POLITICAL LEGITIMACY AND DEMOCRACY IN CENTRAL AFRICA: A LOOK AT CAMEROON, CHAD, THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC AND GABON

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Abstract

This paper offers evidence of the intrinsic relationship between political legitimacy and democracy and scrutinizes the factors that provoke a crisis of political legitimacy and democracy in Central Africa. It contends that there is a need for the reconceptualization of political legitimacy and democracy in Africa as the conventional lines between democracy and totalitarianism seem to be clouding. It then concludes that despite the fact that democratic foundations in the region suffer from daunting challenges, demands for democratization continues to grow, resulting in the need to pay close attention to state legitimacy to ensure a democratic consolidation.

Introduction

This paper examines the state of political legitimacy in Central Africa and its effects on democratic consolidation in the region. We should bear in mind that political legitimacy remains one of the most important foundations for democratic stability and a prominent characteristic of politics in the region since independence. Nonetheless, authoritarian rule is closely linked to it too. The question of political legitimacy in the region still presents a great challenge especially as the region's nations are still building their paths towards democracy.

Subsequent to the events of the 1980's in the world, which were marked by so many countries shifting tides towards democratization which was 'blowing across the globe,' as written Broadbent, (1992: 102)., most countries in the region began holding elections, legalizing multi-party systems, and introducing presidential term-limits for the leaders. Following these events, prospects for democracy in Central Africa grew at a proportion never witnessed since the countries gained independence. This paper seeks to offer evidence of the intrinsic relationship between political legitimacy and democracy, exploring how the presence or lack of political legitimacy has positively or negatively influenced democracy in the region. This paper also suggests evidence that the democratic impulse in the region may have been weakened by the problems surrounding political legitimacy and that the political forces intrinsic to weakening democracy are rather internal than external. Typically, democracy in the region has been defined in terms of elections and transitions of power, but we also have to include other accompanying variables like constitutionalism, the respect of human rights, freedom of association and assembly, topics which remain very much questionable in the region.

The following sections shall provide a brief overview of the literature on the relationship between political legitimacy and democracy and trace the history of political power in the selected countries, then explore what political legitimacy truly is. Another section will be devoted to discussing the development of political power, the prevalence of authoritarian rule or illiberal democracies, and also the reasons for the prevalence of unresponsive multi-party states as the dominant idiom of today's politics in the Central Africa by presenting the state of democracy within the existing political apparatuses. This shall be done by looking at the long-run and short-run rapport between political legitimacy and democracy.

Theorizing Political Legitimacy and Democracy

This section identifies the debates on political legitimacy and democracy by highlighting the determinants of both terms and will go further to establish the nature of the relationship between the two concepts. Larry Diamond summarizes diverse views of the determinants of democracy. These include, inter alia, the economic performance, with indicators such as improvement in living standards which he emphasizes has become a truism. Also, political performances such as freedom and order, human rights, and political legitimacy (Diamond, 1997: 19, 20), which stem from positive policies instituted by the leaders. With democratic consolidation being

the main idea, Diamond set out four standards upon which a democracy can be characterized in his lecture 'What is Democracy?', which this study greatly relies on as the guiding standards for legitimacy:

1. A political system for choosing and replacing the government through free and fair elections.
2. The active participation of the people, as citizens, in politics and civic life.
3. Protection of the human rights of all citizens.
4. A rule of law, in which the laws and procedures apply equally to all citizens. (Diamond, 2004)

We can comfortably place the analysis of democratic stability in the Central African region within the larger literature on political legitimacy, which in general ordinary thinking connotes to approval. Levitov identifies at least two points of departure from which legitimacy may be set to prevail, underscoring a sociological path and a normative path (Levitov, 2016) with the latter emphasizing the morality of right to rule. Showing the relationship between legitimacy and democracy in what he described as "loyalty to the democratic regime", Juan Linz emphasized that legitimacy must not be limited to the abstract form of democracy, but should be visible through commitment expressed in shared and normative behaviours in respect of the laws of the land (Linz and Stepan, 1975: 29-37). Lipset in his analysis on the determinants of democracy highlights political legitimacy alongside social requisites such as emergent industrialization, urbanization, education, wealth, and urbanization. (Lipset, 1959) Talking about political legitimacy, Merriam in *Systematic Politics* maintained that factors such as internal and external security, general state well-being, freedom, and justice paved the way for states to enjoy political legitimacy. (Merriam, 1945: 31) There can be several narratives from which analysis of political legitimacy can depart. My general observation is that there is some degree of legitimacy in democracy through the ballot, or what we normally know as elections. This is because all these countries hold regular elections in the name of democracy, but the problem we encounter in analyzing these elections is how free and fair they are. Again, election results are not sufficient enough variables to be used to characterize political legitimacy. The manner in which these electoral results are achieved is important too: whether or not the elections free and fair, and if the wielders of political authority are legitimate or not. Buchanan outlined three[1] (3) ground conditions for determining the legitimacy of political power. (Buchanan, 2002: 703) It is not a new thing to hear of post-electoral contestations in sub-Sahara Africa, some of which even clash out to violent conflicts. The existence of such examples alone prompts us to question whether or not the governments are legitimate.

Buchanan's works are very important for the provision of a theory analyzing political legitimacy. He argues in favour of political legitimacy rather than political authority, emphasizing on the need for real democratic institutions as the basis for determining political legitimacy (Buchanan, 2002: 718) thus the theory of democratically authorized political power (Buchanan, 2002: 693). Legal theorist Christopher

Wellman, on the other hand, sees a state as legitimate if it enjoys the moral freedom to utilize and threaten force against the ruled (Wellman, 1996: 211, 212). This direction of analysis of legitimacy focuses more on the coercive nature of the state, which alludes to the state's monopoly on the legitimate utilization of physical force to coerce and enforce actions within its territory. Buchanan's ideas are thus more useful to the analysis of this article because even in a democracy, each state has the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force (monopoly on violence). Abusing this monopoly, illegitimately using force, and sneaky attitudes on issues of state against the general health of the country in democracies raise questions in the issue of political legitimacy in these states. This highlights the pivotal role of legitimacy in the analysis of democratic studies.

Leadership has played and continues to play a great role in democracy and the discrepancies between the thoughts and actions and the diversity of the desires of these leaders are important factors in the nature of democracy. Schatzberg quotes Decalo that 'there has been an unfortunate tendency to confuse longevity with legitimacy or the absence of coups with both stability and legitimacy' (Schatzberg, 1989: 445),[2] highlighting how misleading many studies of political sciences have been so far in understanding political legitimacy in African regimes. Inherent to the analysis of Schatzberg is the importance he conveys to political culture, which has been the characterizing factor of leadership in sub-Sahara Africa.

Inglehart advances much on the debate of political culture as he analyses how societies have different patterns of political cultural approaches which are enduring and not unchallengeable (Inglehart, 1988) Inglehart's ideas provoke thoughts on the type of political culture which characterizes the political sphere in Central Africa, and gives meaning to the events which are almost peculiar to the area, there by guiding the understanding of the cultural mechanisms of political legitimacy. This paper however upholds political legitimacy to be the attitude which the system of government deems best for the country, be it morally right, justifiable, proper, and deserving of the people's fidelity. This paper furthers the thought that a legitimate government is one which operates not for the interests of a particular group or the interests of the leaders, but for the majority of the country's population or the whole country, thus giving it a moral title to govern and command obedience from the people, be able to tax the people effectively, be capable of drafting, legislating and enforcing laws, thus being able to practice a mixture of coercion and consent for the general will of the people as democracy stipulates. Democracies however vary and are unique to every area, this

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paper thus sees democracy and political legitimacy as based on the consent of the governed, not saying coercion should not exist, but it seeks to put the voluntary consent of the citizens as the pre-condition for an effective democracy. Political legitimacy explores the relationship between the leaders in power/those who control the state on the one hand and the citizens who are being governed. Also, because of the importance of this relationship to democracy, the moral grounds of legitimate governance must be well established.

Tracing the History of Political Power in Central Africa

Pre-colonial African politics was characterized by a system of governance argued by many as being authoritarian, with hierarchy composing the basis of traditional rule. Others see it as being democratic, made up of societies that engaged in general consultations prior to decision making (Kunz, 1991). Focusing on these skeletal and limited structures to discuss the present state of affairs will be misleading because these forms of practices were not practiced throughout the continent as there were variations in modes of governance in the various societies. Neither where they universally regarded as modelled systems of governance as we define today. We cannot however deny that the tradition of constitutionality (the art of governing according to legally binding written texts), which we have today was absent, because these pre-colonial modes of government had modes of operation (though not written in texts as we do today) which they followed, with laws and legislations peculiar to every environment, to represent mutuality and accountability, thus proving the legitimacy of the governments that existed then, as Gluckman explained (Gluckman, 1965).

The present institutions of governance in Africa are the remnants of a foreign system, instituted during colonialism by the colonial powers to suit their interests, wherein the existing traditional political authorities were ousted and more colonial friendly ones replaced them. Or they were friendly from the beginning and thus the colonial powers incorporated them on the basis of collaboration, thus conserving their 'traditional status' and powers and integrating themselves into the colonial governments. This system of leadership set the ground for the western loyalist governments we have in Central Africa today which operate based on a client-patron relationship. The characteristic of the political elite is one with leaders of little regard for the local political culture who also have very fragile links with societies at large.

As this paper seeks to establish, legitimacy has been variedly defined, but the propositions of this paper's view on legitimacy shall include government responsiveness as a basis for determining a legitimate government, with the assumption being that a responsive government will gain the support of the people, and the loopholes for political opposition and crises shall be limited. The question of responsiveness however remains relative. Relativity here connotes to either economic responsiveness or political responsiveness. Conventional wisdom has it that economic performance by some governments in new democracies serves as a means of a government legitimizing itself. Examples of the miraculous economic achievements witnessed in some African countries such as Rwanda and East Asian economic giants oper-

ating under authoritarian systems of governance permitted these governments to legitimize themselves in power, though as recent waves of events prove, the tides have changed towards securing basic political rights (Wike and Schumacher, 2020). A prolific writer in this field is Adam Przeworski who stresses on the importance of economic delivery to consolidation of democracy by identifying the gap between the real economic experiences and the subjective expectations to conclude that popular support for democracy will increase if the citizens have witnessed and believe democracy to improve upon their individual economic condition (Przeworski, 1991). Experience from the history of Europe has proven that their move towards democracy came with improvements in their national economies. Another group of scholars, William Mishler, Christian Haerpfer and Richard Rose, however, warn against this reductionist theory. They argue to, "not treat all political attitudes as if they were merely reliant on economic situations." They also concluded that it is not just economic factors that define the levels of popular support for democracy, but political factors do so even more. (Rose, Mishler and Haerpfer, 1998: 157, 174) Ascertaining the validity of this analysis is relative to region, country, and time. Popular support for governments has varied across time and circumstances everywhere on Earth. Analyzing the legitimacy and support for governments in countries like Cameroon, Chad, Central African Republic, and Gabon will place political factors in the forefront because the governments in these countries continue to thrive despite the numerous economic challenges and lapses they are facing. The popular support they enjoy (at least from electoral outcomes over the last two or three presidential elections) has proven that the governments remain unshaken, though the elections have always been contested to be fraudulent. (Election, 2018) Contrary to the situation in countries such as Rwanda, economic policy performance and responsiveness has served for many governments as the basis for legitimacy.

This paper contends that the legitimacy of governments in Central Africa is linked to and closely affiliated with the ruling party and its surrounding history. Often, the people do not even have a chance to determine if the government is legitimate or not, and it wouldn't matter if the government is democratic or authoritarian. The economic challenges faced by people often tend to obscure their judgment of legitimacy and by this, draws them further away from political participation, which in turn limits the chances of ascertaining the legitimacy of a government. Some economic policy successes and breakout of civil disobediences and terrorist attacks have been seized as opportunities by governments to further their agenda of holding on to power over an increasingly apolitical population too. Voter registration and electoral results in several of these countries have proven this to be true, with increasingly decreasing figures. Data from the Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) and International IDEA shall be used to illustrate the views of this paper.
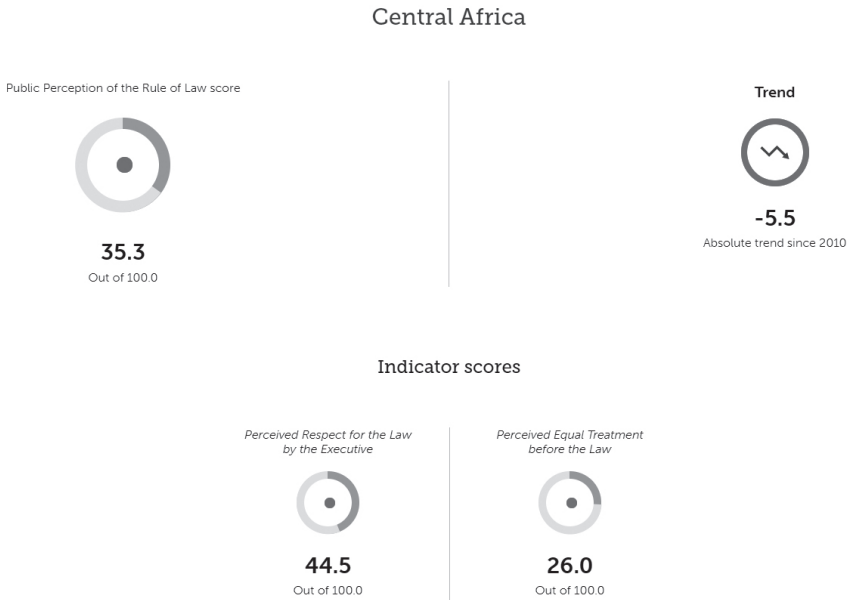
The International IDEA report on the history of electoral processes shows a steady decline in voter turnout at least for the past two presidential elections in Cameroon to have declined from 68.28% in the 2011 presidential election to 53.85% in the 2018 presidential election.[3] This same outcome happens to be exhibited with the case

of Central African Republic which in its subsequent presidential elections recorded a steady decrease from 72.65% in the 2005 presidential elections to 59.01% as of the 2016 presidential elections.[4] 'The justice-based theory of political legitimacy' proposed by Buchanan could be a starting point for further investigation of this situation (Buchanan, 2002: 23).

A few years after attaining independence, countries in this region immediately adopted multi-party politics as a basis of legitimizing their positions. This was done through the institutionalization of nationalist movements who fought for independence to become political parties to shoulder the responsibility of leading the states as the colonial masters packed their bags.[5] A promising age had begun, the age of enlightenment, true promises of the future everyone dreamt of; living in a land of freedom of expression, of speech, and of association. This age ushered in constitutional reforms in so many countries. As a case in point, Cameroon's constitution in 1961 (adopted during the creation of the federal state structure) outlined a multi-party system, with many political parties already operating as of then. Although this situation was short-lived, as the country under the reign of Ahmadou Ahidjo was geared towards another direction adopting a monolithic single mass-party system, a system which aimed to centralize power and eliminate all forms of opposition. This system was characterized by: the nonexistence of competitive political parties and, multiple candidate elections, the absence of freely formed associations, and also the limitation of fundamental political and civil liberties, and strong monopolization of political decision-making.[6] Such measures were adopted then by the regime as a form of ensuring state conservation, to ensure that a country largely divided as Cameroon remains united, which as of then had the formation of political parties based on regional and tribal lineages. Other sources, such as the United States Department of Commerce, saw it as a means for the state to tie together its resources and improve its economic development[7] because multi-party politics would have been a waste of resources. Evidence of the popularity of the existing political parties in Cameroon were proof enough that this assertion was justifiable to a certain extent as the Union Camerounaise (UC), the party of President Ahidjo was popular mostly only in the region where he came from, while the party of John Ngu Foncha, who was vice president of the Federal Republic, Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) was mostly popular only in the Anglophone region where the leader originated from. Ahidjo's position was advanced under the agenda of the "Grand National Party" known by its French appellation "Parti Unifié" (Ngoh, 1996: 235) The mono-party system adopted in Cameroon fell into the trap of desire for political authority as it gradually led to the centralization of state power, which enabled Ahidjo to consolidate his position as president. This system was however abandoned with the coming to power of Paul Biya in what was described as the *'New Deal'* (Aseh, 2006: 110) government in 1982. The idea behind the early one-party system was the same as in many other countries: unifying resources and the people towards common growth, which in essence legitimized the government. The introduction of a multi-party system was a response to a call for liberty because the one-party state had led to the

centralization of power, thus multi-party politics piloted a new era witnessing the passing of liberty laws as was the case in Cameroon (Jua, 2003: 85). This era saw the emergence of political parties who competed in political elections and provided a sense of legitimacy to the governments. The euphoria surrounding multi-parties and legitimizing the leadership of these countries has however been short-lived as political prosecution and suppression of these liberty laws have become the norm and freedoms of expression were seized from the people and opposition leaders were detained as the cases of Cameroon (after the presidential elections)[8] and Gabon in 2016[9] show. IIAG statistics show a downward trend of -5.5 on the rule of law in the Central African region, with the region having a public perception score of only 35.5% as illustrated on the image below. Consequently, the respect for liberty laws is a determinant of political legitimacy alongside government responsiveness.

Another determinant of both political legitimacy and democracy which remains largely ignored is clientelism, a phenomenon that cannot be considered nonaligned, and whose very manifestation is accompanied by high corruption, favouritism and patronage, all these, the ills of governance and the fuel burning down democracy. The role of clientelism[10] in African politics remains a paradox which is difficult to explain especially as the relationships are more or less voluntary. Kitschelt best put it as "relations not only involving some form or reciprocity and voluntarism but also exploitation and domination" (Kitschelt, 2000: 849) and one would wonder why

Central Africa

Public Perception of the Rule of Law score

35.3
Out of 100.0

Trend

-5.5
Absolute trend since 2010

Indicator scores

Perceived Respect for the Law
by the Executive

44.5
Out of 100.0

Perceived Equal Treatment
before the Law

26.0
Out of 100.0

2020 Ibrahim Index of African Governance, iiag.online
Source: https://iiag.online/app.html?v=t0CC_mnn

these relationships persist, but evidence from the Central African region proves that the clients are more accommodating because they could be better off if they severed the relationship. Several reasons could be proposed as to why these relationships still exist as many have argued, particularly the desires of these former colonial masters to maintain their status as world powers and also their spheres of influence in their former colonies. A good example to examine is the activities of France in sub-Sahara Africa, which have been very debatable[11] as their activities were described as being in "support of leaders who are loyal to them" (French, 1996).

African leaders often resort to a form of 'rent seeking' engagement (Krueger, 1974) and Tullock, 1967), which involves the disbursing of the already scarce resources to capture support (often military and economic, which generally serves just the interests of the leaders in power) from external partners and the equilibrium results are often that the support benefits some interest group at the detriment of others. This activity widely practiced by African leaders through which they create monopolies and assign political and economic rights and privileges to influential groups of people and even individuals in exchange for 'rent' with the aim of gaining the support of these groups and individuals not to challenge these leaders' authorities. These relationships have been the source of several forms of inefficiencies in the democratic consolidation process of Africa and its economic development. The approval of these powerful groups and individuals can be considered as a very important survival tactic for these rulers. Mbaku analyses these fears as competitive and transactions cost constraints.[12] The nature of political legitimacy in Cameroon, Chad, Central African Republic, and Gabon is very complex due to such relations because the support for these leaders is both internal and external, and monopoly on power positions keep shifting from old to new rivalries with the coming of different leaders.

Institutionalized state corruption steered by the leaders of these countries has been the most visible hand of the rent seeking which has ensued severe levels of hardship in these countries, draining the national resources into private pockets. Institutionalized corruption is a variable that affects political legitimacy and democracy in this region. Many crises of legitimacy in the continent have been linked to corruption, a continuous process of successive regimes operating with the same agenda under different groupings. The inability of governments to meet people's expectations, matched by growing corruption under normal circumstances gives a big blow to the legitimacy of the government and also democracy especially as widespread dissatisfaction leads to loss of confidence in the institutions of the state which are bent on shredding the remaining state resources for private ends. Government instituted anti-corruption mechanisms have been very ineffective in putting an end to this activity. IIAG data on the Central African region shows that there is a downward trend of -9.8 since 2010 and the public perception on government efforts fighting corruption remains at only 43.6% as shown on the figure below.

Central Africa

Public Perception of Anti-Corruption score

43.6
Out of 100.0

Trend

-9.8
Absolute trend since 2010

Indicator scores

Perceived Freedom from Paying
Bribes for Administrative
Services

72.4
Out of 100.0

Satisfaction with Fighting
Corruption

24.9
Out of 100.0

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Source: https://iiag.online/app.html?v=1gU40dmI

Another very intriguing issue about governance in this region that triggers questions on legitimacy is the usurping of the judiciary arm of government, or rather the political dependence of the judiciary on the executive arm, a relationship which has been clearly formalized. Majority of the governments in the region are presidential republics by constitution, and all have weird twists in their political evolution and several irregularities surrounding their constitutions. The very nature of the constitutions and the judiciary in most sub-Saharan Africa is closely subject to the special rights of the head of state, which in most cases is also the head of armed forces. The judicial authority in Central Africa, contrary to classical constitutional setups, in the context of the events clearly visible in the region have proven to be not in the aim of limiting the power of the executive arm by fulfilling the separation and balance of powers, but rather, as Kamdem explains, serves as an instrument of administrative hegemony over the state machinery (Kamdem, 2019: 52). Emphasizing on the troubling position of the respective arms of the government in Cameroon, Ndifor writes that "the judiciary system in Cameroon has been extremely intertwined in the political affairs of government such that it has lost its independence and currently is being run as an extension of the executive arm" (Ndifor, 2014: 29). The legislative arm of the government has been accused of several exploitations in this region, which allows provisions that places the judiciary in the position to pass judgments and laws to the pleasure of the government in power who appoints them and whose

judgments are final despite constitutional prescriptions that their judgments must be in the favor of the people,[13] as is the case in Cameroon. A depicting feature of this is post-electoral round-up processes. These have been subject to several court procedures but results were twisted to ensure that the government in power secures the vote, because it is the only means they have tended to as a form of legitimacy (Thurston, 2013: 3). They use the vote as proof of being in a better place to manage the affairs of their respective countries. IIAG data proves this assertion yet again correct by showing that executive compliance with the rule of law in the region is on a -1.0 trend, using indicators such as executive compliance with the constitution, executive compliance with judicial decisions and lawful transfers of power. Moreover, impartiality of the judicial system is on a trend of -1.6 and have a score of only 17.4 % as shown on the figure below.

Issues of political legitimacy have been cracking down on democratic consolidation in this region because in many of the countries, the justice system is incapable of checking the power of the other arms of the government, especially the head of the executive arm or the head of state, since the very constitution which prescribes their positions places the head of state above all other functions with statutory powers that cannot be challenged. For example, in Cameroon, the constitution stipulates that the president is the chief executive officer, the head of the armed forces and the head of the Judicial Council[14]. The pivot of political crisis in the Central African region which have led to crisis of legitimacy without further ambiguities must be linked to constitutional weaknesses, which has steered the over empowerment of the executive arm of government. Recent constitutions in the region can be characterized as divisive and interest-oriented, eventually securing very less for the majority of the citizens, with very little progress made from the constitutions drawn during

Central Africa

Executive Compliance with the Rule of Law	Impartiality of the Judicial System
37.6	**17.4**
Out of 100.0	Out of 100.0
Trend	**Trend**
-1.0	**-1.6**
Absolute trend since 2010	Absolute trend since 2010

2020 Ibrahim Index of African Governance, iiag.online
Source: https://iiag.online/app.html?v=AMGWtJak

the pre- and post-independence periods. The outcome of such weak constitutions has been the existence of institutional arrangements that have failed to effectively steer the state to provide mechanisms needed for adequate provision to serve the needs of the people. Pressures for state productivity regarding the ambiguities surrounding the performance of state institutions resonating from the limited nature of their constitutions have often pushed these countries into a series of constitutional amendments, setting further confusion as to which of the constitutions is finally in force in governing these states. In the case of Cameroon, its constitution has been amended more than three times since the first constitution drafted at independence for the country, with the most recent and most controversial being the 2008 constitution, which granted the president immunity from all forms of prosecution for acts as president and also removed presidential term limits, thereby permitting the president to run for an unlimited number of re-elections as he sees fit.[15] Similar cases have been recorded in Gabon (2003), where the leaders manipulate either the parliament or senate to circumvent presidential term limits to allow them to stay in power (Tull, 2017: 87). Vandeginste documents a similar situation in countries such as Senegal and Burundi, where the presidents abused the ambiguities and constitutional weaknesses to legalize more terms through the porous constitutional courts which they control, in 2012 and 2015 respectively (Vandeginste, 2015, 2016).

A good constitution sets the foundations for a sustainable democracy and paves the way for true leadership. Economic development, performance, and provision serving the needs of the citizens can be considered as very important factors for democratic consolidation and legitimacy, but this alone should not suffice in legitimizing a government under democratic constitutions. Economic performance has severally been interpreted as democratic legitimacy, but this study emphasizes that constitutional loyalty, giving the right to independent actions of the other arms of the government should constitute the primary variable in evaluating democratic consolidation.

The Need for the Reconceptualization of Political Legitimacy and Democracy in Africa
In a majority of the cases however, the strategy has changed to warrant that an election (which for many is the face of democracy) must be held, through which the classical autocratic leadership ensures that their position in office is cemented, thereby sustaining at all costs seemingly democratic parties, votes, legislature, and judiciary (Versteeg et al, 2020: 13, citing Meng, 2018). However, such elections are only formal and their fairness and independent status is regularly very questionable at the end due to the common protests from angry opposition parties. Empirical data from IIAG scores democratic elections in the region on 30.1%, following variables such as integrity of elections and election monitoring bodies and agencies.

Following Diamond's four points highlighted above, it will be fair enough to classify such regimes as illegitimate based on the unconventional means by which these leaders utilize to secure their positions in power, which has gradually blurred the conventional lines between democracy and totalitarianism. The nature of authori-

Central Africa

Democratic Elections score

30.1
Out of 100.0

Trend

+2.8
Absolute trend since 2010

Sub-Indicator scores

-Integrity of Elections

35.0
Out of 100.0

-Election Monitoring Bodies & Agencies

25.1
Out of 100.0

2020 Ibrahim Index of African Governance, iiag.online
Source: https://iiag.online/app.html?v=PKDF6-P2

tarianism today, what has been severally described as 'new authoritarianism' is very legitimizing once the position is secured, or at least making the position lasting through the manoeuvring of the state organs to secure decades of presidential power in countries where democracy (or at least moves for democracy) once thrived. The reality about democracy in this region is that the true nature of the governments is unknown and democracy continuous to be on a decline (Bermeo, 2016: 8). Following the past experiences in Niger, 2010, Mali, 2012, Sudan, 2019, just to name a few, a true definition of an illegitimate government would have been one which seizes power by authoritarian means such as through a military coup. Legitimacy crises however, have dissolved from military coups to engulf democratically elected leaders. These governments continually manoeuvre their ways in unethical means to stay in power against the wishes of the people they govern.

Sustainable political legitimacy in Central Africa is a call for concern because the region is plagued with a multitude of problems and many of which have been aggravated by the very people charged with the tasks of governing these countries. There is growing need to put in line a true sense of political legitimacy, and moral authority which will represent the diverse communities making up these states and this is a problem whose answer is far-fetched and will take sadly decades of robust nation-building to achieve especially in an era of democratic decline, wherein donor agencies are still in close collaboration with the very state agencies. The region

is increasingly faced with leaders who did not rise to power through tankers and bullets, but through popular votes, through the ballot boxes in seemingly democratically elected parties. These leaders have, however, upheld not only the holding of regular and constituted elections, but also assumed supposedly democratic organs and institutions to look as if their governance is legitimate. It is not surprising that these countries still operate under constitutions (Elkins et al., 2014: 141, 146) these however are mere decorations serving the strategic needs of the leaders in power. History of political events in the Central African region reveals multiple cases of silencing and delegitimization the opposition, majority of whom are later sanctioned and imprisoned.

Conclusion

This paper concludes on a few important points: the institutions of government; the constitution, which is meant to be liberal and in the interest of all the citizens; the legislatures; the judiciaries, have proven to be permeable and easily bent to the will of the leaders of these states, justifying their acts and helping them eschew a bad name in the face of the world as dictators, while allowing them the advantage to secure individual and group interests at the expense of the people. This however, dreams for democratization in the Central African region are not yet relinquished. The history of democracy in the region is barely a few decades old, though growth seems to be slow and uneven. The future remains promising because at least talks of democracy remain the plea for the majority of the people, giving hope for a better tomorrow.

Judging from the four propositions formulated by Diamond, the foundations of democracy in the region suffer the daunting challenges of constitutional weaknesses, which has plagued these countries since independence, and from which problems of political legitimacy drew their roots. From the empirical data presented above, it is clear that based on the criteria set by Diamond, the countries of the Central African region have fallen short of meeting the expectations of democracy, resulting in questionable governments. The successes of democratic consolidation in the Central African region must pay close attention to the sources of state legitimacy such as the respect for the constitution and provision of basic necessities, to reinstate trust in state institutions, which has been eroded by the concentration of power, leaving state authority questionable. ☀

Notes

1. See "The central idea is this: a wielder of political power(the monopolistic making, application, and enforcement of laws in a territory) is legitimate (i.e., is morally justified in wielding political power) if and only if it (*a*) does a credible job of protecting at least the most basic human rights of all those over whom it wields power, (*b*) provides this protection through processes, policies, and actions that themselves respect the most basic human rights, and (*c*) is not a usurper (i.e., does not come to wield political power by wrongly deposing a legitimate wielder of political power)." In Buchanan, Allen. "Political legitimacy and democracy." *Ethics* 112, no. 4 (2002): 689-719.

2. See Schatzberg, Michael G. "Power, legitimacy and'democratisation'in Africa." *Africa* (1993): 445-461. Page 445, quoting Decalo, Samuel. "Modalities of civil-military stability in Africa." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 27, no. 4 (1989): 547-578.

3. International IDEA, https://www.idea.int/data-tools/country-view/80/40   Cameroon

4. Ibid, https://www.idea.int/data-tools/country-view/75/40 Central African Republic [09/22/2020]

5. See Healey, John Michael, and Mark Robinson. *Democracy, governance and economic policy: sub-Saharan Africa in comparative perspective*. Overseas Development Institute, 1994. Citing Post, 1968, and Collier 1982

6. See Ngolle Ngolle, Elvis. "Democratization and multipartism in Cameroon: challenges and prospects." *Beiträge/Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule, Forschungsstelle für Internationale Beziehungen* 3 (1996).

7. U.S. Department of Commerce, *Country Reports*, US Department of Commerce, Washington D.C.

8. Human Rights Watch, 2019 Https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/01/30/cameroon-opposition-leaders-arrested

9. The World Street Journal, 2019 https://www.wsj.com/articles/gabon-presidential-guard-attack-opposition-headquarters-1472721343

10. The Oxford Dictionary of English defines it as a social order which depends on relations of patronage. This concept, variedly used tends to be suffering from a lack of consensus as to what it truly means. It could be used to describe the relationship between the native African ruler and the colonial masters during the time of colonization, or to allude to the current relationship between the African governments and the external partners including former colonial masters, or even to the most visible form, the relationship between the political leaders and the voters whom they represent

11. For some of the details of French involvement in post-colonial Africa, see University of Westminster. Maghreb Research Group. *Bulletin of Francophone Africa*. No. 9-10. Maghreb Research Group, University of Westminster, 1996, Touati, Sylvain. *French foreign policy in Africa: between Pré Carré and multilateralism*. Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2007.

12. See Mbaku, John Mukum. "The Economic Origins of Political Dictatorship in Africa." *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 53, no. 4 (1992): 446-477. Pages 469-471Analyzing the events in Uganda, Central African Republic and Equatorial Guinea, Mbaku carefully exposes the motives and the survival tactics of Amin, Bokassa and Nguema (Macias) respectively. These three held their countries with the iron fist and are known today as the true faces of Dictatorship in Africa, leaders of competitive interest groups who seized advantage of the state apparatus to control the state economy and make personal wealth.

13. See the Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon 1972, art. 37(1) which states that "Justice shall be administered in the territory of the Republic [of Cameroon] in the name of the people of Cameroon"

14. See the Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon 2008 art. 8(2)) http://africaagenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Const.ofCameroon2008.pdf

15. See Ibid, art. 6(2) http://africaagenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Const.ofCameroon2008.pdf

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