



**Background
Guide**



Orpheus MUN

**UNGA: POWER OF DEMOCRACY
IN THE LIGHT OF PREVALENT
AUTHORITARIAN RULE
WITH FOCUS ON AFRICA**

2023

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Letter From the Executive Board

Respected Delegates,

As the Executive Board of the United Nations General Assembly, it is our utmost pleasure to welcome you all to Orpheus MUN 2023. To begin with, we need to first understand the committee. We expect you to fully understand the mandate of UNGA so that you can have a better understanding on what is the scope of discussion we will aim to have inside the committee.

We expect you all to research most effectively in order to address the root causes of the problem concerning the agenda. This study guide is not authoritarian and exhaustive. This is the foundation of your research.

Your way of speaking doesn't matter as much as your research. Oratory skills and fluency will not have much weightage compared to your research. Research well and speak it to the committee; you will make sense.

We look forward to an exciting and interesting committee, which the all-pervasive nature of the issue should certainly help. The executive board hopes to learn from being part of this committee as much as you do.

Feel free to contact the executive board regarding any doubts.

Ms. Vidhi Singh
Gaur

Co-Chairperson

Mr. Radhekrishnan

Co-Chairperson

Agenda: Power of Democracy in the light of prevalent Authoritarianism with focus on Africa

History

European colonialism in Africa was brief, lasting less than a century for most of the continent. Nevertheless, scholars have enumerated myriad long-term political effects of this brief period of colonial rule. First, Europeans determined the number, size, and shape of African states through their partition of the continent, with contemporary implications for state viability, strength, and legitimacy. Second, colonial rule influenced the nature of ethnic boundaries and their salience for politics through the use of indirect rule, language and labour policies, and the location of internal administrative boundaries. Third, colonial rule significantly shaped the nature of postcolonial state-society relations by divorcing the state from civil society during the colonial era and by engendering deep mistrust of the state as a benevolent actor. Fourth, many colonial institutions were preserved at independence, including the marriage of state institutions and customary rule, with deleterious effects.

Fifth, differential colonial investments across communities and regions generated significant inequality, with continued political implications in the 21st century. The identification of these long-term effects has largely resulted from empirical comparisons across different forms of colonial rule, especially comparing territories administered by different colonial powers. Future research should move beyond this blunt approach, instead pursuing more disaggregated and nuanced measures of both colonial rule and its political legacies, as well as more scholarship on the long-term interaction between colonial and indigenous political institutions.

Phases of Colonisation in Africa:

It is broadly divided into two phases – Mercantile and Industrial phases.

Mercantile Phase:

- This is called as Mercantilism because the major motto of colonial powers was to establish supremacy in **trading relationships**. They sought to source merchandise cheaply and sell it at a premium in European markets.
- They controlled high seas and used this as a means for '**Gunboat diplomacy**' and later establishing extensive empires in the Americas, East Indies (present-day Indonesia) etc.
- The technological superiority of Colonialists wasn't as much as in the later industrial phase. So, they were able to subjugate **only relatively primitive peoples**. Countries with well-established state systems and cultures were able to repel colonialists. (For

example, in India, Mughal emperor Aurangzeb defeated British East India Company in Child's War, 1686. China wasn't attacked till the Opium Wars of the nineteenth century).

- Goods from the east were still in great demand across Europe. So they worked under the trading systems laid by the strong states of India and China.

Industrial Phase:

- This coincided with the Industrial Revolution in Western Europe and the United States of America. The relative technological supremacy and decadence in the Eastern states meant that Europe could interfere in the internal affairs of these states.
- European states used gunboat diplomacy (Opium Wars in China) as well as vile political machinations (Bengal in India, leading to the Battle of Plassey, 1757) to secure their aims.
- Apart from trade, they sought to **secure vast markets** for the new industrial goods produced through the Industrial revolution in these countries. Political influence gained in these countries were used to destroy traditional industries and promoted cheap, mass-produced European goods. Eg: Destruction of the famed textile industry of Bengal by the British to promote cheap cotton from the textile mills of England.
- Colonies were used to source cheap raw materials and value-added manufactured goods were dumped in the colonies under the banner of "Free trade".
- The colonial powers controlled foreign, monetary and trade policies. This meant an advantage to the industrialists at home. This led to the famous **drain of wealth** from the colonies.

Colonialism reached its logical conclusion with the rise of new industrial powers in Europe – Germany and Italy. This led to a competition for accruing larger and larger empires that meant more power and prestige to these countries. This was most pronounced in the tragic event of **Scramble for Africa**.

Decolonization of Africa

It was the **cultural, economic and political process** through which colonies broke free from the colonial empires and integrated themselves to the new 'world order'.

Cultural:

- Colonial empires were generally founded on principles of **Racism and 'right to rule'** over inferior races. These narratives had to be challenged.
- An image of **benevolent and modernising influence** was used as a pretext for colonial exploitation. However, this was later broken. (Eg: Indian National Congress popularised the theory of drain of wealth to demolish the claim of the civilising influence of British Raj)

- The self-confidence of people had to be boosted. Exercises of **cultural integration** and **the creation of national identities** and a shared past were emphasised. Eg: Ancient Greek (Hellenistic) culture was emphasised in the Greek War of Independence, 1829 against the Ottoman Empire. In India, achievements of four ancient civilisations were popularised.
- Most states were successful in this regard, though deep-rooted tribal differences and prejudices led to problems in Africa.

Political:

- Newly freed states had to be allowed to follow an **independent foreign policy**. They had to raise resources and build **stable institutions** (Eg: An Army subject to strict civilian control).
- Representative and democratic institutions needed to be built. This needed an enlightened citizenry and an empowered leadership.

Economic:

- The old European powers sought to exert influence in newly independent states through biased trade policies. This came to be known as **Neo-Colonialism**.
- Most of the investment in these countries came from the erstwhile colonizers. So they were able to control new governments through lobbying and other informal (often corrupt) means.
- Colonial powers were technologically advanced. So they used it as a leverage in **directing foreign investment** and hence controlling the new states. They sought to guard their technological supremacy through tight

Intellectual property regimes.

Challenges to Africa:

Africa faced many unique challenges which made Decolonisation a very difficult process. These were common to most of the new states in Africa.

- **Tribal differences:** Many countries were brought together by the sheer military forces of the colonizers. Lack of a common cultural past and tribal belligerence meant that they slaughtered each other inside these artificial boundaries imposed upon them. This led to worst genocides in Nigeria, Congo (Zaire), Burundi and Rwanda.
- **Cold war rivalry:** Since most of them were resource-rich, the two major blocs didn't want more states slipping into the orbit of its rival power. This led to prolonged civilwars. Eg: Angola, Uganda, Burundi etc.
- **Economic underdevelopment:** Colonisers used them as sources of raw materials. So lack of industries and primitive agriculture made them susceptible to Neo-

Colonialism. Also, most of their economies were entirely dependent upon the export of one or two commodities. When international prices fell, they plunged into political instability and civil wars. Eg: Nigeria, Ghana, Tanzania, Burundi etc.

- **Political and Social problems:** Most colonial powers refused education to Africans. This led to the deficiency in enlightened leadership and a general faith in democratic means. This meant that most countries plunged into corruption and civil war soon after independence.
- **Economic and Natural Disasters:** Devastating famines of the 1980s and ongoing famines due to climate change are spelling disaster to these countries. These events end up ruining economies and destabilising governments. Through the 90s, the spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemic also posed a grave threat to these countries. During the last two decades, climate change-induced disasters are seen to affect third world countries, especially those in Africa.
- **Ethnic conflict:** In some countries with an influential white settler population, Decolonisation was a more complex affair. They offered firm resistance because they were privileged under the old system. Eg: Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and the erstwhile Apartheid regime of South Africa. Sometimes, as in Zimbabwe, forced taking away of estates from the white minority led to an overall fall in productivity and caused economic crises.
- **Religious Extremism:** This is a fairly recent phenomenon in which Islamist ideologies taking over Muslim populations of these countries. Eg: Boko Haram in Nigeria, Al- Shabab in Somalia.

A democratic decline, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, is underway in sub-Saharan Africa. More Africans live under fully or partially authoritarian states today than at most points in the last two decades. Even before the pandemic, an increasing number of African heads of state had moved to undermine term limits or rig elections to remain in power. But COVID-19 has given them greater leverage, providing further pretext for postponing elections in Somalia and Ethiopia, muzzling opposition figures in Uganda and Tanzania, and imposing restrictions on media across the continent. The enforcement of pandemic restrictions by security services has often been brutal, provoking demonstrations in Kenya and even in more advanced democracies such as South Africa. As governments across the continent become, with some exceptions, more authoritarian, Africans will be increasingly alienated from those claiming to represent them. Political instability can manifest itself in severe episodes of violence, as is already being seen in Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Nigeria. Such turmoil will grow as

elites compete for power and citizens resist oppressive regimes, and will, in turn, inhibit social and economic development, to the disadvantage of the continent's rapidly growing population. Taken together, these forces also drive internal displacement and outward migration—both to other African countries and to Europe. Addressing these issues will require grappling with long-standing grievances left untreated and often exacerbated by the poor, sometimes brutal governance that is all too common across the African continent. development, to the disadvantage of the continent's rapidly growing population. Taken together, these forces also drive internal displacement and outward migration—both to other African countries and to Europe. Addressing these issues will require grappling with long-standing grievances left untreated and often exacerbated by the poor, sometimes brutal governance that is all too common across the African continent.

Trends in Africa's Democratic Trajectory

Temporal: Gradual Gains for Authoritarians

In its 2021 report, Freedom House rated only eight countries in sub-Saharan Africa as free. Of these eight, half are small island states: Cape Verde, Mauritius, Sao Tome and Principe, and Seychelles. Others, such as Botswana, enjoy high levels of economic and social development. Strong institutions of government are a common feature, acting as a bulwark against self-interested leaders, such as former South African President Jacob Zuma, who is now on trial for corruption. They also provide added stability around elections. In Ghana's 2020 election, former President John Mahama, running as the opposition candidate, rejected his defeat. But when the country's Supreme Court upheld incumbent President Nana Akufo-

Addo's victory, Mahama accepted the results, conceding that he was "legally bound by the decisions of the Supreme Court." Large-scale violence was absent from the electoral process; five people, however, were killed in postelection violence.

Meanwhile, the number of African countries that Freedom House rated “not free” has grown from a low of fourteen in 2006 and 2008 to twenty in 2021. In Africa, authoritarian states are often run by strongmen, geriatric “leaders for life,” some of whom are now looking to anoint their sons as their successors. These countries usually have low levels of social development, underdeveloped civil organizations, and weak institutions of government. Rwanda is an exception: its social development indicators rank higher than its human rights standing, and its president, Paul Kagame, is relatively young at sixty-three years of age. In other countries, such as the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, and South Sudan, power has changed hands more frequently, though transfers have come from coups, wars, or deals between elites made behind closed doors.

Despite the decline, a plurality of countries (twenty-two) are considered “partially free,” in line with the sixteen-year average. However, within this category, increasingly populist governments are suppressing opposition groups, postponing elections, eliminating term limits, and abusing human rights to maintain power. This growing trend is driving democratic backsliding on the continent. Yet, a single defining characteristic for these countries is difficult to pin down. Tanzania and Zambia, for example, have largely avoided the ethnic and religious conflicts that afflict Nigeria and Mozambique. Kenya and the Ivory Coast, both with gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of around \$2,000, are significantly richer than Malawi and the breakaway territory of Somaliland (rated separately from Somalia by Freedom House), each with income per person at around \$400.

Regional: Following One’s Neighbours

Geography is not quite destiny, but similarly rated countries do tend to form clusters. West Africa and East Africa both have mostly partially free regimes. Ghana is the most notable, positive exception in West Africa. In southern Africa, the triumvirate of Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa are all considered free. However, in Central Africa and the Horn, almost all states are authoritarian. Small island nations make up an

outsized share of “free” African countries, and they are freer on average than similarly sized countries on the mainland, such as Djibouti and Eswatini. Littoral states are also, on average, freer than landlocked ones, likely benefitting from increased interactions with foreigners from democratic societies—a factor more important prior to the advent of the digital age. Economic prosperity, also concentrated on the coasts [PDF], likely has also influenced a positive democratic trajectory.

Digital: The Information Generation

The internet and social media are increasingly empowering Africa’s youthful population to become politically active. This has been seen in Nigeria, where #EndSARS protesters organized online to demand police reforms; in Uganda, where presidential candidate Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, better known as Bobi Wine, used social media to catalyze his People Power movement; and in Ghana, where Twitter users instigated a national discussion on illegal small-scale mining.

Yet, these movements have frequently been met with an equal and opposite reaction: Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni cracked down on activists and implemented a social media ban; in Nigeria, protesters were massacred by army and police forces.

More broadly, digital repression has become commonplace—especially around elections—as leaders seek to throttle the opposition and influence popular discourse, frequently through disinformation. As in other parts of

the world, it thus remains unclear whether the increasing prevalence and importance of the internet and social media, in their totality, will have a beneficial, deleterious, or ambiguous effect on democracy.

COVID-19: Pandemic Politics

Earlier this year, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned that “using the pandemic as a pretext, authorities in some countries have deployed heavy-handed

security responses and emergency measures to crush dissent, criminalize basic freedoms, silence independent reporting, and curtail the activities of nongovernmental organizations.” Freedom House reported in late 2020 that democracy in eighty countries was worse off due to the pandemic. Examples can be found across Africa: from Guinea to Somalia to South Africa, democracy ratings slid amid the COVID-19 crisis.

Tanzania offers a stark example. President John Magufuli repeatedly downplayed the threat posed by COVID-19, claiming that prayer had defeated the disease in his country. The government criminalized the sharing of “unofficial” data and used the law to restrict news coverage of the outbreak and other matters in the run-up to the October 2020 presidential election, which Magufuli won through intimidation and fraud. In March 2021, Magufuli died—his death was attributed to heart disease but was likely brought on by COVID-19. During the president’s weekslong public absence prior, at least one man was arrested for questioning his health.

Initial signs following Magufuli’s death are promising for Tanzanian democracy: Samia Suluhu Hassan, the vice president under Magufuli, was sworn in as president as prescribed by the constitution. President Hassan has shifted the country toward a more evidence-based approach to COVID-19 and reached out to the opposition. But some critics remain unconvinced. After signaling an intention to lift all media bans in the country, Hassan walked back the decision. Opposition figures including Tundu Lissu and Freeman Mbowe have called for a new constitution that limits presidential powers.

COVID-19 has also dramatically redirected Ethiopia's political landscape deeper into authoritarianism. After the central government used the pandemic to postpone parliamentary elections scheduled for August 2020, leaders from the Tigray region held local elections in defiance of the order. Now, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize for earlier reconciliation efforts with neighboring Eritrea, is waging war in the north of his country. Eritrean troops—overtly or tacitly supported by the Ethiopian government—have reportedly committed a range of atrocities, while

Abiy's government stands accused of attempting to starve large swathes of the Tigrayan population into submission.

Yet, Malawi offers a bright spot amid the pandemic. According to Freedom House, Malawi was the sole country globally whose democracy strengthened during COVID-19 lockdowns, after it became the first African country to overturn a fraudulent election through legal means and conduct a free and fair follow-up election.

The *Economist* declared it country of the year. At his swearing-in, Malawian President Lazarus Chakwera said he would lead "a government that serves, not a government that rule." Many Africans, it seems, stand ready to push for the same from their own leaders and governments.

Note To delegate

Please go through the additional resources:

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2020/10/30/threats-to-democracy-in-africa-the-rise-of-the-constitutional-coup/>

<https://www.cfr.org/article/whats-happening-democracy-africa>

<https://cap-press.com/pdf/2273.pdf>

https://www.economist.com/leaders/2016/08/20/africas-fragile-democracies?gclid=CjwKCAiA2fmdBhBpEiwA4CcHzYzW5Y47YwlgpyDw1BwzRYvM8CaEYr_w-H8oveBZLVVUEC4fiRim5hRoCkowQAvD_BwE&gclid=aw.ds

