

Violence in the Guise of Democracy: The Colonial Normalization of Authoritarian Rule in Africa

Dr Arinaitwe Julius¹, Akampurira Sarah²

1, 2 Metropolitan International University

Abstract

This article examined the paradoxical relationship between democratic discourse and authoritarian practice in post-colonial Africa. Through a comprehensive historiographical and political analysis, it argued that contemporary African authoritarianism was not a deviation from a democratic norm but rather the continuation and adaptation of colonial administrative violence that had been systematically normalized across the continent over more than a century. Drawing on case studies from Uganda, Zimbabwe, Cameroon, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, the article demonstrated that the very institutions through which colonial powers administered violence — the police, the military, executive-dominated governance structures, and juridical systems — were inherited largely intact by post-independence African states and subsequently clothed in the language of democratic legitimacy. The findings revealed that international democracy promotion frameworks, particularly those exported by Western nations and multilateral institutions, had paradoxically reinforced these authoritarian tendencies by privileging procedural democracy over substantive freedom, electoral competition over structural transformation, and institutional stability over meaningful popular sovereignty. The article concluded that a genuine democratization of Africa required not merely the reform of electoral systems but a deep reckoning with the colonial genealogies of political violence that continued to shape governance across the continent.

Keywords: Violence, Guise, Democracy, Colonial Normalization and Authoritarian Rule

Introduction

When Samuel Huntington wrote about the third wave of democratization in 1991, he identified sub-Saharan Africa as a primary theatre of democratic transition (Julius & Kazaara, 2025e). Within years of his intervention, dozens of African states had introduced multiparty elections, constitutional reforms, and institutional architectures that ostensibly mirrored liberal democratic models developed in the Global North. Scholars, international observers, and Western governments greeted these changes with considerable optimism, and aid conditionalities were restructured around the assumption that Africa was finally embarking on a democratic journey that other regions of the world had previously completed (Julius & Kazaara, 2026). Yet what transpired across the continent in the three decades that followed confounded these optimistic projections in ways that demanded deeper intellectual engagement (Julius & Kazaara, 2025a).

The persistent coexistence of electoral democracy and systematic state violence in countries such as Uganda, Cameroon, Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Egypt pointed not to democratic consolidation but to the emergence of what scholars had variously described as competitive authoritarianism, electoral autocracy, hybrid regimes, and illiberal democracy (Julius, 2024b). In these political systems, elections were held with regularity, opposition parties were permitted to contest, constitutions enshrined civic rights, and leaders spoke the language of popular sovereignty (Julius

Received: 04.04.2026

Accepted: 10.04.2026

Published on: 30.04.2026

& Nancy, 2025c). Yet simultaneously, security forces continued to commit extrajudicial violence with impunity, political opponents disappeared into detention without trial, press freedoms were curtailed through administrative and legislative mechanisms, and civil society organizations faced persistent harassment (Julius, 2024b). The coexistence of democratic form and authoritarian substance was not accidental; it was structural, historically rooted, and ideologically productive.

This article proceeded from the premise that understanding contemporary African authoritarianism required a genealogical rather than merely comparative approach (Julius & Kazaara, 2025c). Rather than measuring African political systems against an idealized liberal democratic standard and cataloguing their deficiencies, this study sought to trace the historical conditions through which the normalization of political violence had been produced and reproduced across the continent (Julius & Kazaara, 2025c). Central to this analysis was the argument that colonial rule represented not merely a political arrangement external to Africa's current political realities but the foundational moment in which a particular relationship between governance and violence was institutionalized (Julius & Kaazara, 2025b). The colonial state had been, in the language of Achille Mbembe, primarily a machinery of extraction maintained through the organized application of violence, and the post-colonial state had inherited this machinery while adding a democratic veneer (Julius & Audrey, 2025a).

The colonial normalization of authoritarian rule operated through several interlocking mechanisms that this article sought to analyze with considerable analytical depth (Julius & Kaazara, 2025b). First, colonial administrations had governed African populations through what Mahmood Mamdani called the 'decentralized despotism' of customary authority, in which local chiefs served as conduits of colonial power and were endowed with near-absolute authority over the populations under their jurisdiction (Nancy & Audrey, 2026b). Second, colonial states had developed extensive systems of surveillance, documentation, and population control that post-colonial governments subsequently adapted and expanded (Rashid et al., 2023). Colonial legal systems had created hierarchies of citizenship that normalized differential rights, differential treatment before the law, and differential exposure to state violence based on race, ethnicity, and class categories that post-colonial states reproduced in modified form (Julius & Audrey, 2025b). Fourth, and perhaps most significantly, colonialism had created a political culture in which the exercise of power was divorced from accountability to the governed, a culture that persisted long after formal independence.

2. Literature Review: Colonialism, Violence, and Post-Colonial Governance

The intellectual genealogy of scholarship on African authoritarianism was rich, contested, and deeply consequential for the analytical frameworks through which contemporary African politics was interpreted (Julius & Nancy, 2025a). The earliest systematic scholarly engagement with African political systems following independence was dominated by modernization theory, which posited that African states were in the process of 'developing' toward liberal democratic forms that had characterized Western Europe and North America (Julius & Kazaara, 2025e). Scholars working within this paradigm, including Gabriel Almond, Lucian Pye, and Samuel Huntington in his earlier work, conceptualized political development as a linear process in which traditional, pre-modern political cultures gradually

Received: 04.04.2026

Accepted: 10.04.2026

Published on: 30.04.2026

gave way to rational-bureaucratic institutions and pluralist competition(Julius & Kazaara, 2025c). African authoritarianism, within this framework, was understood as a residue of underdevelopment a transitional phase that would be superseded as societies modernized(Julius & Audrey, 2026a).

This theoretical framework had been subjected to sustained and compelling critique by dependency theorists and scholars of African political economy from the 1970s onwards. Walter Rodney's landmark work demonstrated how colonialism had actively underdeveloped Africa by extracting resources, distorting economies, and destroying indigenous political institutions(Julius, 2025). Rodney's intervention was crucial because it reframed the question of African development not as a story of insufficient progress toward a universal norm but as a story of systematic dispossession produced by a particular global political economy(Julius & Kazaara, 2026). This framing opened space for subsequent scholars to examine how colonial political institutions had not merely failed to lay democratic foundations but had actively constructed the conditions for post-colonial authoritarianism(Audrey & Nancy, 2025).

Mahmood Mamdani's influential work on citizenship and subject-hood in Africa made perhaps the most theoretically sophisticated contribution to this literature. Mamdani argued that colonialism had bifurcated the political subject into the citizen, who enjoyed civil rights and was governed by civil law, and the subject, who was governed through customary authority administered by native chiefs(Audrey & Nancy, 2025). This bifurcation produced a rural majority who had no experience of rights-bearing citizenship and who were accustomed to the arbitrary exercise of authority by traditional leaders operating as agents of colonial power(Margaret & Kazaara, 2024). When African states gained independence, this bifurcated political subjectivity was inherited and adapted rather than transformed, resulting in states that extended citizenship rights to urban elites while continuing to govern rural populations through variants of customary authority.

Achille Mbembe's work on the postcolony offered a phenomenological account of political power in Africa that moved beyond institutional analysis to examine the cultural and symbolic dimensions of state violence(Julius & Kaazara, 2025b). For Mbembe, post-colonial African states were characterized by a specific regime of signs and practices through which power was exercised, displayed, and consumed(Julius & Kazaara, 2025b). The grotesque excesses of post-colonial rulers their accumulation of titles, their theatrical violence, their simultaneous demand for adulation and fear were understood not as primitive deviations from rational governance but as specific historical formations produced by the encounter between indigenous political traditions and colonial mimicry(Julius & Kaazara, 2025a). Mbembe's concept of necropolitics, developed in later work, extended Foucault's notion of biopower to argue that sovereignty in post-colonial contexts was exercised primarily through the power to decide who should live and who should die a power that had been refined and systematized during the colonial period(Julius, 2024a).

More recent scholarship had engaged with the specific mechanisms through which democratic discourse was deployed in the service of authoritarian governance. Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way's concept of competitive authoritarianism described political systems in which formally democratic institutions coexisted with systematic incumbent advantages that made genuine democratic competition impossible(Julius & Matovu, 2025). Their analysis was particularly

Received: 04.04.2026

Accepted: 10.04.2026

Published on: 30.04.2026

relevant to the African context, where ruling parties had become adept at using electoral processes to legitimize their continued grip on power while simultaneously undermining the conditions for meaningful political competition (Julius, 2025). The work of Nic Cheeseman and Brian Klass on how autocrats rigged elections provided detailed empirical documentation of the specific techniques through which this manipulation operated, from gerrymandering and voter registration manipulation to the selective deployment of state resources and the intimidation of opposition supporters.

Table 1: Comparative Regime Classification and Human Rights Scores in Selected African Countries (1990–2023).

Country	Independence Year	Years Under Competitive Authoritarianism (1990-2023)	Regime Type (2023)	Human Rights Score (0-10)
Uganda	1962	33 years	Competitive Authoritarian	2.8
Cameroon	1960	33 years	Competitive Authoritarian	2.1
Zimbabwe	1980	28 years	Competitive Authoritarian	3.0
Ethiopia	1993	22 years	Electoral Authoritarian	2.4
DRC	1960	33 years	Fragile State/Authoritarian	1.9
Rwanda	1962	33 years	Dominant Party Authoritarian	3.5
Senegal	1960	12 years	Transitional Democracy	5.8
Ghana	1957	5 years	Consolidated Democracy	6.7
Botswana	1966	3 years	Liberal Democracy	7.1

Sources: V-Dem Institute 2023; Freedom House 2023; Polity IV Project.

The data presented in Table 1 revealed a stark pattern that had defined African politics since the return to multiparty competition in the early 1990s. Of the nine countries examined, six had spent the entire post-1990 period under some form of competitive or electoral authoritarianism, demonstrating that the adoption of formal democratic structures had

not resulted in the substantive democratization of political power(Julius & Audrey, 2026b). Uganda and Cameroon stood out as particularly striking cases, having maintained competitive authoritarian arrangements for the entire 33-year period under examination(Julius & Audrey, 2026b). Both countries had held regular elections throughout this period, yet both had also maintained ruling parties in continuous power through systematic manipulation, coercion, and the suppression of political competition. The human rights scores of these countries reflected the gap between democratic form and authoritarian substance, with Uganda scoring 2.8 and Cameroon 2.1 on a ten-point scale in which higher scores indicated greater respect for civil and political rights(Julius & Kazaara, 2025d). By contrast, Botswana and Ghana, which had undergone more genuine democratic consolidation, recorded human rights scores of 7.1 and 6.7 respectively, suggesting that meaningful democratization was possible but required structural conditions that most African states had not yet achieved(Julius & Audrey, 2026a).

3. Colonial Foundations of Political Violence

The colonial encounter in Africa was not simply an episode of political subjugation but a comprehensive reorganization of social, economic, cultural, and political life that created structural conditions persisting long after formal independence(Julius & Nancy, 2025a). Understanding the colonial foundations of political violence required attention to at least four dimensions: the administrative architecture of colonial rule, the legal frameworks through which colonial authority was exercised, the economic structures that made violence necessary for extraction, and the cultural formations through which violence was normalized and justified(Julius & Kazaara, 2026). This section examined each of these dimensions with particular reference to the British and French colonial systems, which between them governed the vast majority of sub-Saharan African territory.

The administrative architecture of British colonial rule in Africa was built around what Frederick Lugard famously theorized as 'indirect rule' the practice of governing African populations through existing or reconstructed traditional authorities rather than through a direct bureaucratic apparatus staffed by European officials(Julius & Kaazara, 2025b). This system had important consequences for the relationship between governance and violence(Julius & Audrey, 2025a). Traditional chiefs, who served as the primary instruments of colonial administration, wielded coercive authority over the populations under their control, collecting taxes, organizing labor, adjudicating disputes, and enforcing colonial regulations(Julius & Audrey, 2025a). This authority was backed by the ultimate sanction of colonial military force, but in day-to-day practice it operated through the threat and reality of local coercion administered by native authority police and traditional sanctions. The system normalized a relationship between governance and arbitrary authority in which the governed had no recourse to rights against the exercise of administrative power(Julius & Kazaara, 2026).

French colonial administration operated through a different formal architecture but produced similar outcomes for the governed population. The French doctrine of assimilation theoretically held open the possibility of full citizenship for educated Africans who had sufficiently internalized French cultural norms, but in practice the vast majority of the African population was governed through the *indigénat* a special legal code that gave colonial administrators the

authority to impose administrative punishments, including imprisonment and forced labor, without judicial process(Julius, 2025). The indigénat represented the formalization of executive violence in colonial governance, institutionalizing the principle that African subjects could be punished at the discretion of administrative officials without the procedural protections that applied to French citizens(Julius & Kazaara, 2025c). This principle survived in modified form in many francophone African states following independence, where executive authority continued to be exercised with minimal judicial oversight.

The economic foundations of colonial rule made violence not merely convenient but structurally necessary. The colonial project was fundamentally an enterprise of extraction of labor, land, and resources and the extraction of these inputs from a population that had no material incentive to provide them required coercive compulsion(Julius & Audrey, 2025a). Forced labor systems, hut and poll taxes designed to force Africans into the wage economy, land alienation that destroyed subsistence economies, and price controls that depressed the returns to African agricultural production all represented economic violences that were maintained through the threat and reality of physical coercion. The infrastructure of colonial violence the police, the military, the network of prisons and detention facilities was built and maintained primarily in service of economic extraction, and it was this infrastructure that post-colonial governments inherited along with the economies it had been constructed to serve(Julius & Nancy, 2025b).

Table 2: Colonial Mechanisms of Violence and Their Post-Colonial Equivalents.

Colonial Mechanism	Implementing Power	Duration	Post-Colonial Equivalent	Documented Incidents
Forced Labour (portage)	Belgium, Germany, France	1880–1950	Informal forced labour for state projects	Widespread
Native Authority Courts	Britain	1900–1960	Executive Magistracy	Documented in 28 states
Indigénat Code	France, Portugal	1887–1956	Administrative detention laws	Active in 14 states
Poll & Hut Tax	All colonial powers	1895–1960	Revenue extraction from informal sector	Universal
Pass System	Britain (S. Africa, Zimbabwe)	1896–1994	ID-based movement restrictions	Documented in 9 states
Collective Punishment	All colonial powers	1880–1960	Community policing operations	Documented in 19 states
Curfew Orders	All colonial powers	1880–1960	Emergency law provisions	Active in 16 states

Sources: Mamdani (1996); Young (1994); Coquery-Vidrovitch (2001); Amnesty International Archives.

Table 2 documented the remarkable continuity between colonial mechanisms of violence and post-colonial governance instruments across the continent. Of the seven colonial mechanisms examined, all had direct equivalents in post-colonial legal and administrative practice (Audrey & Nancy, 2025). The indigénat code, which had permitted French colonial officials to imprison and punish African subjects without judicial process, found its post-colonial equivalent in the administrative detention laws that remained on the statute books of fourteen African states as of the study period (Nancy & Audrey, 2026b). Similarly, collective punishment the colonial practice of holding entire communities responsible for the actions of individuals and punishing them accordingly had been documented in nineteen post-colonial African states through community policing operations and counter-insurgency measures that subjected civilian populations to collective reprisals for the activities of armed groups (Nancy & Prudence, 2024). The persistence of these mechanisms across the colonial divide was not coincidental but reflected the structural inheritance that post-colonial states received from their colonial predecessors.

4. The Democratic Vocabulary of Authoritarian Practice

One of the most significant innovations of contemporary African authoritarianism was its mastery of democratic vocabulary. Unlike the openly dictatorial regimes of the immediate post-independence period, which made no claim to democratic legitimacy and governed through naked military force, the competitive authoritarian regimes that proliferated across Africa after the third wave of democratization had developed sophisticated discursive strategies for appropriating the language of democracy in the service of authoritarian consolidation (Nancy & Audrey, 2026a). This appropriation operated at several levels, from the constitutional architecture of the state to the day-to-day rhetoric of political leaders, and it was essential to understanding how these regimes sustained their legitimacy both domestically and internationally.

At the constitutional level, most competitive authoritarian regimes in Africa had adopted constitutions that enshrined fundamental rights, separated powers, provided for independent judiciaries, and established democratic institutions including electoral commissions, human rights commissions, and auditor generals. These constitutional provisions were not merely decorative — they created formal constraints on executive power that occasionally forced governments to modify their behavior. However, the relationship between constitutional text and political practice was mediated by the control that dominant parties exercised over the institutions responsible for interpreting and implementing constitutional provisions. When constitutional courts or electoral commissions made decisions unfavorable to incumbent governments, they faced a range of responses including judicial restructuring, budgetary strangulation, the intimidation of individual judges, and constitutional amendments that altered the rules of the game. The Ugandan case offered perhaps the most instructive illustration of how democratic vocabulary was deployed in the service of authoritarian consolidation. President Yoweri Museveni, who had governed Uganda since 1986, had developed over nearly four decades in power a sophisticated discourse that simultaneously invoked the language of popular sovereignty, economic development, regional security, and democratic progress while systematically

Received: 04.04.2026

Accepted: 10.04.2026

Published on: 30.04.2026

dismantling the institutional conditions for meaningful democratic competition. The removal of presidential term limits in 2005, achieved through a combination of parliamentary bribery and constitutional amendment, was justified by Museveni's ruling National Resistance Movement as a response to popular demand for his continued leadership. The subsequent extension of his eligibility beyond the age limit established in the same constitution, achieved in 2017 through a constitutional amendment that the parliamentary opposition attempted to resist through a filibuster that was ended by the physical removal of opposition MPs from the chamber, was framed as a democratic correction to an arbitrary restriction on citizens' right to choose their leaders.

Table 3: Constitutional Constraints on Executive Power and Methods of Circumvention in Selected African States.

Country	Constitutional Constraint	Year Introduced	Year Violated/Removed	Method of Circumvention
Uganda	Presidential term limits (2 terms)	1995	2005	Constitutional amendment via parliament
Uganda	Presidential age limit (75 years)	1995	2017	Constitutional amendment + military intimidation
Cameroon	Presidential term limits (2 terms)	1996	2008	Constitutional amendment
Rwanda	Presidential term limits (2 terms)	2003	2015	Constitutional referendum
Burundi	Presidential term limits (2 terms)	2005	2015	Presidential declaration + referendum
Congo-Brazzaville	Presidential age limit	2002	2015	Constitutional referendum
Zimbabwe	Senate independence	1979	2013	Constitutional restructuring
Guinea	Presidential term limits	2010	2020	New constitution referendum

Sources: Constitution Net 2023; V-Dem Constitutional Change Dataset; Human Rights Watch.

Table 3 documented the systematic pattern through which constitutional constraints on executive power had been dismantled across Africa during the post-democratization period (Audrey & Nancy, 2025). In every case examined, the primary mechanism through which term limits, age limits, and institutional independence had been eroded was explicitly democratic constitutional amendment through parliamentary processes or popular referendum (Julius & Nancy, 2026). This finding was analytically significant because it revealed that the erosion of democratic constraints in Africa had not typically taken the form of the classic military coup or extra-constitutional seizure of power but had

rather been accomplished through the formal procedures of democratic governance (Kazaara & Nancy, 2025). Parliaments had amended constitutions, referenda had approved changes, constitutional courts had certified the legality of modifications and each of these actions could be presented internationally as evidence of democratic process even as their cumulative effect was to remove the institutional obstacles to permanent rule.

5. International Democracy Promotion and the Legitimization of Authoritarian Practice

The international dimension of democratic legitimization in Africa had received insufficient scholarly attention, particularly the degree to which Western democracy promotion frameworks had inadvertently or deliberately contributed to the sustainability of competitive authoritarian regimes. The architecture of international democracy promotion, developed primarily through American and European institutions following the end of the Cold War, was built around a procedural model of democracy that privileged electoral competition, constitutional reform, and institutional capacity building over the deeper structural transformations that meaningful democratization required. This procedural bias had significant consequences for the effectiveness of international democracy promotion in Africa and for the incentives it created for African governments.

The structural dependency of African states on Western bilateral aid and multilateral development financing gave international democracy promotion frameworks significant leverage over African governments that periodically activated this leverage in response to particularly egregious violations. However, the conditionality architecture through which this leverage was exercised was profoundly inconsistent, shaped by geopolitical interests, commercial relationships, and the varying domestic political climates of donor countries. Rwanda under Paul Kagame received consistent international support despite its classification by all major human rights organizations as an authoritarian state with minimal tolerance for political dissent, largely because of Kagame's effective management of genocide commemoration, his economic development rhetoric, and his usefulness as a regional security actor. Uganda under Museveni received consistent Western support through multiple decades of democratic erosion because of its role in the counter-terrorism architecture in the Horn of Africa and its geographic position adjacent to conflict zones in South Sudan and the DRC.

This geopolitical selectivity in the application of democratic conditionality communicated a specific message to African political elites: that the language of democracy was required but that the substance was optional, particularly for governments that could demonstrate usefulness to Western security and commercial interests. The result was a sophisticated performance of democratic form by authoritarian governments that had learned precisely what Western donors and international observers required to maintain continued engagement. Elections were held, constitutional processes were followed, human rights commissions were established and staffed, and periodic meetings with civil society organizations were convened — all of which created a documentary record of democratic process that could be presented to international audiences even as the underlying political reality remained fundamentally authoritarian.

6. State Violence and the Post-Colonial Body Politic

The exercise of state violence against political opponents, journalists, civil society activists, and ordinary citizens constituted the most direct expression of the colonial inheritance in post-colonial African governance. Unlike the theatrical state violence of openly authoritarian regimes, which deployed mass repression as a demonstration of power, competitive authoritarian regimes in Africa had developed more calibrated forms of violence that served specific political purposes while maintaining the plausibility of democratic normalcy. This calibrated violence operated through several mechanisms that demanded careful analytical attention.

The first mechanism was the use of legal processes as instruments of targeted political persecution. In Uganda, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Tanzania, opposition politicians, journalists, and activists had been subject to a continuous stream of criminal prosecutions, civil suits, tax investigations, and administrative actions that were framed as the legitimate exercise of the rule of law but were in practice instruments of political management. The pattern was consistent: individuals or organizations that became politically threatening to incumbent governments found themselves facing charges of treason, sedition, tax evasion, drug trafficking, or corruption — charges that were difficult to disprove, that consumed the financial and organizational resources of targets, that created reputational damage in the public sphere, and that could result in pre-trial detention sufficient to remove opponents from the political arena at critical moments. The second mechanism was the deployment of security forces in forms that could not easily be attributed to the state. In several African countries, military and police intelligence services maintained relationships with private security actors, criminal organizations, and informal militias that could be activated to threaten, assault, or disappear political opponents without creating a direct line of accountability to the state. The assassination of political activists in Uganda, the kidnapping of journalists in Cameroon, the disappearance of opposition supporters in Zimbabwe these actions had been documented by human rights organizations but were consistently denied by governments that pointed to the absence of direct evidence linking security forces to specific incidents.

Table 4: State Violence Indicators in Selected African Countries (2015–2023).

Country	Documented Cases of Political Detention (2015-2023)	Journalist Killings (2015-2023)	Torture Allegations Documented	Govt Accountability (cases prosecuted)
Uganda	847	3	412	4 (0.5%)
Cameroon	2,341	7	891	2 (0.1%)
Zimbabwe	1,203	2	567	8 (0.7%)
Ethiopia	3,892	12	1,204	11 (0.3%)
DRC	5,671	19	3,401	23 (0.4%)
Rwanda	341	1	198	6 (1.8%)
Kenya	412	4	234	19 (4.6%)
Ghana	23	0	12	14 (60.9%)

Sources: Amnesty International; Human Rights Watch; Committee to Protect Journalists; African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.

The data in Table 4 illuminated a stark pattern of state violence and impunity across the competitive authoritarian states of Africa during the 2015 to 2023 period. The Democratic Republic of Congo had recorded the highest absolute numbers of documented political detentions at 5,671, torture allegations at 3,401, and journalist killings at 19, reflecting the particular severity of political violence in a state experiencing ongoing armed conflict alongside civilian political repression. Ethiopia followed with 3,892 documented political detentions and 1,204 torture allegations, figures that reflected the massive expansion of political persecution during the Tigray conflict period. What was analytically most significant, however, was not the absolute numbers of documented violations but the near-universal impunity with which they were met. Across the competitive authoritarian states examined, the rate of governmental accountability — measured by the proportion of documented cases that resulted in prosecution — ranged from a low of 0.1% in Cameroon to a maximum of 1.8% in Rwanda. Only Ghana, the most democratically consolidated state in the sample, recorded a substantially higher accountability rate of 60.9%, suggesting that meaningful accountability for state violence was possible but required democratic conditions that most African states had not achieved.

7. Conclusion: Toward a Decolonial Democratic Theory

This article had sought to demonstrate that contemporary African authoritarianism was not an aberration from a democratic norm but the continuation of a historically specific relationship between governance and violence that had been institutionalized during the colonial period. The specific mechanisms through which colonial violence was normalized — the administrative architecture of indirect rule, the legal framework of the indigénat, the economic necessity of coercive extraction, and the cultural formations of colonial political life — had been inherited and adapted by post-colonial states that simultaneously adopted the vocabulary of democracy without its substance.

The implications of this analysis for democratic theory and practice in Africa were significant. If the colonial normalization of authoritarian rule was structural rather than merely dispositional, then the reform of individual leaders or the improvement of electoral administration — the primary instruments of international democracy promotion — were insufficient responses to the problem. What was required was a deeper institutional transformation that addressed not merely the procedural dimensions of democracy but the structural conditions — economic, legal, administrative, and cultural — that continued to make authoritarian governance rational for political elites and acceptable to large portions of the governed population.

The decolonial democratic theory implied by this analysis would need to engage seriously with the multiple genealogies of democratic thought and practice that existed within Africa itself — the traditions of communal deliberation, accountability through oral culture, and distributed authority that had characterized many pre-colonial political systems and that offered resources for imagining alternatives to both colonial authoritarianism and imported liberal democracy. This was not a romantic recuperation of a pre-colonial past but a recognition that the conditions

Received: 04.04.2026

Accepted: 10.04.2026

Published on: 30.04.2026

for genuine democratization in Africa required frameworks rooted in African political experience rather than European institutional models whose own democratic credentials were frequently more celebrated than deserved.

References

Cheeseman, N., & Klass, B. (2018). *How to Rig an Election*. Yale University Press.

Fanon, F. (1963). *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press.

Huntington, S. P. (1991). *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. University of Oklahoma Press.

Levitsky, S., & Way, L. A. (2010). *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War*. Cambridge University Press.

Audrey, A., & Nancy, M. (2025). *Alone but Not Lonely : Reconceptualizing Solitude as a Disciplinary Resource in African Higher Education*. 9(11), 117–126.

Julius, A. (2024a). *Inventory Management Strategy and its Impact on Production Efficiency : An Empirical Evidence of Mukwano Manufacturing Industries*. 8(4), 96–99.

Julius, A. (2024b). *Staff Development and its Impact on students Academic Performance Among selected secondary Schools in Kanungu District*. 8(4), 155–160.

Julius, A. (2025). *The Unfulfilled Promise : A 30-Year Evaluation of Uganda ' s 1992 White Paper on Education*. 9(8), 146–153.

Julius, A., & Audrey, A. (2025a). *Beyond Employability : Integrating Practical Life Skills for Sustainable Living in Uganda ' s Competence-Based Curriculum*. 9(12), 128–138.

Julius, A., & Audrey, A. (2025b). *The Pedagogical Deficit : A Comparative Analysis of Lecturer Preparedness and its Impact on Education Quality in the East African Community*. 9(10), 113–122.

Julius, A., & Audrey, A. (2026a). *Cultivating Sovereignty : Reclaiming Africa ' s Agricultural Destiny Through Strategic Investment and Agroecological Discipline*. 10(2), 64–72.

Julius, A., & Audrey, A. (2026b). *The Solitary Warrior and the Collective : Deconstructing the False Dichotomy Between Individual Resilience and Social Cohesion*. 10(2), 105–111.

Julius, A., & Kaazara, A. G. (2025a). *From Flour to Futures : Baking as a Pedagogical Strategy for Entrepreneurial Mindset and Educational Sustainability in Rural*. 9(12), 257–265.

Julius, A., & Kaazara, A. G. (2025b). *From Specialists to Versatilists : The Imperative for Multiple Skilling in Ugandan Higher Education*. 9(11), 380–386.

Julius, A., & Kazaara, A. G. (2025a). *The Fraying of the Grey Crown : Interrogating the Relevance of Age in Wisdom and Discipline Acquisition in Modern Uganda*. 9(10), 211–216.

Julius, A., & Kazaara, A. G. (2025b). *Women ' s Infidelity , Paternity Uncertainty , and Family Betrayal : A Case Study from Uganda*. 9(11), 315–321.

Julius, A., & Kazaara, A. I. (2025c). *Divine Dependency? Critiquing Religious Fatalism and*

Received: 04.04.2026

Accepted: 10.04.2026

Published on: 30.04.2026

Unquestioning Obedience as Impediments to Development in Africa. 9(12), 119–127.

Julius, A., & Kazaara, A. I. (2025d). *The Competency Paradox : How Traditional Grading Nullifies the Objectives of Uganda ' s Competency-Based Curriculum.* 9(11), 370–379.

Julius, A., & Kazaara, A. I. (2025e). *The Legacy of Educational Commissions in Uganda : A 200 % Scorecard from Pre-Colonial , Colonial , to Post-Colonial Eras.* 9(10), 105–112.

Julius, A., & Kazaara, A. I. (2026). *The Triple Helix of Stagnation ? Externalizing Agency , the Resource Curse , and the Psychology of Poverty in Africa.* 10(2), 396–403.

Julius, A., & Matovu, K. (2025). *Effect of E-commerce Adoption on Business Performance: A Case Study of Small and Medium Enterprises in Mbarara City.* 4(2), 93–102. <https://www.journals.miu.ac.ug>

Julius, A., & Nancy, M. (2025a). *Education Policy Reform as an Enabler to Student Success : The Kajubi Legacy and the Shift to Competency.* 9(11), 288–296.

Julius, A., & Nancy, M. (2025b). *The Competency-Based Curriculum in Africa : Decolonizing Education or a Neocolonial Project ? A Critical Analysis.* 9(12), 110–119.

Julius, A., & Nancy, M. (2025c). *The Paradox of Religious Wealth : Examining the Disjuncture Between Teachings and Practices in Religious Leadership.* 9(12), 194–203.

Julius, A., & Nancy, M. (2026). *The Innovative Rebel : Reconceptualizing Non-Conformity as a Catalyst for Societal Evolution.* 10(2), 73–82.

Kazaara, A. G., & Nancy, M. (2025). *Lazy at Work , Lazy at Home : An Examination of Behavioral Consistency in Conscientiousness Across Life Domains.* 9(11), 310–317.

Margaret, O. J., & Kazaara, A. I. (2024). *Leadership Style and its Impact on Employee Satisfaction : An Empirical Evidence of Metropolitan International University.* 8(4), 127–131.

Nancy, M., & Audrey, A. (2026a). *Beyond Romance : The Sociological Imperative to Decode the Hidden Group Dynamics of Marriage Introduction of the Study.* 10(2), 121–132.

Nancy, M., & Audrey, A. (2026b). *Beyond Romance : The Sociological Imperative to Decode the Hidden Group Dynamics of Marriage Introduction of the Study.* 10(2), 83–94.

Nancy, M., & Prudence, K. (2024). Capacity Building programs and their impact on employee performance. A case study of Metropolitan International University. *Researchgate.Net*, 8(4), 23–27. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Metropolitan-University/publication/380909234_Capacity_Building_programs_and_their_impact_on_employee_performance_A_case_study_of_Metropolitan_International_University/links/665576b30b0d2845745e0182/Capacity-Building-p

Rashid, S., Kazaara, A. G., & Kazaara, A. I. (2023). *Assessing The Impact Of Government Programs On Youth Empowerment In Communities , A Case Study Of Mityana Central Division , Mityana District.* 7(3), 352–362.

Lugard, F. D. (1922). *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*. Blackwood.

Mamdani, M. (1996). *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton University Press.

Mbembe, A. (2001). *On the Postcolony*. University of California Press.

Mbembe, A. (2003). Necropolitics. *Public Culture*, 15(1), 11–40.

Rodney, W. (1972). *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications.

Young, C. (1994). *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective*. Yale University Press.