

Review

Moving beyond 'Illiberal Democracy' in Sub-Saharan Africa: Recalling the significance of local governance

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The developmental history of today's liberal democratic states demonstrates a clear parallel between liberal state practice and functioning local government institutions. This simple fact has implications for today's policymakers interested in the political liberalization of sub-Saharan Africa's newly declared "democracies." Yet, among the many debates taking place in developmental politics, local governance remains – at best – a niche area that is usually brought up within the context of decentralization policy. Largely due to the recent history of Cold War patronage that focused on central over local government relations, the newly declared democracies of sub-Saharan Africa consistently rank among the lowest in the world in the yearly indexes on freedom compiled by Freedom House. Here it is argued that, if political liberalism is to be realized within these newly declared democracies of sub-Saharan Africa, a renewed emphasis on the role of local government institutions must take place. Emphasis is placed on the recent experience of Zambia, which demonstrates the kinds of internal and external policy challenges proponents of local governance have faced.

Key words: Illiberal democracy, local government, sub-Saharan Africa, Zambia.

INTRODUCTION: FAREED ZAKARIA'S CHALLENGE TO AFRICANISTS

In a provocative article entitled "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," published at the turn of the last century, Fareed Zakaria convincingly argued that, despite holding formal elections, liberal democratic practice in most of the world's newly declared democracies remained elusive.ⁱ Zakaria warned that the holding of formal elections would now confer the formal title of "democracy" to a number of states but that many of them should not be thought of as classically liberal or *free* democracies in the sense of guaranteeing Lockean liberties and permitting the unhindered alteration of power. Citing the Freedom

House's 1996-97 survey, *Freedom in the World*, Zakaria argued:

Illiberal democracy is a growth industry. Seven years ago only 22 percent of the democratizing countries could have been so characterized; five years ago that figure had risen to 35 percent. And to date few illiberal democracies have matured into liberal democracies; if anything, they are moving toward heightened illiberalism.ⁱⁱ

Zakaria was asking us all to think critically of the sudden rise of democratic elections taking place in the post-Cold

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War context; something which could undoubtedly have profound implications for interpreting political realities in sub-Saharan Africa. Over the past two decades, however, Africanists have been slow to respond to this new political reality. It is in response to Zakaria's challenge, then, that this article is written but with a new caveat: for liberal democracy to be realized in sub-Saharan Africa, policy-makers at all levels must place a renewed emphasis on local governance.

The end of Cold War patronage has had dramatic policy implications for sub-Saharan Africa. The kinds of support that corrupt African state leaders had come to rely on was now gone, leaving them decidedly less at ease. As we enter the 21st-century, all of Africa's leaders remain well aware of a new political reality: Cold War ideology can no longer be used as a basis for US or other state support. In retrospect, many within Africa consider the era of Cold War patronage as a politically corrupting force, delaying the democratic hopes of the 1950s-60s. But that is largely an academic view; the kind of argument that might be found in an African university classroom. In practical terms, for a generation of entrenched political leaders all over the African continent, the *end* of Cold War patronage marked the end of their hold on political power and privilege. And for the people of Africa it provided yet *another* reason for democratic hope. Unfortunately, in their analysis of African politics, a good number of Africanists (academic and think tank specialists of African affairs) have continued their long-established pattern of remaining focused on politics at the central government level. Moreover, many are repeating the error that occurred during the era of Africa's "first independence": interpreting democratic elections in an overly optimistic and, in the end, quite superficial manner.

Post-Cold War Optimism: Warranted?

Africanists of all political perspectives have long maintained that the first real democratic hope for sub-Saharan Africa came with decolonization – with the "Year of Africa": 1960 – when thirteen African states gained their independence (from France: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte D'Ivoire, Gabon, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Togo, and the Republic of the Congo; from the UK: Nigeria and Somalia; from Belgium: the Democratic Republic of Congo; others were soon to follow suit. Many scholars, such as the young Immanuel Wallerstein, were thrilled to partake in these great historical events and wrote of them with great optimism.³ In the decades that followed, however, the subject of African politics was decidedly less popular among scholars. Even that previous generation that had expressed so much optimism in the 1950s and 1960s now deemed African studies as, somehow, less appealing or irrelevant. In the words of former Africanist Gavin Kitching, for example,

African studies was "too depressing," as he carefully explained the matter in a 2000 issue of the *African Studies Review and Newsletter*.⁴ And Wallerstein, who has similarly moved on to other areas of academic inquiry, now considers his optimistic language of the time to be unwarranted.⁵

The same can be said of the optimistic observations made by many observers of African politics in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War – what Colin Legum referred to as Africa's "Second Independence."⁶ Writing for the *Journal of Democracy*, for example, Richard Joseph declared in 1991: "It is conceivable that by 1992 the continent will be overwhelmingly democratic in composition."⁷ Carol Lancaster was similarly upbeat in an article written for *Foreign Policy*, noting that "three-fourths of the 47 countries south of the Sahara are in various stages of political liberalization."⁸ The primary reason for these Africanists' optimism was that democratic elections were suddenly taking place across the African continent after decades of single-party and/or autocratic rule. Yet, just a few years later, doubts were being expressed about the "wave of democratization" that was taking place, not only in Africa, but across the globe. It was in 1997 that Zakaria famously remarked: "We see the rise of a disturbing phenomenon – illiberal democracy." He explains: "It has been difficult to recognize the problem because for almost a century in the West, democracy has meant *liberal* democracy – a political system marked not only by free and fair elections, but also by rule of law, a separation of powers, and the protection of basic liberties of speech, assembly, religion, and property."⁹ Zakaria's crucial insight, that has clear implications for today's new democratic states, is that *liberalism* is "theoretically different and historically distinct from *democracy*."¹⁰

It could be argued that today the vague term of democratization, arguably still in vogue in some circles, is gradually being replaced by the notion of democracy *alongside* political liberalization – something that, for many, is more meaningful and more easily subjected to scrutiny and measurement. This is because, as Zakaria points out, the *sine qua non* of democracy is, indeed, elections; and now that most of sub-Saharan African states are holding elections, they can be called formal "democracies." But there can be little doubt that observers of African politics have always had more in mind when speaking of democratization, than the formal process of democratic elections. What many of the aforementioned observers of African politics were thinking of was, not only "democracy," but also the prospects for political liberalization. This post-Cold War concern is not only more "refined" from what was typically argued during the Cold War, it has also made countless observers more sensitive to the need for local institutional support for liberal and other policy aims, such as improved health care and education. In short, the post-Cold War era has already taught us that using the term "democracy" is just not enough.

A problem of African Leadership

In the post-independence era it was quickly apparent that neo-colonial norms, that prioritized the whims of those in central government, continued to dominate the political cultures of Africa. That is, colonial administrators cared more about themselves than in any form of democratic leadership and, post-independence, most of Africa's leaders simply followed suit. Rather than assign part of the responsibility for this nondemocratic form of governing to external patronage, that helped to create the conditions for political monsters like Desiré Mobutu, Africanists were freely writing about a "unique" form of African political leadership that was patrimonial, patriarchal, etc. in form. Harvard's Martin Kilson and Robert I. Rotberg are prime examples of Africanist scholars who based their entire careers on critiquing African leadership. As early as 1963, Kilson was pessimistically describing the "patrimonial," "neo-patrimonial," "patriarchal," "authoritarian and single-party tendencies in African politics" and Rotberg (now pessimistically questioning China's "real motives" in Africa) has been a consistent contributor to the "irresponsible" and "corrupt" African leader angle.¹¹ In a 2004 contribution to *Foreign Affairs* he writes, for example, "Africa has long been saddled with poor, even malevolent, leadership: predatory kleptocrats, military-installed autocrats, economic illiterates, and puffed-up posturers."¹² Most of today's post-Cold War Africa scholars have followed this career-safe pessimistic way of interpreting African realities, whereby the problems within Africa are portrayed as being entirely due to the *internal* shortcomings of Africa and/or Africans.

To continue along the path of one-sided pessimism, I submit, is not only inaccurate, it is irresponsible scholarship: good for careers in political science but hardly an accurate description of Africa's political realities, past and present. Further, post-colonial scholarship – similarly pessimistic in tone – is certainly closer to the mark, in that it emphasizes external influences on virtually aspect of African life, but it can overemphasize the external and neglect internal solutions to African woes.¹³ To be clear: the phenomena which Kilson, Rotberg and other African area experts describe do and have existed in Africa but they cannot be attributed to *only* local politics and politicians. As Peter Schraeder has emphasized, responsibility for the lack of checks and balances in modern African contexts cannot be the portrayed as a uniquely African creation: African political failures are and have been greatly impacted by *external* forces.¹⁴ Moreover, Africanists' tendencies to make generalizations about African political realities based only on corrupt leaders or, at best, central government observations, have only further aggravated the distortions that lead to misunderstanding. As part of an effort to correct these distortions, the next generation of Africanists needs to have a more balanced perspective on the significance of both internal and external capabilities and

influences, and to re-focus its energies on matters of local government.

The careful attention to local governance that colonial observers of African politics, such as Lord Hailey, was problematic – in the sense that it prioritized the interests and racial attitudes of the British Colonial Office – but still, in retrospect, of crucial significance to achieving liberal democratic governance in African contexts.¹⁵ While external pressures and agendas will likely continue to impact African political realities, we must all recall the significance of local participation and input, as they are the best ways to take steps toward a locally-defined understanding of political liberalism.¹⁶ Lost in the overly optimistic (1960s and 1990s) and pessimistic literature of all kinds (ongoing, post-colonial left and corrupt-leadership-focused right) has been the crucial importance of local governance.

Since Africa's initial wave of independence, the process of strengthening local government institutions in sub-Saharan African contexts has been viewed, largely within the context of internal "decentralization policies," as a drain on central government resources and power; it need not be. Proponents of such zero-sum views assume that the functioning of local governments takes place at the expense of central government authority and control. That Africa's central government leaders have tended to hold onto central government political power is nothing new; what is dramatically different in the post-Cold War context is that external Cold War patronage, that tended to support central over local government leadership, is now over. This new environment has already led to highly publicized political reforms, in the wake of the 1990s "wave of democracy."¹ Yet, as indicated above, most observers of African politics have remained focused on central government events. As occurred in the history of today's liberal democratic states, improvements to what Zakaria terms political liberalization – or what has been loosely called "democratization" – will require a renewed emphasis on, and vigorous attention to, local governance issues; in the African context, however, this will also require careful attention to both the internal and external levels of policy-making.

Local governance: Making historical comparisons

Although today's politically liberal states do have differences among them as to how central and local governments function, the assumption among them is that, there are at least some *positive-sum gains* to be had among local and central governments. Considerations of these local-central government relationships, not only at present but in history, do matter to the realization of political liberalism in all contexts. And one should not shy away from making historical comparisons of yesterday's

¹ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late 20th-Century*, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

liberalization experience to the circumstances of today's liberalizing states.

Of course, the promise of all democratic states is that they are an important step toward the expression of the "will of the people" in politics. For a variety of reasons that will have been denied, time and again, in African contexts due to powers that extend well beyond African borders. And it is important to remember that local norms and cultures, in African and other "developing state" contexts, can be compatible with democratic forms of governance. Time and again, the basic notion that democratic norms were found in African and "other," i.e. non-western, contexts is brought up by anthropologists and political observers alike but, just as regularly they are systematically ignored. After a lifelong consideration of what "democracy" might mean in African contexts, anthropologist Maxwell Owusu concludes: "We now know... that free and fair elections must be linked with reasonable economic security for every citizen."¹⁷ The essential point that Owusu makes is that democratic ideas are and have always been present in African contexts; the impediments to their realization lie elsewhere: local security concerns, etc.¹⁸ Similar arguments are found in Asian contexts. Kim Dae Jung has commented, for example, that "long before Locke" democratic liberal ideals existed in Asia and many other parts of the world – not only the West; the problem has been that these ideals have been held back by authoritarian forms of governance and rule.¹⁹

If one is to consider the words of Africa's colonial administrators, or even much of the political science literature on Africa, there is indeed a focus on *order* – even if under authoritarian rule – before *democracy*. This priority of order in sub-Saharan Africa has been the "justified" policy priority of the powerful in Africa's recent history and has clearly been viewed in a much different light among the ruled, as brilliantly discussed by Mahmood Mamdani. In his view, democratization "became a top-down agenda enforced on the peasantry."²⁰ "Without a reform of the local state," he argues, "democratization will remain not only superficial but explosive."²¹

A comparative consideration of the historical expectations of the public in *all* pre-liberal contexts, as to what local governments could reasonably achieve, can be revealing. What, for example, was the expected role of local government authorities in pre-liberal France, Germany, Italy or the United States? Certainly in those historical contexts there was much, often well-founded, suspicion of local wardens of the state. Collection of tax and the inconsistent use of coercive force gave ample reason for public angst over local state authorities in all of these pre-liberal contexts. But in terms of the provision of a public service, the primary expectation of the public was that the state would help to deter violence; what at least some early Western theorists equated with improved social *order*. Perhaps the best known "classic" example is that of 17th-century political theorist Thomas

Hobbes who argued that, without a state, society would be unruly, as "the state of nature is the state of war."²²

Worth repeating is that the need for "order" in African and other developing country contexts, before political liberalization can take place, was similarly emphasized by political theorists of the post-independence era of the 1950s and 60s. In the 1968 book, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, Samuel Huntington famously argued that "political decay" was to be temporarily expected in developing state contexts as they liberalize, i.e. disorder, Huntington argued, was part of the process of change. In retrospect, of course, such arguments can be seen as providing excuses for delaying progress towards political liberalization; the human reality since that initial period of optimism for African political change has been decreasing standards of living throughout the sub-Saharan African region. And, in retrospect, while the impediments were many, the years that followed the hopeful wave of African independence movements provided scant evidence of political liberalization on the African continent. A process that began with great optimism for the peoples of Africa led many, within just a few years, to great disappointment.

In the aftermath then, of Africa's First Independence (the end of the colonial era) and, now, Africa's Second Independence (the end of the Cold War), political liberalization has remained elusive. Many political scientists, of the left and right, who had been so optimistic at the outset, now deem African development as a kind of lost cause; so discouraged by events of recent decades, some Africanists have simply chosen to walk away from the study of Africa.²³ Among those who have remained, there seems to be a focus on either the development of an African "civil society" (bottom-up) or a change in African "leadership" (top-down). Yet neither of these groups, roughly representing the Western political left and right, respectively, dares to make direct historical comparisons based on the practical underpinnings of liberal practice. Instead, ideological assumptions that they might have about political development anywhere are simply transferred to their observations about politics in Africa. The one group of theorists that does emphasize historical circumstances, the Historical Structuralists (Marxis-Leninists), have generally deemed Africa's developmental circumstances as a kind of lost cause due to the nature of the global capitalist system. In fact, the very idea that comparisons of political development North-to-South, or developed state versus LDC, can and should be made has been largely discredited due to the earlier works of Modernization theorists, such as Daniel Lerner or Walter Rostow.²⁴ Debates on the matter of political development are, in a sense, blocked. On the one hand, many Africanists simply dismiss direct comparisons of political behavior and experience as "modernization theory" and/or dismiss the prospects for African development because of the global capitalist system; on the other hand, African citizens themselves are losing any faith in "democracy" that they might have

had just a few years ago, often conflating the meanings of democracy, democratization and liberalism.

Today, we must address the shortcomings of formal “democracy” and turn our attention to the role of governing institutions at supporting liberalism. This will require true historical comparisons that have thus far eluded the field of African area studies and mainstream comparative politics. But there are a few examples of this kind of effort. For instance, it is undoubtedly with African political development in mind that Africanist Robert Bates discusses the structure and purpose of Europe’s pre-liberal governing institutions in his 2001 book, *Prosperity and Violence*. For him, as with Hobbes, the original purpose of governing institutions was to control violence and, in history, this was most visible at the local level. “Political development,” Bates argues, “occurs when people domesticate violence... Coercion becomes productive when it is employed not to seize or to destroy wealth, but rather to safeguard and promote its creation.”²⁵ For Bates, Europe’s pre-liberal governing institutions, by helping to deter violence, in turn, aided European development. Again, with African development clearly on his mind, he argues rather provocatively, “Societies that are now urban, industrial and wealthy were themselves once rural, agrarian and poor.”²⁶ To his credit, Bates does emphasize the centrality of local government to political development in history. But like others, Bates ignores the link between local government development and the new, and historically significant, external influences on development. That is, local governance in sub-Saharan Africa has been dramatically impacted by the dictates of outside (colonial, Cold War, etc.) actors; the same could not be said of the medieval European village. Historical structuralists are right to emphasize the role of history but, like all schools of thought, the emphasis tends to be on “state” – writ large – development.

Like the neo-institutionalists, Bates importantly brings the focus back to the local level (with the understanding of its centrality to the African context) but his focus is on *economic* over political development.²⁷ Looking at data from medieval and early modern Europe Bates argues that, over time, while violence was certainly not eradicated, functioning government structures were developed and “prosperity” resulted. That is, along with a growing sense of security and order among the masses, average incomes rose. As stated, similar arguments were made in the 1960s, notably by Huntington,²⁸ i.e. that order is a necessary precursor to democratic development. But Bates’ work focuses less on the provision of government services and more on the requirements of members of society. The eminent Swedish economist, Gunnar Myrdal, similarly argued: “Even an authoritarian regime cannot record major achievements unless it can somehow mobilize acceptance, participation, and cooperation among the people.”²⁹ Democratic states did ultimately flourish in the European context but it may well

have been the citizen demand for liberalism that made this possible, i.e. the internal policy environment. Again, importantly, in contrast with today’s internal policy environments in sub-Saharan Africa, medieval local government development faced fewer challenges from external actors.

In spite of Zakaria’s 1997 warning of the rise of “illiberal democratic” conditions, the distinction between democracy and liberalism remains elusive among many in external policy environments. For example, in a 2004 article entitled “Why Democracies Excel” Siegle et al. provide a variety of statistics to make the point that democratic states outperform autocratic states in virtually every category of developmental change: economic growth, quality of life indices, and avoidance of humanitarian crises. In other words, they conflate the two: liberalism and democracy. However, their argument still represents an important step away from Huntington’s 1968 argument that “political decay” is only part of the process of change and that authoritarian regimes may be a kind of necessary evil as they promote “order” amidst chaos. That is, the policy of “order over democracy” may not be as valid as previously thought; democratic states do consistently outperform “orderly” autocratic or military forms of governance. Siegle et al. conclude that we must reject all “development first, democracy later” approaches, particularly when it comes to foreign aid.³⁰ In this, they are probably right yet nowhere do they mention local governance, nor do they ever distinguish between democracy and liberalism – as Zakaria warns, the two are simply conflated. Moreover, one can only assume that their revised plan still involves central over local government leadership.

Thus far the internal demand-side of the debates on democratization has generally been portrayed in terms of “civil society.” The prevailing logic of civil society proponents is that improved livelihoods, at the individual and local level, will lead to a variety of developmental improvements including political protest that will eventually take place within the political system. In African contexts they have generally argued in terms of developing the demands of individuals and local representatives so that they may act, collectively, as a safeguard over otherwise authoritarian forms of government. This makes good theoretical sense but the efforts to improve livelihoods at the local level generally have little to do with Lockean ideals.³¹ Instead, discussions of civil society are overwhelmingly oriented toward the policy debates within “developmental circles” that relate, specifically, to the provision of public services, such as water and electricity. While the provision of these public services is undoubtedly a meritorious venture, it is unclear that today’s successful democracies developed in such a fashion. Policy debates on democratization framed, either as an ideological quest or as a desperate call for water or electricity, are importantly neglecting the historical underpinnings of liberalism.

The hard fact is that democratic elections are limited in their impact. Further, in today's African context, a fundamental truth is that "democracy," as with previous forms of government, has been handed down from above without any political struggle by a large section of the people. While the media might portray urban protests as a positive sign of political struggle, it is clear that the majority of sub-Saharan African citizens reside in the countryside where the kind of coordination required for effective political protest is generally lacking. This, in fact, may be very analogous to what happened in early democracies, where urban protest (later documented by historians) was where the debates of political theory took place, while the masses in the rural countryside were largely removed from the process. "Democracy," in other words, can be thought of as an arrangement of the elites to keep the masses contented; all the while, liberalism is what the masses cared most about. "Democracy," thought another way, was how then reigning elites maintained order, while simultaneously disposing of monarchy – obviously a direct interest of elites who were to take-over political power. Faced with an opportunity for establishing liberal state practice, elites were keen to do so, as it protected their own property (thereby avoiding disorder), but it also appealed to the masses in ways that Bates refers to (avoidance of violence) and, gradually, a sense of new possibilities for the future. In early democratic states then, as in new democratic states today, the vast majority of rural and urban residents continues to focus on day-to-day struggle and, if anything, generally has remained politically apathetic and disunited. This reality is not unique to Africa. Democracy is an important step toward political legitimacy but it is not what heightens the interests of the elites or the masses in their respective futures; liberalism does.

The very fact that individual citizens have no real avenue to pursue effective protest is undoubtedly disappointing to many but the disappointment, it must be acknowledged, stems from broader theoretical pre-conceptions of the historical development of *democracy*. Both Western and Marxist models of political development see promise in protest, in the "rising up" of peoples, in an effort to hold their political and/or industrial leaders more accountable. But democracy, it must be acknowledged, is not a panacea as can be seen in the case of the Ancient Greeks, where the masses were generally kept outside of any democratic experiment.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that this model was carried-over into the democratic developments that took place in Europe and America. In fact, scholars such as Charles A. Beard and Richard Hofstadter provocatively argue that the framers of the US Constitution at the Philadelphia Convention of 1787 were highly critical, even fearful, of democracy. According to Beard, the notes of James Madison, which have proven crucial to scholars' understanding of what was discussed at the convention, show conclusively that the members of that assembly

were not seeking to rationalize any fine notions about democracy and equality, but were striving with all the resources of political wisdom at their command to set up a system of government that would be stable and efficient, safeguarded on the one hand against the possibilities of despotism and on the other against the onslaught of majorities.³²

Governor Morris, who was present at the Convention, confirms Beard's conclusion: "An aristocratic body [which he defined as 'men of great established property – aristocracy] will keep down the turbulence of democracy."³³ According to Madison's notes Elbridge Gerry and others warned of the evils that could be experienced "from the excess of democracy."³⁴ Writing on the prevailing logic of America's Founding Fathers, Richard Hofstadter similarly explains

To protect property is only to protect men in the exercise of their natural faculties. Among the many liberties, therefore, freedom to hold and dispose of property is paramount. Democracy, unchecked rule of the masses, is sure to bring about arbitrary redistribution of property, destroying the very essence of liberty.³⁵

Beard was attempting to demonstrate the *economic* logic behind the US Constitution and his work, therefore, was deemed by many within Western states (and particularly within the US) to be Marxist. To many, Hofstadter similarly appears to be overly critical of the US democratic experiment. During much of the 20th-century, because they both downplayed idealistic understandings of the development of "democracy," both of these scholars appeared unpatriotic to many. In particular, linking economic considerations with politics was thought of as leftist at best, Marxist at worst. The works of Howard Zinn on US history have been deemed unpatriotic or Marxist because of his emphasis on the political concerns of the "masses."³⁶ With the ideological fervor that characterized much of the Cold War now over, a reconsideration of these views may be in order. Admittedly some have simply opted to label the works of Hofstadter, Zinn, and others as unpatriotic, Marxist, communist and the like but, today, it is hardly controversial to say that economic considerations are an important part of politics and policy analysis.

Conservatives in the US context regularly intertwine the economic with the political, as Marx might have done, yet no one would dare label their ideas as "Marxist!" For example, CNN quotes Condoleeza Rice as saying: "Economics and security are inextricably linked" and countless others – notably Henry Kissinger – have made similar comments throughout their careers.³⁷ Indeed, with the passing of this ideological block may well come a clearer understanding of the underpinnings of Western political liberalism – that are in fact linked to matters of *security* (as argued by Bates) and *economics* (as argued

by Owusu) – which may help provide important clues for the development of today's new African democracies.

Upon reflection it is clear that the average democratic citizen in history has been less interested in theoretical democracy than in the day-to-day struggle for survival. This does not detract from the overwhelming virtue of democracy over other forms of government; the point is to emphasize the practical concerns of citizens at the local level. At this level of analysis, the individual's struggle for political liberalism, viewed in terms of citizen demand, can be revealing. To the average citizen of pre-democratic and democratic states alike, the state did help to deter random acts of violence, but it also helped legitimize claims to private property ownership, a cornerstone of Western understandings of political liberalism. Because of their geographic proximity, at a time when traveling great distances was especially uncommon, local governments also fostered ties with the central government, e.g. through collection of state tax or tribute and, ultimately, in matters of security. As Bates has argued, contact with the state was considered worthy insofar as the state authorities provided a sense of protection from violence. Another crucial "spill-over" effect, of course, was to affirm, through civil records of births, marriages, and deaths, a sense of national identity.

Importantly, these local government tasks were largely administrative and not, one might suspect, especially cumbersome but they had revolutionary results, in terms of their "liberal" outcome. In the pre-democratic late 17th-century British philosopher John Locke described the inextricable link between these very basic local government functions and – what later became – the Western interpretation of "political liberalism." A reconsideration of Locke's work reminds us that, while the role of democratic state leadership is undoubtedly a crucial consideration in democratic states, it is not only central government leaders that underlie liberal state practice. Citizens of liberal democratic states have historically been more closely linked with local government procedure, largely out of self-interest, and motivated by the security and protection of what Locke referred to as "the fruits of our labor." Specifically, Locke argued that the input of labor into what nature has provided to all is what legitimately creates property.³⁸

Accordingly, within today's liberal democracies there exists a practical connection between government institutions and the citizenry; what Louis Hartz once termed a "Submerged Lockean Consensus."³⁹ By this, Hartz meant that there was popular consensus within liberal states as to what political liberalism entails and what the role of government institutions should be; an interpretation that was first argued by the then radical Locke *contra* the political philosophy on governance then promoted by apologists of illiberal state practice, such as Sir Robert Filmer. Locke's argument that government institutions should protect our "lives, liberties, and estates," later interpreted as the protection of "life, liberty,

and the pursuit of happiness" by Thomas Jefferson in the US Declaration of Independence, is fundamental to liberal practice. The US Declaration of Independence has often been interpreted as an important stepping-stone toward "democracy;" it might better be thought of as a crucial step towards today's predominant view as to what political liberalism entails.

The bounds of political liberalism remain a fundamental matter of policy and debate among liberal states but the fact remains that there is nearly universal agreement of this fundamental role of governing institutions in liberal democratic states. Few would counter, for example, the protection of our private property – again, viewed historically as the things that we work for, what Locke termed "the fruits of our labor" – as a fundamental right within liberal states. This interpretation of what political freedom entails remains an underlying principle in liberal practice and it can be argued that much of the Western "miracle" has relied on this as the basis of liberalism. Indeed, it can be argued that the realization of prosperity (Bates' term) or liberalism (the policy concern of Zakaria and other proponents of freedom in today's new democracies) is a kind of "chicken and egg" phenomenon where development via private enterprise, i.e. economic liberalism, can only occur once property (as Locke terms it "the things we work for") is secure, i.e. once political liberalism is realized. Approaches to liberalism, however, remain mired in such vague notions as "End of History" rather than what it will require: a more practical connection between governing institutions and the citizenry that emphasizes specific Lockean or other, locally defined, aims.⁴⁰ The only arrangement that can be considered appropriate and just – part of any democratic hope – must include the collective expression of hopes, dreams and desires of the local citizenry.⁴¹ As we enter into the twenty-first century, many external actors remain tied to vague, often ideological, aims that are only shared with central government leaders. And, within the new democracies of sub-Saharan Africa, Lockean and/or local notions of political freedom remain largely misunderstood and/or scarcely expressed, due to the ongoing dysfunction of local governments – again, a problem that is largely a result of the priorities of external powers.

For political liberalism to be realized in sub-Saharan Africa's new democracies, local government institutions must assume, at a minimum, the administrative roles that they have had within today's liberal democratic states, e.g. maintaining civil records (births, marriages, deaths), titles to property, and a locally accountable security force; thus far, they have not. Instead, when local governance is mentioned in sub-Saharan African contexts, and for understandable reasons, the focus is on the soaring demand for other more visible public services. As witnessed during the campaign prior to 2006 local government elections in South Africa, candidates were quick to make *unrealistic promises* regarding the provision of improved public health care, education, and

the like, while burgeoning issues that underlie improved local government administration were entirely neglected. In the party manifesto of the African National Congress (ANC) it was declared, for example, that their action plan would make local government “speed up the delivery of services.” Other parties, including the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP) similarly focused on improving “service delivery.” While political organizers know all too well that this would appeal to the voting public, there is little visible support for the view that this will actually happen. Citizens of other early democracies never had these kinds of public service expectations and one can reasonably assume that the citizens of sub-Saharan Africa will only develop cynical attitudes toward “democracy” in this kind of atmosphere.

To date, administrative challenges such as keeping track of titles to property, which generally falls under the heading of “land tenure” in the development literature, have been consistently marginalized in discussions of sub-Saharan state policy. To the extent that land tenure is maintained by government records, there is a tendency to rely on the records of central government authorities that often date back to the colonial era. These notoriously incomplete records require careful consideration if political liberalism of any kind is to be realized in sub-Saharan Africa. And, certainly, in the short term there is no guarantee that the process of improved administrative austerity at the local government level will be without controversy. As countless observers have noted in the wake of the harsh property redistribution policies of the Mugabe regime in Zimbabwe, land records are indicative of a history of colonial rule and influence (what the Mugabe regime described as “white” over “black” property ownership). Certainly, there is no intention here to condone Mugabe’s approach to the problem; it is an exceptional case on the African continent. But the historical result of having state power linked to property ownership has been to alienate many locals from the administrative processes that underlie land tenure. Historically, such procedures have been viewed as being linked to agents of the central government which, since well before the independence era, has generally been something that local citizens would rather avoid. Improved records of titles to property, and other forms of civil administration, would improve the relationship of citizens with their local governments, as has been the case in all liberal contexts.

Today, contrary to the very basic expectations of local governments in early and pre-democratic states, what is most often heard from the citizenry in sub-Saharan Africa is that the state ought to provide better services. It should come as no surprise, then, that the internal politics on local governance is characterized by general avoidance of the issue; because central government authorities view the needs of local government as an inept bottomless pit, local governance is rarely listed on the national policy agenda. Indeed, one is not surprised

to see external actors, such as internationally recognized non-governmental organizations (INGOs), in rural areas of sub-Saharan Africa aiding local communities in a variety of ways. Whether these external actors are motivated by humanitarian concerns, the provision of “basic needs,” or an expectation as to what a modern welfare state might provide, there is virtually no support for what might be termed Lockean ideals at the local government level. Land-tenure remains largely a concern of under-funded anthropologists, while internal and external policymakers frantically address more “pressing” policy matters. As the successes of the Grameen Bank have demonstrated throughout the world, central governments are not especially adept at responding to household-level needs. In the interest of contemplating the prospects for strengthening local government institutions along locally-defined lines, i.e. in an effort to promote political liberalism, the following addresses the recent history of *internal* policies and debates regarding strengthening the local governments of one sub-Saharan African state – Zambia. This is followed by a consideration of changes of *external* policies, and how they might hinder or improve the prospects for strengthening local governments and finally, some of the lessons learned from the decentralization efforts in the Zambian case, are considered.

The case of Zambia

With the collapse of the Soviet Union it was clear to all that the patterns of Cold War patronage with African states were about to change forever. During that period, Kenneth Kaunda, Zambia’s leader after independence, had argued that Zambian citizens should adopt a policy of humanism (what was also called Kaundism). His argument for humanism, which he first expounded in his 1962 book, *Zambia Shall Be Free*, was that with independence there would be a great many changes, perhaps even turmoil and chaos. Because the traditional village ways of life and culture would now be under constant threats of change, citizens should make every attempt to be kind toward one another during this tumultuous time. Certainly, the logic had appeal for many and it must be admitted that Zambia was relatively peaceful in the post-independence years, when compared to her neighbors (Angola, former Zaire, and Mozambique).⁴² Like other sub-Saharan African central government powers, the Kaunda regime relied largely on the export of natural resources. The nationalized Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines (ZCCM) was especially crucial to central government authorities as, for decades copper exports alone accounted for over 80% of Zambia’s foreign exchange earnings. As was the case during the colonial era, “the state” was therefore viewed as a stable resource for the few who were lucky enough to maintain ties; within this political power vacuum, local

government was little more than an inconvenience.

Coupled with central government ties with Cold War patrons, it should come as no surprise that throughout the Cold War period many looked to the central government as Zambia's primary resource. But Kaunda's central government "stability" was threatened by dramatic drops in the world price of copper during the 1970s. With the rising price of oil, the Kaunda government had little option but to borrow funds, notably from the IMF. In a pattern that was replicated throughout the developing world, Zambians found themselves with crippling and historic levels of debt. In 1987, Kaunda announced that he would not allow debt financing to exceed 10% of export earnings and attempted to "delink" from the IMF and World Bank. But by then it was already clear that Kaunda's leadership would be challenged. In an atmosphere of growing critique against African forms of socialism, and growing support for "democratization," a young union lawyer named Frederick Chiluba (who had previously been socialist), soon entered into a presidential race against Kaunda and his United National Independence Party (UNIP). As candidate for the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD), Chiluba represented a growing group of African politicians who were now openly supportive of democracy and capitalism. In spite of protests by supporters of UNIP, Chiluba's MMD won the election decisively, with 75.8% of the vote.

In 1991, as had been the case post-independence, the prospects for democratization seemed great. This time there would be no Cold War rivalry. Now, it was clear to all that the future developmental path of African states would not and could not be that of the Soviets. The newly elected Frederick Chiluba remarked, for example:

The significance of the collapse of communist states should not be underestimated. These events were critical, first because the Eastern European regimes and their constitutions had provided the model upon which the entire structure of government in Zambia's Second Republic came to be based... Second, the Soviet Union had provided aid to the one-party state in Zambia. A Soviet military attaché was accredited to the embassy in Lusaka [and] East German military instructors could be found in Zambia as recently as 1988.⁴³

Following in a pattern that had begun during the colonial era, the Chiluba government maintained central government authority and control. But outside observers, notably donor states and INGOs began to lobby for policies that would promote "democratization." Importantly, the Lockean ideals of establishing local governments with the primary aims of protecting our "lives, liberties, and estates" were not the focus; rather, decentralization was viewed as an important step toward democratization. During the Chiluba era the term

"democracy" was simply used as a kind of trump card for legitimacy and local governing issues continued to be framed in terms of public services. Many involved in public health and education, in particular, argued that these basic services could be more efficiently provided at the local level through a gradual process of decentralization.

In short order, the new regime's Public Service Reform Programme (PSRP) promised the "decentralization and strengthening of local government," with task-based timetables, that were all presented to donor states in a comprehensive text, circulated in 1993. Passage of the PSRP was considered by many to be a remarkable event in Zambia's political history as it was a policy direction that had been long fought for by proponents of decentralization.⁴⁴ In the many discussions that led up to the 1993 PSRP, the 1980 Local Administration Acts that had aimed (on paper) at devolution of power from central government to Councils were openly criticized, and considered a failure, if not an outright sham. This new policy, coupled with the historic break with the past – one that had been dominated by former President Kenneth Kaunda – offered Zambians reasons for democratic hope in the first few years of the Chiluba presidency. As supporters of Chiluba reminded eligible voters in 1991, "the hour had come," and with the 1993 passage of the PSRP, change was in the air.⁴⁵

But in the years that followed, specific tasks that had been listed in the PSRP's Proposed Implementation Schedule, notably that the Ministry of Local Government and Housing (MLGH) would complete a Plan for Decentralization by mid-1993, were clearly being delayed. Seeing that strong central government resistance to the PSRP remained, one of the primary proponents of decentralization in Zambia, the British-funded Local Government Support Project (LOGOSP) that had been formally initiated in March 1995, closed its doors in 1997. From 1995 to 1997, brand new white trucks with LOGOSP decals on the doors were a common sight on the roads of Zambia, particularly in the streets of Lusaka. But, seeing no real signs of political will to decentralize government authority and control, LOGOSP was to last just over two years.⁴⁶ Since then, there have been no signs that there any plans of having LOGOSP return. In response, Bennie Mwiinga, MP for the Ministry of Local Government and Housing (MLGH), made every attempt to revamp LOGOSP through the support of other donor states. But his eleventh-hour efforts proved unsuccessful.⁴⁷ Mwiinga's appeal for what he termed "bridging finance" was only considered as an attempt to keep the MLGH bureaucracy afloat and not linked, in any meaningful way, to implementation of the PSRP. Even the draft decentralization plan that was finally circulated in 1996 did not convince donors that central government leaders were taking the issue seriously; indeed, formal consideration of the plan by Parliament was to take another eight years.

INTERNAL POLITICS: ZAMBIA'S MINISTRY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT & HOUSING'S DESPERATE 1997 APPEAL TO DONORS

In all fairness, Mwiinga's 1997 appeal to donor states never really stood a chance. The only donor state that could have provided any substantive support to the MLGH was the US (or, more specifically, the US Agency for International Development) and, for a variety of reasons, USAID was not prepared to do so. As a leading donor state in Zambia, the consistent position of USAID/Zambia on decentralization is worth noting.

Local governance: A non-starter

First, beyond keeping "democracy and governance" low on this mission's priority list, the task of strengthening local governments through decentralization was consistently portrayed as a non-starter. Throughout the 1990s USAID officials were notably less optimistic to those from other donor states. Observing that there was little central government support for the task, the former Democracy and Governance Advisor of USAID/Zambia commented: "We simply see no political will to allow any sort of localization to take place," adding, "the enabling environment is downright hostile."⁴⁸ Nor is there any indication that there will be any change in USAID's position with regard to local governance in the near future. For example, in the summaries of its Democracy and Governance Program for Zambia, USAID consistently makes no mention of local governance issues, or of decentralization efforts.⁴⁹

Aid as obstacle

Second, USAID/Zambia is entirely dependent on the support of a home government that has been, relatively speaking, anti-"aid." The open critique of aid was especially marked during the 1980s and 1990s and is now commonplace in development circles; one could say, without exaggeration, that the US has led the global campaign against development aid, to great effect. "Aid as obstacle" has since become the established "common wisdom" among donors, i.e. it is generally accepted that aid only distorts the proper development of developing states.⁵⁰ "Well-intentioned" donations of free food and clothing have proven to be powerful examples of how even well-intentioned aid can devastate the local entrepreneur. Specifically, such cases ask: How can local entrepreneurs possibly compete with an influx of free goods that are sent in the form of "aid"?

Central government focus

Third, the Democracy and Governance (D/G) activities of USAID have historically centered on the observation of,

and contact with, central government leaders. The incentive for altering this largely entrenched manner of conducting D/G activities remains minimal; rewards for having central government contacts remain higher than what they might be for establishing contacts out in the countryside.⁵¹ Indeed, during the Cold War, donor state missions in sub-Saharan Africa were expected to *work with* central government leaders – particularly as they were often pro-socialist and/or avowedly Marxist. In the ideological climate of the Cold War it should come as no surprise, then, that USAID missions in the sub-Saharan African region had little difficulty in obtaining home support when submitting requests for funds. During those years, while Kaunda promoted *Zambian Humanism*, other state leaders developed what was considered unique forms of African Socialism, including most famously, Tanzania's Julius Nyerere (President of Tanzania from 1962-1985). Donor state missions from the West, in particular, were therefore cautious of openly criticizing such leaders, lest entire states be lost in a global chess-like battle among states that were considered either pro-Soviet or pro-West. Yet, as we progress into the twenty-first century, it is becoming abundantly clear that the post-Cold War world is dramatically different in that donor state critique of African state leaders occurs with much more ease and, as demonstrated, the use of aid to these same leaders is now openly put into question.

Policy without implementation: The 2004 decentralization plan

Finally, with the overall stance of donor states being hostile toward "aid," USAID's policy stance will likely have dramatic consequences for the future implementation of Zambia's 2004 National Decentralization Policy; that is, without external funding of some kind, implementation of the policy itself will prove to be a non-starter. While there are other potential sources of financial support for this new policy, a consideration of USAID/Zambia's development policies, as viewed through budget allocations, is crucial as USAID remains the largest single bilateral donor to Zambia, followed by the United Kingdom, Germany, Norway and Japan.⁵² In fact, a look at USAID/Zambia's post-Cold War budget figures demonstrates the lack of will, on the part of USAID, to put resources into what is termed "Democracy and Governance." For example, following in order of importance to USAID/Zambia, one typically finds the top two "Strategic Objectives" are Increased Competitiveness and Improved Health; Democracy and Governance has tended to receive around 5% of the overall annual budget.⁵³

External politics: The rapidly changing dynamics of aid

Following the 1980s, a period that has been considered

by many a “lost decade” for Africa, US policymakers made it abundantly clear that their policy priority for Africa was *economic growth*; improvements in other areas, including democratization, could only occur after successful rates of annual growth were achieved. Many now refer to as a “development first, democracy later” approach to African development. Certainly, this was the logic behind what was dubbed “End of Dependency Act of 1996” for Africa (H.R. 4198), that made specific reference to “sub-Saharan Africa’s lack of competitiveness in the global market.”⁵⁴ Sponsored by Rep. Phil Crane (R-IN), Rep. Charles Rangel (D-NY) and Jim McDermott (D-WA), the bill aimed at building “...a market-oriented transition path for sub-Saharan Africa from dependency on foreign assistance to economic self-sufficiency.”⁵⁵ Leading development economist Jeffrey Sachs, former Director of Harvard’s Center for International Development (formerly the Harvard Institute for International Development) and now Director for Columbia University’s Earth Institute, strongly supported the initiative. In February 1997 Sachs submitted a paper to the former Speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich, which was then forwarded to members of the US Congress, entitled “A New Partnership for Growth in Africa” that wholly supported the idea of having a new growth strategy for sub-Saharan Africa. In that paper Sachs called for an “initiative from the United States to work with other major donors to end aid to Africa as we know it.”⁵⁶ Turning his focus away from his consultations on structural reform in other parts of the world Sachs, now especially interested in African development, was regularly quoted as a supporter of the objectives in H.R. 4198, calling it a “new way forward for Africa” in the *Financial Times* and arguing in an interview with *The Economist* that “growth in Africa can be done.”⁵⁷ Hearing that this was a viable plan to help Africa to grow, African-American leaders, following in the footsteps of Rep. Charles Rangel, similarly supported the bill. As a senior member of the Congressional Black Caucus, and chief sponsor of the bill, Rangel argued that “at last, like other ethnic groups in America, African-Americans will be able to point to a special partnership that connects the United States to our ancestral homes.”⁵⁸

Despite the glaring fact that plans for this ‘special partnership’ included continued reductions in aid, opposition to the bill was minimal. By this time the consensus was that dependency on aid diminished the prospects for competition and, hence, economic growth. The lack of any real critique from lobbyists in Washington was largely due to the renaming of the initiative, from “End of Dependency Act” (which was understood to be a partisan, i.e. Republican initiative) to the more appealing “African Growth and Opportunity Act,” which received full bipartisan support. Ralph Nader’s group Public Citizen dutifully called on its members to “oppose the misnamed African Growth and Opportunity Act” but to no avail.⁵⁹ In 1999, with the full support of the Black Caucus, the

House passed the renamed bill with a vote of 309-110, followed by a 2000 Senate vote of 77-19.⁶⁰ Since then, AGOA has remained the dominant policy stance towards sub-Saharan Africa, with direct consequences on USAID budgets. Indeed, the aforementioned pattern of US leadership among donor states in the Zambian context is not likely to last as aid budgets (in thousands of US\$) have continued to decrease in recent years: FY 2004 (\$49,487), FY 2005 (\$28,297) and FY 2006 (\$24,927).⁶¹ Ongoing developments in the aftermath of AGOA, including statistics that demonstrate an increase in trade between the US and Africa, are regularly posted on the new, and often cited, web-site <http://www.agoa.gov>. In December 2005, US President George Bush expressed his hope that 37 African states would be made “eligible” for “AGOA.”⁶² Citing specific sections of AGOA, as well as the US Trade Act of 1974, the president’s press release suggests that certain African states are “making continual progress” and considers the prospect for new AGOA designations for African states, i.e. “lesser developed beneficiary sub-Saharan African countries.”⁶³

Ironically, of course, while this fundamental restructuring of aid to Africa is occurring within the US policy circles, others involved in aid are simultaneously pushing for the United Nation’s Millennium Development Goals that specify the need for *increased* aid from donor states, to reach a minimum of 0.7% of GDP. Proponents of increased aid to Africa within OECD states have already run into tremendous resistance, particularly in US contexts, as the prevailing wisdom remains critical of aid in general.⁶⁴ What is particularly ironic, given Sachs’ aforementioned involvement in pushing for AGOA, is that he is now actively involved in the promotion of the UN’s Millennium Development Goals (UNMDGs), working as Special Advisor to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon.⁶⁵ Furthermore, in 2005, Sachs published a bestselling book entitled *The End of Poverty* that addressed his revised views on aid. Over the past few years, he has held many public lectures and interviews discussing his ideas.⁶⁶ To him there is no inconsistency; economic growth must be the priority and (different from the AGOA approach) aid can help to make that happen. For this later, pro-aid policy stance, Sachs has received tremendous support. In fact, all 192 member states have agreed to the highly publicized eight UNMDGs.

The overarching goal, argues Sachs, was to end “extreme poverty” by 2015 – now delayed due to the 2008 financial crisis.⁶⁷ And again, much of his work focuses on sub-Saharan Africa, specifically. This (delayed) goal cannot be achieved, he argues, by simply cutting aid across the board but through a careful consideration of the unique circumstances in which certain developing states now find themselves in. While still arguing that developing state policy needs to welcome market liberalization, Sachs now focuses on other factors that impact economic growth, such as *geography*; that is, while some countries have been

blessed with access to international markets others, particularly landlocked countries, have had a difficult time accessing world markets and this has translated into increased operating costs. Further, the *initial income level* of a country may be low and that lack of capital adversely impacts the prospects for growth. Such circumstances, Sachs argues, may warrant a write-off, or easing of, debt burdens, etc.⁶⁸ In other words, many of the circumstances that now adversely impact the immediate prospects for the economic growth of most sub-Saharan African states need to be addressed through a variety of development strategies, not by simply cutting aid budgets across the board. Aid can be used in effective ways that aim at promoting economic growth he seems to argue, contrary to prevailing wisdom; what needs to be fostered are the fundamentals of any economy: The support and training of labor, the development of capital, management know-how, and the like. With the view that labor is an abundant and underutilized resource in many developing countries, Sachs has made a concerted effort to point to public health concerns, notably AIDS, as an impediment to growth. While it might seem difficult to refute Sachs' more comprehensive approach to promoting economic growth, his views remain marginalized among many aid policy makers. The recent popularity of Thomas L. Friedman's book, *The World Is Flat*, is testament to the ongoing support for the view that, in this era of globalization, opportunities are available to us all and that, accordingly, aid can only be considered a handout.⁶⁹ In fact, during his book tour for *The End of Poverty*, Sachs made a point of criticizing Friedman's perspective. The question remains as to what direction the Washington Consensus will take on the matter.

It is partly as a result of Sachs' new perspective on the subject of aid, and global support for the UNMDGs that the debate as to whether aid must necessarily hinder developmental patterns, including the development of free-markets, has returned. For now, the notion that aid can be put to good use, e.g. supporting business initiative, assisting the workforce in training and education, and helping to alleviate glaring public health concerns, remains controversial. And the links between these issues and political development, not to mention any improved prospects for liberal political practice, remain difficult to ascertain at best. The question remains as to how all of these political debates on aid, that are largely *outside* of sub-Saharan Africa, will impact the prospects for improved political development *within* sub-Saharan African states.

There can be little doubt that the external policy debates have a profound impact on policy direction within sub-Saharan African states. For instance, decentralization in Zambia, like other policy initiatives, has been largely a donor-driven enterprise. While the leading donor to Zambia, USAID, has had other priorities, Britain and other donors have consistently pushed for decentralization plans including, notably, the increased "capacity" of local

governing authorities. The push for political change, from donor states (*external actors*) must be taken into account when attempting to understand recent trends in sub-Saharan State policy. While African state leaders may voice contempt for such ideas, Africanists such as Jennifer Widener, have consistently argued that in sub-Saharan Africa "political openings usually take place only in conjunction with international pressure."⁷⁰ This was certainly the case, for example, with the long delayed approval of Zambia's National Decentralization Policy in 2004. While USAID took little interest, other donor states lobbied hard for passage of the draft policy.⁷¹ Advocating a new policy direction, of course, is a delicate issue but Zambia's central government leaders have long been accustomed to the idea that donor state funding is linked to certain policy initiatives. Indeed, any contempt that some Zambian leaders and citizens might have for such external pressures is largely due to what is now widely perceived as the donor state's "self-serving" interests during the Cold War. "Why else," goes the refrain of many Zambians today, "would donor states be cutting their foreign aid budgets?"

Conclusion: Recalling the significance of local government institutions

In the geographically vast regions of sub-Saharan Africa, the proximity of government authorities can play a crucial role. Largely due to the history of capital-centered politics and the "national" formulation of policy, local governments have been thus far considered by many a burden or even a luxury. To the extent that local government was considered by colonial administrators, it was to emphasize the maintenance of "order" (through Indirect Rule, Assimilation, or other) and not to establish local government institutions that had, as their principal aim, the maintenance and security of local property. Moreover, due to the colonial history of sub-Saharan African states, local authorities have historically been viewed by local citizens as agents of "the state." In these circumstances, "the state" was something to be avoided and at all costs; this legacy remains. To this day, it certainly is not assumed that a local government authority acts in the interest of the local citizen. Much of this can be explained in terms of colonial history, and the often corrupt practices that continued during the era of "neo-colonialism." This paper has argued that a careful consideration of the limited roles of local government authorities in liberal democratic contexts could be revealing. Within that context, local governance played a largely unsung but crucial role in expanding liberal practice. At least initially, citizens had limited demands. One of the most fundamental functions of local governments in liberal states, then and now, has been the protection of the "fruits of our labor," i.e. our property.

As local – historically agrarian – productivity improved,

administrative ties with central government were improved, with the understanding that there could be *positive-sum* gains to be had by those involved. In the sub-Saharan context, central government leaders were direct beneficiaries of colonial and Cold War ties, to the detriment of local government development. The relationship then, has been viewed as “top-down,” *zero-sum* (competing for limited resources) and antagonistic. By contrast, in liberal democratic states, there have been political debates over the appropriate balance of local-central state authorities, but the largely cooperative connection has always existed.⁷² By contrast, in the sub-Saharan African context, colonial history and its aftermath led to the development of governing institutions that consistently favored centralized over local forms of governance.

Democracy then, in all historical contexts, is a process, not an event. In the post-Cold War environment it must now be openly acknowledged that this has been the case in all democratic states of the world; political freedoms that have become synonymous with democratic practice certainly did not apply to all residents of the early United States, for example, that included a sizable slave population and systematically excluded women. The inclusion of these groups – unquestionable improvements in democratic practice! – took place over time. Such views are now being expressed, in policy circles, as part of the challenge that new democracies must now face.⁷³ This argument – that it takes time – may offer little solace to those anxious to implement liberal democratic practice in new democracies. But these kinds of historical comparisons that focus on the practical underpinnings of liberalism demonstrate the crucial role of local governance.

There are several important lessons to be learned from the internal and external politics that surround the decentralization efforts in Zambia of the past decade. First, the pressures from international or external actors for decentralization are not uniform. Evidence of this can be found by comparing the *types* of donor state support for the decentralization policies pursued by the Chiluba, Mwanawasa and Banda governments, including those behind the 1993 Public Service Reform Programme and, now, the 2004 National Decentralization Policy. Indeed, a more careful consideration of donor support for political change in Zambia demonstrates clear differences among donors as to what the policy priorities should be, based largely on dominant political beliefs among donor states themselves. Broadly speaking, for example, USAID tends to prioritize privatization, increased competition and business development, while the Scandinavian states tend to support more coordination of aid efforts and civil society development projects. Britain and Germany, as well as international organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank, tend to emphasize the importance of institutional “capacity building.” This can also be said of CARE

International in Zambia and other international NGOs that work extensively on the development of rural agriculture and of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). Over time, donor states develop reputations among Zambians (and within the local development community) for supporting various types of development initiatives.⁷⁴

Second, the policies of individual donor states are a reflection of the policy debates that take place within their respective home governments. The parallels between the 1960s expansion of foreign aid and welfare programs, on the one hand, and the 1980s contractions of both, on the other hand, are worthy of note. In the 1960s, while Western states vowed to end poverty at home through a host of new welfare programs, lending institutions such as the World Bank provided unprecedented levels of loans to developing states throughout the world. In retrospect, the parallel is clear: The prevailing policy aim was to eradicate poverty through the promotion of certain domestic state and international development policies. These loans continued to expand until the 1982 LDC Debt Crisis, prompted by Mexico’s refusal to pay debts, and similar refusals only continued throughout the now indebted world. A good way to identify a donor state’s position on aid, therefore, is through a careful consideration of each respective state’s domestic politics. In 1992, US President Clinton announced “the end of welfare as we know it”; the AGOA initiative is now applying the same logic of “ending dependency” to foreign aid. As Steven Radelet argues: “the African Growth and Opportunity Act... should hardly be trumpeted as the United States’ ‘giving’ something to poor countries, since the legislation only slightly reduces existing barriers and leaves significant obstacles untouched.”⁷⁵

Third, the method of pursuing decentralization over the past decade points to the extreme imbalances of wealth and power among the various players involved in the process. Discussions with consultants, development practitioners, and Zambia’s central government staff, led this observer to the conclusion that Zambia’s decentralization policies are pursued largely to appease the concerns of international actors (particularly donor states and the dominant lending institutions of the UN, the IMF and the World Bank). As central government ministries struggle to maintain control, they are constantly under pressure to mention “decentralization” as one of their new policy goals. Unrealistic target dates for decentralization and “strengthening of local government,” with little follow-up in policy implementation, have thus far been the result.⁷⁶

Finally, decentralization is but one of the many goals among international actors that have constant, and growing, budget constraints. As the international funds made available during the Cold War gradually disappear, and despite the political will for continued centralized control, decentralization nevertheless occurs; this demonstrates the simple fact that a continued flow of resources is required to maintain central government control. While

there are likely a variety of reasons for the passing of the 2004 National Decentralization Policy in Zambia, the combined pressures of privatizing ZCCM and decreasing donor aid have left central government authorities with few remaining options but to relinquish some control. But the immediate results of decentralization are likely to be grim. As those involved in decentralization will readily admit, local government institutions throughout Zambia have little hope of coping with the many new challenges that they face in the shorter term.

Hopefully, we will soon get beyond the point of being told that strengthening local government institutions does not matter – or in the Zambia case, that it cannot yet be implemented. A more careful consideration, in policy circles, of local government function is crucial. In fact, the realization of liberal democracy just may well require it.

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ENDNOTES:

¹ Fareed Zakaria (1997). "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy" *Foreign Affairs* 76. Zakaria uses the term "liberal" in the classic sense of the term, i.e. political freedom. In the US context, of course, the term "liberal" has taken on another meaning in recent decades, which means much the opposite: using the state to promote social equity through social services, welfare programs, and the like. It is Zakaria's use of the term that I have in mind throughout. Here, *political liberalization* refers to "political freedom" (the protection of political rights and civil liberties), which is to be distinguished from *economic liberalization*, meaning the freeing up of markets.

ⁱⁱ Ibid: 24.

³ See, e.g. Immanuel Wallerstein (1961). *Africa: The Politics of Independence* (New York: Random House) and (1967) *Africa: The Politics of Unity* (New York: Random House).

⁴ Gavin Kitching, "Why I Gave Up African Studies," *African Studies Review & Newsletter*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (June 2000): 21-26.

⁵ Immanuel Wallerstein, "What Hope Africa? What Hope World?" in *After Liberalism*, (New York: The New Press, 1995), pp. 46-69.

⁶ Colin Legum, "The Coming of Africa's Second Independence," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 13, Issue 1 (December 1990).

⁷ Richard Joseph, "Africa: The Rebirth of Political Freedom," *Journal of Democracy* 2 (1991), p. 32.

⁸ Carol Lancaster, "Democracy in Africa," *Foreign Policy* 85 (Winter 1991-92), p. 148.

⁹ Zakaria (1997), p. 22.

¹⁰ Ibid, pp. 22-23. Emphasis mine.

¹¹ Martin Kilson, "Authoritarian and Single-Party Tendencies in Africa," *World Politics*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (January 1963); Rotberg's publications are numerous and ongoing. On April 22, 2010 the author attended Rotberg's keynote speech for a conference entitled "The New Scramble for Africa? Contemporary Formations Between China & Africa" wherein, again, he pessimistically portrayed African politicians and, in this case, questioned Chinese motives for involvement in African affairs – another career-safe perspective that most Africanists have taken of late.

¹² Robert I. Rotberg, "Strengthening African Leadership," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 4 (July-August 2004), p. 14.

¹³ This author greatly values the important contributions of post-colonial scholars such as Franz Fanon, O. Mannoni, Aimé Césaire, Albert Memmi, Edward Said and countless others.

¹⁴ Peter J. Schraeder, *African Politics and Society*, 2nd Ed., (Thomson Wadsworth, 2004), p. 66.

¹⁵ Lord Hailey, *An African Survey* (1938) is, while problematic, significant and comprehensive (1,676 pages and maps devoted to the topic of local governance). I recently purchased a "discarded" library copy of the book for \$3.00 which is an indication of today's lack of interest in such works. The problem I am attempting to emphasize here is the subsequent marginalization of local governance in African political contexts. Solid and warranted critiques of the British colonial era are many. Of Lord Hailey in particular, see: Suke Wolton, *Lord Hailey the Colonial Office and the Politics of Race in the Second World War* (Palgrave, 2000).

¹⁶ Understandably, there have been growing concerns about the form that "democracy" and/or "liberalism" might take in Africa. See, e.g., J. Shola Omotola, "Attractions and Limitations of Liberal Democracy in Africa," *Africana*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (December 2009).

¹⁷ Maxwell Owusu, "Democracy and Africa – A View from the Village," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Sept. 1992), p. 372. Examples abound. See, e.g. survey of debates in Owusu (1992).

¹⁸ A point emphasized by Bates (2001), cited *infra*.

¹⁹ Kim Dae Jung, "The Myth of Asia's Anti-Democratic Values," *Foreign Affairs, Agenda 1995*, (New York: Foreign Affairs, 1995).

²⁰ Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 288.

²¹ Ibid, p. 289.

²² Thomas Hobbes, *The Leviathan*, (1651).

²³ Kitching (2000).

²⁴ Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society*, (New York: Free Press, 1958); Walter W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960).

²⁵ Robert H. Bates, *Prosperity and Violence*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2001), pp. 101-102.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 21.

²⁷ For similar neo-institutionalist arguments see, e.g. the works of Douglas C. North.

²⁸ Huntington (1968).

²⁹ Seth S. King, ed., Gunnar Myrdal, *Asian Drama: An Inquiry Into the Poverty of Nations*, (London: Penguin 1971), p. 35.

³⁰ Siegle, et al. (2004), p. 71.

³¹ The same can be said of any local governance arrangements of the colonial period. Africanists often emphasize the differences among British (Indirect Rule), French (Assimilation) and other colonizers' approaches to local governance in sub-Saharan African history. But Lockean aims were clearly not the priority of any colonizer. Rather, the overarching concern was the maintenance of "order." Colonial administrators were also, generally, concerned with the prospect of tax revenue, and the protection of colonial "interests" (protection of entrepreneurs, missionaries, etc.) See, e.g. Lord Hailey, *Native Administration in the British African Territories, Colonial Office*, (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1951).

³² Charles Beard, *The Economic Basis of Politics*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1957), p. 140.

³³ Gouverneur Morris, quoted in *ibid*, p. 141.

³⁴ Elbridge Gerry, quoted in *ibid*, p. 140.

³⁵ Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition*, (New York: Vintage, 1948), p. 12.

³⁶ Notably, Zinn's international best-seller, *A Peoples History of the United States* (1980). In response to Zinn's book a "corrective" effort has been published, entitled *A Patriot's History of The United States* (Sentinell, 2010) – at the time of writing a *New York Times* best-seller.

³⁷ See: "Bush in Japan on Six Nation Asia Tour," <http://www.CNN.com>, October 17, 2003.

³⁸ See: John Locke, "Of Property" in *Two Treatises On Government*, (Liberal Arts Press, 1952, originally published in 1690), pp. 16-18.

³⁹ Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America*, (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich: 1955).

⁴⁰ Francis Fukuyama, "End of History," *National Interest* (1989).

⁴¹ This pluralistic notion is not to be confused with the impossible ideal of fulfilling all of the hopes, dreams and desires of all citizens. Samuel P. Huntington (2001), *op cit.*, rightly refers to the pluralistic ideal as "the promise of disharmony," i.e. citizens must agree to disagree, at times, without resorting to violence.

⁴² Zambia's bookstores continue to sell books on Kaunda's philosophy. A popular one is written by M.A. Ranganathan, *The Political Philosophy of President Kenneth D. Kaunda of Zambia*, (Lusaka: Kenneth Kaunda Foundation, 1986).

⁴³ Frederick Chiluba, *Democracy: The Challenge of Change*, (Lusaka: Multimedia Publications, 1995), pp. 49-52.

⁴⁴ By the early 1990s, proponents of the Public Service Reform Programme (PSRP) were keenly aware of the difficulties faced in the

aftermath of the 1980 Local Administration Reforms that had involved plans for extensive devolution of central government powers and functions to Councils. The hope was that, lessons learned, PSRP would be more effective.

⁴⁵ During the 1996 election, support for this view was indicated with an extended thumb and index finger to represent the hands of a clock reaching the hour.

⁴⁶ A newsletter was distributed in Zambia to report the progress of LOGOSP. "LOGOSP Launched!" was announced in the *Local Government Support Project Newsletter*, Issue No. 1, March 1995. In the January 1997 issue (No. 8) of that same newsletter it was announced "Running Out of Money!"

⁴⁷ Specifically, following the pull-out of LOGOSP, the Hon. Bennie Mwiinga, MP Minister of Local Government and Housing held a meeting on June 13, 1997 with donors to request additional funds (what was termed 'bridging finance.')

⁴⁸ Personal correspondence with former DGA at USAID/Zambia, Miles Toder, dated September 27, 1999.

⁴⁹ See: "Inputs, Outputs, Activities, FY 2005 Program," at <http://www.usaid.gov/policy/budget/cbj2006/afr/zm.html>. Decentralization of public services – notably public health – is regularly contemplated and debated among USAID officials but, on the whole, local government matters have not been part of Democracy and Governance activities. See: Christopher LaMonica, *Local Government Matters: The Case of Zambia* (LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2010).

⁵⁰ This was the title of a 1981 book by Frances Moore Lappé, Joseph Collins and David Kinley, *Aid As Obstacle: Twenty Questions about our Foreign Aid and the Hungry*, (San Francisco, CA: Institute for Food and Development Policy, 1981).

⁵¹ Based on personal observation while working with USAID/Zambia in 1997. With little incentive to venture into the countryside, D/G staff would stay for months at a time in Lusaka reporting on developments within the capital.

⁵² See: <http://www.usaid.gov>. Overall donor assistance to Zambia presently (2009) totals about \$350 million a year.

⁵³ See: <http://www.usaid.gov/policy/budget/cbj2006/afr/zm.html>

⁵⁴ "News From the Committee on Ways and Means," Washington, D.C., September 26, 1996: 30.

⁵⁵ H.R. 4198, 104th Congress, 2nd Session, entitled "A Bill to authorize a new trade and investment policy for sub-Saharan Africa", p. 2.

⁵⁶ Jeffrey Sachs, "A New Partnership for Growth in Africa," *Harvard Institute for International Development*, February 28, 1997. This paper was proudly presented by HIID Associate, Malcolm McPherson, in March 1997 at a Harvard development seminar that was attended by the author. At that seminar, McPherson indicated that the paper was the direct result of a chance encounter between Jeffrey Sachs and the former House Speaker, Newt Gingrich, at a Christmas party in December 1996. Gingrich, it was explained, then passed the paper on to members of the US Congress.

⁵⁷ Stephanie Flanders, "New ways forward for Africa: An initiative to aid the sub-Sahara's development deserves serious study," *Financial Times*, April 14, 1997 and "Growth in Africa: It Can Be Done," *The Economist*, June 26, 1996, pp. 19-21.

⁵⁸ "Major Africa trade bill clears Congress," Fox Market Wire, May 12, 2000.

⁵⁹ Activist Alert: "Oppose the Misnamed 'African Growth and Opportunity Act'", *Public Citizen News*, May/June 1998, p. 15.

⁶⁰ As indicated, opposition was lodged by Ralph Nader's Public Citizen. Just one year later, critics could see that there was no stopping AGOA. Rep. Jesse Jackson, Jr. (D-IL), for example, expressed reservations but was supportive of a new trade policy with

Africa. See: "Rep. Jackson Keeps HOPE Alive for African Trade Policy," *Public Citizen News*, May/June 1999, p. 11.

⁶¹ See: <http://www.usaid.gov/policy/budget/cbj2006/afr/zm.html>.

⁶² "Proclamation by the President: To Take Certain Actions Under the African Growth and Opportunity Act," Press Release from *The White House* posted on <http://www.agoa.gov>.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Most Scandinavian states are already near or over the 0.7% threshold; the continued resistance to increased aid comes most strongly from US contributors to the debate.

⁶⁵ Details of this are provided at: <http://www.earthinstitute.columbia.edu/about/director/>

⁶⁶ Jeffrey Sachs, *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2005).

⁶⁷ See: <http://www.undp.org/poverty/>

⁶⁸ Indeed, Sachs famously became part of a global campaign, along with Pope John Paul II and U2's Bono, to do so. Bono's commencement speech at Harvard University in 2001 was likely a result of his contact with Sachs during this campaign. See: Robert J. Barro, "Why would a rock star want to talk to me?" Section: Economic Viewpoint, *Businessweek*, July 16, 2001, p. 24.

⁶⁹ Thomas L. Friedman, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twentieth-Century*, (New York: Picador, 2006).

⁷⁰ Jennifer A. Widener, *Economic Change and Political Liberalization in Sub-Saharan Africa*, (Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins Press, 1994): 2. See also: Marina Ottaway, ed., *Democracy in Africa: The Hard Road Ahead*, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Reiner, 1997).

⁷¹ See, Ch. 5: "International Linkages to Local Governments" in LaMonica (2001).

⁷² Of course, the US Constitution initially favored a strong federal (central) government, despite the fact that many favored more sovereign state control: ever since the debate over political balance has gone on. But the underlying principle of sharing political power – or Federalism – remains. Other Western states have had similar political struggles, with more or less centralization. In all cases, however, political power has been shared.

⁷³ As argued in Stephen D. Krasner and Carlos Pascual, "Addressing State Failure," *Foreign Affairs* 84 (2005), p. 159.

⁷⁴ The above references policy priorities that are, however, generalizations. Specifics can be found in the text of the *Public Service Reform Programme* (PSRP) – Volume I – Main Report, Appendix II, Cabinet Office, Government of the Republic of Zambia, November 1993. In an effort to promote competition for funds, USAID has opposed coordination of aid activities among donor states that have been attempted by NORAD, in particular. I attended a Second "Donor Coordination Meeting" that was hosted by the Norwegian Embassy in Lusaka on June 18, 1997. At that meeting the USAID Director, Walter North, argued that all the donor states had limited resources and that the additional burden of "coordination" among them would just make for "busy work" with little benefit to Zambians.

⁷⁵ Steven Radelet, "Bush and Foreign Aid," *Foreign Policy*, September/October 2003: 115-116.

⁷⁶ As demonstrated in the aftermath of the 1993 PSRP.