African Elections 2024:
Ideology and Practices of Interference

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INTRODUCTION

Ideology is never innocent; it is both targeted and purposeful. Africa to date bears the imprint of colonialism, which is layered by new forms of neocolonialism. This is in many instances transmitted and translated through ideologies that are pushed as superior ways of thinking. Another noted trend is the steady replacement of Westernisation with alternative methods that have been labelled the Easternisation of knowledge. However, the key question remains: What say do Africans have? Are they mere silent bystanders or, on the contrary, is there a shift in taking ownership of their future? This is fundamentally important when it comes to elections on the continent, as the latter should in principle reflect the will of the people; otherwise, it becomes both a waste of resources and loses the support of citizens. Over time, the argument has shifted from simply holding elections (the quantitative dimension) to ensuring credible, fair, and safe elections (the quality dimension).

This paper chooses to focus on ideology and practices of interference in African elections, as 2024 is a momentous year for elections across the world, where some 50% of the global population will be eligible to vote.[1] In Africa, 16 countries have or are going to hold elections, with South Africa celebrating 30 years of post-apartheid rule. There are a number of high-priority topics that are common to most African countries. However, the choice of how elections are shaped/influenced through technology, citizenry engagement, and culture has been made. This will allow for a more informed understanding of electoral processes and subsequently to engage other stakeholders as to what are some of the potential red flags, but also best practices, that exist. Three country case studies are also included to offer readers perspectives from different parts of Africa: Senegal, Mauritius, and Kenya which represent democracy and elections at different inflection points. Senegal's long democratic tradition was nearly jeopardised following the decision of President Macky Sall to postpone the presidential election. This was subsequently annulled by the Constitutional Court and elections were held in March 2024. The island of Mauritius, considered to be a democratic lighthouse in Africa, has rapidly deteriorated and elections due in 2024 will be a test case as to whether they will be free and fair. Lastly, Kenya -- which saw post-election violence in 2008, a Kenyan court decision to void President Uhuru Kenyatta's election in 2017, and, more recently, the victory of an opposition candidate in the 2022 presidential election -- offers some valuable lessons in the conduct of elections.

The paper was developed by the members of Democratic Solidarity Africa (DSA), which is a project run under the auspices of the Forum 2000 Foundation. This project aims to tackle the worrying trend of diminishing democracy in Africa by promoting unity and solidarity among democracy defenders from the region.

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[1] James, T., & Garnett, H. A. (2024). Half the world will vote in 2024, but how many elections will be fair? Retrieved from https://theconversa-tion.com/half-the-world-will-vote-in-2024-but-how-many-elections-will-be-fair-225828

ADVENT OF ELECTION TECHNOLOGY AND ITS INTERFERENCE IN AFRICAN ELECTIONS

Technological support for the process of democracy and, by extension, for the holding of elections was seen as important and referred to as "liberation technology."[2] Over time, the introduction of technology has interfered with elections in the continent through (i) the inhibitive costs of procuring the systems, (ii) the inaccessibility (in some quarters, opacity) of the electoral process, especially for voters and citizens, and (iii) the manipulation of especially sensitive data and electoral outcomes, thus affecting electoral integrity that has ultimately led to disputes and disenfranchisement. Cheeseman and Klaas identify election infrastructure as an area of vulnerability — "technology generates vulnerabilities within election infrastructure that are not present in more traditional forms of election administration."[3]

The Push to Embrace Technology

Election Management Bodies (EMBs) have gradually introduced technology to ensure the accuracy, efficiency, speed, and effectiveness of the processes. These changes in election management tools/systems have seen the voter registration process move from the use of Optical Mark Readers (OMR) and Polaroids to the more recent biometric voter registration in many countries across the continent. Voting operations have moved from the introduction of voting machines (DRC and Namibia) to electronic transmission and the relaying of election results and the biometric identification of voters at polling stations in countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa.

This transition has been fraught with challenges and problems. Apart from the technical issues such as expertise, testing, maintenance, and management, there have also been other system factors, such as the unavailability of adequate national power grids, poor Internet and mobile connectivity, and even physical logistical challenges.

Two particular issues emerging from the deployment of technology by EMBs are of major concern, namely the cost of deploying technology and the role of private vendors, who beget, install, and control the technology in a public-driven electoral process. Since the introduction of key technology-driven components in the Kenyan, Nigerian, and DRC elections, the cost of conducting elections in these countries has skyrocketed away from the average $3-7 in the region to more than $10 per voter in the three countries. Nearly one-third of the overall costs are attributed to the procurement of technology. Given that holding national elections is a critical pillar of genuine democratic governance and a manifestation of a people's sovereignty, expensive elections could invite the support of external actors with ulterior motives and interests.[4]

Promoting a Culture of Opacity

Regarding the engagement of private actors in public elections, technology brings to the fold the contracting of private vendors, usually *foreign* tech companies with the requisite expertise to develop, install, and maintain the systems. This has the indirect effect of introducing non-public actors into critical processes of the elections.

In the 2023 elections in Nigeria, the Independent National Election Commission (INEC), introduced IREV, an online election results portal for transmitting and displaying election results. The system, which was procured from a Chinese company, was heavily criticised and accused of manipulation when it started

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[2] Diamond, L. (2015). Liberation technology. In *In Search of Democracy* (pp. 132—146). Routledge.
[3] Cheeseman, N., & Klaas, B. (2018). How to rig an election. *Yale University Press*. doi:10.12987/9780300235210
[4] UN General Assembly. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (21 [I3]) Paris.

delaying the process of displaying the results. In the 2017 Kenyan elections, a successful petition was lodged by the losing presidential candidate leading to the first nullification of a presidential election on the continent. Among the major reasons leading to this historic decision was the fact that the electronic transmission system did not meet the legal threshold of transmitting all the presidential results before the final declaration was made. Examples such as these two can be found in nearly all the other jurisdictions on the continent where technology has been deployed in electoral processes. An emerging concern from this has been the vendor lock-in conundrum where the agreed contracts between the EMB and the vendor see the latter retaining access and control of many parts of what should be an independent and public-driven process.

Technology has further created the reality of opaque and non-accessible processes. Ideally, public elections (by the people) should be participatory, inclusive, transparent, and open. These qualities are critical for promoting trust in the conduct of the elections and enhances public confidence in electoral outcomes. Where processes are not transparent or accessible, it leads to suspicions of manipulation and threatens the integrity of said elections. There has been debate over the years over the import of voting machines as used in Namibia and the DRC. A number of Western countries, such as the Netherlands and Germany, have gone back to manual systems citing issues of security and unconstitutionality, respectively.

This vindicates the claims highlighted that the use of technology in elections creates a black box scenario in many African elections, thus making them not public. The best example of this is again to be found in Kenya, where in both the 2017 and the 2022 elections there have been calls for election authorities to "open the server." Without this happening, many believe that technology creates an opportunity for interfering in and manipulating electoral outcomes.

Manipulating and Compromising Data

The advent of social media has catalysed an unprecedented rise in incidences of disinformation, misinformation, and hate speech, which have served to cast aspersions on the integrity of electoral information, thus disenfranchising citizens even further. In Kenya for example, the Election Observation Group (ELOG), one of the leading domestic observer platforms in the country, found that 43% of information shared on social media (Facebook, TikTok, and X) during the 2022 electoral period was false. Similar levels of information lacking integrity were found in other elections during the period, such as in Nigeria and Zimbabwe. The use of the Internet and other digital platforms has also invited cyber-attacks, leading to the adulteration and hacking of sensitive electoral data, such as electoral results and voting data. During the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, the Information Ministry confirmed that there had been more than 12 million attacks on the INEC website. It also identified hackers from outside the continent who had attempted to hack into the system. This has been the trend all across the continent where electoral bodies have deployed the use of digital processes.

Delivering Clean, Safe, and Credible Elections

There is great concern over the deployment and use of election technology in African elections. At best it has served to improve some of the hitherto long, protracted, and complex electoral processes that were a common characteristic across the continent. At worst, they confirm fears of foreign interference, whether it be through the use of alien systems or remote cyber-attacks and manipulation, which casts aspersions on the integrity of the elections.

Given this, there is a need to perhaps move towards more people-driven and owned processes. The technology required would need to subscribe to the qualities of simplicity, access, security, verifiability, transparency, and accountability if it is to pass muster. Such a system does exist in the Gambia, where the country has continued to use marbles rather than ballot papers for its voting. While arguably this system can be revisited and interrogated further in terms of its efficiency, it does serve the people of the Gambia and sits well with them. In fact, what is required is a localised and indigenised version of technology that is as immune as possible from external manipulation and interference.

CITIZENRY ENGAGEMENT: THE VIGILANTES OF DEMOCRACY?

The concept that effective governance requires active engagement from citizens and civil society actors has garnered increasing consensus in recent years. Many donors and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) now endorse initiatives such as "participatory governance," "social accountability," or "demand for good governance" programs, which aim to foster citizens' and civil society organisations' (CSOs) active participation in public decision-making processes and to hold governments accountable. Although citizen engagement holds significance in governance globally, the focus here lies on exploring its relevance within the African context, particularly concerning the use of social media in evolving information ecosystems. Equally important is the pivotal role of citizen participation in electoral processes, and how it can enrich the overall democratic process by fostering transparency, accountability, and equitable electoral practices.

Leveraging Social Media

In the African context, the use of social media has significantly shaped the evolution of information ecosystems, fundamentally altering the dynamics of communication, civic engagement, and public discourse. The emergence and widespread adoption of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram have democratised access to information, providing individuals with unprecedented opportunities to disseminate, consume, and interact with content in real time.

One of the most notable impacts of social media on information ecosystems on the continent is its role in amplifying voices that were previously marginalised or silenced. Traditional media outlets in many African countries have often been subject to government control or manipulation, limiting their ability to provide unbiased or dissenting perspectives. In contrast, social media platforms have provided a decentralised space for individuals, civil society organisations, and grassroots movements to share alternative viewpoints, challenge official narratives, and advocate for social and political change.

Furthermore, social media has facilitated the rapid spread of information and the mobilisation of collective action, enabling citizens to organise protests, campaigns, and advocacy efforts with unprecedented speed and efficiency. The Arab Spring uprisings, which originated in Tunisia in 2011 and quickly spread across the Middle East and North Africa, demonstrated the power of social media as a tool for mass mobilisation and political activism. Similarly, throughout 2011, numerous instances of citizen engagement via social media were observed across the continent. For instance, Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan used Facebook to interact with Nigerian citizens during the 2011 presidential elections, even announcing his candidacy on the platform.

Similarly, civil society groups in Zambia leveraged social media to monitor incidents related to the country's presidential elections, encouraging citizens to report instances of violence, hate speech, and corruption. In Uganda, platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogs played a pivotal role in mobilizing the "walk-to-work" protests in April 2011, which were sparked by deteriorating living standards and perceived governance failures.

However, the proliferation of social media has also raised concerns about the spread of misinformation, hate speech, and incitement to violence. In the absence of effective regulation and media literacy initiatives, false or inflammatory content can quickly gain traction online, exacerbating social tensions and undermining democratic processes. On the other hand, governments have resorted to Internet shutdowns as a means of restricting access to social media platforms, particularly during politically sensitive periods. For instance, on 20 August 2023, the government of Gabon enacted an Internet shutdown on the day of the elections, reinstating connectivity only on 30 August, following the overthrow of the regime by a military coup. Similarly, in March this year, Senegal used a comparable strategy to quell protests sparked by the announcement of the postponement of the presidential election by Macky Sall. Political leaders on the continent frequently have recourse to such a tactic to control the flow of information and suppress dissent, particularly during periods of heightened political tension or electoral processes.

Citizen Engagement in the Intricacies of African Electoral Dynamics

Citizen participation in the electoral process across Africa confronts numerous obstacles that impede the achievement of inclusive, transparent, and credible elections. These challenges arise from a multitude of factors, encompassing the electoral context, access to information, institutional deficiencies, political dynamics, socio-economic disparities, and technological constraints. These factors influence the electoral landscape at three primary levels: the public perception of elections, the level of confidence in the electoral process, and the prevalence of violence throughout electoral proceedings.

Firstly, across the continent, elections are still viewed as marketplaces where political parties and candidates compete for votes using financial resources. The influx of money into the electoral process raises concerns about transparency, accountability, and fairness. Political parties often rely on wealthy donors, corporate interests, or even illicit sources of funding, compromising the integrity of the electoral process. Furthermore, the use of money in elections perpetuates inequalities and undermines the principle of equal opportunity for all candidates. To address this challenge, regulatory frameworks must be strengthened to curb the influence of money in politics, promote transparency in campaign financing, and level the playing field for all candidates.

Secondly, the integrity of the electoral process itself is often called into question due to widespread electoral fraud, encompassing practices such as vote manipulation, ballot tampering, and result falsification. Such manipulative actions, orchestrated by incumbent political figures or influential elites, can undermine the credibility and legitimacy of election outcomes, eroding public trust in the democratic process.

Lastly, electoral violence manifests in the form of voter intimidation, which may be fuelled by the political polarization prevalent in many African countries. On the one hand, citizens may encounter coercion, threats, or physical violence intended to dissuade them from participating in the electoral process. Such acts of intimidation can undermine the integrity of elections and curtail the ability of citizens to exercise their right to vote freely. On the other hand, political polarisation stemming from ethnic tensions or contexts marked by political instability or conflict may expose citizens to risks to their safety and security when engaging in electoral activities, leading to voter apathy or disengagement.

Strategies for Trust Building and Conflict Resolution

Various approaches exist for addressing these challenges, with a paramount emphasis on fostering trust in the electoral process. Central to this endeavour is the advocacy for electoral reforms aimed at mitigating key challenges and vulnerabilities inherent within the electoral system, such as voter intimidation, electoral fraud, and deficiencies in transparency. Electoral reform efforts may encompass legislative amendments, institutional restructuring, and capacity-building initiatives tailored to enhance the efficacy of electoral stakeholders. International support and collaboration can play an instrumental role in this process through

the provision of technical assistance, the implementation of capacity-building programs, and the endorsement of democratic governance initiatives by both regional and international entities, as well as bilateral partners. Finally, the reinforcement of mechanisms for conflict prevention and resolution constitutes a critical component in safeguarding electoral integrity. These mechanisms should be fortified to effectively address conflicts before, during, and after elections, thereby promoting dialogue, mediation, and reconciliation efforts aimed at mitigating electoral violence and fostering peaceful coexistence among diverse political actors and communities.

IDEOLOGY AND CULTURE

"Rejecting the Theory of Africa as a Res Nullius"

The economic infrastructure determines the ideological hyperstructure: *"We think differently in a palace than in a cottage"* is a famous statement by Feuerbach and Marxists on scientific materialism. In relationships of economic domination, we must seek justification of the ideologies that govern human societies. For Africa, whether we go back to Herodotus, Pliny, Ibn Battuta, or the more recent Africanists, the voices of Africans about themselves are often ignored. The bottom line is that the dominant ideologies that have shaped and continue to shape the continent's political modernity are not endogenous. The relationship of domination in the case of black Africa, but also to a certain extent in the Maghreb, has been stifled at best and destroyed at worst by all the endogenous institutions of its societies.

For the Negritude movement, but even more for the Black Consciousness Movement, the overriding 'logic' was and remains that of thinking, describing, and affirming black beings, the black citizens outside any white frame of reference. However, this statement does not exempt itself from rationality, the search for truth, and the imperative of justice. It is a double movement: the suspension of exogenous definition, then the birthing of endogenous definition. Artistically, a singer like Fela Kuti, in his title *Gentleman*, gives an ironic definition of the black man by sublimating the racist clichés about the African.[5]

African Renaissance and Socialism: Defining an Endogenous African Citizenry

Many African founding presidents saw socialism and Marxism as a practical ideology against colonisation. President Alphonse Massamba-Débat of the Republic of the Congo even promoted the idea of Bantu socialism as a variant that he thought was endogenous to African societies. This visceral rejection of capitalism, necessarily allied to colonialism, was a powerful driving force behind liberation struggles. All social relations have been re-examined through the lens of Marxist theory. In certain countries, such as Ethiopia, attempts at Maoist-style iconoclastic destruction have been carried out. Destroying old things like religion and customs to build a new African man was the catalyst of the revolution.

For example, Congo-Brazzaville's economy was non-monetary, and involved swapping hunting and gathering products, subsistence farming, and basic crafts. With independence, the Congolese political elite had to raise taxes on a population of hunter-gatherers. For the first revolutionary leaders of the independent Congo-Brazzaville, getting into debt with China[6] meant not getting into debt with France and the capitalist powers.[7] The search for independence was driven by a visceral rejection of capitalism identified in the political discourse with colonialism itself.

Back to Fela Kuti's song: The *Gentleman*, with his refined manners, still remains hungry, tired, and thirsty. According to Fela, the original African, therefore, has a duty to violence. Africans cannot afford to be gentlemen due to political and economic imperatives. A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence.

Translation and Assimilation of the Democratic Idea in Africa

First, our countries must **emerge from ideological lethargy**, which involves translating and oralising the superstructure/political ideology. Indeed, laws and regulations are currently mostly in European languages. Translating texts in the vernacular language and audio versions will nurture the dissemination of the rule of law. One of the basic human rights is to administer, judge, and represent in a language one understands and masters. Without this language barrier, the civic space will expand. Like Japan's Meiji and its Rangaku, it is urgent to initiate a call for African study, which will consist of having the essential texts of humanity translated into the local languages.[8]

Africa must re-examine colonisation's legislative heritage. Are African anti-LGBT laws the heritage of Victorian colonial morality? The result of neo-evangelical church pressure? Or an expression of actual

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[5] Fela Kuti, Afrika 70. (1973). Gentleman. *Gentleman*
[6] Niambi, N. T. (2018). Bilateral cooperation between China and Congo-Brazzaville: The other side of the ledger. *Open Journal of Political Science*, 08(03), pp. 227—238. doi:10.4236/ojps.2018.83016
[7] Bazika, J.-C. B. (2008). Les relations économiques de la Chine avec la République du Congo PDF Logo. *AERC Scoping Studies on China-Africa Economic Relations*.
[8] It must be emphasised that, although AI can help translate content faster, in places where the Internet is still rare and difficult to access, translation to local languages (not just French, English, or Portuguese) is complex.

"African values"? The Tadjabone festival in Senegal, a day when men dress up as women and women as men, suggests that aside from a rigorist interpretation of its Islamic heritage, Senegalese society has always been aware and tolerant of homosexuality.

The second movement is the **acculturation of democratic processes**. Electoral campaigns, even if they must respect the democratic principles of equity, representativeness, and accountability, must take on a local colour that resonates with the population and society — for example, the Gambia votes with marbles. Observing African society will help identify and promote traditional institutions with democratic potential, like the Congolese Mbongui. It is easy to imagine an open place, a public house with the traditional accessories of Bantu conviviality, such as palm wine, groundnuts, or nuts, and a libation space for the ancestors, but modernised with a mixed audience. Such an institution can increase citizen participation and bring administration inherited from a French-style division in line with local realities. The endogenous character and cultural representativeness settle the question of rejecting the democratic form. This Mbongui has no absentees but is a place of dialogue and the engine of the Bantu civilisation. Decisions are made in front of and with the ancestors.

An Encouragement of Learning

Africa will thrive by adapting the Japanese example of a functioning non-Western democracy. Rather than rejecting the West, Japan has assimilated and acclimatised the concepts through Rangaku, or learning. The political philosopher Yukichi Fukuzawa links civilisation and independence to technical and cultural mastery of the codes of universal rationality. The emancipation of the individual (minken 民権) and the need for the independence of the state from the great powers (kokken 国権) is the same movement that allows development. However, developing the country to enrich it and strengthen its military capacity (fukoku kyōhei 富国 強兵) to resist any attempt at external aggression is necessary but insufficient. It is also essential to bring about civilised men and modern people who think differently. The nation and its people must educate themselves, raise their level of consciousness, and strive to become autonomous to achieve and sustain independence. Japan is a living example of democracy being universal. Democracy is not opposed to the blossoming of any culture. It is the process that allows society to perpetuate and evolve.

SENEGAL: THE HIDDEN FORCES BENEATH THE DEMOCRATIC EXCEPTION

An Electoral Tradition More Than 200 Years Old

Unlike its neighbours and other West African countries, Senegal has a well-established electoral tradition. It is often recalled that a Senegalese congressman, Jean Baptiste Belley, participated in the French Revolution. On 4 April 1792, the National Legislative Assembly of the First French Republic granted French citizenship and the right to vote to natives of Saint Louis Island and Gorée. This right was then extended to Dakar and Rufisque. This citizenship and communal democracy led to the development of an endogenous electoral culture dominated by the Catholic, mulatto[9], and white minority. People who paid local taxes and were born or had lived for more than five years in one of the four municipalities had the right to vote and stand for election. The majority of voters were African.

From Parliamentarian to Presidential: A Limited Electoral System

With independence in 1960 and the election of Sedar Senghor, the political domination of the Franco-Senegalese Catholic minority continued. In 1963, following an attempted left-wing coup d'état, the electoral system was appropriated due to the interference of Guinea and Mali, allies of the Soviet Union. Senegal moved from a pluralist parliamentary regime to a presidential regime with a de facto single party. The dominant ideology was social democracy, tinged with Christian democracy. On 25 February 1968, Senghor ran without any opponent and won the presidential election with the totality of the votes, marking the pinnacle of the electoral-process appropriation. This situation extended until the 1976 constitutional reform, which re-established the multiparty system. In 1978, Senegal was one of the first countries in sub-Saharan Africa to organise a pluralist presidential election. This saw the participation of President Senghor, Abdoulaye Wade, and the African Independence Party. That political system was called organised tripartism — only those three parties were authorised.

The Structural Forces Behind the Curtains

The senior administration and the Senegalese political game remained like it had been in the time of the four communes[10], dominated by the influence of religion and economic forces. The handover of President Senghor to President Abdou Diouf in 1980 allowed the country to have a president from the religious majority. Still, through Elizabeth, his Catholic wife of Lebanese descent - Abdou Diouf's presidency was a perpetuation of the Catholic and Francophile minority monopoly over Senegalese politics. Since 1960, Guinea and Mali have been the main external forces that have disrupted the Senegalese political game by supporting separatist movements, such as in Casamance. The other structuring force was Alain Foccart's Françafrique, which has ensured the preservation of French interests to this day.

Sopi[11]: True Alternation That Has Been Misused

In March 2000, a two-round election by direct universal suffrage pitted Wade against the outgoing president, Abdou Diouf. The election of President Wade opened up the political space and introduced new external influences. On 25 October 2005, Senegal announced the re-establishment of relations with Beijing after it had recognised Taiwan since 1995. In 2009, an opposition party supported by public opinion called for the closure of the Israeli embassy in Senegal. This call was simultaneous with the rise in influence of Iranian interests through

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[9] The term "mulatto" is a racist term from the era of slavery and colonialism, used to refer to people with at least one black African parent. It is important to note that this term is outdated and pejorative, and is only used here for historical accuracy.
[10] The Four Communes of Senegal, also known as the Quatre Communes, were the four earliest colonial towns in French West Africa. In 1848, during the Second Republic, the rights of full French citizenship were extended to the residents of Saint-Louis, Dakar, Gorée, and Rufisque.
[11] "Sopi" is a Wolof word in Senegal that means "change" or "transformation." In the political context, "Sopi" refers to the political movement led by Abdoulaye Wade, which brought him to power in Senegal in 2000.

the Iranian state company Iran Khodro.[12] Whereas President Diouf, through his wife, was close to Christian Lebanese-Syrians, President Wade and his party did not hesitate to play the Hezbollah card and even moved closer to regimes such as North Korea. Wade modified the constitution without consultation and used a legal ploy to become a presidential candidate for a third time. Although a candidate, President Wade was defeated by an opposition coalition led by his former minister Macky Sall. This legal ruse spread almost everywhere in French-speaking Africa.

Senegal Today: Democracy in Mortal Danger

After much tumult, Senegal had its presidential election on 24 March 2024. The old forces of interference are also back with juntas supported by Russia in Mali and Guinea, determined to defeat Senegalese democracy by using the legitimate argument of economic justice. Anti-French populist arguments feed into echo chambers of social networks and generate troll farms of hate[13] and polarised sentiments.[14] The decline of the second regulatory force in Senegalese political life,[15] namely the maraboutic brotherhoods and the Catholic Church, in the face of the advance of evangelical churches and Wahhabism/Brotherhood,[16] raises fears of a contagion of Islamist terrorism.[17]

Bassirou Diomaye Faye's puppet candidacy, which announces that he wants to reduce the president's powers for the benefit of the prime minister and give monetary sovereignty[18] to Senegal, fools no one: Ousmane Sonko was the actual candidate. Even though Bassirou was elected and kept his promises, and Ousmane Sanko was designated prime minister, the country is still at risk of experiencing riots. With a bipolar administration, Prime Minister Sonko will permanently undermine Bassirou.

The victory of the populist and neo-nationalist opposition movement led by the dissolved political party PASTEF creates an unprecedented challenge for Senegal's democracy: Without a solid political party and apparent political alliance, the elected president has no parliamentarian majority to govern. The constitution prevents him from dissolving the national assembly, which is controlled by the new opposition, before September 2024.

Senegal's political history spans two centuries, evolving from colonial rule to independence. Electoral rights have gradually expanded, but challenges such as corruption and ethnic dominance remain. The transition to a pluralist democracy has brought new challenges, including populism and increased foreign influence from authoritarian regimes, such as China, Iran, and Arabian monarchies. The recent election highlighted a fragmented political landscape and raised concerns about the future of its democracy.

[12] *Une usine iranienne au Sénégal.* Jeune Afrique. (2006). https://www.jeuneafrique.com/65658/archives-thematique/une-usine-iranienne-au-s-n-gal/
[13] Hérard, P. (2021). *Afrique : une vaste opération d'influence électorale démantelée par Facebook en Tunisie.* TV5MONDE Afrique. https://afrique.tv5monde.com/information/afrique-une-vaste-operation-dinfluence-electorale-demantelee-par-facebook-en-tunisie
[14] Nadiya, J. (2020, June 5). *DFRLabs : Une entreprise tunisienne a influencé la présidentielle via les réseaux sociaux.* Tunisie Haut Debit. https://www.thd.tn/dfrlabs-une-entreprise-tunisienne-a-influence-la-presidentielle-via-les-reseaux-sociaux/
[15] Kane, C. (2023). Au Sénégal, Les religieux à l'épreuve de la crise politique. Retrieved from https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2023/05/19/au-senegal-les-religieux-a-l-epreuve-de-la-crise-politique_6174061_3212.html
[16] Châtelot, C. (2021). Le Sénégal, Déchiré entre les frères Ennemis en Islam. Retrieved from https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2021/12/03/le-senegal-dechire-entre-les-freres-ennemis-en-islam_6104608_3210.html
[17] Mané, I. (2018).. Les « ibadou » du Sénégal. Logiques religieuses, logiques identitaires. Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour. NNT : 2018PAUU1049
[18] During his presidential campaign, Bassirou Diomaye Faye, a 44-year-old anti-system candidate, advocated a break with the CFA franc.

MAURITIUS: COLONIAL AND POST-COLONIAL LEGACIES

Mauritius's political, economic, and social fabric has been shaped by sequential Dutch, French, and British colonialism. The French and the British were present on the island for 250 years (1715-1968). The French turned the island into a plantocracy whilst the British left an administrative and constitutional legacy. Mauritius has no indigenous population, but over time it became populated through slavery, indentured labour, and other forms of migration. The character of the island quickly changed from white-coloured and mulatto[19] elites to people of mixed race and of Indian descent. This changed the nature of political power on the island.

Lingering Forms of Ideology

Colonialism has had an influential hand in shaping the architecture of independent Mauritius — be it in its constitution, the prevailing laws, the electoral model as well as its parliamentary system. Despite living in a multilingual environment, English and French continue to dominate the administrative, legal, and business world. In fact, to this day English is still the official language.

One of the criticisms often levelled against the Mauritian Constitution is that it was handed over by the British with very little involvement from local stakeholders. There have been multiple amendments made in the last 50+ years, such as Mauritius becoming a republic in 1992, changing its head of state from Queen Elizabeth II to that of a president. However, discussions are still ongoing about how to Mauritianise the constitution. Mauritian laws are a mix of French and British legislation and, despite the fact that the Mauritian Supreme Court is the highest form of judicial decision-making, one can still have recourse to the Privy Council, which is considered the highest court of appeal for Commonwealth countries (of which Mauritius is a member).

The current electoral model is "First Past The Post," which is a direct British legacy together with an ethnic quota known as the "best loser," which was introduced at the time of independence to ensure the representation of minorities. As for the Mauritian parliamentary system, it follows the Westminster model, which is patterned on the British Parliament.

Despite being prone to a 'friend to all, foe to none' approach, there has been a noted shift towards a pro-India stance in more recent times. Although it has a population of 1.3 million people coming from different parts of the world (Africa, India, China and Europe) and it celebrates multiculturalism and diversity as a way of life, the island is often referred to as 'Little India.' This is visible in big-ticket infrastructure projects, in marine and air security training and equipment, and in the rise of a brand of Hindu nationalism among certain segments of the population. In fact, there is a pro-India narrative that is being systematically pushed, especially in the state media, to portray India as a generous, friendly, and brotherly country. If this trend persists and becomes the dominant way of framing the Indo-Mauritian relationship, it will have ramifications on the island's ability to be portrayed as a diverse and multicultural society.

From a Democratic Lighthouse to an Electoral Autocracy

Unlike a number of countries in Africa, independence was handed over in a peaceful manner and Mauritius quickly adopted the culture of the ballot not that of the bullet. Building post-independent Mauritius was quite a challenge, as a number of dire predictions relegated the island to a lost cause.

Since independence, 11 general elections have been held allowing for the regular transfer of power. High voter turnout is the norm, reaching 75% at the last election held in 2019.

However, a number of concerns have been noted, especially in the last 10 years, whereby the island's democratic credentials have plummeted, with the Varieties in Democracy Report (2024) referring to Mauritius as a "stand-alone autocratiser".[20] Civic space has shrunk considerably, with traditional and online media having laws slapped on them that can land both journalists and citizens in prison or see them pay hefty fines. Facebook, one of the most popular social media sites, is used both by citizens as a source of news and by politicians to convey their messages. Concerns have been

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[19] The term "mulatto" is a racist term from the era of slavery and colonialism, used to refer to people with at least one black African parent. It is important to note that this term is outdated and pejorative, and is only used here for historical accuracy.
[20] Democracy Report 2024: Democracy Winning and Losing at the Ballot. (2024). Retrieved from https://www.v-dem.net/publications/democracy-reports/

raised in the run-up to the general elections (scheduled for 2024) that social media will be at the epicentre of disinformation and misinformation campaigns. Issues related to deep fakes and the use of AI have cropped up and how they can significantly affect the integrity and credibility of the election. The need for a code of ethics and/or an appropriate regulatory mechanism has been discussed, but nothing has been formalised.

The quality of citizenry engagement (especially during an election campaign) has to an extent been compromised by the advent and spread of money politics, which in certain cases has encouraged vote buying (Kasenally and Ramtohul, 2020).[21] This has had a direct impact on political ideas and offerings, which focus more on populism and emotions as opposed to substantive issues. On numerous occasions. there have been calls for political parties and NGOs to invest in voter literacy, but unfortunately this has not gained much traction.

The use of technology in elections is, of course, a double-edged sword and to a large extent depends on how it is used. Elections in Mauritius use paper ballots and the counting is done manually. However, for the 2019 general election, computers were introduced (for the first time by the Electoral Commission Office), causing a fair amount of confusion and suspicion as what they were intended for. In fact, the presence of computers in a number of counting centres was named in the various post-electoral petitions filed by opposition parties. In the run-up to the 2024 general election, one concern that has been flagged is what use will be made of the existing biometric database of Mauritians (18 and older), as well as the mandatory re-registration of all SIM cards (some 2.3 million). Will this in any way be used to sway the results in a particular direction?

Conclusion

There has been a highly romanticised approach[22] to the Mauritian democratic model, making the different stakeholders (political parties, voters/citizens, civil society, international observation missions) oblivious to the multiple red flags that are steering the island into the democratic danger zone. It is high time for a wake-up call.

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[21] Kasenally, R. and Ramtohul, R. (2020). The Cost of Parliamentary Politics in Mauritius. *Research Report of WFD*. https://www.wfd.org/what-we-do/resources/cost-parliamentary-politics-mauritius

[22] Kasenally, R. (2011). Mauritius: Paradise reconsidered. *Journal of Democracy*, 22(2), pp. 160—169. doi:10.1353/jod.2011.0023

KENYA: WHOSE ELECTIONS? THE PEOPLE VS OTHERS

Kenya has had 14 election cycles since its independence in 1963. Given the subject matter for this paper, it must be noted from the onset that the electoral systems were inherited and adopted *hook, line, and sinker* from the colonial masters. The first exercise was conducted by transitional officers from the colonial government. To what extent the elections were influenced or interfered with to favour colonial interests remains speculative. What is clear is that the *imported model* has been in practice ever since. Four factors are attributable to election interference in the country; (i) the inherited electoral ideology and culture, (ii) inadequate voter education, (iii) the influence of money in elections, and (iv) the impact of technology in elections.

Electoral Ideology and Culture

Kenyan communities emerged from the colonial experiment with some retention of the traditionalistic *ubuntu values,*[23] which had characterised most of Africa. Many of the struggles for African liberation, such as in Kenya, were organised on the basis of this principle. As a result, the nation embarked on its self-governance on the wings of communalism, collectivity, and unity.

Still, despite the many elections since independence, Kenyans feel that their votes do not count. According to recent surveys conducted by Infotrak and TIFA, two leading pollsters, many Kenyans have little confidence in how elections are managed and their outcomes.

The Swahili word for government is *Serikali*, which is a corruption of Siri *Kali*, meaning big secret. Citizens have characterised government affairs as opaque, non-transparent, and unaccountable, thus alienating them in the process. The conduct of elections is seen in the same light. EMBs are still deemed to be part of this *big secret* and therefore not trusted.

A related factor is the ethnic mobilisation of electoral votes. It is well-documented that the British colonialists employed *the divide and rule* approach, whereby different ethnic nationalities were governed away from and against each other.

Since the colonial days up to the last general election in Kenya (2022), ethnicity has been a weaponised tool for votes. This was the key factor during the worst post-election violence ever recorded in Kenya in 2007-08 where more than 1,300 people were killed and over 600,000 displaced.

Inadequate Civic/Voter Education

Statistics on coverage and outreach of voter education campaigns over the last three elections in the country indicate that, on average, 60% of the country is covered by these efforts. This means that many voters do not benefit from proper education about electoral issues. Statistics around the dissemination of broader civic education reveals a similar trait.

It therefore follows that many Kenyans are walking blind when it comes to their participation in electoral processes. This also partly explains the incidence of spoilt and rejected votes during elections as well as emerging apathy among the youth.

Influence of Money in Elections

The cost of elections in Kenya is among the highest on the continent. In the 2017 elections, Kenyans spent an average of $25 per voter and this cost improved marginally to $17 per voter in the 2022 elections. This is just the amount of money that is spent on managing the elections by the EMB. The importance of this is that the elections become unaffordable for the Kenyan taxpayer and as a result, invites foreign support to some of the aspects of this sovereign process. On a related front, a study conducted on the expenses of running for the senate, costed a seat at $350,000 while the lowest seat in the country (Member of the County Assembly) attracted a cost of $31,000. The study also found that the more a candidate spent, the more their chances of winning. This finding immediately raises the question of whether the influence of funding candidates in the country provides a clear opportunity for interference and manipulation.

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[23] Ubuntu is an African philosophy which has been defined as humanness in a worldview that is characterised by values such as caring, sharing, compassion, communalism, communocracy, and related predispositions — taken from Let Africa Lead by Reuel Khoza (2005; 269)

Impact of Technology in Elections

The perennial mistrust of the election authorities and recommendations by the Independent Review Commission (IREC), which analysed and assessed the 2007 elections, led to the gradual introduction of technology-driven electoral processes in Kenyan elections, starting with a biometric registration process and progressing to the electronic transmission of election results. Following the latter's failure in both the 2013 and 2017 elections, popular concerns about sabotage and manipulation were raised. *Calls to open the server* (2017 and 2022) were made by political contestants who felt that the processes were too opaque and foreign-controlled. Other technological developments and innovations have led to a rise in the use of social media and lately, artificial intelligence, bringing with them new opportunities for manipulation and interference. To put it in perspective, between 2022 and 2023, incidences of disinformation recorded in one observed social media platform (X) had risen to 42% of the total recorded by domestic monitors.[24] Perhaps the best case yet on how to interfere in a technology-driven election using technological innovations remains the *Cambridge Analytica* case in Kenya. The use of professional firms to manipulate how people make decisions during elections has been on the rise all over the world.

Conclusion

Given the above factors, elections in the country are still a long way from being indigenous to the people of Kenya. The instance and opportunity for interference and manipulation have existed since independence and continue to be manifest even as new innovative electoral approaches are introduced. With the advent of Artificial Intelligence, there is an urgent need for robust and widespread vigilance by local actors lest this critical pillar of democracy is permanently compromised.

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[24] Elections Observation Group Report: Story Bandia, A Trend Analysis for Mis/Disinformation. The group deployed monitors in 25 digital media outlets (including social media) and obtained 5,020 quantitative reports. X (formerly Twitter) was among the platforms monitored.

CONCLUSION

This paper explores three dimensions of ideological interference in African agency and elections: the use of technology, citizen engagement, and culture. Regarding technology, it reveals how its introduction has interfered with elections due to prohibitive costs, inaccessibility, and manipulation. Concerning citizen engagement, it emphasises the evolution of information ecosystems, communication dynamics, and public discourse influenced by social media. Elections are often held when disinformation, hate, and polarised narratives are at their peak, which in turn can have a negative impact on electoral outcomes. The advent of AI is another threat that can significantly add to the information chaos and due attention must be given to this growing phenomenon. Regarding culture, the paper uncovers the justifications and origins of the spread of certain ideologies, ranging from financial concerns and foreign debt to the significance of linguistic representation. These three dimensions have consequently been demonstrated via the three case studies of Senegal, Mauritius, and Kenya.

The issues tackled in this paper require careful attention and detailed analysis to develop truly effective solutions, which will in any case be complex and will require multiple levels of action. Some recommendations, however, may be drawn from the conclusions of this paper. Firstly, it is necessary to better understand alien technology and strive for full ownership despite its expensiveness. On numerous occasions countries are pressured to adopt the latest technology to demonstrate that they are the bandwagon of modernisation. This is a decision that needs to be weighed carefully as elections must be a source of trust and not of suspicion. There is an urgent need to localise and indigenise technology to make it relevant to the aspirations and expectations of Africans while also fulfilling them. Secondly, the stakeholders' approach to citizens needs to change, mainly to enhance voter literacy where there is a collective and common strategy to equip voters with the skills to deal with disinformation, call out corruption and impunity, and be able to boycott money politics. Last but not least, Africans must learn to be inspired by some of the best practices that they generate and think highly of the examples of their own success stories.

The civic space in Africa still needs to be opened up and made safe for critical voices. Solidarity, collective action, and the sharing of best practices can surely create these safe spaces. Networks like DSA, where a diversity of experts, skills, and knowledge exists, can create an alliance for change that can be transformative in the long term. Regional bodies like the RECs and the African Union can benefit from the grassroots linkages that DSA has, ensuring a trickle-up effect for some of the key concerns faced by the continent. External institutions, such as the EU, can also be helpful allies. However, it is important for this collaboration to acknowledge the historical legacy of colonialism and slavery[25] and to avoid promoting a Eurocentric geopolitical agenda.[26] It is essential to recognize African expertise in their own situations and to ensure their voices are heard at international forums to facilitate productive dialogue for the future of democracy worldwide.

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[25] To analyse that asymmetric relationship between Guinea and France, Ismael Condé talked about "the community of rider and the Horse: *The Franco-African community is the association of the rider and the horse. France being the rider and the colony, the horse*"
[26] Ba, M. (2021). *Référendum du 28 septembre 1958 : Ismaël Condé Explique le " Non " de la guinée*. Mediaguinee.com. https://mediaguinee. com/2021/08/referendum-du-28-septembre-1958-ismael-conde-explique-le-non-de-la-guinee/

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