy capable of first-aid resuscitation? If so, who is the miracle worker who is to do it? Who is Prince Charming with the kiss of life? Towards Resuscitating the Democratic Order Who was the Prince Charming who had been trying to resuscitate African democracy? Who are the miracle workers?

1. Firstly, let us recognize Africa’s pro-democracy movements from the 1980s which have demanded of African dictators greater and greater accountability and insisted on better governance.
2. Who is resuscitating African democracy? Westernized African cultural half-castes who have seen the light
  1. Leopold Senghor retired voluntarily in 1980
  2. So did Mwalimu Julius K. Nyerere in 1985
  3. So did Nelson Mandela in 1998



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4. Founding fathers who permitted themselves to be defeated at the polls
  - Such as Zambia's Kenneth Kaunda
  - Such as Malawi's Hastings Banda
5. Second Generation Leaders who let themselves to be defeated at the polls
  - Diouf out after 20 years in power
  - His party out after 40 years in power
6. Who is resuscitating African democracy? Soldiers formerly from the Barracks who have seen the light:
  1. Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria - Military Ruler 1976-1979 - elected President 1999.
  2. Jerry Rawlings - transformed from brutal dictator to new democrat of Ghana: 2 coups initially brought him to power 2 electoral successes reconfirmed his reformed status
7. Who is resuscitating African democracy? Western Cold Warriors who have seen the light - and no longer perpetuate African dictators as part of a struggle against communism.
  - Mobutu Sese Seko could no longer depend on his Western allies to save him in 1996.
  - President Daniel arap Moi has been under pressure for greater accountability on issues of corruption.
  - The World Bank and the IMF now concede the economic relevance of good governance when in fact they once reiated political conditionality.
  - Smaller European countries more clearly tie their foreign aid to democratic





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- performance in Africa.
- Political apartheid has at last been permitted to collapse without invoking the fear of a communist takeover of South Africa. V. Who is resuscitating African democracy? The demonstration impact of the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, the discrediting of the one-party state, and the decline of Leninist radicalism in the politics of the Third world. Marxist-Leninist regimes in Portuguese-speaking Africa have disappeared outright. Ethiopia has been experimenting with a federation of cultures rather than a vanguard party or a Leninist junta. Pluralism has become respectable in a wide range of African countries - from racial pluralism in South Africa to multiparty systems in Eastern Africa.

Democracy was killed in African by multiple assassins. And the multiple miracle workers have been in the process of resuscitating democracy. Prospects have looked promising - until September 11, 2001.

### Counter-Terrorism versus Democracy

The aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon has affected not only the issue of war and peace in Afghanistan but also civil liberties in the United States. In addition, the aftermath has interrupted the democratic revival in Africa. With the United States it has been demonstrated that even a democracy which is about two hundred years old can be very fragile. One day of terrorist attacks in the United States has demonstrated the following threats to civil rights in the United States.

a. Hundreds of people are held in detention in the United States without trial.

20 b. Most of them are detained without their names being made public.



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c. The Bush Administration is considering secret military trials for people suspected of terrorism.

21 Even the Nazi leaders after World War II had public trials in Nuremberg with access to their own lawyers. Some of the Nazi leaders had killed millions of people, not just two or four thousand. d. Attorney General John Ashcroft wants people to betray their friends in the hope of getting the US Green Card or US Citizenship. In the McCarthy era in America members of families reported on each other's alleged communist connections. Now it is alleged terrorist connections, which are sought.

With regard to the impact of September 11, 2001, on the resuscitation of democracy in Africa, the result so far has been anti-democratic. The Federal Bureau of Investigation has been busy in Kenya and Tanzania with a variety of Muslim names. In Tanzania they arrived with sixty names.

In Kenya the government is sometimes way ahead of what the FBI wants it to do in the fight against terrorism. They have been attempts to try and extradite Kenyan citizens to the United States. Not to be outdone in the anthrax debate, Kenya in October claimed to be the second country after the United States to be targeted with anthrax by unknown terrorists. Not even the US Embassy in Nairobi was impressed by Kenya's claims.

A number of African governments under pressure from the politics of the war against terrorism, have been getting ready to enact new legislation ostensibly against terrorist threats. The legislation is more likely to be used against either ethnic minorities or political opponents to the regime in Africa. In Uganda there is evidence to suggest that the Minister of Internal Affairs will be given additional powers to harass organizations ostensibly because of suspected terrorist leanings. Uganda is a country which is already suspicious of ordinary political parties as potentially divisive and has been trying to move toward a "no-party democracy."

22 Uganda also faces ethnic conflicts in the North - conflicts which should be solved by a political process rather than by the heavy hand of anti-terrorist measures. South Africa, which has one of the most liberal constitutions in the world, is under pressure to reduce civil liberties and return to some of the old anti-terrorist tactics of the apartheid years. And Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe is already learning to use the term "terrorist" as a term of political denunciation. In November 2001 President Mugabe threatened to take action against journalists and reporters describing them as "agents of terrorism."



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23 At the height of the Cold War democracy in Africa suffered because African governments were allowed to sacrifice civil liberties in the name of fighting communism. Will democracy now suffer because African governments are encouraged to sacrifice civil liberties in the name of combating terrorism?

On the Orient Express of history, African democracy had once been murdered by multiple assassins. And then at a First Aid railway station multiple miracle workers and Princes Charming started resuscitating African democracy.

There are more political parties in Africa legalized than ever before, far fewer military regimes than in the 1980s, greater Freedom of the Press and more open debate about corruption and mismanagement than was conceivable fifteen years ago. Some of the new constitutions – like Ethiopia's regionalist idea of a federation of cultures

24 – even respected ethnic ancestors in a new way. African democracy was slowly getting resuscitated. And then came September 11, 2001. Thousands of people died at the World Trade Center. I suspect thousands of Afghans of different parties have since also been killed. September 11 has had many horrendous casualties. African democracy is in intensive care. Must it also die because of September 11? The African patient was beginning to breathe again. Must the plug be pulled?

Let us hope the worst will be averted, resuscitation will be resumed, and a new equilibrium will be found between democracy as means and democracy as ultimate goals in Africa's political experience.

### NOTES

1. A recent discussion on fundamental rights may be found in Milton R. Konvitz, *Fundamental Rights: History of a Constitutional Doctrine* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers/Rutgers University, 2001).
2. For a historical overview of democracy, consult Roland N. Stromberg, *Democracy : A Short, Analytical History* (Armonk, N.Y. : M.E. Sharpe, 1996); and for a contemporary view, see Anthony H. Birch, *Concepts and Theories of Modern Democracy* , 2nd ed (London ; New York : Routledge, 2001Edition,). Specific treatments of African democracy may be found in Obioma M. Iheduru, ed., *Contending Issues in African Development : Advances, Challenges, and The Future* (Westport, CT. : Greenwood Press, 2001), and Teodros Kiros ; with a preface by K. Anthony Appiah, *Explorations in African Political Thought : Identity, Community, Ethics* (New York : Routledge, 2001); and for a cultural approach, see Daniel T. Osabu-Kle, *Compatible Cultural*



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Democracy : The Key to Development in Africa (Peterborough, Ont. ; Orchard Park, NY : Broadview Press, 2000).

3. For discussions on the American and British scene, see Thomas R. Hensley, ed., *The Boundaries of Freedom Of Expression & Order in American Democracy* (Kent, Ohio : Kent State University Press, 2001), and Part IV of David Feldman, *Civil Liberties And Human Rights In England And Wales* (Oxford, England : Clarendon Press ; New York : Oxford University Press, 1993)

4. Michael Kinsley, "Listening to Our Inner Ashcrofts," *Washington Post* ( January 4, 2002). p. 27.

5. Libel suits and other legal actions can endanger freedom of expression even in the land of the First Amendment; see for instance, Lois G. Forer, *A Chilling Effect : The Mounting Threat of Libel and Invasion of Privacy Actions to the First Amendment* ( New York : Norton, 1987).

6. See, on the Hempstone case, *New York Times* (August 23, 2001), p. 7.

7. For recent discussions, see Dilip Mookjerjee and Debraj Ray, eds., *Readings In The Theory Of Economic Development* (Malden,MA: Blackwell Publishers,2001); B. N. Ghosh, *Contemporary Issues In Development Economics* (London and New York: Routledge,2001); and Yujiro Hayami, *Development Economics: From the Poverty to the Wealth of Nations*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

8. For an overview of gender and work in Africa, consult Aderanti Adepoju and Christine Opong, eds., *Gender, Work And Population In Africa* (London and Portsmouth, NH: J.Currey and Heinemann, 1994); and for a specific Kenyan case, see M Silberschmidt, *Rethinking Men and Gender Relations: An Investigation Of Men, Their Changnig Roles Within the Household, and the Implications for Gender Relations in Kisii District,Kenya* (Copenhagen, Denmark: Center For Development Research,1991).

9. This kind of ethnic corruption and favoritism eats away at the basic fairness implicit in a democratic system, and ethnicity becomes an obstacle in Africa's march toward more democratic regimes. Consult, relatedly, E. Ike Udogu, "The Issue of Ethnicity and Democratization in Africa: Toward the Millennium," *Journal of Black Studies* 29, 6 (July 1999), pp. 790-808 and Julius O. Ihonvberre, "The 'Irrelevant' State, Ethnicity, and the Quest for Nationhood in Africa," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 17 (January 1994), pp. 42-60, and for an extended recent discussion on corruption in Africa, see Kempe Ronald Hope, Sr. and Bornwell C. Chikulo, eds., *Corruption And Development in Africa : Lessons From Country Case-Studies* (New York, N.Y. : St. Martin's Press, 2000).

10. A World Bank paper by a former University of Liberia president lays out the obstacles and



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some approaches to reforming higher education in Africa; see Mary A.B. Sherman, *Building Consensus for Higher Education Reform In Africa: Some Reflections* (World Bank:Washington,DC, May 1993) and for a regional discussion, see Dickson A. Mungazi and L. K. Walker, *Educational Reform and the Transformation of Southern Africa* (Westport, CT: Praeger,1997).

11. The two periods of Japanese transformation are described in Anne Waswo, *Modern Japanese Society* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1996).

12. The African experience with democracy is surveyed through various case studies in Larry Diamond, Juan Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds., *Democracy in Developing Countries*, Vol. 2 (Boulder, CO: L. Rienner,1988).

13. An overview of the way in which military power took over civilian governments is provided in Ruth First, *The Barrel of a Gun: Political Power in Africa and the Coup* (London: Allen Lane, 1970).

14. For overviews of the African situation in the Cold War, see Fred Marte, *Political Cycles in International Relations: The Cold War and Africa, 1945-1990* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1994), and Zaki Laidi, *The Superpowers and Africa: The Constraints of a Rivalry, 1960-1990* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

15. This classic novel of the Cold War was first published in the sixties; see John Le Carre, *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1964).

16. This time might be a ripe opportunity to launch discourses on new constitutions; see John Mbaku, "Effective Constitutional Discourse as an Important First Step to Democratization in Africa," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 31 (June 1996), pp. 39-51.

17. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France: A Critical Edition*; J. C. D. Clarke, ed., (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 184.

18. See V. Rich, "Africa's 'New Wind Of Change,'" *World Today*, Volume 48, Number 7 (July 1992), pp. 116-119, and also Julius O. Ihonvbere, " On The Threshold Of Another False Start? A Critical Evaluation of Pro-Democracy Movements in Africa," in E. Ike Udogu, ed., *Democracy and Democratization in Africa: Toward The 21st Century*, (Leiden and New York: E.J.Brill, 1997), pp. 125-142.

19. In fact, M. Ould-Mey, in an article entitled "Democratization in Africa: The Political Face of SAPS," *Journal of Third World Studies*, Volume 12, Number 2 (Fall 1996), pp. 122-158, argues that western donor/lender influence was more important than pro-democracy movements in affecting the positive trend towards democratization.

20. *New York Times* (November 29, 2001), p. 1.

21. See the concerns raised by critics in a report in the *New York Times* (December 29, 2001),



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p. B7.

22. Consult, for instance, Nelson Kuofir, "No-party Democracy in Uganda," *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 9, Number 2 (April 1998), pp. 49-63.

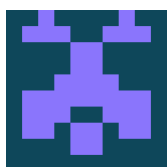
23. See the Associated Press report, cited in, for instance, *The Hamilton Spectator* (November 24, 2001), p. D2.

24. For more details on the Ethiopian federalism experiment, see *Ethiopia: A New Start?* (London: Minority Rights Group, 2000).

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