

ABSTRACT

DEMOCRACY PROMOTION IN AFRICA: INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

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Democracy is seen as a viable means to rebuild the legitimacy of African states, in particular in post-conflict settings. However, African democracy is often based on a particular set of institutions which tend to concentrate power in the executive. A powerful president operates in a context of low separation of powers and few possibilities to restrain the executive. The party-political landscape is highly majoritarian (see van Cranenburgh 2008 and 2009).

Most democratic reforms and democracy assistance policies have been directed at multiparty elections, and not at the institutional context of multi-party competition, such as presidential versus parliamentary government, coalitions, electoral systems and decentralization. This is a serious flaw which also limits the extent to which legitimacy and accountability has been increased.

The neglect of formal institutions has often been implicit in the analysis of personal rule in Africa. Although institutions frequently serve to bolster personal rule, at the same time, as observed by Posner and Young (2007), institutional rules limiting executive power are beginning to matter more in Africa, as evidenced in patterns of succession and observance of presidential term limits. Building on previous research, my contribution will deal with the institutional means through which accountability in Africa might be increased, i.e. reassessing presidential power, increasing separation of powers, coalitions or co-habitation, and will suggest new strategies in democracy assistance policies.

References

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