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## EMERGING DEMOCRACIES

On November 8, 1989, the people of Namibia quietly started a revolution. For five days, they turned out in droves to line up for hours under the broiling sun to do something that they, their parents, and their grandparents had not been allowed to do: peacefully and openly choose their national leaders. An amazing 98 percent of registered voters turned out to elect 72 delegates to a constituent assembly that would draft a new constitution that would later lead to presidential elections and the formation of a new government.<sup>1</sup> Little did they know that their actions would reverberate far beyond their borders and mark the beginning of a slow but steady sweep of democracy across Africa.

And little did they know that exactly as they were voting, far away from their country, forces were under way that would bring about some of the most important political changes in world history. Five thousand miles away in Berlin, the very next day on November 9, the government of East Germany hurriedly opened many of the checkpoints dividing East and West Germany. The Berlin Wall was about to fall. Political relationships and systems around the world were about to undergo seismic changes, most obviously in Eastern Europe, but also in Namibia and in many countries across sub-Saharan Africa that had been under the long shadow of the Cold War. But it was not just the Cold War. Just nine weeks later on February 11, 1990, South Africa released Nelson Mandela from jail. Apartheid was beginning to crumble as well.

Namibia's elections were a long time coming. Germany's colonial occupation of the territory, known then as South West Africa, had ended

*Opposite:*

Liberian woman casts her ballot in the 2005 presidential election

(©2010 Benjamin Spatz)

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Wren, "Milestone in Africa: Namibians Vote their Future," *New York Times*, November 8, 1989, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/11/08/world/milestone-in-africa-namibians-vote-their-future.html>.

along with World War I. But South Africa's apartheid government took control, initially under a League of Nations mandate that lasted until 1946. When the League of Nations was dissolved in 1946, the newly formed United Nations pushed to end South Africa's rule and place South West Africa under a UN trusteeship. But South Africa refused to cooperate; instead it unilaterally and illegally annexed the territory.

In the mid-1960s, armed conflict began along the border with Angola between South African troops on the one side and the military wing of the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) on the other, supported by Angola and later Cuba. The South African Border War, as it came to be known, mixed apartheid with the Cold War in an ugly combination. The United States provided covert support to South Africa, while Russia, Cuba, and Angola all supported SWAPO. The war lasted more than 20 years.

Finally, in late 1988, South Africa, Angola, and Cuba agreed to a regional peace accord in a pact mediated by the United States, with the Soviet Union as an official observer. The agreement linked the withdrawal of South African troops and Namibian independence to the end of Soviet military aid and the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola.

It also paved the way for the historic 1989 elections. Namibian independence followed shortly thereafter on March 21, 1990. After decades of struggle—both violent and peaceful—Namibians finally could speak for themselves. Voters rode on crammed trucks, pedaled bicycles, or walked for hours through the bush just to vote.

"They feel like human beings," said the Rev. Liborius Ndumbu, an Ovambo priest at the Roman Catholic mission in the nearby settlement of Anamulenge.

"They have got rights; they are voting for the future of the country. . . . It is very exciting for them." . . .

"My dream has been fulfilled."<sup>2</sup>

The elections hardly solved all of Namibia's problems and by themselves were no guarantee of democracy, accountability, better governance, or increased prosperity. Elections, even fair ones, are not the same as democracy. The process of democratization is rarely smooth and does not happen all at once, and Namibia was no exception. Since independence, there have been conflicts and controversies over land reform, human rights, and President Sam Nujoma's decision to run for a third term in 1999, among many other issues. But over time, Namibia's democracy has

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2 Christopher Wren, "Namibian Voting is Eager and Heavy," *New York Times*, November 11, 1989, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/11/11/world/namibian-voting-is-heavy-and-eager.html>.

continued to mature and solidify. Mr. Nujoma stepped down in 2005, and Namibians elected Hifikepunye Pohamba as their second president. Namibia now ranks relatively high in observance of civil liberties, political rights, and other similar indicators.

Namibia's 1989 election was enormously important in its own right, but its significance spread well beyond the territory's borders. Although it was not obvious at the time, a new era of democracy in sub-Saharan Africa—fragile, imperfect, and uncertain—had begun.

## The Rise of the Big Man

Fifty years ago, as the great wave of independence movements swept across Africa, there was enormous hope for democracy and for competent, accountable governments. Citizens fully anticipated that the new governments would reverse the dictatorial practices of the colonial rulers and instead would work on behalf of all citizens to bring prosperity and development. Many independence leaders pledged to protect political freedoms and civil liberties and introduced constitutions that enshrined political pluralism. In some cases, the beginnings of competitive multi-party political systems began to emerge.

But once the initial post-independence leaders were installed, many quickly moved to seize full control. Nascent pluralistic systems gave way to authoritarianism and military rule. Power became concentrated in strong executives, with weak judicial and legislative branches easily co-opted to go along. Authoritarian governments allowed little dissent. They curtailed civil liberties and political freedoms, outlawed opposition parties, seized control of the press, weakened auditing and other public financial control mechanisms, and dismantled the few remaining institutions of restraint and checks on power.<sup>3</sup>

By the mid-1980s, in the years just before the dramatic changes in Namibia, almost every sub-Saharan African country was ruled by a dictator. The era of the African "big man" was at its zenith.<sup>4</sup> General Ibrahim Babangida was in the midst of his reign as president of the Armed Forces Ruling Council of Nigeria, with the tyrannical rule of Sani Abacha not to begin for several more years. Samuel Doe's disastrous dictatorship in Liberia had several more years to run before it would come to a bloody end, only to be replaced by 14 years of civil war dominated by the even worse Charles Taylor. Mobutu Sese Seko was two decades into his oppressive rule in Zaire. And the list went on.

<sup>3</sup> See Paul Collier, "Africa's External Relations, 1960-1990," *African Affairs* 90(3): 339-56.

<sup>4</sup> For a good discussion of Africa's "big men," see Todd Moss, *African Development: Making Sense of the Issues and Actors* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007).

Democracy was rare. Few countries met even minimum standards for democracies in terms of protecting fundamental political freedoms and civil liberties, or in establishing key institutions such as free and fair elections, representative government, and checks on executive power. This was evident in any of a wide variety of measures of democracy, such as Freedom House's *Freedom in the World* index and the University of Maryland / George Mason University *Polity IV Index of Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions* (see Box 3.1, page 68). Of the 48 countries in SSA, only three met basic standards of democracy captured by both of these indices in the mid-1980s: Botswana, The Gambia, and Mauritius. And The Gambia was soon to fall prey to a 1994 coup d'état, ending more than 25 years of democratic leadership.

Outside of these countries, most leaders weren't even bothering with a façade of democracy, much less the deeper substance of accountability to their citizenry. From 1985 through 1989, the five years preceding Namibia's election, competitive elections (in which an opposition party gained some presence in the national legislature) were held in just nine African countries.<sup>5</sup> Governance was dominated by strong-man presidents who faced few constraints on power—other than the threat of violent overthrow—and who could easily ignore inconvenient constitutional restrictions and laws with impunity.

The strong political hand was matched by a strong economic hand. Buttressed by the powerful currents of global ideologies of the 1960s and 1970s, most governments introduced wide-ranging state controls over the economy, including fixing exchange rates and interest rates, regulating a vast array of prices, running business empires extending from power companies to corner grocery stores, subsidizing favored private businesses, expanding the civil service, and introducing controls on imports and exports. These policies, dubbed as "control regimes" by the AERC Africa growth study, were at the heart of the downward economic spiral that began in the mid-1970s, as discussed in Chapter 4.

The political and economic systems were deeply intertwined. In the absence of competitive and accountable political systems, authoritarian governments had little need to implement policies that would benefit the majority of citizens; they instead funneled economic benefits to their key supporters: civil servants, protected businesses, labor unions, the military, and urban consumers. Farmers and others with little political clout were particularly vulnerable to losing out. Political scientist Robert Bates has demonstrated the link statistically: authoritarian governments in SSA, whether one-party states or military regimes, were far more likely to

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 7.

maintain strong economic control regimes than less authoritarian governments.<sup>6</sup> Whereas in other regions of the world, especially Asia, the relationship between authoritarianism and economic performance is ambiguous, in SSA it is clear: with few exceptions, authoritarian governments have had disastrous economic records.

And so it was that in the 1980s, as authoritarian governments tightened their grip, economic performance plummeted precipitously. Africa's development crisis was in full swing.

## The Forces of Change

Strong political and economic controls enabled many governments to maintain power for years, and in some cases decades, but these systems contained the seeds of their own ultimate destruction. The economic dynamics proved unsustainable, especially following the global oil shocks of the mid-1970s. As the world economy stalled, budget and trade deficits ballooned across SSA, investment declined, and capital fled. To finance the deficits, governments borrowed from abroad and printed money at home, generating both large debts and rising inflation. But once Mexico defaulted on its debts in August 1982, bank credit for African countries almost completely disappeared. Governments were forced to borrow at home from local banks and suppliers, but there wasn't much to borrow. Financing options were disappearing fast.

By the mid-1980s, many governments were running out of room to maneuver. Without financing, there was little choice: deficits had to be closed. And this meant painful choices to cut spending, reduce subsidies on food and fuel, cut health and education services, raise taxes, and devalue currencies. Governments were forced to turn to the International Monetary Fund to obtain emergency funding and debt rescheduling in return for adopting stringent reform programs. Although these reform programs—always controversial because of the tough austerity measures and struggles over the role of states and markets that are their core—generally succeeded in their immediate aim of closing deficits and bringing about some degree of macroeconomic stability, they did so at a cost, both economically and politically. And they had little impact, at least initially, on stimulating economic growth and creating clear benefits for most citizens. The economic benefits only accrued later.

But the austerity measures immediately and directly threatened the economic interests of the key beneficiaries of authoritarian rule. Civil ser-

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Bates, "Domestic Interests and Control Regimes," in *The Political Economy of Economic Growth in Africa, 1960–2000*, vol. 1, ed. Ndulu, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 185.

vants and union workers saw their pay cut or their jobs disappear. Urban consumers, including the military, watched electricity, food, and fuel prices rise and had to pay steep black-market premiums for scarce foreign currency. Protected businesses lost their subsidies and tariff protection.

Authoritarian governments in SSA had seen protests before. But in the past, they had always been able to respond to them by raising civil service wages, cutting university tuitions, or increasing subsidies for food or electricity. No more. As Bates put it, "Authoritarian governments appear to have fallen not because they faced more unrest but because they were unable to respond to it."<sup>7</sup> Many of the very groups that had supported authoritarian governments now turned on them. By the late 1980s, political protests were on the rise, often starting with university students and spreading to labor unions, civil servants, and other groups. The number of protests across the continent rose from fewer than 20 per year in the early 1980s to more than 50 in 1990, and continued to rise to more than 80 in both 1991 and 1992.<sup>8</sup>

The discontent was rooted in more than just lost economic benefits for the favored few—it was much more widespread. Basic beliefs, ideas, and opinions were changing as well.<sup>9</sup> Increasingly, civic leaders, bankers, economists, religious clergy, business leaders, and others in the intellectual elite began to recognize the failures of the past and to call for political and economic change. It was increasingly evident to them that, despite the claims of their leaders, the old systems were economically, intellectually, and politically bankrupt, as political scientists Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle observed:

In previous years, rewards and repression had served to quell unrest. Not so in the 1990s. Spurred by deepening economic distress and reacting against heavy-handed government tactics, protestors began to insist on political change. For the first time, narrow economic interests were superseded by calls for the ejection of national leaders and the reintroduction of plural politics.<sup>10</sup>

As these domestic forces led the way for change, international pressures pushed in the same direction.<sup>11</sup> Donor policies played a role, although they were secondary to other forces. Donors increasingly condi-

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7 Robert Bates, "Political Reform," in *The Political Economy of Economic Growth in Africa, 1960–2000*, vol. 1, ed. Ndulu, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 363.

8 Bratton and Van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments*, 3, 100.

9 Benno Ndulu, "The Evolution of Global Development Paradigms and Their Influence on African Economic Growth," in *The Political Economy of Economic Growth in Africa, 1960–2000*, vol. 1, ed. Ndulu, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), chapter 9.

10 Bratton and Van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments*, 104.

11 For a more in-depth discussion of the domestic and international forces behind political reform in Africa, see Bates, "Political Reform," and Bratton and Van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments*.

tioned their financial support on countries' adopting stabilization policies and moving away from controlled economies and toward more open markets, especially after the election of the Reagan and Thatcher governments in the United States and United Kingdom. While some countries became adept at avoiding these conditions (and many of the conditions were poorly designed), the shifting global consensus away from a strong economic role for the state and toward more flexible markets began to gain more widespread traction.

The most powerful international forces were the end of the Cold War and, alongside it, the demise of apartheid. As global power structures began to change, many authoritarian governments lost their patrons, eliminating both their financing options and the last remnants of their international legitimacy. Authoritarian governments could no longer turn to their old friends to bail them out with no questions asked. Economically, strong forms of socialism and state control lost credibility. Politically, growing calls for more pluralistic and competitive governments in Eastern and Central Europe were heard around the world, giving confidence and inspiration to protest groups across Africa.

On New Year's Eve in 1989, Frederick Chiluba, Chairman of the Zambia Congress of Trade Unions (and future president of Zambia), asked at a labor rally, "If the owners of socialism have withdrawn from the one-party system, who are the Africans to continue with it?" The next day in Nairobi, Kenya, the Reverend Timothy Njoya of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa used a New Year's Day sermon to argue that if one-party ideologies were collapsing in Eastern Europe, African governments also should shift toward democracy.<sup>12</sup> African citizens were not just angry. Now they were emboldened.

Changes began to unfurl rapidly in the late 1980s and early 1990s, at least in many countries. The sequence of events varied across countries, and of course in some countries there was little change at all. But a general pattern began to emerge. The austerity measures of the mid-1980s were followed by a rise in political protests, which, according to a careful analysis by Bratton and Van de Walle, peaked in 1991.<sup>13</sup> Many governments responded to the protests by beginning to introduce reforms to guarantee civil liberties, which reached an initial peak in 1992. This was followed by an upswing in competitive political elections, which rose from no more than 2 per year in the 1980s to 14 in 1993. Almost in tandem, governments began to adhere to greater political rights, which surged to an initial peak

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<sup>12</sup> As cited in Bratton and Van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments*, 105.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-6.

in 1994, the year that Nelson Mandela rose to the presidency of South Africa.

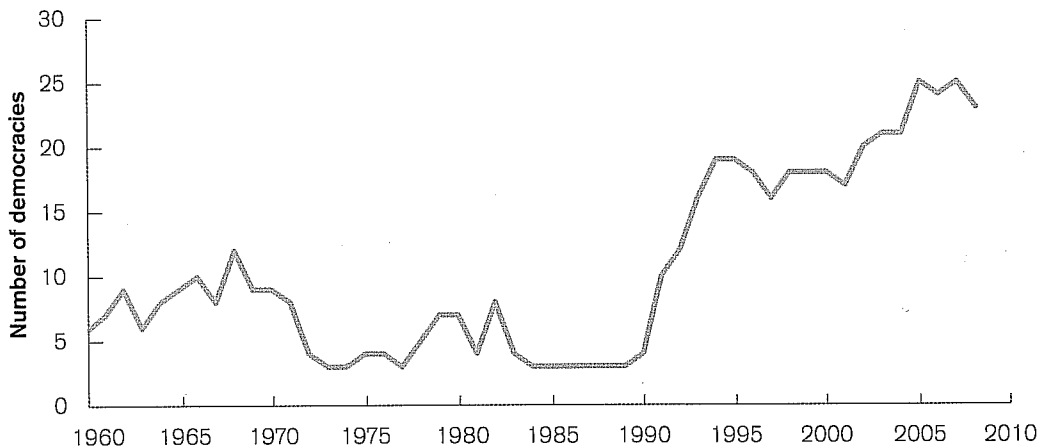
The push toward democracy was on.

### The Spread of Democracy, 1989–2008

Today, just two decades after Namibia’s historic elections, the political landscape has changed dramatically. Using the Freedom House and Polity IV indicators, the number of democracies in SSA rose from 3 in 1989 to 23 in 2008 (Figure 3.1). Following Namibia, the change began in earnest in 1991—the year of the dissolution of the Soviet Union—when Benin, Cape Verde, Comoros, Madagascar, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Zambia all began to shift toward democracy. In South Africa, the end of apartheid in 1994 ushered in a new era across the southern region of the continent. By 1994, Lesotho, Mozambique, Malawi, and South Africa had joined the ranks of the new democracies.

In the early years, the changes were rapid. According to Bratton and Van de Walle, between 1990 and 1994, 38 African countries held competitive elections—quadrupling the number of the previous five years—and the average share of legislative seats held by opposition parties tripled from 10 to 31 percent. They count 29 of the 38 as “founding” elections, meaning that the position of head of government was openly contested following a period in which political competition had been denied. Eleven sitting

**FIGURE 3.1 The Rise of Democracy in Africa**



**Source:** Author’s calculations, based on the methodology and sources described in Box 3.1. To count as a democracy, a country must score four or less on the average Freedom House index and zero or greater on the polity index from Polity IV.

presidents were voted out of office during that first flurry of elections, with Benin's Kerekou the first to go. Three more presidents decided not to seek re-election.<sup>14</sup> An unmistakable change was under way.

But by the mid-1990s, there were worries that democratization in SSA had stalled or even was beginning to erode. Between 1994 and 1999, only Ghana joined the ranks of emerging democracies, and several countries took steps backward, including Comoros, the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville), The Gambia, Niger, and Zambia.

But the death of Nigeria's brutal dictator Sani Abacha in June 1998 led to the election of Olusegun Obasanjo the following year and launched Nigeria's fragile and incomplete move toward democracy. Ghana held elections in 1992 and 1996 and solidified its change in 2000 when it elected an opposition candidate, John Kufuor, to succeed Jerry Rawlings. It repeated the process in a very close, well-run, and peaceful election in early 2009 by electing opposition candidate John Atta Mills (Rawling's former vice president) to succeed Kufuor. By 2002, Kenya, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Zambia had joined the ranks. And the end of the civil war in Liberia ushered in a new era of democracy with the elections of October 2005, in which Ellen Johnson Sirleaf became the first woman elected head of state in Africa.

This change is remarkable: in just 20 years, Africa has gone from almost no democracies to nearly half the continent under democratic rule. It is all the more extraordinary because so many of the countries are among the poorest in the world, and it was long thought that democracy wasn't really feasible for low-income countries. Yet when Mozambique became a democracy in 1994, it had an income per capita of just US\$130, making it one of the poorest countries in the world. Of SSA's 23 democracies, 12 have incomes per capita below US\$600. *Never before in history have so many low-income countries become democracies in so short a time.*

The shift toward popularly elected governments in these countries was a watershed achievement. Consider the account in the *New York Times* of Sierra Leone's 2002 elections following a decade of brutal war:

On Election Day in Sierra Leone, the exhilaration was palpable at a camp for those with hacked-off limbs, the injuries that defined the horrors of that country's civil war. Among them was Lamine Jusu Jarka, whose hands were cut off in a rebel attack in 1999. Mr. Jarka voted by stamping his ballot sheet with an ink-stained toe. "This morning, I am voting for the future," he said.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 7, 197.

<sup>15</sup> Rachel Swarns and Norimitsu Onishi, "Africa Creeps Along Path to Democracy," *New York Times*, June 2, 2002, <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/06/02/world/africa-creeps-along-path-to-democracy.html>.

The dramatic changes in political competitiveness have been most evident in the executive branch of power, but to some extent have extended to legislatures, as shown in Table 3.1, panels a and b, respectively. With respect to the executive, 36 of 46 countries in 1990 had an executive that was either unelected or elected in a contest with only one candidate. By 2006, there had been nearly a complete flip, and only nine leaders were chosen that way; in 36 countries, multiple parties competed and won votes, and the winner received less than 75 percent of the votes. A similar pattern of change is evident in legislative contests. In 1990, 35 countries had no legislature, an unelected one, or an elected one with only one party. By 2006, only six legislatures had those characteristics. Instead, 37 legislatures included multiple parties, with the largest party receiving less than 75 percent of the vote. Competitive politics had arrived in SSA.

**TABLE 3.1 Politics Have Become More Competitive in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Score	Description	No. of countries	
		1990	2006
<b>a. Executive index of political competitiveness, SSA</b>			
7	The largest party received less than 75 percent of the votes	7	23
6	Multiple parties competed and won votes <sup>a</sup>	1	13
5	Multiple parties are legal, but only one won votes <sup>b</sup>	0	0
4	One party, multiple candidates	0	0
3	Elected, one candidate	20	5
2	Unelected executive	16	4
1	No executive	0	0
	N/A	2	1
<b>b. Legislative index of political competitiveness, SSA</b>			
7	The largest party received less than 75 percent of the seats	3	29
6	Multiple parties competed and won seats <sup>a</sup>	6	8
5	Multiple parties are legal, but only one won seats <sup>b</sup>	0	2
4	One party, multiple candidates	16	1
3	Elected, one candidate	7	1
2	Unelected legislature	2	2
1	No legislature	10	2
	N/A	2	1

a But one party won 75 percent or more of the seats.

b Because other parties did not exist, compete, or win seats.

**Source:** World Bank, Database of Political Institutions (updated 2010), <http://go.worldbank.org/2EAGGLRZ40>. See Thorsten Beck, et al., "New Tools in Comparative Political Economy: The Database of Political Institutions," *World Bank Economic Review* 15(1): 165–176.

But elections alone do not make democracies. Democracy requires the protection of basic civil liberties and human rights; the establishment of public institutions that are accountable to their citizens and that limit the power of their leaders; and the recognition of rights of freedom of expression, assembly, and the press, among other dimensions. These changes do not come about overnight, nor do they follow automatically from elections.

But they are beginning to happen in Africa—slowly, unevenly, imperfectly, but unmistakably—alongside freer and fairer elections. Three key developments stand out in the shift to democratic governance.

**1. There is a clear shift away from the politics of the individual big man toward institutionalization of power and adherence to basic rules of the game.**

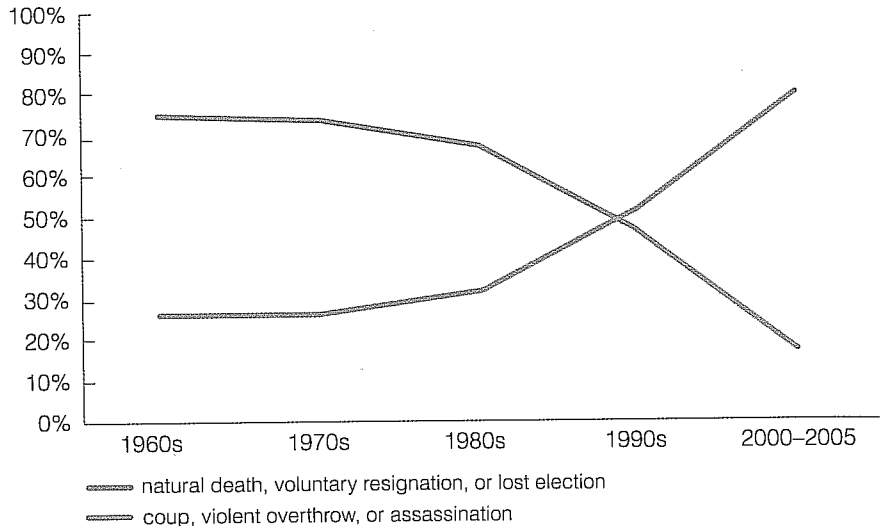
The formal institutions and rules that had been so easily ignored in the past are beginning to matter in many countries. Political scientists Daniel Posner and Daniel Young have pointed out that from the 1960s through the 1980s the vast majority of African rulers left office through some form of violent overthrow, but since 1990 the reverse is true. The majority leave office through elections, resignations, or other institutionalized processes. More specifically, between 1960 and 1980 nearly three-quarters of African leaders left office through violent overthrow or assassination—more than three times the global average—whereas between 2000 and 2005 only one out of five succumbed to violent overthrows, about equal to the global average (Figure 3.2).<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, Posner and Young point out that, more than ever before, new leaders face far greater constraints that limit them from keeping power indefinitely. More countries now constitutionally limit the president to two terms in power, and term limits are more likely to be honored and attempts to circumvent them more likely to fail, especially in the democracies. Since 1990, only one country among SSA's 23 democracies—Namibia—has successfully amended a constitution to allow a third term (there were only five other such amendments among SSA's nondemocracies). By contrast, in 15 cases term limits were honored, either because there was no attempt to amend the constitution (12 cases) or the attempt to do so was unsuccessful (3 cases).<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Daniel N. Posner and Daniel J. Young, "The Institutionalization of Political Power in Africa," *Journal of Democracy* 18(3): 126–140.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 132. Posner and Young list nine countries that had no attempt to amend the constitution, but they restrict their analysis to countries that adopted new constitutions after 1990. In addition to their list, Botswana, Mauritius, and South Africa have honored term limits.

**FIGURE 3.2 Political Leadership Change: Coups are Out, Elections are In**  
Manner of Departure from Power as Share of All Transitions



Source: Adapted from Daniel N. Posner and Daniel J. Young, "The Institutionalization of Political Power in Africa," *Journal of Democracy* 18(3): 128.

In addition, legislatures and other government institutions of restraint such as court systems, local governments, and electoral commissions are slowly growing stronger. As political scientist Joel Barkan has observed, "Once the rubber stamp of the executive, or non-existent during periods of military rule, [African legislatures] have begun to assert their independence as players in the policymaking process, as watchdogs of the executive, and as organizations that respond to the demands of civil society."<sup>18</sup> African legislatures remain weak in relation to the executive, but are much stronger today than they were 15 years ago, and they are increasingly important players in setting policy agendas and restraining the power of presidents and chief executives.

**2. There have been substantial improvements in the extent to which civil liberties and political rights are honored and enforced.**

Governments are much more likely to support basic rights of freedom of speech, the press, and assembly, alongside other basic civil liberties and political rights. In today's 23 democracies, the Freedom House scores on the protection of civil liberties (on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 the best and 7 the worst) improved substantially, from an average score of 4.9 in 1990 to 2.8 in 2008. In some countries the change was even more dramatic: Ghana, for example, recorded a dismal 6 in 1991, but today its score is 1.5. The improve-

<sup>18</sup> Joel Barkan, "African Legislatures and the 'Third Wave' of Democratization," in *Legislative Power in Emerging African Democracies*, ed. Joel Barkan (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2009), 1.

ment in the protection of political rights across all these countries was even larger, with the average score improving from 5.2 in 1990 to 2.7 in 2008.

In many countries, people are beginning to see change with respect to basic rights, as captured by this sentiment following the 2002 elections in Mali:

“Justice prevails a little more,” said Sulamo Djiguiba, a wizened old man who was contemplating democracy on Election Day. “During the military regime, soldiers would just come and arrest us and make us work for the army or on their farms. Now that doesn’t exist. We are free. We can go where we like.” Ansema Djiguiba, 25, agreed. “The mayor and his representatives come and we have the right to talk about our needs without fear,” he said. “They have dug wells for us. Some villages have schools. But we are still asking for more help. Many people are still hungry.”<sup>19</sup>

In addition to civil liberties and political rights, a wide range of other governance indicators have significantly improved, as we explore later in this chapter. The press in the emerging democracies is much more active, with far more radio, newspaper, magazine, television, and internet outlets. The discourse in the press is far more open and active (even if the reporting is not always accurate!). All across the continent, but especially in the democracies, new media outlets have emerged, exposing corruption, demanding results, keeping officials accountable for their actions, and opening the space for greater political discourse and dissent.

**3. There has been significant growth in a wide range of civil society groups, nongovernmental organizations, “watchdog” groups, and other voices aimed at monitoring government actions and improving transparency and accountability.**

As Stanford University political scientist Larry Diamond points out, a combination of older civil society organizations in Africa that date back to the colonial and immediate postcolonial periods—including student associations, trade unions, and religious bodies—and newer groups working explicitly for good governance and democracy such as think tanks, bar associations, human rights groups, women’s groups, civic education groups, and election monitoring organizations, are helping to keep governments accountable:

To a degree far beyond the early years of nationhood, the construction of democracy in Africa is a bottom-up phenomenon. Nongovernmental organizations are teaching people their rights and obligations as citizens, giving them the skills and confidence to demand accountability from their rulers, to expose and challenge corruption, to resolve conflicts peacefully, to pro-

<sup>19</sup> Swarns and Onishi, “Africa Creeps Along.”

mote accommodation among ethnic and religious groups, to monitor government budgets and spending, to promote community development, and to recruit and train new political leaders. Civic groups are also working at the national level to monitor elections, government budgets, and parliamentary deliberations; to expose waste, fraud, and abuses of power; and to lobby for legal reforms and institutional innovations to control corruption and improve the quality and transparency of governance.”<sup>20</sup>

The change toward deeper democracy, increased accountability, and greater legitimacy in Africa since 1990 is unmistakable. But the changes are far from perfect, and they are far from complete. Just as it is critical to battle the pervasive pessimism and negativism that typically are used to characterize Africa, it is equally important not to be overly sanguine about Africa’s dramatic political changes. These changes are a very promising beginning. But they are still new, and still fragile. It takes decades to build the institutions, public attitudes, expectations, checks on power, and other systems required for democracy to become firmly established. It took more than a century for democracy to solidify in Western Europe, and the process continues to unfold in Eastern Europe today. It took the United States 185 years to achieve universal suffrage, with numerous violent conflicts, a very bloody civil war, disputed elections, and abuses of basic human rights along the way. The process is neither fast nor easy.

Nor are there any guarantees of ultimate success. If history is any guide, it is likely that some countries unfortunately will reverse course and return to autocratic rule. Other countries may oscillate for many years, at times moving more toward democratic rule and openness only to lurch back toward more controlled systems, perhaps followed by some reopening, never quite reaching full democracy nor returning to autocratic rule. Democratization is rarely a linear and orderly process.<sup>21</sup>

In fact, several countries in SSA once considered democracies have shifted back into nondemocratic rule. The Gambia, one of Africa’s three democracies in 1989, took a huge step backward in 1994 when Lieutenant Yahya Jammeh launched a coup and overthrew democratically elected President Dawda Jawara. The Central African Republic, the Republic of Congo, Comoros, and Guinea-Bissau all took initial steps toward democracy only to slip back later (more recently, Comoros and Guinea-Bissau have again met the threshold for democracy, but remain tenuous).

One of the most tragic situations in recent years occurred in Kenya, which had shown great promise following the election of 2002 in

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20 Larry Diamond, *The Spirit of Democracy: The Struggle to Build Free Societies Throughout the World* (New York: Times Books, 2008), 256.

21 Thomas Carothers, “The End of the Transition Paradigm,” *Journal of Democracy* 13(1): 5–21.

which Daniel arap Moi was persuaded not to run and peacefully stepped aside after 24 years as president. But the violence following Kenya's next election in late 2007 was a sobering reminder of the difficulty of establishing strong democratic norms, institutions, integrity, and a sense of fairness. Kenya followed a pattern that has been repeated throughout history all too often, including by many of the Western countries along their long path of democratization. And, of course, there continue to be difficulties in many African countries that do not meet the basic standards of democracy, including most recently Zimbabwe's marred elections.

The good news is that Kenya's and Zimbabwe's experiences are less the norm than they once would have been. Other elections in 2007, 2008, and 2009 went more smoothly, and as is usually the case when things go well, they received much less press coverage and international attention, and therefore had less influence on public perceptions.

Consider Zambia, which entered a new period of enormous political uncertainty following the death of President Levy Mwanawasa in August 2008. A close election followed on October 30, 2008, in which Rupiah Banda of Mwanawasa's MMD party won 40 percent of the vote over Michael Sata (38 percent), and Banda was sworn in on the same day. Although Sata claimed fraud and there were some demonstrations and unrest, independent monitors found the election to be generally free and fair, and overall the transition went much more smoothly than might have been the case.

Or Ghana, which showed great democratic maturity during its elections of 2008–09. President John Kufuor stepped down after eight years, and John Atta Mills defeated Nana Akufo Addo by the narrowest of margins: 50.2 percent to 49.8 percent. Voter turnout for the second round on January 2, 2009, was 73 percent (easily besting 61 percent turnout in the 2008 U.S. presidential election). While the results were close, there was no violence and there was a peaceful and successful transfer of power to an opposition party.

While in some African countries democracy remains tenuous, in others—in fact in the majority—it has continued to solidify. Of the 17 SSA countries that became democracies between 1990 and 1995, 16 are democracies today. Fourteen SSA countries consistently have met the standards for democracy for at least 13 consecutive years. Each has held multiple elections and has had at least one peaceful leadership transition through the ballot box, an occurrence almost unheard of before 1990. In other words, *the countries that began shifting toward democracy in the early 1990s are far more likely to have stuck with it and deepened democracy than reversed course.*

Africa's democracies are not perfect, and it is easy to find weaknesses. But, as Van de Walle puts it, imperfections should not diminish recent improvements:

The gloomy view tempts us to hold African democracies to impossibly strict standards of liberal democracy, standards that even mature Western democracies cannot meet consistently. . . . Obvious imperfections should not blind us to the clear improvement in competition and participation that the 1990s have brought. We must not forget that even if day-to-day politics fall short of democratic ideals, the typical SSA country is measurably more democratic today than it was in the late 1980s.<sup>22</sup>

## Democracy in the Emerging Countries

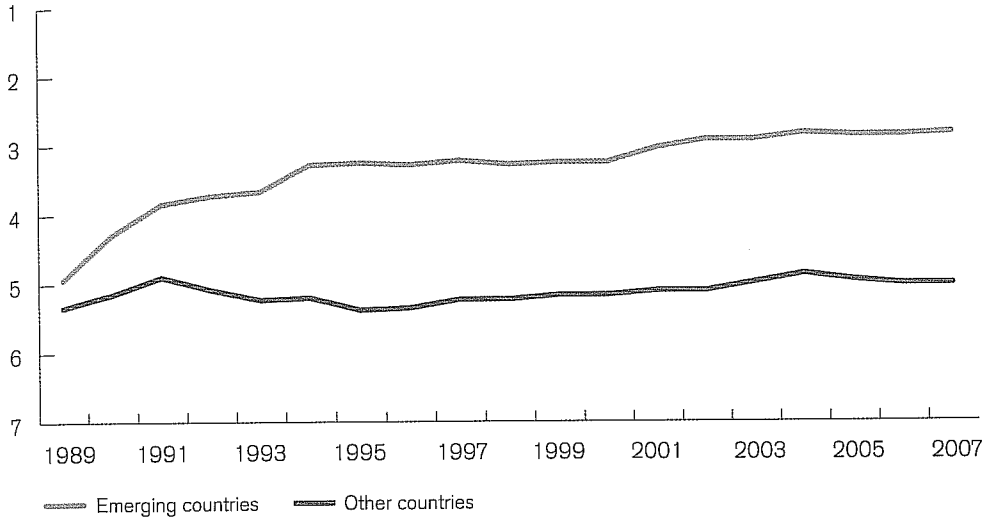
The discussion so far has been about the shift to democracy across SSA as a whole. What about in the 17 emerging countries? It turns out that the shift to democracy in these countries has been even more pronounced than for the continent as a whole. Thirteen of the 17 emerging countries meet the basic Freedom House and Polity IV standards to be considered democracies, and the other four have shown important shifts in that direction.<sup>23</sup> In addition, all six of the threshold countries meet the basic democracy standards. In most countries, the shift toward democracy and basic freedoms since the early 1990s has been quite dramatic. This change is critical for the future of the emerging countries, as it provides a cornerstone for continued growth and development.

Let's look more closely at the changes in the Freedom House and Polity IV scores for the emerging countries. The scores have improved substantially since 1989. The average Freedom House civil liberties score (scale 1 to 7, with 1 the best score) has improved from 4.9 to 2.8 over 20 years, while the improvement in the political rights score has been even larger, from 5.4 to 2.9 (Figure 3.3 shows the average of these two scores). At the same time, the average Polity IV score (scale -10 to 10, with 10 the best score) has improved from -3.9 to 4.6, a huge change.

Every one of the emerging countries has improved its Freedom House scores since 1989, with the single exception of Botswana, which already had an excellent score (Table 3.2). The same is true for all six threshold countries. In most cases the improvement has been quite large. For example, Mozambique has improved from 6.5 to 3.0, and Cape Verde has moved from 5.5 to 1.0. In only three countries have the gains been relatively small: Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Uganda. A similar pattern is evident in the Polity IV scores, with clear improvement in measures of democratic institutions in almost every one of the 17 countries.

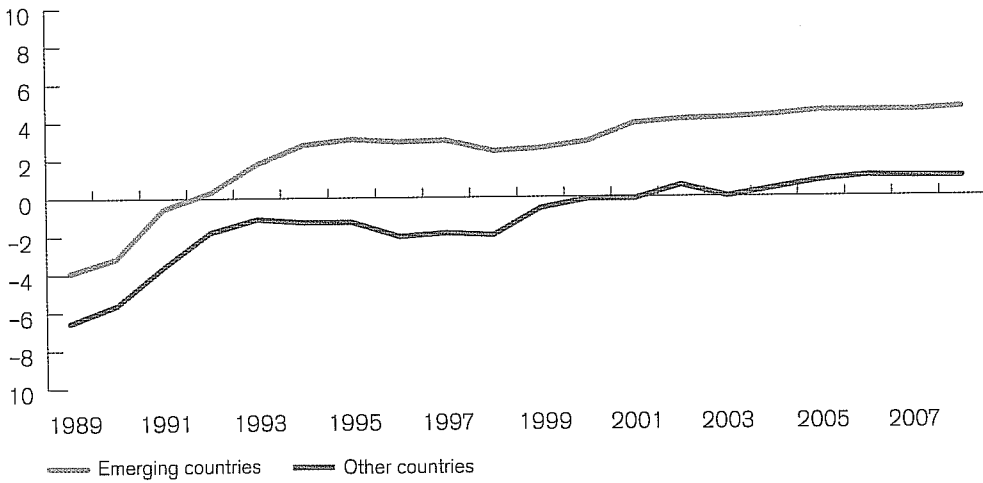
22 Nicolas van de Walle, "Africa's Range of Regimes," *Journal of Democracy* 13: 66-80.

**FIGURE 3.3 Political Rights and Civil Liberties Are Rising . . .**  
 Freedom House Scores: Average of Political Rights and Civil Liberties Scores



Source: Freedom House.

**FIGURE 3.4 . . . And Democratic Institutions Are Gaining Strength**  
 Polity IV Scores



Source: Polity IV Index.

## From Democracy to Governance

Beyond these basic indicators, a critical question is whether the shift to *democracy* has corresponded with improved *governance* in a broader sense, including in areas such as reduction in conflict, adherence to the rule of law, less corruption, and more effective government institutions. This is a central question for the sustainability of the emerging countries' progress into the future. It could easily be the case that countries achieve basic democratic standards without actually improving the quality of governance, or that countries improve their governance without necessarily moving toward democracy. But neither has been the case: overall in the 17 emerging countries, measureable improvements in governance have gone hand in hand with the shift toward democracy.

To begin with, there has been a significant reduction in political violence. The 1970s and 1980s were periods of intense violence across SSA, with cross-border and civil wars, assassinations, and riots affecting nearly every country across the region. As the economic crisis deepened, the Cold War came to an end, and apartheid began to collapse, political violence briefly surged in the early 1990s alongside intense political uncertainty.

But as the transition to democracy took root, incidents of political violence fell sharply, especially in the emerging countries. The most comprehensive database on political violence has been put together by Professor Arthur Banks of the State University of New York (Binghamton). Banks includes a broad range of different types of violence, including assassinations, general strikes, guerrilla warfare, government crises, purges, riots, revolutions, and antigovernment demonstrations. Looking at all of these different types of violence, between 1980 and 1995 the emerging countries saw an average of 26 violent incidents every year. But after 1996, the number of incidents dropped to an average of five per year (Figure 3.5). Political violence also declined in oil exporters and other SSA countries, but not nearly as sharply.

Turning to other dimensions of governance, let's look at the World Bank Institute's Worldwide Governance Indicators, perhaps the most widely used data measuring the quality of governance. They include six broad indicators of governance: political stability and nonviolence, rule of law, voice and accountability, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, and control of corruption. The data go back to 1996, far enough to see changes over a period that roughly coincides with the improved growth rates of the emerging economies.

For SSA as a whole, the indicators show no overall change in the average quality of governance since 1996. But the lack of change in the aggre-

**TABLE 3.2 The Shift to Democracy in the Emerging Countries**

Freedom House and Polity IV Scores

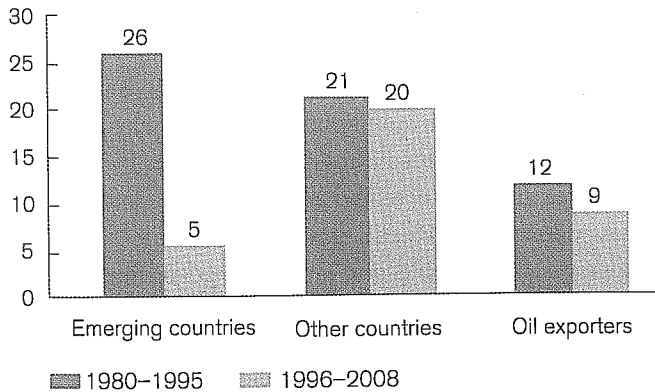
Emerging Countries	Freedom House		Polity IV Score	
	7 = worst score 1 = best score	1989	2008	-10 = worst score +10 = best score
Botswana	1.5	2	7	8
Burkina Faso	5.5	4	-7	0
Cape Verde	5.5	1	N/A	N/A
Ethiopia	7	5	-8	1
Ghana	5.5	1.5	-7	8
Lesotho	5.5	2.5	-7	8
Mali	6	2.5	-7	6
Mauritius	2	1.5	10	10
Mozambique	6.5	3	-7	6
Namibia	3.5	2	6*	6
Rwanda	6	5.5	-7	-3
São Tomé and Príncipe	5.5	2	N/A	N/A
Seychelles	6	3	N/A	N/A
South Africa	5.5	2	4	9
Tanzania	6	3.5	-6	-1
Uganda	5	4.5	-7	-1
Zambia	5.5	3	-9	7
<b>Threshold Countries</b>				
Benin	7	2	-7	7
Kenya	6	3.5	-6	6
Liberia	5.5	3.5	-6	6
Malawi	6.5	4	-9	6
Senegal	3.5	3	-1	8
Sierra Leone	5.5	3	-7	7

\* Namibia's Polity IV score in 1989 is not available, but subsequent scores rate it consistently with a 6.

Source: Freedom House and Polity IV.

**FIGURE 3.5 Political Conflict Has Fallen Sharply in the Emerging Countries**

Average Number of Domestic Conflict Incidents per Year



Source: Cross-National Time-Series Data Archive, [www.databanksinternational.com](http://www.databanksinternational.com).

gate disguises two opposing trends: *on each governance indicator, the emerging countries have shown clear improvement on average, while other countries in the region have registered clear deterioration* (Figure 3.6).

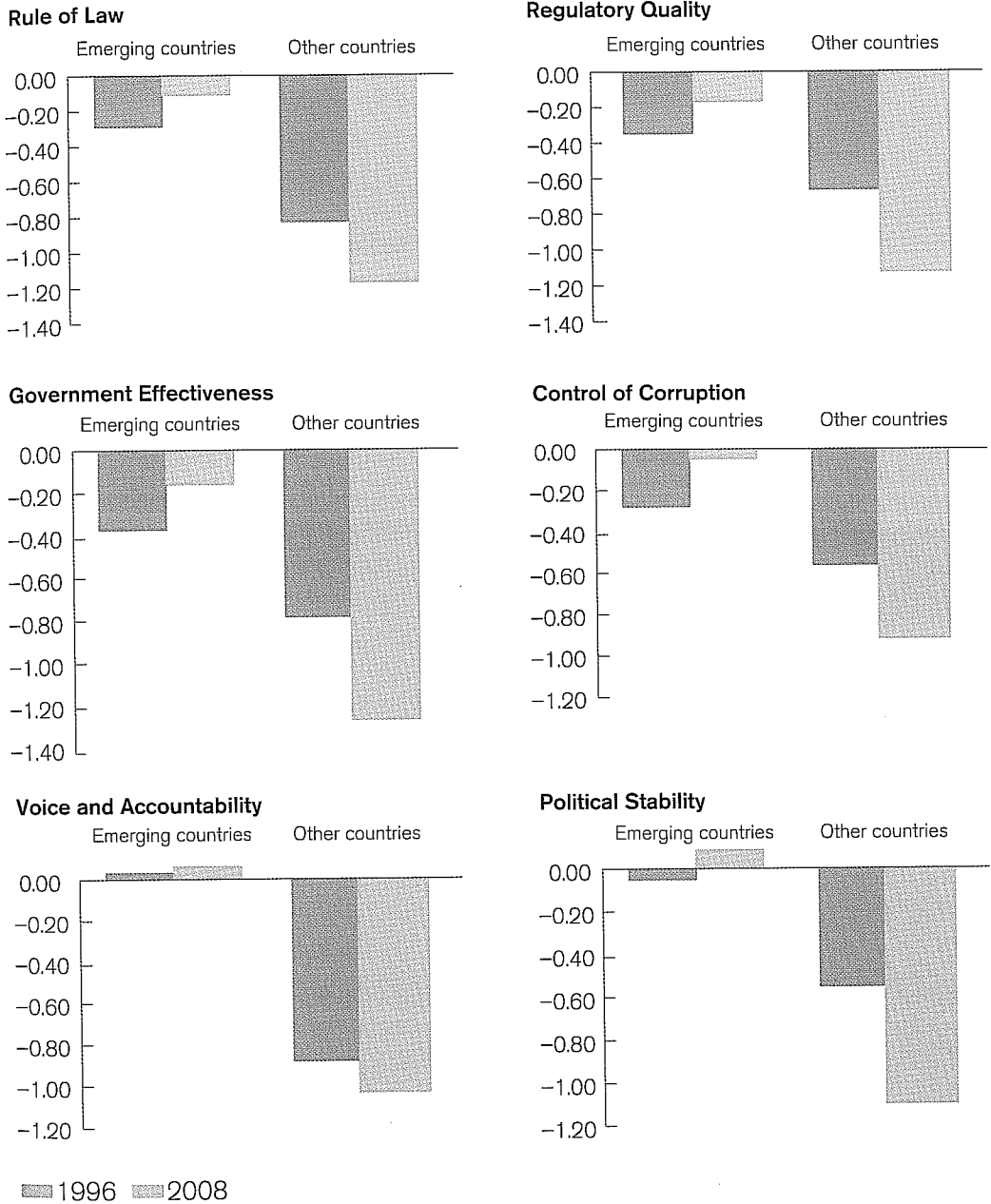
For example, on control of corruption, the average score for the emerging countries has improved from  $-0.28$  to  $-0.05$  (the global scores range from about  $-2.5$  to  $+2.5$ , with  $0.0$  the global median). The average country ranking has improved from 104th to 89th between 1996 and 2008. But at the same time, for other countries in SSA, the average control of corruption score worsened from  $-0.57$  to  $-0.92$  and the average country ranking fell from 140th to 148th. A similar pattern is evident in the other five governance indicators. Notably on two of the indicators—"voice and accountability" and "political stability"—the emerging countries' score is now higher than the worldwide median.

Thus, since the mid-1990s Africa's emerging countries have seen accelerated economic growth, a shift toward democracy, and improvements in governance. What is the relationship among the three? It appears that they are connected in a virtuous circle in which improvements in one area help support improvements in the others. In most cases, the Freedom House and Polity IV scores began to improve first, but the acceleration in economic growth and improvement in governance began very soon thereafter. It is probably the case that the strengthening of democracy helped improve the quality of governance, but improvements in the quality of governance almost certainly have helped sustain democracy. Similarly, the improvements in democracy and governance have helped put into place better economic policies that have helped accelerate growth, while the faster growth rates have helped deliver tangible benefits to citizens that reinforce the shift to democracy and better governance. While dictatorship, poor governance, and weak economic performance created a self-reinforcing negative cycle during the late 1970s and 1980s, since the mid-1990s democracy, stronger governance, and improved economic performance have created a positive self-reinforcing cycle, with each supporting improvements in the others.

But what really matters is the future. In the emerging countries there has been a fundamental shift in the quality of leadership, away from the days when dictators used national resources as their personal assets and toward governments that actually serve and are accountable to their citizens. These changes bode well for Africa's emerging economies. The shift toward more democratic, accountable, and legitimate governments with improved governance provides a strong foundation to sustain and accelerate the progress they have achieved since the mid-1990s. Other changes under way should help reinforce this trend, as we will see in the chapters that follow.

### FIGURE 3.6 Governance Is Improving in Emerging Africa, but Worsening Elsewhere

Worldwide Governance Indicators (a score of zero is the median for all countries in the world)



Source: World Bank Institute, Worldwide Governance Indicators 1996–2008, accessed July 2009.

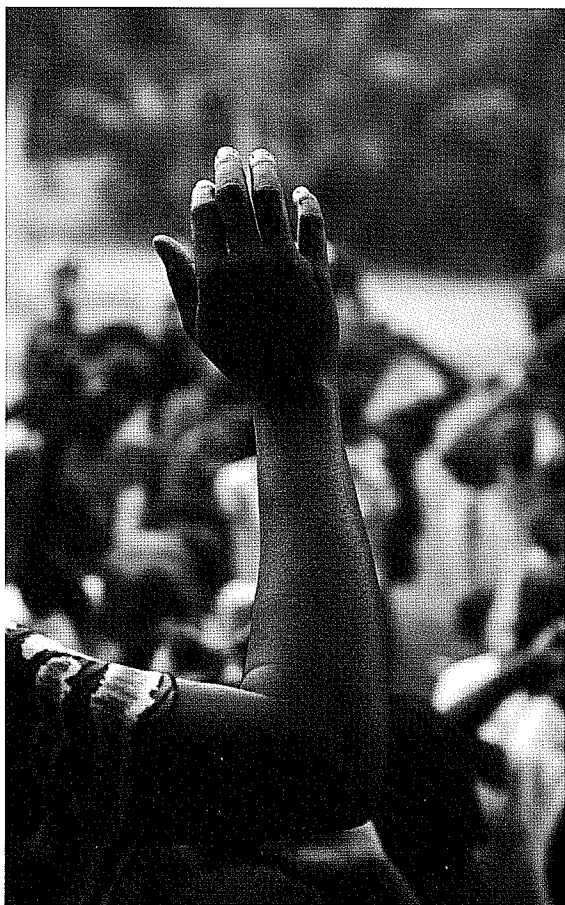
### Defining Democracy

Deciding which countries are democracies is far from straightforward: there is no universally accepted definition. No single institution or event constitutes democracy. Competitive elections are a key component, but elections alone cannot guarantee true democracy. It is a process rather than an event. It has many facets, including popular sovereignty through either majority rule or representation; freedom of speech and the press; the rule of law; protection of minority rights, civil liberties and basic human rights; civilian control over the military; and systems for accountability and checks on power.

There are, however, several internationally recognized indices and rankings of democracies. Two of the most widely used are Freedom House's *Freedom in the World* index and the University of Maryland/George Mason University *Polity IV Index of Political Regime*

*Characteristics and Transitions*. The two indices capture different but complementary characteristics usually associated with democracy. Both are used here to categorize countries as democracies.

Freedom House is primarily a *rights-based* index that provides a comparative assessment of the extent to which political rights and civil liberties are honored. The Freedom House index does not explicitly measure democracy, but rather focuses on the basic rights and freedoms that are generally seen as integral to democracy. Based on a checklist of 25 questions, the index gives 193 countries and territories around the world a score from 1 (the highest level of freedom) to 7 (the lowest level) on two separate indices of political rights and civil liberties. The two scores are averaged to determine an



overall “freedom status” for each country. Freedom House considers countries and territories with a combined average score of 2.5 or below to be “free,” those with scores between 3 and 5 to be “partly free,” and those with scores of 5.5 or above to be “not free.” Those in the “free” category are generally considered to be democracies, along with some in the “partly free” group. For our purposes, a country must be in the top half of the Freedom House rankings with a combined score of 4 or below to be considered a democracy.

The Polity IV index focuses primarily on *institutions*. It is based less on judgment than on measurable characteristics of regime type and political authority. The polity index measures the competitiveness and openness of elections, constraints on executive power, regulations on political expression, the duration of regime type, and other institutional measures of authority and governance. Thus, Polity IV focuses on measuring the authority that the government wields, whereas Freedom House aims to measure the freedoms that the government protects.

The hallmark composite Polity variable is a 21-point measure ranging from -10 (most autocratic) to +10 (most democratic). Most analysts consider countries with a score greater than zero to be democracies, and that is the standard that we use.

Countries that achieve both standards (a Freedom House score of 4 or below and a Polity IV score of 0 or above) are considered democracies in this book. (Polity IV does not have scores for Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe, or the Seychelles, but because of their strong Freedom House scores, they count as democracies here). The two indices generally are consistent with each other, as would be expected. Greater political freedoms and stronger political institutions typically go hand in hand. Seven countries meet one standard but not the other in the latest Freedom House (2008) and Polity IV (2008) scores: Djibouti, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Tanzania, Nigeria, Côte d’Ivoire, and Ethiopia. Using the combined standard, only three countries in sub-Saharan Africa were democracies in 1989; by 2008 the number had grown to 23.