

Policyweekly

Protecting Democracies in Africa through Continental Coalition of Civil Societies



Policy Recommendations

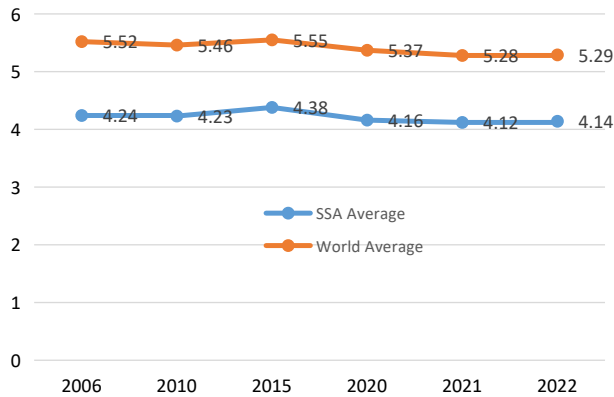
- 1 Existing CSO networks working in the area of democracy should scale up regional networks.
- 2 There is a need for CSO networks to partner with think tanks for evidence-based programming.
- 3 CSO coalitions must put in place robust sustainability strategies to ensure that the coalition is sustained as a formidable community of practice for the protection of democracies in Africa.
- 4 Continental and regional organisations should deepen partnership with CSO coalitions.
- 5 There is a need for development partners to prioritise support for CSO coalitions.

Introduction

[Reports](#) on the state of global democracy in 2022 reveal the decline in and stagnation of democracy around the world. The situation is worsening in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), particularly in the Sahel, where coup d'état and unconstitutional transfers of power continue to undermine democracy. Since 2019, at [least 17 coups](#) have been attempted in the Sahel, leading to unconstitutional transfer of power in Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, Mali and more recently in Niger. Beyond the wave of coups d'état, many sub-Saharan African countries are performing poorly in various democratic indices. Data from the [Economist Intelligence Unit \(EIU\)](#) show that in the past two decades, SSA as a region declined from a democracy index score of 4.24 in 2006 to 4.12 in 2022 (fig. 1). The region also consistently performed below the global average in the EIU democracy index which is measured by five indicators: electoral process and pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, political culture, and civil liberties. In 2022, SSA's lowest scores were in indices relating to elections and governance (fig. 2). As of 2022, only one out of 44 countries in SSA was classified as full democracy, six were classified as 'flawed democracies', 14 as 'hybrid regimes' and 23 were

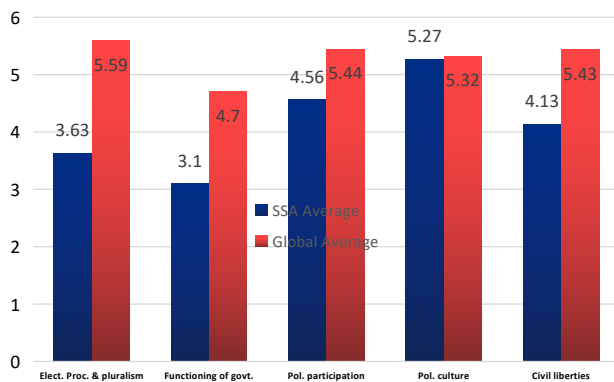
classified as ‘authoritarian regimes’ (fig. 3). [Experts](#) argue that more democratic governments in the Sahel may fall through coups d’état if attention is not given to the underlying triggers of coups in Africa.

Fig. 1: Democracy Index 2006-22



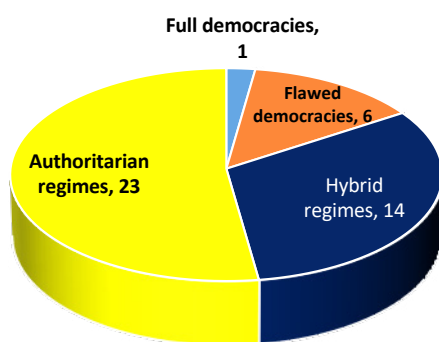
Source: Based on data from Economist Intelligence Unit (2022), <https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2022/>

Fig. 2: SSA 2022 Scores on Democracy Indicators



Source: Based on data from Economist Intelligence Unit (2022), <https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2022/>

Fig. 3: Regime Types across SSA, 2022



Source: Based on data from Economist Intelligence Unit (2022), <https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2022/>

Meanwhile, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have mushroomed across SSAs, partly in response to the need to strengthen democracies across the region. Studies attest to the role of CSOs in protecting democracies in Africa, particularly through promoting credible elections. Yet, much still needs to be done to bolster the works of CSOs in protecting democracies. This edition of Nextier SPD Policy Weekly explains the democratic backsliding across Africa and advocates for regional coalition building among CSOs for a deeper impact in their efforts to protect democracies.

Democratic Backsliding Across Africa

Towards the end of the twentieth century, many African countries were celebrated for transitioning to democracy simply because they were able to hold elections and transfer power to constitutionally elected governments. Between 1989 and 1997, approximately [75 per cent of African countries](#) adopted multiparty elections. By the first decade of the twenty-first century, Africa was already experiencing alternation in power in countries like Ghana (in 2000 and 2008) and Nigeria (in 2015), to mention a few. With the conduct of multiparty elections and experience of alternation in power, one would expect that democracy has come to stay in Africa. Unfortunately, procedural democracy (conduct of multiparty elections) experienced in Africa in the 1990s could not be transformed into substantive democracy (improved governance and delivery of public goods). Instead, since 2019, Africa has been experiencing democratic backsliding. The resurgence of military coups across the West African Sahel since 2019 signifies the extent of democratic backsliding across Africa. Three factors explain the current democratic backsliding: governance deficits, rising violent conflicts and insecurity across the region, and weak elections.

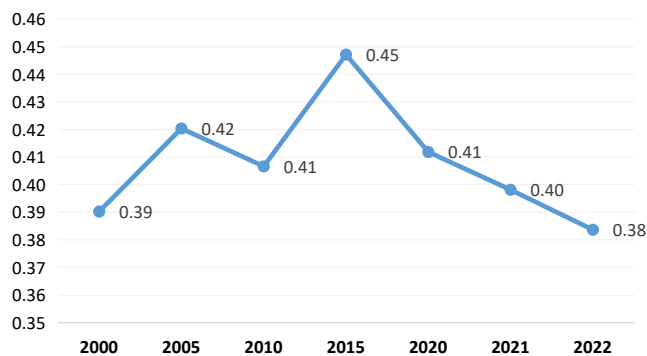
The transition of many African countries to civil rule did not translate to improvement in governance as was expected by the masses. The conduct of multiparty elections and the return of the soldiers to the barracks did not put an end to corruption and the scourge of poverty in African countries. It is estimated that Africa [loses \\$148 billion](#) to corruption annually. These losses undermine the capacity of governments to deliver public goods, thereby exacerbating poverty which creates room for violent uprisings and instability across the region. [The recent violent protest in Kenya](#) over the high cost of living exemplifies the frustration of the masses in African countries when elected governments fail to deliver the anticipated improvement in livelihood. Such protests, sometimes amplified by political opposition, create room for the government to engage in some undemocratic practices like rights abuses and repression of the opposition/civil society.

The rising violent conflicts and insecurity in the region also contribute to democratic backsliding. The 2022 Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance [report](#) remarked, “Africa is less safe and secure than ten years ago.” The 2023 Global Terrorism Index (GTI) [report](#) showed that in 2022, the Sahel region became the epicentre of terrorism, accounting for 43 per cent of the total deaths arising from terrorism globally. The activities of insurgents weaken the national governments and create gaps exploited by the military (sometimes supported by foreign private military organisations like the [Wagner Group](#)) to take over power. In 2022, as a result of growing insecurity in Burkina Faso, [Roch Marc Christian Kaboré was overthrown in a coup](#) following weeks of protests over the government’s failure to tackle rising insecurity occasioned by insurgents. Months later, the coup leader Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba was himself overthrown in another coup led by Captain Ibrahim Traoré, who cited insecurity as the reason for the overthrow.

Although multiparty elections continue to hold across Africa, with at least ten countries scheduled for elections between 2022 and 2023, the quality of many of these elections still needs to improve. Data from [International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance](#) Global State Of Democracy (GSOD) indices reveal that overall, the quality of

elections has declined in Africa (fig. 4). Reports of recently concluded elections in [Nigeria](#), [Sierra Leone](#), [Angola](#), as well as upcoming elections in [Gabon](#), [Zimbabwe](#), [South Sudan](#) reveal some weaknesses in the important democratic index of electoral process and pluralism. [Ibeanu](#) attributes the decline in the quality of elections in Africa to three factors: weak institutions, weak infrastructure and weak citizen engagement. Even though there have been electoral reforms in some countries to address the declining quality of elections, a [recent study](#) demonstrates that the experience of countries like Nigeria shows that reforms do not deliver quality elections because of two factors – wrong conception of the reform programme and the overbearing self-interest of the reformers.

Fig. 4: Africa's Scores on Clean Election, 2000 - 2022



Source: Based on data from International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) Global State of Democracy (GSoD) Indices, <https://www.idea.int/gso-d-indices/dataset-resources>

Civil Society Organisations and Protection of Democracies in Africa

Despite the decline in democracies across Africa, CSOs have remained at the forefront of protecting democracies in Africa. CSOs play significant roles in providing [support for election administration](#), [voter education and electoral accountability](#). What is more, CSOs contribute to [election security measures](#) through early warning and peace messaging. In [Nigeria](#), the [Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room](#) – a network of over 70 CSOs in Nigeria have played a remarkable role in protecting Nigeria's democracy by supporting credible election. At the continental level, a coalition made up of over 50 CSOs, media groups and activists across ten African countries scheduled to hold elections between 2022 and 2023, have organised under the umbrella of '[Democratic Network](#)' (DemNET). Through the DemNET coalition, CSOs, media groups and activists are able to receive capacity building and experience sharing that enable them to support electoral processes in various ways in their countries. In Nigeria, DemNET Nigeria members have continued to advocate for continuous voter registration in line with Section 10 of the Electoral Act (2022). In Gabon, DemNET Gabon members successfully trained over 700 polling agents for the elections. In Angola, DemNET

Angola members are promoting civic participation in the electoral processes. The story is the same in Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe, South Sudan, Kenya, Madagascar, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo, where DemNET members are working tirelessly in collaboration with relevant stakeholders to enhance the quality of elections. The cross-country coalition established by DemNET members has yielded remarkable benefits not just for the CSOs but for African democracy. The shared experiences among CSOs from different countries ensure that plausible solutions are offered to electoral challenges identified in any country by the local DemNET members. Undemocratic practices in any country are amplified not just by the local CSOs but a network of regional CSOs. This ensures that even where the national government succeeds in suppressing local CSOs, such undemocratic practices are brought to global attention, and pressures are mounted on the perpetrators to desist from such.

Recommendations: Strengthening Regional CSOs Coalition for Protection of Democracies in Africa

- CSOs to scale up regional networks:** Existing CSO networks working in the area of democracy in African countries should expand the networks to include more members specialising and working on different thematic areas of democracy. This would enable the CSOs to evolve a more formidable continental coalition for protecting democracies in Africa. In line with this, the novel DemNET coalition should expand its membership beyond the ten countries where it currently has members to gradually include CSOs across all African countries. More so, the programming of the CSOs should be expanded beyond elections to include other democracy-related thematic programmes like human rights, governance, corruption, transparency and accountability. This will ensure that the coalition is able to identify and address all forms of threats to democracies in Africa.
- CSO networks to partner with think tanks for evidence-based programming:** The CSO coalition should work with think tanks and credible consulting firms to ensure that its programming is based on empirical evidence and sound theories of change. Think tanks and credible consulting firms are sound knowledge hubs with a pool of research output, information and database that would be of use to CSOs to ensure programming has a deeper impact. For instance, DemNET is a brain-child of [Nextier](#), [CDD \(Centre for Democracy and Development\)](#) and [Center for Peace, Democracy, and Development \(CPDD\)](#), University of Massachusetts, Boston, USA, with funding from The US Department of State. Members of this coalition have been receiving training and support from Nextier, CDD and CPDD-UMass.
- CSO networks to devise robust sustainability strategies for the coalition:** CSO coalition must put in place robust sustainability strategies

Nextier SPD Policy Weekly provides an analysis of topical conflict, security, and development issues and proposes recommendations to address them. It is a publication of Nextier SPD.

Nextier SPD (www.thenextier.com/spd) is an international development consulting firm that uses evidence-based research to develop and build knowledge and skills to enhance human security, peace, and sustainable development as means to achieving stability and prosperity in Nigeria, and in the African region.

to ensure that the coalition is sustained as a formidable community of practice for the protection of democracies in Africa. To do this, there must be strategies in place to ensure that programmes are not terminated with the exit of funders. The coalition can adopt a multi-pool funding mechanism which allows all development partners to channel their assistance into one basket fund. This will ensure that no thematic area suffers because of a lack of funding.

4. **Continental and regional organisations to deepen partnership with CSO coalitions:** Continental and regional bodies like the African Union, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Southern African Development Commission (SADC) etc, should deepen partnerships with CSO coalitions. This will facilitate more effective implementation of democratic norms, principles and protocols adopted under the auspices of these continental and regional organisations. Implementation of principles contained in the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG) can be deepened through partnerships between regional bodies and CSO coalitions.
5. **Development partners to prioritise support for CSO coalitions:** International development partners should prioritise support for CSO

coalitions as such formidable coalitions are better positioned to implement more effective programmes given their pool of skills, expertise and potential to sustain programmes beyond the exit of funders.

Conclusion

There has been democratic backsliding across African countries in the last few years, as evidenced by the rise in military coups and the failure of elected governments to deliver public goods. Three factors explain the current democratic backsliding: governance deficits, rising violent conflicts and insecurity across the region and weak elections. CSOs have the potential to contribute to the protection of democracies in Africa. The formation of formidable regional CSO coalitions will bolster the capacity of CSOs to protect democracies in Africa.

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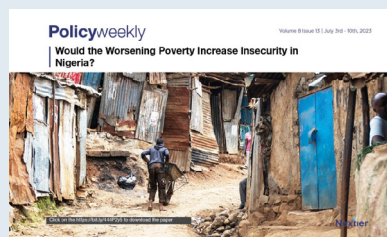
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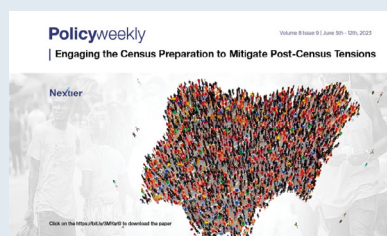
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