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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Why democracy fails in Africa

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Abstract

Oftentimes, we have been informed that democracy is the best form of government possible. In African politics, this view has mostly been adopted and pursued as true. Surprisingly, democracy has mostly failed as a system in most parts of the continent—with most democratic governments undermining the mandates of the citizens who are supposed to have placed them in power, and also escalating the already spiralling decline of the continent through bad leadership and corruption. In this article, and with Nigeria as the primary case study, I offer explanations regarding why democracy fails in most African countries. Specifically, I argue that mass miseducation and false self-interestedness are the main culprits that limit the success of democracy in Africa. I further propose that democracy in Africa can only be salvaged when there is proper moral ideology guiding the informal education of citizens, when citizens are offered proper quality formal education that would grant them the necessary skills and aid them to make informed decisions, and when citizens take a turn from false self-interestedness to true self-interestedness (which is fealty to collective interests).

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Since the demise of colonialism, most independent African states have resorted to democracy as the desired form of government moving forward. Despite these efforts at democracy, the continent has not improved at levels commensurate with the wealth located in it and democracy as a system of government has become so skewed that it is no longer recognizable. Why is this the case and why is democracy in Africa considerably inept when compared to other democratic systems practised in certain other countries, for instance countries like Norway and Sweden?

One can look to things such as corruption, bad leadership, (neo)colonialism, etc., as possible culprits, but Salif Keita (quoted by Dickens Olewe) is much closer to the truth. '"To have a democracy, people have to understand democracy, and how can people understand when 85% of the people in the country cannot read or write [?]" he asks' (Olewe, 2019, NP). In this chapter, I offer new perspectives regarding the failure of democracy in Africa. I specifically argue that there are two reasons why democracy fails as a system of government in Africa. This I identify to be the miseducation of citizens of many African nations and the pursuit of, what I call, false self-interests. This miseducation involves the miseducation of citizens in both the formal and informal sense. Without proper education, making informed decisions (whether in choosing leaders, representatives or policies) or having the required skill for leadership becomes near-impossible. In the same vein, the pursuit of momentary individual gain, instead of the common good or collective interest, greatly undermines the ability for actors to act in their interest. I further argue that democracy would only work in Africa when a significant majority of citizens of a society are properly educated formally (through quality mainstream education), informally (by establishing a moral ideology that undergirds what is taught informally) and when citizens begin to pursue true self-interest (as determined by the collective interest).

To pursue this thesis, this article is divided into three sections. The first section attempts to provide an analytic overview of the concept of democracy. In it, I offer my preferred definition of the concept of democracy as a system of government. In the second section, I show how and why democracy fails in Africa. I explain how miseducation and the pursuit of false self-interest are paramount to the failure of democracy in Africa. In the last section, I offer some ideas about how to rejuvenate democracy in Africa. In it, I show how a proper educational framework and the pursuit of the collective interest ensures the correct functioning of democratic governance.

2 | THE CONCEPT OF DEMOCRACY

Conventional history likes to attribute the concept of democracy (at least a systematic/practical version of it) to the Greeks, whose version of democracy involved people-participation in policy-making and policy adoption. However, whether the Greeks were truly democratic is another matter altogether since 'people-participation' rarely involved women, slaves or children (if ever), and since human rights (hallmarks of democracy today) mostly did not really exist, at least not in the way we understand it today. Indeed, not all philosophers in ancient Greece were particularly enamoured by the concept, with philosophers like Plato, Aristotle and Thucydides rejecting it as a viable system of government or criticising some aspect of Athenian democracy (Birch, 2007, p. 109).

Now determining what democracy actually is, as a concept, is a hard nut to crack. To unpack the concept, I must first delineate what I am referring to when I utter the term 'democracy'. In the first instance, I am talking about the system of government, distinguished from a system of

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social relationships. Birch had gestured towards this distinction when he stated that, in various other instances, democracy has been used to describe social relationships in certain societies with decidedly communist and socialist systems of government (Birch, 2007, p. 110). To sharpen the distinction, Birch tells us that:

> ... a democratic society, [at least] in the American sense, is one without hereditary class distinctions, in which there is something approaching equality of opportunity for all citizens. The term 'democratic' is used to indicate a degree of social equality, not a form of government. (Birch, 2007, p. 110)

Birch's distinction is instructive, and this distinction allows us to focus our definition of democracy away from the idea of a *democratic society* and towards democracy *as* a system/form of government. Now, when we talk about democracy as a form of government, its most popular definition (based on Abraham Lincoln's definition) is, as Gyekye notes, 'government of the people, by the people, for the people' (Gyekye, 1992, p. 244). What immediately comes to mind, when examining this simple definition, is the emphasis on 'people' as it pertains to governance. What this definition immediately implies is that governance is in the hands of the people and that it is members of the society that decide what policies best suit their polity. In other words, governance resides in the will of the people. Simple as it seems, this definition is, at once, vague. First, we do not have a clear understanding of what 'people' entails. In some societies (especially in the past), this excluded women, children and individuals who happened to be slaves. In contemporary times, people would generally include every individual, excluding those under the age of 18 and those who reside in that society but are not citizens of that society. Even if we take the latter to constitute 'the people', a truly people-based governance appears unrealistic as most modern democracies adopt a representative style of governance, where representatives are given the mandate to represent a group of people, even though they do not always make policies that represent the will of those people.[1] Indeed, there are few or no countries, in the 21st century, where all government policies are produced by citizen's votes or direct people-participation. Rather, choosing leaders and representatives is where the people's will counts. As Huntington (1991, pp. 6–7) opines, a system of government is democratic if 'its most powerful collective decision makers [leaders and representatives] are selected through fair, honest and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which all the adult population is eligible to vote'. Even at that, one still wonders how much of the people's mandate is at play, when these leaders, representatives and/or political demagogues engage in high-level manipulation while campaigning for either themselves or the causes they prefer.[2] It is important to note here that this choice is usually made on the basis of majoritarianism, where variations of the principle of the 'highest number of vote wins' are entrenched. It then seems, from the foregoing, that one can draw the following points in our search for the meaning of democracy:

[1]When we claim that representatives express the will of the people, this is untrue, practically speaking. The only mandate the representative has is the mandate to make decisions on behalf of the people, not a mandate to make decisions expressed by the people.

[2]See, for instance, the campaign of misinformation during BREXIT in the United Kingdom (Hall et al., 2018).

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> D1: democracy, as a system of government, at the very least, requires that leaders and representatives are chosen by members of a society/group, who are above the age of 18, via the majoritarian principle.

It is not so much that leaders and representatives are chosen by the people, it is that these leaders are chosen and/or removed, without bloodshed, and via the will of the people. This brings me to my second point. There is an emphasis on another aspect of democratic governance that involves not choosing leaders but controlling their excesses. The idea at play here is the idea of checks, and these checks are performed by certain institutions of government. As Popper states, '...only democracy provides an institutional framework that permits reform without violence, and so the use of reason in political matters' (Popper, 1966, p. 14). In modern democracies, you find democratic leaders, for instance, being checked by other institutions of government such as the legislature, the judiciary and even the press/media. While democracies ensure certain civil rights and liberties, these institutions help to ensure that those liberties can be expressed when required and that those liberties are not squashed by those with political power. This allows us to modify our definition of democracy even further:

> D2: democracy, is a form of government that requires that leaders and representatives are chosen by members of a society/group, who are above the age of 18, via the majoritarian principle; and requires that institutions of government, which ensure civil liberties and provide the checks and balances that ensure a bloodless transition of power and/or reform, continues to exist.

What then distinguishes democratic governments from other types of governments is the existence of these institutions whose essential aim is to avoid tyranny. Since these institutions do not always come into being by default, they must be created, developed and reformed to continually protect the ruled from the ruler(s). Popper captures this essential point when he states:

> ... we can now describe, as the principle of a democratic policy, the proposal to create, develop, and protect, political institutions for the avoidance of tyranny. This principle does not imply that we can ever develop institutions of this kind which are faultless or foolproof, or which ensure that the policies adopted by a democratic government will be right or good or wise—or even necessarily better or wiser than the policies adopted by a benevolent tyrant. (Popper, 1966, p. 130).

Avoiding tyranny, which Plato (c. 375 BC/2000) described as evil, appears to be the main goal of democratic systems, rather than rule by the people (which, as I have said, does not reflect what modern democracies are about or how they operate). Also, as Popper says, these institutions are neither faultless nor do they always produce the best policies. What is important is that these institutions remain and continue to function, ensuring civil liberties and avoiding tyranny. For me, tyranny goes beyond mere dictatorships, where one individual assumes total power, to include any situation where a person or a group of persons, leveraging on their mere existence as human beings, seek to acquire for themselves, unmerited social and political advantages over others. Avoiding tyranny, in this extended sense of the word, would encompass avoiding all forms of oppression, discrimination, injustice, etc. The following allows me to slightly modify the definition of democracy as follows:

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> D3: democracy, is a form of government that requires that leaders and representatives are chosen by members of a society/group, who are above the age of 18, via the majoritarian principle; and that institutions of government—which ensure civil liberties, provide checks and ensure a bloodless transition of power and/or reform—continue to exist in order to avoid tyranny by an individual or a group of individuals.

So far, our definitions have not taken African (philosophical) variations of democracy into account, and since my major concern is democracy in Africa, it is important that I also discuss and include the various nuances that can be found in African conceptions of democracy.[3] From the literature, it appears that the most pertinent variable in the discussion of democracy, for most African scholars, is the idea of consensus. Like democracy itself is traced to the ancient Greeks (specifically the Athenians), consensus can be traced to ancient precolonial African polities, like the consensus-based egalitarian Igbo societies in south-central and south-eastern Nigeria (Opone, 2012, p. 58) and the Akan societies in Ghana (Gyekye, 1992, p. 246, Wiredu, 2007). In these societies, decisions were made through a process of dialogue and exchange of ideas, which eventually led to decisions that recognised the interests of at least a majority of individuals, spread out among various interest groups.

The key thing to note here is that, unlike most Western models of democracy, majoritarianism was not the primary goal, instead *compromise* was what was sought after—usually with reconciliation as an important part of the process (Gyekye, 1992, p. 248). This is not to say that in majoritarianism, a consensus is impossible; the point being made is that in most African societies, agreement or compromise was the main focus—not necessarily the number of votes. Wiredu one of the chief proponents of what he calls 'decisional consensus' expresses this view as follows:

> By and large, then, the cognitive and the moral cases of consensus are a matter of numbers. Not so decisional consensus, which is the form of consensus germane to the kind of democracy we have in mind. To be sure, decisional consensus too involves numbers. We have this variety of consensus when all the people concerned with a given matter decide that a certain thing is or is not to be done. If the unanimity is instantaneous, the consensus is perfect in some sense....what is crucial for the kind of unanimity that secures a non-trivial consensus is its manner of achievement, not its numerical value. That manner is the manner of compromise. (Wiredu, 2007 , p. 162)

The power of compromise draws from a very interesting distinction that Wiredu makes viz. the distinction between 'what is the case and what ought to be the case, taken together, and what is to be made the case' (Wiredu, 2007 , p. 161). While what is the case and what ought to be the case is potentially a matter of differing opinion, what ought to be made the case is a matter of compromise. While compromise would generally involve sacrifices by all/most parties in order to make a decision more unanimous, Wiredu says that such sacrifices ought not to put any

[3] It is important that I state, here, that whereas I am seeking to incorporate Africa-related forms of democracy into my understanding of democracy, this understanding is mostly theoretical and does not mean that current governments in Africa are precisely practising what I describe (we shall get to what is actually practiced in the next section). What I describe is African views about democracy, especially as found in African philosophical literature.

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sacrificing party at an utmost disadvantage. Compromises, if they are to make any sense, ought to be workable and something that all parties can generally live with. It is important to note, at this point, that compromise as a model of reaching consensus, is normally employed when a straightforward consensus is, at that particular point in time, impractical. For instance, a society might easily reach a consensus, and without compromise, if it had to decide whether killing innocent citizens at random was a justifiable policy or not. However, such a quick consensus would be hard to come by if that society was to reach an agreement/consensus about how best to distribute a resource since various individuals or groups would have differing opinions about the matter. In this latter instance, compromise would have to be employed if a consensual decision is to be made.

Now, there are some criticisms that one can level against the consensual framework, ranging from its outdatedness to its impracticability on a large urban scale. These sorts of criticisms, though valid in their own ways, do not threaten the idea of consensus as a possible addition to the system of democratic governance, bar one critique. Emmanuel Eze (1997) had, in a book chapter, alluded to the possible critique that consensus, as Wiredu describes it, does not 'fit the description of democracy' since consesus is not the primary goal of democracy (Eze, 1997, p. 321). The consensual framework, for me, is properly democratic, mainly because decision-making, whether in terms of policies or leaders/representatives, remains a prerogative of the people. In fact, consensus, if truly practical, would involve an intimate form of people-participation rather than majoritarianism—indeed Bernard Matolino (2018) points to the fact that for some, consensus is far superior to majoritarianism. Majoritarianism, as Popper notes, involves an acceptance of the vote of the majority even if what is voted for, does not express the views of the individual in the minority. So, ironically, majoritarianism installs a communal dictatorship, where those in the minority could be consistently suppressed by those in the majority. At best, the individual in the minority can only hope to 'combat [the views of the majority] by democratic means, and to work for its revision' (Popper, 1966, p. 130)—which, of course, must be approved by the majority. In such an exchange and counter-exchange, both the minority and the majority seek to promote their views/interests. If the default mode of this promotion does not involve compromising, friction and discontent are inevitable.

This then allows me to modify our general definition of democracy (D3) to include the African consideration of consensus.

> AD: democracy, when we include the traditional African perspective, is a form of government that requires that policies (whenever possible), leaders, and/or representatives are chosen via a majority or consensus by members of a society/group who are above the age of 18; and that institutions of government—which ensure civil liberties, provide checks and ensure a bloodless transition of power and/or reform—continue to exist in order to avoid tyranny by an individual or a group of individuals.

3 | DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA: HYPE AND FAILURE

Now, wars have been fought in various countries in a bid to democratise those countries and subvert dictatorships. We see examples of such interventions in efforts to democratise countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and North Vietnam by force. Regardless of other alleged ulterior motives behind some of these interventions, the underlying assumption guiding these

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interventions is the idea that democracy is the best form of government and, therefore, one that every country, if it must not be tyrannical, ought to embrace.

Due to this assumption, more than a few African countries adopted different forms of democratic governments, usually mimicking the British parliamentary system or the American presidential system (as was the case in Nigeria at different points in its history). Whether democracy is the best form of government or not for Africa (some, like Nyerere, prefer some form of African socialism) is beside the point when we realise that the type of democracy that is actually practised in most African states do not conform to even the general definition of the term (D3 and/or AD) above. Take Nigeria, for instance. More often than not, leaders in the country are barely chosen by majority or consensus. Election violence and other forms of undue coercion continually ensure that people are forced to choose their candidates either through the threat of violence or bribes. Election rigging and other forms of corruption and forgery also ensure that neither consensus nor an actual majority vote is possible (see; Ani & Ojakorotu, 2022). Furthermore, in making policy changes, campaigning as an overwhelming majority barely guarantees any change. The 'End-SARS' protest in Nigeria, which was abruptly ended by a government-backed military intervention (which was allegedly fatal for many), barely implemented the policy changes it was looking for, and not without violence (Richards & Eboibi, 2022). Civil liberties are barely protected by institutions that are either not working properly or are working against the people. I do not need to rehash the number of despots who have dominated the political landscape of their various countries—some of whom have continued their legacy through their progeny. This is why my initial focus in this section is the failures associated with the type of democracy practised in Africa. These failures can be traced to two main foundational problems viz. Mass illiteracy/miseducation and false self-interestedness.

There are those who would point to various other factors such as the adversarial nature of a multi-party system (Teffo, 2004), as reasons for the failures of democracy in Africa. Others would claim that democracy, as it presently constituted is unsuitable for the African context since it is a relic of colonialism—the precise reason it fails in the continent (Matolino, 2016). This is why African leaders like Julius Nyerere (1968) and Kwame NKrumah (1970) have argued for Africa-based socialism in various guises and/or one-party systems, and others like Wiredu (2007) have argued for a non-party system that is guided by consensus.[4] These may well be legitimate problems, but the main issue in such arguments is the assumption that a one-party system rather than a multi-party system works best. This assumption immediately falls to the ground when we examine the failures of the Kwame Nkrumah administration in Ghana, in providing the full dividends of democracy to the people of Ghana. More problematic is the risk of dictatorship that eventually overshadows such a system. In Ghana, claims about the repressive nature of Nkrumah's policies abound (like the Preventive Detention Act), but what is more poignant to the story is that these policies only served to strengthen Nkrumah's (desire for a) stranglehold on leadership (Gupta, 1975). Whether he saw himself as a messianic figure or he intended to be a dictator like some of his colleagues in Africa, the stroll towards a dictatorship was inevitable. Nigerians, a few border crossings away, were lucky to escape a similar fate at the hands of the erstwhile dictator, Sani Abacha, whose vision for a one-party state (in the late 1990s) was one where he alone remained the sole unopposed candidate in all the five 'licenced' (puppet) political parties—a clear move towards a

[4]Matolino (2016) refers to Jacques as one who reliably shows that a one-party system and a non-party system are one and the same thing. They are only semantically different, at best. At this moment, I tend to agree.

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one-party system at the federal level—as he transitioned from a military dictator to a democratic dictator (Rupert, 1998). It is also instructive to note the positive uproar that heralded the demise of the one-party system in Zambia, suggesting the discontent that trailed the one-party system in that country (Phiri, 2021). These empirical examples do not require deep philosophical arguments to establish their truthworthiness but there is a need to dig deeper to discover why these apparent failures came to pass. In this deep dive, I discovered that there is a hierarchy of problems and if one does not tackle the root/foundational problem, tackling the super-structural problems alone only breeds failure. I will explain what I mean, presently.

In a recent talk, Nigerian philosopher Jonathan Chimakonam suggests that any tradition of philosophy must have a foundational logic and ontology (with logic deriving from the human gaze towards reality), which grounds the method of discourse, and the creative ideas that proceed from it. I believe that the problem of democracy in Africa can be similarly structured. At the base, we have morality and political ideology. This foundation is what builds character and the noetic propaedeutic among members of a polity and guides their behaviours in terms of what that society believes to be behaviours that engender the common good. Built on this foundation is the method of politicking. It is here that questions about the political system—whether democracy is good or bad, or what type of democracy works—are relevant. Built on top of the method is what one may refer to as service delivery. Here, problems related to the evident failures in governance and politics are relevant. So, when we talk about failures in leadership, poverty, poor institutions, etc., these problems refer to service-delivery problems that proceed from poor choices in our method of politicking, which proceed from the foundational problem of an unsustainable morality and ideology.

Indeed, the very symptoms of a failed democracy such as the emergence of a dictator (as seen during the time of Robert Mugabe), incessant corruption (as encapsulated in the 'democratic' regime of Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria, and seemingly re-energised in the 'democratic' regime of Bola Tinubu), failure in the consistent delivery of basic amenities (as seen throughout the continent), the failure to hold credible and violence-free elections, insecurity, the blatant disregard for human life, etc., points more to the failures of the very individuals locked in the democratic struggle, who have no clear understanding of the ideology and normative viewpoint that builds character and expectation. The neo-colonial imposition of democracy in Africa (which is truly a secondary problem) is not the primary reason for the embezzlement of funds (a tertiary problem), and a multi-party system is not primarily responsible for the lack of good schools or proper health care across the continent. What is truly lacking is the character needed to seek out the joy of the community as a means of safeguarding individual interests—whether that involves making informed decisions whose positive repercussions are felt by as many individuals as possible, for as long as possible, or whether it involves some sense of duty and moral uprightness. Also missing is the character needed to identify and root out the sort of leadership that leads to the downfall of the community. One sees a subtle irony here. For we often claim that because we are unfamiliar with the present majoritarian/multi-system style of democracy (since it is a colonial imposition), we are doomed to fail at it, yet the communitarianism, which we claim is in our blood (Khoza, 1994), and which could help us progress and hold leaders accountable, is blunted by our inability to use or understand it. Showing, once again, that it is not the system that is primarily at fault, but the character and ability of the individuals involved.

Thus, crucial to this primary problem, then, is the (ideological) illiteracy and miseducation of those joined together in the struggle, as well as the proper type of ideology that helps us positively

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navigate our base needs and/or safeguard our interests.[5] If one is not properly educated to understand the true needs of society, that individual is bound to sometimes (if not most times) undermine societal progress via a lack of knowledge. Similarly, if true self-interestedness (which ensures that the purpose of society—safeguarding the interests of all—is established) is ignored then the fragmented forms of self-interests that often lead to negative consequences—what Asouzu (2003, 2004) calls the ambivalence of human interests—become (almost) inevitable. This is why I take mass illiteracy/miseducation and false self-interestedness to be the primary problems of democracy in Africa (there might be more of such primary problems, but I have yet to articulate them). Solving these primary problems, first, is important, before we move to examine secondary and tertiary problems. One might even say that solving these primary problems helps us resist the secondary and tertiary problems but I suspect that that is an argument for another day.

3.1 | Mass illiteracy/miseducation

Education is either of the formal type or informal type. Formal education is usually, and quite erroneously, tied solely to 'Western education'. Perhaps a legacy of colonialism. Western formal education was often associated with real education and acquiring it meant acquiring true knowledge, which usually led to jobs and prestige. However, formal education simply means systematic learning and includes all varieties of knowing, insofar as it is systematic and practical. Informal education, on the other hand, is not as systematic and usually involves learning from advice, experience or being taught some communally approved virtue by one's elders, parents, extended family, etc. (Nyerere, 1968, p. 45).

Systematic or not, informal forms of education are also crucial since what is transmitted as knowledge are the very norms, moral and otherwise, that undergird the very rules that guide communal relations in a society. These norms proceed out of ideology—in this context, a society's underlying philosophy about what constitutes the best means to sustain its own flourishing.

While one can speculate about the level of informal education that persons have (or do not have) and are (not) receiving, what is sure is that the (especially public) school system in a country like Nigeria has mostly failed (see: Jegede, 2017; Vanguard Newspaper, 2017). The popular saying that 'it takes a village to raise a child' loses its potency in today's urbanised society, where high fences, fear of molestation, general indifference to the lives of others, fear of meddling, etc., have cocooned individuals into their personal spaces such that the influence of the village stays at the door—unlike in precolonial societies and tight-knit rural communities of times past. The resultant effect is the emergence and development of individuals who are, for the most part, unaware of the moral and normative requirements expected from them when dealing with others. A simple admonition, such as 'do not take what belongs to others except through their express permission' becomes significant when the individual who is not given such an admonition at a younger age becomes a democratic leader and is tempted to embezzle funds. Consider a young person who is not taught how to be assertive and who has not been taught that human beings possess intrinsic dignity, such an individual would find it difficult to elect her preferred

[5]One can argue that political or moral ideologies that shelve self-interest in favour of some grand utopic ideal, often fails, and quite woefully too. If we take contractarianism seriously, it becomes apparent that the real reason for society is the safeguarding of individual interests. Any other goal does not speak to the reason for society.

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representative or leader, and/or call back his/her those representatives that are performing at a poor level. Such an individual would find it difficult to treat others with respect if s/he finds herself in a position of power. In these simple instances, the moral sense that allows the individual to identify certain social virtues/norms, and also *choose* to perform only those actions that align with such virtues, has not been ingrained into the individual through a thoroughgoing education process.

While one can question the fervour with which proper informal education is being imparted in our families and societies, proper formal education is another matter altogether. Over the years, the educational systems in some, if not most, African countries have seen serious decline and decay. Using Nigeria as a case study, this point could not have been made more poignant by a fairly recent scandal in Kaduna state where a massive number of teachers (21,780 out of 33,000) at the primary level could not themselves successfully pass primary school exams (Vanguard Newspaper, 2017). What this grim statistic simply tells us is that in the present system, those meant to educate are themselves unqualified and, one can say, uneducated - all these against the backdrop of a severe brain drain. For the coming generation, then, one can only suppose that a significant number of Nigerians are, for the most part, miseducated by teachers who are themselves either unqualified or uneducated. Beyond this, the infrastructure required for proper learning is often lacking (Jega, 1996, p. 62), so even in those instances where personnel is competent, poor infrastructure cripples the experience of proper education.

What does this all mean in relation to democracy and why it fails? With the masses mostly uneducated or miseducated, the resultant effect can only be the production of members of society who are at best 'intellectually not up to standard' or students that are worse off than their teachers. Also, one cannot imagine that students from this unfortunate pool who may later become leaders or representatives in a democratic setting will effect the change needed since it is highly unlikely that they can produce game-changing policies if they are poorly educated. Indeed, with regard to leadership, we see individuals with particularly flawed mindsets (mostly because of the poor education received) vying for elections and political positions that they are ill-equipped to assume.

Now, since democracy, as I have defined it (AD), requires that *policies (whenever possible), leaders and/or representatives are chosen* via *consensus by members of a society*, there is no gainsaying the fact whether via consensus or majority, those who choose leaders, representatives and/or policies are simply members of society. With the majority of these electorates mostly uneducated and/or miseducated, it is not surprising that vices such as ballot box snatching, thuggery, bribing of electoral officials and even the bribing of the electorates remain rampant. Because the electorates are mostly miseducated (both formally and informally) to see beyond the immediate gratification of a bribe, or to see that electing a poorly equipped leader or representative for the sake of things like favouritism and tribalism, they find it easy (on the basis of what they believe is self-interest) to give up their votes for momentary gratifications.

It might be the case that there are a few individuals who know this and therefore only work to enable the status quo—perhaps this might be the explanation for the vast efforts by those in authority to keep the public educational sector consistently backwards. It is this short-sightedness that fuels the destructive sadness and melancholy that Ada Agada (2015, 2022) speaks of so eloquently.

If the pool from which leaders and representatives are chosen is mostly inundated with individuals who are miseducated, both formally and informally, it, therefore, means that the mandate of the people would most likely be placed in the hands of those who are unable to lead and are, therefore, more susceptible to vices. Where this is the case, tyranny (which democrats fear

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and/or ought to fear) is no longer a distant proposition. What is even more worrying is that when it is the majority that is miseducated, important decisions would be inevitably swayed by this miseducated majority. Wiredu, for instance, speaks to this sort of situation when he says:

> Suppose now, for the sake of conceptual analysis that polarization of opinion in the assembly was usually on these same numerical lines. That would mean that a substantial part of the citizenry suffered veritable disenfranchisement in the matter of decision-making. (Wiredu, 2007, p. 157)

This would normally be overlooked as a frailty of democracy, but where the majority is either miseducated or selfish, or both this frailty is fatal. The inability to properly achieve the common good (by virtue of a lack of knowledge) and the ease with which demagogues often sway the miseducated, all contribute to this fatality. Plato, in his critique of democracy, tells us that democracy does not do a good job in avoiding bad leaders or tyrants. This is mainly because of the emphasis on populism than on competence in most circumstances. He says:

> .... our claim that only someone with an outstanding nature could ever tum out to be a good man, and only if from earliest childhood he played in the best company and the right surroundings, and did all the right kinds of things. How magnificently the city tramples all this underfoot, paying no attention to what kind of life someone led before he entered political life! All anyone has to do to win favour is say he is a friend of the people ... (Plato, 2000, p. 558b-c)

The early signs that show an individual's tendency towards tyranny and poor leadership become irrelevant once the individual can con (the mostly miseducated masses) into believing s/he stands for their interest. This way, democracy is not only defeated but also becomes a harbinger of failed states. The dictatorships of Robert Mugabe (who ironically fought really hard for democracy), Tedodoro Mbasogo of Equitorial Guinea (who has mysteriously held democratic power since 1979) and Omar al-Bashir of Sudan (who was only ousted by a recent military coup) are prime examples of what I mean. These sorts of leaders are amply described by Popper (1966, p. 50), in his examination of Plato's views, when he says:

> The transition from democracy to tyranny, Plato says, is most easily brought about by a popular leader who knows how to exploit the class antagonism between the rich and the poor within the democratic state, and who succeeds in building up a bodyguard or a private army of his own. The people who have hailed him first as the champion of freedom are soon enslaved; and then they must fight for him, in 'one war after another which he must stir up ... because he must make the people feel the need of a general'. With tyranny, the most abject state is reached.

It is important to note that miseducation is not always brought about by *poor education*. Miseducation can also happen when a (formally) well-educated individual misses a vital life lesson or the sort of moral ideology that s/he could have acquired from proper informal education. Indeed, well-educated individuals have become leaders/representatives, chairmen of electoral commissions, justices, etc., and have willfully exhibited bad leadership, electoral malpractice, injustice, etc. Inspired by a false sense of superiority over others that allows for tyranny, these individuals fail to realise that their allegiances are to those who have given

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them the mandate to lead. They fail to understand that acts that mitigate against the collective interests of the society they are a part of, invariably affects their interests, since their interests are immersed in the collective interest. This failure stems from a profound ignorance that rejects the common good. If ignorance is a lack of knowledge and knowledge is acquired through education, then the ignorance of these individuals logically stems from (at least) miseducation. It is unsurprising, then, that the list of the top 10 most educated societies in the world (Canada, Japan, Luxembourg, South Korea, Israel, The United States, Ireland, The United Kingdom, Australia and Finland) reflect some of the wealthiest societies in the world and some of the strongest democracies in the world (Erudera, 2022). While some of the least literate societies in the world (South Sudan, Niger, Mali, Central African Republic, Burkina Faso, Benin, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone) or least educated (Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, Central African Republic, Ethiopia Eritrea, Guinea, Pakistan, Gambia and Angola) reflect some of the least developed countries in the world with weak democratic systems (World Population Review, 2023). This is why Cusher and Menaldo (2021, p. 28) say that 'it makes sense to note a relatively uncontroversial point, one that is almost a truism in the study of leadership: there are strong connections, even mutual dependencies, between leadership and education'. If it is true that higher levels of education often imply wealthier societies with strong leadership, it is not far-fetched to draw a link between higher levels of education and informed decision-making, which is at the core of a viable democracy (since democracy, whether majoritarian or consensual, require that its citizens decide, in some way, the policies that will govern the society). Leaders too, who must steer society towards the right direction, would find themselves ill-equipped to lead and susceptible to actions that undermine true self-interest, which is wrapped up in the common good. It becomes clear, then, that miseducation is the sort of problem that affects both the masses and its leaders.

3.2 | False self-interest

Human beings often tend to pursue those ends that generally ensure self-preservation. Usually, those ends normally serve the individual's interests—or at least are thought to do so. Now, there are two issues at play here. Either an individual pursues an action that she/he believes would serve his/her interest and it does not (especially in the long run), or the individual pursues an action that actually serves his/her interest.

Human societies, according to Thomas Hobbes' (Leviathan 1651, p. 78) compelling allegory of the social contract, came into being because the solitary life was, among other things, nasty and short, precisely because every individual pursued his/her self-interest. In other words, prior to the social contract, one can assume that individuals constantly pursued their self-interest but rarely avoided premature death. When individuals now came together to form societies via a social contract, they were seeking to ensure survival by placing their individual mandates in the hands of the leviathan—the one ruler who was given the right to curate society, ensure justice and fairness, etc. The leviathan could be a tyrant, an oligarchy, an aristocratic leader or even a democratic leader. Insofar as individuals have decided to be part of a society, they subscribe to that society's leviathan. What the above suggests is that even the coming together of society and/or the phenomenon of governance (including the democratic system of governance), all arise from self-interest and the desire for self-preservation.[6]

[6]Sometimes, the 'self' extends beyond the individual to include children, close relatives, extended relatives, tribes-people, countrymen, etc. Often in that order.

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Even though the instinct towards self-preservation and pursuing one's existence pervades much of human existence, it is not always the case that what is pursued, actually serves our interests or actually preserves our own lives. What this means is that, in terms of democratic governance, both leaders and citizens sometimes engage in actions that they believe would preserve their lives/interest, or momentarily preserves their lives/interest but, in the long run, fails to do so or works against that self-interest. This is what I call false self-interest.

Innocent Asouzu had earlier defined self-interest as 'the disposition always in all situations to desire undue advantage for and solely for the person or persons involved, in total disregard of the common good' (Asouzu, 2003, p. 20). For me, this is not a definition of self-interest but a definition of false self-interest. The reason I say this is because almost all human actions are directed towards self-preservation (which grounds our interests), even altruistic acts.[7] However, what makes truly selfish acts acceptable (such as choosing to be a member of a society), is their moral/utility value. Following this, one must admit that unacceptable selfish acts exist and that what makes them unacceptable is their lack of moral/utility value, in relation to the common good or collective interests. This is what makes Asouzu's definition above a prime definition of false self-interestedness.

It is instructive that Asouzu mentions the common good. Societies, including democratic ones, consist of various individuals with certain differing and shared interests. Here, what is deemed in the best interest of all members of that society is the common good. This is especially so in democratic societies, where the main aim is to avoid the tyranny that often relegates the interest of the people in favour of the interest of the tyrant (except in the case of a benevolent tyrant), and instead ensures that leaders/representatives produce policies that ensure the common good.

Unfortunately, leaders/representatives mostly present policies that serve their interests and/or endanger the common good. They do this in two ways—knowingly and unknowingly. When done unknowingly, it is often as a result of the fact that most leaders/representatives/citizens are too miseducated and ill-equipped to be leaders, and so are too myopic to see that their actions constantly endanger the common good. When done knowingly, the dynamic is different. Here, momentary gratification is often preferred to the common good with the underlying thinking being that that momentary gratification preserves the interest and lives of the leaders/representatives/masses who are falsely self-interested. In Africa, the expression of this false self-interestedness and its effect on many of the continent's democracies is well documented (Asouzu, 2003; Gyimah-Brempong, 2002; Hope, 2017; Yagboyaju, 2017). With regard to citizens, we the best examples in various democratic elections where individuals are willing to sell their votes for little take-aways ranging from a few dollars to small sachets of food. This particular example is most relevant as it touches on the democratic governing process itself. We see some democratic leaders intending to extend their tenure by circumventing the democratic process either through the legislature or by buying votes. In this way, Plato's question: What if it is the will of the people that they should not rule, but a tyrant instead? (Popper, 1966, p. 128), becomes most relevant as individuals (who are, ironically, enmeshed in poverty) are willing to allow for a democratic tyranny in exchange for momentary gain—false self-interest. We also see leaders, representatives and their cronies embezzle funds from national treasuries, only to use those same funds to bribe their way back into power. We also see

[7] Altruistic acts are pleasurable, and often projects a sense of self-worth and the sense that one is a moral hero. This feeling often fuels the need to go beyond and above the call of duty.

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citizens and leaders who corrupt the electoral process for momentary gain (usually a bribe) thereby crippling the essence of the democratic process.

With these problems endemic in most African states, there is no doubt that the democratic system fails since the mechanisms, which administer said democracy, are, themselves, compromised by leaders who are either miseducated, falsely self-interested or both. These two foundational problems branch off to create problems in social aspects of democratic living, where corruption and nepotism are rife. How then does one restructure democracy in such a way that it works for Africa(ns) today?

4 | REFORMING DEMOCRACY FOR AFRICA

For democracy, as a system of government, to succeed in Africa, a reformation of the citizen's mindset is necessary. This reformation would be tailored to mitigate against the two foundational issues that I mentioned above—miseducation and false self-interestedness. This reformation will take the form of a mass (re)education and the propaedeutic of 'true self-interestedness'.

4.1 | Mass literacy

Mass literacy must first begin with the establishment of a moral ideology that undergirds the moral thinking and moral expectations of the society. This is especially so for informal types of education. One would expect that such an ideology negates vices such as nepotism, discrimination, bribery, looting of public funds and other forms of corruption. For most Africans, relationality plays an important role in their social lives. We see this in ideas such as complementarity (Asouzu, 2004), Ubuntu (Ramose, 1999), Ukama (Murove, 2007), Ujamaa (Nyerere, 1968) and Consciencism (Nkrumah, 1970).

In all these theories, there is a general theme of developing the sorts of virtues that makes one a *person*, by treating other *persons* as ends in themselves, engaging positively with them, and identifying with, or showing a certain solidarity with, one's societal norms and rituals. Metz (2017, p. 115) had earlier sought to crystallise, from his interpretation of the African viewpoint, a relational moral view salient in sub-Saharan African philosophical literature into a moral theory as follows:

> An action is right just insofar as it promotes shared identity among people grounded on goodwill; an act is wrong to the extent that it fails to do so and tends to encourage the opposites, relationships of division and ill-will.

As a moral ideology, Metz submission is particularly relevant to what I propose in this paper as it would place on the individual, the obligation to engage with others from a place of goodwill and avoid divisions and discrimination by enjoining individuals to promote a shared identity. Of further interest to me is Asouzu's delineation of what he terms the 'ambivalence of human interests', where individuals perform actions that they believe to be of their own interest only to realise that such actions undermine those same interest. This ambivalence proceeds from the fragmented thinking that is associated with false self-interests. This happens when individuals consider the effects of their actions on a small part of reality rather than the complementary whole, as well as ignoring the future effects of their actions. If the individual needs the society

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to survive, then she must only choose to do the very things that ensure the flourishing of her society both at present and in a future referential manner. For many societies, the values that ensure this flourishing are formally and/or informally laid out in the various norms and laws that that society finds relevant. Beyond this, the need to constantly engage those values, in terms of deciphering their present and future relevance as well as their capacity to ensure flourishing, becomes crucial in developing the ideology that would matter for a given society. In addition, this ideology can be contextual too, and so I will not pretend to propose a universal moral ideology but I will attempt to present the bare bones that society can work with—an ideological concept that would guide various conceptions.

Also of importance, is the understanding that community may not imply homogeneity. If this is true, one might ask how the diversity of seemingly opposed interests or expectations may align with what I seek to propose here.[8] To answer this question, I briefly turn to Jonathan Chimakonam's idea of conversationalism. Conversationalism, as a philosophy, specifically deals with the type of interactions that ought to exist among seemingly opposed 'variables'. Within the view, a few principles are highlighted: (1) the resistance to hegemony since no individual or specific group is, in itself, self-sustaining; (2) the importance of critical engagements, which aid the constant improvement of differing viewpoints through arumaristics[9]; and (3) the avoidance of a synthesis of opposing variables in order to prevent the loss of the precious identities of differing groups. Thus, when societies have seemingly opposed individuals or groups within it, what I propose is constant conversations among such groups, such that their views about what constitutes their interests are firmly interrogated, reconstructed and understood in a way that does not destroy identities and interests through the emergence of an hegemony but in a way that ensures mutual refinement and mutual growth. It is through this creative contestation that inputs and compromises are made, all in a bid to ensure the flourishing of everyone involved.

Now, in the context of democratic governance, Metz's idea can be tweaked slightly to emphasise the importance of establishing communal flourishing or the common good, now and in the future. The idea of communal flourishing good is relevant since it preserves the interest of the *individual in a group* (as opposed to the interest of the individual alone). Thus, from Metz's relational idea, Asouzu's complementary philosophy and Chimakonam's conversationalism, I draw out a democratic moral ideology (DMI) that can stand as a guide for African states, as a guide for drawing out the values and norms that would ensure their flourishing, as follows:

> DMI: Individuals/societies ought to act/value only in those ways that would promote a shared identity among those in their society that is grounded on goodwill, persistent conversations and the flourishing or joy of their society, both now and in a future referential manner; individuals ought not to act in ways that tend to encourage relationships of division, ill-will and/or in ways that encourage the ambivalence of human interests.

With DMI in mind, individuals who are citizens would, socially, act in ways that inspire goodwill towards others (since goodwill often ensures the flourishing of others) and, politically, endorse candidates and policies that ensure that the interests of every individual is

[8]Many thanks to a reviewer for this observation.

[9]A process of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of ideas and viewpoints, via an encounter with the *other*.

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realised by virtue of the pursuit of the common good. Leaders and representatives, in making compromises and creating policies, would only serve the common good/interests of their societies and not the interest of some small fragment of society (usually to the detriment of others).

From DMI, one can develop more specific ideological frameworks that cater to the contextual needs of varying societies. And, so, in response to the question; 'what type of ideology is acceptable?', my reply would be a contextually relevant ideology that is grounded on the principles put forward in DMI. Moral ideologies, as they emerge in various societies (undergirded by DMI), should then be presented in informal forms of education. From small family units where children are taught how to behave in society, to age-grade groups, initiation ceremonies, religious gatherings, etc., individuals can be taught lessons that embody the moral ideologies, undergirded by the principles associated with DMI—shared identity, goodwill to others and communal flourishing. With these ideals firmly engraved in the brains of individuals, individuals would be morally educated/equipped to deal with petty vices that are meant to circumvent the democratic process in favour of a false sense of personal gain.

Beyond this, the formal educational sector ought to be vastly improved (in terms of quality of instructors, the quality of the curriculum and the quality of infrastructure). Why this is important is because when the quality of formal education is high, individuals easily acquire the requisite knowledge and skill to make informed decisions—especially regarding policies that affect various aspects of life. In the same vein, the broadening of one's intellectual horizon mitigates, to a significant degree, the myopia that often affects the individual's outlook on life and an individual's ideals. This is not to say that once educated one is no longer prone to occasionally making wrong decisions. What is crucial is that the individual is arguably less likely to make bad decisions on average. This is especially so, politically speaking, if individuals are taught to understand the history and political landscape of their various societies, and also the civic responsibilities/obligations owed to their societies.

One question still remains, however, and that is the question of how to mitigate against the problems associated with unreflective dogma and the possibility of mass manipulation and other related problems.[10] My response to this problem is simple. DMI, as a meta-ideology, springs from the foundation of safeguarding the individual interests through communal flourishing. Crucial to this foundation is the understanding that every individual's interest ought to be considered if communal flourishing is to be complete. What this, then, entails is that any ideology that is truly built on DMI cannot damage individual interests (whether by means of miseducation or manipulation) since such a damage violates individual interests. Also, insofar as there is a constant engagement regarding what constitutes communal flourishing, DMI excludes itself from the category of unreflective dogma.

4.2 | True self-interestedness

True self-interestedness relies on the premise that individuals ought to always act in ways that truly preserve their lives and interests, all things considered. Now, there is an important point that one must take note of in any discussion about true self-interestedness. This is the understanding that individuals can express true self-interestedness in two ways—as individuals and as *individuals in a group*.

[10]Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising this concern.

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The first instance involves true self-interestedness in relation to individuals operating on their own. Whereas such an existence is almost impractical for a human being, who is understood as a social being, it is still conceivable. Here, simple actions like clothing one's self, feeding one's self and managing environmental resources would all serve to truly preserve the individual's life/interests. This would be unlike actions related to the mismanaging resources. False self-interestedness would also express itself here if the individual, for instance, mismanages a resource (a recent harvest) for a momentary gain (the pleasure of eating a lot of food over a short period of time). However, true self-interestedness of this type does not concern us, since our concern is with democracies, and since individuals rarely exist as *beings-alone*. True self-interestedness, as it relates to individuals in a democratic society, necessarily involves an appeal to the common good or common interest. When individuals come together in a society, they not only impose their individual mandates on a sovereign, they also agree to merge their individual interests into a collective interest. Unsurprisingly, the need to sustain that collective interest is mostly (if not only) hinged on self-interest.

This collective interest, being a conglomeration of individual interests, serves the interest of the individual in a group or *individual in society*. In other words, any talk of truly preserving one's life/self, insofar as the individual is part of a democratic society, must involve the preservation of the collective interests since the individual, who necessarily needs a community to survive, must ensure the flourishing of that community because his/her life depends on it. Why tyrannical and oligarchical governments are problematic, is due to the fact that collective interests are sidelined in favour of individual interest or the interest of a few. It is this nod to collective interests that also justifies acts of independence and secession when the interest of a minority, or any group, is irredeemably undermined—especially where collective interests are determined by a majority.[11] To be sure, one can summarise true self-interestedness as follows:

> TSI: Insofar as the individual belongs to a democratic society, the individual truly pursues and preserves her interest/life when s/he acts according to the collective interest.[12]

When individuals in a society begin to uphold the collective interests of that society, then the problems associated with false self-interest outlined in the previous discussion about false self-interestedness are mitigated. Thus, when one declares that democracy, *especially from an African point of view, is a form of government that requires that policies (whenever possible), leaders and/or representatives are chosen* via *consensus by members of a society/group who are above the age of 18*, we are sure that those individuals deciding on their leaders/representatives, as well as the policies, are doing so from an experienced, well-educated and well-informed perspective. When we further add *that institutions of government—which ensure civil liberties, provide checks and ensure a bloodless transition of power and/or reform—continue to exist, in order to avoid tyranny by an individual or a group of individuals*, we are relatively certain that those manning these institutions, as well as those in positions of power, truly

[11]In such instances, individuals ought to be able to retrieve their mandate—as per the social contract—and install a new society and sovereign that would ensure their uncompromisable interests.

[12]It is important to point out, at this juncture, is that whatever is considered to be the collective interest ought to be derived from dialogue and compromise such that what is proposed is of utmost good benefit to as many individiduals as possible; this means that whatever encourages the true flourishing should be what is pursued.

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understand that tyranny (which usually subverts collective interests) rarely ensures collective interests.

For me, education (both formal and informal/ideological) and ethics (in terms of true self-interestedness) are crucial to politics since politics particularly involves making the right choices in the interests of all. Where one is not educated enough to make the right choices, and when one makes choices that seek only a fragmented sort of self-interest (the interest of one or some, rather than all), it is inevitable that the wrong choices will be made (whether in the choice of leadership or the choice of policies), except where sheer luck allows a misinformed and/or falsely self-interested individual to make the right choice. In this way, one cannot but see the link between education, ethics and politics.

5 | CONCLUSION

I have, so far, x-rayed what I consider to be the two main reasons why democracy has failed in Africa—miseducation and false self-interestedness. The major draw of the democratic system of government has been the fact that individuals possessed the power to determine who their leaders are and, to some extent, what those leaders do. This power is often expressed in elections, referendums and/or other such forums where individuals or their representatives choose their leaders/policies. As we have seen, democracy in Africa fails precisely because individuals are either too miseducated to always make the right decision or implement what has been decided and/or because individuals fail to pursue the collective interest (true self-interestedness). While I have outlined possible solutions bordering on the pursuit of true self-interest and proper education of citizens, it remains to be seen whether African peoples/states would willingly decide to solve the problems plaguing their democracies. For that, I am staunchly pessimistic.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There is no conflict of interest to disclose.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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