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Francophone Africa in Flux

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In early 2001, Benin stood proudly poised for its third competitive presidential election in ten years. Expectations were high and a sense of accomplishment filled the air. Benin had, after all, moved smoothly in 1991 from military rule under Mathieu Kérékou's Marxist-Leninist regime to functioning democracy under former World Bank official Nicéphore Soglo. Soglo's election victory over Kérékou was a turning point for Francophone Africa. It was the first time an incumbent president lost at the polls, accepted the outcome, and peacefully relinquished power. This achievement brought Benin into the limelight as a model for democratization in the subregion and a harbinger of hopeful political trends.

In the ten years since, Benin had created new institutions—including a highly respected Constitutional Court and an autonomous Election Commission—to strengthen the foundations of democratic governance. In 1996, the country held a second credible presidential election, in which Soglo was defeated by Kérékou and peacefully ceded power back to his rival. Three successful National Assembly elections were held during the 1990s, with a new legislative majority emerging each time. The reputations of Benin's Election Commission and Constitutional Court grew, and the perception that democracy was taking root in Benin became widespread.

As the 2001 elections approached, analysts therefore predicted a smooth ride for a country increasingly considered Francophone Africa's "laboratory of democracy." Unexpectedly, however, the tide turned. The opposition banded together to challenge President Kérékou's early and substantial lead in the first round of the March 4 elections. The challengers

Table—Democratic Progress in Francophone Africa

Countries	Population (in millions)	Last Multiparty Elections	Freedom House Rating[1]	Next Scheduled Election
Tier 1—Moving Toward Democratic Consolidation				
Benin	6.4	2001	2.0	2006
Mali	10.7	1997	2.5	2002
Mauritius[2]	1.2	1997	1.5	2002
Senegal	10.0	2000	3.5	2007
Tier 2—Halting Progress Toward Democracy				
Central African Republic	3.5	1999	3.5	2005
Gabon	1.2	1998	4.5	2005
Madagascar	15.5	1996	3.0	2002
Niger	10.1	1999	4.0	2004
Tier 3—Future of Democracy Uncertain				
Burkina Faso	11.9	1997	4.0	2005
Cameroon	15.4	1997	6.5	2004
Chad	8.4	2001	5.5	2006
Côte d'Ivoire	16.0	2000	5.5	2005
Djibouti	0.5	1999	4.5	2005
Mauritania	2.7	1997	5.5	2003
Togo	5.0	1998	5.0	2003
Tier 4—Backsliding				
Burundi	6.1	1993	6.0	*n/a*
Congo (Kinshasa)	52.0	*n/a*	6.5	*n/a*
Congo (Brazzaville)	2.8	1998	5.0	2001
Guinea	7.5	1998	5.5	2003
Rwanda	7.2	1988	6.5	2002

[1] On a scale from 1 (most free) to 7 (least free). *Source:* Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2000–2001,* Washington, D.C., 2001.

[2] Some analysts would consider Mauritius to have already attained consolidation.

accused Kérékou of vote rigging and, pointing to the disparity between the Elections Commission's returns and those of the Constitutional Court, called into question the Commission's competence and neutrality. Runner-up Soglo refused to participate in the runoff election required when no candidate obtains an absolute majority in the first round. The Election Commission, with the Constitutional Court's blessing, then invited third-place candidate Adrien Houngbedji to replace Soglo in the runoff. Houngbedji, who had endorsed Soglo in the runoff, turned down the invitation. Although some of its members resigned in protest, the Commission extended the invitation to fourth-place finisher and Kérékou ally Bruno Amoussou, who agreed to face Kérékou in the runoff. Not surprisingly, Kérékou won the runoff with 84 percent of the vote.

The problems that characterized Benin's much-awaited presidential election point to the unsettled state of democratic development in Francophone Africa today. There have been recent gains, as in Senegal and Niger, as well as recent setbacks, as in Côte d'Ivoire and Congo (Brazzaville). A rough assessment of democratic progress in Francophone Africa is provided in the Table above.

Francophone Africa comprises 20 countries with a total population of approximately 194 million. In terms of their political development,

Francophone African countries fall roughly into four categories: 1) those that are on the path toward democratic consolidation; 2) countries in which democracy is making halting progress; 3) countries in which the future of democracy remains uncertain; and, finally, 4) countries in which the democratic gains of the early 1990s are eroding.

Senegal and Mauritius rank among the countries that have emerged at the forefront of democratic consolidation. Expanded political participation and mobilization have resulted in credible elections that led to peaceful transfers of power in both countries. Benin, whose institutions, political leaders, and civil society seem to have successfully withstood the shock of the chaotic 2001 elections, belongs in this category, as does Mali, where the judiciary, media, and civil society are vibrant enough to stimulate open and lively political dialogue. Although Mali has not yet weathered a postelection transfer of power, President Konaré seems intent on respecting constitutional term limits when his term expires in 2002. Mali also has the most liberal media laws and the highest number of private, independent radio stations in all of Francophone Africa.

A second category consists of countries where the political will to move toward democratization is present but socioeconomic constraints and the damaging legacy of past authoritarian rule imposes serious obstacles to reform. This group includes the Central African Republic, Gabon, Madagascar, and Niger.

In the third category, the political will to democratize is either altogether lacking or has been diverted into attempts to get by with minimalist openings. In these countries, which include Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Mauritania, and Togo, there is a yawning gap between the aspirations of citizens at the grassroots and the attitudes of the political leadership. (Prior to its inclusive and successful local elections in the spring of 2001, Côte d'Ivoire seemed mired in this category, but it now may be better placed to reengage in a process of genuine democratization through national reconciliation and more credible electoral processes.) The absence in these countries of a national consensus on the goal of democratization raises serious questions about even the longer-term prospects of peaceful change toward genuine democracy.

The final group contains "backsliding" countries, in which gains made earlier in the decade have been erased by failed political processes, excessive violence, or a return to military rule. These conflict-plagued countries include Burundi, Rwanda, Guinea, Congo (Brazzaville), and Congo (Kinshasa).

How It All Began

The past decade began with optimism and high hopes for democracy worldwide. The collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the demise of the

Soviet Union, and the end of the Cold War transformed the international landscape. The leading world powers began to revisit their approaches to international relations and to place a higher premium on the promotion of democracy and human rights. Democratization became a strategic objective and relevant benchmark in bilateral relations. Yet the end of the Cold War also coincided with the decay or collapse of the state in many African countries. All these changes produced unexpected results in Francophone Africa: Countries formerly close to the Soviet bloc, including Benin, Congo (Brazzaville), Mali, and Madagascar, rushed to embrace democratization, while political elites in countries formerly allied with the liberal Western democracies—Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Togo, and Zaire, now Congo (Kinshasa)—either resisted or sought to undermine the democratization process.

Benin has set the political pace for much of Francophone Africa.[1] It was the first of many countries to use a National Conference as a political rite of passage in the transition from one-party or military rule to democracy. Widely considered replicas of the eighteenth-century États Généraux of revolutionary France, National Conferences became broadly inclusive forums for the renegotiation of state-society relationships. Participants at National Conferences usually claimed sweeping sovereign powers to rewrite constitutions and election laws in order to promote political pluralism and guarantee better protection of human rights and political freedoms. Some National Conferences might have seemed frenzied or unending, but democrats lauded these grassroots initiatives as rare opportunities for Africans to define their own rules of political participation and to take full ownership of their political futures. Except in Togo and Zaire, these conferences were generally peaceful and tended to launch national reconciliation processes that helped stimulate the intense political activism of the last decade.[2]

One significant accomplishment of most of the National Conferences was to move governments away from the extremely centralized presidential systems inherited from the French Constitution of 1958 to more balanced semipresidential or semiparliamentary systems that institutionalized the position of prime minister and provided for the holder of that office to be backed by a legislative majority. Between 1991 and 1993, Benin, the Central African Republic, Congo (Brazzaville), Madagascar, Mali, and Niger, all of which organized National Conferences, conducted peaceful elections that precipitated changes in political leadership.

Political leaders in other countries, however, blocked meaningful democratic change. In Gabon, Guinea, and Togo, the political establishment permitted National Conferences to take place but quickly undermined them or diluted their outcomes in order to maintain its hold on power. In 1993, these three countries held highly controversial multiparty presidential elections, all won by incumbents.[3]

While most political leaders in Francophone Africa acceded to calls for a National Conference, Félix Houphouët-Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire and Paul Biya of Cameroon did not. In the face of massive demonstrations in mid-1990, Houphouët-Boigny hurriedly enacted legislation specifying the constitutional conditions under which political parties could form.[4] He then called immediate presidential and legislative elections, which he and his ruling Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI) won handily. In Cameroon, Biya reluctantly allowed parties to form after his attempt to organize government-sponsored demonstrations against multiparty politics failed. He then initiated a process of "tripartite talks" involving the government and ruling party, the opposition parties, and civil society groups, chaired by his prime minister. Biya shelved most of the resulting recommendations, had a compliant parliament amend the electoral code, and called early elections for October 1992. Although he won only a plurality in a contest criticized as fraudulent by opposition parties and international observers alike,[5] Biya succeeded in securing his hold on power.

Even as the gap widened between the democratic aspirations of African citizens and the maneuvers of incumbent political leaders to preserve their power, democratization received a boost from unexpected quarters. At the 1990 summit of Francophone heads of state in La Baule, France, French president François Mitterrand publicly embraced democratization by linking vital economic assistance to democracy promotion.[6] Although the impact of his statement was later watered down—first in 1990 by his political rival Jacques Chirac during an official visit to Abidjan in his capacity as mayor of Paris,[7] and then by Prime Minister Pierre Bérégovoy during the 1991 Francophone summit in Libreville, Gabon—Mitterrand had served notice to reluctant democrats that France would no longer tolerate the violent suppression of opposition or political dissent.

Nine years after La Baule, the next major high-level impetus to democratization came from heads of state gathered at an Organization of African Unity (OAU) summit in Algiers.[8] In a move spearheaded by such African leaders as Algeria's Abdelaziz Bouteflika, Mali's Alpha Konaré, Nigeria's Olusegun Obasanjo, and South Africa's Thabo Mbeki, the OAU adopted a resolution banning leaders who came to power through the use of force from admittance to the OAU or participation in its summit meetings. Incumbent presidents who had come to power through military coups were granted up to three years to restore democratic civilian rule. General Robert Gueï of Côte d'Ivoire, who assumed office after a December 1999 coup, and Major Daouda Malam Wanke of Niger, who seized power in April 1999, were the first targets of the OAU's new activism.

By the time the OAU convened for its 2000 summit in Lomé, Togo, Niger's military had returned to the barracks and Wanke had ceded power

to a democratically elected civilian government. In Côte d'Ivoire, however, Gueï continued to hold sway. Gueï exacerbated ethnic tensions and took steps to eliminate viable opposition candidates as he prepared for presidential elections. The OAU expeditiously formed a consultative committee of ten heads of state to seek a negotiated solution to the rising political tensions in Côte d'Ivoire. The committee sent a delegation to Abidjan to dissuade Gueï from seeking the presidency in October 2000 and from undermining the democratization process in his country. The mission failed. In October 2000, Gueï dissolved the Election Commission and declared himself the victor of blatantly flawed elections. Riots erupted in Abidjan. Tens of thousands of Ivoirians took to the streets and, backed by some units of the military, battled with Gueï loyalists. By late October, more than 200 people had been killed in Abidjan, Gueï had been chased from office, and opposition candidate Laurent Gbagbo had ascended to power. His rule remained under a cloud of illegitimacy, however, due to the fact that Ivoirian political leader Alassane Outtara had been prohibited from contesting the election.

Shaken by such setbacks and confronted with mounting agitation for a public commitment to democratization, leaders of the Francophone states convened an international symposium in Bamako, Mali, on the status and practice of democracy within the global French-speaking community. The conference approved the Bamako Declaration of November 2000, in which Francophone governments reaffirmed their commitment to the basic principles of democratic governance and, even more importantly, declared:

> Democracy, as the political framework for the rule of law and the protection of human rights, is the system of government that best promotes long-term stability and legal security; thanks to the climate of freedom that it creates, democracy also establishes the conditions for freely accepted mobilization on the part of the people to achieve development; democracy and development cannot be dissociated: these are the factors promoting lasting peace.[9]

While it may be too early to judge the Bamako Declaration's real impact, its adoption provides another important affirmation of high-level support for democratic governance in Francophone Africa.

New Actors and Institutions

Francophone Africa's political experience over the last decade offers practical examples of the distinction that political scientists have sought to draw between genuine *democratization* and the simple *liberalization* of single-party governments. Genuine democratization entails a broadening of political space, an expansion of opportunities for political participation and mobilization, and the establishment of credible

processes and institutions that allow for the change or renewal of political leadership through elections. Liberalization alone is much less far-reaching. It allows citizens to enjoy greater rights and freedoms only insofar as this is compatible with preserving existing power structures and the privileges of their immediate beneficiaries. In some Francophone African countries, progressive leaders have responded to the aspirations of the masses and sought to promote genuine democratization. In others, often described as pseudodemocracies or illiberal democracies,[10] authoritarian leaders resistant to change have made some concessions toward liberalization but have held democratization in check.

The struggle for democratization during the past decade has witnessed the emergence both of significant grassroots initiatives and of important constitutional reforms and institutional innovations.

Civil society. Civil society organizations have propelled democratization in a number of countries. Over the last ten years, myriad nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have played a vital role in promoting political participation and good governance in Francophone Africa. National associations or leagues for human rights, associations of women jurists, and politically activist bar associations exist in almost every Francophone country. Along with independent journalists and other civil society groups, they act as crucial "watchdogs" to safeguard newly won rights and freedoms and to foster further democratization. Their pronouncements on the state of democracy and human rights help to inform their fellow citizens and the world at large about the plight of their countries.

Multiparty elections have served as important catalysts to the emergence and strengthening of civil society organizations, which often become active in monitoring the fairness of elections. Domestic monitoring not only has contributed to the transparency and overall credibility of electoral processes but has allowed participating civic organizations to hone their membership recruitment, message development, fundraising, coalition-building, advocacy, and political skills. Civic activists have also developed expertise in constitutional and electoral law, and learned to appreciate the relevance of such international standards and instruments as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Their skill and persistence have made it difficult for undemocratic governments to deny domestic groups the accreditation needed to monitor national elections.

Numerous broad-based coalitions of civil society organizations that initially formed to observe national elections have subsequently gone on to make important contributions to democratization in the postelection period. These include the Study Group for Democracy and Economic and Social Development in Africa (GERDDES-Afrique) in several West African countries, the National Committee for Election Observation (CNOE) in Madagascar, the Support Group to the Malian Electoral Process

(APEM) in Mali, the Collectif coalition of NGOs in Niger, the National Observatory of Elections (ONE) in Côte d'Ivoire, and the Front for Civil Society Action (FASC) in Senegal. The professionalism of these and other African civil society organizations has earned them the respect of both international partners and their own governments. In 1996, for example, the Collectif issued a statement on the presidential elections in Niger that most of the international community considered more credible and substantive than the statements issued by some international observer delegations.

Increasingly, the vibrancy of civil society has become an accurate barometer of the state of democracy in Francophone Africa. Thus in countries such as Benin, Mali, and Senegal, where political leaders are committed to genuine democratization, civil society organizations find the space to conduct advocacy activities, develop better channels of communication with the executive and legislative branches of government, and provide input into the governance process. On the other hand, in countries such as Cameroon, Congo (Brazzaville), Guinea, and Togo, where democratization has stalled, credible civil society organizations are few, and their relations with the authorities are typically antagonistic.

Election administration. Prior to the early 1990s, ministries of the interior or of territorial administration, usually headed by die-hard supporters of the president, held sole responsibility for election administration in Francophone Africa. Proponents of free and fair elections strongly and rightly criticized these arrangements as ill-suited to transitional states. Nascent democracies, they asserted, required nonpartisan and transparent arrangements conducive to credible election outcomes that contestants and voters alike could view as reflecting the electorate's will.

Although Francophone African countries have not responded uniformly to the quest for free and fair elections, most have stripped ministries of the interior of the mandate to conduct elections. All but three countries have created independent election commissions. Cameroon, Guinea, and Senegal have retained the ministry of the interior's jurisdiction over all aspects of election administration, but they have added an "observatory" (or, in Guinea's case, a "higher council") to monitor the ministry's activities. Mali, on the other hand, is moving toward a three-pronged election-administration system, with its Ministry of Territorial Administration, Directorate General of Elections, and Election Commission each playing a distinct role. While disagreement remains over the most appropriate form of election administration, there is now a widespread expectation that domestic civil society organizations, the independent media, the judiciary, and international NGOs will all be involved in the electoral process.

Constitutional courts. The last decade has also seen validation of

the judiciary's role as an independent arbiter of political competition in Francophone Africa. Prior to the early 1990s, supreme courts tended to hold final jurisdiction over administrative, criminal, constitutional, civil, and commercial matters. During democratization, most countries created separate constitutional courts to handle litigation pertaining to the constitutionality of laws or acts of government. These newly established courts have assumed jurisdiction over election-related disputes and the conditions of eligibility for public office.

Moreover, access to the courts has increased. Previously, only heads of state, speakers of national assemblies, or absolute legislative majorities had legal standing to take constitutional matters to court. Today, elected officials, party leaders, and, in many cases, ordinary citizens of voting age also may petition constitutional courts. Allowing citizens access to institutions that can pass judgment on the executive branch's acts or omissions is likely to curb future abuses. It also introduces another important level of oversight regarding state–civil society relations.

Constitutional courts have already demonstrated their influence. In 1994, the Constitutional Court of Benin served as the arbiter of a heated dispute between President Nicéphore Soglo and the National Assembly over budget responsibilities. In 1996, the same court ordered President Mathieu Kérékou to retake the oath of office after he had omitted a phrase that he considered offensive to his religious beliefs as a born-again Christian. The decision sent a strong symbolic message to Kérékou that his actions in office would be keenly scrutinized by the court. In Madagascar, the Constitutional Court ruled in 1995 that President Albert Zafy could be impeached and removed from office for failing to respect the country's Constitution. In March 1997, Mali's Constitutional Court annulled the results of the first round of legislative elections and ordered new balloting in response to a petition from opposition parties. And as recently as March 2001, Gabon's Constitutional Court quashed a presidential decree appointing all the members of the country's Economic and Social Council in violation of a constitutional requirement calling for 85 percent of its members to be elected by their peers from throughout the country.

Constitutional court justices have begun regular international meetings to exchange information on best practices, hoping that this will enhance their ability to play a leading role in promoting democratization and respect for the rule of law. In 1997, constitutional courts within the Francophone states formed the Association of French-Speaking Constitutional Courts (ACCPUF) to reinforce institutional cooperation and solidarity on questions of human rights and the rule of law. The second ACCPUF congress, held in Libreville in 2000, focused on the question of citizen access to constitutional courts.

Legislative bodies. Competitive multiparty elections have also rendered legislative bodies more representative of diverse political view-

points and constituencies. Furthermore, as electoral systems have moved away from closed party lists to other forms of proportional representation or to single-member constituencies, elected representatives have grown more responsive to constituent needs and have loosened their ties to party hierarchies. These two developments have empowered legislators to initiate hearings, legislative inquiries, budget debates, and motions to censure governmental policy. In a number of cases, even ruling-party deputies have joined opposition colleagues in voting down executive-branch bills.

Although legislation introduced by individual members remains rare, activism among legislators has increased noticeably in many countries. In 1999, for example, even though the ruling PDCI held an overwhelming majority in the Ivoirian National Assembly, deputies voted down a bill backed by President Henri Konan Bédié to amend the Constitution to create a senate. Three years earlier in Madagascar, the Malagasy National Assembly voted to impeach Head of State Albert Zafy for misappropriating funds and attempting to dismiss the prime minister in violation of the Constitution.

The Hurdles

Despite visible progress, democratization in Francophone Africa continues to face significant challenges. Flawed elections, poorly managed civil-military relations, weak political parties, partisan bureaucracies, and finally, misunderstandings between African democrats and their potential Western partners continue to hinder democracy's advance.

Flawed elections. Political developments in Francophone Africa concretely demonstrate how flawed elections can undermine democratization in transitional societies. In Cameroon (1992), Gabon (1993), Togo (1993), and Guinea (1998), poorly organized and dispute-ridden elections polarized political discourse. In Congo (Brazzaville), disagreements over the 1997 electoral framework reopened old wounds and flared into chaos, violence, and civil war.

The history of competitive elections in Francophone Africa suggests that flawed elections reflect resistance on the part of incumbents to inclusive or transparent political processes. Election administrators, political parties, and candidates also display a disturbing lack of interest in strategic planning, often treating elections merely as one-day events rather than lengthy political processes that are critical to a country's political development. For example, although electoral codes in many Francophone African countries mandate voter registration in the first quarter of every year, administrative authorities and political parties often fail to pay attention until incomplete or unreliable voter lists have already been established. And in order to avert full-blown constitutional crises, many countries rush headlong into poorly prepared elections.

Politicized armed forces. Ill-defined and poorly managed civil-military relations also weaken the prospects for democracy in Francophone Africa. The military will continue to threaten political stability until countries restructure their defense forces to meet evolving national needs and take steps to depoliticize and professionalize their officer corps.

Having inherited colonial-era militaries at independence, many states continue to groom them for the traditional task of protecting territorial integrity against external aggression. Thus one often sees huge military establishments demanding exorbitant resources to accomplish missions that have become obsolete in today's less confrontational world. While countries such as Mauritius and Seychelles have responded to the absence of any imminent external threat by restructuring their national defenses, most Francophone African countries persist in fielding traditional land, sea, and air forces as well as paramilitary troops (or *gendarmerie*) and police. As a result, many governments—especially those with weak electoral mandates or little legitimacy—have been tempted to lean on the military for police functions. Inviting the military into the civilian political arena has, in turn, precipitated human rights violations and internal instability. With the notable exception of Senegal, every Francophone African country has experienced a mutiny, an attempted coup, or military rule—even, in some cases, during the past decade of democratization.

The military's undue political involvement in Francophone Africa has been obscured by the crude "civilianization" of coup makers and military leaders over the last ten years. As Africans called for an end to military rule and a return to elected government in the early 1990s, an overwhelming number of military rulers simply changed their dress code, trading their military attire for business suits and presenting themselves as candidates in elections, which they almost invariably won.[11] The difficulty of building an apolitical military is also heightened by a lack of rejuvenation within the officer corps, where the first generation of officers trained during the height of military rule typically remains in active service. In some countries, ethnic tensions, exacerbated by the political manipulation of military recruitment and promotions, further erode military professionalism. The phenomenon of military dictators turned "elected" leaders, along with the absence of apolitical, professional militaries, casts a dark shadow on the short-term prospects for genuine democracy.

Weak political parties. Francophone Africa's structurally weak and fragmented political parties are generally incapable of providing good governance and thus are ill-equipped to counterbalance the military's disproportionate political involvement. Both opposition and ruling parties

often lack the capacity to fulfill the traditional party functions of political education, political mobilization, and interest aggregation. While opposition parties tend to rely heavily on ethnic or regional bases of support, most ruling parties show a striking inability to detach themselves from executive dictates. Party structures remain extremely hierarchical, and charismatic leadership rather than party platform often drives party loyalty. Moreover, frequent protest-driven election boycotts deprive both ruling and opposition parties of opportunities to hone their skills in electoral politics.

The weakness of political parties, which often virtually disappear between elections, raises concerns about their long-term sustainability. In fairness, the fundraising and organizing restrictions frequently imposed on parties by state officials (who often are also political competitors) hinder their development. A dearth of public financing and the opaque and unorthodox processes that enable ruling parties to arrogate state resources to themselves during elections have not helped. Fortunately, a number of countries, including Gabon, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, and Cameroon, have recently enacted laws that provide for public funding of political parties based on their past electoral performance and anticipated contributions to democratic vitality. Until such measures are fully and fairly implemented, political parties in Francophone Africa will continue to center around a few wealthy individuals who can afford to finance party activities and election campaigns.

Meanwhile, as long as perks and patronage flow from ruling parties, citizens may prove unable to resist forsaking their ideological preferences for personal gain. The phenomenon of "carpet crossing"—seen recently in Senegal, where many highly placed Socialists abandoned the party soon after its defeat—has grown so common that Benin and Niger have promulgated laws prohibiting members of parliament from switching party affiliation.

Recalcitrant bureaucracies. Even as democratization has entailed a renegotiation of state-society relations in favor of ordinary citizens and decentralized institutions, many state functionaries have refused to relinquish the power and authority—rooted in France's Jacobin tradition—that they have accumulated over the years. The civil service remains, for the most part, conservative and heavily indebted to the patronage system that continues to flourish in many Francophone African countries. This is especially evident in the jurisdictional conflicts that have emerged between election commissions and ministries of the interior, and in the reluctance of presidential appointees and auxiliaries, such as governors, prefects, and subprefects, to tolerate the emergence of critical political parties and civil society organizations. Unfortunately, little of the technical assistance that has been allocated to

democratization in Francophone Africa has sought to change the behavior of civil servants and other state officials at the national, regional, provincial, and local levels.

The International Dimension

A lack of cohesion and coordination within the international community has also impeded meaningful change in Francophone Africa over the last decade. In the early 1990s, U.S. and French officials were openly at odds. In one country, the U.S. ambassador met regularly with prodemocracy activists and condemned human rights abuses, while his French counterpart shied away from those groups and, upon retirement, accepted a position as special adviser to the incumbent president. French officials pointedly linked Secretary of State Warren Christopher's 1996 trip to Mali to U.S. election-year politics, even as Christopher urged that Western countries "cooperate rather that compete" in Africa.[12] For its part, the United States publicly criticized French policies in Rwanda in 1994, in Niger after its 1996 coup, and in Nigeria prior to that country's democratic transition in 1999.

The discord between U.S. and French officials has sent mixed signals.[13] African perceptions of Western attitudes crystallized around the following three propositions: 1) that some circles in Paris backed every incumbent autocrat responsible for stalling a transition; 2) that Washington supported all opposition figures; and 3) that neither France nor the United States was sufficiently supportive of democratization on the Continent, especially when the sanctioning of governments with questionable democratic credentials was required.

In recent years, however, France and the United States seem to have found more common ground, especially since the French Socialist party gained a parliamentary majority. Support for democratization in Francophone Africa may also be bolstered by a 1998 joint initiative by France and Great Britain to improve the coordination of their foreign policies, including their democracy-assistance activities in Africa. Observers are still awaiting details of U.S. president George W. Bush's Africa policy and clear indications as to the priority that his administration will place on democracy-support programs. These developments, along with the outcome of the French national elections in 2002 and the European Union's growing interest in democratization, may determine whether the newly found similarity of purpose among international donors in favor of good governance, democracy, and human rights in Francophone Africa will endure.

Democracy has advanced in fits and starts in Francophone Africa over the last decade. The number of long-lasting autocrats has diminished as progressive and visionary leaders have begun to emerge. Real advances have been made toward democratic consolidation in some countries, while in others serious reversals of fortune have undone progress toward

democratic governance. Despite the setbacks, however, the people of Francophone Africa seem committed to furthering democracy. The challenge lies in persuading the political elites in these countries to embrace their peoples' aspirations and to maintain the momentum of democratic progress.

NOTES

1. Benin was notorious for instability and suffered the highest number of military coups prior to 1990.

2. Between 1990 and 1991, the following countries organized National Conferences: Benin, Congo (Brazzaville), Congo (Kinshasa), Gabon, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and Togo. Cameroon and Côte d'Ivoire amended their constitutions to allow for political party formation without National Conferences. Senegal permitted multiparty elections before 1990.

3. In August 1993, Togo's Eyadema "won" an election boycotted by all major opposition candidates; in Gabon, Omar Bongo won reelection with 51 percent of the vote amid claims of vote rigging in December 1993; and a few weeks later, Lansana Conte declared himself the winner of Guinea's elections with a similar 52 percent.

4. Article 7 of the Ivoirian Constitution provided that political parties could form under conditions defined by presidential decree. Although Houphouët-Boigny never initiated implementation of Article 7, he could claim that Côte d'Ivoire was not a *de jure* one-party state.

5. National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, *An Assessment of the October 11, 1992 Election in Cameroon,* Washington D.C., 1993.

6. *Agir Ici et Survie, La France à Biarritz: Mise en examen de la Politique Africaine de la France* (Paris: Karthala, 1995).

7. Tim Witcher, "French Hold on Africa Threatened," *The Sunday Telegraph,* 24 June 1990, 16.

8. Organization of African Unity, 35th Annual Ordinary Summit of African Heads of State and Government, *The Algiers Declaration* (Addis Ababa, 1999).

9. Francophonie, *Bamako Declaration* (Bamako, 2000), Article 3(3). The Francophonie also adopted a draft program of action heavily weighted toward democracy promotion. Francophone heads of state will consider it at their 2001 summit in Beirut, Lebanon.

10. Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 15–16; Richard Joseph, "Africa, 1990–1997: From *Abertura* to Closure," *Journal of Democracy* 9 (April 1998): 3–17.

11. Except for former Central African Republic president General André Kolingba, who lost the 1993 and 1999 presidential elections, former military rulers are back in power as "elected" leaders in Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Congo (Brazzaville), Equatorial Guinea, Guinea, Madagascar, and Togo.

12. Howard W. French, "U.S. and French Sniping Heats Up over Paris's Links to Africa," *New York Times*, 17 October 1996, A13.

13. Peter J. Schraeder, "Cold War to Cold Peace: Explaining U.S.-French Competition in Francophone Africa," *Political Science Quarterly* 115 (Fall 2000): 395–419.