

CHAPTER 4

Exporting Elections: International Donors and the Era of Democratic Dependency

International efforts to reform Africa did not end with the reintroduction of multiparty politics in the early 1990s. Instead, a number of European and North American governments became frustrated with the slow pace of change and began to take a more active role in democracy promotion. The U.S. government sold these policies to its own citizens as both a moral imperative and a way to protect U.S. interests by exporting its own values. As John F. Kennedy put it in a Special Message to the Congress on Foreign Aid back in 1961: “There is no escaping our obligations: our moral obligations as a wise leader and good neighbor in the interdependent community of free nations … and our political obligations as the single largest counter to the adversaries of freedom.” Freed from Cold War pressures, the 1990s appeared to be America’s moment to liberate the world by painting it in its own image.

By 1994, the growing salience of democracy promotion within the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) had led to the creation of the Centre for Democracy and Governance, which grew rapidly over the following five years and by 2009 had amassed a global annual budget in excess of \$420 million. All told, USAID’s spending on democracy promotion rose from \$103 million in 1990 to more than \$1 billion in 2005.¹ This was not all new money – in some cases existing projects were simply rebranded to fit

¹ Finkel, Steven E. et al. “Effects of U.S. Foreign Assistance on Democracy Building”. USAID, 2006, retrieved from http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pnade694.pdf.

TABLE 4.1 *Annual aid per capita by region (1960–2012), current US\$*

Region	1960–1969	1970–1979	1980–1989	1990–1999	2000–2009	2012
Middle East & North Africa	7.0	26.5	32.5	30.3	38.8	35.1
sub-Saharan Africa	3.9	9.0	23.1	29.7	38.1	50.7
East Asia& Pacific	1.0	1.8	3.0	4.9	3.9	3.9
Latin America	3.3	3.8	8.2	12.0	12.2	16.9

Source: *World Bank*.

the new zeitgeist – and much of it was spent on Afghanistan and Iraq. Nonetheless, by 2010 democracy promotion had become USAID's third largest activity, and the organization had established missions in twenty-three African countries and programs in forty-nine.

Europe did not lag too far behind. The member states of the European Union (EU) collectively spent around €2,500 million on democracy assistance in 2007, and committed a further €150 million per year through the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) of the European Commission (EC). In 2008, democracy promotion represented around 8 per cent of the aid budget of the United Kingdom and one-tenth of aid spending in Germany and the Netherlands. Although some of this money was redirected from other priorities in Africa, aid per capita to the continent increased considerably between the 1980s and the 2000s (Table 4.1).

The growth of international democracy promotion activities was not limited to Africa, but rather reflected the response of Western donors to the end of the Cold War and the opportunity to engage with young multiparty systems in Central and Eastern Europe. From a relatively low base in the 1980s, the amount invested by the international community in promoting democracy around the world exploded in the 1990s: by 2009 the democratization industry was spending around \$2 billion a year on funding elections, deepening institutions, and building civil society abroad.

But while donors were often effective at pushing governments to reintroduce multiparty elections, they proved far less capable of shaping subsequent processes of political reconstruction and democratic consolidation. Frustrated by the lack of change on the ground, the most committed democracy promoters – most notably the United

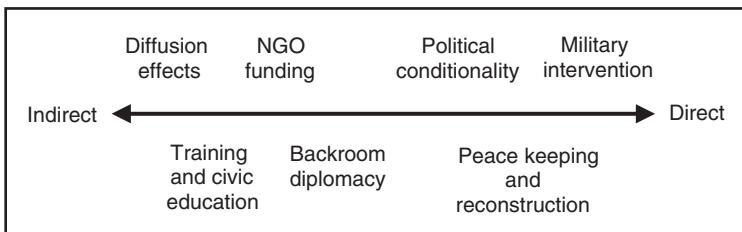


FIGURE 4.1 The spectrum of international democracy promotion activity.

States and the United Kingdom – began to focus their energies on the most obvious barriers to genuine political change. When donors came to realize that elections would not promote accountable and responsive government if they were contested by weak parties that were dominated by their leaders, they sought to promote stronger and more transparent party organizations. In turn, once it became clear that the fragility of electoral and party structures was in part rooted in citizens' lack of awareness of their rights, and limited expectations of their leaders, members of the international community engaged in political education and rolled out programs designed to promote adherence to basic human rights and civil liberties.

Throughout the 1990s, Western donors thus expanded the breadth and depth of their democracy promotion efforts. By the end of the decade, these activities encompassed a broad range of strategies from indirect and low-profile efforts, such as the provision of training to government officials, through to the most direct and high-profile forms of engagement, such as political conditionality and military intervention (Figure 4.1). But the more donors struggled to fix African democracy, the more they became involved in controversial projects of political and social engineering that risked undermining their own legitimacy.

Externally Managed Transitions

The international community became most deeply involved in democracy promotion efforts in countries that had recently experienced civil war. During the 1990s, international mediators increasingly sought to end conflicts in three stages. After first securing a ceasefire, the second stage was to persuade the warring parties to form a power-sharing government. Once this had been achieved, the

power-sharing administration was expected to draw up a new constitution and political system, paving the way for fresh elections. Holding elections was understood to be particularly important: the ultimate symbol of a successful transition. Thus, UN Resolution 1885, which extended the UN's mission in Liberia until September 2010, explicitly identified the holding of elections as "a core benchmark for UNMIL's [United Nations Mission in Liberia] future drawdown".

Peace mediators came to fetishize elections because they believed that they would help to prevent a return to war. Elections were understood to be the defining feature of legitimate states, and so it was assumed that if governments in war-torn countries such as Afghanistan, the DRC, and Iraq were elected they would be more legitimate and hence more stable. Moreover, donors hoped that by providing all communities with the opportunity to exercise their political rights, elections would generate more inclusive political systems and more representative parliaments. Such assumptions were underpinned by the belief that multiparty politics would generate more accountable and effective governments, which in turn would give rise to stronger economies, reducing poverty and curtailing some of the long-term drivers of conflict. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon neatly summed up this position when, ahead of the Iraqi elections of March 2010, he argued that "a credible election process will greatly contribute to national reconciliation and give Iraqi leaders a new impetus to work together in a spirit of national unity to rebuild their country after years of conflict".

In addition to this at times naive faith in the power of elections, the design of peace-building strategies was also motivated by more practical considerations. The key advantage of elections over other conflict-resolution mechanisms was that they deferred the need to make a decision regarding who would occupy the presidency until polling day. Mediators could thus direct discussions away from issues likely to cause talks to break down, and instead focus on more technical and hence manageable questions such as how the electoral commission should be designed. In turn, this enabled peace builders to secure a cessation of violence, creating sufficient breathing space to begin the process of national reconstruction. But while this strategy brought short-term gains, it had obvious limitations. Most notably, it resulted in elections being held in countries where institutions were weak, the main participants did not trust each other, and there was little commitment amongst the political elite to democratic norms.

In their rush to harness the positive aspects of multipartyism, donors ignored the potential for political competition to exacerbate civil conflict.

Consider the peace-building process in Angola, which suffered a prolonged and brutal civil war between José Eduardo dos Santos's Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) government and Jonas Savimbi's National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) rebels following the collapse of the Portuguese empire in 1974. The conflict proved to be particularly intractable because neither side was capable of inflicting a definitive defeat on its enemy, or willing to lay down its guns unless it was guaranteed control of the state. Support from the United States and South Africa for the "anti-communist" UNITA was offset by the support of Cuba and members of the Soviet bloc for the "communist" MPLA government, resulting in a stalemate that prolonged the war and cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of soldiers and civilians.

Things began to change in the late 1980s, when the thawing of relations between the United States and the Soviet Union created new opportunities to negotiate an end to a number of conflicts in Southern Africa that had been sustained by the Cold War. In 1988, Cuba agreed to remove its troops from Angola if South Africa would end its support of UNITA and grant independence to Namibia. However, hopes that this opening would lead to a ceasefire in Angola were soon dashed after Savimbi rejected claims that he had agreed to go into exile and disband his forces as part of the peace deal. Following the failure of these negotiations it became clear that neither leader would accept a peace process that required them to accept defeat. Because both men were convinced they could win the support of the majority of the population, elections were the obvious solution. A peace deal signed in Lisbon and brokered by the Portuguese government committed UNITA and the MPLA to a process of national reconstruction that would culminate in the election of a civilian government. In support of the process, the UN launched the United Nations Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM) to monitor the ceasefire and observe the polls. However, the lack of trust between Dos Santos and Savimbi, combined with the absence of democratic institutions capable of operating outside of executive control and the inability of international mediators to enforce the disarmament process, ensured that neither leader had any real confidence in the process. Thus, in

the shadow of the election campaign both sides kept their forces battle-ready.

The first round of the presidential elections was held in September 1992 and the results gave Dos Santos – who secured 49.6 per cent of the vote to Savimbi's 40.6 per cent – the upper hand. Because no candidate secured more than 50 per cent, a second round of voting was required. But this election never took place because Savimbi refused to accept the first-round results, claiming that the elections had not been free and fair. As tensions rose, clashes between UNITA and the MPLA broke out in the capital, Luanda, and quickly spread throughout the country. Following a series of UNITA military victories it became clear that Savimbi had retained his forces as an insurance mechanism against the unpredictability of the ballot box. In the absence of the political will necessary to end the conflict, all of the ingredients of a long and bloody civil war remained in place. It was only after MPLA forces killed Savimbi in 2002, leaving UNITA leaderless, that Angola was able to find a pathway to peace.

The Angolan example is instructive, because it demonstrates that while international intervention can pause conflicts, domestic factors ultimately determine the prospects for a lasting peace. But this does not mean that international intervention cannot help war-torn countries to make a fresh start when conditions on the ground are more favourable. No country better illustrates what can and cannot be achieved by international engagement than the West African state of Liberia.

Founded by freed American and Caribbean slaves, Liberia is Africa's oldest republic. However, political stability began to unravel under the government of William R. Tolbert, an Americo-Liberian elected in 1971. As inequalities between the Americo-Liberian elite and the country's indigenous population intensified, the increasingly authoritarian bent of Tolbert's New Whig Party gave rise to mounting public discontent. In 1980, a military coup led by Samuel Doe toppled Tolbert, executing the former president and thirteen of his aides in the process. But Doe's leadership proved to be no more conducive to political harmony than his predecessor, and by the late 1980s a combination of economic decline, his bias towards the Krahn ethnic group, and a fraudulent election in 1985 had undermined the credibility of the new regime. As a result, Doe's government was poorly placed to withstand an invasion by rebel forces in 1989.

The rebels were led by Charles Taylor, who took up arms against Doe after he was removed from his position as director general of

the Liberian General Services Agency. But although Doe's authority collapsed under sustained attack, Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) also splintered, and it was a rival group led by Prince Johnson, an ex-NPFL fighter, who found and executed Doe in September 1990. By that point the brutality of the civil war – which ultimately took the lives of one in ten Liberians – and the potential for the conflict to spread throughout the region had prompted the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to establish a peacekeeping force. But when the resulting Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) was deployed, it struggled to overcome the gulf between its mandate and the reality on the ground because it quickly became apparent that there was no peace to keep and no ceasefire to monitor. Only after further cycles of conflict and negotiation did the warring factions agree to the Abuja Accords and Abuja II, which created a six-member council of state that operated as a proxy government of national unity and, following the dominant peace-building model of the time, scheduled elections for May 1997.

The announcement of the polls triggered a remarkable international effort. The ECOMOG peacekeeping force was expanded to 11,000, while USAID and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) created programmes to give ex-combatants jobs, and hence a stake in a peaceful outcome. Largely as a result of the heavy international presence, polling day passed without incident. Rallies organized by the two main candidates, Charles Taylor and Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf – a former supporter of Taylor's who later opposed his handling of the conflict and took up a position with the UN – passed peacefully, despite being held in close proximity. Turnout was impressive with some 85 per cent of registered voters casting their ballots, and the elections produced a clear winner: Taylor secured more than three-quarters of the vote in a poll deemed credible by observers.

Yet although the elections were a technical success it was not clear that they offered Liberians a free and fair choice. Most notably, Taylor enjoyed a significant advantage over his rivals as a result of the territory, equipment, and resources that his army had amassed during the civil war. In particular, Taylor's control over shortwave radio meant that he enjoyed a near monopoly over the media in rural areas. This was not the only problem. Many Liberians feared that if Taylor lost he would reignite the conflict. In the eyes of many voters, this meant that the choice was not really between Taylor and Johnson-Sirleaf, but

between Taylor and a return to war. And not just any war. Taylor's troops had committed the most heinous of human rights abuses, raping and amputating their victims. Taylor himself was later indicted by the International Criminal Court for war crimes and crimes against humanity as a result of his support of rebels during the civil war in neighbouring Sierra Leone. The bleak reality of post-conflict elections was demonstrated by the rallying cry of his supporters: "He killed my ma; he killed my pa; I'll vote for him."

As president, Taylor's refusal to establish an inclusive government and to stop meddling in the affairs of other countries set Liberia back on the road to conflict. Within two years of his election, the country was overrun by a number of insurgencies that were backed by the same governments that Taylor had tried to destabilize. When Monrovia fell to rebel forces in mid-2003, Taylor fled to Nigeria. The transfer of power to Taylor's deputy, Moses Blah, enabled a fresh round of negotiations, after which international actors mobilized to support a peace process that, once again, culminated in elections that were scheduled for 2005. It would not have been possible to hold the polls in this timeframe the absence of foreign assistance: the UN deployed a 15,000-strong Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) to relieve the embattled ECOWAS troops, set up 3,070 polling stations, and provided training, transportation, and protection for electoral officials. But what really paved the way for a more successful peace process was that the situation on the ground had changed, creating a much more positive context for democracy promotion.

In contrast to the 1997 elections, members of the transitional government agreed not to stand for election. Along with the absence of Taylor, this meant that warlords did not overshadow the contest. Although a number of parties represented former rebel leaders, and Taylor funded some candidates in a bid to maintain his influence, men in uniform did not dominate the polls. Instead, the main choice facing Liberians was between Johnson-Sirleaf and George Weah – Liberia's most famous sportsman and former FIFA World Footballer of the Year. The more civilian nature of the campaign produced a calmer political atmosphere, while the absence of Taylor freed voters from concerns about an immediate return to war. This is not to suggest that the polls were free of controversy. Although Weah won the first round of voting with 28 per cent of the vote, Johnson-Sirleaf picked up more support from losing candidates and convincingly won the second round run-off. Disappointed by this reversal of fortunes, Weah

initially alleged electoral fraud, sparking clashes between some of his supporters and peacekeepers. But ultimately he came to realize that he had more to gain by supporting the consolidation of multipartyism, and hence the opportunity to win the presidency in future elections, than by plunging the country into fresh chaos.

In power, Johnson-Sirleaf's government struggled to overcome the legacy of the civil war and a chronic lack of resources, but managed to avoid both the resumption of conflict and significant democratic back-sliding – a considerable achievement. In doing so, it demonstrated the potential of donors and international organization to strengthen peace processes by acting as external referees, creating a window of opportunity for African leaders to break out of cycles of violence and instability.

The Era of Democratic Dependency

The distinctive feature of externally managed transitions in countries such as Angola, the DRC, Liberia, and Sierra Leone was that, due to low state capacity and the legacies of war, they remained unable to sustain the process of democratization without external support. As a result, these countries entered into a period of democratic dependency, which was no less significant than the period of economic dependency that began in the 1980s (see Chapter 3). African states came to depend on donors in two main ways: first, to fund essential expenditure, from the printing of ballot papers through to the payment of peacekeepers and electoral staff; and second, to provide essential skills and logistical support, from the design of electoral regulations through to the management of polling stations. Such democratic dependency was not a uniquely African phenomenon. The first transitional administration of the modern era was established in Cambodia in 1991. Subsequently, the UN dispatched similar missions to the disputed territories of Kosovo and Timor-Leste in 1999. But the situation in Africa was very different to that in Kosovo, because the sovereign status of most African states was not in question. International actors therefore had to be more careful to be seen to be supporting, rather than leading, transitional administrations. Thus the UN stressed that its role in Angola was solely “to observe and verify the elections, not to organize them”. Yet on the ground, the sweeping influence of UN and donor representatives at times empowered international actors to call the shots.

International interventions in African elections were perhaps most intensive and invasive in the DRC. In the 1990s, Mobutu's brutal regime was weakened by economic decline, falling donor support and a series of rebellions. In 1997, his ailing government was finally defeated by a rebellion led by Laurent Kabila. Because Kabila led mainly Tutsi fighters against mainly Hutu forces, some of whom had fled to the DRC following the Rwandan genocide, he attracted support from pro-Tutsi regimes in Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda. The new president's international sponsors hoped that he would be able to establish a stable government that would be forever in their debt. Instead, Kabila turned his back on his sponsors and set about centralizing power in a manner not dissimilar to Mobutu himself. In response, Uganda and Rwanda threw their support behind a new rebellion, while Kabila fell in with a new set of allies in the form of Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe – each seeking to benefit from the country's vast mineral reserves. As different factions fought out a series of complex battles across the country, the situation quickly escalated into the Second Congo War. The number of governments involved, the magnitude of the resources at stake, and the difficulty of establishing order in a country as large and diverse as the DRC meant that conflict became one of the worst ever seen on African soil. Although the figures remain contested, it is thought that the war resulted in more than 5 million deaths, many of which were caused by the spread of disease and starvation.

In early 2001, Kabila was assassinated by one of his bodyguards as the violence unfolded around him. He was succeeded by his son, Joseph, who subsequently entered into a protracted set of negotiations with rebels and neighbouring states, leading to the formation of a transitional government in July 2003. As in Angola and Liberia, elections were identified as a key component of the peace process and were scheduled for 2006. The vast size of the country, history of violence, and depth of mistrust between different leaders meant that the challenge facing international actors was immense. In the lead-up to the polls, more than 16,000 peacekeepers were deployed as part of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC). By 2007, the Mission had swelled further to a total of 18,400 uniformed personnel including 2,000 civilian staff, at a cost of around \$1 billion. During the election campaign itself, this was supplemented by a European Union (EU) military operation that contributed an additional 1,200

troops to ensure orderly elections. All but \$15 million of the cost of holding the elections was met by donors.

The activities of foreign actors including the EU and United States were coordinated through the International Committee in Support of the Transition (CIAT). Because CIAT was central to the funding and organization of the electoral process, many Congolese assumed that the decisions of the Independent Electoral Commission reflected the will of donors. This was significant, because the donors were seen to favour the victory of the incumbent, Joseph Kabilà, over the two main opposition candidates, Jean-Pierre Bemba and Etienne Tshisekedi. For example, when Tshisekedi decided to abandon his boycott of the polls and to run for the presidency, CIAT administrators refused to reopen voter registration for his supporters, claiming that this would have delayed the elections. Tshisekedi supporters interpreted this ruling as evidence of international sympathy for Kabilà, leading to accusations of political bias against the supposedly neutral international intervention. Yet while such critiques were not without foundation, it would simply not have been feasible to hold credible elections in the absence of U.S. and European support.

In the end, polling day passed off remarkably smoothly. Having secured 45 per cent of the ballot in the first round, Kabilà defeated Bemba in the run-off, winning 58 per cent of the final ballot. Although Bemba questioned the validity of the results, he ultimately accepted defeat and agreed to lead the opposition in parliament. However, precisely because Western governments had sought to construct a democracy in such an inhospitable environment, they found the country's democratic gains particularly hard to safeguard. Shortly after the elections, the International Crisis Group (ICG) warned that continued progress towards democratization was unlikely unless the level of international engagement was maintained. Yet donors were unable and unwilling to stay so intensively involved after the elections. The dissolution of CIAT shortly after the polls undermined the capacity of the international community to protect the independence of key democratic institutions and the space for opposition parties and civil society groups to operate. In turn, this undermined the faith of opposition leaders in the political system and contributed to the impression that foreign governments were prepared to tolerate democratic backsliding.

Partly in response, Kabilà's government progressively removed checks and balances on executive power, undermined the independence of the judiciary, and reduced parliament to little more than a

talking shop. The centralization of power, and Kabila's concomitant failure to implement a system of decentralization – originally designed to promote a sense of inclusion among the country's plethora of ethnic groups – exacerbated inter-communal tensions and led to a rapid deterioration in the security situation. The next presidential elections in 2011 passed without a return to outright conflict, but the circumstances surrounding Kabila's re-election further undermined the legitimacy of the political system.

In contrast to 2006, the main opposition leaders rejected the results while election observers from the Carter Centre questioned the integrity of the polls on the basis of variations in the quality of vote counting across the country. Meanwhile, Tshisekedi, who placed second, claimed that he had won the elections and criticized the international community for not doing more to ensure credible elections after incidents of violence broke out around the country. According to his spokesman, "MONUSCO was supposed to [bolster] security for the Congolese people and also to help us through the electoral process", but instead had become part of the problem because "the election figures were all made up with the complicity of the MONUSCO". As with the Congo Crisis fifty years earlier (see Chapter 1), international actors found themselves becoming part of the problem rather than part of the solution, and struggled to exit the country with their reputations intact. The case of the DRC is thus a good illustration of limitation of externally-managed transitions: in the absence of far reaching change on the ground, democratic gains remain dependent on unfeasible levels of international engagement.

Of course, few African governments were as democratically dependent as the DRC. But between 1990 and 2010 elections continued to receive considerable donor support, even in relatively stable and open states. In Zambia, the unexpected death of President Levy Mwanawasa in August 2008 prompted the UNDP to establish an Open Trust Fund, which raised more than \$6 million in order to allow the country to hold a constitutionally required presidential by-election within 90 days. Similarly, in Malawi, donors provided almost \$30 million to support the electoral process in the three years leading up to polls in 2009. Despite the country's vast oil wealth, donors were even more generous in the run-up to the Nigerian elections of 2015, providing hundreds of millions of dollars worth of support to the electoral process in a country where the government stands accused of stealing and wasting billions of dollars of state resources.

The willingness of the donors to bankroll elections and the reluctance of African leaders to create strong and independent electoral commissions means that, some twenty years on from the reintroduction of multiparty politics, the basic institutions of democracy still lack comprehensive and secure sources of domestic funding in most countries. As a result, they remain vulnerable to executive manipulation and fluctuations in the priorities of the international community.

Mission Creep

Many democracy promotion programmes were requested by African governments, but donors also became drawn into a number of controversial projects that enjoyed far lower levels of political support on the continent and threatened to undermine the legitimacy of Western interventions. This is well illustrated by recent moves to provide foreign aid to political parties. Parties are central to systems of representative democracy because they are the bodies through which the will of the people is supposed to be translated into government policy. Historically, donors left party support to NGOs and Western political parties prepared to support African partners because they feared that engagement in this area would be interpreted as partisan political activity and a violation of sovereignty. However, some donors slowly came to realize that parties' willingness to engage in corrupt and violent activities, coupled with their lack of internal democracy, meant that they were "the weakest link" in African democracies.² They therefore began to engage directly with political parties, despite the fact that in most Western countries parties are banned from receiving funds from foreign governments.

An early example of this trend was the donor support offered to the Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO) rebel movement. Following a long civil war that claimed more than 900,000 lives, a peace accord in 1992 paved the way for the reintroduction of multiparty elections in 1994 under UN stewardship. The rebels faced many pressing challenges, including how to disarm and integrate their forces into the regular Mozambican army, manage disputes between moderates and hardliners over whether to revert to war, and transform the

² Carothers, Thomas. *Confronting the Weakest Link: Aiding Political Parties in New Democracies*. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006.

party's tarnished image: following years of support from the South African government, RENAMO was seen by many to be little more than an apartheid stooge. Meeting these difficulties was all the more problematic because RENAMO had established little by the way of a political or administrative framework prior to 1985.³

Donors' concern to ensure that Mozambique developed a viable opposition party that could act as a check to the power of the Liberation Front of Mozambique (FRELIMO) government resulted in an unprecedented level of engagement, including the creation of a trust fund for the party worth \$18 million. When RENAMO threatened to pull out of the process in October alleging fraud, donors were persuaded to offer an extra \$1 million, effectively paying party leaders off so that they did not sabotage the polls. Donors did not want just any kind of party though, and so they attempted to use their financial leverage to encourage RENAMO to establish internally democratic structures and to focus on substantive issues rather than past grievances and sectional appeals during the campaign. Although such strategies proved largely ineffective, foreign funding was critical to RENAMO's emergence as a credible opposition. Somewhat against the odds, the former rebels took 112 of the 250 available seats in the founding parliamentary election of 1994, enabling them to block constitutional change. Donors thus played a central role not just in rebuilding the political landscape, but in shaping the nature of the party system, the outcome of the elections, and the composition of the legislature. However, this did not last for long: over time the combination of waning donor support and FRELIMO's ability to manipulate the advantages of incumbency resulted in the gradual consolidation of one-party dominance.

Although the intentions of Western governments in the Mozambican case were laudable, there is clearly a danger that if donors start to fund the activities of cash-strapped political parties, Africa's political leaders will have a strong incentive to please foreign governments rather than their own people. This is problematic from the point of view of democratic accountability, and threatens to undermine donors' claims to be politically neutral. It may also result in the emergence of parties that make impressive but unsustainable gains based on foreign support, as in Mozambique. For all of these reasons, the donor

³ Manning, Carrie. "Constructing Opposition in Mozambique: Renamo as Political Party". *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24, 1 (1998), pp. 161–189.

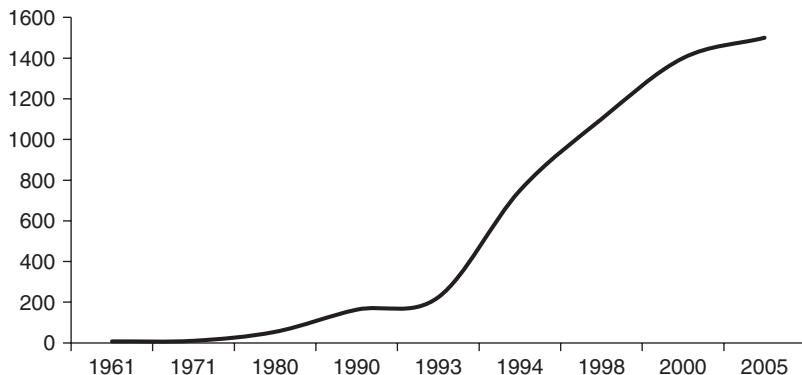


FIGURE 4.2 Officially registered NGOs in Tanzania (1980–2000).

Source: Fitted line to data points in 1961, 1971, 1980, 1990, 1993, 1994, 2005. Data from the Aga Khan Development Network. “The Third Sector in Tanzania”, available online, 2007; Andrew Kiondo. “When the State Withdraws: Local Development, Politics, and Liberalisation in Tanzania”, in Peter Gibbon (ed.), *Liberalised Development in Tanzania: Studies on Accumulation Processes and Local Institutions*. Uppsala, Nordic Africa Institute, 1995; Michael Jennings. *Surrogates of the State, NGOs, Development and Ujamaa in Tanzania*. Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2008.

community is deeply divided over the question of whether to provide support to political parties on a more systematic basis.

Similar concerns have been raised with regards to other more common practices, such as international support for African NGOs. Frustrated by the lack of political will to implement reform within many state bureaucracies and ruling parties, and emboldened by the Berg report’s damning assessment of the economic failures of African governments (see Chapter 3), donors began to look for alternative ways to effect change in the 1990s. They responded by diverting aid funds to civil society groups. By the middle of the decade, USAID was channelling almost half of its assistance through non-state actors in countries where the state was believed to be particularly corrupt and inefficient, as in Kenya.

African civil society activists responded to this new avenue of funding by developing the types of NGOs that donors wanted to support. As a result, the size of the NGO sector expanded rapidly (Figure 4.2). At the same time, parts of the civil society sector became increasingly dominated by groups that sought to represent African communities, but received their funding and their priorities

from foreign capitals. While many NGOs had strong domestic roots, and funders later came to take the local ownership of NGO activities seriously, it is clear that these organizations were funded precisely because they enabled donors to push messages and programs that elected African governments were reluctant to endorse. In countries such as Kenya, this created a dangerous divide between the government and Western-funded civil society groups, which were inherently vulnerable to the accusation that they were doing the dirty work of untrustworthy foreign powers. Moreover, because so much of the funding for key public services such as health and education was channelled through NGOs, they were empowered to negotiate with African governments over the direction of public policy. This process of “NGOization”, along with the economic demands of the IMF and World Bank (see Chapter 6), meant that unelected NGOs were at times empowered to dictate policy to elected leaders.

Donors also funded NGOs to run civic education programs and to strengthen key democratic institutions. For the most part, such programs were welcomed by people who had campaigned long and hard for democratic reforms. However, at times donors’ desire to inculcate democratic norms resulted in mission creep; by the mid-2000s, NGOs were not simply providing information and services, they were engaged in a battle for the hearts and minds of African citizens. In Sierra Leone, efforts to generate a stronger democratic culture focused on shaping the attitudes and beliefs of children because the war had been in part motivated by generational conflicts. A number of international organizations and NGOs, including the United Nations Mission to Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), offered to fund some of the running and staff costs of radio stations in return for the right to broadcast certain messages and programs. NGOs subsequently developed messages designed to disseminate information regarding the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. No one would disagree with the intention of improving the lot of African children, but the attempt to push “right” answers to a range of complex questions around issues such as when it is legitimate for children to work and marry was interpreted by many listeners as an unjustified criticism of local norms. As with donor efforts to reform African political parties, such programs appear to have had relatively little effect, but they nonetheless raise difficult questions about when civic education turns into cultural imperialism.

The Inconsistencies of the International Community

It will strike many readers as somewhat paradoxical that during the era of democratic dependency and mission creep the donor community was willing to trade democracy off against other priorities. To understand why this was the case it is first important to appreciate that there was actually no such thing as a coherent “international community”. Instead, there were a number of competing players who operated at different levels: non-state groups such as NGOs and democracy promotion organizations, which, although often funded by states, had distinctive aims and methods; multinational companies that operated in a number of African countries; internationally recognized states that variously acted as lenders and debtors, peacemakers, and rivals; and, finally, different assemblages of these states into various international and regional bodies, such as the EU, UN, and World Bank.

It was precisely this complex array of countries and organizations, each with their own priorities and modus operandi, which created the opportunity for African leaders to control the pace of reform. All too often, serious attempts by some actors to promote democracy were undermined by the willingness of others to turn a blind eye to authoritarian excess in order to improve their own security or access to resources. Even if we limit the discussion to the role played by states, the picture in the 1990s was remarkably complicated. While almost all Western donors spoke of the need to promote human rights and democracy, the policies of former colonial powers such as France and the United Kingdom owed as much to historical political loyalties, economic networks, and mutual obligations than a rational evaluation of the situation on the ground. France in particular established deep ties to ruling political elites in its sphere of influence, and frequently prioritized these over the rights of ordinary Africans.

The most shocking illustration of this diplomatic double standard is not the example of Togo discussed in Chapter 3, but the case of Rwanda, where around 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus lost their lives in a government-led genocide (see Chapter 5). It is now clear that the French government was aware that radical factions within the government of Juvenal Habyarimana were planning to massacre hundreds of thousands of innocent Hutus in a desperate bid to keep their Tutsi clique in power. Despite this, France delivered large shipments of weapons to the army, engaged in frontline combat against

the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) rebels, and trained many of the militias that would later carry out the killing. Worse was to come. When the atrocities started, the French failed to act decisively and instead intervened to prevent the capture of their allies. This occurred in the same decade that Western governments spoke proudly of their determination to encourage democracy around the world.

Even when donors did set out to prioritize development and democracy, African leaders were often able to use international engagement for their own ends. If manipulating foreign governments was a sport, President Museveni of Uganda would have been World and Olympic champion. As we saw in Chapter 2, after overthrowing Milton Obote's regime in 1986 Museveni constructed a "no-party democracy". Although he subsequently allowed other candidates to contest the presidency in 1996 and 2001, these elections were tightly controlled and political parties remained banned. It was not until 2005 that political parties were legalized, and even then the NRM regime exploited all of the advantages of incumbency to dominate elections in 2006 and 2011. Museveni was so effective at resisting calls to open up the political system because he had an uncanny ability to understand exactly what donors hoped for, and feared. Throughout his early years in power, Museveni emphasized the potentially destabilizing impact of multiparty politics, warning donors that if they forced him to democratize too early they would bring about a return to the chaos of the Idi Amin era. This argument was not without foundation and it was highly effective – the Danish government, among others, argued that a more gradual schedule of reform was necessary given Uganda's history of conflict.

Museveni also proved to be remarkably adept at identifying what foreign governments wanted, and giving it to them. Following decades of failed interventions around the world, European and North American donors were desperate for a success story. By presenting Uganda as a pliant guinea pig on which international aid programs could be tested, Museveni offered donors a chance to show that their policies would have worked if only they had been implemented correctly. Thus, Museveni committed his government to talking about, and tackling, HIV/AIDS at a time when most African governments were refusing to recognize and respond to the danger posed by the pandemic. He also embraced the advice of the IMF and World Bank, accepting economic liberalization as the price of delaying political liberalization.

Initial results were so positive that Uganda became a poster boy for international development agencies. Economic growth increased to 6.5 per cent a year and HIV prevalence rates fell from a high of around 15 per cent in 1991 to around 5 per cent in 2001 (although these figures were later contested). As a result, European development agencies gained a vested interest in maintaining strong ties with the Museveni regime. When the United States began to advocate a more robust democracy promotion approach in the mid-1990s, a number of aid agencies lobbied for criticism to be communicated behind closed doors so that it did not disrupt their positive relationship with the Ugandan government. In doing so, some development agencies clashed with their own foreign ministries, which favoured a tougher approach – demonstrating the potential for disagreements over foreign policy to emerge not only between different governments, but also between different branches of the same government. As a result of these divisions, the same European governments who used their leverage to trigger elections in nearby Kenya (see Chapter 3) publicly argued that it was for the Ugandan people, and not the donor community, to determine the country's political system. Consequently, aid to Uganda came with relatively few political conditions attached. Even before multiparty politics was reintroduced, Uganda received more American aid money per year than Nigeria, despite having only one-fifth the population. Museveni was therefore well placed to resist domestic pressure to democratize.

However, as time went by Uganda increasingly began to look like an embarrassing anomaly, and Museveni came to understand that even he could not keep the winds of change at bay indefinitely. He therefore followed the example of Moi in Kenya, introducing a multiparty system while he still had the authority and resources to control the pace of change. A referendum on the introduction of multipartyism was accompanied by a constitutional amendment that scrapped presidential term limits, enabling him to remain in power. The run-up to the 2006 presidential elections followed in a similar vein, as Museveni secured 60 per cent of the vote, but only after the widespread harassment of opposition candidates and supporters.

Museveni's reluctance to allow for a level playing field finally forced donors to question their alliance with the National Resistance Movement (NRM), prompting the United Kingdom to cancel £5 million worth of aid. Recognizing that the credit he had gained as a good development partner was running out, Museveni looked for

other ways to stymie international criticism. He quickly realized that events in Somalia represented the ideal opportunity to once again make his regime indispensable to European and North American governments. Against a backdrop of endemic instability, the United States feared that the absence of an effective central government in Somalia would facilitate the spread of radical Islamic groups within the region. Following a number of deadly bomb attacks in Uganda by the Somali based group al Shabaab, Museveni, and a number of other East African leaders, came to share these concerns. However, although the African Union agreed to provide a peacekeeping force, launching the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) on 17 January 2007, few countries were prepared to actually contribute troops to the effort. By providing 2,500 peacekeepers, nearly half of the 5,100 total, Museveni cleverly positioned himself as a valuable American ally in the war on terror. Moreover, the failure of AMISOM to secure its original target of 8,000 troops left international efforts in Somalia heavily reliant on Ugandan support, which in turn undermined the willingness of the UK and U.S. governments to censure Museveni for the absence of meaningful reform. Once again, the tail wagged the dog.

Ugandan democracy was not the only casualty of the war on terror. Following the terrorist attacks by al-Qaeda on 11 September 2001 – and with the bombing of the U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 still fresh in the memory – the American government encouraged African states to introduce antiterror legislation. Many leaders did as they were asked, in part because they realised that such policies could be manipulated to empower the security forces, roll back human rights legislation, and facilitate the targeting of minorities. As a result, Amnesty International found major problems with anti-terror legislation in Kenya, Ethiopia, Mauritius, and Uganda between 2001 and 2010. U.S. policy was thus marked by a problematic inconsistency as different departments of the U.S. government worked against each other. While USAID was spending hundreds of millions of dollars supporting good governance programs, the United States was also funding military training in some of the continent's least democratic regimes (Table 4.2). Although much of this expenditure was aimed at increasing the professionalism of the security services, it inevitably strengthened the coercive capacity of a number of profoundly authoritarian governments. Moreover, the willingness of the State Department to channel funds to repressive regimes in Angola and

TABLE 4.2 *American military expenditure in selected countries (2007), thousand US\$*

	Freedom House rating*	Military & education training	Military financing	Antiterrorism	Total
Angola	Not Free	289	—	4,850	5,139
Chad	Not Free	392	—	795	1,187
DRC	Not Free	—	263	1,375	1,638
Djibouti	Partly Free	3,800	345	356	4,501
Ethiopia	Partly Free	1,900	472	1,150	3,522
Ghana	Free	500	643	38	1,181
Nigeria	Partly Free	1,000	696	1,862	3,558
Sudan	Not Free	96	3,725	84,000	87,821
Tanzania	Partly Free	66	—	2,302	2,368

*The Freedom House overall ratings is based on the average of an average of the country's political rights and civil score. On a 1–7 scale in which lower scores = more free, countries that average 1.0 to 2.5 are considered Free, 3.0 to 5.0 Partly Free, and 5.5 to 7.0 Not Free.

Source: *Freedom House and the US Department of Defence*.

Ethiopia signalled that a lack of democracy was not a barrier to profitable relations with Washington.

It was not just foreign governments that made it easier for authoritarian leaders to retain control – African states also contributed to the inconsistency of the international community. On the one hand, some of the continent's most influential governments have been willing to promote democracy across their borders. Despite its own democratic deficit, Nigeria led peacekeeping and democracy promotion efforts in West Africa through ECOWAS, as demonstrated by its constructive role in Liberia. Similarly, the ANC government in South Africa played an important role in brokering peace negotiations in Burundi and the DRC, and in shaping outcomes throughout southern Africa. Post-2000 there were also increasing signs that African governments were willing to commit themselves to the promotion of human rights and democracy, at least on paper.

In 2001, the Organization for African Unity (OAU), which brought together fifty-three African states, established the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and created the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) in 2003. Through NEPAD and the APRM, member states committed themselves to a self-monitoring process in which they would review each other's progress with

regards to political, economic, and corporate governance. When the African Union (AU) replaced the OAU in 2005, a pledge to protect human rights was enshrined in the new organization's founding charter. Going far beyond the commitments undertaken by members of the EU and the UN, the AU asserted the right to "intervene in a Member State pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity".

On the other hand, African leaders have also colluded to insulate each other from external pressure to reform. Part of the reason that African governments were willing to sign groundbreaking agreements to protect human rights at the regional level was that they did not expect the AU to have the institutional capacity and political will to act. To be fair, this has not always been the case. Following flawed elections in 2010 the AU moved to suspend Côte d'Ivoire and recognize the opposition leader, Alassane Ouattara, as the country's "democratically elected president". Two years later, Guinea Bissau and Mali were also suspended following military coups. But all too often African governments have pulled their punches when it came to promoting democracy.

This is well illustrated by the case of Zimbabwe. Following a prolonged liberation war against the white minority regime of Ian Smith, Robert Mugabe came to power through a negotiated transition to majority rule in 1980. For the next fifteen years, his ZANU-PF government dominated the political landscape. But in the late 1990s economic crisis, a failed military intervention in the DRC, and the centralization of power under Mugabe combined to erode the government's popularity. Opposition crystallized around a constitutional referendum in 2000, when critics of Mugabe's "undemocratic" proposals formed the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) and inflicted a humiliating defeat on the president. The success of the "no" campaign encouraged many groups and leaders that had been part of the NCA to contest the parliamentary elections later that year under the banner of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).

Mugabe was quick to recognize the threat posed by the MDC. But despite extensive electoral fraud and voter intimidation, the new party still won 57 out of 120 elected seats. Ahead of the presidential elections in 2002, the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) government began a systematic campaign of harassment against opposition candidates to ensure Mugabe's victory. Although

the elections were described as “credible, free and fair” by the OAU, commonwealth observers concluded that they had been “marred by a high level of politically motivated violence and intimidation”. Zimbabwe was subsequently suspended from the commonwealth and cut off from IMF and World Bank support. The same year, George W. Bush introduced Executive Order 13288, imposing sanctions “against specifically identified individuals and entities in Zimbabwe”. Following an intensification of attacks on the MDC, the United States branded Mugabe’s regime one of the world’s six “outposts of tyranny” and introduced a resolution at the UN to establish an arms embargo.

The strong desire of the United States and Britain to promote genuine reform meant that, in contrast to the strategy that they adopted in similar cases elsewhere in Africa (see Conclusion), they were reluctant to resolve the electoral crisis through a power-sharing deal that would enable Mugabe to retain the presidency. However, regional governments refused to adopt sanctions against the ZANU-PF leadership. Debates at the UN in 2008 revealed a split between the United States, backed by Britain, France, Belgium, Burkina Faso, Costa Rica, Croatia, Italy, and Panama, and a range of governments that spoke against sanctions, including China, Russia, South Africa, Tanzania, and Angola. Because Mugabe was so adept at depicting British intervention as colonial aggression, and because South Africa enjoyed considerable influence in Zimbabwe and the southern African region as a result of its economic power, Western governments were forced to take a back seat in negotiations. This significantly eased the pressure on ZANU-PF to reform.

Although Zambian President Levy Mwanawasa and Botswanan President Ian Khama spoke out against ZANU-PF, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) was more influenced by the South African president, Thabo Mbeki. Significantly, the ANC leader appears to have felt a greater connection to the authoritarian government than to the opposition, despite his country’s strong democratic credentials. In part, this was because Mbeki did not respect the MDC’s leader Morgan Tsvangirai, who he saw as being uneducated and untrustworthy. The South African leader’s stance was also motivated by strategic considerations. His British education, elitist reputation, and neo-liberal economic policies left him vulnerable to the accusation that he was a Western stooge, especially when contrasted to the liberation war credentials of his main rival, Jacob Zuma, who had been a prominent figure in the armed wing of the ANC. Given

this, supporting international efforts to force a liberation hero from power would have been a risky strategy. Instead, Mbeki pushed for a strategy of “quiet diplomacy” that would be led by regional governments, in line with personal commitment to find “African solutions for African problems” as part of an “African renaissance”. South Africa thus blocked British attempts to extend commonwealth sanctions in September 2002, and consistently followed the same strategy for the next decade.

Unsurprisingly, the general election of 2008 was once again marked by electoral fraud and the widespread repression of opposition supporters. Although the MDC won the most votes in the first round of the presidential contest, the extent of the violence deployed by the government forced Tsvangirai to withdraw from the run-off. Despite this, Mbeki supported proposals for a power-sharing deal that allowed Mugabe to retain the presidency and many key ministries (see Conclusion). Once again, inconsistencies within the international community created just enough wriggle room for an authoritarian incumbent to cling on to power.

Between 1990 and 2010, then, the impact of the international community on the direction of political change on the continent was not unlike a car being driven by multiple drivers. When everyone pointed in the same direction, incumbents faced real incentives to move in the direction of democratic reform. But all too often, rival powers identified contradictory destinations and effectively cancelled each other out, leaving the fate of democracy to be decided by domestic forces.

Enter the Dragon

In the 1990s, China emerged as a global superpower, transforming the complexion of the international community. The rapid escalation of Chinese engagement in Africa was driven by a desire to broadcast power on a global basis and a need for raw materials and new markets. In October 2000, the government of the People’s Republic China (PRC) held the first Ministerial Conference of the Forum of China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), bringing representatives of forty-four African countries and seventeen regional and international organizations to Beijing to establish “a new long-term and stable partnership based on equality”. The speed with which this “partnership” developed was remarkable. As early as 2003, Chinese arms sales

to Africa were worth almost \$1.5 billion, more than any European country. By 2006, Chinese trade with the continent had surpassed \$100 billion, eclipsing all competitors bar the United States. And by 2008, almost 1,000 Chinese state-owned firms were operating in Africa, while more than a million Chinese citizens were said to be living in Africa. Over the same period, rising Chinese demand for natural resources, combined with investment from Chinese firms and small-scale entrepreneurs, transformed the continent's economic outlook (see Chapter 6). In 2013, the value of Chinese trade with the continent topped \$200 billion – more than twice the \$85 billion traded between Africa and the United States.

African governments found Chinese assistance particularly attractive because it came with less political strings attached and was often delivered in the form of long-term concessionary loans. Although this had the negative consequence of increasing the debt burden of many states, it also meant that African governments enjoyed greater freedom to determine their spending priorities, and were not required to demonstrate democratic credentials in order to receive support. This development was naturally a considerable source of consternation for the democracy promotion community, who feared that it would reduce the dependency of African countries on Western donors, and so undermine their traction on a range of political and economic issues. Most significantly, the absence of democracy back home meant that China had no interest in forcing the pace of political liberalization abroad. China's economic success also worried many European and North American development agencies because it demonstrated that state-directed development within a one-party state could lead to economic growth, and so challenged the IMF and World Bank's favoured policy of simultaneous political and economic liberalization.

Such fears were not without foundation; Chinese support has clearly enabled some African autocrats to resist calls for reform. Most famously, China continued to work closely with the regime of Omar al-Bashir in Sudan despite international criticism of human rights abuses in the Darfur region. In the five years between 2000 and 2005, when condemnation of the Bashir government was at its peak, trade between China and Sudan increased from \$890 million to \$3.9 billion. During the same period, attempts to build support for action against the Sudanese government within the UN Security Council were undermined by the threat of a Chinese veto. When Bashir was indicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for

war crimes and crimes against humanity, the Chinese government expressed concern and urged the ICC “not to hear this case for the time being”. Sudan was not an isolated case. In 2004, China’s Eximbank provided \$2 billion in credit to the Angolan government to support projects such as the restoration of the Benguela railway. Combined with a range of other deals and vast investments by Chinese companies in Angola’s oil sector, such loans reduced the country’s reliance on the IMF and Western donors and strengthened President dos Santos’s resolve to resist Western pressure for economic and political reform.

But China’s impact on democracy promotion was not as dramatic as has often been claimed. For one thing, the number of countries in which the rise of China has reshaped the political and economic landscape was more limited than is often assumed. According to estimates published by the Department for International Development of the UK government (DfID), between 2006 and 2008 a quarter of two-way trade between China and Africa occurred with just one country – Angola. A further 18 per cent was accounted for by South Africa. In other words, beyond a small number of other countries that included the Republic of Congo, Nigeria, and Sudan, the actual impact of Chinese aid and trade was limited. Overall, direct relations with China substantially changed the economic position of only ten or so resource-rich African states – although many more benefitted from rising export prices as a result of Chinese demand. Indeed, while total African exports to China increased by 110 per cent between 2006 and 2008, the exports of sixteen countries, including Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda, actually fell. Chinese engagement was also tightly concentrated around trade deals and was much less significant in the realm of aid: by 2007 Chinese aid to sub-Saharan Africa was only around half a billion dollars, compared to the \$30 billion provided by members of the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD). As a result, China did not represent a genuine alternative to engagement with Western donors for the majority of African governments.

It is also important to note that in some cases the Chinese government has proved willing to readjust its Africa policy in the light of feedback from the international community. Following widespread criticism of its cosy relationship with Bashir’s National Congress Party (NCP), the Chinese government committed itself to playing a more “constructive” role in dealing with his regime. Sudan was

subsequently removed from a list of privileged investment destinations for which companies could receive government subsidies. At the same time, the Chinese government took on a far more prominent role in international efforts to bring peace and stability to a range of African countries, providing more than 3,000 peacekeepers for missions in Liberia, the DRC, and Sudan. Whether China will remain true to its policy of “unconditionality”, or will gradually start to conform to Western expectations, remains to be seen.

There are other good reasons to question whether the resurgence of China represents a “game changer” for African democracy. Most significantly, China’s refusal to apply political conditions to its economic packages did not undermine a pro-democracy consensus among Western donors, because, as we have seen, there was no such consensus to disrupt. China’s support for Sudan was no more disastrous to the fate of democracy in that country than French support to the Habyarimana regime was for Rwanda, or South African support to the Mugabe regime was for Zimbabwe. The international community was already deeply divided by the time that China rose to prominence. The addition of another major player on the global scene further complicated an already messy picture, but in terms of the overall impact of foreign governments on African democracy it did not represent a paradigm shift.

Consider Nigeria. The West African oil giant initially turned to China following Western condemnation of Sani Abacha’s government for carrying out the death penalty on Ken Saro-Wiwa and other members of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) in 1995. China’s willingness to engage with Abacha’s regime in return for access to oil significantly eased the pressure for reform that other international actors had been seeking to build. The relationship between the two countries continued to grow over the next two decades: by 2009, Nigeria was one of China’s top ten African trading partners, receiving billions of dollars of investment from the CNPC, and regular visits from President Hu Jintao. Nigeria therefore seems to be a classic example of how Chinese engagement has undermined democracy promotion efforts. But it was not just China that pulled its punches where Nigeria was concerned.

Although the U.S. government was highly critical of Abacha, following the reintroduction of multiparty politics the United States adopted a much more lenient stance towards the government of Olusegun Obasanjo. In part, this was because Obasanjo had been one

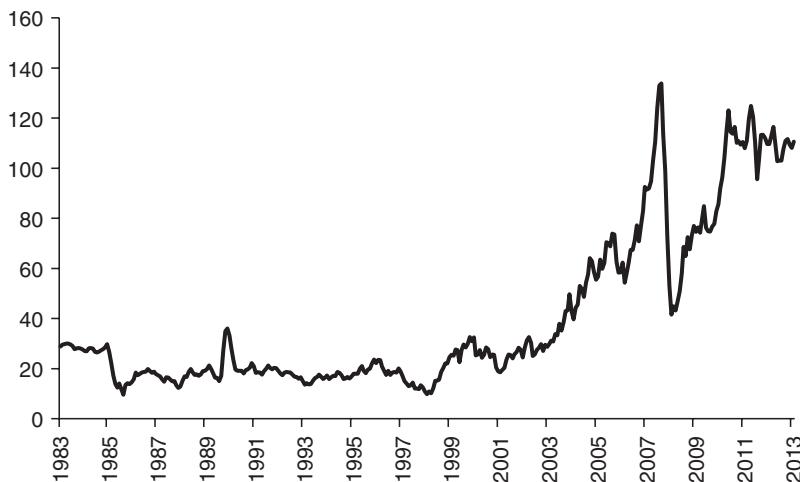


FIGURE 4.3 The price of crude oil on world markets (1983–2013), price per barrel in current US\$.

Source: *Index Mundi*.

of the only African military leaders willing to transfer power to an elected government during the 1970s, and because his tenure in office (1999–2007) was significantly more peaceful and democratic than that of his predecessors. But when Obasanjo's People's Democratic Party (PDP) became increasingly corrupt and authoritarian, the United States frequently failed to speak out. It did so for much the same reason as China – the United States was afraid of compromising its relationship with a key regional ally and one of the world's largest oil producers. Instability in the supply of oil from 2003 onward had resulted in a significant increase in prices (Figure 4.3). In response, the United States moved to reduce its dependence on the Middle East by diversifying its sources of oil. One of the countries that it looked to was Nigeria, which by 2006 was servicing around a third of the U.S.'s oil needs.

It should therefore come as no surprise that when Obasanjo presided over a flawed election in 2007 – described by some observers as the worst they had ever witnessed – U.S. criticism was muted, or that relations with the PDP regime subsequently continued much as before. The willingness of the United States to tolerate democratic backsliding reflected a more general trend in which the economic importance of oil, and the financial independence it guaranteed,

insulated resource-rich governments from both domestic and international criticism (see Introduction). The argument that petro-states such as Angola, Nigeria, and Sudan would have made real democratic progress had it not been for the rise of China is therefore based on a profound misreading of Africa's recent history. The complex and contradictory nature of the international community today does not represent a new threat to democracy on the continent; it has always been so.

Select Bibliography

- Abrahamsen, Rita. *Disciplining Democracy: Development Discourse and Good Governance in Africa*. London: Zed Books, 2000.
- Alden, Chris, Daniel Large, and Ricardo Soares de Oliveira (eds). *China Returns to Africa: A Rising Power and a Continent Embrace*. London: Hurst and Co., 2008.
- Krishna Kumar (ed.). *Postconflict Elections, Democratization, and International Assistance*. London: Lynne Rienner, 1998.
- Ottaway, Marina, and Thomas Carothers (eds). *Funding Virtue: Civil Society, Aid and Democracy Promotion*. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000.

For a bibliography for this chapter go to www.democracyinafrica.org