**Mbarara University of Science and Technology**

**Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies**

**Political Economy of Africa and Development**

**Topic: Democracy, Democratization and Good Governance in Africa**

**Defining democracy**

The origins of the term democracy can be traced back to the ancient Greece. Democracy is driven from the Greek word ‘kratos’ meaning power or rule. Democracy thus means ‘rule by the *demos*’ (*demos* referring to the people. Although Greeks originally used to mean ‘the poor’ or ‘the many’

According to Morley, democracy is the form of government by which the ultimate control of the machinery of government is committed to a numeral majority of the community

Democracy is a concept that does not seem to lend itself to and universally accepted definition because of the ideological, cultural and historical contextualization that underpins its several meanings. But all versions of democracy share one fundamental objective –how to govern the society in such a way that power actually belongs to the people. The elements include

In common terms democracy is taken to mean ‘government of the people, for the people and by the people’. According to Schumpeter, democracy is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decision in which individuals acquire the power to decide, by the means of competitive struggle, for the peoples’ votes; independent judiciary; bill of fundamental human rights, a free market economy or a multiparty political dispensation in which every party has a chance of coming to power through periodic elections

**Characteristics of democracy**

* A society that is based on democracy is the one which is based on equal opportunity and individual merit rather than hierarchy and privilege (Heywood, 2002)
* A system of welfare
* Popular consultation,
* popular sovereignty,
* Political equality of all citizens as implied in the rule of law, regular free and fair elections, respect of human rights
* competition for power by more than one candidate or party,
* universal human suffrage (one man one vote and that, all sane adult permanent residents of the society are eligible to vote in each election
* popular participation by the citizens in deciding who rules and how decisions are made,
* separation of powers,
* Independent and impartial judiciary,
* Respect for the rule of law and social justice which involves treating individuals and groups fairly and justly;
* Freedom of speech, association, assembly, worship, the press (Liberty),
* public accountability and responsiveness of the rulers to the demands of the citizens;
* Representative government and Recognition of pluralism (that is the principle that people of different political and religious beliefs, racial or ethnic background can live peaceful together in society through the spirit of accommodation, tolerance or compromise)
* The party in power never attempts to restrict political activity of any citizen or party as long as they do not make attempts to overthrow government by force.

**Democratization**

It is generally acknowledged that development is impossible in the absence of

true democracy, respect for human rights, peace and good governance. The concept of good governance will be dealt with in the subsequent lectures.

Democratization can be conceptualized as a process of transforming a group, community or a state into a democratic entity (Fasoro et al, 1992)[[1]](#footnote-1). Democratization implies the following among others

* The vesting of supreme power in the people who will exercise power directly or through their elected agents or representatives
* The establishment of the laws formerly granting equal rights and privileges to all the citizens without any form of discrimination. This is because the hallmark of democracy is political equality
* The sustenance of deliberate efforts through law and behavior to always enthrone and defend popular government through regular democratic elections and peaceful transitions.
* The legal empowerment of the people to determine who governs and what policies and programmes governors shall pursue even if such policies and programmes are not in the interest of the government
* The establishment of the laws and machinery to ensure that those who govern are responsible, responsive and accountable to the people who bear the weight of their governance
* The full participation of the people in the management of their affairs
* The pursuit, respect, preservation and promotion of democratic objective[[2]](#footnote-2)
* The establishment of a democratic political system which as explained by Mayo[[3]](#footnote-3) as a system in which policies are made on a majority basis, by representatives subject to effective popular control at periodic elections which are conducted on the principles of political equality and under the conditions of political equality and under conditions of political freedom.
* The respect and promotion of fundamental human rights and freedom
* Making of the laws by the people or their popular elected representatives. This provides greater chance for justice in the society unlike when the military makes the laws
* The rule of law (not the rule of man)

From the above description of democratization which is a process (while democracy is a concept) democracy has been and still very difficult to achieve in Africa. Most governments in Africa are to a large extent not responsible, responsive, or accountable to the people.

**Models of Democracy**

According to Heywood (2002) there are various contrasting models of democracy. These are:

* Classical democracy
* Protective democracy
* Developmental democracy
* People’s democracy
* Liberal democracy

**Classical democracy:** this was during the 4th and 5th century. A system of rule that secure the rights and interests of the minorities by placing checks upon the power of the majority. This model of democracy was based on the polis, or city-state of Athens Greece. The form of direct democracy is portrayed as the only ideal system of popular participation. Athenian democracy can be described as a form of government by mass meetings. All major decisions were made by the Assembly to which all citizens belong. Officials were chosen by ballots to demonstrate that a microcosm of the citizenry participated. Every Athenian citizen (male over 20 years of age) had the right to attend, to speak and to vote in the meetings of the Assembly which met 40 times a year. Decisions at the Assembly were taken on majority vote and then became law. Every citizen belonged to one of ten ‘tribes’ and each year 50 members of each tribe were chosen to sit on the Council which set agenda for Assembly. Citizens held office for one year, and no more than twice in a lifetime, except for ten generals who could be re-elected. What made the Athenian democracy so remarkable was the level of political activity of its citizens[[4]](#footnote-4)

**Protective Democracy**

When democratic ideas were revived in the 17th and 18th centuries, they appeared in a form that was different from the classical democracy of Ancient Greece. In particular democracy was seen less as a mechanism through which the public could participate in political life, and more of a device though which citizens could protect themselves from the encroachment of the government and hence protective democracy. The idea of direct democracy was shelved. John Locke argued in the 17th century that the right to vote was based on the existence of natural rights (God-given rights that are fundamental to human beings and are inalienable/ unchallengeable). Locke argued that if government, through taxation, has the power to expropriate property, citizen were entitled to control the composition of the legislature. Democracy now meant a system of government by consent, operating through a representative assembly. Jeremy Bentham and John Mills, utilitarian theorists in the 18th century proposed a radical approach and advanced their argument in support of individual interest.

The critical point of protective democracy is that it aims to give people the widest scope to live their lives as they choose. This liberty must then be protected by a mechanism of the separation of powers via separate executive, legislature and judiciary.

**Developmental democracy**

Although earlier democracy theory focused on the need to protect individual rights and interests, it soon developed an alternative focus: a concern with the development of the human individual and the community. Jean-Jacques Rousseau provided an alternative view to the democratic theory. At the centre of Rousseau’s model is the general will: the genuine interests of a collective body, equivalent to the common good; the will of all provided each person acts selflessly. He proposed that ‘no citizen shall be rich enough to buy another, and none so poor as to be forced to sell himself.’ Rousseau’s system of radical development required economic equality. Development of self can only be achieved when citizen by participate in decisions that shape their lives. Mills views are also instructive as he promotes the ‘highest and harmonious’ development of individual capacities, by participating citizen enhance their understanding, strengthen their sensibilities, and achieve the highest personal development.

**People’s democracy**

The term people democracy is derived from the orthodox communist regime. Karl Marx believed in the principle of a democracy based its implication of egalitarian prospects and thought of a society in which there was common ownership of wealth (social democracy). He believed the overthrow of capitalism would lead to the flourishing of a genuine democracy. A system of ‘bourgeois’ democracy would be replaced by ‘proletarian’ democracy. He predicted that class antagonisms would dissolve and the capitalist state would ‘wither away’. There would only be one class, the workers/proletariat

**Liberal/Representative Democracy**

Liberal democracy is accepted as the worldwide practices of politics. Its key constructs are: Indirect or representative form of democracy in which political office is gained by success in regular elections. It is based on competition and electoral choice. There is a clear distinction between the state and civil society. This modern democracy is based on liberal philosophy in which the role of the state is restricted by the constitution, producing a distinction between private and public that would have been acceptable in classical Athens where citizens who lived an entirely private life were dismissed as idiots. Various interpretation of liberal democracy as advanced by the following: Pluralism, Elitism, Corporatism, The new right Marxism

* **The pluralist view**: The pluralists[[5]](#footnote-5) argued that society is ruled by competing organized groups in which individuals are represented largely through their membership, and all groups have access to the policy process. The main features of the pluralist perspective are that: there is a wide dispersal of political power amongst competing groups as it was advanced by Joseph Schumpeter who conceived democracy as party competition and that the elite rule was inevitable and desirable; there is a high degree of responsiveness with group leaders being accountable to members and there is a neutral government machine that is sufficiently fragmented to offer groups a number of points of access.
* **Elitist view**: Elitism[[6]](#footnote-6) developed as a critique of egalitarian ideas such as democracy and socialism (Heywood 2007). Classical elitists argue that democracy is a ‘foolish delusion’, according to them the privileged minority in society always dominates with political power. It is this minority group that organizes and makes decisions, even in parliamentary democracy.
* **Corporatist view:** Neo corporatism or liberal corporatism gives rise to ‘tripartite government’ in which government is conducted through organizations, state officials, employers’ groups and unions to deal directly with one another.
* **Marxist view:** The Marxists view of democracy is that power cannot be evenly dispersed in society as long as class power is unequally distributed.

**The concept of Good Governance and its principles/underlying assumptions**

**Governance vs Government**

Governance is a broader term than government. It refers in its wider sense, to the various ways through which social life is coordinated. It is the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s social and economic resources for development. In other words governance means the way those with power use that power. One might conclude that governance is the *process* – by which authority is conferred on rulers, by which they make the rules, and by which those rules are enforced and modified.

Government is broadly defined as the administrative group of people with authority to govern a [political state](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_%28polity%29). It is a body of people that [sets](http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/set.html) and [administers](http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/administer.html) [public policy](http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/public-policy.html), and [exercises](http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/exercise.html) [executive](http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/executive.html), political, and [sovereign power](http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/sovereign-power.html) through [customs](http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/customs.html), [institutions](http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/institution.html), and [laws](http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/law.html) within a state.

Government can therefore be seen as one of the institutions involved in governance. They use mechanisms to ensure ordered rule is maintained; its central features being the ability to make collective decisions and the capacity to enforce them. Government is more commonly understood to refer to the formal and institutional processes that operate at national level to maintain public order and facilitate collective action. The core functions of the government are to make laws (legislation), implement laws (execution), and interpret law (adjudication).

**Good Governance**

Since there has been a historical record of bad governance, improving the governance environment with the proper adherence to good political, economic, and corporate governance should be a key to Africa’s development challenge. Good governance is taken here to mean a condition whereby responsibility is discharged in an effective manner; adhering to the principles democracy, transparency, accountability, integrity, respect for human rights, and promotion of the rule of law. Good governance entails the existence of efficient and accountable institutions – political, judicial, administrative, economic, corporate – and entrenched rules that promote development, protection of human rights, respects the rule of law, and ensures that people are free to participate in, and be heard on, decisions that affect their lives. It can be noted that good governance, in all its facets, has been demonstrated to be positively correlated with the achievement of better growth rates, and particularly through the building of institutions in support of markets

**Principles of Good Governance**

* **Accountability**: Good governance implies accountability in political oversight, and regulatory decisions by government and public bodies and systems being in place that are facilitated by public institutions to hold public officials to account for their behavior, actions, and decisions. Accountability at the macro level this includes financial accountability, in terms of an effective, transparent and publicly accountable system for expenditure control and cash management, and an external audit system. It encompasses sound fiscal choices, made in a transparent manner, that give priority to productive social programmes – such as basic health services and primary education vital to improving the living standards of the poor and promoting economic development – over non-productive expenditures, such as military spending. At the micro level it requires that managers of implementing and parastatal agencies be accountable for operational efficiency. Auditing systems should meet international standards and be open to public scrutiny.
* **Transparency:** Transparency of decision-making, particularly in budget, regulatory and procurement processes, is also critical to the effectiveness of resource use and the reduction of corruption and waste. There is need for reliable, relevant, and timely information about the activities of government being available to the public.
* Effective public sector management with stable macroeconomic policy, effective resource mobilization and efficient use of public resources; increased government responsiveness to citizens at the local level including a pro-poor orientation as well as create conditions for economic prosperity.
* Adherence to the rule of law in a manner that protects personal and civil liberties and gender equity and ensures public safety and security with equal access to justice for all; and provides effective and fair institutions in the legal arena.
* **Participation:** Good governance requires that civil society has the opportunity to participate during the formulation of development strategies and that directly affected communities and groups should be able to participate in the design and implementation of programmes and projects. Even where projects have a secondary impact on particular localities or population groups, there should be a consultation process that takes their views into account. This aspect of governance is an essential element in securing commitment and support for projects and enhancing the quality of their implementation.
* A political system which provides opportunities for all its citizens, including the poor and disadvantaged by creating the conditions that encourage broad input in governance and development decision-making from all elements of civil society.
* A political system that provides for effective transfer of power and periodic renewal of the leadership through representative and competitive multi-party and multi-candidate elections; impartial and credible electoral administration; effective oversight of the electoral process; and an informed and active citizenry.
* Strengthened public sector legislative and administrative institutions, including efficient parliamentary oversight, judicial independence, and adequacy of the audit machinery - providing and verifying that government decisions are in line with its legal commitments.

To quote former UN Secretary-General Kofi Anan

*“good governance is perhaps the single most important factor in eradicating poverty and promoting development”.*

Furthermore, to emphasize the vitality of good governance, and quoting President Mbeki of South Africa

*“Africa wishes to realize the goal of good governance, in all its elements, “not because we seek to improve our relations with the rest of the world as a first objective, critically important as this is, but to end political and economic mismanagement on our continent, and the consequential violent conflicts, instability, denial of democracy and human rights, deepening poverty and global marginalization”.*

**Democracy and Democratization in Africa: Challenges and Solutions**

*Journal articles are provided*

1. Fasoro Ayo, Haastrup & Otubanjo Femi. (1992). *Understanding Democracy.* Ibadan: Bookcraft Ltd [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In the words of Thompson (1970) as he wrote his book on Democratic Citizen, the democratic objective stipulates that a political system produces rules and decisions which of all practical alternatives, are those which will satisfy the interest of the greatest possible number of citizens [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Note that participation in Athens was restricted to Athenean males who were over 20 years of age. Slaves (who were majority of the population) women and foreigners had no political rights whatsoever [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. E.g Locke and Montesquieu [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Elitists include Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923) Gaetano Mosca (1857-1941) among others [↑](#footnote-ref-6)