



**GOOD
GOVERNANCE:**
**Strengthening
trust between
people and their
leaders**

Institutional resources for overcoming Africa's COVID-19 crisis and enhancing prospects for post-pandemic reconstruction

*"The policymakers' approach in the process of preparation of the modern state for the next pandemic, necessarily, involves the transformation of **public finance** and **public administration**, the backbone of any country's economic and social development, and the key instrument for the success of design and implementation of government policies and plans, respectively. This process will require a break with the old assumptions, and a bet on new and modern paradigms, approaches, and working methods."*

Madame Luísa Dias Diogo, Former Prime Minister and Former Minister of Planning & Finance, Mozambique

Popular explanations for Africa's "lucky escape" from COVID-19's most devastating effects have largely focused on the continent's natural endowments, especially its youthful population and warm weather. When Africa's own agency is recognized, though, observers tend to give credit to its governments' early and aggressive lock-

down measures and consistent messaging about wearing face masks.¹²² While such early government actions likely saved thousands of lives, Africa's citizens, who largely complied with extremely inconvenient top-down measures even where governments' administrative and enforcement capacities were weak, deserve praise as well.

Importance of political capital in pandemic crisis management and recovery

Ordinary Africans' contribution to the success of lockdown programs highlights the importance of state legitimacy and trust in government

for securing compliance with necessary but arduous government orders, especially those vital to public health and safety.¹²³

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¹²² Kevin Marsh and Moses Aloba, "COVID-19: Examining Theories for Africa's Low Death Rates," *The Conversation*, October 7, 2020.

¹²³ Danielle Resnick, "Trust in Science and in Government Plays a Crucial Role in COVID-19 Response," *International Food Policy Research Institute*, June 10, 2020. Mark Lawrence Schrad, "The Secret to Coronavirus Success is Trust," *Foreign Policy*, April 15, 2020. See also Robert A. Blair et al., "Public Health and Public Trust: Survey Evidence from the Ebola Virus Disease Epidemic in Liberia," *Social Science & Medicine* 172 (January 2017): 89-97, which highlights the extent to which trust in government was a critical resource for securing the public cooperation necessary to overcome the 2014-2016 Ebola outbreak in West Africa.

An examination of recent COVID-related events and Afrobarometer surveys in 34 African countries can provide more insight into this phenomenon. For example, Ghana has relatively strong institutions, with free media, strong opposition parties, and independent judiciaries. Before the pandemic, in Afrobarometer's 2016/2018 surveys, Ghana's core state institutions enjoyed very high levels of perceived legitimacy (84 percent), and President Nana Akufo-Addo was trusted by 70 percent of citizens. In contrast, Malawi ranked lowest in perceived institutional legitimacy (53 percent), and its then-president, Peter Mutharika—before losing his bid for re-election in June 2020—enjoyed the trust of just 36 percent of Malawians (Figure 6.1).

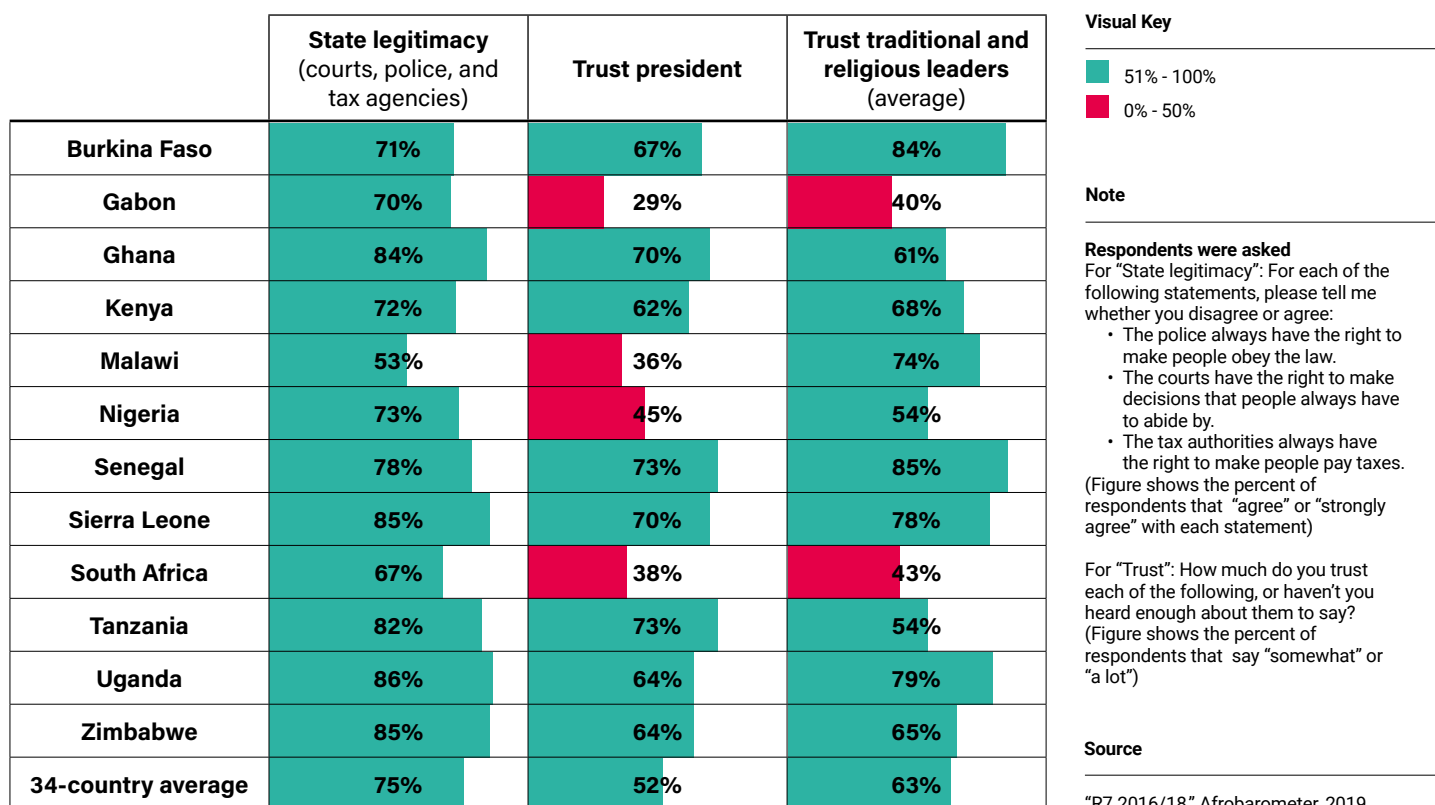
As the pandemic set in, public responses to COVID lockdowns varied significantly: Ghanaians accepted the lockdown measures their president announced in March 2020 even be-

fore the subsequent unveiling of economic and social relief packages. Malawi's government, on the other hand, has faced considerable public resistance to anti-pandemic measures, including a successful court case challenging a lockdown on the basis of undue economic harm.¹²⁴ Other factors, such as Malawi's relatively greater poverty, may also play a role in the two peoples' divergent responses to COVID-19 measures, but it seems likely that perceptions of their leaders and institutions helped shape citizens' willingness to follow their dictates.

Another pairing makes a similar point: In Senegal, where 73 percent of citizens expressed trust in the president, the COVID-19 response has drawn international praise,¹²⁵ while Nigeria (where trust for the president hovers around 45 percent) has contended with widespread flouting of public health guidelines and the looting of government warehouses storing COVID-19 relief supplies.¹²⁶

FIGURE 6.1
POLITICAL CAPITAL OF LEADERS, SELECTED COUNTRIES

High levels of state legitimacy and trust in presidents can support an effective response to a crisis. In countries with deficits in these assets, trust in traditional and religious leaders might be an especially valuable resource when responding to crises.



¹²⁴ Rabson Kondowe, "This Country's High Court Blocked Its Coronavirus Lockdown in a Bid to Protect the Poor," *Quartz Africa*, April 17, 2020.

¹²⁵ "Coronavirus in Senegal: Keeping COVID-19 at Bay," *BBC*, October 4, 2020.

¹²⁶ Percy Dabang and Angela Ukomadu, "In Nigeria, Looters Target Government Warehouses Stocked with COVID-19 Relief," *Reuters*, November 9, 2020.
"COVID-19: Can Nigeria Avert Another Lockdown?" *APA News*, May 6, 2020.

Enhancing prospects for overcoming Africa's COVID-19 crisis and post-pandemic reconstruction

If political capital can aid in the management of a pandemic, then African leaders must aim to create an environment for its conservation or enhancement as they confront COVID-19 and the next crisis.

But threats to public trust are often on the horizon, especially in times of crisis: Reports of irregularities and corruption in the management of COVID-19 funds and relief not only impede the effectiveness of those measures but also undermine trust and legitimacy in government leaders and core institutions.¹²⁷

Excessive reliance on coercion in the enforcement of COVID-19 measures can be detrimental as well.¹²⁸ Similarly, attempts by some governments to leverage the pandemic to introduce repressive legislation and curb media freedoms and other civil liberties will only erode the democratic governance gains of the past 20 years and likely face significant popular pushback.¹²⁹

African governments can shore up their deficits and strengthen their responses to COVID-19 and

other crises by tapping into the political capital of informal leaders, such as religious and traditional leaders. On average, almost two-thirds (63 percent) of Africans expressed trust in these non-elected leaders (69 percent for religious leaders and 57 percent for traditional leaders), although these trust levels, too, vary widely by country, from just 40 percent in Gabon to 85 percent in Senegal (Figure 6.1). Indeed, some African presidents have recognized this organic institutional resource and explicitly mobilized it in managing the pandemic through consultations with informal leaders (South Africa) and public acknowledgements of their important contributions in sensitizing and encouraging compliance in their communities (Nigeria and Uganda).¹³⁰

In conclusion, African governments will be in much better position to effectively overcome the COVID-19 crisis and enhance prospects for post-pandemic reconstruction if they show true commitment to conserving and deepening domestic political capital, strengthening the social contract with their citizens, and governing accountably.

While early government actions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 likely saved thousands of lives, Africa's citizens, who largely complied with extremely inconvenient top-down measures even where governments' administrative and enforcement capacities were weak, deserve praise as well.

¹²⁷ For example, Pearson's r for the correlation between trust in the president and perceived corruption in the office of the president for Afrobarometer Round 7 is $-.387$, significant at the 0.01 level. See Michael Bratton and E. Gyimah-Boadi, "Do Trustworthy Institutions Matter for Development? Corruption, Trust, and Government Performance in Africa," *Afrobarometer Dispatch* 112 (August 2016).

¹²⁸ In April, Kenya and Nigeria reportedly had more citizens killed by security agents "enforcing" pandemic-related restrictions than by the coronavirus. See Alison Sargent, "Curfew Crackdowns in Several African Countries Kill More People than COVID-19," *France24*, April 17, 2020. "Coronavirus: What Does COVID-19 Mean for African Democracy?" *BBC*, May 15, 2020.

¹²⁹ Uganda, where the government has used COVID-19 regulations as a pretext for cracking down on the opposition and media (see "Authorities Weaponize COVID-19 for Repression," *Human Rights Watch*, November 20, 2020), is just one of 80 countries where Freedom House says the state of democracy and human rights has deteriorated during the pandemic (Sarah Repucci and Amy Slipowitz, *Democracy Under Lockdown* (Washington, D.C.: Freedom House, 2020)).

¹³⁰ Riaan Grobler and Tshidi Madia, "COVID-19: Ramaphosa Consults with Traditional Leaders on Lockdown," *News24*, May 23, 2020. "COVID-19 Lockdown: Buhari Sends Message to Christians, Muslims, Traditional Leaders," *Bioreports*, 27 April, 2020. Rimiliah Amandu and Clement Aluma, "Religions Play a Crucial Role During Uganda's Lockdown," *LSE*, April 17, 2020.

All of us together: Governing Malawi

When I took the oath of office as Malawi's newly elected president on June 29, 2020, I was fully aware that I may very well be the last member of my generation to hold the office of president in my country. I felt the unique burden that destiny had placed upon me of transferring the task of nation-building from my pre-independence generation to a rising generation of Malawians born free. To put this within its historical context, Malawi's founders completed the task of national liberation in the 1960s, their sons and daughters achieved political liberation in the 1990s, and now what remains is the goal of economic liberation.

We are united in the conviction that there can be no new Malawi if the only people deemed guilty of ruining our country in the past are those who lost the recent election, or if the only people deemed responsible for fixing our country going forward are those of us who won the election.

The goal of economic liberation has been elusive for many years, largely because we have had one administration after another shifting its post to the next election. What's worse, leaders from my generation have not only left our homeland unbuilt, but also in ruins. In clearing this rubble, we must not point fingers at a particular section of our society as the only ones responsible. We are each in some way part of the problem and must each in some way be part of the solution.

It is this sense of shared responsibility for our problems and shared participation in the solutions that characterizes our administration. We are united in the conviction that there can be no new Malawi if the only people deemed guilty of ruining our country in the past are those who lost the recent election, or if the only people deemed responsible for fixing our country going forward are those of us who won the election. This is the bedrock of what we have come to call the "Tonse Philosophy" that guides our "Tonse Alliance" of nine parties, so named to capture the essence of the vernacular word "Tonse," which means "all of us together."

***His Excellency
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Chakwera***

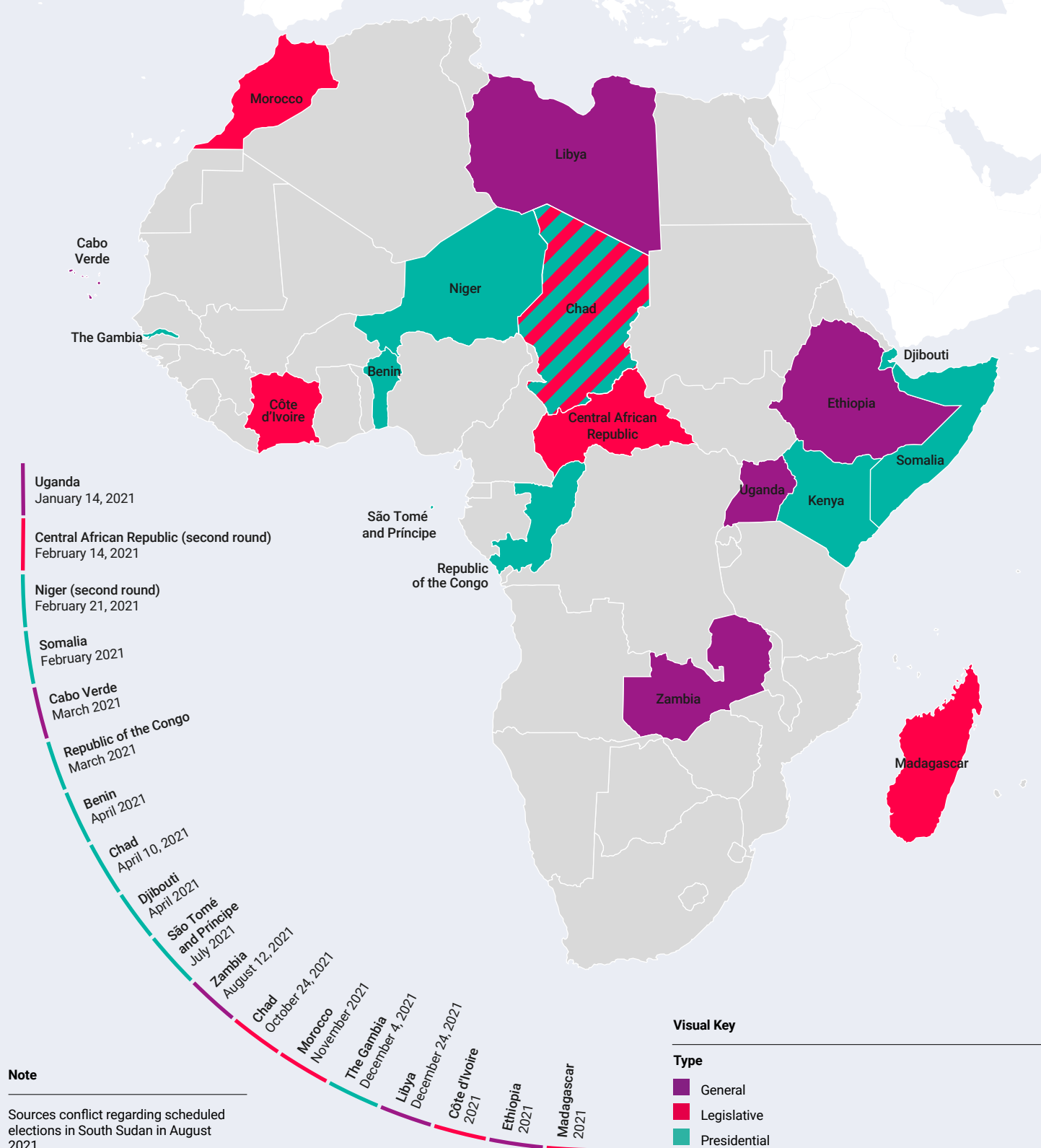
President of the Republic
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To practice this philosophy, we are facilitating a nationwide mindset change dialogue to foster behavioral synergy around five core values we have dubbed the SUPER Hi5 Agenda: Servant Leadership; Uniting Malawians; Prospering Together; Ending Corruption; and the Rule of Law. All our policies are guided by this template, including our approach to foreign policy and our strategy for attracting foreign direct investment, so that it can now be said with sincerity that Malawi is the most robust and stable democracy in Africa and the best place to do business.

FIGURE 6.2 ELECTIONS IN 2021

In 2021, 16 African countries will hold general, presidential, or legislative elections. Several of these elections, such as those in Ethiopia and Somalia, were delayed from 2020 due to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic on in-person voting. These challenges are likely to persist throughout much or all of 2021, but African countries now have successful examples of pandemic elections—such as those in Malawi and Ghana—off of which to build.



Voting in a pandemic: Lessons for elections in Africa in 2021

Elections are large-scale community-based events that thrive on participation, as well as transparency and confidence to ensure their credibility. For this reason, in Africa, with limited provisions for early voting or alternatives to in-person voting in many countries, the COVID-19 pandemic is placing the integrity of elections at risk. While some countries have postponed their elections due to the pandemic, many others have chosen to move forward during this trying time. However, since COVID-19 will remain a reality in 2021, its associated risks, including reduced campaigning; decreased voter turnout; and less transparent, but more expensive elections may undermine the public's trust and, thus, democracy more broadly.

African elections held early on in the pandemic have compelled urgent adaptations and innovations to electoral processes and timelines. Burkina Faso was forced to reduce the inspection period for the voters' register, while Côte d'Ivoire introduced online checking of the voters' register. Nigeria widely publicized its COVID-19 electoral policy framework, increasing transparency for interested parties. In the Central African Republic, a dedicated poll worker is responsible for ensuring voters abide by COVID-19 mitigation measures. Malawi increased its use of social media to distribute COVID-sensitive voter education materials, relying on animation instead of human actors.

Planned national and local elections in 2021, such as those in Ethiopia, South Africa, Uganda, and Zambia, will face greater pressures to replicate these lessons. In an era when elections face a major trust deficit, election authorities need to act even-handedly when it comes to things like election campaigns. How authorities enforce rules for election campaigns, such as crowd sizes or the absence of masks at campaign rallies, will influence voters' perceptions of their independence. Unequal enforcement of COVID-19 rules will sway voters' views of bias easily.

Elections in 2021 will come under greater scrutiny as election observation resumes. Election authorities will need to increase transparency on critical procurement decisions, changes to the electoral calendar, credibility of voter registers, and accessible complaints mechanisms, while simultaneously increasing access to the ballot for marginalized voters and improving the use of trusted and appropriate technology. Similarly, governments will be asked key questions about sufficient election funding and the timely release of such funds to ensure the electoral process is not delayed.

And, of course, there is the logistical challenge of holding campaigns and elections during a pandemic. Political parties need to adapt their campaigns to increasingly use radio and social media rather than in-person events, but gaps in technology and, in many places, the policing of social media hinder such efforts to reach voters. Voters themselves must be assured that sufficient COVID-19 safety measures have been enacted at the polls.

Given all these obstacles, supporting electoral systems and increasing trust in democracies will be put to the test in Africa in 2021, but, given the region's resilience, it's a test it can pass.

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Governance in Africa: Citizen dissatisfaction is growing, and COVID-19 is likely to reverse recent gains

The most recent release of the Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG)¹³¹ indicates that, while progress has been made in overall governance performance on the continent over the last decade—as of 2019, over 6 in 10 of Africa’s citizens live in a country where governance is better than in 2010—this progress has slowed down in the latter half of the decade. Indeed, in 2019, average year-on-year governance performance fell for the first time since 2010.

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We’ve witnessed not a huge drop—barely 0.2 points—but that decline is a warning sign that needs to be monitored and addressed. Undeniable gains in human and economic development have been achieved. But they are not able to offset deteriorating performances, often at a worsening pace, regarding security, rule of law, participation, rights, and inclusion. This reality underscores a deeper truth: There can be no sustainable trade-off between progress in human and economic development and disdain for citizen participation, rights, rule of law, and transparency.

There can be no sustainable trade-off between progress in human and economic development and disdain for citizen participation, rights, rule of law, and transparency.

Africa’s citizens are increasingly dissatisfied

Because citizens must be at the heart of governance, the 2020 IIAG includes a new section—*Citizens’ Voices*—mirroring the main IIAG results¹³² around citizens’ perspectives.¹³³ In more than half of the 39 countries sampled, citizens are less satisfied with governance performance than 10 years ago. Moreover, this dissatisfaction has been worsening since 2015, reaching its lowest level since 2010 last year. Given that over 60 percent of Africa’s population is under 25, attention must be paid to this growing mistrust, as mistrust from youth could easily turn to frustration and anger.

¹³¹ The 2020 Ibrahim Index of African Governance, with an updated framework and strengthened indicators sourced from 41 official, expert, and public perception data sources, provides key, if often sobering, insights on African governance performance and trends over the last available decade (2010-2019).

¹³² At category and sub-category levels.

¹³³ From a sample of citizens in 39 countries representing around 87 percent of Africa’s population.

COVID-19 risks reversing the positive gains, but is also a key opportunity to reset current models

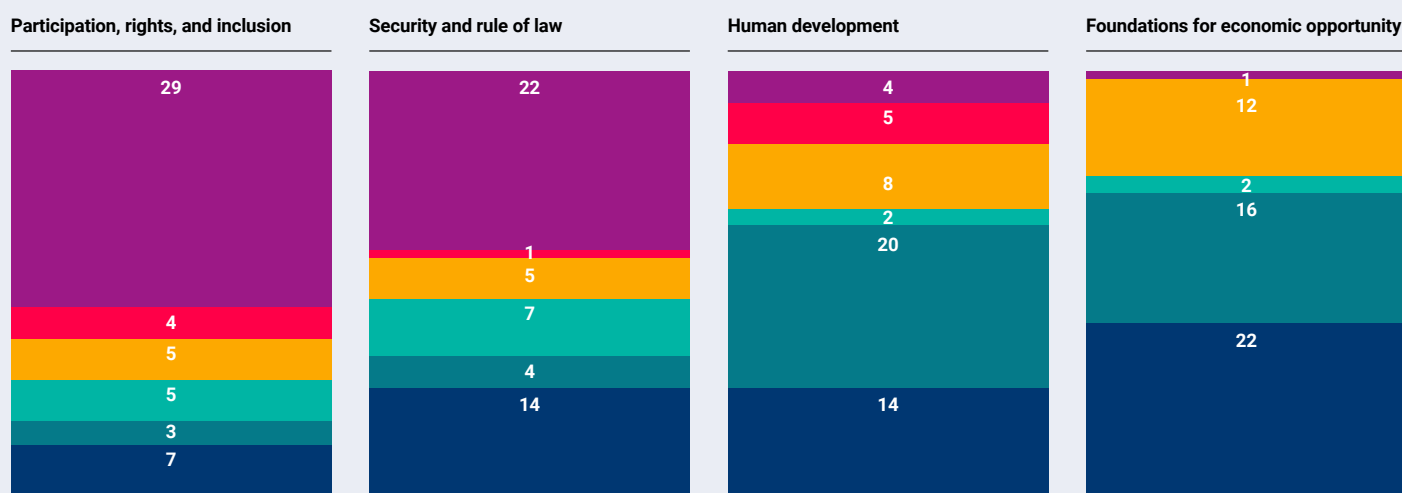
COVID-19 is set to exacerbate governance's existing challenges and reverse positive gains achieved. Even if the virus only mildly hits Africa's population, the continent's still-weak health systems are already overstretched. The number of out-of-school children has risen alarmingly.

Postponed elections and excessive lockdown measures have further deteriorated the democratic and rights landscape as well as civil society space. But the most concerning impact of COVID-19 for Africa is economic and social, with recession predicted in Africa for the first time over the last 25 years. Such an event could threaten to reverse the gains obtained over the last decade in economic and human development, which up to now had been the main drivers of overall progress on the IIAG as governments have gained greater ability to provide public goods and services to their people.

However, history has taught us that no momentous change has ever taken place without being triggered or forced by a major crisis. So maybe COVID-19 presents us with the opportunity to re-think, rather than merely re-build, a new growth model—one that is more sustainable, more resilient, more job-creating, and more inclusive.

FIGURE 6.3
AFRICAN COUNTRIES: IIAG CATEGORIES, NUMBER OF COUNTRIES PER TREND CLASSIFICATION (2010-2019)

According to the Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG), over the past decade, performance in "Participation, Rights & Inclusion" and "Security & Rule of Law" has deteriorated, while, at the same time, "Human Development" and "Foundations for Economic Opportunity" have improved.



Visual Key

Trend classification

- Increasing deterioration: Decline over the last ten years, with the rate of decline increasing over the last 5 years
- Slowing deterioration: Decline over the last ten years, but the rate of decline is slowing over the last 5 years
- Warning signs: Progress (or no change) over the last ten years, but showing recent decline over the last 5 years
- Bouncing back: Decline (or no change) over the last ten years, but showing recent progress over the last 5 years
- Slowing improvement: Progress over the last ten years, with the rate of improvement slowing over the last 5 years
- Increasing improvement: Progress over the last ten years, with the rate of improvement increasing over the last 5 years

Source

Mo Ibrahim Foundation, *Ibrahim Index of African Governance* (London: Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2020).

Biden, democracy, and Africa

President Joe Biden has committed to restoring American leadership globally. With the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, this task became immensely more challenging. For Africa, nevertheless, this will translate into an American policy that strives to respect the people and governments on the continent.

Respect for democratic governance—which the president has called not only the foundation of our society, but the “wellspring of our power”¹³⁴—will also be at the top of his policy agenda. Given Donald Trump’s effort to overthrow our election and the violent breach of the U.S. Capitol, the Biden administration needs to speak up for democracy and human rights at home and globally more than ever, a point made by my Brookings colleague, Thomas Wright.¹³⁵

Indeed, a desire for democratic governance is part of the connective tissue between Americans and Africans: Afrobarometer finds that 7 of 10 Africans aspire to live under democratic governments. A greater majority reject authoritarian or autocratic rule, presidents-for-life, and military rule.¹³⁶ (For more Afrobarometer’s findings around African attitudes towards governance, especially under the pandemic, see the essay on page 77).

The institutions of American democracy faced extraordinary pressure during the 2020 elections and were under siege during the transition. The challenges we faced in this election cycle should enable the United States to share, listen, and learn with its partners on the continent while laying the groundwork for a renewed U.S. policy agenda in Africa to promote resilient, democratic societies. It is appropriate, for example, that Joe Biden’s first congratulatory call from Africa came from South Africa’s President Cyril Ramaphosa, whose own democracy has been stress-tested by eight years of “state capture” under Jacob Zuma, not to mention the ongoing struggle to overcome the legacy of apartheid. Our shared experience in shoring up democratic governance and working to address legacies of racial inequality offers a unique opportunity to re-energize our relationship with South Africa and other countries on the continent.

The middle ground

Last year in Africa, electoral outcomes often did not reflect African aspirations. Such was the case in Guinea, Tanzania, Burundi, and elsewhere. Moreover, the 2020 Ibrahim Index on African Governance has found that the public perception of overall governance is at its lowest in over a decade, and the pace of deterioration has nearly doubled over the last five years.¹³⁷ (For more on these trends, see the viewpoint on page 83).

In reality, democracy in Africa is a work in progress, as it is in the U.S. and everywhere, with some countries progressing better than others. While the Ibrahim Index notes a deterioration in the average African governance score over the last year, it also finds that overall governance performance has improved slightly over the last decade. At the same time, Freedom House ranks only seven countries in the “Free” category—the smallest number since 1991—but the group of “Not Free” countries is also shrinking.¹³⁸

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¹³⁴ Joseph R. Biden, Jr., “Why America Must Lead Again: Rescuing U.S. Foreign Policy After Trump,” *Foreign Affairs* 99, no. 2 (March/April 2020).

¹³⁵ Wright, Thomas. 2021. “The U.S. must now repair democracy at home and abroad.” *The Atlantic*, January 10, 2021.

¹³⁶ E. Gyimah-Boadi et al., “US Foreign Policy Toward Africa: An African Citizen Perspective,” *Brookings Institution*, October 23, 2020.

¹³⁷ Mo Ibrahim Foundation, *Ibrahim Index of African Governance* (London: Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2020).

¹³⁸ Jon Temin, “Democratic Trends in Africa in Four Charts,” *Freedom House*, April 17, 2020.

The U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), which makes infrastructure investments based on a rigorous set of governance indicators, has initiated programs in 25 African countries.¹³⁹ Only two programs have been terminated, Madagascar in 2005 and Mali in 2006, and one suspended, Tanzania in 2016.

Together, these comprehensive governance analyses suggest that the majority of African nations occupy the middle ground between democratic and non-democratic governments. The bottom line, however, is that democratic backsliding in Africa is a reality.

A Democracy Summit

Enter Joe Biden, for whom democracy is a core value. Reflecting this belief early in his campaign for the presidency, Biden committed to convening a global “Summit for Democracy” during his first year in office.¹⁴⁰ The relevance of this summit is greater than ever. Its goal will be to strengthen democratic institutions, forge a common agenda for making democracy meaningful for everyday lives, and ensure that institutions deliver, most immediately in the response to COVID-19.

This won’t be simply a talk shop. Invited countries will be expected to arrive with a basket of commitments in three areas: (1) fighting corruption; (2) defending against authoritarianism; and (3) advancing human rights on the national, regional, and global levels. Civil society organizations that are on the frontlines of promoting democratic practices are expected to be involved in the summit. Private sector representatives will also be included, especially from technology and social media companies given their importance to the health of vital institutions and democratic norms.

Reimagining U.S.-Africa relations

The Biden commitment to democracy can deepen American partnerships with African governments. We can learn from the African experience while sharing the causes of the recent assault on the U.S. Capitol and what it means for the future of democracy in the United States.

A positive-sum approach to democratic governance would lay an effective groundwork on which to build dynamic commercial relationships; generate resources for mitigating the impacts of climate change; enhance the livelihoods of women, youth, and the poor; and strengthen efforts to broaden peace and security.

Such an approach will present new challenges for the U.S. on a continent where democracy is backsliding. As an action forcing mechanism, convening regular summits with African leaders, such as the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit of 2014, would offer an opportunity to focus on the many common priorities, including advancing democracy, human rights, and good governance.

And China?

The Biden commitment to renewing democracy inevitably will be compared to China’s role on the continent. On trade, the U.S. is trailing badly. Between 2017 and 2018, two-way trade between the U.S. and Africa increased from \$55.4 billion to \$61.8 billion.¹⁴¹ During this same period, the value of bilateral trade between China and Africa increased from \$155 billion to \$185 billion.¹⁴²

While the U.S. will not catch these numbers any time soon, there is another important role for the United States in its partnership with African governments. African leaders want to attract more American companies for their willingness to invest in human capi-

¹³⁹ “Where We Work,” *Millennium Challenge Corporation*, accessed December 8, 2020.

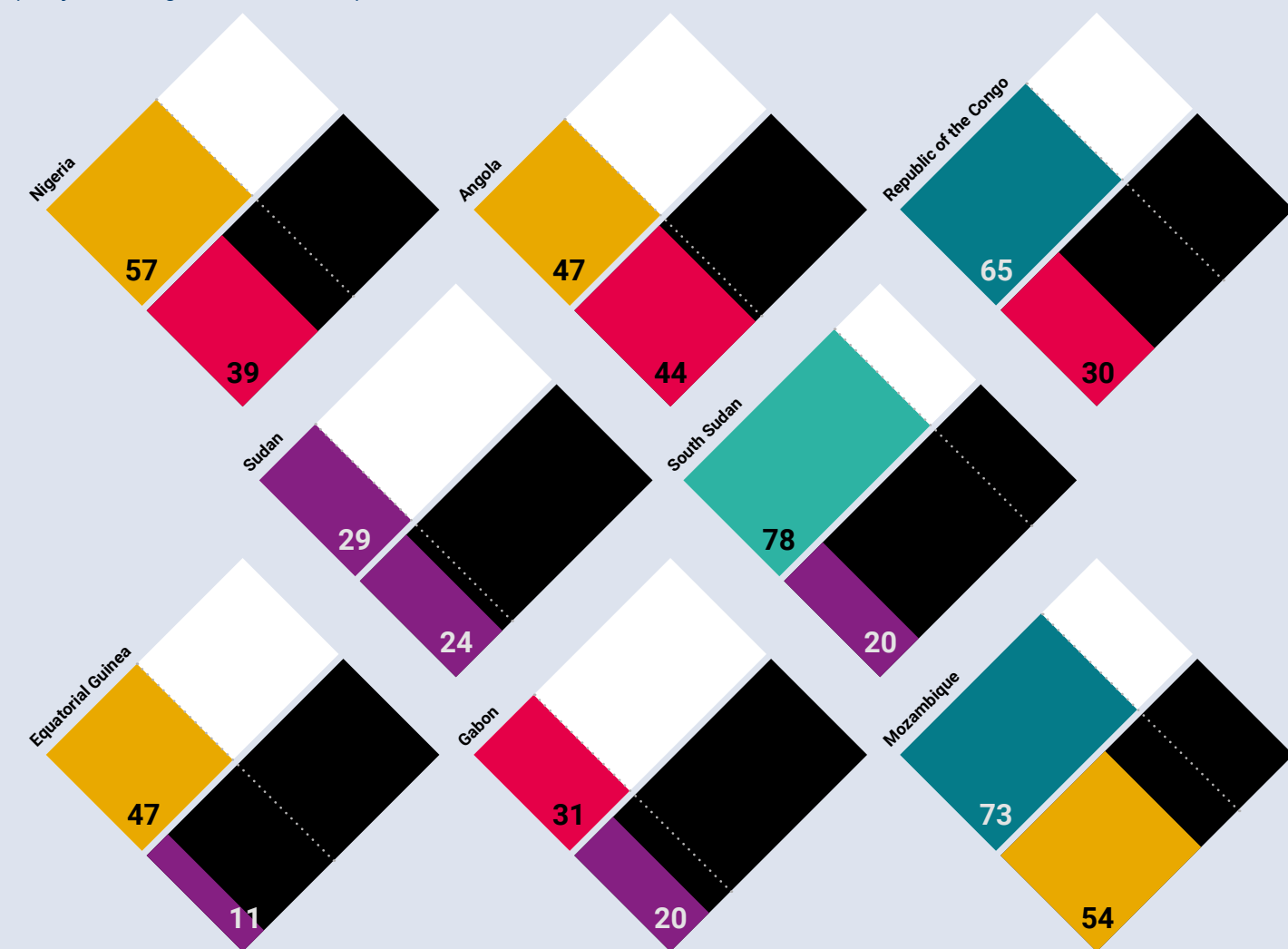
¹⁴⁰ “The Power of America’s Example: The Biden Plan for Leading the Democratic World to Meet the Challenges of the 21st Century,” *Biden for President*, accessed December 8, 2020.

¹⁴¹ “Foreign Trade – Trade in Goods with Africa,” *United States Census Bureau*, accessed December 8, 2020.

¹⁴² “Data: China-Africa Trade,” *China-Africa Research Initiative*, accessed December 8, 2020.

FIGURE 6.4
QUALITY OF NATURAL RESOURCE GOVERNANCE LAW AND PRACTICE

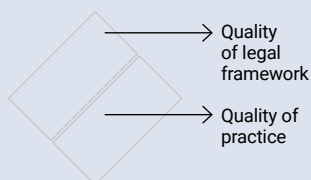
Many African countries with large natural resource endowments struggle both to create strong legal frameworks for natural resources and, even moreso, to practically implement those frameworks. The Natural Resource Governance Institute (NRGI) finds that South Sudan, for example, has a good legal framework for the management of its oil and gas resources, but has failed to successfully implement that framework. In contrast, NRGI finds that Angola has only a weak legal framework for resource management, but that its practices of implementation are almost fully aligned with its framework. Overall, for the eight countries below with substantial oil and gas resources, the quality of both legal frameworks and practice remain low.



Visual Key

Rank

- Good
- Satisfactory
- Weak
- Poor
- Failing



Source

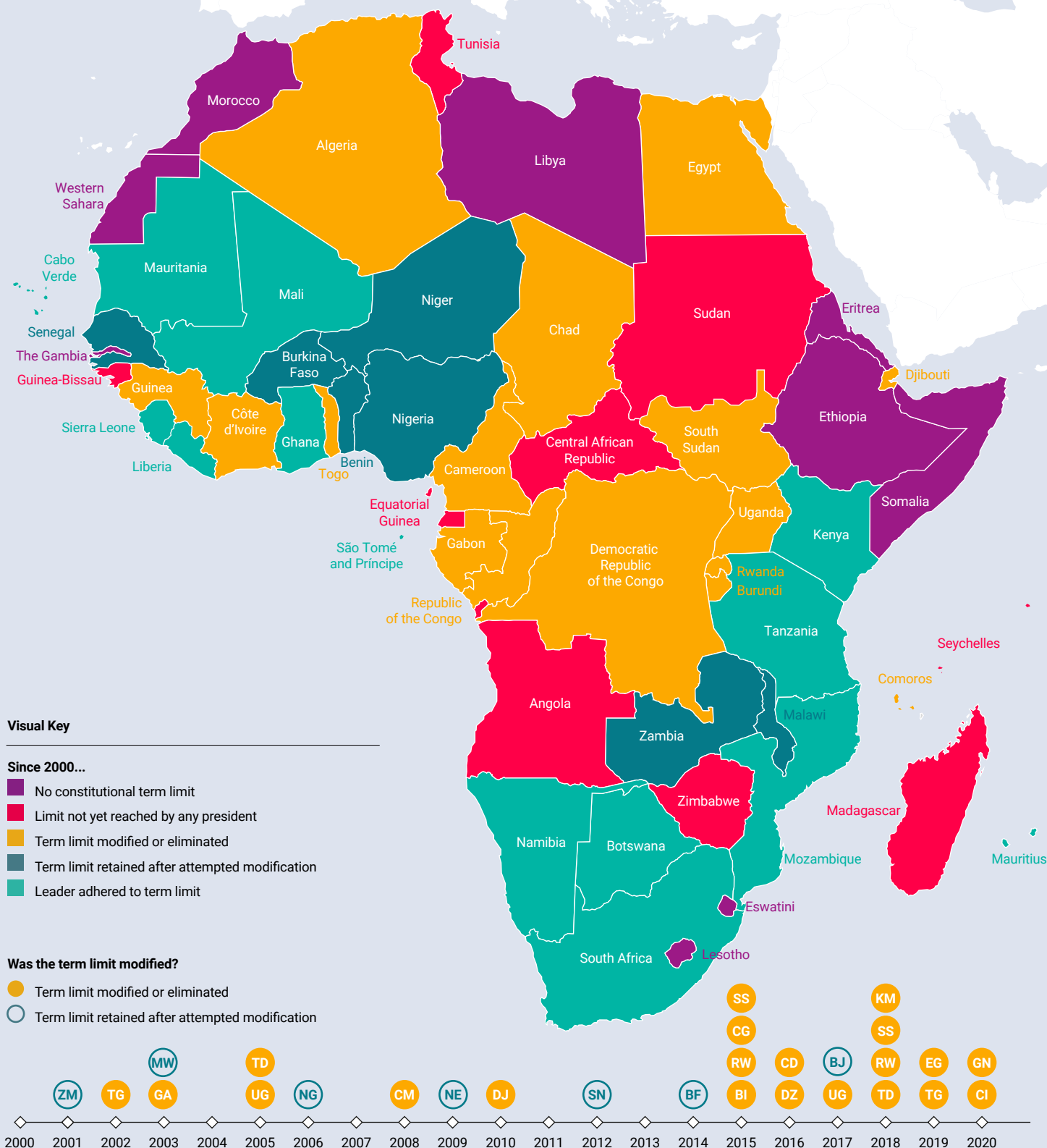
"2017 Resource Governance Index," *Natural Resource Governance Institute*, 2017.

tal by transferring needed skills, and to train and advance their African employees. American companies also work to conform to global best practices in anti-corruption, labor practices, and the protection of the environment. This is in stark contrast to the practices of most Chinese companies. The U.S. has also invested effectively in Africa's youth, although more needs to be done. Since the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) was established in 2014, nearly 5,000 of the region's best and brightest young men and women have received leadership training at American universities, and several hundred thousand young African leaders participate virtually in the YALI network.

The challenge for the Biden administration is to genuinely see Africa as a continent of opportunity. The new administration also needs to renew the U.S.-African relationship in a way that shares the full American experience in support of African aspirations for both democratic governance and greater prosperity.

FIGURE 6.5 THIRD TERMISM IN AFRICA

Africa has faced a growing pattern of term limit evasion in recent years. Among African countries with a two-term constitutional limit for presidents, 21 have attempted to modify or eliminate presidential term limits since 2000, and 14 countries have succeeded in their attempts. This pattern has accelerated since 2015, with 16 attempted term limit modifications between 2015-2020, of which 15 were successful.



Note

Countries are identified by their ISO 3166-1 alpha-2 codes.

Source

Joseph Siegle and Candace Cook, "Circumvention of Term Limits Weakens Governance in Africa," *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, September 14, 2020.

Entrenching democracy in African countries: Policy imperatives for leaders in 2021

While African countries faced many challenges in 2020, the year 2021 is creating many opportunities for them to significantly improve their governance systems. For one thing, COVID-19 has forced many policymakers and civil society leaders to recognize the importance of technology to political and economic participation. For example, video conferencing platforms—now ubiquitous due to their use in minimizing the spread of the virus—have enabled governments, firms, and civil society organizations to conduct business virtually, creating the space to improve participation in governance generally and in elections in particular. Such a process augurs very well for inclusiveness and the entrenchment of democracy. So, in 2021, African governments should **invest in the necessary infrastructure to significantly improve access to these participation-enhancing technologies.**

An important challenge that Africans face as they seek to create a democratic tradition is that many citizens are not aware of their national constitution, nor understand the role that the provisions of the constitution plays in the regulation of their relationship with their governments, as well as with their fellow citizens. For good governance to be truly entrenched, the majority of citizens must understand their constitution and see the law as a tool for protecting their rights and enabling other activities (e.g., entrepreneurship to create wealth) to improve their lives. Thus, in 2021, **African governments should begin nationwide civic education programs** in languages that their citizens can understand in order to help them internalize these complex and important relationships. Such steps can bolster the civic engagement that is already on the rise. Indeed, 2020 saw an eruption of **peaceful protests throughout many African countries as citizens demanded an end to police brutality and impunity by state- and non-state actors.**¹⁴³ (For a visual on the spread of protests in Nigeria, see Figure 6.6).

Although the pandemic has complicated the election process, many countries have been able to hold elections and must continue to do so. (For strategies for holding elections in Africa during a pandemic, see page 82). Unfortunately, the possibility of post-election violence continues to diminish the critical role played by elections in institutionalizing and entrenching democracy. Thus, in 2021, African countries must **redouble their efforts to minimize political interference in the judiciary**, ensuring that their judicial systems are both independent and robust enough to peacefully adjudicate such conflicts. As evidence from Ghana and Kenya shows, if court rulings are based on the application of the facts to the law, citizens are likely to accept those decisions and resist the temptation to engage in violent mobilization.

Importantly, elections—of which 15 national-level are scheduled in 2021—can help Africans build and sustain effective democratic institutions, but they cannot be undertaken in institutional environments that are pervaded with extrajudicial killings and

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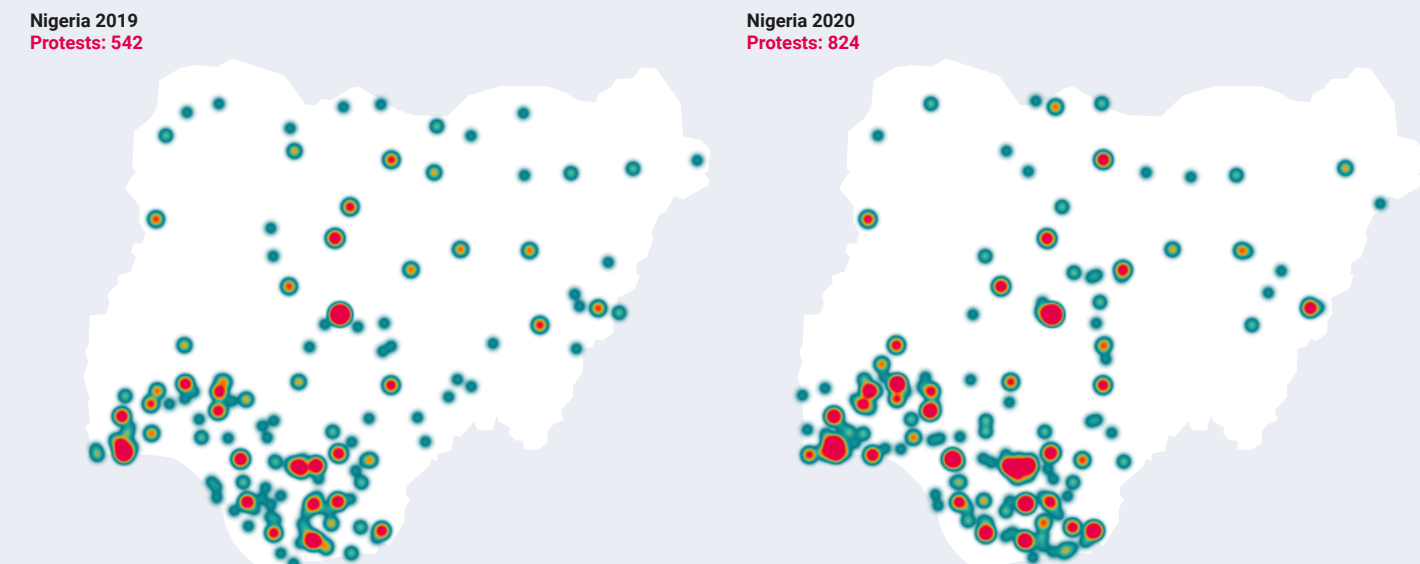
Brady Presidential
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¹⁴³ For example, in Nigeria, protestors stood up against extrajudicial killings by the police and other security forces; in Cameroon, against the killing of civilians by government security forces in the country's Anglophone North West Region; in Egypt against what protestors claimed was continued government repression; in South Sudan against brutality by soldiers; and in Kenya against police brutality.

FIGURE 6.6

PROTESTS ACROSS AFRICA

In recent years, Africans across the continent have exercised their right to protest a variety of issues, including modifications of constitutional term limits, corruption, and insecurity. In Nigeria, protests erupted this year under the tagline #EndSARS in response to widespread police brutality. Protests in Nigeria over this and other issues were more widespread, more frequent, and more widely attended in 2020 than protests in 2019.



Visual Key



Source

Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), 2020, www.acleddata.com.

other forms of government impunity. Hence, this year, African countries must work hard to make certain that their governing processes **provide citizens with the tools (e.g., an independent judiciary; a free press; free, fair, transparent, inclusive, and credible elections)** to effectively guard the exercise of government power and force governments to be accountable to the people and the constitution.

In recent years, many authoritarian governments in Africa have manipulated elections to remain in power indefinitely. They have done so by first, changing their constitutions to eliminate term limits for the president and, second, by rigging national elections and making it difficult for the opposition to participate. In 2021, many **African countries will have to revisit the process of amending their national constitutions** and provide themselves with one that cannot be easily manipulated by opportunistic political elites. (For more on the attempts to eliminate term limits on the continent, see Figure 6.5). While it is necessary to strike a balance between rigidity and flexibility, the process must be robust enough to prevent individuals and special interest groups from engaging in opportunistic constitutional changes.

The new Biden/Harris administration, which came into power in January 2021 in the United States, has already indicated its interest in leading the struggle for good and inclusive governance and the rule of law around the world. (For more on the Biden agenda for democracy and what it means for U.S.-Africa relations, see the viewpoint on page 85). Thus, 2021 offers opportunities for civil society organizations in African countries to engage their national governments—hopefully with the help of Washington and other like-minded global players—to improve governance generally and the recognition and protection of human rights in particular.

Thus, as African economies seek ways to restructure themselves after COVID-19, now is the time for many governments that have drifted away from their founding principles of good governance and democracy to return to the path of constitutionalism and the rule of law.