Democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Introduction

Sub-Saharan Africa experienced a wave of democratization over the past 25 years and this increase in democracy. Virtually every country in Sub-Saharan Africa has held repeated multiparty elections. However, democratic development is progressing at an uneven pace across the continent. In some countries, there seems to be a deepening commitment to democratic norms and practices, but in others, this commitment, both by political elites and the public, has proven shallow. This study attempts to find answers to the questions of why these Sub-Saharan African countries vary greatly in their levels of democracies although their democratic transitions were happened almost simultaneously. To answer to this question, this study explores various determinants of democratic consolidation in Sub-Saharan African countries. The five major approaches of democratization including modernization, elite, civil society, political culture, and international relations are tested by analyzing the data relating to political development from all Sub-Saharan African countries.

Five Theories of Democratization

Why are South Africa and Namibia a democracy when neighboring Zimbabwe and Angola are not? Competing explanations for democratization and democratic institutionalization have fallen in and out of favor over time. Some of this explanations that were accurate at one time lose their explanatory power as the world change.

Modernization

One of the more prominent theories argues that democratization is correlated with modernization. The theory explains that as societies became more modern, they would inevitably become more democratic. Modernization is related to better education, a weakening of traditional institutions that stressed authority and hierarchy, greater gender equality, and the rise of a middle class. Modernization theory explains that as peoples become more economically sophisticated and better educated, they need and desire greater control over the state to achieve and defend their own interests.\(^1\)

Modernization theory fell out of favor in the 1970s when democracy was filing in many Latin American countries, and economic development in some Asian countries was under nondemocratic regimes. Although scholars of contemporary politics no longer make sweeping claims that modernization inevitably leads to democracy, some insists that wealth and sustainable economic development are essential to the institutionalization and long-term survival of any democracy.\(^2\)

Elites

Modernization theory originally implied that democratization was almost automatic once a country developed a strong middle class and reached a certain standard of living. However, modernization theory did not explain how the change would happen. Democracy has not followed in the oil rich states of the Middle East where standards of living have risen. Indeed, Gabon, one of the richest country in Africa, is still not free state whereas Benin, Senegal, and Tanzania who are a poorest country in Africa are all free states. What explains this?

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Some scholars noticed the role of people in power, the political elites, especially the strategic motivations of the political elites. They concentrated on what would lead elites to hang on to or surrender power. The elite theory pays attention to the distribution of wealth more than overall economic prosperity or poverty. Like Nigeria, where economic assets are concentrated in the hands of elites, political change is much less likely if they believe that it would divest them of their wealth. However, if the elites believe they can take some wealth with them in exchange for stepping aside, they may no longer see much value in clinging to power. The theory of elites mainly focuses on the roles of elites for democratization.

Civil Society

Elite-based theories give us a sense of why leaders may be more or less willing to surrender power to the public, but not why the public would demand power in the first place. Therefore, some scholars emphasize not the importance of political elites, but the political power of society. These scholars more interested in the role of society stressed the importance of public organization or specifically, what is called civil society. The term civil society originally used to explain the movements in Eastern Europe in the 1970s that organized independent of communist rule. Civil society is defined as organized life outside of the state. Civil society is a group of organizations created by people based on their own interests that are not necessarily political. Environmental groups, churches, sports teams, fraternal organizations, and so on can be these associations. They can train people to articulate, promote, and defend what is important them and eventually to communicate to their governments.

Civil society provides the ideas and the tools of political action and mobilization that allow small-scale democratic practices to spread. Therefore, if civic association can emerge, it may create an enticement for democratic change. Modernization may help foster civil society, and civil society in turn may pressure elites for change. Then, these elites may or may not acquiesce, depending on their incentives to do so.

International Relations

While most the variables that affect democratization are internal, it is also imperative to consider factors that are made up of external influences. As we can see the cases, such as the occupation of Japan and Germany after World War II, or of Iraq and Afghanistan after September 11 attack, international factors also play a role of democratization. Foreign investment, globalization, international trade lead to modernization in turn may push democratization forward. International pressure or incentives may cause elites to favor democracy. Indeed, in the 1990s, most of Eastern European countries were encouraged to achieve the institutionalization of democracy because democracy was a prerequisite for membership in the European Union. However, influence of external factors may depend on some factors, including how open to and dependent on the outside world that society is.

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6 Ibid, 146.
7 Ibid, 147.
Political Culture

Some scholars argue that democracy is basically a culture emerging from historical, religious, and philosophical foundations. The concept of political culture as a system of beliefs and values in which political action is embedded and given meaning. Political culture is shaping the landscape of political activity and may influence the preference for certain kinds of politics. In this view, modernization does not lead to individualism and democracy. In contrast, Western democratic and individualist practice give rise to modernity. If this argument is true, then democratization can be only found in the West. This argument make many scholars uncomfortable. Latin American countries having hierarchical Roman Catholicism and Asian countries sharing hierarchical Confucianism were seen as unlikely to democratize until they achieved.

In sum, there are numerous ways to explain why democratization takes place in some cases and not others. While scholars tend to favor one of these explanations over the others, we find that most of these factors play some role in each case of democratization. Modernization can set the stage for political activity and awareness, which can find its organizational expression in civil society. Elites may be influenced by economic conditions at home and international inducements or sanctions. Even culture may encourage certain kinds of identities and ideas that catalyze democracy or get in its way. In the end, changing domestic and international conditions may mean that what leads to democracy now may be unrelated to how it comes about in the future.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa is the term used to describe the area of the African continents which lies south of the Sahara Desert. Geographically, the demarcation line is the southern edge of the Sahara Desert. The regions are distinct culturally as well as geographically. Unlike those living north of the Sahara, Sub-Saharan Africa was not much influenced by Arab culture and Islam. There are 42 countries located on the Sub-Saharan African mainland, in addition to 6 island nations including Madagascar, Seychelles, Comoros, Cape Verde, Mauritius, and Tomé and Principle.

In the 1880s, European interest in Africa increased dramatically. The colonial power had to make use of the colony economically. In the aftermath of World War II, Africans sought independence for their states, partly as means to achieve equality of status, modernization, and economic development that would benefit them. Nevertheless, Sub-Saharan Africa is the poorest region in the world, still suffering from the legacies of colonialism, slavery, native corruption, socialist economic policies, and inter-ethnic conflict. The region contains many of the least developed countries in the world.

In response to both internal and external pressure for change due to a wave of democratization over the past 25 years, the Sub-Saharan states increasingly liberalized their political processes, permitting opposition parties organize and allowing greater freedom of the press. After several years of steady gains for democracy, Sub-Saharan Africa has suffered some

10 Ibid, 148.
recent setbacks. By the recent Freedom House research, Republic of Congo, Burundi, Chad, Cote d’Ivoire, Somalia, and South Africa were among those countries that suffered declines. On the positive side, Freedom House noted the holding of successful presidential elections in Democratic Republic of Congo, the first in the country’s history, and process in fighting corruption and expanding government transparency in Liberia.

**Research Design: Variables, Hypotheses, and Methods**

The purpose of this study is to explore major determinants of uneven pace of political development in Sub-Saharan African states. There are 42 countries located on the Sub-Saharan African mainland, in addition to 6 island nations. These states have experienced a wave of democratization over the past 25 years, and this increases in democracy. However, democratic development is progressing at an uneven pace across the continent. This study explores all 48 states in Sub-Saharan Africa.

**Dependent Variable (Democratic Development by Freedom House Score: 0 to 100)**

Democratic development is the dependent variable of this study. Freedom House provides the most well-known democracy index and score. Freedom in the World uses a three-tiered rating system, consisting scores, ratings, and status. This study measures the recent Freedom House scores of Sub-Saharan African states. A country or territory is awarded 0 to 4 points for each of 10 political rights indicators and 15 civil liberties indicators, which take the form of questions; a score of 0 represents the smallest degree of freedom and 4 the greatest degree of freedom. The political rights questions are grouped into three subcategories: Electoral Process (3 questions), Political Pluralism and Participation (4), and Functioning of Government (3). The civil liberties questions are grouped into four subcategories: Freedom of Expression and Belief (4 questions), Associational and Organizational Rights (3), Rule of Law (4), and Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights (4). The political rights section also contains two additional discretionary questions. For additional discretionary question A, a score of 1 to 4 may be added, as applicable, while for discretionary question B, a score of 1 to 4 may be subtracted, as applicable (the worse the situation, the more points may be subtracted). The highest score that can be awarded to the political rights checklist is 40 (or a total score of 4 for each of the 10 questions). The highest score that can be awarded to the civil liberties checklist is 60 (or a total score of 4 for each of the 15 questions). The scores from the previous edition are used as a benchmark for the current year under review. A score is typically changed only if there has been a real-world development during the year that warrants a decline or improvement (e.g., a crackdown on the media, the country’s first free and fair elections), though gradual changes in conditions, in the absence of a signal event, are occasionally registered in the scores.

The mean of recent Freedom House score in the region is slightly higher than 45. The lowest scored state is Eritrea with 3 whereas the highest scored state is Cape Verde with 90.

**Independent Variables**

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12 Ibid.
This study tests the relationship between various independent variables and democratic development in Sub-Saharan African states. The independent variables include economic development, education, press freedom, corruption, globalization, and ages of independence. These independent variables are measurements of five theories of democratization.

Economic Development (GDP/Capita)
Modernization theory argues that without economic development democratic consolidation is impossible. Is it also a case in Sub-Saharan African states? The source of GDP/capita is the World Bank.\textsuperscript{14} The mean of GDP/capita in the region in 2016 is $5,485. The highest one is Equatorial Guinea with $38,700 while the lowest state is Somalia with $400.

Education (Literacy Rate)
Education is essential to economic and political development. Educated citizen challenges tradition and non-democratic rules. Levels of education in Sub-Saharan African states are measured by 2015 literacy rate. The literacy rate is provided by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.\textsuperscript{15} The mean of 2015 literacy rate in the region is 78.67%. The highest literacy rate is in South Africa with 99.03%. The lowest one is in Niger with 26.56%.

Press Freedom (Media Freedom Score by Freedom House: 0 to 100)
Media freedom is also essential to political development. The measurement utilized for this variable is “Freedom of the Press” score provided by Freedom House.\textsuperscript{16} Freedom House rates each state’s level of media freedom annually. The scoring scale ranges from 0 to 100, with lower scores reflecting a freer media environment. The mean of recent press freedom in the region is 59.26. The highest score (lowest level of media freedom) is in Eritrea with 94. The lowest one (highest level of media freedom) is in Cape Verde with 27.

Corruption (Corruption Perceptions Index by Transparency International: 0 to 100)
Corruption is a manipulation of policies, institutions and rules of procedure in the allocation of resources and financing by political decision makers, who abuse their position to sustain their power, status and wealth. Therefore, political development may not be happened in corrupted states. Transparency International, the global coalition against corruption, measures and publishes the Corruption Perceptions Index annually since 1996.\textsuperscript{17} The CPI ranks 168 countries in 2016 on a scale from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean). The global average score is a paltry 43. The mean of 2016 CPI in Sub-Saharan African states is 31.84. The most corrupted one is Somalia with 10. The cleanest one is Botswana with 60.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{17} Transparency International, \textit{Corruption Perceptions Index}, http://www.transparency.org/research/cpi/overview (accessed 03/10/17).
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Globalization

International factors also play a role in democratization. Foreign investment, globalization, international trade lead to modernization in turn may push democratization forward. The measurement of the level of globalization is from the KOF Globalization Index.\textsuperscript{18} The Index covers economic, social and political dimensions of globalization. The scale ranges from 0 to 100 scale. The lowest level of globalization is 0 whereas the highest level is 100. The mean of 2015 globalization score in the region is 85.23. The highest level of globalization is in Mauritius with 82.23 whereas the lowest level of globalization is in Burundi with 22.23.

Ages of Independence (Years)

Sub-Saharan Africa is the poorest region in the world, still suffering from the legacies of colonialism. Overcoming neocolonial cultures is a necessary condition of achieving political development in the region. Therefore, this study measures ages of independence in the region. The mean of ages of independence in Sub-Saharan African states is 54.73. The eldest one is Liberia with 169 years old while the youngest one is Eritrea with only 23 years old.

Hypotheses

This study proposes six hypotheses:

Modernization
Hypothesis 1: The higher GDP per capita an African state has, the higher level of democracy it will have ($\beta_1 > 0$).

Elites
Hypothesis 2: The higher literacy rate an African state has, the higher level of democracy it will have ($\beta_2 > 0$).

Civil Society
Hypothesis 3: The higher level of press freedom an African state has, the higher level of democracy it will have ($\beta_3 > 0$).

Hypothesis 4: The lower level of corruption an African state has, the higher level of democracy it will have ($\beta_4 < 0$).

International Relations
Hypothesis 5: The higher level of globalization an African state has, the higher level of democracy it will have ($\beta_5 > 0$).

Culture
Hypothesis 6: The longer history of independence from colonialism an African state has, the higher level of democracy it will have ($\beta_6 > 0$).

The data of this study have been acquired from databases provided by the World Bank, Freedom House, KOF Globalization, UNESCO, Central Intelligence Agency, and Transparency

International. To estimate the impacts of the independent variables on democratic development in Sub-Saharan African states, this study uses the method of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression using the cross-national data across 48 states. Through empirical research with this method, the relevance of the independent variable explaining political development within the context of Sub-Saharan African region will be established. The proposed model of this study to predict political development is:

\[ \text{Political Development} = \alpha + (\beta_1 \times \text{Economic Development}) + (\beta_2 \times \text{Education}) + (\beta_3 \times \text{Media Freedom}) + (\beta_4 \times \text{Corruption}) + (\beta_5 \times \text{Globalization}) + (\beta_6 \times \text{Ages of independence}) + e \]

**Results**

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of variables. Although all Sub-Saharan African states have experienced a wave of democratization over the past 25 years, and virtually every country in the region has held repeated multiparty elections. However, democratic development is progressing at an uneven pace across the continent. According to recent Freedom House Index, only 10 of 48 states in the region are “free”; 20 states are “partly free”; and 18 states are “not free” states. Likewise, level of economic development, level of education, level of media freedom, corruption score, globalization score, and ages of independence in Sub-Saharan African states are different, too.

[Table 1 around here]

Table 2 shows correlations between independent variables and political development. Except Ages of Independent, all independent variables are statistically significant at 0.05 level. In addition, the relationships between all independent variables and the dependent variable of political development are also commonly expected direction. Especially, two independent variables, Press Freedom and Corruption, and the dependent variables are very highly correlated. However, the relationship between Age of Independence and the dependent variable of political development is not statistically significant. Moreover, the relationship between two variables shows unexpected direction.

[Table 2 around here]

Table 3 summarizes the results of the multivariate regression analysis. The F-test illustrates the proposed model is a good fit with the formula:

\[ \text{Political Development} = 79.098 + (-0.001 \times \text{Economic Development}) + (0.179 \times \text{Education}) + (-1.092 \times \text{Press Freedom}) + (0.574 \times \text{Corruption}) + (-0.037 \times \text{Globalization}) + (0.045 \times \text{Ages of independence}) + e \]

The overall relationship between six independent variables and the dependent variable of political development is reported as \( R = 0.926 \). The results show that the six independent variables explain more than 85 percent of the variance in the dependent variable, political development (\( R^2 = 0.857 \)). Three independent variables (Literacy Rate, Press Freedom, and Corruption Index) are statistically significant at 0.05 level, having t values of 1.703, -8.267, and 3.120. Press Freedom, especially, is the most powerful predictor of political development with a
beta (β) value of -0.745 among six independent variables. Corruption and Literacy Rate also have a major and predictable impact on political development with beta (β) values of 0.291 and 0.137. In contrast, the variable of GDP/Capita is statistically significant only at 0.10 level, having t value of -1.300 while Globalization and Age of Independence variables are not statistically related to the dependent variable.

Therefore, the results of this regression analyses support all hypotheses of three major theories including modernization, elites, and civil society. However, the results fail to support the other theories such as international relations and culture.

[Table 3 around here]

**Conclusions and Implications**

The purpose of this study has been to examine the determinants of political development in Sub-Saharan African states. The findings suggest that press Freedom is the most influential factors to determine the level of democratization in Sub-Saharan African states. Corruption is the second most influential factor to explain the level of democratization in the region. Literacy rate is another leading determinant of democratization in Sub-Saharan African states. Economic Development is also a determinant of political development in the region. However, Globalization, and Ages of Independence are not statistically significant variables to explain democratization in Sub-Saharan African states. Therefore, although some unexpected results are found, this study is still highly informative. Nevertheless, this study naturally calls to be continued and considers possible future directions for related research.

One implication of the study is related to relatively small number of cases. There are only 48 states in the region, and some of countries are not even accessible for measuring. Therefore, a cross-national time series model would provide greater number of cases. The other implication concerns the validity of operationalization and measurement for some variables, especially variables for testing International Relations and Culture theories. Like other previous researches, this study has not successfully measured variables of these theories. Thus, the future research would hope to find more relevant variables that are better suited to the task.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
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<th>Maximum</th>
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<td>Press Freedom (1-100)</td>
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<td>Corruption Index (1-100)</td>
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<td>Globalization (1-100)</td>
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<td>Ages of Independence (year)</td>
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<td>GDP/Capita (PPP) (US $)</td>
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<td>.013</td>
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<td>Ages of Independence (year)</td>
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Table 3: Determinants of Democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa

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<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Coefficients (b)</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
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<td>GDP/Capita (PPP) (US $)</td>
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<td><strong>Elites</strong></td>
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<td>Literacy Rate (%)</td>
<td>.179</td>
<td>.105</td>
<td>1.703**</td>
<td>.137</td>
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<td><strong>Civil Society</strong></td>
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<td>Press Freedom (1-100)</td>
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<td>-8.267***</td>
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<td>3.120**</td>
<td>.291</td>
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<td><strong>Culture</strong></td>
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Source: Freedom House Index (Score 1-100) from Freedom House; GDP/Capita (PPP) in 2016 from World Bank; Literacy Rate in 2015 from UNDP; Press Freedom in 2016 from Freedom House; Corruption Perception Index in 2016 from Transparency International; Globalization Index in 2013 from KOF; Years of Independence from CIA World Factbook

Note: * p < 0.1; ** p < 0.05; ***p < 0.001 in two-tailed tests.

1. Multicollinearity: no collinearity problems based on the variance inflation factor (VIF) test (mean VIF = 1.735).
References


