

AFRICA INFACT



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LOCAL GOVERNANCE

UNCIVIL SERVANTS

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KILLING FOR**

COALITIONS

**THE GOOD AND
THE BAD**

DECENTRALISATION

**HOW TO GET THE
BALANCE RIGHT**

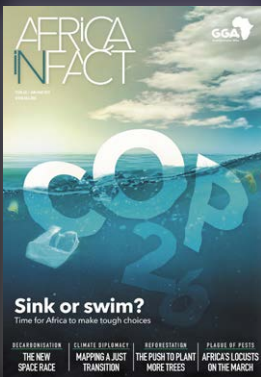
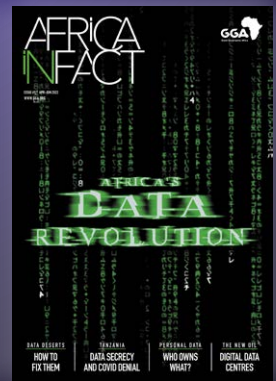
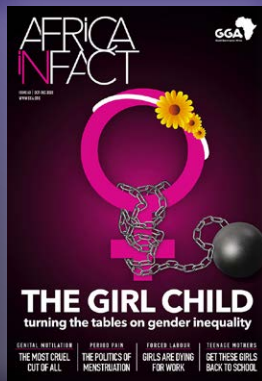
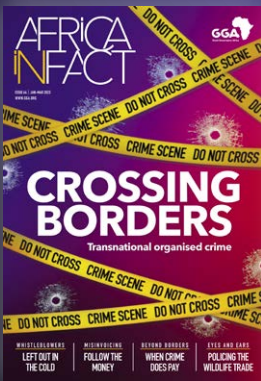
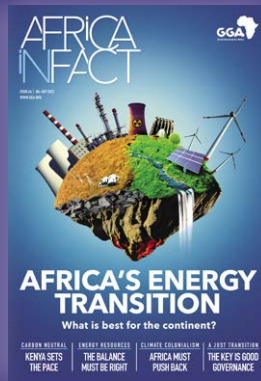
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Good Governance Africa is a registered non-profit organisation with offices in Johannesburg (South Africa), Lagos (Nigeria), Accra (Ghana), Dakar (Senegal), Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) and Harare (Zimbabwe).

We aim to improve governance performance across the continent; to inform and persuade the policy community that transparency and accountability are the basic building blocks of successful development; to strengthen the rule of law; and to build an active citizenry that institutionalises constraints on executive power.

Our publications serve to further these goals. Opinions expressed are those of the individual authors and not necessarily of Good Governance Africa.

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Why local government matters

Bemoaning the inconvenience of a 24-hour power cut that began in a corner of Johannesburg on Christmas Day – following several days without water – the response from a friend recently returned from West Africa was, “well, at least here we have a schedule; in Nigeria there is no notice [of cuts].”

Small mercies. In a grossly unequal city like Johannesburg, blighted by crumbling infrastructure and local government unwilling or unable to keep the taps flowing and the lights on, there are far too many citizens for whom even an intermittent supply of either water or electricity remains unattainable.

As contributor Stuart Mbanyele notes in this issue, in an article arguing for the professionalisation of the civil service, local government is a complex environment with demands that include financial resources management, implementation of technical deliverables and the balancing of complex legislative requirements.

At the forefront of debates about the functioning of local government should be the question of whether municipalities have the administrative capacity to fulfil their responsibilities. It is with this in mind that this first issue of *Africa in Fact* for 2024 takes a broad sweep in examining the role and responsibilities of local government in Africa, as well as the related emergence of coalition politics.

The publication, as usual, takes a pan-African view, seeking to understand the status quo at local government level, noting the challenges and opportunities implicit in decentralising government and proposing frameworks to create stable, viable coalitions. Several of the articles, however, pay special attention to South Africa, where a pivotal national election takes place later this year amidst public rage at government corruption, the disintegration of basic services in cities and towns, all on the watch of a ruling party seemingly paralysed by internal power struggles and the prioritisation of vested interests.

The outcome of the election, which could see the ruling ANC’s already reduced majority eroded further, has geopolitical implications for the SADC

region as a whole. And while the articles published here acknowledge that coalitions can represent an opportunity for a more inclusive democratic process, representing diverse constituencies, the South African example of how the ANC’s reduced majority has led to paralysis and instability in South Africa’s major metropolises serves as a cautionary tale.

Good Governance researcher Mxolisi Zondo puts it succinctly in his article: “The unresolved issue of unstable and unregulated coalition administrations, mainly prevalent in local municipalities, becomes more concerning as the 2024 South African general elections draw near. However, South African political parties and politicians have demonstrated that they lack the wisdom and political maturity the constitution assumed when it predicated a multi-party system of democratic government as one of its values.

In addition to the existence of a multi-party system of democratic government, the constitution specifically lists accountability and responsiveness as some of our foundational values. Testing these values against the works of the most recent coalition governments exposes the cracks within the system as we know it. They are not responsive, at least not to service delivery needs, and perhaps this is due to the reality that these coalitions have also been unable to shield the bureaucracy from political developments.”

Coalitions aside, Adio-Adet Dinika writes that decentralisation reforms have swept across modern Africa as countries seek to devolve decision-making power, resources, and service delivery responsibilities from central bureaucracies to provincial, district and municipal bodies. Decentralisation impacts on welfare, rights and inclusion remain mixed across African countries, he adds, but there are notable gains.

For example, evidence shows Ethiopia’s rural immunisation rates have improved faster than in urban areas after decision-making devolved to so-called *woreda* councils, which enabled marginalised pastoralist communities to directly voice needs for mobile clinics during annual planning meetings,

leading to a 28% increase in outpatient visits from 2008-2015.

Regular contributor Raphael Obonyo points out, however, that the transformative role of decentralised government systems is undermined in Africa by multiple challenges, including limited resources, weak institutional capacity and accounting and accountability mechanisms. “Administrative inefficiency, gaps in policy, weak laws and collusion between unscrupulous local government officers and cash collection firms and leakages have conspired to deny decentralised units much-needed revenue,” he writes.

“Indeed, the fundamental problem confronting most local governments, especially in developing countries, is the widening gap between the availability of financial resources and spending needs.” As the articles in this current issue illustrate, the intricate web of revenue generation mechanisms – reliance on central government transfers, grants, taxes and fees – poses a major challenge for local governments as they battle to juggle financial sustainability and their citizens’ ability to access and afford essential services.

But there are other factors, too. Significant levels of corruption that divert resources from service delivery, central government interference in local affairs, disparity in service delivery between rural and urban areas due to various factors, including geography and inadequate infrastructure, are also challenges to good governance at the local level.

Unfortunately, the spectre of corruption in all its forms casts a shadow across most of the 19 articles in this issue. Terence Corrigan’s contribution dissects how and why corruption and political appointees have dealt a savage blow to the hope of economic upliftment for millions of Africans. “In fact, in South Africa’s townships and informal settlements, the inability of municipalities to perform their duties and the consequent sense of alienation has sparked a protest culture that bears some resemblance to the anti-apartheid urban uprisings of the 1980s,” Corrigan writes. “This is a critical problem for South Africa, even an existential one. The crisis in South Africa’s municipalities is an expression of the broader dysfunction in the South African state.”

Author and investigative journalist Greg Arde, meanwhile, uncovers the dynamics behind the assassination of local councillors and people connected to them in KwaZulu-Natal. Arde, who lives in KZN and has worked with the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime (GI-TOC), says, “In KwaZulu-Natal, the province where I live, 21 local councillors have been murdered in the past year (2023) alone.”

Most of the victims, he points out, were members of the ANC, killed in power struggles over patronage, although politics and organised crime are becoming increasingly intertwined in an environment where violence has become institutionalised, ANC cadre deployment allows state capture, and corruption hobbles government service delivery.

Given the challenges to functional local government, is it any surprise that, across Africa, communities and towns are looking at running themselves? Using examples in Angola, South Africa, Western Sahara and Somaliland, Michael Schmidt’s article looks at the varied forms and degrees of autonomous municipalism that have arisen across Africa, asking the question: can self-management deliver?

While space does not allow for even a brief synopsis of each article in this issue of AIF, it is fair to conclude that as the continent grapples with decentralisation efforts and the emergence of coalition politics, the question of whether local governments possess the necessary administrative competence looms large. The South African example serves as a cautionary tale, emphasising the potential pitfalls of reduced majorities and unstable coalitions. Despite the complexities, decentralisation has shown promise in some areas, with tangible gains in service delivery; the Ethiopian example cited above is but one of many.

However, obstacles like limited resources, weak institutions, and corruption hinder the transformative potential of decentralised systems, making it clear that the way forward lies in robust and accountable local governance committed to equitable service provision, fiscal responsibility, and prioritising the needs of citizens.

Susan Russell – Editor



ABOVE: A doctor examines a pregnant woman in a clinic powered by solar energy at Sabon-Gida village , near Lafia, Nassarawa State, Nigeria on October 17, 2023.

Photo: Kola Sulaimon / AFP

WINDS OF CHANGE

By Adio-Adet Dinika

From Cape to Cairo, decentralisation reforms have swept across modern Africa as countries seek to devolve decision-making power, resources, and service delivery responsibilities from central bureaucracies to provincial, district and municipal bodies. These sub-national units can ostensibly sharpen needs assessment, infrastructure oversight and welfare policies in unique community contexts.

The theoretical promise is far-reaching: bridging development gaps through localised innovation, incubating participatory democracy where state institutions engage with citizens, and stabilising national politics. Democratic openings across Africa since the 1990s have further boosted decentralisation, suggesting responsive governance and legitimacy gains where centralised authority once suppressed plural voices.

Although decentralisation's impacts on welfare, rights and inclusion remain mixed across African countries, there are notable gains. For example, select evidence shows rural immunisation rates in Ethiopia are improving faster than in urban zones after decision-making devolved to *woreda* councils; *woreda* reforms enabled marginalised pastoralist communities to directly voice needs for mobile clinics during annual planning meetings, leading to a 28% increase in outpatient visits from 2008-2015, surpassing fixed urban facility growth. According to the World Bank, Ethiopia's decentralisation has also narrowed the gap in educational outcomes between disadvantaged and better-off *woredas*, particularly in southern Ethiopia.

Similarly, Nigeria's immunisation uptake jumped in Lagos and Kaduna states after localisation. A 2019 study by Advancing Partners and Communities (APC) found that Senegal's decentralised community clinics narrowed gender gaps in reproductive health screenings by 15% through targeted outreach to women by local female health workers compared to nationally managed facilities.

In education, school enrolment rates in Uganda climbed faster at the primary level after decentralisation between 2010 and 2016, facilitated by district bursary allocations reaching poorer families. In Kenya, similar positive effects were also observed in districts like Tharaka Nithi, for example, where primary school dropout rates were



ABOVE: Ethiopian refugees of the Qemant ethnic group sit in a make-shift medical clinic at a camp in the village of Basinga in the Basunda district of Sudan's eastern Gedaref region.

Photo: Eduardo Soteras / AFP

cut because of school nutrition programmes under localised budgets.

Regarding basic services, Rwanda's decentralisation expanded rural electricity access from 6% in 2006 to 35% by 2017 as maintenance and household connections improved under district supervision. But continuity concerns plague piped water programmes; a World Bank study found that decentralised rural schemes suffered much higher breakdown rates than nationally managed urban projects in Ghana over 2008-2016 when local capacity weaknesses manifested.

Risks of elite capture can also exclude women and marginalised groups from localised planning processes, as in the case of water management decentralisation in Uganda, where patriarchal village structures granted greater land access and irrigation control to male farmers. Civil society groups have critiqued district elite capture risks in natural resource allocation cases in Tanzania but praised the widening of judicial appeal avenues on land disputes under localised magistrates in Malawi.

The lingering question therefore persists: why has Africa's decentralisation wave not yielded more uniformly positive governance

transformation? What lies behind the glaring gaps separating extensive policy rhetoric from halting on-the-ground realities across decentralised units? Grappling with these concerns can shed light on potential pathways ahead. This article examines the obstacles at surface level as well as the deeper institutional bottlenecks and political-economic manipulations that shape implementation.

Politically, decentralisation facilitates more pluralistic democratic competition initially,



ABOVE: Medical personnel belonging to an international non-governmental organisation check on an internally displaced child in a clinic in Chagni, Ethiopia.

as happened in Ghana after reforms in 1988. However, dominant party regimes often erode local accountability over time by prioritising patronage networks over responsiveness to citizen needs, for instance in South Africa, Tanzania, and Mozambique. Upward accountability to central ministries tends to override downward accountability to citizens, re-entrenching national politicians. Still, democratic participation through local elections and civic engagement on policy issues has increased substantially.

The crux of decentralisation's bumpy road lies in politics. Regional factions can gain strength, threatening national cohesion, so central rulers limit actual decentralised power. An example of this is Zimbabwe, where, despite the devolution provided for in the 2013 constitution, the government has dragged its feet in implementing it. Frequent clashes between executive mayors of cities like Harare, Chinhoyi, and Mutare, who belonged to the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), and the Minister for Local Government, belonging to the ruling ZANU PF party, illustrate the clash between political interests and how it often sabotages efforts at decentralisation.

But decentralisation can also consolidate central

authority. In Nigeria and South Africa, federal constitutions emerged from tense centrifugal pressures, helping preserve unitary statehood. Kenya's 2010 constitution had a stabilising effect despite devolving significant resources. So, when managed prudently with adequate safeguards, decentralisation may reinforce national stability.

Ultimately, decentralisation's efficacy hinges on political will. Leaders must genuinely share resources and decision-making latitude, not just token authority. Upward accountability should balance grassroots democratic control. Powerful groups must not be allowed to dominate decentralised institutions. Where self-seeking behaviour takes root reform derails. Getting incentives right to keep diverse interests reasonably aligned is essential for progress, although challenging where patronage and authoritarian habits run deep.

Critical to success and failure are financing arrangements and public sector administration after decentralisation. More often than not, centralised fiscal control has frequently short-circuited decentralised governance. Though poorer sub-national units desperately need resources, reliance on unconditional central transfers can foster local corruption instead of own-source revenue generation and institution building for accountability.

Yet local poverty necessitates substantial transfers in the short run. The solution lies in carefully designed fiscal transfer systems that bridge financing gaps while incentivising transparency and accountability. Countries must empower fiscally disciplined communities and prevent fiscal abuse by the privileged few. Nigeria demonstrates these tensions most starkly: massive oil wealth accruing to sub-national tiers since 1999 has fuelled unprecedented elite corruption rather than service delivery.

Getting this balance right is tricky but essential. As renowned political scientist Goran Hyden has stated, "The ledger book rather than the ballot



Photo: Ashraf Shady / ACP



ABOVE: Children attend a class at Makindye Citizens pre and primary school in Kampala, Uganda, in April last year.

Photo: Stuart Tibbaweswa / AFP

box represents the weakest link when it comes to decentralisation in Africa”. Deft financial management must underpin reforms. A clear example of this is how student-teacher ratios have worsened in Nigeria’s Kwara state as a result of inadequate local financing.

Navigating centre-periphery tensions inherent in delineating sub-national boundaries remains crucial for balanced and equitable decentralisation. Federal constitutions in Ethiopia, Nigeria, Tanzania, Comoros, and South Africa (although South Africa isn’t technically a federal state) have sought to strike a workable bargain between centralised unity and regional demands for autonomy. Nigeria’s six-zone federal structure, balancing Muslim north and Christian south, diffused secession threats, as did the Ethiopian constitution’s devolution concessions to fractious ethnic regions (the recent ethnic conflicts such as in Tigray may, of course, call the efficacy of this into question). Clear constitutional demarcation of powers and dispute resolution mechanisms help stabilise tensions.

But multi-tiered decentralisation experiments involve inherent trade-offs. District creation in Uganda and Ghana improved local responsiveness but added bureaucratic layers that diluted

coordination. Lagging regions in Ghana, like Upper West with weak technical capacity, saw widened development gaps due to poor absorption of earmarked funding by local authorities. Centralised oversight is thus still needed in monitoring fiscal transfers and human resourcing.

Centralised distortions also impact identity rights and create access barriers when local languages, cultures or needs receive inadequate recognition from public services. For instance, in Zimbabwe, over-centralisation concentrates national registrations in Harare (Shona speaking), leading to distorted spellings for Ndebele, Kalanga and minority groups. Where such offices exist in local areas, central manpower planning has also resulted in the deployment of Shona personnel who lack local cultural and language expertise, further heightening grievances. People also incur huge transport costs to correct errors due to linguistic unfamiliarity and distance. Similar experiences in Malawi led to the decentralisation of birth/death certification. So, administrative streamlining should balance standardised national guidelines with the flexibility to incorporate grassroots management capacities.

Overall, nurturing intergovernmental coordination channels, like South Africa’s district



Photo: Zinyanga Autonomy / AFP



Photo: Zinyanga Autonomy / AFP

ABOVE: A boy herding goats walks past a chalk board under a tree used as a classroom at Sinamwenda primary school in Binga, Zimbabwe.

mayoral forums and Nigeria's State Houses of Assembly, helps oversee decentralised units. Constitutions codifying regional rights, while upholding non-discrimination centrally, enable participative development.

Decentralisation in Africa remains a work in progress, but prudent sequencing offers viable pathways for deepening governance gains. While smooth linear progress has proven elusive, context-tailored approaches aligned to complex realities can manifest incremental transformation over time across the continent's diverse polities.

The latent promise of community empowerment is real; by mobilising local resources around shared needs, decentralisation can render development more responsive and rights protections more accessible if institutional risks are mitigated. Success hinges on devolving fiscal, administrative and political levers to sub-national tiers in calibrated steps, while enhancing transparency protections



Photo: Stuart Tibaweswa / AFP

to check elite capture. Where regional and ethnic tensions lurk, constitutions must balance meaningful autonomy with centralised oversight against localised discrimination.

No singular template guarantees outcomes, but the evidence shows decentralised gains embedding most sustainably when seeded in wider ecosystems of participatory decision-making, social accountability structures and redress mechanisms overseen by an alert central watchdog. South Africa's integrated framework comes closest to such a synergistic model.

The road ahead remains bumpy but by walking judiciously, decentralised governance can steer states from high-handed centralisation towards needs-based, rights-respecting development focused on citizen priorities. With prudent balancing of community discretion and systemic oversight, the promises of decentralisation can progressively reshape the African state's compact with its people towards responsive and accountable prosperity.


A clear political commitment is equally vital for meaningful authority and autonomy. With these preconditions, decentralisation's latent promise can unfold dramatically to transform state effectiveness from the ground upward. As former Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere said, "If real development is to take place, the people have to be involved." [GGP](#)



Taking the measure of local governance

By Pranish Desai

ABOVE: Children play on a drainage pipe at Abba Nanka informal settlement in Port Harcourt, southern Nigeria.



The quality of governance is dynamic, not static. In short, it shifts, sometimes quickly and, at other times, more slowly. It is precisely this attribute of governance that makes it suitable for empirical measurement. Governance is also central to every facet of human life, with its downstream effects impacting society, the environment, the economy, and human security.

With these two assertions in mind, there is perhaps no more appropriate locus for empirically measuring governance than the African continent. The continent is striving to economically develop at a time when technological innovation and data-driven decision-making are more ubiquitous than ever.

The empirical measurement of governance can therefore play a crucial role in helping identify areas of governance progress and areas of shortfall within the African setting. We can also use the insights derived from measures of governance quality to understand the drivers of key phenomena such as development and conflict. In turn, this can aid in the development of evidence-based policymaking models.

To an extent, broader society has recognised the potential for providing an independent but empirically sophisticated measurement of national-

level governance. Annually, for instance, the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) project publishes governance scores for all countries on six dimensions of governance: control of corruption; government effectiveness; political stability and absence of violence or terrorism; regulatory quality; rule of law; and voice and accountability. Figure 1 maps the scores for each African country on the WGI indicator of government effectiveness for the most recent available year (2022).

Within the African setting, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation produces a robust national-level governance measurement instrument called the Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG), which annually scores and ranks all African countries on overall governance, as well as on the components of foundations for economic opportunity, human development, participation, rights and inclusion, and security and rule of law.

One area where governance measurement in Africa has been less pronounced is at the local level. Naturally, this is of concern because the local level is the level of government closest to the ordinary citizen. Moreover, in many African countries, it

is local government that is responsible for the provision of core basic services, including drinking water, adequate sanitation, and waste removal.

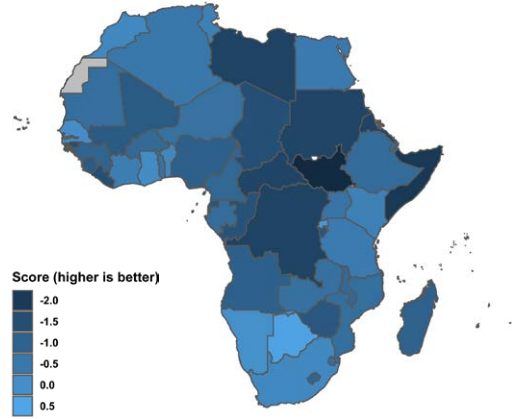
Local government, then, is the level of government through which many African citizens form their perceptions of the state, while also being a key structure that will determine Africa’s ability to combat some of the core governance and welfare challenges the continent faces. Among these are high child mortality rates, environmental degradation, corruption, and localised political instability.

However, if we only have national-level measures of governance performance, then we have little clarity about how the state of governance differs within nations, an equally important consideration. Ultimately, the ability to measure localised governance in Africa will give us a more realistic understanding of how we can effectively resolve these threats and by when.

Some African governments in relatively well-capacitated states have recognised this and have introduced assessments designed to empirically measure the state of governance and development at the local level. Examples of such assessments are the South African government’s ‘State of Local Government’ report and the Ghanaian government’s ‘District League Table’, for which they partner with the United Nations Children’s Fund, and which focuses on providing a local-level assessment of the state of children’s welfare.

These are welcome and essential initiatives, though with two caveats. First, unlike the governance measurement tools produced by the World Bank and the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, they are government-developed assessments and, by definition, not independent. Second, because they are government-led initiatives, they have no scope for growth beyond the borders of their nations.

One governance assessment tool that independently measures the state of local governance and aspires to expand across the



Source: Worldwide Governance Indicators (2023)

FIGURE 1: Government effectiveness scores by African country (2022)

continent is Good Governance Africa’s (GGA) Government Performance Index (GPI). Since its inception in 2014, the GPI has focused on providing an assessment of local governance across South Africa’s 257 municipalities. The intent, however, is to expand the GPI, starting with other southern African countries such as Botswana, Namibia, and Zambia soon. In the long run, expanding the GPI to other parts of the continent is a major aspiration of GGA.

Figure 2 provides a brief glimpse of the value of a tool like the GPI for policymakers, civic organisations, international organisations and the private sector. Specifically, the graph visualises governance performance in four key categories across South Africa’s eight metropolitan municipalities. Combined, nearly four in 10 South Africans reside in these areas, highlighting their importance. It is clear from the graphic that the aspect of governance that major South African cities struggle with most is administration and governance, which encompasses aspects of accountability, compliance, financial soundness, and human resources management.

South Africa will soon not be unique among African countries in having such a high concentration of its population residing in a handful of cities. In fact, estimates produced by the African Development Bank suggest that by 2030, approximately half of the continent will be living in

urban areas. An expanded GPI would be able to offer highly specific insights into the state of sub-national governance across Africa, along with the associated benefits of encouraging responsible commerce within well-governed areas, while also providing independent guidance on the sort of interventions which less well governed areas need most.

While urbanisation is one of the African continent’s most pivotal trends, it is equally vital that we develop an empirical understanding of local governance in rural areas where most of the continent still lives. It is here, however, where Africa’s core challenges around a lack of data collection capacity and technical capacity are most felt.

An accurate assessment of local governance in rural areas is possible in a country like South Africa, which has effective financial administration and data collection institutions. Both GGA’s GPI, and the government-led ‘State of Local Governance’ report, draw on regularly updated and reliable data produced by credible institutions like Statistics South Africa, the Auditor-General of South Africa, and the National Treasury.

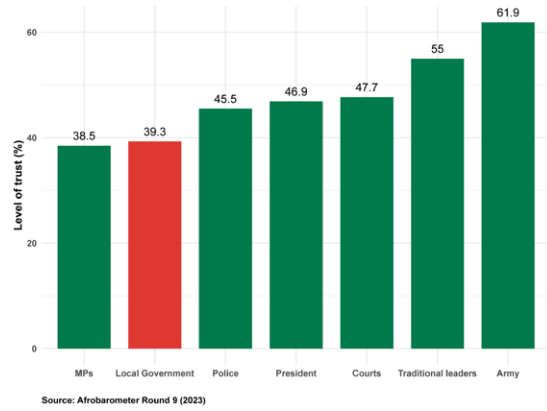


FIGURE 3: Average trust in key institutions across 37 African countries (2022-2023).

Such capacity is lacking in most African countries, a problem that becomes more obvious the more one travels away from urban centres. Therefore, a tool such as the expanded GPI should also aspire to be part of a broader effort to improve the statistical and technical capacities of these types of institutions.

As Figure 3 suggests, the necessity of getting a more accurate picture of the state of local governance extends beyond the realms of academia and analysis. According to Round Nine of the Afrobarometer survey, local government was the second-least trusted institution among key institutions, with only 39.3% of respondents across 37 countries saying they trusted their local government councillor either “somewhat” or “a lot.”

This reflects a crisis in both the standard of local governance in many African countries and the public legitimacy of many local government structures across the continent.

Developing reliable, accurate and independent empirical tools designed to understand the state of local governance across Africa can help to improve the standard of that governance, especially if it results in more informed policy decisions. If it succeeds in this mission, then it can also play a crucial role in making citizens feel more connected to local politicians, officials and institutions that are meant to serve the public interest. [GGTV](#)

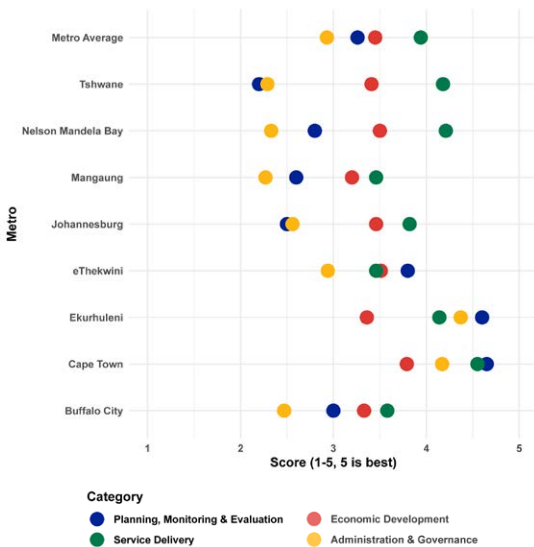


FIGURE 2: Governance performance by Metropolitan Municipality in South Africa (2024).

Source: Good Governance Africa (2024)

SERVICE DELIVERY: SHOW US THE MONEY

By Raphael Obonyo

Decentralised systems of governments in sub-Saharan Africa have been hailed as transformative because of their key role in the delivery of public services and contribution to higher growth. But these roles are delivered against a backdrop of multiple challenges, including limited resources, weak institutional capacity and accounting and accountability mechanisms.

Administrative inefficiency, gaps in policy, weak laws, and collusion between unscrupulous local government officers and cash collection firms and leakages have conspired to deny decentralised units the much-needed revenue that would offer relief for myriad financial challenges.

Indeed, the fundamental problem confronting most local governments, especially in developing countries, is the widening gap between the availability of financial resources and spending needs. There are concerns that local governments over-depend on central government transfers, with

less revenue derived from property taxation and service charges.

In a number of African countries, although decentralisation has empowered many regions that would otherwise lag behind, sub-national governments are struggling to establish their Own Source Revenue (OSR) generation.

For example, in Kenya and Nigeria where devolution, the strongest form of decentralisation that offers local governments full discretion and broad policy guidelines under which to implement programmes, is being practised, devolved units have struggled to finance their projects and activities, with dismal own-source revenue collection.

In Tanzania, there were concerns by some financial management property experts that the national government was usurping lucrative local government revenue sources, including property rates, a levy on billboards and service levies. Similar stories are found across Africa. In some cases, the transfers to local

ABOVE: A Kenyan activist shouts amidst teargas during a protest over tax hike plans in Nairobi on June 6, 2023.

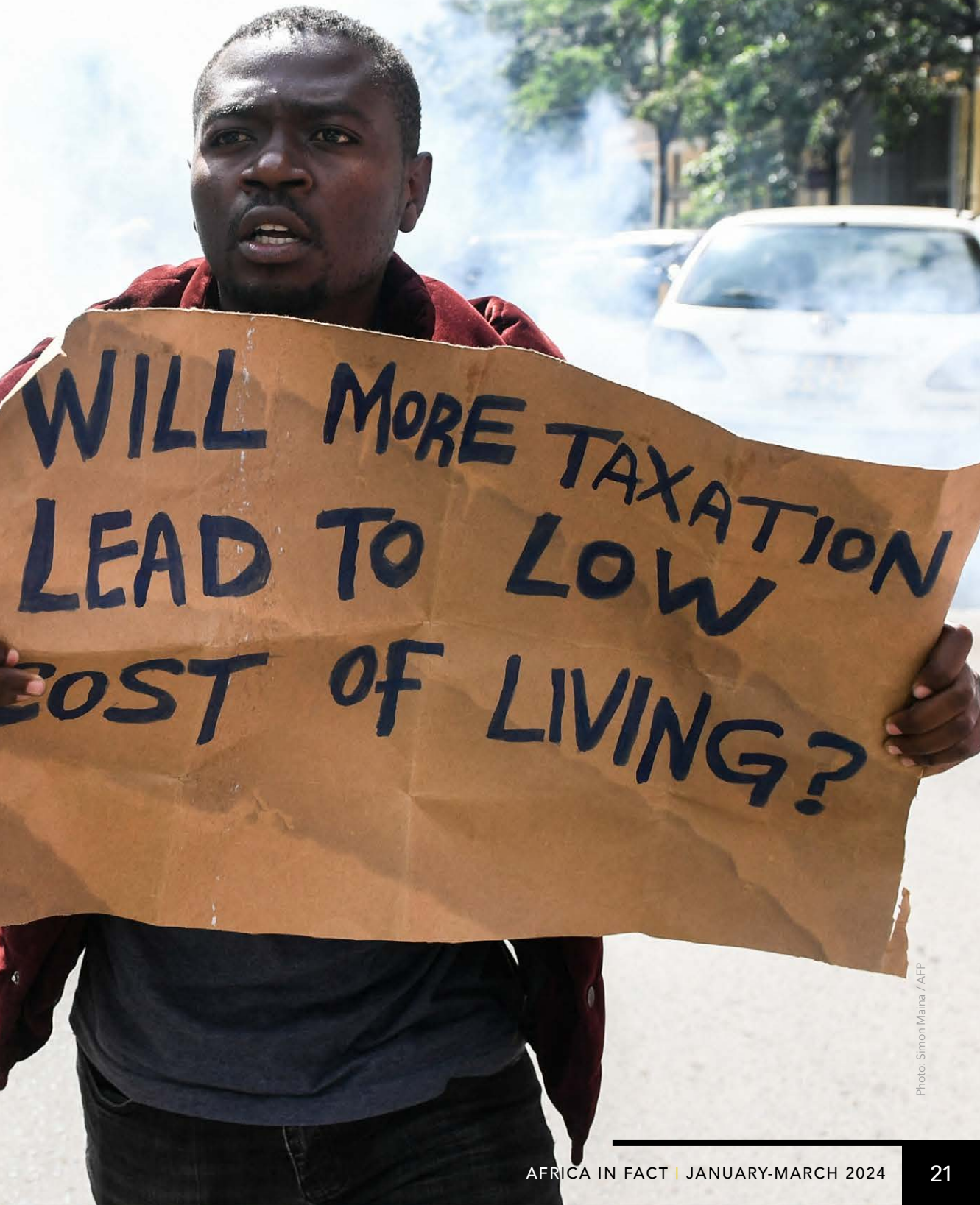


Photo: Simon Maina / AFP

governments are largely earmarked by central government to provide specific goods and services. At the same time, transfers from central government are significantly low.

There are no easy or quick reforms to increase OSR at local government level. However, efforts to increase sub-national government revenue must start with the creation of an enabling environment – decentralisation policies and legislation to support the process.

In Nigeria, for example, there have been calls to strengthen laws that establish and empower local governments – the third tier of government – through a review of legislation, by none other than the former president of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan.

In April 2021, addressing the Nigeria Union of Local Government Employees, who had paid him a courtesy call to seek support against a Bill that was seeking to delist local governments from the constitution, Jonathan implored the National Assembly to enact laws that would make local government councils autonomous and give them powers to generate their own revenue.

“Local governments are the oldest globally accepted means through which governments impact positively on the lives of people at grassroots level, and any Bill targeted at delisting from the constitution is an abuse of democratic tenets and procedures,” he said. “Local governments must be strong, autonomous and allowed to generate their own revenue.”

Indeed, an own-source resource approach can bolster local government efforts to provide efficient and effective service delivery. For example, Nakuru, one of Kenya’s county-devolved units, in an attempt

to reduce its reliance on national government, has established its own revenue agency with the ambitious aim of increasing from some \$16 million to at least \$26 million per annum. First, however, Nakuru county, which had been unable to meet its revenue targets, passed a law that paved the way for creating the agency to assess, collect and account for all revenues.

Local governments also need to be able to borrow to finance some of their projects, especially those requiring large capital investment. However, to be able to borrow, local governments must prove

their creditworthiness and meet the requirements of the prevailing regulatory and economic environment.

In Namibia, where skills shortages have led local authorities to use consultants to prepare their financial statements, auditor general Junias Kadnjeke, who was reappointed to serve a fifth term last year, has pledged to strengthen local governments’

capacity for financial reporting. Kadnjeke made this pledge after the annual audit reports of most local authorities revealed that funds could not be accounted for, and international public sector accounting standards had not been adhered to.

Service delivery will continue to suffer if development efforts don’t support generating revenue at local levels, which is why more should be done to help local governments generate their own revenue.

One such effort is in Uganda where sustainable development NGO the Southern and Eastern Africa Trade Information and Negotiations Institute (SEATINI) and Oxfam Uganda, in collaboration with Advocacy for Research in Development, are implementing a Local Revenue Enhancement Plan

“Local governments must be strong, autonomous and allowed to generate their own revenue.”

Photo: Guillem Sartorio / AFP



ABOVE: Graffiti that reads “ANC”, in reference to the South African ruling party, the Africa National Congress, next to a pothole in Johannesburg on March 3, 2023.

(LREP) to improve equitable sub-national revenue mobilisation in the cities of Gulu and Soroti.

Speaking at a LREP event in Soroti, Jane Nalunga, the executive director of Seatini Uganda, said she believed that for local governments to successfully raise their own revenue they must pay critical attention to planning.

“We believe that local government has the capacity to generate their own revenue and reduce dependence on the central government” said Nalunga, “but I want to reiterate the importance of planning.”

She said citizens had a role to play in being vigilant to ensure taxes collected locally were properly spent. To this end, Seatini has trained tax justice campaigners to advocate for local government accountability and lobbying fellow citizens to pay their taxes.

According to UN-Habitat, local governments have to ensure accountability to tackle a potentially serious problem in African cities, namely a growing perception among residents that the money they pay for rates and other local taxes goes into a bottomless pit with no discernible impact on the quality of physical infrastructure and services. In recent years, for example, in parts of Nairobi or Johannesburg, there have been suggestions that

residents should suspend rates and service charge payments until the quality of roads, water, and sanitation begin to improve. Given the deteriorating state of infrastructure, residents will increasingly demand to see results from the rates that they pay.

In South Africa, dissatisfaction with local authorities has even seen citizens calling for some municipalities to be dissolved and put into administration. Reflecting why citizens are increasingly unhappy with local government service delivery, the SA Auditor General’s 2020-2021 report on local government audit outcomes revealed that the situation regarding financial management at most municipalities was dire, that service delivery levels and the financial health of local government had deteriorated, and was approaching system shutdown.

The African Development Bank (AfDB) has recommended in its ‘State of Urban Governance in Africa’ report, and its Strategy for Economic Governance in Africa (SEGA) 2021-2025, that civil society organisations are supported to act as effective watchdogs of public services, monitoring and evaluating public procurement to help curb corruption. In the meantime, citizens in Nairobi, Johannesburg and Lagos look for alternatives to local government services and consider their options. [GGY](#)

Time to professionalise the civil service

By Stuart Sandile Mbanyele

Local government fulfils an essential developmental function as the site of direct interface with government and service delivery for citizens. Yet, while pockets of excellence exist, many of South Africa's municipalities are in a poor state, characterised by governance lapses. Public discourse is replete with stories about politicking and instability in councils. The inability of poorly politically appointed leadership is but one of the challenges, and can be attributed to both single-party dominance on some fronts and unstable coalition governments by multiple parties in other instances, and the perverse corruption wrought by the political leadership in both.

Yet, there is a crucial divide between political decision-making and the independence of administration by public servants in municipalities, and that is only one side of the politico-administrative divide. The local government sector also has deep-seated

problems due to a lack of professionalism and poor management at an administrative level by unskilled career public servants. This has many consequences, including a lack of accountability, fueling community scepticism, disillusionment, and anger, and leading to the eruption of often violent protests that cause human casualties, the destruction of private property and damage to public infrastructure. The result is the flight of businesses and a loss of investment and economic opportunities, setting development gains back within communities.

Professionalism includes two core dimensions. The first is skills and experience or competence in the given area, and the second is the values, ethics and norms as a way of practice that help bind members of the profession, occupation, or organisation to a common mission.

There are a multitude of challenges in



ABOVE: Protesters pull a burning tyre towards a barricade in the Kliptown section of Soweto, South Africa, during a service delivery demonstration in July 2016, ahead of August 3 municipal elections.



Photos: Luca Sola / AFP

applying a blanket approach to “professionalism” within the public sector. After all, the country has over 1.2 million public servants who work in its administration at different levels, ranging from teachers and nurses to police and others whose main job is to contribute to public welfare overall. This paper focuses on local government and how it provides both technical and administrative services.

Local government is a complex environment with demands that include financial resources management, implementation of technical deliverables, and the balancing of complex legislative requirements. At the forefront of debates about the functioning of local government should be the question of whether municipalities have the administrative capacity to fulfil their responsibilities and what role administrators play in ensuring financial and technical management and administering service provision. In South Africa, the clear vacuum left by this question highlights the need for far-reaching public service

reforms targeted at promoting high professional standards at the frontlines to build a capable local government workforce.

Professionalism is associated with a system that serves the population according to an ethos of competence and merit as opposed to narrow interests. Since the inception of South Africa’s democratic dispensation, the professionalisation of the public service has been recognised as an important objective. Pieces of legislative frameworks that speak to professionalisation include the Constitution, the National Development Plan, the Municipal Systems and Structures Act, and the Public Administration Management Act, which make prescriptions within local government. However, this professionalisation has remained an elusive goal, and in 2022, the South African government renewed the focus by approving the long-awaited National Framework towards Professionalisation of the Public Sector, which aims to ensure a “responsive, meritocratic, and



ABOVE: John Modise (L), member of the board of South African Municipal Workers (SAMWU), speaks to the crowd during a strike over wage increases in Beyers Naude Square, Johannesburg, on November 10, 2022.

professional public administration in the service of the people” and sets out a series of fundamental public sector reforms.

The framework provides an approach to building human capital throughout the public sector and is based on five pillars of intervention.

- Pre-entry, reviewing recruitment and selection mechanisms.
- Introducing induction and onboarding practices.
- Improving planning and performance management tools.
- Improving training policies, continuous learning and professional development.
- Reviewing talent management practices in the public service.

However, efforts to professionalise the public sector face several challenges. Municipal departments have a high rate of vacancies, struggling to fill important administrative posts.

The problem is evident in Gauteng province, South Africa’s economic hub, and most populous region. There vacancies span across every level, including that of municipal manager (for which in 2020, four of 11 positions were vacant). In the City of Johannesburg, there is a 42% vacancy rate, in Sedibeng a 50% vacancy rate, Lesedi and West Rand a 33% vacancy rate, and Merafong stands at 42%. As a second example, in the Free State Province, there is a 57% vacancy rate: of the total number of 129 senior posts required at municipalities, 73 are vacant. And only eight of the 23 municipalities have a qualified permanent municipal manager.

There is also a shortage of technical skills in financial reporting. The latest Auditor General’s report on local government audit outcomes highlights the grim picture, especially regressions in accountability in public procurement. Over the past year, material irregularities amounting to approximately R51.9 billion were identified. There was also an increase in instances of localised

corruption, theft, fraud and malfeasance by municipal officials responsible for managing public funds. Granted, adverse findings by the Auditor General don't always mean corruption. At times, there is an overemphasis on achieving clean audit outcomes at the expense of prioritising public service delivery objectives.

Also, many municipalities rely on consultants to prepare financial statements and often outsource work to consultants, professional services, and private contractors is the outsourcing due to the skills deficit?. The Auditor General reported that local government forked out consultant fees amounting to R1.6 billion or 13% of the R12.3 billion total financial reporting cost for the 2021-2022 period. Moreover, According to Stats SA, local government spent R39 billion on contracted services in the 2022 financial year.


Another challenge to professionalisation efforts is non-meritocratic appointments, nepotism and pervasive political intervention; the appointment of staff who simply lack adequate qualifications and

do not meet the relevant minimum requirements for their roles due to limited experience. For instance, an estimated 1,200 senior managers are reported to lack the required qualifications for their roles. A significant part of this problem stems from the influence of political officials in the appointment process and broader administration and appointment of individuals who do not meet the minimum job requirements, compromising professionalism and effectiveness. Worryingly, the trend is not exclusive to areas governed by the ruling African National Congress, It has evolved even in places governed by multiparty coalitions, with the City of Johannesburg currently a potent case in point.

Low staff morale also to a lack of staff retention and high turnover. At present, the organisational culture does not provide a conducive environment for employees to serve. Interactions with the public have become more toxic and risky, leading to the threat of intimidation, violence and loss of life. This results in staff being unable to focus on their work and a clear deterrent to willingness to perform.



Photos: Marco Longari / AFP



ABOVE AND BELOW: Protesters stand at a burning barricade in the Kliptown section of Soweto during a service delivery demonstration in July 2016, ahead of the municipal elections.

SO, WHAT IS TO BE DONE TO BUILD A PROFESSIONAL LOCAL CIVIL SERVICE:

- Retaining talent and managing performance:** municipalities are in dire need of highly technical expertise such as engineers, planners, surveyors and financial administrators, all of which are lucrative careers found in the private sector. This leads the most skilled people to be less inclined to go to places that require the most help such as rural and underdeveloped areas and townships. Instead of struggling to pay staff salaries and providing employment benefits, municipalities need to adequately incentivise people for their skills, build solid institutional cultures and adopt best practices for talent development of those holding municipal positions.
- Managing political overreach:** more emphasis should be placed on mandatory in-service training and competency testing for would-be senior managers, as well as pre-employment competency assessments for individuals being recruited into senior management. This will go a long way in remedying non-meritocratic appointments and mitigating unfettered political influence.
- The development of a clear set of norms and standards:** this can be achieved through improved collaboration with professional bodies operating within the various disciplines, including engineering, planning, auditing and property valuation. There must be active attempts to create tailored training programmes and ensure continuous learning and development with organs like the National School of Government and institutions of higher learning.
- The adoption of whole-of-society approaches and collaboration:** the responsibility for professionalising local government and achieving Integrated Development Planning objectives lies with elected public representatives, executive officers, oversight and accountability bodies, and citizens themselves. Allowing for forward-thinking, knowledge and technological proficiencies will modernise administration, management and systems; and bolster institutional innovation, planning and implementation in response to current challenges. [GGP](#)

Coalitions call for cool heads and political maturity

By Mxolisi Zondo

The unresolved issue of unstable and unregulated coalition administrations, mainly prevalent in local municipalities, becomes more concerning as the 2024 South African general elections draw near.

In the next election, should there be no majority party in the National Assembly and this results in a hung parliament, a coalition may be formed to constitute the next national government. Reading the South African constitution may suggest that there is nothing wrong with the scenario of a

national coalition government, and perhaps there isn't.

However, South African political parties and politicians have demonstrated that they lack the wisdom and political maturity the constitution assumed when it predicated a multi-party system of democratic government as one of its values.

In addition to the existence of a multi-party system of democratic government, the constitution specifically lists accountability and responsiveness as some of our foundational values. Testing



these values against the works of the most recent coalition governments exposes the cracks within the system as we know it. They are not responsive, at least not to service delivery needs, and perhaps this is due to the reality that these coalitions have also been unable to shield the bureaucracy from political developments.

It's reasonable to assume and expect that for the bureaucracy to function well, it ought to be shielded from politics and shifts in political power. This is not understood as suggesting that politicians should not provide strategic guidance and play their oversight role. Of course, elected leaders determine the administration's direction, outline the goals, and provide a solid plan. However, this becomes problematic when this role is not understood or fulfilled.

Politics should not interfere with the provision of reliable and effective services. Essentially, if the political-administrative interface is left unchecked

and misunderstood, it contributes to the decline in government performance. Service delivery is hampered by an unstable political-administrative interface when political shifts in coalition agreements affect the administration. There is no doubt that this volatility negatively impacts public value.

This piece does not intend to argue that the mere existence of coalition agreements means that service delivery will be compromised. The underlying issues are usually political immaturity, misalignment, and the lack of a cohesive vision. As previously demonstrated in Good Governance Africa's (GGA) 2019 Government Performance Index (GPI), which assessed 213 municipalities, 20 of the best-performing municipalities were governed through coalition arrangements. More recently, in 2021, GGA's GPI revealed that of the 20 best-performing municipalities, four were governed through coalition agreements.

As previously shown in GGA's Policy Briefing



on coalitions, at the minimum, there are at least three elements of public value that citizens expect from their governments: (i) well-performing administrations characterised by service delivery; (ii) institutions that are reliable and effective in attaining envisioned public outcomes; and (iii) institutions that function fairly and impartially for the benefit of the public.

Coalition agreements that have been carefully crafted and underpinned by values and agreements that seek to enforce stability for the greater good may have a chance of achieving this complex public value. The experience that we have gained from coalition governments in South Africa, however, at least at the level of local municipalities, is that these have been largely based on political interests that are devoid of real politics based on values and principles that seek to better the lives of citizens. This kind of politics has been based on wanting to be in power by any means necessary.

Political parties no longer care too much about the kind of partner with which they are negotiating. For instance, party X does not consider the position of Party Y on fee-free education or the question of access to quality healthcare, immigration laws, etc. These ideological and policy considerations are absent, and therein lies the problem. Political party policy decisions in South Africa are understood to underpin what becomes government policy should the party in question ascend to power.

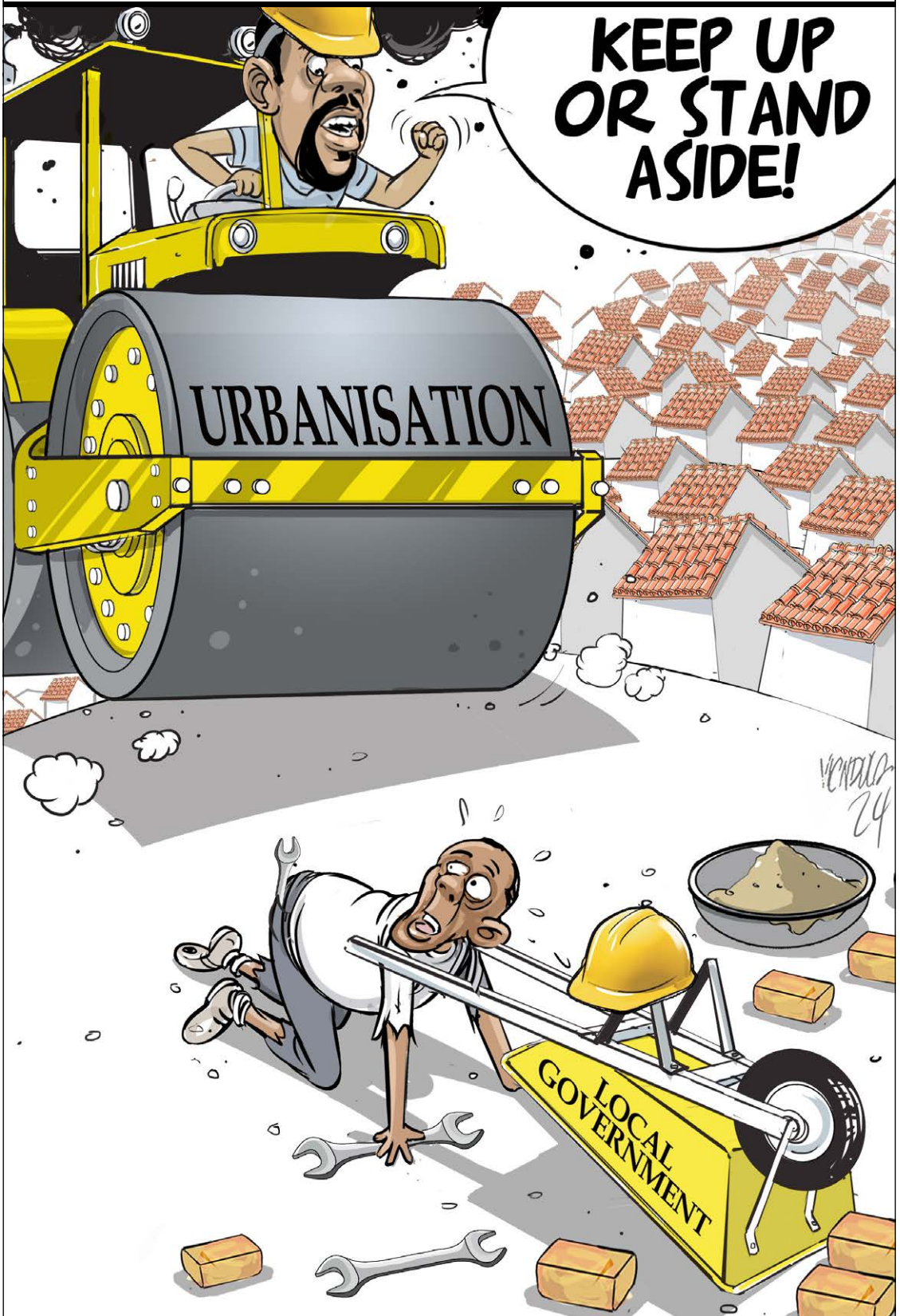
LEFT TO RIGHT: President Cyril Ramaphosa (ANC), John Steenhuisen (DA) and Julius Malema (EFF).

These policy positions then contribute to government priorities, budgeting, and spending. If there is misalignment at this level, how do we begin to expect that there will be integrated development plans that the administration will pursue? On what principles and values would they be based? Political parties should prioritise these considerations as they consider who to partner with, be it at the local, provincial, or national level in the future. Perhaps this may even lead to what society has been asking for: the publication of coalition agreements. Under the current circumstances, one may assume that one of the reasons for not publishing coalition agreements is that political parties are partnering with their ideological and policy opponents. Essentially, their partnerships are not based on policy and a shared vision of the future, but on expediency.

As we go into the next general election and the elections to follow, political parties and decision-makers addressing the problems of coalitions should keep in mind that the government’s primary mission is to service citizens and strive toward practical agreements that don’t infringe on any tenets of the social contract. **GGV**

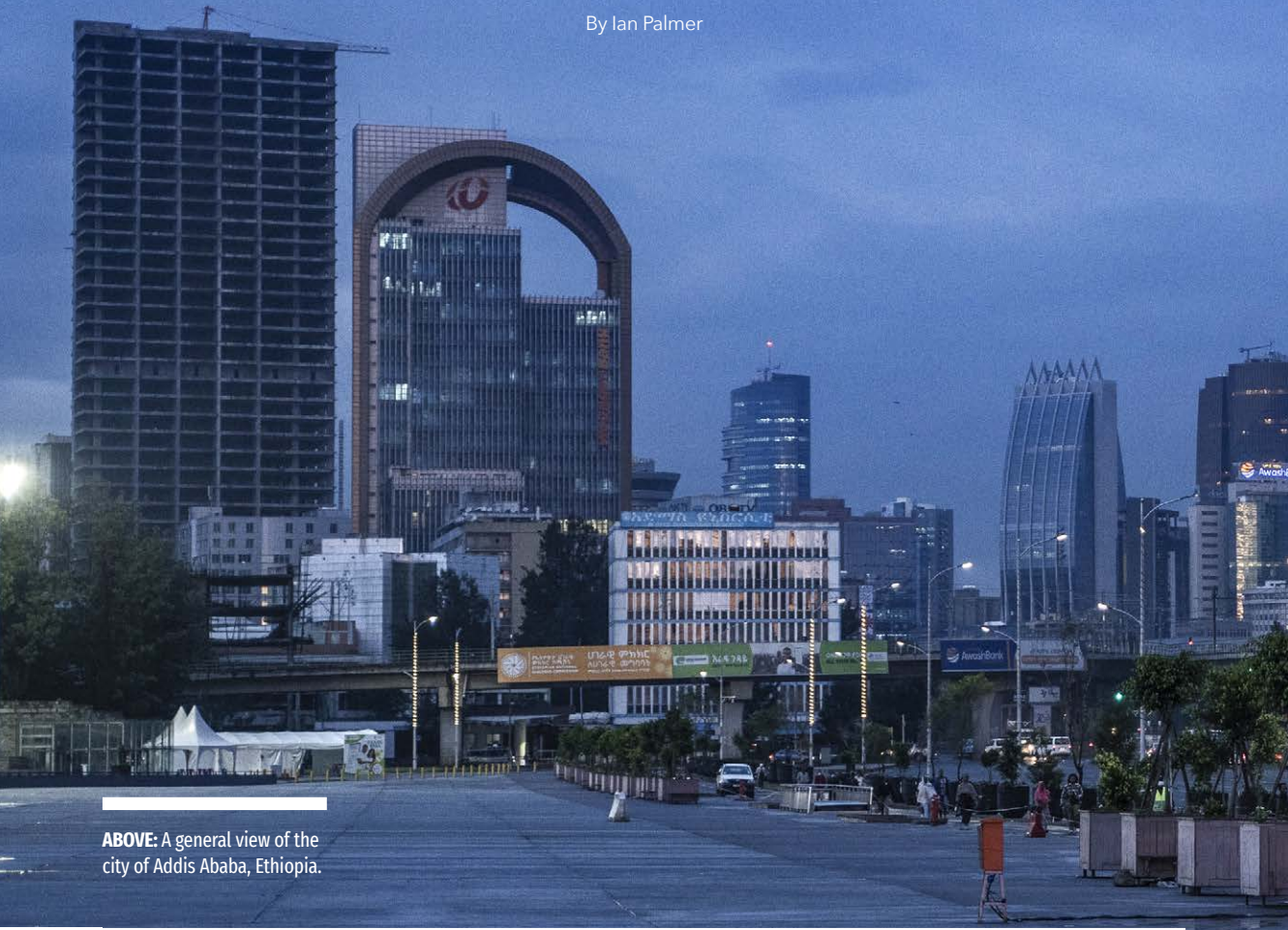
CARTOON

by Victor Ndula



A TALE OF FIVE AFRICAN CITIES

By Ian Palmer



ABOVE: A general view of the city of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The “governance” of cities may be narrowly focused on the way the local authority manages its organisational affairs, essentially the internal relationships between the council, political parties, and city administration. More broadly, “governance” needs to include management of the relationships the local authority has with external parties, including other government entities at the national, provincial, and local levels, and service providers active in the city’s functional area. The viability of the city as a place to live and work is fundamentally correlated with success in managing these relationships.

The extent of these external relationships also depends on how the “city” is defined, with the argument here that this should be taken as the functional urban area: the city and its commuting zone (OECD 2012), which can be approximated as the geographic area within the urban edge. As is evident from the case studies presented here, it is often the case that the functional area of the city spills over the primary city administrative boundary.

This means there are multiple local authorities responsible for a single-city functional area, which creates considerable complexity in the planning and management of the city as an integrated urban area.

This leads to the primary argument in this article: that the success of cities as functional areas is promoted through having fewer institutions involved in both the management of the city and the associated provision of services to households and enterprises.

Five cities have been selected as case studies for this article as they are key cities in sub-Saharan Africa, they have differing institutional forms, and information on them was available to the author,



Source: Oxford Economics data

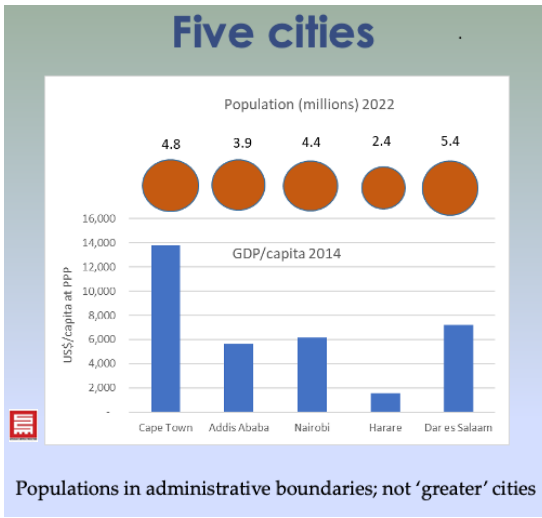


FIGURE 1: Relative population and GDP per capita for five case study cities

based on work for the African Centre for Cities and the African Development Bank (AfDB). They have broadly comparable populations – although Harare is substantially smaller than the others – but very different economic circumstances, as shown in Figure 1 below.

In the case of Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian government and Addis Ababa city are working towards densifying the city, with a focus on multi-storey residential complexes. Nevertheless, the urban area is expanding into rural areas outside the city boundary, particularly in the northeast, with expansion into the surrounding Oromia region. This is causing political difficulties with the Oromia people, as rural land on the periphery of the city is giving way to urban development in the Oromia region, which surrounds Addis Ababa.

In Nairobi’s case, Nairobi County is the primary local authority serving the Nairobi functional area, but with three neighbouring counties, Kiambu, Kajiado, and Machakos, also administering parts of the area. City expansion is occurring in these neighbouring areas, which will result in increasingly fragmented city management, with water and sanitation services also affected as the counties

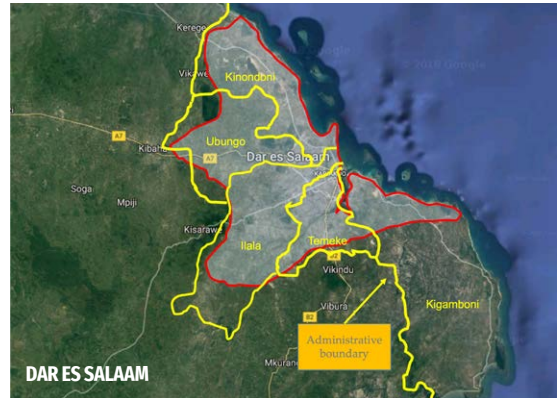
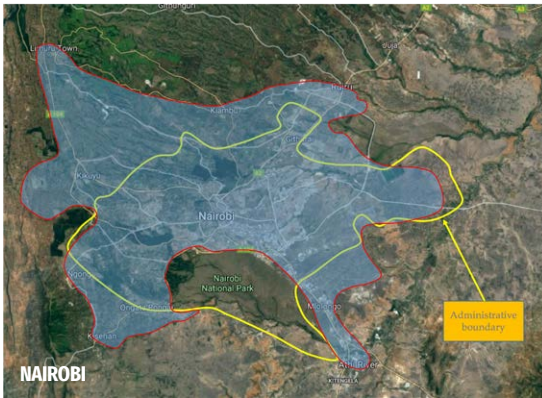
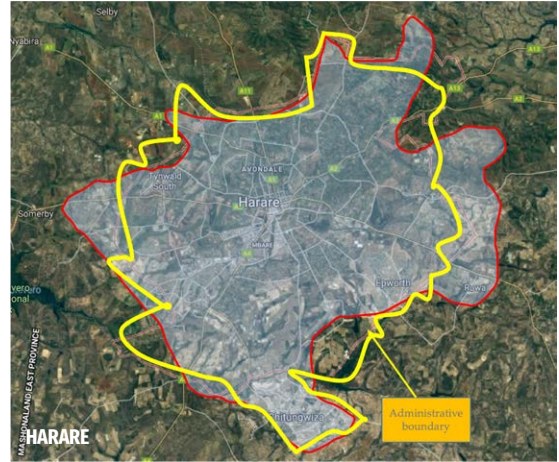
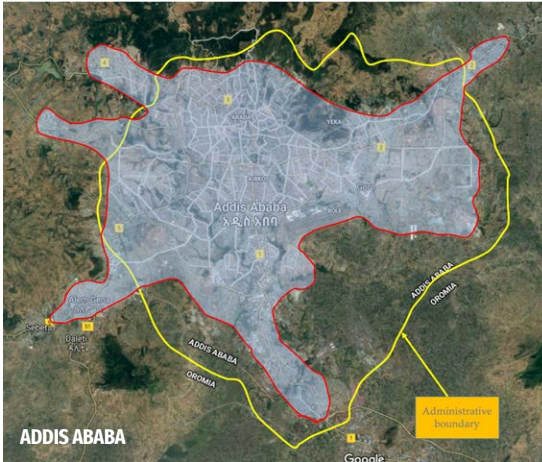
own the water and sanitation companies. The functional area of Harare also spills over the administrative boundary of Harare City into neighbouring rural district council areas, notably Goromonzi, Chegutu, Zvimba, and Mazowe. The city also has three “urban” municipalities within its functional area: Chitungwiza and the Epworth and Ruwa local boards.

Dar es Salaam does not have this “urban overflow” problem as the functional area of the city is largely within the administrative boundary of Dar es Salaam city council. In this case, administrative complexity is created within the city boundaries due to five municipal councils being given greater powers and functions than the city council. Cape Town’s administrative area also covers the city’s whole functional area; thus, relationships with neighbouring municipalities are relatively insignificant.



	Yellow line	Administrative boundary
	Red line	Urban edge (as far as this could be determined)

FIGURE 2: Maps showing city boundaries



There are a range of local government arrangements internal to the primary city government that can be referred to as two-tier local government, with the relative responsibilities of these tiers depending on how powers and functions are allocated through national legislation. Dar es Salaam, with five municipal councils within the boundary of the city council, has the most complex intra-city relationships; the city council has relatively few functions and revenue sources compared to the internal councils. By contrast, Addis Ababa, has 10 districts (sub-cities) within the city boundary, but the city has primary responsibility for services. A portion of the revenue raised by the city council is paid to the sub-cities in return for administering neighbourhood activities.

Nairobi, Harare, and Cape Town do not have separate urban services institutions within their boundaries, but they do have community liaison arrangements through, for example, ward committees.

All cities must abide by national policies and are, to a large extent, regulated by their national governments. However, the extent to which powers and functions are devolved to local government varies. Cape Town, for example, is the only one of the cities discussed here that is given responsibility for electricity distribution.

It is also important to recognise the difference between *de jure* devolution and what happens *de facto*. This was well covered in *Africa in Fact* Issue 45 on Africa's urban future, where examples of the



Photo: Ericky Boniphace / AFP

marginalisation of local governments in several countries are reported, Harare being an extreme example. All cities are also dependent on transfers from the national fiscus, to varying degrees, and national governments can exert control over municipalities through the system of transfers, depending on how well-protected this system is through legislation.

If cities need to relate to provincial governments, this also brings complexity, typically without much benefit. This is the case with Cape Town, where some functions are assigned to the Western Cape Province. This does not apply to the other case study cities.

The management of a city's functional area is enormously complex, requiring a multitude of functions, many of which are associated with services to households and enterprises. It is not intended to deal with them comprehensively here; rather, the focus is placed on networked infrastructure-intensive functions that are central to the success of cities as integrated urban areas.

The emphasis is on municipal or publicly owned

service providers (SOEs), whether they are national or regional. This is not to suggest that private service providers are not a valid service provider option, but this is not considered here, partly as this is not currently a major consideration in the case study cities. The merit of municipal vs SOE service providers is also not considered here other than through the argument that an internal (municipal) service provider does not require a relationship with an external partner.

Water and Sanitation: Although some African countries have national utilities – Uganda, for example – in all five case study countries, water and sanitation services are provided at city level, but with big differences in institutional form.

Cape Town and Harare have municipal supplies, while local SOEs in the other cities provide water and sanitation services. Here, too, there are significant differences, with Dar es Salaam Water Supply and Sanitation Authority (DAWASA) answerable primarily to the national government and serving some areas outside the city boundary. Meanwhile, the Addis Ababa Water and

Sewerage Authority is directly answerable to the city and receives funding from it for capital works. The Nairobi Water and Sanitation Company is intermediate between these two, with a substantial degree of autonomy as it is wholly owned by Nairobi County but does not receive funds from the county.

As noted above, the situation in Nairobi is also complicated as there are other county-scale water and sanitation companies active within the Nairobi city functional area: the Kiambu, Ololaiser and Mavuko water and sewerage companies. The latter two serve the counties of Kajiado and Machakos, and all three include part of the Nairobi functional area in their areas of supply.

Electricity: Four of the five cities discussed here have electricity supplied by national SOEs, with Cape Town the exception, where the city's own electricity department distributes power to the majority of households and enterprises, with the national electricity provider, Eskom, serving some township areas. In fact, South Africa

is quite exceptional internationally for having electricity distribution as a local government function; a few other examples in the world include Los Angeles and some Canadian municipalities. This is surprising, as there are considerable benefits for a city to be an electricity distributor. It is a revenue-rich service and brings a potentially large advantage in that electricity supply can be cut to properties where other payments are in arrears, as happens in Cape Town.

Roads: All the case study cities, and most cities internationally, have multiple agencies managing roads within their functional areas. Typically, a national roads agency will provide and manage the major trunk routes running through the city functional area: Ethiopian Roads Authority (ERA), Tanzania National Roads Agency (TARURA), Kenya Urban Roads Authority (KURA), Zimbabwe National Road Administration (ZINARA) and the South African National Roads Authority (SANRAL).

In some cases – Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, for



TOP LEFT: A new building of Dar es Salaam Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) terminus. Tanzania received 14 economy-class carriages from South Korean company Sung Shin Rolling Stock (SSRT) in Dar es Salaam on November 25, 2022.

BELOW: Aerial view shows part of the Ngong Road Forest, adjacent to the Kibera slum, in Nairobi, in 2022.

example – the national agency also manages roads of lower hierarchy within cities. But most typically, these lower-hierarchy roads are provided and managed by the municipality or, in the case of Addis Ababa, by a public entity owned by the city, the Addis Ababa City Roads Authority (AACRA).

The extent of devolution to city road departments is contested in cities such as Nairobi, where the city is marginalised in relation to KURA, and Harare, where the national government limits access to funding for the municipality’s roads.

Public transport: In this article, public transport is limited to the provision of mass transit systems, on the assumption that other public transport modes, such as buses and taxis, operate on the roads. Mass transit is of increasing importance for burgeoning African cities where roads are typically congested. This is recognised through recent city-scale interventions: Addis Ababa’s commuter rail system, Dar es Salaam’s bus rapid transit (BRT)

system, and the BRT system currently under construction in Nairobi.

While these mass transit systems are promoted as successes in improving city viability, the Cape Town commuter rail system is failing and in decline due to corruption and mismanagement. In Addis Ababa and Cape Town, the rail system is run by national SOEs: the Ethiopian Railways Corporation (ERC) and the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA). Dar es Salaam has a two-tier BRT arrangement, with Dar es Salaam Urban Transport Authority (DUTA) as the asset owner and Dar es Salaam Rapid Transit (DART) as the operator. Nairobi also has a split system, with the planning by the Nairobi Metropolitan Area Transport Authority, which covers the city’s functional area (including Nairobi’s neighbouring counties) with the intention to employ private operators to run the buses on the BRT corridors.

The benefit of having fewer external parties



ABOVE: A man walks over a main road in Harare on August 20, 2023. Zimbabweans went to the polls on August 23, 2023, to vote in general and presidential elections.

Photo: John Wessels / AFP



BELOW: People practice sports in a street in the city of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in January last year. Portions of downtown Addis Ababa are closed to traffic on Sundays during the morning so people can practice sport.

Photo: Eduardo Soteras / AFP

engaged in city management as functional areas is obviously not the only factor influencing their viability. However, it is argued here that this is most important, with Cape Town an example of institutional simplicity, where the city council has responsibility for the whole functional area and where the city directly provides all networked services other than public transport.

It has only three primary relationships to manage: national government, PRASA (for public transport), and Eskom for electricity distribution in part of the city. It is recognised that Cape Town also has other advantages in relation to other case study cities: a strong economy, a substantial revenue base, and political stability.

Addis Ababa also has a relatively uncomplicated set of relationships to manage, six in number: National government, Oromia regional government, the national electricity provider, the national rail corporation, and two municipally owned entities responsible for water sanitation and roads.

In Harare's case, the city has seven external organisations to manage in addition to national

government, with complexity created by the spillover of the functional area into five neighbouring local authorities. On the other hand, it has only two external service providers to consider, those responsible for electricity and roads.

Nairobi has the disadvantage that the city must deal with three other counties serving the functional area of the city, four water and sanitation providers, a national electricity provider, a national roads authority and a public transport authority, and national government: 11 organisations in total.

In the case of Dar es Salaam, the city council must relate to five municipal councils, three local SOEs responsible for water, sanitation, and public transport, two national SEOs providing roads and electricity, plus national government: 12 organisations in total.

In the final analysis, there are manifold benefits to having a strong single-tier municipality serving the whole functional area of a city. Fragmentation creates administrative and political complexity and reduces the ability of local government to raise revenue and finance capital works. [GGP](#)

WORLDS APART


By Malcolm Ray

Johannesburg, Cape Town and the radical remaking of apartheid

First it was a generation lost to countries abroad. Now the ongoing exodus of affluent white families from Johannesburg to Cape Town has drawn new, unprecedented spatial and political battle lines at local government level that mirror apartheid in all but name.

Photo: <https://www.gettyimages.com/photos/snapeverything>

ABOVE: Johannesburg.



Summer comes to Johannesburg in October. In the early evenings, storm clouds, dark and gravid, crackle and burst in heavy downpours that water the rivers and parched trees, which give the city's well-heeled suburbs their eerie beauty. By late October 2023, water was desperately needed for something else, quite new, not only to lubricate the naked, dry landscape but for all the necessities of life. Ailing water and electricity infrastructure, incompetence and corruption in the public sector conspired to produce a perfect storm that made life simply unbearable. Johannesburg was aquiver.



ABOVE: A view of Table Mountain, across Table Bay, from Bloubergstrand Beach, in Cape Town.

Apart from affluent whites who fled the chaos of the Zuma presidency for the security and safety of developed economies abroad, no other city has, like a staged theatrical reenactment of the Great Trek, ever emptied out such large numbers of skills and capital. It is called, colloquially, “semigration”; but the word is scarcely adequate. If the electricity crisis produced an older generation lost to countries abroad, by the time of the Covid-19

pandemic in 2020-21 the ground shifting beneath Johannesburg’s sclerotic economy was producing a generation of affluent semigrants – quietly at first, later gathering momentum – who have been abandoning their homes for the ambience of Cape Town.

In the absence of official census data, the sheer scale of the phenomenon is hard to tell. But there are hints. One early clue was a survey in January 2022 by analytics group Lightstone Properties. The data revealed that each year since the 2016 local elections, quite literally thousands of Johannesburg residents, lured by the sequestered luxury, comfort and security of Cape Town, left the city. Real estate trends from Lightstone on homeowners moving out of Johannesburg show an increase from 36% in 2016 and 2017 to 39% in 2019 and 2020 and 43% in 2021.

To put that in perspective, perhaps no other area starkly emblemises the suddenness and magnitude of the stony and tortuous path since the 2016 local elections as Houghton. Outwardly, Houghton has been a patrician enclave of historically white privilege. Large Edwardian-style mansions, replete





Photo: Rodger Bosc / AFP

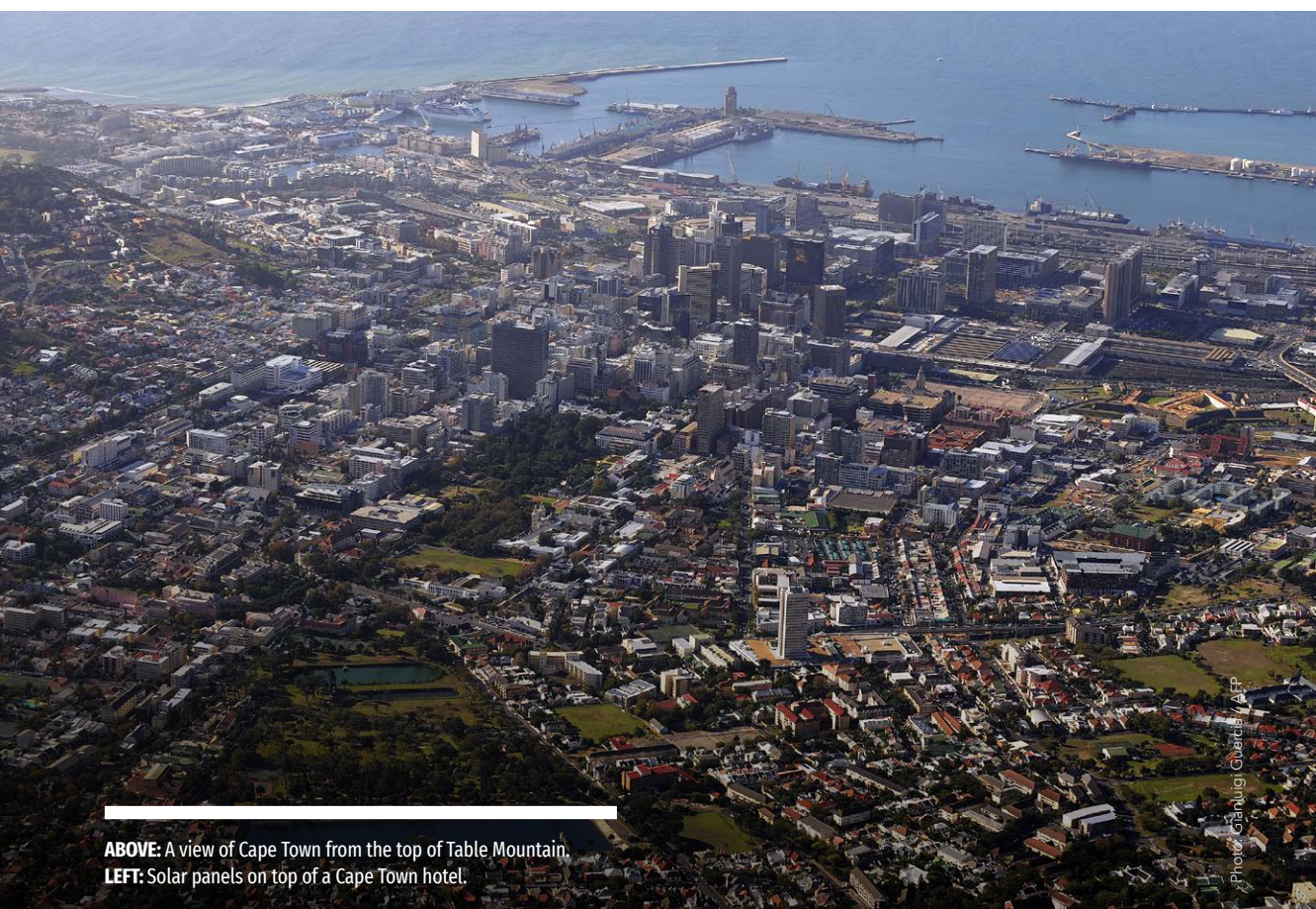


Photo: Stanislav Gunder / AFP

ABOVE: A view of Cape Town from the top of Table Mountain.
LEFT: Solar panels on top of a Cape Town hotel.



Photo: Luca Solar / AFP

ABOVE: An aerial view of Johannesburg as seen from the 51st floor of Ponte City tower, in Hillbrow, Johannesburg.

with tall gabled columns at their entrances behind heavily fortified walls, reveal the decorative pastiche of the New English architecture associated with Herbert Baker, dropped, as though by accident, into a rugged cityscape during the 1930s.

But beneath the veil, another reality cuts through the heart of present-day Houghton like a clumsily retouched image: the appearance of the place fades out of the real South African story, but its grim shadow remains in what the urban planner Martin Murray has described as an “aesthetic anarchy”, where privatised urbanism that once sustained a self-sufficient playground of the filthy rich and upper middle classes is faltering in the face of unsustainable power and water shortages and radically altering Johannesburg’s social, economic and political landscape. On every street, for-sale signs line manicured lawns; lights are often out;

large festering swimming pools lie half empty; and potholes circled in paint are labelled ANC, a swipe at the African National Congress (ANC), which presides over an R81 billion metropolitan budget and six million people who call Johannesburg home.

Predictably, the ANC-led metropolitan council has downplayed the crisis, claiming that there is nothing like a quiet exodus underway. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, the city council’s strongest impulse has been to sit back. No longer capable, as journalist Patrick Bulger has written, “of settling into a comfort zone decorated in the shades of the inequality inherited from the past”, the ANC at local level has had to surrender to the frustrations, disappointment and anger of the urban poor and black middle class in the face of strong support for the official opposition, the Democratic Alliance (DA) among the city’s white upper and middle classes.

And so it's also safe to assume that caution by the ruling ANC in the city speaks to another side of the story: the ongoing exodus of affluent white families from Johannesburg to Cape Town has drawn new spatial and political battle lines at local government level between the DA, on the one side, and the ANC and Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), on the other, who would like nothing more than to rid the city of DA support.

This is not a hyperbolic repartee. In a recent study of urbanisation in Johannesburg, sociologist Owen Crankshaw found that the racial composition of the Johannesburg region has undergone a radical transformation over the past four decades. About 40% of the population of the city was white when the National Party rose to power in 1948 and most of the remainder was African. Since then, the African population has grown steadily in both relative and absolute terms. By 1996 the proportion of white residents had dropped to one-fifth of the population. Correspondingly, the African population grew steadily so that by 1996, African residents made up 71% of the population. By the end of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, wealthy DA strongholds in Johannesburg like Houghton had quite a different demographic profile. These days its capsular architecture of enclosure fortifies a new type of local resident: black households, whose traditional loyalties have been to the ANC and, more recently, the EFF, are buying up properties vacated by wealthy white families in fire sales.

Although the picture emerging is not quite clear enough to draw definitive conclusions, perhaps the deeper implication of the meshing of these issues serves as an allegory for a massive fallout

in local politics, thus raising a more animating question: in what way is the shifting demographic landscape recasting party support in two of the country's largest metros? Addressing this question requires an exploration of the two endpoints along an emerging north-south divide in the country's spatial and demographic profile that will have large implications for the shape and form of party loyalties at local and provincial government levels.

During and after the 2016 local government elections, there was a growing sense nationally that the perpetuity of the ANC's electoral dominance and

hegemony was declining. In Johannesburg – the heart of South Africa's economy and a municipality that the ANC dominated for years – the ANC had only 44.5% of the vote and, consequently, no outright majority. This decline meant that larger opposition parties, such as the EFF and the DA, had to form coalitions with smaller or opposing parties to form majority governments.

Since the 2021 local elections, however, contestation for the city began to coalesce around the emerging dynamic of a declining DA support base, due partly to semigration, and closer ties between the ANC and EFF that is a harbinger of things to come. Nowhere is this local political dynamic more apparent than from the ANC's Gauteng premier Panyaza Lesufi's informal alliance with the EFF in Johannesburg, a crucial voting pool for the ANC in the city and one it stands to lose if delivery in the city is not improved.

Put broadly, the changing demographic profile and political architecture of local contestation is not simply a matter of fragmentation within the Johannesburg metropolitan region between wealthy elites in spatial enclaves backing the DA, on one side, and ramshackle black townships and blighted

Predictably, the ANC-led metropolitan council has downplayed the crisis, claiming that there is nothing like a quiet exodus underway.

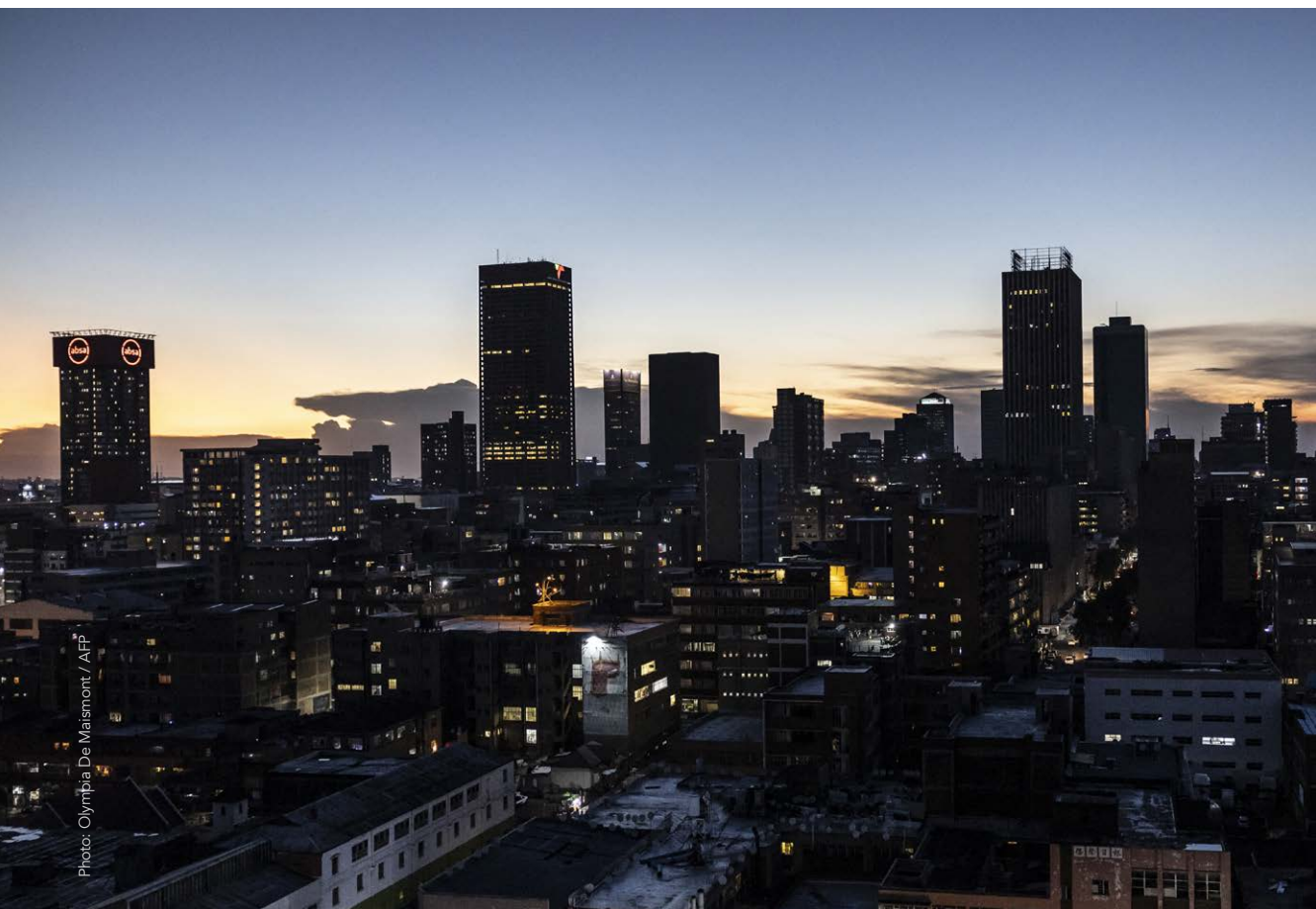


Photo: Olympia De Walsmort / AFP

ghettoes on the urban fringes behind the ANC and EFF on the other. Perhaps the deeper truth is that race has always been mapped onto party support bases. The difference since the 2016 and 2021 local elections, when the ANC lost its outright majority in Johannesburg and other major metros, is that the decline in its share of votes due to poor performance is likely to be offset by the movement of the DA's natural constituency to Cape Town. What was once a polynucleated spatial and political configuration within Johannesburg is being recontoured across an old geopolitical fault line that once divided the English in the Cape and Afrikaners in the Transvaal before the 1910 Act of Union.

Correspondingly, by history and demography, the ANC in the Western Cape, and the Cape Town metro specifically, faces tougher challenges than anywhere else in the country as wealthy whites

flock to the city. In all other provinces, black Africans constitute the majority of voters. According to political analyst Keith Gotschalk, although all major South African parties commit to a vision of a non-racial society, it is estimated that less than 2% of white voters vote for the ANC, and less than 6% of African voters vote for the DA. Put broadly, for white households historically barricaded behind wealthy DA strongholds in Johannesburg, there is now a larger displacement of local boundaries into unchartered territory: no longer capable of falling back on privatised urbanism, affluent whites are now seeking to reestablish a political bulwark of power hierarchies, wealth and status in Cape Town against the ANC and the spectre of an EFF-led coalition in Johannesburg.

And that's the all-important point. Since the end of apartheid, there has been increasing pressure to

attain the macro and micro spatial structure most suited to social cohesion and inclusive growth. However, trends such as these upset conventional interpretations of South African society that have tended to emphasise the rise of intra-racial inequality over inter-racial inequality as a post-apartheid phenomenon. Indeed, the geopolitical cleavage between Johannesburg and Cape Town suggests that the evolution of local government in South Africa from a deeply divided, fragmented, and skewed system rooted in the former apartheid dispensation may be regressing back to apartheid in all but name. What was “separate development” under apartheid is now increasingly synonymous with the re-racialisation of local politics between Cape Town and Johannesburg. The unevenness in the distribution of wealth between Cape Town and Johannesburg is no more apparent than from Crankshaw’s finding that “wealth” is socially located amongst whites (1% of households below the poverty line), and “poverty” remains concentrated amongst blacks (60.7% of households below the poverty line).

Whilst this was intended under apartheid, it appears to be resurfacing in local government, albeit in a slightly different guise. Although it is too soon to draw a line in the sand, what does seem clear enough is that the current semigration trajectory is socially locating uneven development by remapping intra-racial inequality and settlement patterns *within* cities onto an emerging local government divide *between* cities.

What does this mean for future party political contestation? For one thing, the reversal of the post-apartheid trend towards intra-racial social

inequality designates a new apartheid inscribed in white (and coloured) voter support for the DA in Cape Town (and the Western Cape) and the ANC and black opposition parties in Johannesburg. In a broader sense, then, what matters is not whether the total share across all municipalities of the DA’s local vote is thinly spread and stagnant, but the consolidation of that voting constituency behind the party in the Western Cape due to semigration and its corresponding abandonment of Johannesburg to the ANC and black opposition parties like the EFF. This re-embedding of racial segregation in the spatial fabric of local government has large implications for

future power configurations and coalition arrangements: rather than a deracialisation of local government, the localisation of race is an emerging reality in Johannesburg and Cape Town.

The makeover is dramatic enough to have prompted a small but significant number of researchers to call into question the long-term political implications of the evolution of the entire local government landscape over the previous two-plus decades. Besides showing the magnitude of the economic

crisis in Johannesburg, semigration has revealed a hidden political dynamic: a sense that it prefigures a kind of nervous disorder and radical reordering of local politics – a sense, in other words, that the movement of wealthy people out of Johannesburg to Cape Town will slowly but surely coalesce around an emerging local and provincial political, social and spatial order of new place-making and boundary-marking, and thus an entirely new form of separation and fragmentation splintered more broadly between local governments to the north and south of the Karoo. [GGV](#)

Since the end of apartheid, there has been increasing pressure to attain the macro and micro spatial structure most suited to social cohesion and inclusive growth.



KENYA AND THE CASE FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

By Mmabatho Mongae



The introduction of the 2010 Constitution in Kenya was monumental, particularly for the decentralisation of civic participation. This framework was a significant step in further cultivating civic engagement in Kenya. This article examines the factors that strengthen and impede civic engagement in Kenya and finds that although the deepened institutionalisation of governance and democracy strengthens civic participation, it does not sustain it. It is therefore worth identifying factors that contribute to the gap between the institutionalisation of governance, democracy, and civic engagement, as this can provide insight into how to narrow this gap.

Historically, civic engagement has played a central role in African politics. Before the third wave of democracy in the early 1990s, civic engagement included *inkundla/lekgotla* meetings, hometown associations, and ethnic welfare associations. According to CIVICUS's 2022 Civic Society Index

report, civic space is under threat globally, and it is civil society that plays a critical role in holding those responsible to account. CIVICUS also noted that in eight African countries in 2008-2011, civic engagement in Africa was relatively high compared to other regions. However, as of 2023, CIVICUS assessed 27 African countries as repressed, 14 were "obstructed", three "narrow" and two "open", indicative of a repressed civic space in the region.

To attain and maintain democratic health requires a joint effort by the state and its citizens. Citizen engagement can take place in campaigning or advocating for shared goals, engaging with

ABOVE: Sister Evelyn (C), a Christian charity social worker speaks to a small group of elderly people in the upgraded slum of Ngendo on the outskirts of Nairobi, Kenya.

Photo: Roberto Schmidt / AFP



ABOVE: A member of the public holds a shield with the Kenyan national flag colours while attending a celebration marking Kenya's 60th anniversary of independence from Britain, known as Jamhuri Day, in Nairobi on December 12, 2023.

Photo: Simon Maina / AFP

governments, holding them accountable, and making demands of them. It can also take place through paid employment in non-governmental advocacy. More importantly, civic engagement takes place in a voluntary capacity. This article is interested in understanding the nature of the latter engagement in the Kenyan context.

Civic engagement is determined by many factors, including but not limited to the type of political system, the effectiveness of local government, and the country's history, which shapes its social, political, and ideological framework. For example, Sudan's political ideology is largely undermined by ethnic politics, which took shape during its colonial experience. Decades later, ethnic divisions and ethnic-based politics remain an underlying feature in Sudan. In South Africa, political ideology is shaped by its apartheid experiences of inequality. In Tunisia, the 2011 Arab

Spring has and continues to shape the nature of governance and political system; in Rwanda, the 1994 genocide has significantly shaped the country's post-genocide political ideology. Similarly, Kenya's political ideology has been shaped by inequalities and by post-colonial experiences that contributed to the 2007-2008 post-election violence.

Like many other African countries, Kenya's current democratic landscape has been shaped by its [unique] colonial experience. The colonial administration concentrated on developing certain regions and excluded others – this further entrenched ethnic inequalities. Post-independence, ethnic fractionalisation was not addressed but has been weaponised for political gain. Additionally, because inequality has ethnic undertones this also fuels ethnically polarised national politics and therefore public participation in politics and the democratic process.



ABOVE: A man reads a commemorative newspaper as Kenyan students holding flags wait for the start of the celebrations of Kenya's 60th Independence Day last year.

Photo: Luis Tato / AFP

However, the Kenyan government has made great strides in strengthening and consolidating civic engagement. This includes transitioning from a single party to a multiparty system, and the adoption of a new constitution in 2010 that makes provision for public participation. This new constitution was monumental as it introduced a new system of decentralised governance. This new system restructured the government system by establishing one national government and 47 county governments. The new constitution also addressed the issue of inequality and exclusion, where marginalised counties could now have access to grants to address these inequalities. Public participation is further institutionalised through the County Governments Act (2012), the Public Finance Management Act (2012), and the Intergovernmental Relations Act (2012).

How has the institutionalisation of decentralised

governance influenced civic engagement in Kenya? Who is upholding civic engagement in Kenya and what lessons can other African countries learn from the Kenyan experience?

Pan-African research network Afrobarometer measures civic participation by accounting for different typologies, which include attending community meetings; contacting political and civil society leaders or government; joining forces with others to raise an issue; and involvement in a community group or voluntary association. Compared to other African countries, participation across these measures is relatively high but on the decline in Kenya.

According to the Afrobarometer, on average attending community meetings is the most common form of civic engagement (58%) in Africa. However, there is great variation between countries – 89% of Madagascans attend community meetings, 82% in



ABOVE: Eighty-two-year-old James Kumuyu (R) joins in song and prayer with other members of a senior citizens support group during their weekly meeting where they discuss the earnings of a community charcoal and animal feed store they manage as a group, on the outskirts of Nairobi.

Photos: Roberto Schmidt / AFP

Tanzania, compared to only 12% in Tunisia. About 24% of Africans say that they are either leaders or active members of voluntary associations or community groups. The proportion is the highest in the Gambia (54%), Liberia (50%) followed by Kenya (46%) and is the lowest in Morocco, Mauritius, and Madagascar (9%), and Tunisia (6%). Worth noting is that, except for Mauritius, according to Freedom House, all the lower-ranking countries are classified as partly free.

It is interesting to note that changes in Kenya’s constitutional reform have been met with divergent changes in civic participation. Figure 1 depicts a time trend of civic participation in Kenya.

Kenya has adopted various mechanisms and platforms to promote citizen participation. In addition to the mentioned Acts, the Kenyan government has made use of public forums such as newspapers, local community vernacular radio stations, announcements on national websites, and social media platforms to encourage citizens to

attend public forums. So, why is this not translating to sustained civic participation?

As Figure 1 indicates, in Kenya civic engagement – across all indicators – was the highest in 2003. Engagement was particularly high for the attendance of community meetings (53%) and joining others to raise an issue (43%) while it was lowest for the attendance of a demonstration or protest march (8%). Between 2003 and 2008

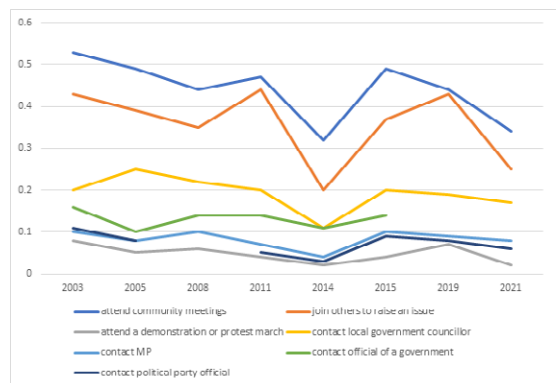


FIGURE 1: Civic engagement in Kenya

there was a decrease in civic engagement across all indicators – except for contact with a local government councillor. This decline coincides with the post-election violence of 2007-2008, which was fuelled by ethnic polarisation.

As noted earlier, the 2010 Constitution significantly altered the structure of government with the executive's powers reduced. Additionally, provisions were made for the reallocation of human and financial resources, as well as political power to help address the imbalances of the past. More importantly, the Constitution provided an avenue for the marginalised to address their grievances. Unsurprisingly, in 2011 there was a significant increase in civic participation.

The challenge for Kenya is in maintaining citizen participation. Civic participation reached an all-time low in 2014, with a sharp decrease across all indicators. This general decline is the result of various factors, the most potent being a weakened civil society that is argued to have become more reactive and some of its strong members absorbed by the government. In addition, the former Kenyatta government made great efforts to suppress and restrict civil society activities, including violence and police action against demonstrators as well as imposing limitations on freedom of speech and assembly through legislative initiatives.

But Makueni county is a success story worth noting. Makueni County's public participation model enables citizens to engage in local governance decision-making and processes. For example, citizens are allowed to identify their development priorities and are involved in the planning, prioritisation and setting of budgets and

expenditures for identified projects. The county also consults with the public to make decisions and to obtain their feedback on alternatives. The public is also kept informed and involved to ensure that their concerns are considered throughout the decision-making process. This model simultaneously captures indigenous practices and formal democratic governance practices. In essence, it narrows the gap between institutional performance and individual experiences and expertise.

The Makueni example illustrates why it is necessary to understand, cultivate and invest in



ABOVE: Members of a senior citizens support group listen carefully as it's explained to them on how to filter bottles of water using the Sun's ultra-violet rays at a trade fair in Nairobi.

Photo: Roberto Schmidt / AFP

civic engagement. In the case of Kenya as a whole, it has made great strides in institutionalising and decentralising power and governance. Although there are impediments and gaps between the institutionalisation of civic engagement and actual civic participation, Makueni offers a model to close this gap.

Kenya has established its own, homegrown model that can be used as a reference point for other African countries. The health, longevity and stability of democracy is highly dependent on civic participation as citizens are the ones who uphold and defend democracy. [GGY](#)

MORE THAN JUST APATHY

– why youth don't vote

By Stuart Morrison

Youth in Botswana, under the age of 35, make up over 60% of the population. However, despite this, young people eligible to vote, especially between the ages of 18-25, had one of the lowest voter turnout rates in the country's 2019 general election. While this statistic highlights a growing trend of youth voter apathy across the African continent, it has created the perception that youth are apolitical and "disinterested" in politics.

Political participation, however, goes beyond voting and low voter turnout amongst youth does not, on its own, make one wholly apolitical. This raises an interesting question about whether young people are wholly apolitical or if they are simply not voting.

Democracy requires citizens to participate, not only to influence public policy but also to ensure that there is transparency and accountability for political leaders and parties. This participation can take the form of more formal types of political engagement such as voting in elections, joining political parties or running for local council, as well

as informal forms of political participation such as collective action and advocacy.

Due to the wide range of activities encompassing political participation, it can be quite difficult to define. However, almost all political scientists agree that participation is a key component of any healthy democracy, as it is closely associated with several democratic principles such as freedom of expression and freedom of assembly.

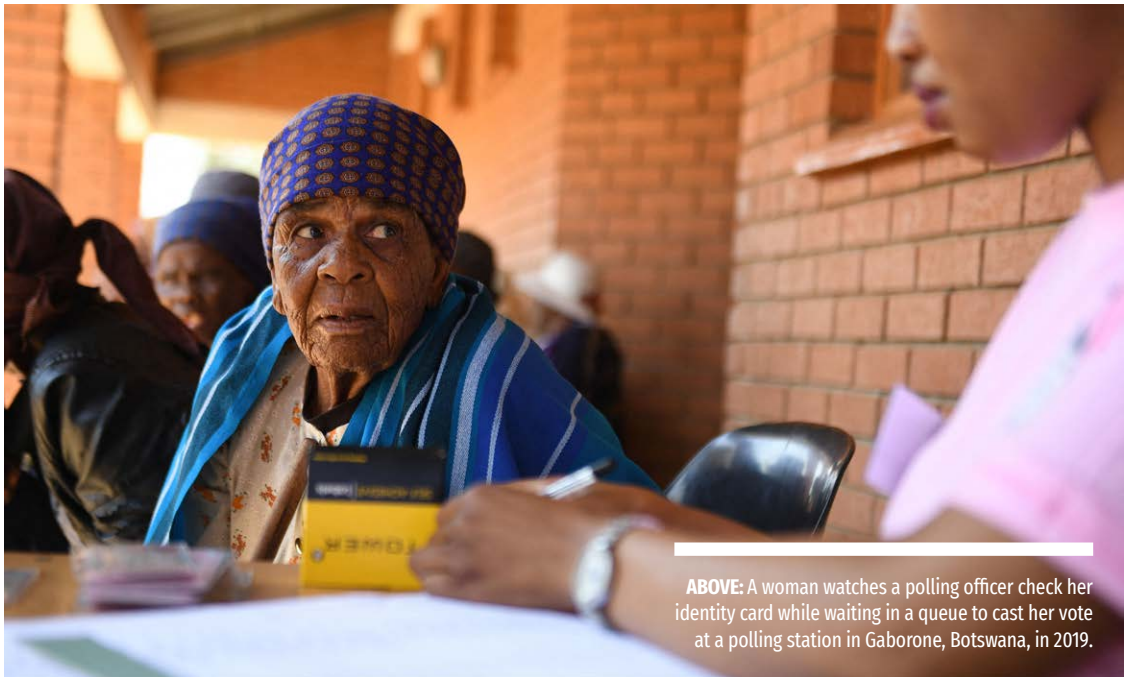
In recent years, youth political participation has become a key focus, emphasising the need and importance for young people to engage and be included in civic activities. One of the key reasons this has been under the spotlight in recent years is because there has been a social shift in how youth are perceived. In many societies, young people have been excluded from participating in civic activities because the assumption is that young people do not know enough.

However, this perception is misplaced, as young people have generally been relatively active in collective political movements. Thus, with the



ABOVE: A woman casts her vote at the Ntebogang Community Junior School polling station in Kanye, Botswana.

Photo: Monirul Bhuiyan / AFP



ABOVE: A woman watches a polling officer check her identity card while waiting in a queue to cast her vote at a polling station in Gaborone, Botswana, in 2019.

Photo: Monirul Bhuiyan / AFP

greater attention brought to these movements through media and social media, societies are beginning to acknowledge youth as a political group, emphasising the need for youth political participation beyond protests and collective action.

Encouraging political participation among youth is also important for instilling a culture of civic duty. The assumption around political participation in the past has been that it comes naturally to people, and the youth are just not that interested in politics. However, studies have shown that promoting a culture of political participation helps ensure that democracy is not undermined and those in power are held to account.

Botswana is one of the longest-uninterrupted democracies in Africa; it became a democracy in 1966 following its independence from British colonial rule. Botswana is a parliamentary republic with a multiparty electoral system. Since 1966, they have had 12 general elections, with the most recent one held in 2019. Voter turnout in Botswana has been relatively high since the 1980s. The latest national election in 2019 saw just over 83% of registered voters turn out to vote. This voter turnout is one of the highest in the southern African region,

beating countries such as South Africa and Namibia. Similarly, when looking at voter turnout as a percentage of the voting-age population, Botswana ranks second in the region with 53%¹, beaten only by Namibia at 55%.

However, breaking down the different age categories, there was lower voter turnout amongst eligible youth, particularly within the 18-25 age group, who make up a large percentage of the population in Botswana. While these statistics are not surprising as they follow general patterns of low voter turnout among youth worldwide, they are still concerning given that Botswana has such a high population of young people.

To explore political participation outside of elections, I used Afrobarometer Round 9 survey data. Afrobarometer is an organisation that conducts surveys every few years on issues around democracy, governance and other relevant issues that affect people on the continent. For this article, I used responses to questions from participants in Botswana on political participation. Specifically, I used three core questions: Have you attended a community meeting in the last year; have you gotten together with others to raise an issue in the last year,

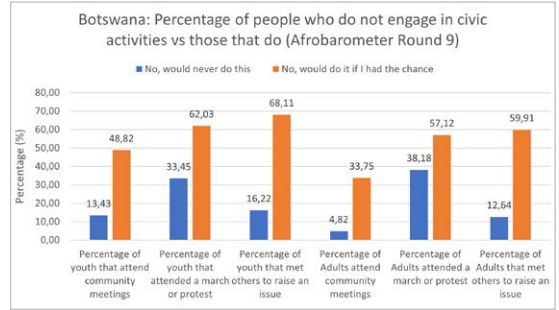
and have you attended a protest or demonstration in the past year?

For each of these questions, the respondent had a choice of answering: “No, would never do this”, “No, would do if I had the chance”, “Yes, once or twice”, “Yes, several times”, or “Yes, often”. While this does not fully capture political participation as a whole, it does give an idea of how active people are in the civic space.

I also used the age variable to understand the age range of responses. I divided the ages into two groups: youth, which ranged from 18-35 and adults, from age 36 onwards. I defined my youth range as 18-35, because Afrobarometer does not interview anyone under the age of 18.

To start with, I wanted to better understand how many youth and adults participated in the civic activities listed. The graph below shows the percentage of people who selected “Not at all”, “Once or twice”, “several times” or “often” to the question of whether they have participated in various civic activities. I combined the “No, would never do this” and “No, would do if I had the chance” responses into one category as I was mostly interested in respondents who were involved in civic activities.

The findings show that political participation across age groups is quite low. This reveals that low political participation in Botswana is not necessarily a youth problem but rather a wider issue of political participation. This supports scholar Adam Mfundisi’s argument that political



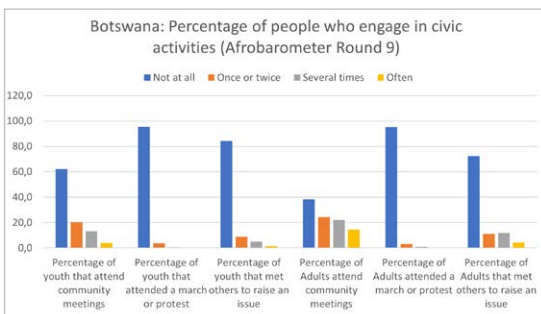
Graphic: Stuart Morrison

participation has been an issue since the start of Botswana’s democracy. The fact that there is still quite low political participation as in the 90s, means that there needs to be greater efforts by all sectors of society to promote political participation. However, the question remains: are youth simply apolitical as Graph 1 would seem to suggest?

Fortunately, because of how Afrobarometer phrases its questions, it can give a clearer understanding of why people in Botswana are not participating in civic activities. To do this, I looked at the percentage of people who responded “No, would never do this” and, “No, would do if I had the chance”. As shown in the graph below, the majority of people who responded no, followed that up with “would do if I had the chance”, this shows that while there is low political participation rates in Botswana, people would be more active given an opportunity to do so.

Overall, these findings highlight two very important things about political participation in Botswana. Firstly it shows that low political participation in the country is not only a youth issue but something that affects all age groups. This is important as it means that while prioritising political participation among youth is important, policy should ensure that older people are included.

Secondly, it shows that using the term apolitical can be somewhat misleading and reductive as it runs the risk of overlooking the nuances around political participation, as demonstrated with Botswana. [GGV](#)



Graphic: Stuart Morrison

TWO LESSONS FOR AFRICA'S MEGACITIES

By Ronak Gopaldas



With megacities such as Lagos, Nairobi, Cairo, Kinshasa, Luanda, Johannesburg and Dar es Salaam set to become increasingly important continental economic hubs, this looming explosion in urbanisation has created a set of unique challenges for policymakers and businesses across Africa. Indeed, as pressure for limited resources intensifies due to population migration, there will be a growing need for innovative and sustainable solutions to ensure these potential gains are met. Transport, housing, and financial inclusion are all set to be key priorities as African cities look to transform themselves, achieve prosperity, and avoid socio-economic distress.

Against this backdrop, what can African cities learn from the likes of Medellín and Singapore (and other global success stories) and which cities on the continent are on track to succeed?

In the early 1990s, Medellín in Colombia was classified as the most violent city in the world. The homicide rate climbed to 381 murders per 100,000 people in 1991, close to 40 times greater than the UN's definition of endemic violence, at 10 per 100,000 people. Much of the violence can be attributed to the reign of Pablo Escobar, who used Medellín as a base for his drug-related and criminal activities. The illicit trade and turf wars between

Escobar's cartel and the state led to dizzying levels of violence that hurt the poorest parts of the city the most. These days, Medellín is an attractive city with its open botanical gardens, library parks, and enterprising business climate. From being the most dangerous city in the world to becoming a world-class smart city, the transformation of Medellín has been staggering. Just how did a city ruled by crime and drugs turn into a digital nomad haven and tourism mecca in such a short period?

The first factor, which cannot be underestimated, is politics. The combination of urban planning at the local level, security at the federal level, and a truce among gangs on the ground set the foundation for this remarkable transformation. Indeed, the creation of a new social contract was central to the maintenance of peace and drastic improvement in living standards in the city.

Following Escobar's death, the demobilisation of guerilla groups, major policy changes, the addition of social programs, and serious infrastructure investments all facilitated greater political and economic stability across the country. With improvements in macro factors, the local leadership of the city undertook a series of ambitious and bold reforms. Several city mayors, starting in 2000, took listening to their constituency seriously. They revamped the city's education system,

BELOW: Marina Bay Sands hotel and resort in Singapore.





Photo: Joaquín Sarmiento / AFP

implemented initiatives to guide youth away from gangs, upgraded health care systems, added millions of square feet of public spaces and renovated parks, built new museums and sports facilities, added electric buses and a citywide free bike-sharing service plus 60 miles of bike lanes. While mayor from 2003 to 2007, Sergio Fajardo adopted the slogan “from fear to hope,” and the sentiment set in as public projects revitalised the city.

Given the newfound stability, conditions were fertile for new investments – the second key priority. Big bets were made on infrastructure investments for public safety. The city also prioritised technology and innovation to improve governance.

For example, Medellín looked across alternative industries and decided to repurpose chairlift technology, conventionally used in ski resorts. Using the existing technology, Medellín built the world’s first urban cable car system (Metrocable) dedicated to public transport at half the cost of a comparable railway system. The same innovation was used to improve the security landscape across the city by using data to create more efficient



Photo: Joaquín Sarmiento / AFP

crime monitoring systems. Authorities used GPS trackers, CCTV, facial recognition technology, and smartphones for police to make the necessary safety improvements. This attracted corporate partners and powerful multinationals and unlocked private-sector investment, particularly in infrastructure. Indeed, the city’s big spending spree in the mid-2000s was largely a result of a unique private-public partnership between the city and Empresas Públicas de Medellín (EPM).

The third factor was inclusion. The ‘Medellín model’ prioritised building “a cross-class and



Photo: Raul Arboleda / AFP



Photo: Joaquín Sarmiento / AFP



LEFT: The Medellin aerial tramway in a low-income neighbourhood in Medellin, Colombia.
BELOW: Aerial views of the Puente de la 4 Sur bridge, Botero square, and the Comuna 13 neighbourhood.



cross-income coalition for change.” Whereas most smart-city initiatives assist the tech-savvy and well-resourced segments of the community, the transformation in Medellín has benefited chiefly those with the fewest resources. As momentum grew, new schools and cultural centres were built in the poorest areas by the best-known architects in the country. With each project, “the mayor’s office imagined integrated services so that a school would never just be a school but a place for health services, a community centre, a space for adult education.”

With support from microfinance institutions,

entrepreneurship centres were set up in slums, providing business support and technical advice to locals. These centres led to the creation of more than 50,000 microenterprises. The city also opened up daycare centres to support and upskill underprivileged mothers and children, providing both resources and employment opportunities. The launch of a new public transportation system in 2004 to connect the city’s low-income neighbourhoods to the city’s central business district was a prime example of this integrated approach. The idea, according to local civil servants,



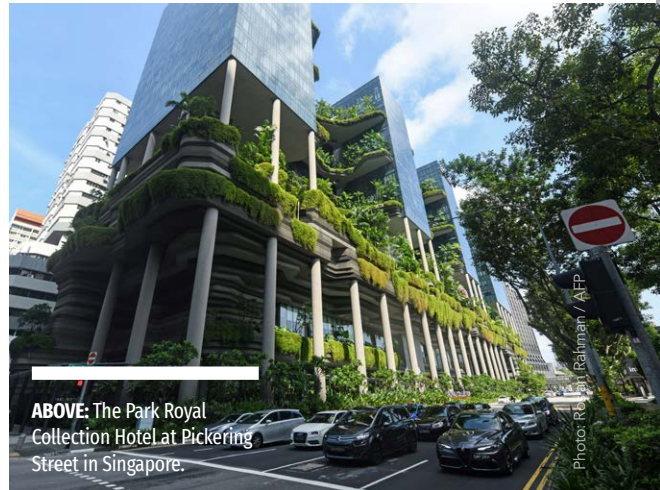
RIGHT: A couple poses for pre-wedding photographs next to the Merlion statue in Singapore.

was to provide dignity and value to the most marginalised and to dispel the idea that poor people deserved the poorest things.

The significance of Medellín’s transformation cannot be overstated. Through bold moves in architecture, planning and urban design, it went from lost cause to becoming, in 2012, “Innovative City of the Year”. As architect Alex Warnock-Smith noted in a 2016 piece for the *Guardian*, an integrated multidisciplinary approach was central to the city’s success. Specifically, an approach of “radical urbanisation” and “an attitude towards urbanism as a tool for promoting social mobility and equity – a process in which *comuna* dwellers became clients, participants, and stakeholders in the city, with the chance to design their own destiny” was a central feature of the city’s success.

Singapore is another success story. Policymakers had two key priorities: the first was a focus on making people’s lives liveable, and the second was helping the land become sustainable. Through smart and pragmatic design, an efficient state, and long-term thinking, Singapore was able to achieve these goals.

The first thing policymakers did was recognise and adapt to their unique conditions. They



ABOVE: The Park Royal Collection Hotel at Pickering Street in Singapore.

recognised that living environments would need to be designed for a high-density city. However, many planners expressed concern that by creating high-rise public housing blocks, Singapore was creating conditions ripe for a different kind of urban slum.

The Housing and Development Board (HDB) was established in 1960 to oversee the construction of public housing. By the 1980s, more than 80% of Singaporeans lived in HDB flats. This approach to public housing was innovative in many ways, including the use of prefabricated building components to speed up construction, the creation of high-density but liveable communities, and the

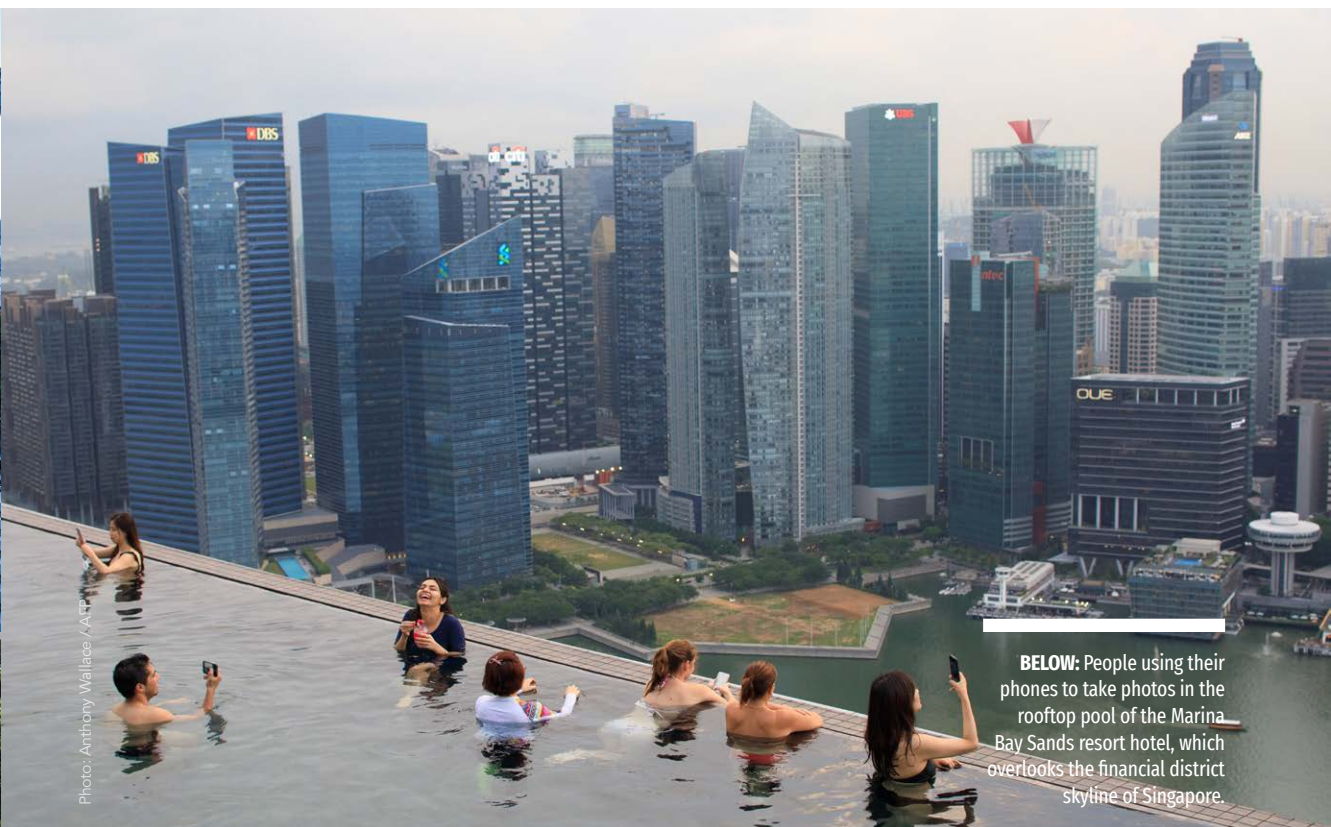


Photo: Anthony Wallace / AFP

BELOW: People using their phones to take photos in the rooftop pool of the Marina Bay Sands resort hotel, which overlooks the financial district skyline of Singapore.

provision of public amenities such as schools, parks, and community centres. The focus was on providing residents with homes. By 1990, 88% of residents owned their homes, and the number has stabilised at around 90%, one of the highest home-ownership rates in the world.

A strong focus on protecting the environment meant attempts were made to limit air pollution and increase green cover across the city. This, coupled with Singapore's early investment in essential infrastructure, like public transport, sewers, water and electricity, enabled it to transform into a first-world city in a short period.

In more recent times, Singapore has adopted a smart city model, which describes a city that uses technology and data to improve the quality of life for its residents by making the city efficient, sustainable, and liveable. A smart city incorporates a variety of technologies in its design, such as sensors, data analytics, Internet of Things (IoT) devices, and artificial intelligence (AI) systems, to collect

and analyse data about the city's infrastructure, environment, and residents. This data can be used to make informed decisions about how to improve city services, reduce energy consumption, optimise transport systems, and enhance public safety, among other things.

As noted by researchers Sarah Colenbrander and Ian Palmer, African cities will gain a billion new residents by 2050. But local authorities across the continent don't have the resources, powers or skill sets to meet the growing demand for housing and services. Against this backdrop, what lessons do the examples of Medellín and Singapore offer for African cities?

Five key learnings stand out. First, to become a competitive, efficient, and equitable economy with a harmonious society requires good governance and efficient public administration, supported by resilient public and private institutions. There is quite clearly no substitute for political will and bold, visionary leadership. African cities have a long way



RIGHT: A view inside the Cloud Forest at Gardens by the Bay in Singapore.

Photos: Justin Rahman / AFP

to go in this regard. Barring a few exceptions, the quality of political and technocratic leadership both at a state and local level is simply not fit for purpose and will need to be significantly upgraded.

Second, African cities must embrace technology. This argument is compellingly made by the collaborative African research hub, Intelliverse AI, which argues that in African cities, “the amalgamation of rapid population growth, limited resources, and outdated infrastructure has given rise to complex challenges. From sprawling traffic congestion to energy inefficiencies and strained public services, the urban fabric has become a canvas awaiting the strokes of innovation. This is precisely where the promise of AI becomes compelling – not merely as a technological novelty but as a strategic force capable of reshaping the very essence of urban living.”

There are clear examples of how such tools are already employed in some cities. Cape Town’s open data portal stands out; through this, all data recorded in the city is made publicly available to its citizens. Furthermore, in response to water scarcity challenges, Cape Town now uses AI to monitor water usage patterns, predict shortages,

and optimise distribution, thus enhancing its water conservation efforts.

In her analysis for Outside Insight, marketing and communications specialist Thea Sokolowski observes that Kenya’s smart city efforts are well underway. Konza Techno City on the outskirts of Nairobi, dubbed Silicon Savannah, is a proposed satellite city that will gather data from smart devices and sensors embedded in roadways and buildings, enabling optimisation of traffic and infrastructure, smart communication services, and improved citizen participation.

Smart cities and a tech-oriented approach are gaining traction across the continent, with Nigeria’s Eko Atlantic, Accra’s Hope City, and Kigali’s Vision City all emerging as ambitious hubs that aim to replicate the success of modern cities like Dubai and Singapore. According to Mira Slavov, a fellow at LSE, these initiatives are also giving rise to “a new model where governance is shared between the private and public sectors.”

Third, in the push to net zero, the imperative to design, build, and operate more efficiently and cost-effectively is the new norm. The need for sustainable cities is particularly urgent, considering cities



LEFT: The newly built Changi Jewel complex at Changi international airport is pictured during a media preview in Singapore on April 11, 2019.



generate more than 70% of global carbon emissions.

This shift from “pollution to solution” is important, especially since Africa’s citizens face higher exposure to climate risks than any other continent while having a lower capacity to adapt. The continent’s urban environments are particularly vulnerable to flooding, droughts, and outbreaks of diseases.

This speaks to the fourth lesson: the need to provide dignity to their citizens. As the Singapore and Medellín examples show, deliberate efforts were made to ensure that this was inclusive and

helped the most marginalised in society. Bottom-up solutions and ‘dignity by design’ were central tents in both transformations.

Fifth, the right conditions for investment must be created. Given the extent of the challenges and the lack of fiscal resources governments face, there is a clear need for “out-of-the-box” solutions. Private sector investment across hard, soft, and digital infrastructure will be vital. To do this, governments and cities will need to provide clear incentives and regulatory certainty. Public-private partnerships must be prioritised, while data-backed strategies to enhance formal-sector participation and expand tax nets will need to be developed. Cities would also do well to replicate the success of cities like Johannesburg and Cape Town in using green bonds and using financial instruments to raise funds for development.

Given Africa’s demographic challenges and rapid urbanisation, the need for innovative, scaleable, and sustainable solutions is both urgent and obvious. Although the continent’s development path is unique, the case studies of Medellín and Singapore offer inspirational lessons on how to build inclusive, safe, and prosperous cities. [GGV](#)

Nigerians grapple with BROKEN PROMISES

By Fisayo Alo and Eniayo Ibirogba



Photos: Florian Plancher / AFP

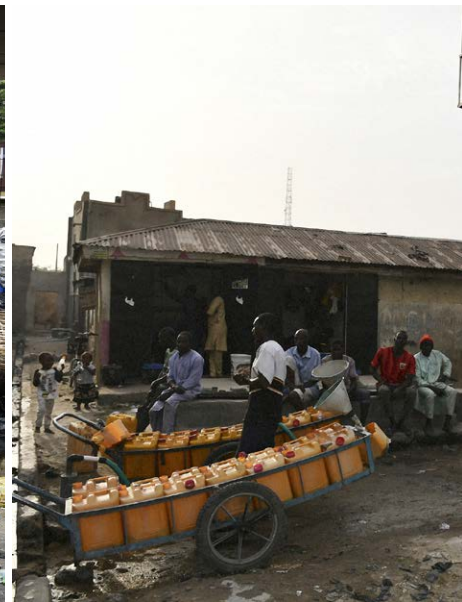
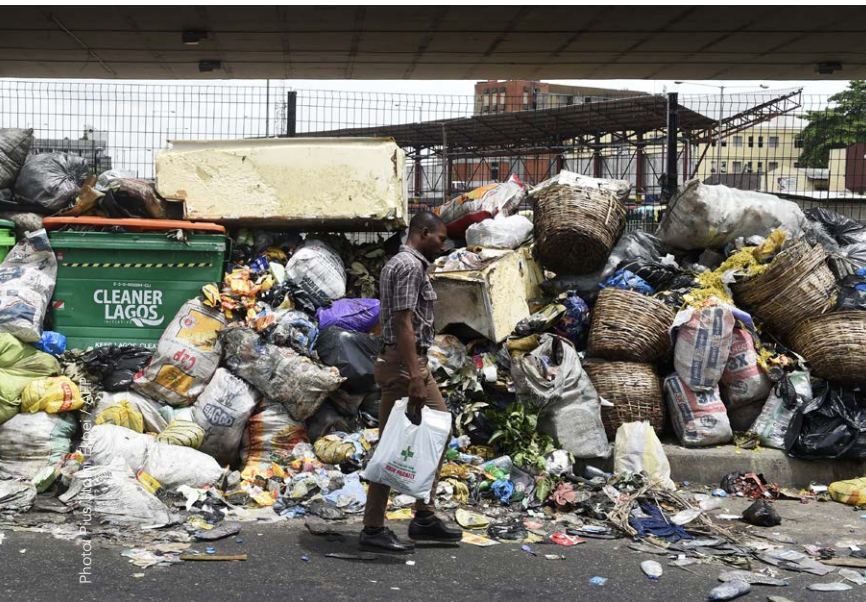
Local governments are essential components of democratic systems worldwide. They are responsible for addressing the needs of local communities and residents and play a vital role in governance. The unique position of local governments allows them to develop policies tailored to their regions' specific context. They understand the challenges and opportunities within their boundaries because they are dedicated to a particular geographic area. This proximity to the community enables them to respond promptly to their constituents' unique issues. Local governments are not just service providers but also critical catalysts for local development and enhancing the quality of life.

Local governments in Nigeria, with the third tier closest to people, face significant challenges in providing fundamental services such as health,

education, housing, water, and sanitation. Despite their proximity to the populace, deficiencies in service delivery highlight the need for improved local governance effectiveness. Addressing the specific needs of communities is critical, and the effective management of local governments can play a vital role in steering the country's development towards a more impactful trajectory. This article aims to provide concise insights and practical solutions that fortify local governments for efficient service delivery and sustainable development within communities by dissecting these elements.



ABOVE: A girl walks on a dump in the Bariga shanty fishing community in Lagos, Nigeria.



In practice, the promises of effective local governance in Nigeria frequently go unfulfilled, leaving citizens to grapple with the realities of unmet essential needs. The prevailing experience for many Nigerians is one of self-reliance, as local governments struggle to consistently deliver on their designated functions. This disjuncture between the envisioned roles of local governance and the daily experiences of citizens emphasises the urgent need for a comprehensive reassessment of existing systemic challenges.

As Daniel Jordan Smith notes in an article titled ‘Every household its own government’, published in *Africa Today* last year, when basic services are not reliably provided, communities are forced to find ways to address their own needs. This significant difference between what is expected and what happens highlights the need for reforms that can transform local governments into dependable providers of essential services.

The challenges faced in service delivery emphasise the necessity of re-evaluating and strengthening local government structures. To harness their full potential, local governments must transition from solely administrative bodies to dynamic agents capable of driving tangible improvements in the quality of life for citizens.

This article navigates the intricacies of bolstering the capacity of local governments in Nigeria, particularly in fund acquisition and strategic use for enhanced service delivery. Woven into this exploration are five crucial considerations, namely the impact of fiscal autonomy on local development, the interplay of resource allocation and citizen participation, leveraging untapped competitive advantages, addressing capacity gaps through strategic measures, and balancing service delivery with economic development. This article aims to provide practical solutions that strengthen local governments, promote efficient service delivery, and support sustainable development within communities.

Enshrined in Nigeria’s constitution, local governments stand as the explicitly listed and indispensable third tier of government. Their constitutional mandate points out their importance in ensuring governance reaches the grassroots level and meets the diverse requirements of everyday Nigerians.

Each local government in Nigeria operates under a council headed by an elected chairperson and vice chairperson and is made up of multiple councillors who represent different wards. They serve as the legislative branch and work together to address the unique needs and concerns of their communities. This decentralised and representative



Photo: Ayuda Maire / AFP



Photo: Julius Dornik/Egret / AFP



structure ensures that local governance is collaborative and inclusive.

Nigeria's local governments receive their primary funding from monthly allocations from the central government, which is supplemented by an expected contribution from state governments. However, in practice, only a few states meet this expectation. Until 2019, the allocation system directed funds into each state's Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA), giving state governors direct access to these funds. In recent times, however, there has been a shift towards a more direct approach, with most local governments now set to receive their funding directly. In addition to these allocations, local governments are now empowered to enhance their financial capacity by generating revenue internally through specific taxes and fees. This will help them to be less reliant on external funding and provide better services to their constituents.

But while local government autonomy is ostensibly acknowledged in Nigeria, the reality paints a different picture because the constitution allows state legislatures to exert significant control over local government activities. This situation has allowed state governors to hinder local governments from fulfilling essential duties like delivering basic services. State governments wield control beyond

FAR LEFT: A man walks past a pile of waste deposited on a roadside in Lagos, Nigeria.

CENTRE: Water sellers in Maiduguri, in February 2021.

RIGHT: Mothers arrive at a primary health clinic in Glgwai Sokoto North, in northwest Nigeria.

mere fiscal oversight; it permeates the very fabric of local governance, encroaching into critical domains such as budgeting and planning. The result is that local governments are required to follow the instructions of state authorities before initiating any significant development projects. This structural dependence fundamentally undermines the autonomy that local governments should ideally have to meet the unique needs of their communities.

At first glance, state government supervision may seem necessary. However, this oversight has unintentionally fostered an environment that promotes corruption. In certain cases, for example, project approval requirements have resulted in a system where kickbacks are exchanged, creating a worrisome pattern of corruption within the local governance framework.

Centralised control over local governments has also made it difficult to properly allocate finances. Typically, the central government deposits funds into the State Joint Local Government Account

(SJLGA). The SJLGA serves as the designated account for local governments within its jurisdiction, consolidating both federal and state allocations. However, this financial consolidation becomes a double-edged sword, as state governors have been known to make deductions from the SJLGA, diverting funds for other purposes. Between 2008 and 2018, a substantial sum of \$38 billion was disbursed to Nigeria’s local governments, yet tangible results remain elusive. In response, the Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit issued a directive in 2019 to halt withdrawals from the SJLGA for purposes other than those intended. Despite this directive, some states have not complied with fiscal transparency requirements, highlighting challenges in local governance.

In Nigeria, salaries devour a staggering 80% of local government expenditure, according to an August 2021 report in *Sahara Reporters*. After salaries are paid and overheads deducted, the funds are often reduced even further by deductions by state governors, making it difficult for local governments to provide crucial services like water and sewage disposal. As a result, citizens who rely on the informal economy are forced to take on the role of service providers themselves. The impact of this is evident on the ground. This grassroots-level self-reliance is the disconcerting reality – citizens actively engaging in meeting their basic needs due to the inadequacies of local governments. Forcing citizens to take charge of their own needs has its challenges. For example, the absence of a structured and coordinated approach hinders citizen-led development efforts from seamlessly integrating into national development policies.

Local government failure to commit to infrastructure development in Nigeria has severe consequences, worsening the country’s already significant infrastructure deficit, with estimates that it would require a colossal \$1.5 trillion over 10 years to address pressing needs. Considering that



ABOVE: A man walks past a generator that supplies electricity to a store in the business centre in Lagos. Nigerian homes and businesses are forced to use generators because of poor to non-existent grid supply.

relying solely on occasional, citizen-initiated efforts, no matter how well-meaning, is not enough to bridge the significant infrastructure gap, active and strategic local government participation is not just desirable, but necessary to achieve comprehensive and nationally aligned development.

Nigeria’s local governance challenges require strategic alignment between citizen-led development initiatives and government policies. Collaboration could amplify grassroots initiatives, improve basic service delivery, and foster sustainable development. This alignment nurtures a more cohesive and coordinated approach to development and holds the transformative potential to amplify the impact of grassroots initiatives.

The pervasive capacity gap in Nigeria’s local governments is rooted in several contributing factors. One is the lack of training among most local government employees, who secure their positions through political patronage rather than merit. Instead, emphasis must be placed on competence and adequate skills as requirements for running local

BELOW: People walk past mobile toilets for sale displayed along the road with a placard reading "shit business is serious business" at Kara-Isheri in Ogun State, southwest Nigeria.



Photo: Plus Umimi Ekpe / WFP

the current framework limits local government involvement in economic planning and development to recommending policies within their jurisdiction to a state economic planning commission.

Each local area has its own unique set of challenges, thus making the local government council best suited to pursue and implement local economic policies tailored to specific needs. However, Nigeria's hierarchical control structure hinders local governments from addressing the day-to-day challenges ordinary Nigerians face.

A constitutional amendment is required to address this impediment to economic development. However, the likelihood of such an amendment is slim, given the potential resistance from states to relinquishing their political and administrative control over local governments within their jurisdiction. This constitutional hurdle highlights the need for a nuanced approach to empowering local governments to drive their economic policies.

Local governments can, however, proactively seek cooperation among themselves to navigate the constraints of centralised economic planning.

By collectively designing economic policies that specifically address shared local issues, they can present a united front and jointly recommend these initiatives to the state commission. This collaborative governance effort requires local governments to identify strategic development projects that effectively tackle common challenges their communities face. For example, they could collaborate on initiatives such as the construction and maintenance of vital road arteries that connect different local government areas to facilitate the movement of goods and services and promote trade and tourism.

This approach not only underscores the importance of a unified and localised strategy for economic planning, but it also enhances capacity at the local level, gives credence to local officials, and ensures inclusion since it is assumed that the recommendations would have been reached via consultations and inputs from residents. This, likewise, promotes community ownership. By focusing on shared concerns, local governments can demonstrate the potential for comprehensive and



ABOVE: A sewage truck drives past the Lagos Terminus of the Nigerian Railway Corporation.

community-centric solutions that reflect the unique needs of each locality.

It is, however, crucial to recognise that such a collaborative approach may face resistance or sabotage, as it will challenge the existing power dynamics and administrative control vested in state governments. Overcoming this resistance would likely require a nuanced and diplomatic negotiation process. It is pivotal for local governments to advocate for a more decentralised and participatory approach to economic planning to assert their role in shaping the development trajectory of their communities.

To conclude, local governance in Nigeria is a complex landscape that presents both challenges and opportunities. While local governments play an important role in providing essential services and driving development at the grassroots level, they face a range of issues such as lack of fiscal autonomy, limited resources, capacity gaps, and centralised control. These challenges are compounded by issues such as political patronage, inadequate training, and delayed wages, which further hinder the effective functioning of local government structures.

Despite these obstacles, there are ways to improve the situation. For instance, public-private partnerships can be strategically used to improve service delivery if transparency issues are addressed. Furthermore, local governments must collaborate to overcome centralised planning constraints by identifying shared issues and recommending joint initiatives to state commissions.

To address these challenges, a multifaceted approach is required. This includes constitutional amendments for greater autonomy, capacity-building programmes to enhance workforce skills, and advocacy for transparent and collaborative governance models. While the path to empowering local governments faces obstacles, the potential for positive change lies in the collective efforts of policymakers, communities, and stakeholders. By fostering cooperation, embracing innovative strategies, and advocating for decentralisation, local governments in Nigeria can evolve into dynamic agents of positive change, delivering impactful and tailored solutions to the diverse needs of their constituents. [GGY](#)

AUTONOMOUS REGIONS

Can citizen self-management deliver?

By Michael Schmidt

Its skyline is dominated by the rail-served grain silos that are the cathedrals of the South African platteland (rural flatland). Ottosdal appears as a typical small town straddling a railway branch line, sustaining only one guesthouse and one safari lodge, and a small “country club” near the quarry outside of town.

The town originated as a Dutch Reformed Church parish in 1913 and was incorporated four years later. Inevitably, given the longevity of apartheid geography, this North West Province settlement of more than 800 registered residents in only 5,15km² still has a “black” township, Letsopa, and adjoining shantytown separated from the “white” town by the railway line.

Yet Ottosdal is unique, being one of a trio of small maize, sunflower, and peanut-farming towns falling under the Tswaing Local Municipality whose residents withheld their municipal rates and banded together to directly provide services to their neighbours – black and white – that democratically-elected local government was incompetent to provide.

In a country marred by continual and often violent “service-delivery” protests against corrupt, inept, and financially collapsing town councils, the actions of these autonomous, ratepayer-run towns marked a constructive – though hotly contested – attempt to fill a local governance vacuum.

Varied forms and degrees of autonomous



municipalism have arisen across Africa, which we will examine here. Ottosdal has, alongside the neighbouring towns of Delareyville and Sannieshof, “been at the forefront of rates withholding in South Africa because of severe municipal service delivery failures,” according to a 2019 study on five such towns by Annette May and colleagues of the Community Law Centre.

In 2007, the three towns declared a dispute with the Tswaing authorities under three statutory acts relating to municipal financing and services, especially appalled at their collapsing water and sewage systems. But after losing in court, the towns embarked on a rates boycott of Tswaing, paying their rates instead to SIBU, a local affiliate of the National Taxpayers’ Union, which claims affiliates in 200 towns.

Delareyville is a larger 36.5km² municipality, laid out in 1914 with a current 10,000+ population and boasting a golf club, aerodrome, and maize mill, while Sannieshof is a 5,4km² town of 11,000+ that started life in 1928 as a post office village. Sannieshof also has an attached township, Asiganang, and an informal settlement, Pelhidaba, while Delareyville’s township is abutted by unincorporated shantytowns.

By 2009, a year in which government admitted that 80% of the country’s municipalities had water

and sanitation provision problems, the Sannieshof Inwoners Belastingbetalers Unie (SIBU), run by Sannieshof resident and florist Carin Visser, had “literally taken over the municipal government in Sannieshof. Financed by the residents, who pay SIBU (rather than Tswaing) for local services rendered, SIBU has become a municipality within a municipality,” according to a North West University study.

“The residents’ initiative managed to repair broken water systems and cleaned up the town,” the report said. “They also upgraded the town’s waste disposal site. In addition, they employed four workers and paid some outstanding accounts of Tswaing Local Municipality. In total, this had cost the ratepayers R163,000.”

It spent another R30,000 repairing a sewage pump in Asiganang township and R45,000 on a new pump for the waste-treatment works. “Essentially, the town was well-managed,” the report opined. SIBU had embraced the townships and informal settlements, and as its campaign “gained momentum, a sense of local patriotism took root” that crossed racial lines.

With all 25 North West municipalities reportedly on the brink of collapse, the provincial premier put the entire district under which Tswaing falls under provisional administration. Yet today, the sanitation

BELOW: Google Street view of Ottosdal.



Photos: Ryad Kramdi / AFP



crisis in Tshwaing is unresolved. At the same time, the 2022 municipal financial viability ranking conducted annually by independent analytical company Ratings Afrika showed 107 out of 112 of the country’s largest local municipalities and metros (cities) were on the verge of financial collapse.

Other forms of municipal autonomism in Africa include towns forced by conflict or government prejudice to sustain themselves; voluntary off-grid eco-communities; political decentralising experiments; the semi-autonomy of high-tech, free-trade zones; supposedly temporary refugee camps that entrench themselves with time; and even entire unrecognised countries with millions of inhabitants.

Involuntary withdrawals from governance include municipalities that have been starved of central state funding because of political hostility from the capital city, such as the Unita-run towns of central Angola in the aftermath of the war from 1992.

Angolan academic Paula Cristina Roque tells *Africa in Fact*: “In the province of Huambo, many areas... were run uniquely because the members had been trained by the rebel movement... They had their own way of functioning and setting up villages. They were starved of support because they were Unita, and that was for several years *after* the war.

“In some areas, in Cabinda,” [the enclave with a



long history of secessionism that is separated from Angola by a sliver of the DRC] “and in the two Lunda provinces that are the poorest, most disenfranchised provinces, you would [still] find something like that.”

Other involuntary cases include towns in areas deliberately under-served by dominant ethnic elites because of their minority, immigrant, or marginalised populations, which is a widespread problem across the continent and the subject of monitoring by Accountability International, and a corrective programme by the African Alliance.

Some secessionist areas, like the third of Western Sahara run by Polisario, have consolidated over



BELOW: Displaced Sahrawis attend a Polisario congress at the refugee camp of Dakhla, which lies some 170km to the southeast of the Algerian city of Tindouf, on January 13, 2023. The Polisario movement is seeking independence in the disputed Western Sahara.

administration in Africa is that of Somaliland, which seceded from imploding Somalia in 1991. Despite almost totally lacking international recognition, this territory of 176,120 km² has been moderately effectively run as a democracy since then, though it only decentralised governance from district to the local level in 2002. A study 10 years later by Abdirahman Adan Mohamoud in the capital Hargeisa noted that initially, “the functions of the municipalities were severely affected by serious power struggles that diverted the attention of local councillors and administration away from institutionalisation and service delivery. This was coupled with severely limited resources, institutional and capacity concerns, and legal framework issues.” Although local councils’ statutory mandate includes the “promotion of participatory planning and community participation in local decision making”, implementation is far from ideal.



ABOVE: Brahim Ghali, President of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SARD) and Secretary-General of the Polisario front.

time as alternate administrations, while its tented refugee camps in Tindouf province, southern Algeria, established in 1975/6, have evolved into eight established, brick-walled self-administered towns.

Though Polisario’s Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic government-in-exile runs its affairs from the Roubani camp, the towns are divided into four districts consisting of collections of villages (*dairas*) made up of neighbourhoods (*barrios*). Local committees distribute goods, food and water, while education, culture, and medicine are administered at *daira* level by *barrio* representatives.

But the most developed alternative

Voluntary communities that retreat from governance, largely using ecological and new-tech subsistence methods, tend to be tiny, either based on dropout sub-cultures, religious sects, ethnic separatism (such as the controversial whites-only private town of Orania in South Africa), or the secessionist mentality of wealthy gated communities.

A 2023 study on renewable off-grid mini-power solutions in sub-Saharan Africa by Nigeria’s University of Agriculture says mini-grids “managed by independent developers... constitute an autonomous model that provides a pathway to



ABOVE: A signpost shows the direction to Orania, South Africa, in 2022. Orania is nestled in the vast but sparsely populated Karoo region; its population of 2,500 has surged almost 10-fold since its creation at the end of apartheid three decades ago.

Photos: Marco Longari / AFP

actualising a vision of an independent and self-sufficient supply of off-grid electricity to solve the problems of energy poverty.”

Political decentralising experiments that have all subsequently died on the vine since the 1970s include those of Libya’s localist People’s Committees under Muammar Gaddafi’s “third universal theory”, and the “Ujamaa socialism” of Julius Nyerere’s Tanzania, which based its concepts on clan-centred village communalism.

“First,” Gaddafi wrote in his *Green Book*, “the people are divided into [some 600] basic [that is, local grassroots] popular congresses. Each basic popular congress” made up of sectoral interest groups such as syndicates, associations, and unions, “chooses its secretariat. The secretariats together form popular congresses which are other than the basic ones.” These representative inner-ring Popular Congresses in turn elect some 2,700 representatives to the General People’s Congress.

“Then the masses of those basic popular congresses choose administrative people’s committees to replace government administration. Thus all public utilities are run by people’s

committees, which will be responsible to the basic popular congresses and these dictate the policies to be followed by the people’s committees and supervise its execution.”

People’s Committees – the local administrations – would then elect representatives to a General People’s Committee, which sat at national level alongside the General People’s Congress. Running from 1977 to 1993, the whole system was meant to be an exercise of living, direct democracy with the grassroots Basic Popular Congresses transmitting policy and action inwards via concentric rings.

But it was simultaneously an expression of corporatism in that all of society without exception was forcibly welded into a single instrument, and in practice, the General People’s Congress was a de facto legislature and the General People’s Committee an executive cabinet, while Gaddafi’s penumbral status as “Brotherly Leader and Guide” with no public functions, occluded the true central power he wielded.

Nigerian trade union activists Sam Mbah and IE Igariwey, in their assessment of African grassroots-democratic systems in their 1997 book *African*



Anarchism, said Gaddafi’s proposals were “followed generally more in the breach than in practice”, while in Tanzania, the Ujamaa model failed because it had been used by Nyerere merely as a means of consolidating his political power among the peasant majority, with state bureaucrats, in line with World Bank and foreign aid strategies, controlling crop prices and dictating production targets, dragooning the peasantry and squeezing as much surplus out of them as possible.

On the opposite side of the political spectrum, in the case of free-trade zones, several studies indicate that to ensure efficiency, they are best run by entities that exercise financial and administrative autonomy from the usual phalanx of government agencies.

For instance, the UN Conference on Trade and Development’s 2021 *Handbook on Special Economic Zones in Africa* says that of the continent’s 237 such zones (SEZs), most are concentrated in Kenya, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Morocco, Egypt, Cameroon, Botswana, Uganda, South Africa, and Tanzania.

They have proliferated since the 1990s, with 43% state-owned, 41% in private hands, and 16% run by hybrid models, usually public-private partnerships. Given that these “zones are often large, integrated zones built as townships with residential areas and amenities”, many fall within the definition of towns for the purposes of this article.

TOP LEFT: Francois Joubert, 69, an engineer who designed the Orasol solar farm, poses at the farm in 2022.

TOP RIGHT: An aerial view of the Orasol solar farm in Orania. Swampy plains not fit for farming or building houses are a new source of desperately needed electricity for Orania, the Afrikaner whites-only town.

The manual advises: “Best practice suggests that the SEZ authority should be an independent regulator governed by a board of directors with representatives from both the public and the private sectors... In all programmes [regardless of their ownership model] the board should be equipped with appropriate financial and administrative autonomy to shield it from political pressures as well as equip it with sufficient resources... Ideally, the SEZ authority should be conferred freedom in setting labour policies within SEZs – such as hiring, setting salaries and laying off workers. Taxation matters, such as establishing incentive packages, should also be delegated to the SEZ authority, if not provided in the SEZ law.”

Whether one is a small group of parallel municipalities as in South Africa’s North West province, a mid-sized autonomously administered high-tech zone, or a big constellation of supposedly community-participative towns as in Somaliland, it all comes down to: can self-management deliver? [GGY](#)

Francophone Africa needs a new governance model

By Tara O'Connor and Leonard Mbulle-Nziege

A slew of military coups in West and Central Africa have occurred in what is colloquially known as francophone (French-speaking) Africa. The most recent – in Gabon in August – ended the presidency of Ali Bongo Ondimba and his family's 55-year rule of the country, the latest in a series of military coups carried out across West and Central Africa since 2021 that have seen the removal of elected leaders in Mali, Chad, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger.

As *francophone* suggests, these countries were previously French colonies, and the coups have given rise to questions about the suitability and sustainability of institutions inherited from their former colonial rulers. Are French-style institutions more susceptible to military takeovers and other forms of political instability? At independence from France, Africa's newly formed states adopted a model of the unitary centralised state that drew upon General Charles de Gaulle's 5th republic that was largely imposed on France after the chaos of World War II and which French people now widely accepted.

In France, this constitution has proved a powerful tool for national, regional, and local economic development and transformation – and now, to meet existential crises like climate change and potentially catastrophic events such as COVID-19. The 5th Republic grew out of 200 years of political turmoil that culminated in World War II and is unique among constitutions in that it provides for a powerful executive president.

The president appoints a prime minister whose role is to manage a cabinet and the legislative programme through the national assembly. A professional national, regional, and local

ABOVE: Military musician Maman Sani Maigochi performs at a new year's eve concert, which was organised by the military authorities and broadcasted live on the national television, in Agadez, Niger, in January this year.

bureaucracy implements decisions made by the president and central government.

Local government and its organisational structure are key to delivery. The smallest villages are represented – organised into communes, which elect a mayor and councillors. All cities and towns down to small villages have a *Mairie*, or mayor's office, at their centre. The *Mairie* is both the mayor's office and a public service building and information centre for citizens and visitors alike. The mayor may or may not be attached to the ruling party, but the bureaucrats supporting the mayor ensure the presidential programme is implemented. The deputy mayor is traditionally a *fonctionnaire* or paid bureaucrat. The mayor's political focus is first and foremost local.

Critically, the mayor has local tax-raising powers and autonomy over how the budget is spent. Great emphasis is placed on *aménagement* – local economic development – improving constituents' lives as well as overseeing the core functions of local schools, roads, housing, waste management, planning permission and tourism. France's current focus is its part in the global energy transition: most rural towns and villages now have electrical vehicle infrastructure, adding to 300,000 public EV charge points, and the *Mairie* administers state subsidies for constituents to replace fossil fuel-based heating systems.

Politically ambitious mayors use their achievements as public administrators as a calling card for higher office, including the presidency. Emmanuel Macron's first prime minister has



ABOVE: A man holds a placard with the image of Niger's new military ruler, General Abdourahmane Tiani, as supporters of Niger's National Council of Safeguard of the Homeland (CNSP) protest outside the Niger and French airbase in Niamey on September 2, 2023, to demand the departure of the French army from the country.

Photo: AFP

returned to his former post as mayor of Le Havre, from where he is expected to prepare a future presidential bid. Mayors have been fundamental to France's economic development in the post-war era; the system has delivered economic development and social mobility, equally and in a largely uniform manner nationwide.

However, this powerful instrument of development failed to have the same results in France's former colonies. Just as de Gaulle imposed the 5th republic on France, it became the model for its newly independent former colonies with one difference – it was organised around a one-party system – already popular among newly independent anglophone countries. A highly centralised one-party state – organised around a powerful executive president, supported by an autonomous (inherited) state bureaucracy – is a hallmark of francophone African governance. At the time, it was justified as a means to streamline decision-making and fast-track much-needed development.

However, the key to the post-independence



Photo: Olympia De Maisonneuve / AFP

relationship between France and francophone African nations was France's concerted efforts to control the region as a market for French companies and to give the former colonial power additional weight in international forums. France signed a comprehensive set of treaties covering defence and security, foreign policy and diplomatic consultation, economic, financial, commercial and monetary



Photo: AFP



Photo: AFP

LEFT: A demonstrator points towards the anti-France message on his T-shirt as he gathers in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso to show support to the military on January 25, 2022.

ABOVE: Gabon's new strongman, General Brice Oligui Nguema (2nd L), who was inaugurated as interim President, reviews the troops before a military parade, in Libreville in September 2023.

matters, as well as technical assistance with these newly independent countries.

Underpinning this political framework was a common currency, the CFA franc, which has been in use in 14 countries in the region since 1946. The “franc of French colonies” still has a fixed exchange rate with the euro since it replaced the French franc in 2000. While this guarantees convertibility, maintains economic stability and controls inflation, French requirements that user nations hold reserves and an operational account in the French central

bank have given rise to claims that these West and Central African countries are not independent.

Finally, bilateral defence and security agreements allowed France to intervene militarily at the request of the signatory country. In return, France was granted preferential access to strategic mineral resources such as natural gas, petroleum and uranium and permitted to set up military bases as well. These conventions have fundamentally shaped the political, economic and social trajectory of the signatory African nations.

While this mode of governance was largely accepted in the 1960s and 1980s, the top-down approach in francophone countries excluded significant proportions of the population from participation and decision-making. A commodities crash during the mid-1980s, the ensuing economic crisis and growing popular protests for political pluralism led France, donors and Bretton Woods institutions to abandon this top-down approach in favour of bottom-up and more broad-based participatory approaches based on greater democracy, which they believed would eradicate governance and development efficiencies.

Despite the turmoil of the 1990s and pressure from pro-democracy movements, the leaders of most francophone countries controlled the reform programme. So, even after democratic reforms, they have retained semi-presidential systems, where an appointed prime minister coordinates government action. Power has remained substantially vested with the president, who retained and, in some cases, extended wide-ranging powers of appointment. These have undermined democratic transitions and allowed the routine rigging of elections, the removal of constitutional term limits, corruption, the emergence of dominant ruling parties, presidents for life and family-led dynasties.

One such example where democratic reforms have further concentrated power in the presidency is Cameroon. The 1996 constitutional amendment

provided that the country was a unitary decentralised state, which was initially seen as a continuation of the political liberalisation efforts undertaken since 1990. However, while increasing the overall level of citizen participation by introducing municipal and regional councils as well as a senate, the apparent reform also reinforced the head of state's already wide-ranging appointment prerogatives.

For example, in addition to selecting members of the cabinet and local administrative authorities (prefects), the president was allowed to appoint habitually elected officials, such as governors, and 30 of the 100 members of the Senate. Furthermore, until 2020, despite the election of municipal council mayors, the head of state would nominate government delegates to head the country's largest urban councils. These individuals would act as "super mayors" and have significant discretion concerning budget execution and decision-making.

The move was interpreted as the government ensuring it would retain control over municipalities, even if they fell to opposition parties. The head of state also appoints heads and members of institutions of accountability, including the judiciary, legislatures, electoral commissions,

and state ombudsmen. Prevailing centralisation tendencies were coupled with a manifested lack of desire to fully pursue the decentralisation process. A 2012 World Bank report, for example, acknowledged that cabinet ministers viewed government efforts to pursue decentralisation as a threat to their influence as well as their access to resources.

In Côte d'Ivoire, the decentralisation process started in 1980 with the organisation of its first multi-candidate municipal election, and decentralisation laws were adopted in 1998, 2002 and 2003. However, a socio-political crisis leading to a full-scale civil war in 2002–2007 interrupted the implementation of reforms. Alassane Ouattara's election has reinvigorated the process, but, as in Cameroon, the authorities remain reluctant to ensure a full devolution of powers to elected officials. While Côte d'Ivoire's 2016 constitution provides for a senate, the head of state has the power to select 33 of the 99 senators.

Ivorian political elites have also used reforms to accumulate more power; it has become common for cabinet ministers to retain positions as mayors, parliamentarians, and regional council presidents simultaneously. Amidst complaints that he was



using state resources to improve the economic capital, Abidjan, at the expense of the regions, Ouattara created 14 autonomous districts to improve local development. He then undermined his own reform by appointing “minister-governors” to oversee development rather than providing for elected governors.

The appropriation of democratic reforms in francophone countries to increase the concentration of power in the presidency has seen the routine rigging of elections, the removal of constitutional term limits, high levels of corruption, the emergence of dominant ruling parties, lifetime presidencies and family-led dynasties. Critically, the concentration of power has resoundingly failed to deliver economic development, let alone evenly distributed economic development.

Except for Gabon, the coup-afflicted countries are among the world’s poorest, according to the United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI) for 2021–2022. Chad (.394), Niger (.400), Mali (.428), Burkina Faso (.449) and Guinea (.465) are classified in the low-development category. Insecurity and state fragility add to low levels of development. A recent ACLED

Conflict Index, which ranks the 50 countries most exposed to conflict, includes Burkina Faso (13th), Mali (15th), Niger (30th) and Chad (47th). The 2022 Uppsala Fragility Index also placed Chad, Guinea, Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso in its “high alert” category. The 2022 Mo Ibrahim Index for African Governance (IIAG) suggests that the prevailing deterioration in security in these countries has negatively impacted overall governance. Democratic backsliding has led to armed conflict in Burkina, Mali, and Chad, and periods of sustained political violence in countries such as Benin, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Senegal, and Togo.

Disaffection with the ruling class – the accumulation of popular grievances focused on successive governments’ failures to deliver economic development or to improve people’s lives in any way – has resulted in popular, albeit qualified, support for the coups. This has raised fears that it could lead to coup contagion, and the normalisation of military rule – a repeat of the 1960s-1980s when most countries in the region were led by unelected military juntas. Either way, what is certain is that francophone countries need a new, homegrown model of governance. [GG+](#)



ABOVE: Nigerien security forces trucks, part of an escort to a French Army military convoy, crosses the Lazaret district in Niamey on October 10, 2023.



ABOVE: Members of the South African Communist Party (SACP) sing and dance as they attend the funeral of their fallen comrade Mhlengi Khumalo in Edendale township, Pietermaritzburg, in February 23, 2019.

KILLERS FOR HIRE

Local politics in South Africa is dogged by political assassinations

By Greg Ardé

The man on the phone was obviously scared. He was uptight and wired. I had tracked him down through friends who encouraged him to speak to me, but when he did, it was with a reluctance that seemed like paranoia at first. And then I heard his story.

“Please. I don’t want any comeback. Things are already so bad,” he said. The man’s wife had begged him not to stand as an ANC councillor candidate in the local government elections of 2021. A spate of killings linked to ANC infighting where they lived in rural KwaZulu-Natal meant a committed democrat had shrunk back from public office, putting his life and his family first.

“These people are extremely evil,” he said. “They are heartless; they do not act for the people. The municipality is like a taxi rank. Most councillors have taxis and for them to get hitmen is easy. There is a very

dangerous relationship between the taxi industry and politicians.”

The story was ghastly. It involved nine people killed and 17 injured, much of the violence linked to an ANC councillor. It is the sort of story I heard with sickening repetition while researching my book *War Party* (published by Tafelberg in 2020) about political assassinations.

Since then, I have worked with the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) researching the gangs, drugs, and mafias that dominate the underworld. GI-TOC’s data shows 141 assassinations in South Africa in 2022, an average of more than two a week. In KwaZulu-Natal, the province where I live, 21 local councillors have been murdered in the past year alone.

Why, you ask? Well, the short answer is that most of the victims are members of the ANC, killed in power struggles over patronage. But

there is also a longer, more nuanced answer, about how politics and organised crime are increasingly enmeshed in an environment where violence has become institutionalised. ANC cadre deployment allows state capture and corruption hobbles government service delivery. The criminal justice system is under strain and organised crime rises on the back of a weak state.

The upshot is that in this terrifying environment, killers flourish.

Those are the drivers and dynamics behind the assassination of local councillors, but again, that's the story in broad brush strokes. The bigger picture is a detailed one that involves a host of issues, including the availability of guns and hitmen for hire. The story weaves in and out of the taxi industry, inter-party contestation (versus intra-party battles), gangs and drugs, traditional leadership, the private security industry, entrepreneurs, and so-called construction mafias. All of these rely on the ready supply of hitmen, or *izinkabi*, contract killers who assassinate for payment of a few thousand rands or hundreds of thousands of rands.

Against this backdrop, it is difficult to give a definitive account of the problem of political

violence. There is no single cause and its tentacles intertwine, so much so that talk about political violence becomes amorphous. It's down to hired killers, but, as the minister of police, Bheki Cele, once told me in an interview, catching the masterminds often means muddling through the minions first to find out the motive for the assassination.

The history of political violence in South Africa is well documented. The apartheid state, often acting in concert with the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) against the United Democratic Front (UDF), fostered an ideologically driven civil war. Democracy ended that, but vestiges of the conflict remained, and many of the victims mimicked the violence of their oppressors and, in some instances, outdid them.

Wars create strongmen and "violence entrepreneurs", who rule with fear and blood. These didn't disappear in 1994, but were absorbed into politics, either by hijacking political parties, or worse, embraced by elites anxious to access the power they commanded. Today, many of the strongmen are from the taxi industry, a lucrative cash business where firepower determines route dominance.

A frightening figure in this landscape was Sputla Mpungose, a Zululand taxi boss who left Inkatha and was embraced by the ANC.

Mpungose, a menacing figure with a long history of involvement in violence: political, personal, and business, died of Covid. He rose through the ranks of Inkatha and reportedly led hostel attacks in Johannesburg on communities sympathetic to the ANC.

In 2004, when he switched to the ANC, he was accused of leading a hit squad in the Inkatha heartland of Nongoma. He was arrested the same year for raping a 14-year-old girl. A year later she, her mother and cousin were killed before they could testify against him. The state accused Mpungose of executing them when the family refused an offer of 10 cows to drop the charges. At the time, he was out on bail for allegedly killing a rival taxi boss. He was





ABOVE: Mhlengi Khumalo, 35, an (SACP) regional branch secretary of the Vubamasi voting district in Ward 10, was shot dead on February 12, 2019, in an allegedly politically motivated assassination in the KwaZulu Natal province.

Photos: Reuters/Anadolu / AFP

convicted on the rape charge, sentenced in 2007 but in 2011 he was released on appeal.

Mpungose made headlines again in 2015 when a top cop alleged he had put a R1.2 million price tag on his head. When I wrote *War Party*, sources claimed he had the ear of government ministers and often attended ANC conferences. He was also defended by a high-profile ANC attorney. Sputla's men, I was told, had a hand in assassinations in the Newcastle area, where internal rivalry has claimed the lives of many ANC members.

He was by no means an exception; across South Africa heavies of his ilk hold sway. Researching drugs and gangs for GI-TOC, multiple sources spoke about how private security businesses (some owned by taxi bosses) provided cover for gangsters, giving them firearms and manpower. The same names crop up repeatedly – hoods linked to politicians and crooked police.

The police are not altogether powerless to act

against gangsters. In fact, they did so in September this year in a bloody shootout with Nkululeko Mkhize, a high-rolling entrepreneur who terrorised communities around Richards Bay on the Kwa-Zulu-Natal north coast. He and an accomplice, former police officer Sabelo Cele, were killed when police stormed his home at Zimbali, a luxury gated estate in Ballito.

The incident followed the shooting of five people in Richards Bay the previous day, leading police to the Zimbali residence. Mkhize was a notorious extortionist, taxi and tow-truck boss in Richards Bay and part of a powerful taxi family. At his funeral, his brother Mathula made an extraordinary apology to people terrorised by his brother. People tend to listen when Mathula speaks. A former regional chairman of the South African National Taxi Council, he has been spotted on social media posts at ANC events and travels with a crew of bodyguards. He is also a co-accused in the corruption trial involving former



ABOVE Nolisizo Maduna, fiancée of South African Communist Party (SACP) leader Mhlangi Khumalo, places a flower on Khumalo's coffin

Photos: Rajesh Jantilal / AFP

eThekweni mayor Zandile Gumede. He is a voice in the construction sector, as project liaison committee leader on a huge government infrastructure project, multi-billion rand highway upgrades in the province.

Construction mafia and business forums are the new bywords for violence, which has led to President Cyril Ramaphosa calling in the army to help deal with the issue. But while many South African companies feel under siege by extortionist, violent construction mafia and business forums, they may not be the primary target of the villains.

Local councillors are often in the crosshairs. In September last year, for example, ANC councillor Mnqobi Molefe was shot dead while in hiding. His family and friends say he was killed because rival business mafias were vying to control part of the spend on the R6 billion Umgeni Water project in the area, although as is often the case, the motive is difficult to establish. In May this year, in Durban, opposition parties welcomed the removal of Ward 101 councillor Mzi Ngiba who reportedly earned close to R1 million languishing in jail awaiting trial for the murder of his comrade, ANC ward candidate Siyabonga Mkhize.

In June, meanwhile, pastor John Myaka, an African Christian Democratic Party councillor in Richards Bay, was gunned down while delivering a sermon. Then in July, in Nongoma, a National Freedom Party (NFP) councillor, Ntombenhle Mchunu, was shot dead, her comrades claiming that IFP members were responsible. The NFP had recently walked away from a coalition arrangement with the IFP.

In 2016 the government responded to the growing violence in KZN by appointing a commission of inquiry headed by Advocate MTK Moerane, although his report was largely ignored. He said killings were on the rise because state tenders were being manipulated and exploited by politicians willing to kill for money; like greedy taxi bosses, they moved to eliminate opposition. With low barriers to entry, competition for the job of councillor was fierce as its salary meant an instant meal ticket and provided access to state patronage. Corruption was the backbone of South African politics, Moerane said. "And that's the cause of violence."

University of KwaZulu-Natal political analyst Dr Imraan Buccus agrees. He says the state is the



ABOVE: Members of the South African Communist Party (SACP) sing and dance around the coffin of their fallen comrade

quickest facilitator of social mobility in South Africa, with a job as a councillor the difference between life on the margins and access to the finer things in life. “People will kill to have it,” he says.

In developing societies, the underworld has a big stake in local government and asserts this when state institutions are weak. The impact of this in South Africa is profound. Gareth Newham from the Institute for Security Studies recently cited this startling figure: between 2012 and 2022, the ability of the police to solve murder docket dropped by 55% despite its budget growing by 86% in the same period. This meant that only 14,5% of murder dockets were solved last year.

Having said that, the police have made some inroads. In September, police minister Cele said a dedicated task team investigating political killings in KZN since 2018 had investigated 321 dockets. He said there were 63 more dockets compared to when he had given an update 18 months earlier. The 321 total included 155 cases of murder, 51 of attempted murder, 77 of intimidation, 12 cases of conspiracy to commit murder, and 26 other ad hoc cases. This led to the arrest of 348 suspects, of whom 62 had

been convicted. Cele said investigations showed the parties most affected by political violence were the ANC, IFP and NFP. Of the 52 councillors murdered since 2011, 31 were ANC, 14 were IFP and four were NFP. “While 52 councillors have been gunned down since 2011 to date, alarmingly, 103 officials working within municipalities as political office bearers and officials in political offices were also killed,” Cele said.

In this scenario, South Africans are robbed of people of conscience because increasingly, only desperados and crooks are prepared to become councillors. This entrenches corruption, while the playbook of violence and intimidation creates a climate of fear.

Veteran violence monitor Mary de Haas says this has a direct bearing on the calibre of people prepared to be involved in politics. “Violence and intimidation affect the psyche of people; they are terrified,” she says. “It is layer upon layer of violence that involves thugs, mafia, drug dealers, corrupt politicians, and taxi hitmen. The police response is often shambolic or worse, some police are working with criminal syndicates. Might is right and the bullies hold sway.” [GGV](#)

South Africa's municipalities **RUN ON EMPTY**

By Terence Corrigan

“**T**hey’re useless, all of them,” hissed Sam (not his real name) across the table. “Messed it up completely.”

Sam and I were at a popular Rosebank eatery, catching up after not seeing each other for some years. We’d first met back in the 1990s. He’d come of age in the 1980s, during which time he had been a youthful anti-apartheid activist (he was “coloured”, though vociferously rejected that moniker). He had joined the ANC shortly after its unbanning in 1990.

You wouldn’t think so now. His assessment of the state of Gauteng’s cities was laced with venom. He described one



Photo: Phil Magakoe / AFP

municipal employee who barely leaves his house – “literally, always at home”. He reeled off a list of the quality-of-life failings that plague urban South Africa. Sam is fortunate: a successful career as a governance consultant (whose advice is not always heeded) means that he can afford to buy himself out of some of this mess. So do large parts of South Africa’s hard-pressed middle class. Others are not so fortunate.

But this is a painful situation for Sam; he’s always had a belief in the importance of a competent state, something that attracted him to the ANC’s policy offerings in the first place. For the most part, that is just not an option anymore.

It’s not just disaffected suburbanites like Sam and myself who see things this way. The most recent report from the country’s Auditor General for 2021-2022 put it in these words: ‘For years, local government has been characterised by deteriorating standards of living, service delivery failures, dysfunctional municipalities, council and administrative instability, financial mismanagement, service delivery protests

BELOW: Residents of Bhambayi settlement stand near burning tyres during their protest for water and electricity services while closing off the M25 highway in Inanda, north of Durban, on April 13, 2022.



and crumbling municipal infrastructure. Citizens continue to express their dissatisfaction and frustration through the media and other platforms, calling for urgent attention to address their plight.’

In fact, in South Africa’s townships and informal settlements, the inability of municipalities to perform their duties and the consequent sense of alienation have sparked a protest culture that bears some resemblance to the anti-apartheid urban uprisings of the 1980s.

This is a critical problem for South Africa, even an existential one. The country’s governance system accords a key role to local government, even providing for it in the country’s constitution. The ANC, despite a hard bias against government devolution, was in favour of strong municipalities. These would be the prime agencies for the provision of day-to-day services and socio-economic development and would be fora in which ordinary people (organised through the party, of course) could participate in their own governance and upliftment. In 1995, its slogan for the local elections was “Let’s make it happen where we live.”

So, what went wrong? The crisis in South Africa’s municipalities is an expression of the broader dysfunction in the South African state. For years now, South Africans have spoken with cynicism about failings in public administration (“poor service delivery”) and with mounting trepidation about comprehensive state failure in the future. Former editor Brian Pottinger’s 2008 book *The Mbeki Legacy* was a prescient early discussion of this.

South Africa’s municipal system was constituted atop enormous structural challenges. Because

of historical segregation at both community and national levels, the economic foundations on which sub-national governments would depend were wildly unevenly distributed. Many of the municipal jurisdictions that emerged lacked a robust revenue base. Even in the more developed cities, past planning had been geared at separation rather than economically rational integration. The latter was split between competently administered cores (serving predominantly white communities) and deeply contested, sometimes effectively ungoverned, black townships and expanding

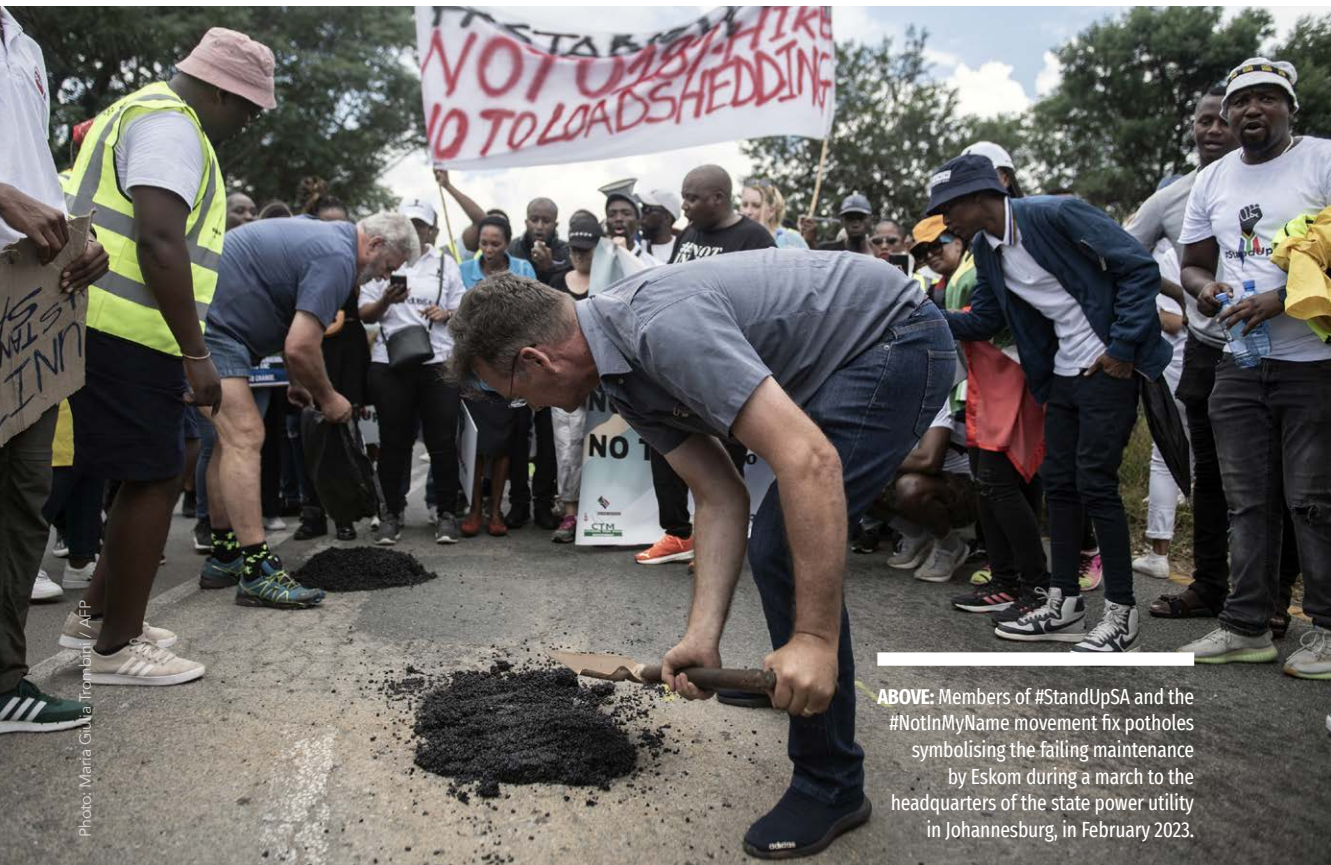
shack lands. All of this called for extraordinary prudence and skill in managing the newly formed entities, ensuring they would not only meet their administrative responsibilities but perform the developmental mandate that would sustainably improve people’s lives.

As Pottinger notes, the seminal criteria for doing this was skills. While the ANC paid lip service to this reality, it rapidly set about rearranging the personnel profile of the

public service to ensure that people it trusted would manage the administration and that the public service would “reflect the demographics” of society. State positions were also a ready source of reward to party members. The administrative consequence, inevitably, was a considerable loss of expertise at a time when it was sorely needed.

But in 1997 something more profound took place. Secure in power, the ANC turned to building its “hegemony” over society. Central to this was cadre deployment. This would involve placing loyal party activists in positions of power on the instruction of “deployment committees” within

**Secure in power,
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deployment.**



ABOVE: Members of #StandUpSA and the #NotInMyName movement fix potholes symbolising the failing maintenance by Eskom during a march to the headquarters of the state power utility in Johannesburg, in February 2023.

Photo: Maria Gula/Trombini / AFP

the party. These deployments were not limited to elected offices or to inherently political roles (such as spokespersons or political advisors) but were to cover positions South Africa's constitution intended to be meritocratic, career-oriented and dedicated to the service of the country's people as a whole.

Few people have spoken as extensively about cadre deployment as Paul Hoffman, advocate, author and director of the NGO Accountability Now. For him, this lies at the root of the malaise confronting local government, and directly contradicts South Africa's constitution.

Hoffman notes that cadre deployment is in flagrant violation of South Africa's constitution. In addition to Section 197, which requires that "no employee of the public service may be favoured or prejudiced only because that person supports a particular political party or cause", Hoffman points to Section 195, which demands "good human-resource management and career-development practices, to

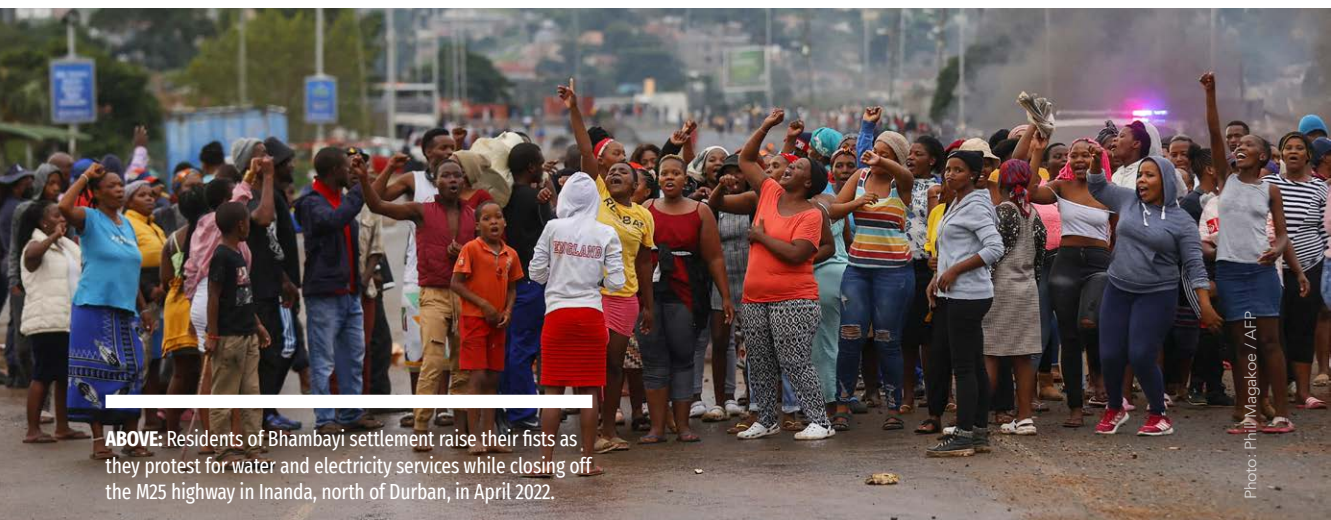
maximise human potential, must be cultivated."

By subjecting appointments to an opaque party process, both are undermined. "By relying on an exclusive party gene pool, you were always going to get the mess you got," Hoffman remarks.

Surprisingly, the introduction of cadre deployment attracted little condemnation. Most commentators dealt with it extremely cautiously, avoiding discussion of its full implications

But by 2008 South Africa was rapidly running out of room to manoeuvre. The global financial crisis severely shrank fiscal space, and unlike its emerging market peers, economic growth did not recover. Added to this were the general corruption and mismanagement of the Jacob Zuma era. Local government, always a prized source of employment and patronage – especially for those in South Africa's impoverished hinterlands – became even more valuable.

The ANC itself, despite its external appearances



ABOVE: Residents of Bhambayi settlement raise their fists as they protest for water and electricity services while closing off the M25 highway in Inanda, north of Durban, in April 2022.

Photo: Phil Magakoe / AFP

to the contrary, was never an especially coherent or well-run organisation, further undermined during the Zuma era by brazen corruption and personal loyalties. This created the perfect environment for regional and local barons to build their own fiefdoms. The ability to deploy was essential for local notables, and the benefits were critical for local supplicants. The consequences for the administration were catastrophic. Kevin Allan, Managing Director at Municipal IQ, a consultancy, summed things up in a recent newspaper column: “Cadre deployment is the real problem in local government and has run for years like poison through the sector. It is not only that cadres are deployed to political positions, but also in senior administrative positions, a role for which they have, mostly, little or no qualifications or experience.”

This has an especially sinister side, as journalist Greg Arde has illustrated in his book *War Party: how the ANC's Political Killings are Breaking South Africa*. Focusing largely on KwaZulu-Natal, it details how a combination of crooked business, political patronage and a violent political culture is steadily corroding governance. And while the province has a long history of violent political conflict between the ANC and its rivals, contemporary violence tends to take place within the party, over the spoils of office. Politicising the state has become a lethal matter.

Cadre deployment has created a severe threat

to the integrity of democratic governance. In its conception, the idea tacitly assumed that the ANC would rule indefinitely. Politicising the state was seen as a means to ensure permanent alignment between the administration and the party. This was no longer plausible by the 2016 local elections, as the ANC began to lose its majority in some cities. By the 2021 local elections, it was in visible retreat, and polling points to an ongoing slide in its fortunes.

So, what comes next? In 2021, for a period, the centrist opposition, the Democratic Alliance was able to form coalition governments in Gauteng’s three large metropolitan areas: Tshwane, Johannesburg and Ekurhuleni. (Subsequently, it lost control of the latter two, holding on now only in Tshwane.) In each case, it complained about an obstructive civil service.

Africa in Fact spoke to Benjamin (not his real name), who worked in an administrative position in the Ekurhuleni municipality during the DA’s incumbency. He details gridlock and inaction. Some of this, he says, was clearly intentional sabotage. Equipment would mysteriously be damaged and not repaired, or repairs would be delayed for weeks as invoices languished in in-trays.

Was this about political hostility towards the DA and loyalty to the ANC? In other words, was this cadre deployment in its full glory? “It’s nuanced,” Benjamin says. “At some level, let’s say the lower-

level workforce, the sort of people represented by ANC-aligned unions, there was some open antipathy to the DA. The DA are the bosses and the capitalists; this is what they've been indoctrinated to believe, and you get to know it.

As you move up the food chain, things become more complicated. Here's where the money is. It's swinging contracts to connected comrades, and maybe taking a cut for themselves. These are people who have a lot to lose, even their lives. Their careers are built on fiddling with the rules, and some of them are tied up with criminal syndicates. It's not even really recognisably political for some of them anymore. And some are just chronically lazy, entitled and incompetent. There hasn't been much consequence management; a cushy council job has meant a great salary for minimal effort, and if that depends on political contact, then that's a contact they want to keep sweet."

Governance in South Africa is lurching from crisis to crisis, and the absence of an able public service is universally acknowledged as a centrepiece of the issue. South Africa's National Planning Commission laments the 'rejection of meritocracy' in the country's public institutions. President Cyril Ramaphosa and his administration have made the creation of a "capable state" a key priority; a plan for the "professionalisation" of the public service has been adopted, and recent legislation passed will restrict the ability of party officebearers to hold a municipal job. But Ramaphosa has explicitly indicated that cadre deployment will continue.

Declining ANC support raises the possibility that South Africa might turn away from this noxious practice; however, this possibility is qualified by the fact that the ANC will remain a significant player

for the foreseeable future, able to veto reform in many instances.

However, there may be grounds for some cautious optimism. *Africa In Fact* reached out to veteran DA politician Athol Trollip about his experience as mayor of Nelson Mandela Municipality between 2016 and 2018.

Discussing his incumbency, Trollip says that an "obstructive, truculent civil service" was the incoming administration's greatest concern. In practice, it was a mixed experience. Lower-level

workers could be a headache. A particular problem was that work crews would turn off water to townships over weekends, reinforcing the narrative of an uncaring, racist administration.

"But on the positive side," he said, "mid-level and senior staff are middle class. We found that they wanted to live in areas without potholes. They wanted the life they had earned. Our feedback from them was that

they had had enormous interference in their work. Now they could express themselves professionally. I used the metaphor of railroad tracks to explain my position. I would stick to my track and I wanted them to stick to theirs; if we did that, things would function and we'd deliver. They could express themselves professionally, and it worked well for all of us."

But South Africa's local governments need a great deal more of this. The ANC has dispensed with professional, skilled managers in the name of political control at the great cost of the country and its people. And as long as cadre deployment persists, so will the failures of South African local government.

Meanwhile, Sam, myself and millions of other South Africans will continue to seethe with anger at the burdens this imposes on our lives. [GGV](#)

Was this about political hostility towards the DA and loyalty to the ANC?



A CONFLICT

By Barnabas Thondhlana

ABOVE: A man sits in front of Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) campaign posters on the wall of the infamous Mbare flats in Harare on August 20, 2023.

Photo: John Wessels / AFP

- Jobs
- Food
- Health
- Freedom
- Peace
- Prosperity

Winning
For
Everyone!



FIBION TUTE
FOR COUNCILLOR MBARE WARD 3



**NYIKA
INOVAKWA
NEVENE
VAYO**



**CDE MARTIN MATINYANYA
FOR MP
MBARE CONSTITUENCY**



Nyika inovakwa nevene vayo | lizwe lakhiwa ngabanikazi bato

OF INTEREST

Zimbabwe's constitution clearly prohibits traditional leaders from advancing a political party but this isn't always the case

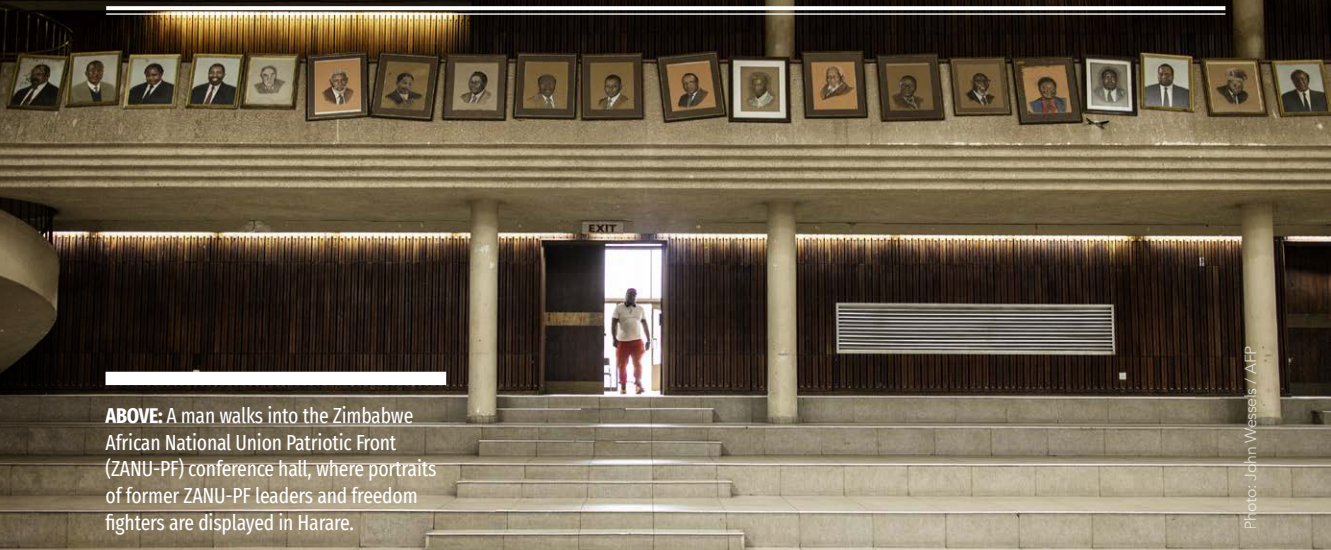
Zimbabwe has faced complex tensions between traditional leadership and multiparty governance. Traditional leaders, such as chiefs, have been accused of playing partisan roles in elections and favouring specific political parties. These accusations have raised concerns about the neutrality of traditional leaders in the democratic process.

Zimbabwe's Constitution and the 1988 Traditional Leaders Act define the role of traditional leaders. Their role includes promoting and upholding the cultural values of their communities, facilitating development and administering communal lands, protecting the environment, resolving disputes in their communities, and exercising any other functions conferred or imposed on them by an act of Parliament.

Zimbabwe's constitutional and institutional frameworks make sufficient provisions that clearly prohibit traditional leaders from partaking in elections and electoral processes to advance the interests of any political party or candidate.

What is problematic is enforcement, because the political elite who are supposed to ensure enforcement are beneficiaries of the status quo. On the other hand, traditional leaders are willing collaborators because they benefit from political patronage.

In Zimbabwe, as elsewhere in Africa, traditional leaders have always commanded profound respect among rural communities, where they preside over everything from the resolution of disputes to the sharing of resources. Chiefs and headmen are still revered within some political circles for having



ABOVE: A man walks into the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) conference hall, where portraits of former ZANU-PF leaders and freedom fighters are displayed in Harare.

Photo: John Wessels / AFP

worked with nationalists and freedom fighters in the 1960s and 1970s during the bloody and protracted guerrilla war against Ian Smith's white minority government.

However, critics and analysts say that with the emergence of a powerful opposition in 2000 in the form of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), traditional leaders have been blatantly threatened, bribed, politicised and used by the ruling ZANU-PF to rally villagers behind the party.

Traditional leaders receive a generous monthly government stipend as part of Zimbabwe President Emmerson Mnangagwa's strategy to keep them on side. In the run-up to the August 23 general and presidential elections last year, they also received off-road vehicles doled out by the Mnangagwa government.

But bribery is not the only method of inducement Mnangagwa and his supporters use. In its regular pre-election monitoring updates before the August 23 poll, the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) observed that chiefs who had given opposition party Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) permission to hold campaign rallies in their locality had been harassed by state security agents, who threatened to withdraw government support if they continued to do so. The CCC is now the biggest opposition party in Zimbabwe, overshadowing the MDC-T, which is now a pale shadow of its former self.

On May 16, 2018, Justice Garainesu Mawadze of the Masvingo High Court issued a judgement banning all traditional leaders from partisan politics. The National Chiefs Council (representing all 282 Chiefs in Zimbabwe) and its then President, Chief Fortune Charumbira, were prohibited from making political statements on their involvement or allegiance to ZANU-PF on any public platform. Conducting campaigns on behalf of the ruling party by traditional leaders – chiefs, head persons or village heads – was declared unconstitutional and a violation of the right not to be treated unfairly in a discriminatory manner on the basis of political affiliation.

This has created the notion of a “competing principals dilemma” where the institution of traditional leaders, unable to resist its co-option, finds itself with a conflict of interest – having to simultaneously serve the interests of the political authority on the one hand and those of the people on the other.

In South Africa, for example, traditional leaders support the electoral process as a national programme that is not an end in and of itself but a means to a developmental end. They must make their areas of jurisdiction accessible to all aspirant parties and candidates.

The Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) had no kind words for chiefs and the role they played in Zimbabwe's August 2023



harmonised elections. In its post-election report released in November, the ZHRC pointed out glaring irregularities during the 2023 polls, including the involvement of affiliate organisations.

“Despite the peace and calm that prevailed during the election period, the watchdog received cases of violations of civil and political rights, including intimidation, coercion and threats, among others,” the ZHRC said. “There were also allegations of intimidation, organised voting, the conflation of roles by some traditional leaders who doubled up as political agents, and the practice of conducting exit poll surveys, which might have compromised the secrecy of the ballot.”

But the former Deputy Minister of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting and ZANU-PF provincial chairman, Kindness Paradza, begged to differ. He defended the role of chiefs in elections and electoral processes.

“Chiefs are part of the establishment,” Paradza told *Africa in Fact*. “Also, chiefs were at the forefront of the liberation struggle, so one cannot separate them from the revolution party, ZANU-PF. Those that deviate were born after independence in 1980 and are not so well-versed in our liberation war history.”

The Zimbabwe Elections Support Network (ZESN), in a position paper on elections, says the role of traditional leaders in elections and electoral processes depicts a picture of a traditional authority

LEFT: A supporter of the opposition leader for the Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC), Nelson Chamisa, sings the national anthem during their final campaign rally in Harare on August 21, 2023. **RIGHT:** Supporters of the Zimbabwe ruling party The Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) receive parcels of roller meal, bread and flour as they arrive to attend an election campaign rally in December 2023.

whose existence is held in tension between the expectation of citizens that it be a neutral vanguard of traditions, customs and community development on the one hand and the ruling elite’s demands for it to be loyal and serve the interests of the incumbent party.

But despite this, and notwithstanding the political polarisation prevailing in Zimbabwe, there is a consensus on the institution of traditional leaders regarding its development role at the local government level.

According to Gabriel Masvora, the Director of Communications and Advocacy in the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works, traditional leaders have a central role to play in liaising with government departments to champion growth in their areas.

“Traditional leaders in their institutional framework chair village, wards, and chiefs council meetings, are mandated to produce local economic



plans,” he told *Africa in Fact*. “The bottom-up process. In the same vein, central government, which administers devolution funds, for example, is then supposed to use the [money] to target projects that are identified in local economic plans.”

Masvora was adamant that chiefs were not political animals: “Section 282 of the Constitution clearly states the roles of the traditional leaders and, in particular, that they are not supposed to be involved in active politics.

“The accusation that chiefs favour one political party over others stems from those people who confuse the roles of chiefs,” Masvora said. “Chiefs are part of the country’s governing system and are supposed to help in implementing government projects. In Zimbabwe, the ruling party is superior to the government and gives direction to policies that are used by the government.

“The confusion [happens] when chiefs implement government programmes, some of which would have been directed by the ruling party. Some people confuse this as being partisan and biased,” Masvora said.

Rashid Mahiya, the executive director of the civic organisation Heal Zimbabwe, said traditional leaders, if left to discharge their duties independently, could be effective mediators and adjudicators in their communities, able to spearhead positive traditional forms of conflict resolution and intervention on behalf of victims of injustice.

“In light of this, traditional leaders meddling in politics greatly compromises this important role that helps to build peaceful communities and social cohesion within them,” Mahiya told *Africa in Fact*.

The blurred lines in traditional leaders’ interference in elections and electoral processes, despite the constitution and subsidiary laws prohibiting it, are to be found in the historical relationship between traditional leaders and the political elite during the colonial period as well as in the post-independence era. The colonial powers manipulated traditional institutions and, using an indirect rule system, interfered with traditional institutions, rewarding obedience while also punishing dissent.

In Zimbabwe, as in the colonial period, dissent



FAR LEFT: Crown Prince Bulelani Khumalo (C) arrives for the annual King Mzilikazi commemoration, escorted by his regiments, held on September 9, 2023, 22km outside Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. **LEFT:** A visiting Venda Prince arrives for the commemoration. **BOTTOM LEFT:** Gcina Zulu from the Zulu royal family attends the commemoration.



has been punished, which has compelled traditional leaders to toe the line. As a result, there is a perception that the entire traditional institution is pro-the ruling party.

A good example is Ntabazinduna Chief Nhlanhla Ndiweni, who was accused of overstepping his jurisdiction as a traditional leader. Chief Ndiweni found himself in the eye of a storm four years ago when he called on western countries to impose sanctions on government leaders if they went ahead and repossessed a piece of land in his area in Ntabazinduna, which was occupied by a white commercial farmer.

The firebrand chief, a close friend of opposition CCC President Nelson Chamisa, also said he did not recognise President Mnangagwa's government. He was subsequently stripped of his chieftainship and charged and sentenced to 24 months in prison for malicious damage to property after he was accused

of destroying property belonging to a villager who had resisted an order to leave his area. Ndiweni skipped the country and is currently living in exile in the United Kingdom.

Heal Zimbabwe's Mahiya said realignment of the traditional Leaders Act to the Constitution was necessary and called for the creation of an Integrity and Ethics Committee of Chiefs as espoused in Section 287 of the Constitution. The committee would then exercise the following functions: develop and enforce integrity and ethical conduct on the part of traditional leaders, resolve disputes between traditional leaders, and deal with complaints against traditional leaders.

Mahiya also appealed to traditional leaders to respect the Constitution and reassure citizens that they were non-partisan, performing their duties and responsibilities in a professional and non-partisan manner that allowed all citizens, regardless of political affiliation, equal access to resources and guaranteed non-discrimination on partisan basis.

The ZESN position paper, meanwhile, called on traditional leaders not to accept any directive that demands they unduly influence citizens under their jurisdiction when exercising their constitutional right to elect leaders of their choice. Zimbabwe's parliament, the ZESN said, must ensure that all citizens enjoy fundamental freedoms and human rights, including freedom of association, assembly and expression, in line with the SADC Principles Guiding Democratic Elections. [GG9](#)

LEFT IN

Kenyan service delivery goals face multiple challenges

By Issa Sikiti da Silva

ABOVE: A family carrying their belongings on a donkey cart on a road destroyed by flash floods at the Garissa-Wajir Road in Maalimin, Kenya, on November 21, 2023.

Photo: Luis Tato/AFIP



LIMBO

A group of construction workers discussing Kenya's President William Ruto's administration's aggressive taxation campaign swiftly brings up the issue of corruption, which they believe has eroded people's trust in the government, led to inadequate service delivery, and generated poverty in the country, where the gap between the richest and poorest has reached extreme levels.

"These people have been collecting billions of shillings in tax every year in the past six decades, but service delivery remains poor because all that money goes into people's pockets," a man identified as John Omondi says. "Look at the state of the roads in our townships and villages, especially now that is raining heavily. The people who were killed by flooding, it's the result of living in inadequate

housing and areas lacking proper infrastructure," Omondi adds.

"Nothing seems to be working in this country," complains Alfred Musya. "Bandits are making our lives a living hell, uncollected waste is littered all over the place, community healthcare centres are in a mess, and the cost of life keeps rising.

"And instead of fixing these issues, Ruto and his yes-men continue to increase taxes to make us poorer than ever."

Another worker, probably a supporter of the ruling party, joins the conversation, pleading with his comrades not to solely crucify Ruto for Kenya's endless social problems.

"The people that you should be criticising are the MCAs [members of county assemblies] who, instead of maintaining close contact with the electorate on



Photos: Luis Tato / AFP

issues affecting the grassroots, just disappear after the elections only to reappear five years later during the next election campaign,” the man, who does not wish to be identified, says.

These disgruntled construction workers may not have expert knowledge of fiscal policies but like many Kenyans, they are all too familiar with the country’s continuously inadequate service delivery despite a wave of decentralisation initiatives undertaken in the past decade.

Kenya’s Constitution of 2010 set out a devolution process that established electoral, horizontal, and direct accountability mechanisms at the county level, and specifically assigned 14 functions to counties. In 2019, the World Bank hailed Kenya’s decentralisation project as among the most rapid and ambitious devolution initiatives in the world.

However, more than a decade down the line, co-authors Abdu Muwonge, Timothy Stephen Williamson, Christine Owuor, and Muratha Kinuthia, in a 2022 assessment, *Making Devolution Work for Service Delivery in Kenya*, were critical about



the mixed results devolution had had on service delivery, writing that ambiguities still existed around financing and service provision.

Michael Juma, a devolution and community development practitioner, told *Africa in Fact* that corruption was a deeply rooted problem, which was one of the reasons that county governments were yet to fully deliver on their functions as contemplated in Kenya’s constitution.

“Some of the problems that have hindered



ABOVE: People carry their belongings while crossing a section of a road that collapsed due to flash floods at the Mwingi-Garissa Road near Garissa, Kenya, in November 2023.

country governments' effective performance and service delivery are internal to them and others external, and corruption leads the internal problems," Juma said. "Corruption is deeply rooted in the counties. The Auditor General has flagged this problem in all counties in annual reports and has continued due to weak political commitment to fight the vice."

"Sometimes it seems [as if] county governments are run by criminals, and the growing culture of integrating corruption in policy, planning, and budgeting processes is even more worrying. Corruption in procurement has also risen steadily,

and state and county officials have established outfits, which they use to do business with the government."

Juma said genuine businesses, meanwhile, were becoming extremely cautious about doing business with the government due to non-payment for services rendered. The Nairobi-based local governance expert said this was the biggest problem at county level, making county governments "hated and lowly rated" by citizens.

According to Jean Bossuyt, senior executive and head for inclusive governance and accountability at the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM), corruption constitutes a flaw of decentralisation and devolution processes in many places across the globe.

"In 2022, our foundation led a major evaluation of EU efforts to support the rule of law and the fight against corruption – with Kenya as a case study. There, we could see how limited investments were made so far to foster the rule of law in all proceedings of local authorities," he said.

Bossuyt pointed out that devolution itself does not create conditions for effective and accountable governance.

"Kenya's 2010 Constitution and the subsequent devolution changed the formal rules of the game, which constitutes a major jump forward from centralised systems, from where national elites could orchestrate what happened at the local level," he said.

"But, as in other countries on the continent, the informal rules did not change overnight [with devolution], which explains the predominance of patronage politics at local level [as well] and the well-entrenched culture of poor accountability towards citizens (coupled with impunity, for instance, for corruption) in Kenya."

Bossuyt said most decentralisation/devolution processes across the world were essentially political processes about the distribution of power and control over resources, and not primarily oriented



towards better service delivery or local economic development (except in the discourse).

“Therefore, getting better services and accountability is proving to be a ‘struggle’, which needs a wide range of local and other actors to challenge existing power relations (which devolution often masks) and demand better governance using a variety of tools, mechanisms, approaches.

“You cannot have a local democracy without local democrats who are also interested in public affairs and willing to engage,” Bossuyt said. “This rebalancing of powers for a more inclusive and accountable system of local governance will be an uphill struggle, as is the case in Kenya, and requires time as well as support from different angles to foster a different culture of governance.”

Juma also pointed out to *Africa in Fact* that other internal factors were hampering Kenya’s county governments’ ability to perform effectively and provide quality service delivery. These included a bloated workforce, which takes more resources at the

expense of development; the low completion rate of projects; poor performance in own-source revenue collection and management; and political domination and manipulation of planning and budgets.

“This has culminated in a process where the implementation of development projects and services are often not properly aligned with citizens’ priorities,” he explained.

As for external problems, Juma said these included persistent delays in the transfer of an equitable share of the nationally collected revenue to county governments, delays in unbundling, costing and transferring their constitutional functions to county governments, and a growing inclination of national government to perform country government functions.

Juma mentioned housing and roads as two examples of bickering between Kenya’s national and county governments.

“It depends on the classification of the roads,” he told *Africa in Fact*. “National government entities like



LEFT: A general view of the Nairobi Expressway along Mombasa road in Nairobi.



Kenya National Highways (KENHA), the Kenya Rural Roads Authority (KERA) and the Kenya Urban Roads Authority (KURA) are responsible for major roads and international trunk (roads) as well as those leading to major urban areas as well as to regions of the country. This responsibility includes related facilities, including public lighting.

“Counties, on the other hand, are responsible for county roads, for example, those in the estates and streets and their related services such as lighting. The challenge is that national government entities like KURA and KERA have been performing some of these functions and have retained the related funds to the detriment of county governments. It is

unconstitutional, hence the contest over the transfer of functions to county governments. This is one of the key problems facing devolution.”

Bossuyt told *Africa in Fact* that for local governance to work well in Kenya and provide quality service delivery, the country needed, among other measures, to invest in civic education to educate citizens about their rights, foster inclusive governance, both the process and outcomes, strengthen existing accountability mechanisms; try innovative approaches, and institutionalise rule of law principles in the conduct of local affairs.

According to Juma, devolution in Kenya will work properly only if citizens are empowered through deliberate and continuous civic education to engage meaningfully to claim their sovereign rights as stipulated in the Kenyan Constitution. “All we need in Kenya is the strict implementation of the relevant constitutional and legal provisions, which only citizens can push for. The problem is that the government (national and counties) have not prioritised civic education and citizen empowerment,” Juma said. “Instead, this critical function has been led by civil society organisations, which rely largely on donor funding for their programmes, and they have been heavily affected by funding shortfalls.” [GGY](#)



ABOVE: A technician at the CNAO (Togo's national orthopaedic and physiotherapy centre) checks the last details of a 3D-printed prosthetic limb.

Togo decentralises with 117 new municipalities

By Blamé Ekoué

In recent years, the West African country of Togo has committed itself to the path of decentralisation, which led in 2020 to the first local elections in more than 30 years. However, over the past five years since the creation of 117 municipalities managed by majors, results have varied, with more work left to be done to meet the citizen's expectations.

Policymakers and civil society organisations believe decentralisation will accelerate Togo's progress towards achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals 2030. Indeed, analysts have tracked notable progress in education, health, sanitation, and access to drinking water, largely through the construction and renovation of infrastructure in all 117 municipalities. According to a report by a group of civil society organisations, 'On achieving the Millennium Development Goals' published in 2022, after a national survey carried out across all 117 municipalities, Togo has made significant progress in respect of five SDGs, including education.

But despite detailed planning, some local administrations have pointed to lack of funding as a major impediment to achieving all 17 SDGs. "Despite our goodwill, we are unable to meet all the expectations of the people in our municipality," Edoh Komi, the deputy mayor of the Golfe2 commune in the capital, Lomé, told *Africa in Fact*. "This is because we face a glaring lack of funding. The small allocation from the state is not enough to support our vision of achieving all the sustainable development goals in our municipality. Today, we are forced to target only certain priority goals, while we would have liked to invest in almost all sectors."

This lack of funding for local administrations leaves some decentralisation experts sceptical that effecting municipal development plans before the end of their mandate in 2025 is achievable, creating a knock-on effect on achieving the SDGs by 2030.

"At this rate, saying that we will be able to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2030 is an unrealisable dream," Ouro Bossi Tchakondo, a noted decentralisation expert, told *Africa in Fact*. "The [government] must review its decentralisation policy to allow local administrations to be much more financially autonomous, to create wealth that can be used to finance the development of their local communities."

To accelerate progress, the government has, since 2021, adopted a shared responsibility approach. This requires national government to contribute to the efforts of local administrations through co-financing and shared management in the priority sectors of education, health, and sanitation. Thanks to this approach, municipalities can now finance their projects in these key sectors.

“There are 36 neighbourhoods in our commune, Golfel, and one of the needs remains electrification,” explains Francis Pédro, a municipal councillor responsible for procurement in the commune. “We have developed a project to electrify 12 neighbourhoods per year to reach all neighbourhoods in three years. This project has dragged on to this day due to a lack of funding, but we aim to achieve SDG 7 (affordable energy access) in our municipality.” He also pointed out that his municipality had succeeded in building new health and education infrastructure last year thanks to locally mobilised funding.

Local administrations do benefit from a special allocation from the state thanks to a support fund for local and territorial authorities set up in 2019. Allocations are determined according to a certain number of criteria, which include the poverty index, the surface area, and the number of inhabitants in a municipality. The country’s 117 municipalities have received approximately \$24.5 million over three years.

Municipalities are also allowed to mobilise their own resources by implementing taxes and fees at a local level. This revenue increased from approximately \$23 million in 2020 to \$26.5 million in 2021. Local administrations are increasing initiatives aimed at mobilising additional resources to provide for the basic needs of their populations.

Germany, through the German Development Bank, has also stepped in. In November last year, the bank granted a financial package of more than 20 million euros to 69 municipalities. This will help finance social and economic infrastructure (schools,



markets, health centres), the development of project management capacity (procurement techniques) and strengthen the capacities of other staff.

To properly channel resources and ensure efficient management, the authorities have implemented controls. The first was a commission to study and assess the budgets of local authorities, made up of delegates from all 117 municipalities, as well as officials from the Ministry of the Economy and Finance.

In addition to the commission, any disbursement of funds for a project proposed for financing by a local administration must go through a monitoring mechanism at all levels. However, this



Photo: Plus Utomi Ekpeyi / AFP

TOP: Students in the village of Atome, Togo, look forward to attending their new school.

BOTTOM LEFT: Doctors treat patients for free in the hospital of Sotoubou, 300km north of Lomé.

BOTTOM RIGHT: A woman drinks water outside a hut in Tababou village, in the Savannah region in northern Togo.

sometimes delays project financing, giving rise to complaints that central government is attempting to maintain control and interfere in projects initiated by local administrations close to the opposition.

“These mechanisms are not [necessarily] a bad thing since they are aimed at healthy and transparent management of resources,” Edoh Komi told *Africa in Fact*. “But it must be said that sometimes this process drags out local administration projects while citizen expectations are numerous and urgent on the ground.

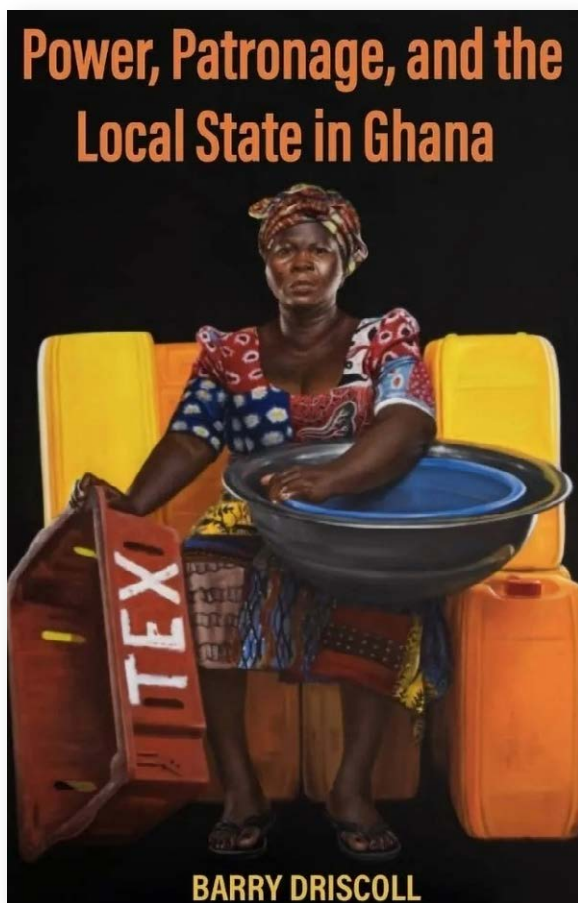
“Originally, these different control mechanisms were not supposed to be a brake on municipal development, but at this rate, we have the impression that they are since many projects drag on before being given the go-ahead or rejected. In Africa, you know, everything that politicians do is for political aims or considerations. So, if opposition mayors do not manage to implement their development projects by the end of their mandates because of these control mechanisms, the population will say that [the mayors] did not keep their promises. As a result, voters will vote for no confidence in the next local elections.”

One solution suggested by local government experts is that civil society is given the role of monitoring development project implementation, producing regular reports in a participatory, transparent, and inclusive manner and reviewing progress to hold all stakeholders, including local administrations, to account for progress or lack thereof.

Bossi Tchakondo told *Africa in Fact* that the authorities needed to review the decentralisation process to involve citizen action. This would ensure grassroots populations could play their part in monitoring and controlling initiatives aimed at achieving the SDGs. But right now, Togo is trying to combine local governance with achieving the SDGs while also focusing on promoting the transparency and accountability of local administrations.

Power and patronage in political competition

Power, Patronage, and the Local State in Ghana, by Barry Driscoll, published by Ohio University Press, Athens, Ohio (2023)



In *Power, Patronage, and the Local State in Ghana*, Barry Driscoll examines the unwritten rules and inner workings of clientelism (patronage and vote buying) in Ghana's politically competitive environment and its impact on the local state apparatus.

Driscoll puts forth that Ghana is a useful case study on competitive politics, mostly between the two main political parties, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP), for two main reasons.

Firstly, Ghana's history is representative of many developing countries in recent decades, having attained independence earlier than most in 1957 and going through several periods of structural adjustment and transition from authoritarianism. Despite the decentralisation of the state, the central government still retains important sources of control over the government's finances and personnel. Secondly, there is a troubling disconnect between Ghana's international image and the way Ghanaians view their country. Although Ghana remains one of Africa's star performers for its political stability and is viewed by outsiders as a model for its neighbours, its citizens from various

towns and villages view their country as a model of corruption, *rentierism*, and inequity.

To make sense of the complex relationship between power and patronage, Driscoll struck a balance between quantitative and qualitative research. Qualitative data was largely sourced from district chief executives, politicians, party activists, market traders, tax collectors, and other personnel in local state offices, and quantitative data was sourced from surveys covering almost all local governments.

His extensive study, conducted across six districts, primarily revealed that one of the greatest sources of pressure on local state actors, such as politicians and chief district officers, is not violent gangs, rent-seeking bureaucrats, landed elites, or boisterous opposition parties but rather the demands for favours coming from their own party supporters, and in turn how political party systems mediate the relationship between local state actors and the groups that keep them in power.

Equally, the author's findings showed that individual vote-buying is not as common in Ghana. In the cross-national surveys mentioned in the book, Ghanaians reported some of the lowest individual vote buying across 29 sub-Saharan African countries. Driscoll argues that the state's strong party system leads to low voter mobility between parties, so clientelistic parties only need to buy voter turnout rather than the vote itself.

The comparative analysis of the aforementioned groups of local state actors revealed a complex interplay of relationships. For instance, district chief executives (commonly referred to as chief executives) are uneasily situated between demanding forces from above and below. Driscoll puts forth that, from "above", they are "the president's men", expected to dutifully carry out the mandate of the president and his party since the president has the power to appoint and fire chief executives at will.

But from "below", in the eyes of the activists of

the governing party, a chief executive is "our man". This is because, according to party activists, the chief executive occupies their office. After all, activists got them there. This they accomplish by toiling to get their party into power in national elections as well as forwarding the name of the chief executive for the president to nominate in the first place. Yet again, for some district chief executives, the ability to ultimately control and manipulate party activists once in power is done through listening to them and being receptive to their demands. This means, for example, that it is not uncommon for certain NDC-controlled districts to provide more patronage than other NDC-controlled districts.

Even though Driscoll's research shows that party activists use their power to demand patronage from district chief executives, they are not always successful. Some featured cases show that chief executives can ignore or disregard party activists' demands and opt instead to negotiate with opposition assembly members to get the central government's plans underway. This is because in Ghana, although the ruling party holds executive control of the state, elections are sufficiently fair and usually closely fought to warrant and sustain the opposition's engagement, even if it is otherwise excluded from state rents.

The explanation developed throughout the book is that such scenarios mean that political competition shapes how exposed or vulnerable a politician is to their own supporters. In certain districts, the chief executives were found to be relatively insulated from demands for patronage from their own party activists because party electoral strength was not precariously balanced. This simply means that being a member of the ruling party, even as a party activist, is insufficient to ensure patronage.

Driscoll clarifies why there is a difference across states in response to patronage demands made by party members and activists. The difference

results from the variation in paths to power and consequently insulation/exposure while in office and their connection to the party apparatus, notwithstanding political competition during elections. This ultimately generates two types of candidates for local state office: chief district executives beholden to activists or those labelled as insufficiently partisan.

The chief executives beholden to activists are often inundated with requests that range from securing employment (be it blue-collar or white-collar jobs in government), preferential treatment when processing loans or documents such as birth certificates, or simply priority access to resources such as state-provided fertiliser. Suffice it to say, when campaigning for office, district chief executives do make such promises, which activists expect to be fulfilled. Featured in the book are cases of disgruntled party supporters, particularly youth, who were promised jobs and loans that they never received. Consequently, in some districts, this resulted in protests, that nonetheless had no impact.

Fascinatingly, Driscoll also shows that partisans with a strong desire to provide patronage may not necessarily undermine state capability by emphasising the role that patronage networks play in political rivalry and decision-making. This is because politicians may feel pressured to create more robust bureaucracies to fulfil their patronage-giving obligations.

Therefore, local governments often hire highly qualified civil servants to improve administration in politically competitive and patronage-giving situations. Evidently, what often constrains government workers and civil servants more is the lack of resources to perform their duties.

Overall, Driscoll's attempt to demonstrate, in great detail, the complexities of Ghana's local state and political environment in the quest to understand the dynamics of political struggle in developing nations enumerates the following broad lessons for the field of comparative study:

Firstly, observers of developing countries often fail to distinguish between the two aspects of clientelism: patronage and vote-buying. Driscoll puts forth that many examples of clientelism featured in his book would fit a general definition of corruption. Consequently, corruption can be disguised as clientelism.

Furthermore, varieties of clientelism are key to influencing the strength of party systems, meaning political systems can exhibit different forms of patronage, such that a country with very little vote buying like Ghana could still be highly clientelistic, which influences corruption levels.

Thirdly, bureaucrats are less constrained by their own incompetence or lack of resources but more by the general political environment in which they operate. The deeper challenge for some weak states may not be in hiring better bureaucrats but in negotiating mutually beneficial partnerships between state and non-state actors. This is because the government in Ghana relies heavily on its non-state actors, such as the private sector and non-governmental organisations, for information and funding.

Across the board, the evolving landscape of developing nations shows how decentralisation is not a "magical solution". Regrettably, clientelism, when left unchecked, is arguably the reason why decentralisation has often led to forms of corruption such as rent-seeking. [GGY](#)

Consequently, corruption can be disguised as clientelism.



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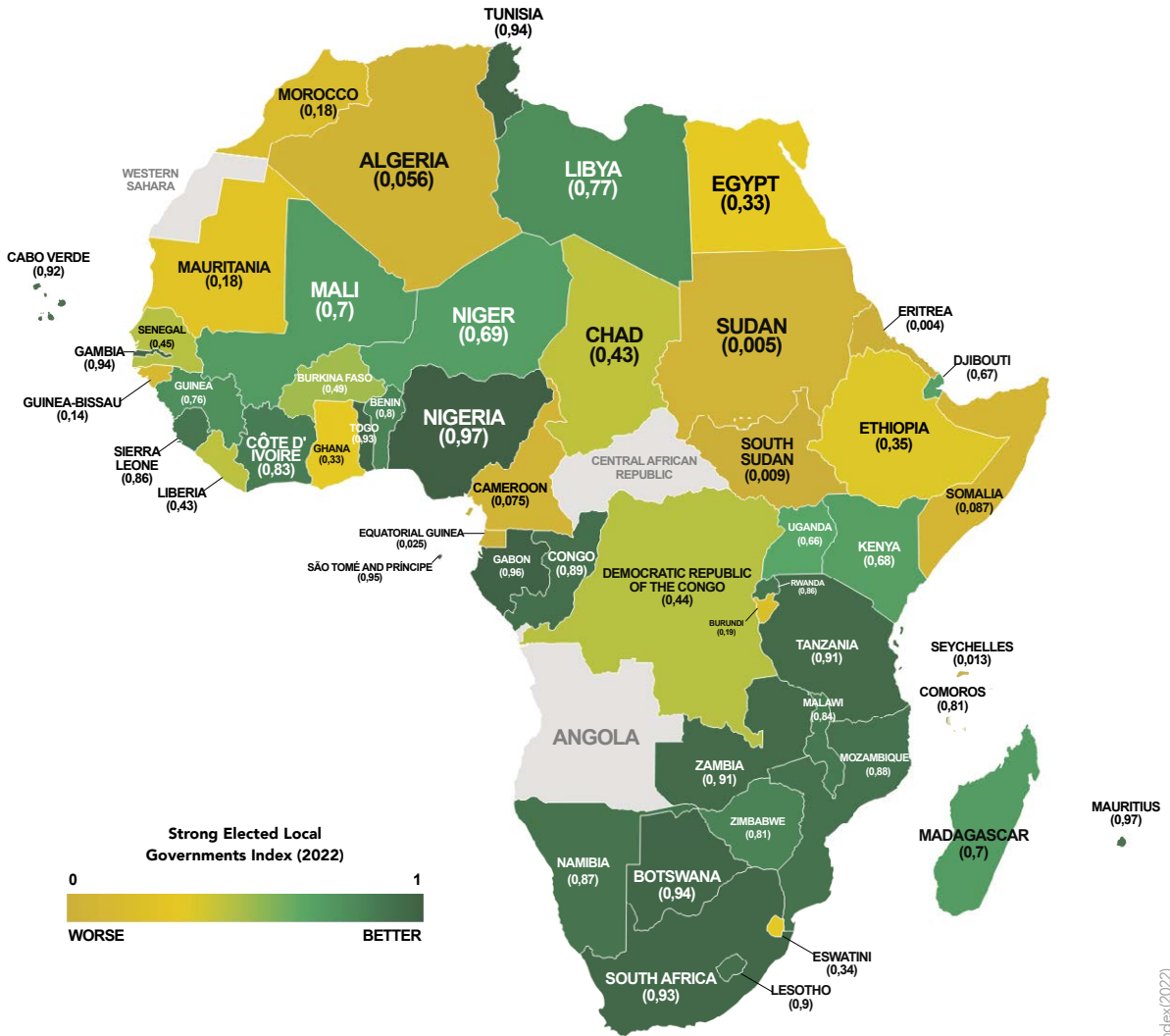
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AFRICA BY THE NUMBERS



Strong Elected Local Governments Index (2022)

BASIC STATE FUNCTIONS SCORES (2021) BY COUNTRY

Algeria	8,5	Djibouti	7	Libya	1,5	Seychelles	NA
Angola	6	Egypt	6,5	Madagascar	4,5	Sierra Leone	6
Benin	7,5	Equatorial Guinea	6	Malawi	7	Somalia	1,5
Botswana	8,5	Eritrea	5	Mali	4	South Africa	7,5
Burkina Faso	4,5	Eswatini	8	Mauritania	6,5	South Sudan	2
Burundi	5,5	Ethiopia	5	Mauritius	9,5	Sudan	2,5
Cabo Verde	NA	Gabon	7,5	Morocco	7	Togo	6,5
Cameroon	5	Gambia	7,5	Mozambique	5	Tunisia	7,5
Central African Republic	1,5	Ghana	7,5	Namibia	7,5	Uganda	6
Chad	4,5	Guinea	6	Niger	4,5	Tanzania	7
Comoros	NA	Guinea-Bissau	5	Nigeria	4	Zambia	7
Congo Republic	5,5	Kenya	5	Rwanda	7,5	Zimbabwe	6
Cote d'Ivoire	7,5	Lesotho	6	Sao Tomé and Príncipe	NA		
DR Congo	2,5	Liberia	7	Senegal	6,5		

*The Strong Elected Local Governments Index (2022) is based on the index by V-Dem. It measures the extent to which citizens can elect local governments which are free from influence of unelected local actors except for courts and ranges from 0 to 1 (strongest).

** The Basic State Functions scores (2021) is based on the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (2022). It measures the extent to which the state has the monopoly on the use of force and provides basic public services across the country. It ranges from 1 to 10 (most functioning).