

Review Paper

The effects of leadership strategies on underdevelopment in sub-Saharan Africa: A comparative perspective

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This article looks at the impact of leadership strategies on underdevelopment in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) in a comparative perspective. Using survey data from the World Bank, the Afrobarometer and the freedom house index, it refutes the conventional developmental argument, demonstrating that the effect of economic growth on poverty reduction is more balanced than usually recognized. It also shows that even though SSA experienced rapid democratization changes in the early 1990s, democratic standards have stagnated globally since then, forging patterns of unfinished transitions. The empirical analysis illustrates the poor perceived record of African politicians and a clear gap between the general support and the current satisfaction with democracy in SSA. Finally, the paper points out that change in democratization are positively related with changes in lived poverty, underlining that democratic leadership is even more important in tackling underdevelopment than economic growth in itself.

Key words: Leadership, underdevelopment, economic growth, democratization, Sub-Saharan Africa.

INTRODUCTION

How do leadership strategies affect underdevelopment in sub-Saharan Africa? Even though this question is central in understanding how political factors might influence the socio-economic trends of the sub-region, the political science literature remains sharply divided on the matter.¹ While some believe that SSA's persistent underdevelopment can be explained by insufficient levels of economic growth and market reforms, others argue that it can be explained by unequal international terms of trade and the burden of external debts.

Since the 1980s and the first structural adjustment programs (SAPs)-led reforms, and especially since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the majority of communist regimes, the hegemony of economic liberalism has led to a growing emphasis on market liberalization in SSA. International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and Western countries have considered that reforms to sustain economic growth should be a priority if SSA is to experience poverty reduction in the long term. In fact, after numerous years of turmoil and decline in the aftermath of the late 1970s oil crisis and the emergence of the external debts, SSA has been experiencing renewed economic growth since the mid-1990s. Many analysts

have suddenly become optimists again, claiming that SSA is finally on the track of development.

It is true that numerous changes have taken place over the last two decades. The discovery of sizeable petroleum reserves in recent years in Angola or Equatorial Guinea, for instance, has improved the economic status of these respective countries. The reinforcement of the presence of Chinese interests in the continent has engendered a renewal of Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) and fierce competition for Africa's natural resources. After a long period of marginalization, the world has started to rediscover Africa's geostrategic importance. However, while some commentators have venerated renewed economic growth and others have blamed the persistence of IFIs conditionalities, it seems that there is still a missing link in the explanation of Africa's recurrent stalemate.

Indeed, how can it be explained that in spite of renewed economic growth, SSA is still lagging behind in development? If the traditional developmental assumption holds, that is, that economic growth constitutes the main condition for reducing underdevelopment, SSA should be better off nowadays than it was a decade ago. Nonetheless, contrary to the conventional emphasis on

growth, this article shows that the effect of leadership strategies might play an even greater role in promoting or, inversely, prohibiting development. Using a comparative perspective, it illustrates how there is no real link between economic growth and changes in poverty reduction, and on the contrary, how democratization might affect development much more positively.

The article is structured in three complementary parts. The first section introduces the theoretical debate on the explanation of underdevelopment in SSA, showing the limits of developmental and critical approaches. It emphasizes how the gap needs to be bridged between the two opposed perspectives, while focusing on the leadership strategies of political actors and their links with underdevelopment in SSA. The second section questions the conventional developmental orthodoxy by looking at the limited effect of economic growth on poverty reduction. Finally, the last part of the paper considers the poor record of African postcolonial leaders as compared with the rest of the world, delineating a pattern of unfinished political transitions and demonstrating the impact of democratization on poverty reduction in SSA.

EXPLAINING UNDERDEVELOPMENT IN SSA

The limits of developmental and critical approaches

Africa's persistent underdevelopment remains a prominent puzzle for political analysts. Two main schools of thought, which could be characterized as the developmental and the critical approaches, have formulated opposing views on Africa's stalemate. On the one hand, the developmental approach, originally called the modernization school in the 1960s, is centred on the Western-centric belief that states would all progress along the same developmental path and economic development would lead to democratization (O'Donnell, 1973: 3). All societies in the world aspire to and would succeed (at least eventually) in substituting traditional modes of organizations with a modern type of political order, attempting to 'catch up' with the Western trajectory (Przeworski and Limongi, 1997: 156). The modernization school claimed to provide an all-encompassing theory of political development, based on the idea that the political functions in each society are the same (Almond, 1969: 17).

Nowadays, the developmental state paradigm still puts the primary emphasis on efficiency, economic growth and a rational management of state affairs, which would permit SSA to "achieve, first, some measures of stability and autonomy and, ultimately, a pattern of convergence with the Western industrialized world" (Chazan et al., 2001: 16). The persistence of neo-patrimonial practices with their consequences for modern bureaucracy and rational economic development has nevertheless provided a strong limit for the theory (Sandbrook, 1976: 165 - 185; Gendzier, 1985). The theory's "developmental" perspective has also led it to accept existing power

structures and take for granted formal political institutions (Sandbrook and Barker, 1985; Zartman, 1995). The undeniable heterogeneity of the "Third World" since the 1980s has also refuted the argument of a unique developmental path (So, 1990: 96). In recent years, trying to take these critiques into account, the developmental state approach has introduced new concepts like "good governance", "sustainable development" or the "new public management" to consider the relation between economic and policy-making reforms.

In opposition to the developmental state paradigm, critical theorists, originally inspired by the dependency theory and building nowadays on a neo-Marxist framework, have shifted their focus from the course of modernization and development to the foundations of underdevelopment (Amin, 1973a: 104). Critical theorists have brought political economy back to the core of political analysis, stating that SSA's marginal position in the world system would explain "the development of its underdevelopment" (Gunder Frank, 1971: 3). Introducing a "world system theory" has led critical theorists to "rethink" international relations, arguing that the periphery of the capitalist system was inherently exploited at its core, perpetuating global hegemony (Rodney, 1972; Wallerstein, 1978; Halliday, 1994). SSA's persistent stalemate is explained by the prevalence of "neo-colonial" practices which bias SSA states' economic orientations. The dependence of many SSA countries on the exportation of their primary goods and their natural resources, mainly suits the interests of developed countries, while it would entertain their fragility in the world economic order (Amin, 1973b: 274).

In today's world politics, the hegemony of neo-liberalism and the globalization of production would maintain inequalities of power and wealth among countries (Cox, 1993: 112). However, the development of Southeast Asian countries since the 1970s has illustrated the theory's over-emphasis on developed countries' agency in the underdevelopment of the Third World (Bayart, 1996: 13). Southeast Asian peripheral elites have, in fact, been able to limit their marginalized position in the international system through active and responsible state-led development (Amsden, 1989: 5). The existence of transnational relations, networks and functional exchanges between African and foreign elites also shows how core and peripheral elites of the world system can cooperate at the expense of civil societies. As Badie says, it could be that "more than a systemic logic, dependency might be an interactive logic" (Badie, 1992: 36).

To explain SSA's underdevelopment, we need to merge the gap between the developmental and the critical explanations. Through IFIs' imposition of SAPs and market reforms, public monopolies have, in many instances, been privatized without this necessarily leading to poverty reduction. Many Western countries and international donors also perpetuate an important hypocrisy in that most of the development aid provided to

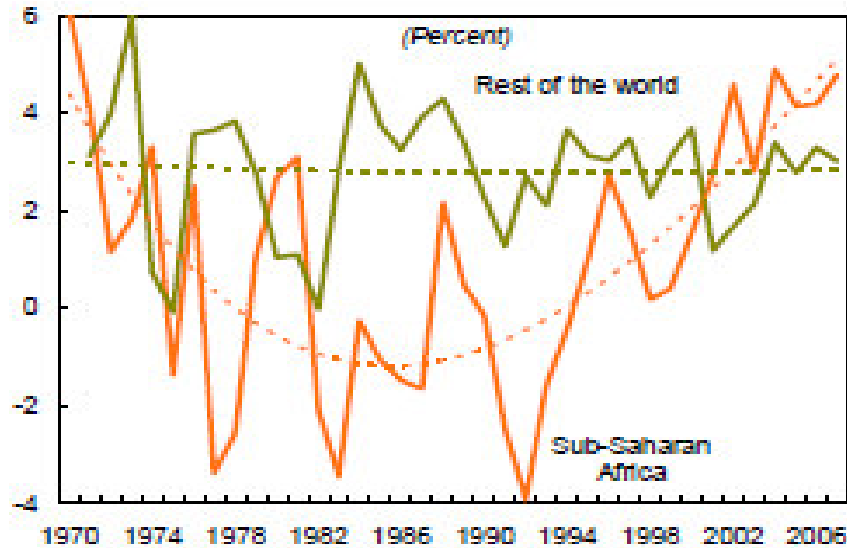


Figure 1. Evolution of economic growth in Sub-Saharan Africa and in the rest of the world (1970-2006) %.

Source: International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook 2008 and IMF, Regional Economic Outlook, sub-Saharan Africa, October 2008.

SSA is generally already mortgaged by the repayments of annual debt services. International patterns of “unequal exchange” still prevail nowadays, for instance through massive subsidies for European agriculture, or even illegal practices of dumping through the exportation of the surplus of the production of primary goods, which compete unequally with local productions on African markets (Emmanuel, 1972: 1).

However, the effect of leadership strategies on the persistence of underdevelopment also seems crucial, so that it requires reallocating political actors at the centre of the analysis (Evans et al., 1985; Clapham, 1996; Van de Walle, 2001). African political orders have been labelled as “quasi-states”, “shadow states” or even “vampire states”, stressing the centrality of neo-patrimonial practices and extractive tendencies (Jackson, 1990; Frimpong-Ansah, 1992; Evans, 1997). The question of leadership strategies appears even more crucial nowadays: before the 2009 world economic crisis, SSA had experienced more than a decade of important economic growth but not necessarily a consequent reduction of underdevelopment. Consequently, the next section questions the conventional perspective on the effect of economic growth on poverty reduction.

THE LIMITED EFFECT OF ECONOMIC GROWTH ON POVERTY REDUCTION

Questioning the common orthodoxy

First of all, it is true that if one looks at empirical evidences taken from standard data on economic growth, it can be

said that, on average, SSA has experienced a renewed economic growth, especially since 1994. Since 2000, many commentators have suggested that the old legacy of numerous sequences of recessions is gone. Figure 1, which presents data until 2006, might be interpreted in that sense, given that the average trend of Africa’s economic growth seems to have been more dynamic over the last decade, especially compared to the slow growth in the rest of the world. It could also be said that even if slower, economic growth in the rest of the world has been more continuous, while progress has been more chaotic in SSA.

It is also true that while Africa’s overall economic performance is improving, the continent has historically had the slowest growth of any region. SSA has also had to face a high level of inequalities in income distribution and structural challenges like an underdeveloped industrial capacity. For example, according to the IMF, SSA countries would be expected to suffer economic instability as their economic growth would jump from over 6% in 2008 to 4.5% in 2009, while Africa as a whole would witness a 50% growth decline.² The historically lower degree of development of the continent engenders the consequence that only high level of economic growth can really reduce poverty and increase living standards. The willingness and the commitment of SSA’s top leaders is also crucial, a factor which is often lacking as we will see later on.

In order to better consider the link between economic growth and poverty reduction, Figure 2 uses recent data from the World Bank and the IMF to present the relation between real per capita growth and a change in poverty in nineteen SSA countries. The analysis is based on household survey data released between 1984 and 2004.

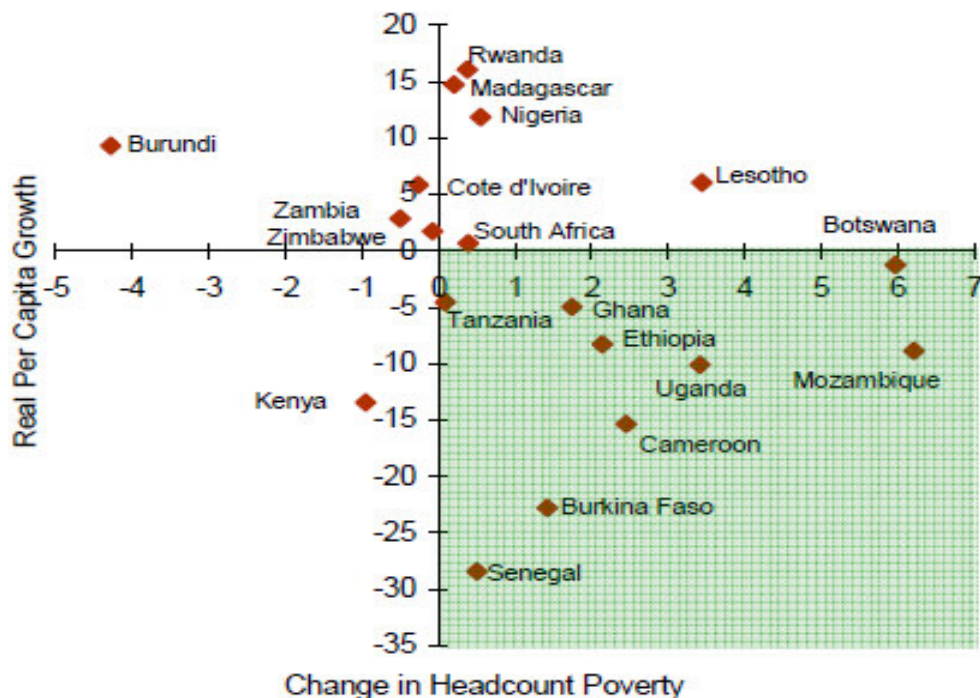


Figure 2. Relation between real per capita growth and change in poverty in 19 sub-Saharan African countries (1984-2004).

Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators 2006 and IMF, Regional Economic Outlook, Sub-Saharan Africa, April 2007. Change in poverty is the fall/rise in the percentage of population living on less than a dollar a day. Growth is the average real per capita growth between survey years.

The Figure shows that in the six countries (Ghana, Ethiopia, Uganda, Mozambique, Cameroon and Burkina-Faso) that sustained real per capita growth above 1% between surveys, the share of their population living on less than a dollar a day has been reduced. These six cases support the argument that poverty reduction is primarily linked with economic growth, a view formulated by IFIs to justify SAPs, and which is still used nowadays to justify the conditionalities of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. Through this lens, liberalization and de-regulation policies would be a priority not only for economic but also for social purposes. Even though in almost one third of the countries considered, the effect between economic growth and poverty reduction follows the conventional vision, it is worth pointing out that the relation does not seem to be so straightforward in the other twelve cases.

First, in Botswana and Lesotho, two countries with high real per capita growth, the share of their population living on less than a dollar a day has not been reduced. It so, this might be explained by the fact that these two countries present the highest income inequalities in Southern Africa. The same is true in South Africa, but also in Madagascar, Rwanda and Nigeria. In all these countries, a slow real per capita growth has not led to positive changes in headcount poverty, but on the contrary, to an

overall reinforcement of poverty. Second, the argument that these countries have not experienced an enough growth to reduce poverty is perfectly contradicted by the case of Tanzania, with a comparable level of real per capita growth, but with a much more positive record in poverty reduction. Senegal is also paradigmatic in that regard, with a slow real per capita growth of 1%, the country has nevertheless reduced headcount poverty by 35% between 1984 and 2004, that is to say, much more than countries like Botswana, Mozambique or Uganda with a high real per capita growth. It is also interesting to note that while poverty has slightly progressed in Zimbabwe, Zambia and Cote-d'Ivoire due to negative real per capita growth, these countries are paradoxically in a better situation to contain poverty than Nigeria, Madagascar and Rwanda, where headcount poverty has worsened in spite of positive real per capita growth. The case of Kenya is also enlightening given that it has been able to reduce headcount poverty even though it has witnessed a negative real per capita growth.

Thus, Figure 2 shows that contrary to preconceived ideas, there is no direct link between growth and poverty reduction. Overall, only a few countries really fit the developmental state argument. Senegal has done much better in reducing poverty than other countries with more important real per capita growth; underdevelopment has

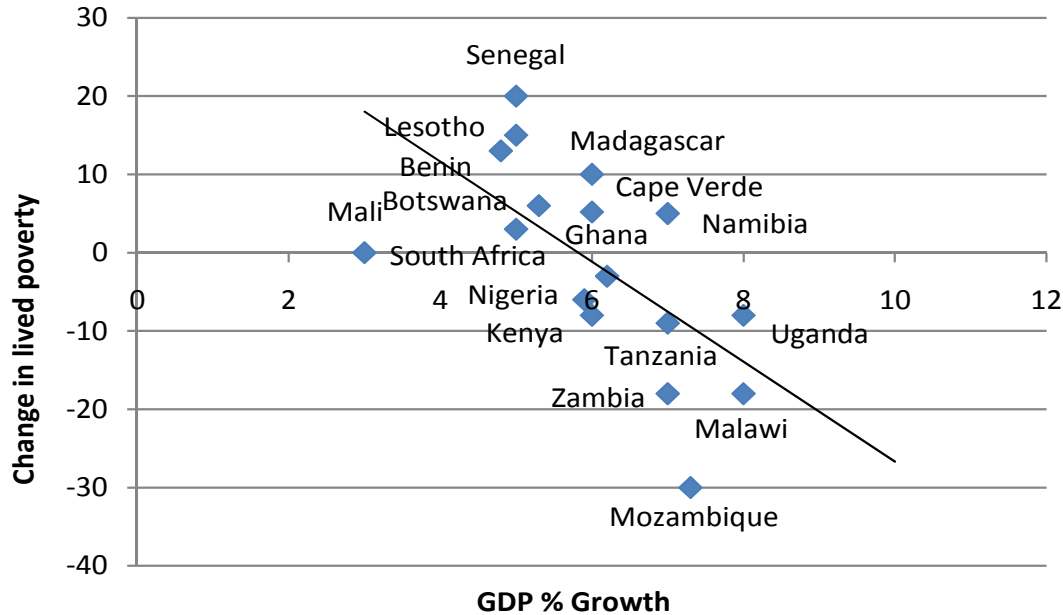


Figure 3. Relation between economic growth and lived poverty reduction by country (2005-2008) (%). Source: Author's own empirical analysis based on the Afrobarometer survey, Round 3, 2009. Notes: For the change in lived poverty, a change of +40 represent a correlation of +0.4 and at the other extreme a change of -40 represents a correlation of -0.4.

remained the same in Botswana and even in Lesotho has worsened, despite important growth; poverty has progressed in South Africa, Rwanda, Madagascar and Nigeria under conditions of positive real per capita growth. While the common orthodoxy which justified SAPs and IFIs' current pressures for fostering market reforms present growth has "the" main factor influencing the well-being of African populations, it seems that only sustained growth and a parallel political willingness to implement effective redistribution policies can effectively halve poverty. Other factors like income distribution or hierarchical socio-political structures also have to be considered.

In the same way, a recent working paper on the 2008 Afrobarometer survey results, has suggested that "the proportions of people living below the income-based poverty line decreased in nine of the eleven countries considered" (Afro Brief, 2009: 12). Nevertheless, within these nine countries, "lived poverty", that is to say self-perceived poverty, actually increased in three of them (Madagascar, Nigeria and Senegal) and showed no change in another (Mali). These results do not mean that the World Bank data are wrong, but that strong criticisms might be made of the SAPs "growth priority" or nowadays on the "poverty line" approach of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Underdevelopment is not only a matter of growth and income. It is also a self-perceived situation of poverty linked with the evolution of social infrastructures as well as the material and living conditions of a country. In this vein, William Easterly has,

for instance, claimed that the MDGs "places great value on growth that moves an individual from below to above the absolute poverty line, while it places zero value on growth that increases income of those who still remain below the poverty line. There is no rational basis in welfare economics for such extreme weighting" (Easterly, 2007: 4).

The fact that economic growth might be associated with changes in lived poverty, can not be refuted but its effect in SSA is much more modest than is conventionally recognized as argued. Figure 3 uses Afrobarometer data to consider the correlations between changes in economic growth and lived poverty reduction. Looking at the trends across 17 countries between 2005 and 2008 we see that there is indeed a positive relation between economic growth and lived poverty reduction. In other words, the probability to reduce lived poverty increases with higher economic growth. However, what also clearly emerges from the empirical analysis is that lived poverty only fell in those countries that achieved growth rates of 5.5% per year or higher over the four years considered.

In other words, contrary to IFIs' exclusive emphasis on growth, it seems rather that economic growth is a necessary but not sufficient condition to lead to poverty reduction. This analysis would seem to indicate that only countries with a high level of growth, superior to 6%, such as Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania, Malawi or Mozambique, have really been able to reduce lived poverty. In fact, in several countries such as Botswana, Cape Verde, Namibia or even more strikingly in Madagascar (+10),

Benin (+12), Lesotho (+15) and Senegal (+20), lived poverty has progressed in spite of an average economic growth of 5% (Figure 3).

The comparison between Figure 2 (objective poverty) and Figure 3 (lived or subjective poverty) gives us another interesting indication of the limits of conventional measurements. It is true that in most cases, the World Bank's measurements of objective poverty changes are quite consistent with the evolutions perceived subjectively by sub-Saharan Africans. For instance, just as the World Bank considers that headcount poverty has been reduced in Kenya, Mozambique, Ghana, Uganda and Tanzania, so too, according to the Afrobarometer data, do the local populations in these countries also perceive that the situation of underdevelopment has improved over the last few years. The inverse relation regarding an increase in objective and lived poverty is also true, for instance, in Madagascar and Lesotho. However, in three cases, the results are not consistent: while the World Bank considers that headcount poverty has not been reduced in Zambia or in Nigeria, local populations on the contrary perceive their situation as being better. This pattern is even clearer in Senegal, as this country is considered by the World Bank to have had the greatest success in reducing headcount poverty, but the Senegalese population has the highest perception of increased poverty. Nevertheless, while overall, objective and subjective measures of poverty do follow the same direction, in some cases, they present contradictory results; thus, while IFIs might conclude that poverty has been reduced in a given country, people might sometimes feel differently and vice-versa. While fighting underdevelopment might only be partially linked with economic growth, the next section looks more specifically at SSA's poor leadership and its effects on underdevelopment.

THE POOR DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP OF SSA AND ITS EFFECTS ON UNDERDEVELOPMENT

The effects of leadership strategies on SSA's persistent underdevelopment might be highlighted through their links with the democratization of the continent, and especially through what could be considered as a pattern of unfinished transitions. By unfinished transitions, we consider situations in which initial efforts of political liberalization were not fully consolidated and subsequently deepened. In the early 1990s, the "national conference phenomenon" in Benin, Zaire and elsewhere was considered a paradigmatic illustration of the growing democratic openness in SSA (Robinson, 1994: 575-610; Koko, 2008). Yet, it could be said that "the literature on political transitions has focused excessively on the contingent interactions of key political actors and underestimated the formative impact of political institutions" (Bratton and Van de Walle, 1994: 454).

Mainstream studies of political transitions have overestimated the role played by elites in the failure of an authoritarian regime, its subsequent liberalization and the negotiation of political change (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986: 17-19). In fact, nearly two decades after these episodes, even though several countries like South Africa, Ghana or Namibia have successfully witnessed the development and consolidation of democratic standards, patterns of unfinished transitions still characterize most SSA states.

Neopatrimonial interests and poor leadership have generally created situations in which state elites have few incentives to sponsor policies and reforms that would question their own positions. Political transitions have consequently occurred more commonly from below in SSA: "Of twenty-one cases of transition between November 1989 and May 1991, the initiative to undertake political reform was taken by opposition protesters in sixteen cases and by incumbent state leaders in only five cases" (Bratton and Van de Walle, 1994: 461). Huntington's conceptualization of the three possible paths towards a democratic transition, bottom-up, top-down and negotiated political change, helps solidify our argument that political transitions in SSA remain globally unfinished and that political changes are more likely to originate in social protests and armed rebellions than within the regime itself (Huntington, 1991: 54). The absence of soft-liners and political openings in regimes focused on their own survival has led many elites to resist change and has encouraged them to design mechanisms to enable the self-reproduction of their regime, while challengers have been condemned to use radical means for promoting change. In that sense, "it is striking to observe how fresh political figures have emerged in the immediate past other than through military coups" (Chabal and Daloz, 1999: 33).

These unfinished transitions have more recently engendered the rise of governments of national union, for instance, in the Central African Republic, Kenya and Zimbabwe. These institutional agreements have been increasingly used in order to reach compromises between government and opposition, generally after contested elections. While the resolution of conflicts and the definition of contingent compromises through this mechanism have obviously to be welcomed, the intense rivalries and campaigns of distrust which precede the formation of these bipolar governments show that, in many instances, state elites still resist change, elections are not always fair, and the losers not responsible enough to accept defeat. SSA's unfinished transitions might consequently be explained by poor leadership strategies which play an important role in the perpetuation of the underdevelopment of the sub-region. Poor leadership strategies, in this context, refer particularly to public decisions taken by state elites which contradict the goals of democratization and development.

To provide empirical evidence of this argument, Figure

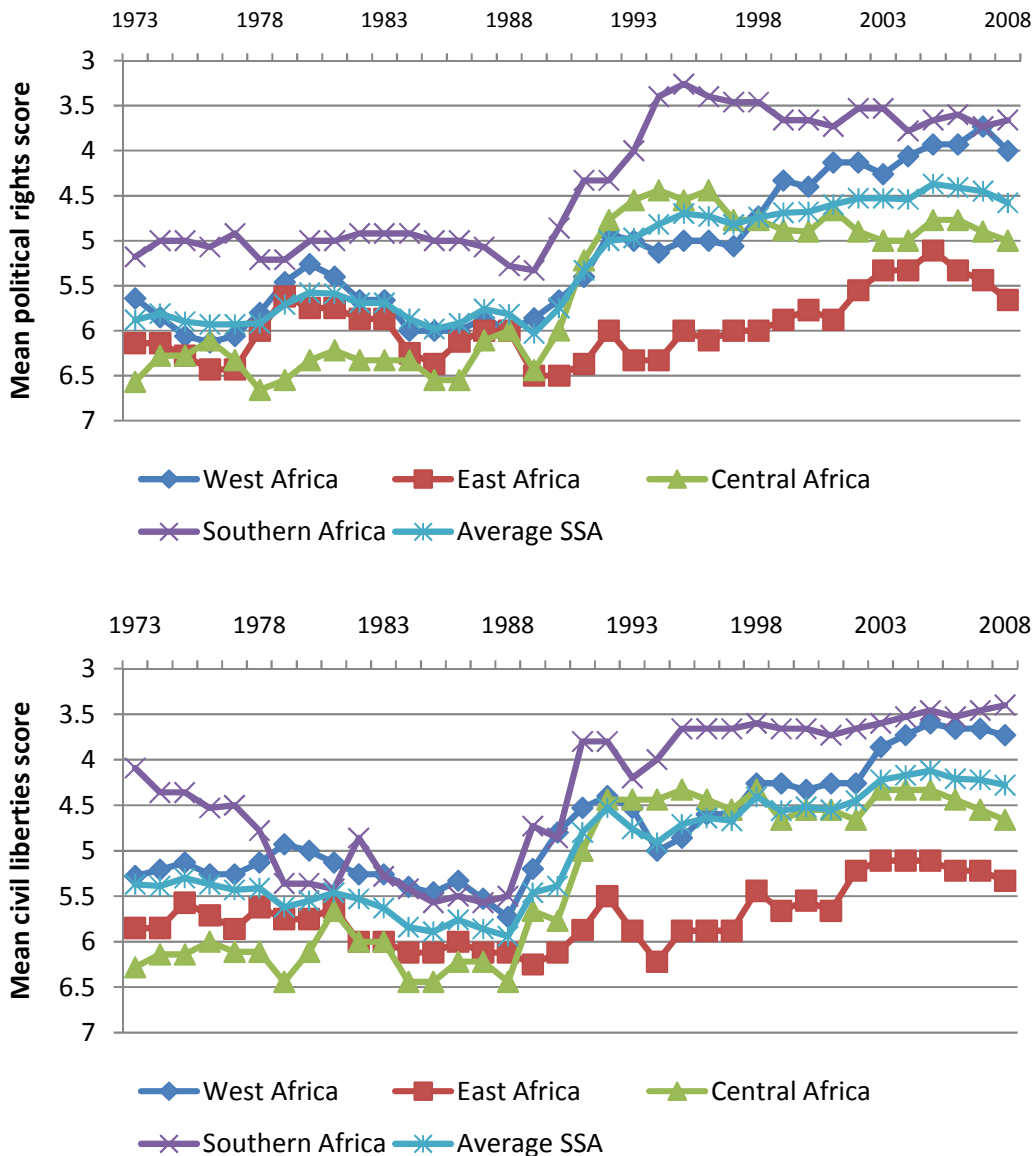


Figure 4. Trends in democracy in sub-Saharan Africa (1973-2008).

Source: Author's own empirical analysis based on The Comparative Survey of Freedom (New York: Freedom House, 1973-2008), available at [<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=1>], retrieved on 13 September 2009.

4 uses the Comparative Survey of Freedom to consider the broad trend in the democratization of SSA countries from 1973 to 2008.³ The regional trends are presented on the two traditional dimensions of political rights and civil liberties.⁴ The Freedom House reports provide us with the best coverage of any time-series data set on liberties and democracy currently available. The reports summarize the quality of different regimes on a seven-point scale, with 1 representing the “most free” and 7 the “least free”. Countries whose combined average ratings fall between 1.0 and 2.5 are characterized as “free”, those between 3.0 and 5.0 are considered as “partly free”, while those between 5.5 and 7.0 are designated “not free”.

The graph shows that SSA states experienced broad evolutions towards increased political rights and civil liberties especially between 1988 and 1993. On average, political rights stagnated between 1973 and 1988 with a corresponding decline in civil liberties. Between 1988 and 1993, in contrast, the two dimensions both progressed from 6 to 4.75, showing a rapid trend of democratization. The 1992 - 1994 periods marked the pinnacle of a dynamic of increasing democratization in which African governments gradually introduced reforms to guarantee new civil liberties and political rights. However, a regional approach highlights that SSA states have not all experienced the same political liberalization. While pro-

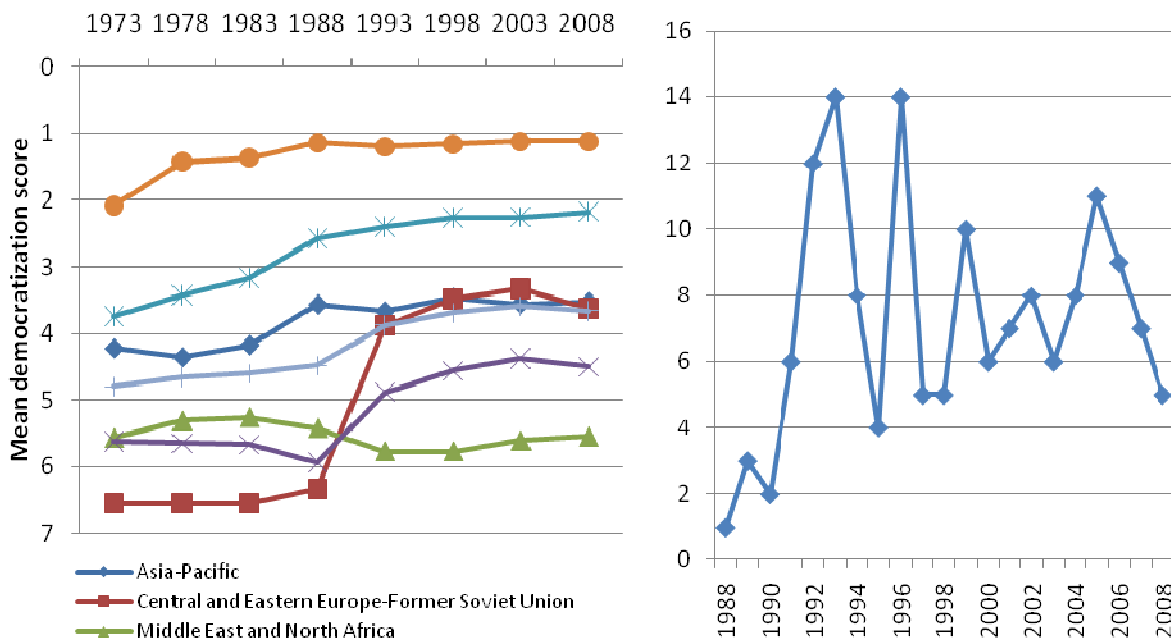


Figure 5. Trends in democracy worldwide (1973 - 2008) and number of presidential elections in sub-Saharan Africa (1988 - 2008).

Sources: Author's own empirical analysis based on the comparative survey of freedom and data collection on presidential elections based on African elections database, available at [africanelections.tripod.com/bj.html], retrieved on 25 September 2009.

cesses of democratic openness were quite important and rapid in Southern and Central Africa between 1988 and 1993, the evolutions were more gradual in West Africa and almost non-existent in the East and the Horn of Africa.

Most scholars have focused exclusively on the average democratic trends in SSA, which seems to suggest a linear progression until 2008. Yet, a more detailed regional analysis illustrates how this progression is almost exclusively due to the gradual reforms introduced in Western African states. Between 1993 and 1998, during the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, democracy globally stagnated in West Africa, progressing again after 1998. Between 1993 and 1998, democratic reforms in Benin and Guinea-Bissau in 1994 were counterbalanced by regression in civil liberties and political rights in Gambia. Interestingly however, despite having experienced rapid democratization changes until 1994, since then, Southern Africa has globally stagnated, while in Central Africa, democratic standards have even declined. Even though democracy has progressed overall in Eastern Africa, democratic standards remain very low in this part of the continent: four countries, Sudan, Somalia, Rwanda and Eritrea are still considered "not free", while only Kenya and Tanzania, characterized as "partly free", have really progressed over the broad time-period. In the end, as expected, it appears that while experiencing rapid democratic changes in the early 1990s, most SSA states have not since then continued to

expand their democratic standards. Apart from the Western African states which have seen an average increasing trend, the last fifteen years have generally been characterized by a stagnation of democratic standards in SSA.

Moreover, not only have democratic standards relatively stagnated since 1994 in SSA, but if we look at Figure 5, apart from the parallel poor record of Middle East and North African countries, the SSA mean democratization score remains on average lower than in the rest of the world. In Western Europe, democratic standards have remained high, and in the Americas they have gradually progressed, especially since the end of the last dictatorships in Latin America; nowadays, these two regions together with Central and Eastern European countries, are considered to be the most democratic worldwide. While between 1973 and 1988 the satellites of the Soviet Union were generally considered to be less democratic than SSA postcolonial states, since 1988, the former have experienced more important processes of democratization.

The left-hand side of Figure 5 also presents the empirical results of a personal data collection on the evolution of the annual number of presidential elections between 1988 and 2008, an interesting indicator of the trend of democratic openness. The Figure points out quite clearly a rapid progression of the number of elections: while only one election took place in 1988, three in 1989 and two in 1990, in 1992 there were twelve. Overall, while only

Table 1. Perceived record of politicians in sub-Saharan Africa (2005-06): “Your national politicians...”

	Rarely/never...		Often/always...	
	Keep their campaign promises after elections	Do their best to deliver development after elections	Make promises simply to get elected	Offer gifts to voters during election campaign
Benin	95	89	96	84
Botswana	81	86	80	52
Cape Verde	78	76	86	72
Ghana	82	79	90	68
Kenya	92	91	95	94
Lesotho	86	85	87	40
Madagascar	88	86	84	64
Malawi	92	91	80	69
Mali	85	80	91	83
Mozambique	58	60	73	61
Namibia	60	60	76	41
Nigeria	77	80	88	84
Senegal	83	79	93	79
South Africa	71	70	86	46
Tanzania	82	79	77	48
Uganda	83	82	95	85
Zambia	91	89	96	93
Zimbabwe	91	92	94	83
Mean	82	81	87	69

Source: Afrobarometer, Compendium of Public Opinion Findings from 18 African Countries, Round 3, “Citizens and the State in Africa”, 2005-2006, available at [<http://www.afrobarometer.org>], retrieved on 15 August 2009.

twelve presidential elections were organized between 1988 and 1991, fifty-two took place between 1992 and 1996. Since then, even though it is undeniable that elections have been held more regularly than in the 1980s, independently of electoral cycles, the graph shows there has been a steady decline: forty-one presidential elections were held between 1996 and 2002 compared to thirty-eight between 2003 and 2008. The trends described above corroborate the idea that political transitions and processes of democratic openness occurred in SSA in the early 1990s, while the late 1990s and the beginning of the new millennium have witnessed democratic stagnation and patterns of unfinished transitions.

Another means to evaluate the current democratic trends in SSA is to look at the public perceptions of leadership strategies. Crucial information on the perceived record of politicians in SSA can be found in the Afrobarometer surveys, as Table 1 suggests.⁵ On average, 82% of the sub-Saharan Africans interviewed consider that their national politicians rarely or never “keep their campaign promises after elections”, while 81% judge that they rarely or never “do their best to deliver development after elections”. The percentages are only slightly lower in Mozambique and Namibia. On average, 87% of the people interviewed state that their

politicians often or always “make promises simply to get elected”, while 69% claim that they often/always “offer gifts to voters during election campaigns”. If the four questions are cumulated, it emerges from the analysis that 79.75% of the Africans considered in the sample view their national politicians negatively. These negative views are higher in countries like Benin (91%), Zimbabwe (90%) and Zambia (92.25%) than in more progressive, less corrupted and better governed countries like Namibia (59.25%), Mozambique (63%) and South Africa (68.25%). In general, a clear distrust of local populations exists towards their national politicians, their ability to keep their promises and deliver development (Table 1).

In our attempt to assess how SSA is poorly led, not only requires us to look at African’s perceptions of their national politicians, but also more broadly, to reflect on how they perceive their national democratic standards. Figure 6 summarizes the empirical results linked with African’s general support for democracy and their current level of satisfaction with the way democracy works in their respective countries.⁶ Interestingly, the graph suggests the existence of a general gap between democratic support and democratic satisfaction. In sixteen out of eighteen countries, more than 50% of local populations declare that a democratic regime is preferable to any other form of government. Only in Tanzania (38%) and in

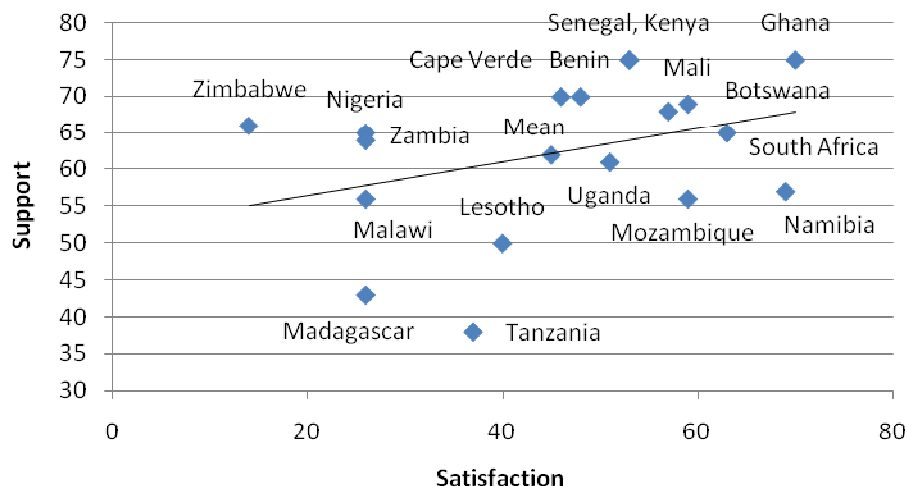


Figure 6. The democratic support/satisfaction gap in 18 sub-Saharan African countries (%). Source: Author's own empirical analysis based on Afrobarometer, Compendium of Public Opinion Findings from 18 African Countries, Round 3, "Citizens and the State in Africa", 2005-2006, available at [<http://www.afrobarometer.org>], retrieved on 15 August 2009.

Madagascar (43%), are people more sceptical or indifferent towards the interest of a democratic regime as compared with other regime types. The support for democracy is situated between 50% and 60% in Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique and Namibia and is superior to 60% in all the other countries. In contrast, the satisfaction with the way democracy currently works in the eighteen countries considered is less clear. The satisfaction with democratic institutions is superior to 60% in only three countries, arguably those which have carried out the greatest number of democratic reforms over the last decade: South Africa (63%), Namibia (69%) and Ghana (70%). While in nine countries people are relatively satisfied, in nine others, the degrees of satisfaction remain very low: in Madagascar, Nigeria and Zambia, for example, only 26% of the respective national samples are satisfied and in Zimbabwe only 14%. Overall, while 62% of the Africans interviewed consider democracy to be the most preferable political regime, only 45% of them are satisfied with the way democracy works daily in their respective countries. This empirical evidence suggests a clear gap between people's democratic desires and their perception that their top political leaders have a poor record in favoring democratic developments.

We have seen that even though economic growth might help to reduce underdevelopment, a linear relation between growth and poverty reduction does not exist. While IFIs have tended to privilege the economic side of development, it seems that other factors linked with the reduction of inequalities or the redistribution of incomes might also be considered crucial elements. The missing link in the equation might be that the effect of leadership strategies can play an even greater role in promoting or, inversely, prohibiting development. The empirical analysis has demonstrated the disparate paths of democrati-

zation in SSA and the common gap, independently of the country considered, between the local populations' support for democracy and a general dissatisfaction with the real democratic standards in their countries. Thus, it might be worthwhile investigating how changes in democratization in SSA might affect changes in poverty reduction. To do so, we have used the Afrobarometer surveys to look at the correlations between changes in degree of freedom and changes in lived poverty.⁷ In each round of surveys, lived poverty has been correlated with indicators of political freedom.⁸ It clearly appears from the empirical analysis that changes in lived poverty are positively linked with changes in degrees of freedom. It is nevertheless quite likely that at least part of this association might be due to higher levels of wealth amongst the more democratic countries of the region.

To provide a stronger piece of evidence, the level of democracy has been held constant so that Figure 7 only looks at how changes in democratization (and not the overall level of democracy) relate to evolutions in lived poverty reduction. Even though the graph only presents the results for the period 2005 - 2008 ($r = -.531$, $N = 17$), the link also exists in 2000 - 2005 ($r = -.633$, $N = 11$) or 2000 - 2008 ($r = -.531$, $N = 17$), for previous rounds of the survey. Apart from the cases of Cape Verde and Namibia, all the countries which have witnessed a higher degree of political freedom have also experienced lived poverty reduction. The relation is especially clear in Ghana, Tanzania, Zambia and Mozambique. Even though Nigeria, Kenya and Uganda have reduced lived poverty over the last few years without a more important degree of political liberalization, there is no country which has been able to reduce lived poverty when political rights and civil liberties have been restrained. In Senegal, Lesotho, Benin and Madagascar, political freedom has

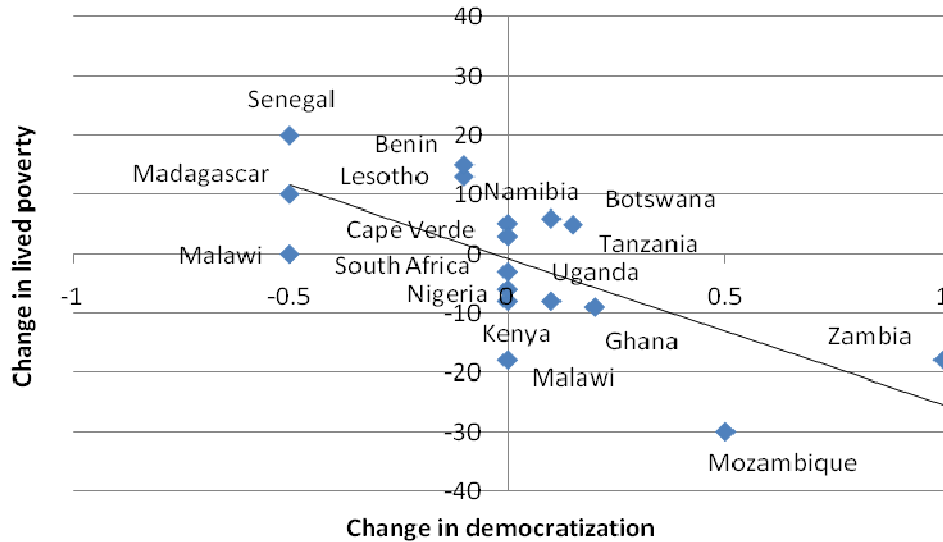


Figure 7. Correlations between changes in democratization and changes in lived poverty (%).

Source: Author's own empirical analysis based on Afrobarometer, Compendium of Public Opinion Findings from 18 African Countries, Round 3, "Citizens and the State in Africa", 2005-2006, available at [<http://www.afrobarometer.org>], retrieved on 21 August 2009.

recently always been limited in parallel with increase degrees of lived poverty. Overall, Figure 7 shows that the more a country promotes higher levels of political freedom, the more it reduces poverty.

CONCLUSION

In the end, how do leadership strategies affect underdevelopment in sub-Saharan Africa? To answer this research question, several elements might be outlined. We have seen that even though SSA has historically known the poorest economic record of any region in the world, it has also witnessed a renewed economic growth since the mid-1990s. Using the World Bank's household survey data released between 1984 and 2004, nevertheless it was demonstrated that sustained real per capita growth above 1% between surveys has effectively led to the reduction of the share of population living on less than a dollar a day, but only for one third of the countries considered. In all the other SSA countries, the relation between economic growth and poverty reduction does not seem to be as straightforward as the developmental state argument might suggest. For instance, underdevelopment has remained the same in Botswana while in Lesotho, despite important growth, it has even worsened. Similarly, poverty has increased in South Africa, Rwanda, Madagascar and Nigeria in spite of positive growth. Contrary to the IFIs emphasis on growth, it seems rather that economic growth is a necessary but not sufficient condition to lead to poverty reduction.

Moreover, while fighting underdevelopment might be only partially linked with economic growth, after investiga-

ting its relation with leadership strategies. Using standard data on the degrees of civil liberties and political rights in SSA, the analysis has shown that while experiencing rapid democratization changes between 1989 and 1994, SSA, apart from the Western African states, has on average stagnated since the mid-1990s. The same trend can be observed regarding electoral cycles: while it is undeniable that the number of presidential elections which took place in the early 1990s increased as compared with the 1980s, their average number declined between the mid-1990s and 2008. In addition to the poor perceived record of African politicians by local populations themselves and the existing gap in almost every country between democratic aspirations and democratic practices, it can be said that in spite of regional variations, a clear pattern of unfinished political transitions nowadays characterized the SSA political landscape. In the end, the analysis shows that the effect of leadership strategies plays an even greater role in fostering or inversely, limiting development. While economic growth rarely in itself leads to development, the effects of the consolidation of democratic standards is usually greater given that democracy does not only bring freedom of choice, but it also enables voice and economic freedom, two essential factors for social progress and poverty reduction.

ENDNOTES

1. I wish to especially thank the two anonymous referees, whose helpful comments have been beneficial to improve the paper. The usual disclaimer applies.

2. "The African economic growth will decline by 50% in

2009", *The Economist*, 9 February, 2009.

3. Freedom House reports scores for a country's compliance with standard lists of civil liberties (thirteen items) and political rights (nine items) as estimated by a panel of expert reviewers. It summarizes the quality of different regimes on a seven-point scale, with 1 representing the "most free" and 7 the "least free". The Freedom House data has been criticized and defended over the years (Bollen, 1993), "Liberal Democracy: Validity and Method Factors in Cross-National Measures", *American Journal of Political Science* 34: 1207-30; versus Muller EA and Seligson MN (1994), "Civic Culture and Democracy: The Question of Causal Relationships", *American Political Science Review* 88: 637. In practical terms, the survey provides the best coverage of any data set on liberties and democracy currently available. The data are derived in a reasonably systematic manner, presented in quantitative form and are complete both cross-sectionally (for 186 countries in recent years) and over time (from 1973 to the present).

4. In order to provide a more detailed analysis, the dataset for SSA has been differentiated through four sub-regions, West (15 countries), East (9), Central (9) and Southern Africa (15). West Africa includes Benin, Burkina-Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. East Africa embraces Burundi, Djibouti, Kenya, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan and Tanzania while Central Africa consists of Cameroon, Cape Verde, the Central African Republic, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Sao Tome and Principe and Uganda. Finally, Southern Africa comprises Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Gabon, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

5. The Afrobarometer public attitude survey, Round 3 has been conducted in 18 countries from 2005 - 2006. It considers the results of national sample surveys on the attitudes of citizens in selected African countries towards democracy, markets, civil society and other aspects of development. The Afrobarometer is a collaborative enterprise of Michigan State University (MSU), the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) and the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD, Ghana).

6. The support for democracy is based on the answer agrees to the following statement: "democracy is preferable to any other kind of government", while the satisfaction with democracy is based on the answers "fairly" or "very satisfied" with "the ways democracy works in your country".

7. Changes in degree of freedom are calculated using the Freedom House database (see Endnote 2) for each of the seventeen countries between 2005 and 2008. 8. In Round 1, the correlation is $r = -0.652$ ($N = 11$), for Round 2: $r = -0.614$ ($N = 16$), for Round 3: $r = -0.897$ ($N = 18$); and Round 4: $r = -0.452$ ($N = 19$). The Round 1 of the Afrobarometer survey

covered 12 countries between 1999 and 2001 (Botswana, Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe). Round 2 surveys, conducted in 2002 - 2003 also included Cape Verde, Kenya, Mozambique and Senegal. Round 3 in 2005 - 2006 covered 18 countries with the inclusion of Benin and Madagascar. Burkina Faso and Liberia were added in Round 4. Fieldwork for Round 4 Afrobarometer surveys was conducted in 19 African countries between March and December, 2008.

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