The importance of external actors to democratisation and development in Ghana and Uganda

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Abstract

Have Africa’s governments been forced to respond to overwhelming external pressures - in terms of contemporary political outcomes - as recent dependency-inspired arguments would maintain? Or are Africa’s political ‘inadequacies’ regarding democracy a consequence more of the region’s unique history, culture and social structures, as proponents of modernisation-orientated approaches would contend? In the first part of the paper I look the general issues and examine the arguments in relation to this issue.

In the second section, I focus upon the following issues: Why have Ghana and Uganda democratised in divergent ways and with different outcomes? In Ghana, was President Rawlings’s apparent conversion to liberal democracy primarily a capitulation to external pressures? In Uganda, was President Museveni’s refusal to go down the same road an indication of his ability to deny such demands? I argue that Uganda and Ghana are important case studies in the wider issue of democratisation in Africa as their cases help shed light on a wider issue: was the region’s recent democratisation the result, primarily, of internal or external pressures? More generally, the issue is both significant and topical because the quality of our political analysis of contemporary Africa is closely linked to the clarity of our understanding of the nature of political causality in the region.
Until the early 1990s very few African governments were democratically elected. ¹ With military, one-party or personalist regimes the norm, beset by economic problems and often riven by growing societal strife, Africa was a region which seemed, to many observers, to be in crisis. As Villalón noted, things in many African countries seemed ‘somehow [to have] “gone wrong” since independence’. ² As a result, many observers, not to mention large numbers of ordinary Africans, believed that wholesale reform of state structures and institutions was necessary try to overcome the region’s myriad political and economic problems.

At this time, Africa was swept up in the massive changes that characterised the third wave of democracy. Typically involving a combination of domestic and international imperatives, changes in African countries were primarily the product of intentional reform, amounting to what was variously called: ‘a resurgence of hope’, ‘a new beginning’, a ‘second liberation’, a ‘second independence’, or ‘a new phase of real political liberation’, with three main dimensions: democratic elections, economic reforms, more, and better, human rights. Domestically, this amounted to a (re)awakening of political voice by civil society organisations articulating what various interest groups - such as, workers, trade union activists, students, business people, civil servants, religious leaders, and so on - had already begun to demand. As time went on, calls for reform were focused, often made integral parts of political programmes, by professional politicians. A problem, however, was that the relative strength and power of civil society varied significantly between African countries, and, as a result, the former’s vitality and ability to pressurise those in power would be a significant factor when seeking to account for democratic progress, or its lack, in African countries. As Bratton and van de Walle put it: African prospects for developing democracy ‘hinge on the strength of the permanent state apparatus

¹ ‘Africa’ in this paper refers to sub-Saharan Africa.
relative to the ability of nongovernmental actors to exert countervailing powers’. ³

Adding weight to domestic calls for reform was encouragement from various external sources, including foreign aid donors and governments. They proclaimed that what was needed was better governance, specifically more democracy and fundamental economic changes, necessary if Africa’s disappointing democratic and developmental trajectory would be reversed. In many cases, such external actors made it clear that the fulfilment of their demands were essential requisites for the continuation of their financial aid.

In sum, demands for wide-ranging reforms in Africa amounted to a discovery or rediscovery of political voice by domestic interest groups and individuals, catalysed by years of popular frustration, and encouraged by post-cold war reawakening of international concern for Africa’s plight. Authoritarian governments were often persuaded by a variety of pressures - both domestic and external - to embark upon reforms. As Wiseman put it, such reforms emanated from ‘the changing environments [regimes] faced’. ⁴ The overall point is that African governments responded to pressures for change in a variety of ways: some demonstrated implacable resistance to reform, while others were prepared to countenance significant political and economic changes.

Reflecting their varied political backgrounds and histories, African countries had varied and distinctive paths of political change leading to a variety of political outcomes. By the mid-1990s, 16 of the region’s 42 countries (38 per cent) had met minimal electoral procedural tests for transitions to democracy; while 26 (62 per cent) had not. ⁵ Whether by the ballot box or by coup d’état, changes of government

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⁵ Bratton and van de Walle, ‘Democratic Experiments’, p. 119.
occurred, *inter alia*, in: Benin, Cape Verde, the Central African Republic, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Namibia, Sao Tomé and Principe, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Zambia. Some countries collapsed into novel or renewed civil conflict, such as: Burundi, Liberia, Rwanda, Somalia and Sudan, while others (Burundi, Niger, Congo-Brazzaville) experienced the return of military rule after a brief civilian interregnum. In still others, incumbent governments - for example, in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Seychelles, Uganda, and Zimbabwe - managed to win at least two rounds of elections during the 1990s. In a further category came those regimes refusing to allow any meaningful test of public opinion - such as, Nigeria (until 1999), Togo, and Congo-Kinshasa (formerly, Zaire). Overall, during the 1990s, agitation for change led to the ousting of incumbent rulers in about two-fifths of Africa’s 42 countries.

By the end of the 1990s, there had typically been two rounds of elections in those African countries where there had been significant moves towards democratisation. However, as Wiseman notes, outcomes were often ambivalent: ‘The holding of second elections in a large number of [African] democratic transition states ... produced a mixed bag of evidence related to assessing prospects for [democratic] consolation … In no African state can democracy be said to be fully consolidated and immune from serious erosion or termination in the future’. ⁶ Emphasising the uncertain future for democratisation in Africa, Kasfir pointed to the complex nature of regional political systems, which ‘reflect[ed] a contradictory combination of characteristics of democracy, authoritarianism and inherited practices of neopatrimonialism’. ⁷ Some observers argued that explaining patchy democratisation outcomes was simple: Africa was not ready for truly competitive forms of democracy, only for ‘a lesser system that French speaking scholars derisively call

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“démocratie tropicalisée” (‘tropicalised democracy’).  

Despite doubts as to the plausibility of recognisably democratic systems widely developing in Africa, it was undeniable that many regional countries had more and better civil liberties (CL) and political rights (PR) in 2000 than a decade earlier. As Table 1 indicates, of the 21 new - that is, post-1989 - African democracies, none saw deteriorations in the position of PR or CL in the 1990s. By the end of the decade, no less than 28 African countries (that is, two-thirds of the region’s states) were characterised by Freedom House as ‘Free’ or ‘Partly Free’ states (that is, they had recognisably democratic regimes), while the remainder were authoritarian, ‘Not Free’, regimes. Of the 28 democracies, 22 (78.5 per cent) had a combined PR and CL score of between 8-10, and were, as a result, at the margin between ‘Not Free’ and ‘Partly Free’. The consequence, Diamond suggests, is that the highly limited nature of many African democracies meant that ‘half of the forty pseudodemocracies in the world are in sub-Saharan Africa’.  

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Table 1: New Democracies in Africa, 1988-98

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In sum, Africa’s democratic position was characterised at the end of the 1990s by duality: on the one hand, there was widespread evidence of improvements, or at least a lack of decline, in the position of political rights and civil liberties; on the other hand, progress was uneven, resulting in only a limited range of improvements in many African countries. The outcome was that, over time, a tendency towards democratic (over-)optimism on the part of observers was replaced by growing pessimism that in many cases Africa’s democratic transitions would ultimately turn out to be much less significant than earlier hoped or expected.
Ghana and Uganda: where do they belong in the overall democratic picture?

Data in Table 1 indicate that Uganda and Ghana, the subjects of the current paper, were both categorised by Freedom House as ‘Partly Free’ at the end of the 1990s. While Ghana showed clear improvements in its civil liberties and political rights position over the decade, Uganda’s position was largely unchanged in these regards in the 1990s. Both countries are examples of polities whose leaderships were firmly against multiparty elections at the beginning of the 1990s. Over time, however, pressure from a variety of sources persuaded the leadership of Ghana to allow them; but not the government of Uganda. Instead, the latter presided over an unusual ‘no-party’ political system, known as the ‘movement system’, which, despite a partial lack of conventional democratic competition, nevertheless managed to gain the approval of important foreign aid donors and western governments. This was especially important because Uganda, with an economy all but destroyed after years of civil war, was in desperate need of considerable injections of capital from external sources to rebuild.

Ghana and Uganda are ‘typical’ African countries in that, following independence from colonial rule - in 1957 and 1962 respectively -, each later endured several decades of often extreme political instability and periods of military rule. During the 1980s and 1990s, however, both countries made great progress in developing political stability under the leaderships of their long-term presidents, Yoweri Museveni (Uganda) and Flight-Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings (Ghana). By 2000 each had been in power for long periods: Rawlings since 1981, Museveni since 1986. Two factors contributed to their longevity in the political hot seat: first, in each case, the strength of their governments rested on popularity with the mass of ordinary people, a renown built on the fact that citizens generally seemed highly appreciative of the political stability and relative economic steadiness which each leader had managed to develop. Second, both leaders had not only shown a crucial ability to win and maintain the
respect and support of their respective armed forces, but had also built a necessarily
tight control over other instruments of power and security, including the police.  

The political background of each of the leaders was interesting. Both were initially
left wing revolutionaries, who managed to attain their country’s leadership by means
other than via the ballot box. Flt.-Lt. Rawlings led a populist (and generally popular)
coup d’etat in 1981, while Yoweri Museveni, leader of a victorious guerrilla army,
attained power in 1986 through armed struggle. At the outset, both leaders declared
themselves singularly unconvinced by the claimed merits of western-style democracy.
Over time, however, their views on this issue polarised: by the early 1990s Rawlings
had become an apparent advocate of multi-party democracy, while Museveni
continued to maintain that, for Uganda, its demerits greatly outweighed its attractions.
For him, the main drawback of the practice of multi-party democracy in Uganda was
that when it had been tried in the past political parties had almost invariably organised
themselves on the exclusive basis of regional/ethnic/religious affiliations. The
outcome, Museveni argued, was that the country had to endure years of extreme
political volatility and hostility which was only brought to an end following his
accession to power in 1986.

Why have Ghana and Uganda democratised in divergent ways and with somewhat
different outcomes? Was Rawlings’s apparent conversion to liberal democracy a
capitulation to external pressures? Was Museveni’s refusal to go down the same road
an indication of his ability to deny such demands? Uganda and Ghana are important

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case studies in the wider issue of democratisation in Africa for they help shed light on a wider issue: was the region’s recent democratisation the result, primarily, of internal or external pressures on authoritarian governments? The issue is both significant and topical because the quality of our political analysis of contemporary Africa is closely linked to the clarity of our understanding of the nature of political causality in the region. The wider issue is one long debated: Are the region’s governments forced to respond to overwhelming external pressures to have certain kinds of political systems as advocates of the erstwhile dependency school long maintained? Or are Africa’s democratic ‘inadequacies’ more a consequence of the region’s unique history, culture and social structures, as proponents of the modernisation approach have contended?

Internal pressures to democratise

While emphases differ as to the relative weight we should attach to each set of factors, many analyses of recent political change in Africa point to the conclusion that democratisation during the 1990s was a result of a combination of both external and internal pressures. There are, in effect, two schools of thought on the matter. The first contends that internal, often bottom-up, pressures played the dominant role in persuading Africa’s authoritarian rulers to restructure their countries’ political systems along more recognisably democratic lines. Those stressing the primacy of internal considerations typically highlight four main factors: (1) steep declines over time in the legitimacy of authoritarian governments; (2) often chronic diminution of state capacity to achieve developmental objectives; (3) the impact of economic crisis in many African countries, the consequence of an interaction of domestic policy failures and malign changes in the global economy; and (4) the effect of political protest, economic reform, and/or pro-democracy movements.

Adding to and underpinning these domestic factors was the impact of the swift demise of the communist counter-hegemonic challenge to liberal democracy and capitalism in the 1980s. This was instrumental in undermining the claimed benefits of one-party or military rule in many African countries. Such governments had claimed that strongly centralised, one-party, no party, or military rule was necessary to deliver social and political stability, while economic planning would help smooth out capitalism’s cyclical hiccups. But Africans could see with their own eyes that, in most cases, such claims were patently false, utilised to justify the increasingly unjustifiable, the perpetuation of regimes which were not only, in many cases, inept, but also often grotesquely corrupt.

It is important to stress the significance of economic decline on demands for political changes in Africa. Most of the region’s economies performed very poorly in the 1980s and early 1990s: during 1980-93 there was an average annual regional decline in per capita GNP of -0.8 per cent - the worst record in the world during this period. The consequence was that quality of life indicators for many Africans declined: the consequence was that the need for socio-economic change in Africa was obvious to many people in a region where, annually, more than 4 million children die before they reach the age of 5 years, a third of all children are malnourished, one in eight is disabled and one in three has no primary education. But despite clear signs of widespread poverty and stymied development, the region’s governments were very often slow to embark on systematic economic reforms. The power of vested interests helped to prevent change, and it was often sustained pressures both from below as well as from external actors that ultimately helped force economic reforms.

To help combat poor economic indicators, the region’s share of global aid more than doubled in the 1970s compared to the preceding decade. But many African economies still performed poorly. A major problem was that increased aid flows on their own were not enough without debt relief to put the region’s economies on a
sound footing. With gross international debts more than 100 per cent of annual export output, and with service payments over three times annual export earnings, by the 1980s Africa was stuck in a vice from which it could not easily escape. Increasingly peripheral to the world economy, in the 1980s and 1990s the region suffered greatly in the harsh international climate because it was by far the weakest region economically. 14

The typical pattern was that economic grief led to domestic political unrest at home. In the first decade-and-a-half of independence (c.1960-75) most African economies had been relatively prosperous. It was easy then to claim that economic success was the result of rule by one-party or other forms of authoritarian states which, like the common role model, the USSR, appeared to be well suited to the twin task of national integration and development. But the oil shocks of the 1970s showed the hollowness of this claim as the weaknesses of African political systems, built on the ability of regimes to grease the wheels of power and keep ‘big men’ happy, were cruelly exposed. Resources dwindled, states were increasingly unable to fulfil their neo-patrimonial functions, either in providing employment or in enabling state resources to be distributed by patrons to their clients, and domestic demands for reform grew. As their grip on power was challenged, African regimes typically became more repressive (viz. Mugabe’s government in Zimbabwe at the present time). In short, it was the economic crisis, primarily a consequence of poor government policies over long periods, which was a major catalyst for the political changes of the 1990s.

External sources of democratisation
To some observers, foreign pressure was pivotal in explaining the changes because, it is argued, it was most unlikely that internal opposition on its own would have been

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sufficient to encourage authoritarian regimes to inaugurate political and economic reform. Analysts argue not only that the economic crisis was of great importance but also that the demonstration effect of the sudden, unexpected implosion of East Europe’s communist regimes and the demise of the cold war in the late 1980s was an important contributory factor.  

Africa became a renewed focus of attention by western governments and western-dominated international financial institutions (IFIs) following the end of the cold war. Western governments and states began to attach political ‘conditionalities’ to aid and investment: African regimes denying sufficient human and political rights to their citizens were likely to be refused funding. In some cases political conditionality was directly linked to democratisation, but in others it was liked to the more nebulous notion of ‘good governance’. The reasoning behind political conditionality was partly economic in that it was argued that economic failure in Africa was in some measure due to the absence of democracy and political accountability. Without significant political changes the imposition of economic conditionality, requiring major economic reforms as precondition for foreign aid and investment, would not produce the desired economic results. But it is not the case that democracy was forced on reluctant Africans by dominant foreign actors: there is no single case in Africa where externally-derived political conditionality was applied in advance of significant domestic pressure for democratisation.

The situation of political conditionality of the 1990s contrasted with the west’s early position. During the 1970s and 1980s African regimes with few democratic credentials to speak of were nevertheless often strongly supported by the west as long as they claimed to be ‘anti-communist’. Indeed, some - for example, President Mobutu in Zaire - were encouraged to preserve their anti-democratic political systems

as a bulwark against communism. While liberal democracy may have been the theoretically preferred condition, there is very little evidence to suggest that most western governments regarded free and fair elections or civil and individual rights as a primary condition for economic support or military or diplomatic protection. Neither did the World Bank or IMF show a serious commitment to promote democratic government - although as primarily economic institutions there was no real reason why they should. In short, for long periods it was widely seen by western governments as conducive to their strategic interests for there to be undemocratic, ‘anti-communist’ governments in Africa.

Where democratic institutions and processes were tolerated it was at ‘low intensity’, for example, the facade democracies of Côte d’Ivoire, Cameroon or Senegal. In these countries political elites worked closely with supporting military agencies, armed by the French government. Under such conditions, socially progressive or reformist movements were unable to make much headway. Often they were regarded as disloyal opposition, a danger to continued western support. As a result, human rights violations coexisted with western aid programmes, trade links or military pacts. Meaningful democratic transitions were inevitably impeded. In the late 1970s and early 1980s a period of low intensity democracy sprang from the growing confidence of the Carter and Reagan administrations that capitalism was winning the war - especially the global economic struggle - against communism. But by the mid-1980s the way was open for a ‘Crusade for Democracy’, the term used by Ronald Reagan in his address to the British Parliament in 1982. What this amounted to was that democratic transition in Africa should be limited to forms of government that could be counted on to apply economic structural adjustment.  

Gills, Rocamara and Wilson, with a recent variation of the ‘standard’ dependency

argument, claim that democratic changes in non-western regions were largely controlled by western governments, especially that of the USA, in cahoots with local conservative elites. 17 Both parties, they argue, shared an interest in limiting the extent of political changes. In other words, their theory of democratisation highlights both the limited significance of democratisation in non-western contexts during the 1980s and early 1990s, as well underlining the important role of certain external actors in this process. The outcome - low intensity democracy - was no more than a democratic veneer overlaying otherwise unreformed political structures. Power stayed in more or less the same hands as before with the illusion only of greater democracy. It satisfied western governments’ allegedly insincere concerns for wider democratisation. In short, the argument is that external forces dictated the process of political change in Africa and other non-western political environments for their own aims, which were intimately connected to their strategic and economic goals and the continued survival in power of their local allies.

There is very limited evidence in support of the ‘low intensity democracy’ argument vis-à-vis Africa, for three reasons. First, the collapse of communism reduced but not removed the need for strategic advantage, which actually led to guarded - but apparently genuine - US support for ‘real’ prodemocracy movements in several formerly communist countries in Africa, including Angola, Benin, Ethiopia and Mozambique.

Second, the low intensity democracy argument overestimates the extent of western - especially US - influence on domestic political developments in Africa. The USA was been quite unable to influence definitively the direction of political change in Somalia, Nigeria, or Sudan.

The fact is that western governments have two, not necessarily congruous aims in Africa: they may well wish to see liberal democracy as a desirable moral and political good; on the other hand, they may also prefer nondemocratic governments under some circumstances. Over the years successive US governments were decidedly ambivalent about the prospect of social democratic governments coming to power - even by the ballot box. In the early 1990s, the World Bank argued that nondemocratic government ‘in polarized societies’ - that is, most African countries - was actually more conducive to economic stability than democratically-elected regimes which might polarise society still further. 18

While more and better democracy was no doubt morally desirable, of greatest importance to western industrialised countries was a stable international economic system. Consequently, it was important that Africa, along with other less-industrialised regions, should continue to play their traditional role of suppliers of raw materials to western industry and, in addition, be consumers of western manufactured goods. For these objectives, stable regimes, not necessarily democratic governments, were sine qua non.

Third, external actors can only rarely - for long - impose political systems on unwilling countries. Democracy rarely develops and becomes embedded itself without the active involvement of a coalition of self-interested and self-aware class forces acting together to ensure that democratic change endures. In fact, ‘external imposition of any kind of regime is difficult, and particularly so of democratic rule. Short-term external intervention can tip the balance in favor of democratisation only if the internal balance of class power and the state-society constellation are favourable’. 19

The main point is that, generally speaking, western governments seemed satisfied if African regimes are stable, with a relatively good human rights regime; if they are democratic as well it is a major bonus. To examine the issue of the west’s impact on their democratic and developmental processes and outcomes, I turn next to the case studies, first, Ghana, then Uganda.

**Ghana**

The emergence of the constitutional regime of Ghana’s Fourth Republic in January 1993 came 11 years after the inception of Flt.-Lt. Rawlings’s Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) government in December 1981. Two important political developments preceded its inauguration first, a referendum on future political arrangements was successfully conducted in April 1992; second, presidential and parliamentary elections were held later the same year. A ban on party politics until mid-1992 served to give him and his party a significant head start over competitors, especially in the presidential race. Following the presidential elections in November 1992, Rawlings was elected president with over 58 per cent of the vote; his party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC), and their allies won nearly all the seats in the legislature in December polls following an opposition boycott.

Despite emphatic electoral victories, what was most striking after more than a decade of PNDC rule was an inability to maintain a broad, secure support base following, from the mid-1980s, significant macro-economic successes. The regime seemed more tolerated than loved. However, the broad acceptance by the political opposition of the thrust of the PNDC’s economic policies - pain was necessary before gain, as Rawlings never tired of proclaiming - was clear: the election campaigns of 1992 did not focus on the desirability of continuing the economic policies. Central was opposition claims that the PNDC regime was a brutal, oppressive government, interested only in continuing in power via elections; consequently, the opposition campaign focused upon the government’s legitimacy, accountability and human
rights record. There were four main charges. The regime had allegedly failed to: (a) respect Ghanaians’ human rights; (b) prevent a diminution of the rule of law; (c) protect the quality of social services and education; and (d) spread the gains of economic growth relatively equitably. But the opposition collectively miscalculated,underestimating the value that most ordinary Ghanaians put on political and economic stability which, despite its authoritarianism, the regime had increasingly managed to provide. Opposition leaders seemed to think that ordinary Ghanaians shared their agenda; the elections results showed they did not. 20

Why did Rawlings allow multiparty elections, given that he was a vocal proponent of the no-party state until the early 1990s? The simple answer is that he was converted to the virtues of multi-party democracy because he believed that he would elections run under such an arrangement. In 1991-2, opinion polls revealed, if a presidential election were held in the near future, he would win it. But to help institutionalise his power he would need a party, a vehicle in parliament to complement his presidency. Would he throw in his lot with an opposition group or start one of his own? Initially the strategy was to do the former; ultimately, however, the latter prevailed. 21

But the issue was not only about his own preferences: to an extent democratisation was forced upon him by the weight of pressures emanating from home and abroad. As will be recalled, the contemporary zeitgeist of the late 1980s and early 1990s was, simply put democracy good, authoritarianism bad. This definitely helped to focus attention in and on undemocratic Ghana. Galvanised by the implosion of the one-party system in Eastern Europe, Rawlings was beset by increasingly vociferous calls to allow multi-party democracy and its corollary, greater governmental

21 Ghana’s post-colonial political tradition is a tale of two competing perceptions of the desirable political state the liberal view of the Busia-Danquah tradition and the populist-nationalist stance of that of Nkrumah.
accountability; this was an especially significant issue in Ghana after more than 10 years of a ‘provisional’, nondemocratic government. But demands for multiparty democracy were initially - and peremptorily - refused by Rawlings; but the pressures refuse to go away.

Three factors strengthened the hands of those calling for political changes. First, the IMF and the World Bank, as well as western governments including those of Britain and America, made it plain that aid and loan flows could be reduced, held up or even halted unless moves towards democracy began. Second, what appeared at the time to be successful political reforms in neighbouring Nigeria - later aborted, before recommencing in the late 1990s - helped persuade Rawlings and his key advisers that it was better to reform at a pace and, hopefully, in a style they could control, rather than have the speed and direction of events carried by unforeseeable developments as in Romania or East Germany.  

Third, increasingly well organised domestic pressure groups, especially the umbrella Movement for Freedom and Justice (MFJ), piled on the pressure. From mid-1990 to mid-1992 anti-PNDC opposition was co-ordinated by the MFJ. But once competitive party politics was allowed, the coalition of interests the MFJ claimed to represent fractured. By allowing the resumption of party politics in mid-1992 - just six months before the scheduled elections - the regime shrewdly gained the upper hand for the forthcoming electoral battles. Rawlings believed that the previously united opposition coalition would fragment once party politics were allowed; and that’s precisely what happened: the opposition found it impossible to present a united front against Rawlings and his party - there were too many vying egos among anti-PNDC politicians. When they couldn’t unite they handed an easy victory to Rawlings and the NDC.

For an account of the pressures to allow political reforms from both internal and external sources, see Jeff Haynes, ‘One-party state, no-party state, multi-party state? 35 years of authoritarianism, democracy and development in Ghana’, Journal of Communist Studies, 8, 2, 1992, pp. 41-62.
The elections of 1992 were notable for two main things: (a) the handsome victory of Rawlings in the presidential elections and the overwhelming triumph of his party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC), in the parliamentary polls and (b) ferocious - yet unproven - opposition charges of cheating by Rawlings’ government. The outcome of the latter was that opposition parties boycotted the parliamentary polls, with the result that NDC candidates won 189 (of the 200) seats. In the presidential polls, Rawlings achieved 58.4 per cent of the votes nationally, while his nearest challenger, Albert Adu Boahen, managed little more than half this figure (30.4 percent). Due to lack of space in the current piece, I will not go in detail into the pros and cons of the electoral fraud issue which has been debated extensively elsewhere. Suffice for now to say that international observers agreed that the polls were generally free and fair but that things could have been better. No reasonably objective account of the 1992 elections that I have read suggests that fraud fundamentally altered the outcome, only that Rawlings’s margin of victory might have been less without it. Rather than the result of cheating, his triumph is best explained by his charisma and talents as a politician, his shrewd use of the benefits of incumbency, the strong support he enjoyed from many ordinary people, especially in the rural areas which had by and large enjoyed many material benefits under the PNDC regime, and by divisions within the opposition.

The opposition parties’ failure to contest the parliamentary elections meant that they collectively shot themselves in the foot: out of parliament, they had virtually no political influence from early 1993 - when the democratically-elected parliament of the Fourth Republic constituted itself - until the next elections in late 1996. Partly for this reason it is difficult to assess to what extent democracy became consolidated in Ghana in the first half of the 1990s. Economic growth was reasonably good but the

23 the remaining seats were secured by independent candidates
24 See Jeffries and Thomas, op. cit.
country remained very poor - the thirty-first poorest globally in GNP per capita terms, at US$390 - despite annual average economic GNP growth per capita of 4.43 per cent in 1990-96. But progress towards reducing poverty was painfully slow, with the poorest 20 per cent of the population receiving just 7.9 of total income. Another factor was that civil society, while relatively developed by African standards, was nevertheless still both fragmented and largely unrepresentative of the country’s mostly rural population.

Ghana also had the typically African problem of political tensions exacerbated by ethnic divisions, making the development of a democratic political culture highly problematic. On the other hand, Ghana was nothing like as bad as some other African countries in this regard, such as Nigeria, Kenya or Uganda; but it nevertheless remained a significant social and political factor. Finally, with the opposition boycotting the 1992 parliamentary elections it was very difficult to make clear progress towards what many take to be the sine qua non of democratic consolidation: political leaders and ordinary people alike believing that democracy was ‘the only game in town’, that is, the only legitimate form of political contestation. The fact of the matter is that, whatever the rights and wrongs of the opposition claims of electoral fraud, the democratic transition was top-down, government-controlled, executed gradually, and in pursuit of relatively moderate objectives. It was not forced by the opposition as in Zambia, Benin or Ethiopia; it was more like the managed political ‘transitions’ found in Kenya and Burkina Faso, where authoritarian governments managed to transform themselves into elected regimes by successfully controlling the transition from authoritarian rule and winning subsequent polls, due, at least in part, to opposition schisms.

Uganda

Uganda was at a critical juncture in its political and social, and economic development when President Museveni achieved power in 1986. Museveni’s National Resistance Movement (NRM) took power in January 1986 following a guerrilla war with, first, the second government of Milton Obote (1980-85) and then that of Generals Bazilio and Tito Okello (1985-6). Given the past political trauma that characterised the country and the near disintegration of the state under Milton Obote and Idi Amin in the 1970s and early 1980s, the Museveni government took power at a time when some observers believed that the country was on the fast track to political disintegration. This concern was contextualised by the fact that Uganda desperately required a period of multifaceted revitalisation following years of oppressive dictatorial regimes in the 1970s and 1980s, years which saw the deaths of tens of thousands of Ugandans and much destruction of the country’s infrastructure.

On coming to power, Museveni’s government introduced an unusual ‘no-party’ democracy, known as the ‘movement system’ with a national network extending from the capital to the rural areas. Only one political organisation, the NRM, latterly the ‘Movement’, was recognised; in effect, it was the ‘party’ of President Museveni. However, he maintained that the Movement was not a political party, but a movement able to claim the loyalty and support of all Ugandans. Of the political parties that existed - but were prohibited from sponsoring candidates, the most important were the Ugandan People’s Congress, the Democratic Party, and the Conservative Party.

Like Ghana, Uganda embarked on a managed transition to a more democratic regime in the early 1990s. Unlike Ghana, it was not towards multi-party democracy but was an experiment in ‘no-party’ government. President Museveni attacked the concept of multi-party democracy with both vigour and eloquence, claiming that it was inappropriate for Uganda, a fundamental cause, when tried in the past, of the country’s political problems. Similarly to Ghana, however, Uganda was the recipient of billions of dollars of foreign aid and loans in the 1980s and 1990s; both countries
had to establish and follow through major economic reforms via structural adjustment programmes whose adoption was strongly encouraged by the IMF and World Bank.

Following the establishment of President Museveni’s government in 1986 there were aspirations to introduce programmes of social welfare and change, although the first priority was to arrest the country’s economic decline and to restart growth. In June 1987, the government launched a four-year Rehabilitation and Development Plan for fiscal years 1998-91. It not only aimed to restore the nation’s productive capacity, especially in industry and agriculture, but also to rehabilitate the social and economic infrastructure. The plan targeted industrial and agricultural production, transportation, and electricity and water services for particular improvements. The plan envisioned an annual five per cent growth rate, requiring foreign funding to the tune of US$1,289 million over the four-year period. Transportation would receive the major share (29.4 per cent), followed by agriculture (24.4 per cent), industry and tourism (21.1 per cent), social infrastructure (17.2 per cent), and mining and energy (6.9 per cent). Although the response of the international financial community was encouraging in terms of debt rescheduling and new loans, the initial rate of economic recovery was modest, before later improving.

While in Ghana there were sustained attempts to link the granting of financial assistance to the progress of democratic reforms, external actors did not do the same in Uganda. Why? Part of the answer, as argued above, is that to a degree western demands for democracy in Africa in the 1990s were not much more than rhetoric: what western governments wanted primarily was political and economic stability, not necessarily democracy.

Turning to the political sphere, Museveni claimed that there was a continuing, ultimately fundamental, shift of power to the mass of ordinary people at the grassroots, a process occurring since he came to power. Museveni claimed to have
created a government of national unity drawn from as many effectively autonomous or semi-autonomous political force as possible, ‘basically in order to bring the country’s internal wars to a close’. 27 ‘Balancing and to some extent constraining the resultant broad-based but weak centre of government …were stronger representations of the multifarious political grassroots of the country in the form of resistance councils’ (RCs). 28 These bodies were established initially in the early 1980s in the ‘liberated areas’ under Museveni’s control. Small scale, face-to-face support groups, they were examples, he claimed, of grassroots, popular democracy in action. Following the achievement of power, RCs spread throughout Uganda as a conscious aspect of NRM policy.

The RCs were not seen by the country’s leaders as some kind of inferior substitute for other kinds of representative institutions. Rather they were defended by NRM leaders as being fundamentally more democratic institutions than earlier political parties operating in Uganda had been. The main traditional political parties - the Democratic Party, the Uganda Peoples’ Congress, and the Kabaka Yekka (‘the king alone’) (located in Buganda) - collectively made Uganda’s transition to independence from Britain in 1962 an intensely pressured and divisive affair. Their manoeuvres and strategies to achieve power had the counterproductive result of strongly encouraging ethnic, regional and ‘sectarian’ differences, that is, the politico-religious cleavages still dividing Uganda four decades after the achievement of independence). 29

After its seizure of power, the NRM installed an intricate structure of resistance councils from village to district level throughout the parts of the country that it controlled. 30 Elections to the various levels were held in 1989 and 1992. Under the terms of the constitution introduced in 1995, legislative power was in the hands of a

28 ibid.
30 Three relatively small-scale civil wars are currently underway in Uganda.
unicameral parliament (the National Resistance Council) with 276 members (of whom 214 were directly elected and sixty-two nominated). Executive powers were held by the president, directly elected for a five-year term. The 1995 constitution required the suspension of political party activity until a referendum would be held on the matter, probably later in 2000. The 1995 constitution provided for a 276-member unicameral parliament and an autonomous, independently-elected president. The constitution formally extended Uganda’s one-party ‘movement system’ form of government for five years and severely restricted political party activities. Ugandans would be free then either to continue with the no-party system or to organise political parties. It would also allow them, according to decide on any other type of democracy, except for one-party government. 

In what was widely interpreted as a step towards political normalisation, in June and July 1996 separate generally peaceful and orderly presidential and parliamentary elections were held. Like Rawlings in Ghana, Museveni was elected president by a wide margin (70-30 per cent) over his nearest challenger, Paul Ssemogerere, joint candidate of the Democratic Party and the Ugandan People’s Congress, the two most important of the old political parties. In addition, NRM supporters, like their counterparts in Ghana’s NDC, won an overwhelming majority of seats in the new parliament. Overall, popular participation in the three sets of elections was generally considered to have been widespread, successful and to have provided positive evidence of the NRM’s commitment to its own kind of no-party democracy.

What was the response of the international community to the Museveni regime’s commitment to an unconventional political system? Despite the regime’s disavowal of multi-party democracy and a questionable human and civil rights record, there was considerable financial support for the NRM government from external

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sources. The Ugandan government, like that of Ghana, relied very heavily on foreign aid to support its development programme, with foreign assistance accounting for approximately 51 per cent of government spending. 33 Like under Rawlings in Ghana, Museveni’s leadership resulted, in similar textbook fashion, in the adoption of an IMF/World Bank-supported structural adjustment programme. There were economic rewards in so doing: between 1985-96 average annual growth in GNP per capita averaged 2.7 per cent in Uganda; and since 1990 growth has been even better: with over 7 per cent a year on average during the 1990s; the most recent data, for 1997-8, indicates a growth rate of 5.8 per cent. 34 While much of this growth was no more than rebuilding after years of civil strife, it was nonetheless a good record.

Museveni repeatedly warned that untrammelled multi-party competition would threaten the country’s economic progress and hard won political stability by aggravating extant ethnic and religious divisions. In Uganda, there are four main religious divides - Protestants, Catholics, Muslims and followers of African traditional religions; while ethnic diversity is reflected in the fact that there are at least 40 distinct ethnic groupings in Uganda. 35

Given such factors how surprising was it that he managed to secure broad-based international support for his political and economic programmes, while defying western pressures for multi-party democracy? The philosophy advanced by the NRM regime was that it was trying to build a democratic system which allowed free choice to be exercised by the individual. According to George B. Kirya, Uganda’s High Commissioner to Britain, politically ‘[e]ach individual has freedom to participate fully without fear or favour … the emphasis being on political empowerment of the people from the grassroots, leading to participatory democracy … Decisions are then made by consultation and consensus, rather than “winner takes

33 http//www.usis.it/hr_reps/uganda.htm  
The main elements of the ‘movement’ democratic philosophy are:

- all leadership and policies come from the grassroots through strong village and local government;
- individuals are elected to political office on individual merit;
- accessibility to all positions of leadership is open equally to all citizens, and not just a few;
- the culture of tolerance through discussion is enhanced, rather than shutting up people who may not agree with a particular policy;
- participatory, all inclusive democracy, instead of confrontation;
- accountability and transparency;
- agreement on issues by consensus, rather than trying to outmanoeuvre others;
- full participation of women, the youth and the disabled in the democratic process.

As a consequence, Uganda, it is claimed, ‘has become an island of tranquillity, with a peace and stability never experienced before’. While under Museveni the country shed its shameful reputation for state violence, High Commissioner Kirya’s claims do not fully stand up to scrutiny. According to Freedom House ratings, ‘partly free’ Uganda managed a 4 on political rights and a 4 on civil liberties in 1998. Cape Verde, Ghana, Sao Tomé and Principe, South Africa, Benin, Mali, Namibia, Malawi, Madagascar, Seychelles, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique all did better than Uganda in these regards among new African democracies.

While the government’s human rights record did seem to improve over time according to the US government, ‘numerous, serious problems remain[ed]’. Citizens

36 Kirya, “‘No-party government’”, p. 234.
37 ibid.
38 ibid.
39 1 represents the most free and 7 the least free category.
had the right to change their government, but NRM domination of ‘the flawed election process’ limited this right. In the late 1990s, ‘[s]ecurity services used excessive force, at times resulting in death. Government forces committed or failed to prevent some extrajudicial killings of suspected rebels and civilians’. Police and army personnel ‘regularly beat and sometimes tortured suspects, often to force confessions … [S]ecurity force abuses remained a problem throughout the country’ in the late 1990s.  40 It is necessary to relate, however, that the government is fighting three separate civil wars, in the north-east, the north-west, and the west of Uganda. 41

If Uganda has flawed elections and a questionable human rights regime why has it not come under attack from western governments? Instead foreign donors have praised the country’s economic and political recovery ‘What is happening in Uganda is … your own type of democracy that is trying to fit into the Ugandan context’, said one. The British Labour government decided on coming to power in May 1997 that it would not ‘press for multiparty reforms in Uganda’. 42 The international donors’ willingness to accept the Museveni version of democracy at face value is significant because elsewhere in Africa donors have insisted that aid depends on continued progress toward permitting parties to form and compete freely.

The simple answer is that Museveni has been able to bring political stability and economic steadiness to most of a country that has hardly experienced either since independence in 1962. Surrounded by politically volatile countries - including the Democratic Republic of Congo (Zaire), Sudan, Ethiopia, and Rwanda - Uganda is seen by western governments as an island of stability in an increasingly turbulent East African region. But the rapprochement between Museveni and the west has been slow

40 http://www.usis.it/hr_reps/uganda.htm
42 Quotes from Kasfir, “‘No-party democracy’”, p. 50.
and tentative. While fighting in the bush, Museveni vowed never to deal with western-controlled financial institutions in general, and the World Bank and the IMF in particular. He blamed them for forcing structural adjustment policies (SAPs) on nations such as Ghana and for being insensitive to their plight by compelling cuts in expenditure on key social services such as health and education. He also used to argue that aid should not be tied to development, but viewed as obligatory compensation from the colonial powers for the slave trade and many decades of plundering Africa. 43 On coming to power, however, he found, like Rawlings in Ghana had before him, that it is impossible to rebuild a smashed economy without substantial foreign assistance. Governing a country that relies on foreign aid and loans for all development projects and the financing of the budgetary deficit, Museveni has now embraced, apparently with conviction, previously criticised IMF goals such as privatisation, currency reform, trimming of the civil service and full economic liberalisation. His volte face was clear recently when he stated at the UN General Assembly in New York, that ‘the greatest structural constraint that has inhibited Africa’s growth over the last 35 years of independence has been the phenomenon of sustained state intervention in business’. 44

It is tempting to suppose that endorsement of western economic growth strategies would go some way to compensate for the lack of ‘conventional’ democracy in Uganda. And this would seem to be the case. Museveni has made a successful diplomatic offensive to sell his no-party version of democracy to the west. His success in convincing the west that his all-inclusive ‘movement system’ democracy can work without political parties has surprised many observers. While neighbouring countries, such as Kenya, were forced by western backers to adopt multi-party democratic systems. But Museveni managed to side-step this outcome by the use both of subtle diplomacy and innovative appointments, such as Specioza Wandira

44 ibid.
Kazibwe who, as vice-president, is the highest-ranking female politician in Africa.

**Conclusion**

I posed several questions at the beginning of this paper: Why have Ghana and Uganda democratised in divergent ways and with different outcomes? Was Rawlings’s apparent conversion to liberal democracy a capitulation to external pressures? Was Museveni’s refusal to go down the same road an indication of his ability to deny such demands?

Uganda and Ghana are examples of countries whose leaderships were firmly against multiparty elections at the beginning of the 1990s. But pressure from a variety of sources - both internal and external - persuaded them of the desirability of fundamental changes. While Ghana’s government presided over - and ultimately benefited from - multi-party elections, the government of Uganda inaugurated an unusual ‘no-party’ democracy - the ‘movement system’ - which nevertheless gained the widespread approval of important foreign aid donors. Donors accepted Museveni’s system because they valued immensely his ability to build stability in the country; in addition, they came to realise that there was, in fact, very little they could practically do if the regime steadfastly set its face against western demands for political reforms, especially as the government could offer proof, via electoral outcomes, that it was broadly supported by a majority of those voting in recent elections.

In conclusion, both Uganda and Ghana are important case studies in the wider issue of democratisation in Africa because they help shed light on a wider issue: it is neither solely internal or external pressure which has led to contemporary political reforms in the countries, but a combination of the two. External-imposed economic reforms have been important catalysts for political reform but internal factors have shaped the precise pattern and content of those reforms.