



2nd African Union Studies Annual Symposium

Inclusive Development and the Future of Democracy
in Africa: The Role of the AU and the RECs

Concept Note and Call for Papers



Co-organised by the Institute for Pan-African Thought and Conversation (IPATC) at the University of Johannesburg (UJ), South Africa, and TrustAfrica, Dakar, Senegal.

1. Introduction

Following the successful hosting of the symposium titled “The African Union at 20: Progress, Problems and Prospects,” in commemoration of the 20 years of existence of the African Union (AU) in November 2022, the Institute for Pan-African Thought and Conversation (IPATC) at the University of Johannesburg (UJ), and TrustAfrica are jointly organising the **2nd African Union Studies Annual Symposium** on the theme: ***Inclusive Development and the Future of Democracy in Africa: The Role of the AU and the RECs***, to be convened at the Radisson Blu Hotel Sandton, Johannesburg, Gauteng South Africa between **4-6 November 2024**. This document serves as a concept note and a call for papers organised along various sections.

2. Contextual Background

The contemporary discourse on inclusive development and democracy in Africa has garnered significant attention as the continent stands at a crucial juncture in its socio-political evolution. Post-colonial African states were fascinated by the appeals of liberal democracy, viewing it as a path to attaining socio-political stability and accelerated economic development. Over the past decade, scholars and policymakers involved in Africa’s democratisation have had to ask whether democracy is being consolidated on the continent. While numerous countries have made significant strides toward establishing democratic institutions and practices, there are threats to democratic governance, and the consolidation of democracy remains uneven across the continent.

Many African countries have failed to attain political development beyond what has become the “ritualistic” conduct of elections and superficial political transitions without the substantive institutionalisation of democratic principles. The unfulfilled promises of democracy have been accompanied by poor governance and exclusivity politics, contributing to widespread poverty and insecurity. In regions such as West Africa and the Sahel, most people live below the poverty line of \$2.15 per day as of 2020, and millions of Africans face threats from religious extremists and other non-state armed groups. This issue has been starkly illustrated by recent political instability, including three attempts at military coups and five successful military interventions in the past 14 months. Additionally, economic development has been uneven, with significant disparities between urban and rural areas and a lack of inclusive policies that address the needs of marginalised or neglected groups, including the youth and women. The economic challenges are exacerbated by poor infrastructures, limited access to education and health care, and high unemployment rates, particularly among the youth. Similar patterns of democratic deficits and developmental challenges are also evident in West, Central Africa, and East Africa, where political instability and conflict have further impeded the attainment of the *Africa That We Want*.

Youth and women are often excluded from political and economic processes, limiting their opportunities for advancement. Historically, these groups have faced systemic barriers that limit their participation in economic, political, and social spheres, leading to persistent inequalities and exclusion from development benefits. Interestingly, Africa boasts the world’s youngest population, 70 per cent under the age of 30, and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) stands as the largest free trade area by population, exceeding 1.3 billion, with a combined gross domestic product (GDP) of \$3.4 trillion. Nevertheless, unemployment continues to soar, with about 13 million unemployed youth in 2023. The inability to harness this opportunity properly has translated what could have been a great demographic dividend into a source of social unrest, instability, and proliferation of violent extremism across the continent. However, the youth has demonstrated their capacity to influence states’ decision

-making processes as displayed during the #Feesmustfall movement in South Africa, the #EndSARS protest in Nigeria, the youth-led protest in Senegal, and the Gen-Z movement in Kenya.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the AU's Agenda 2063 provide a comprehensive blueprint for sustainable development and inclusive growth in Africa. Both frameworks emphasise the importance of good governance, social inclusion, and economic development. The SDGs, particularly Goal 16, which focuses on peace, justice, and strong institutions, align closely with the Agenda 2063 Aspirations 3 (an Africa of good governance, respect for human rights, justice, and the rule of law) and 4 (a peaceful and secure Africa). The AU's strategic framework for socio-economic transformation envisions a prosperous, integrated, and peaceful Africa driven by its citizens that represents a dynamic force in the global arena. These frameworks and the SDGs offer a roadmap for achieving democratic and inclusive development in Africa. Despite establishing the NEPAD-AUDA (the economic development initiative of the AU) and the African Peer Review Mechanism (to promote democratic governance), Africa continues to experience both development gaps and democratic deficits.

The inability of African countries to achieve sustainable socio-political stability and economic development highlights the fragility of African democratic institutions. It illuminates the urgent quest for rethinking the prevailing political and economic order across the continent. Thus, it is crucial to examine the role of the AU and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in fostering democratic governance and promoting inclusive development. Through its various organs and initiatives, the AU aims to promote democratic governance, human rights, and socio-economic development. The RECs, namely the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA); Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA); Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD); East African Community (EAC); Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS); Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD); and Southern African Development Community (SADC); are building blocks of the AU, which are mandated to facilitate regional integration, economic cooperation and development, and political stability. While they have struggled to perform effectively, their collective efforts are vital in addressing the continent's challenges and harnessing its potential for sustainable development.

The resurgence of military coups in several African countries shows that the military is still heavily invested in African politics. This is categorised as a threat to democracy and inclusive development, as the military's role is to serve, protect, and not interfere with the democratic process. However, because of the shortcomings within African political administrations and the "refusal" of civilian governments to undertake genuine security sector reforms (SSR), military coups are becoming acceptable, particularly in the Sahel region, as a countermeasure for bad governance. Tenure elongations have also been identified as one of the motivations for military coups in the Sahel. African heads of state have explored this gap in the Lome Declaration to perpetuate themselves in power by imposing a caricature of constitutional changes on the people. However, the blatant disregard for democratic institutions on the continent is concerning, and the audacity to assault the stewards of political authority underscores the profound failure of the promises of democracy in Africa. Thus, what is the future of democracy on the continent? While many have seen military coups as a prominent and observable threat to African democratisation, few others have presented the military as the 'saviour' of the society from the brink of social disintegration, economic regression, civilian autocracies, and security threats.

Africa, rich in natural resources and cultural heritage, faces various leadership challenges that significantly impede its political development, economic growth, and security. About 30 per cent of global mineral resources are deposited in Africa. However, over 11 per cent of the world's population in extreme poverty live in the resource-rich Nigeria, while around 10 per cent live in another resource-wealthy Democratic Republic of Congo. This represents an untenable paradox,' deeply rooted in historical, socio-economic, and political contexts and reinforced by leadership failures, poor governance, violent conflict, and socio-political instability. Thus, addressing these challenges is crucial for the progress and well-being of Africans.

One of Africa's most pervasive leadership challenges is the prevalence of authoritarianism and exclusive governance. Many African countries struggle with leaders who cling to power using illicit wealth, corruption, and undemocratic means, such as rigging elections, suppressing opposition, and curtailing civil liberties. This autocratic rule and regime consolidation often leads to political instability, as citizens and opposition groups resort to protests and, in some cases, armed rebellion to express their discontent. The result is a vicious cycle of instability that hinders economic development, reinforces corruption, and aggravates social divisions. Political corruption is another significant leadership challenge that plagues many African countries, undermining government institutions' performances, impeding public trust, reinforcing mismanagement, and diverting resources from essential services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure.

Moreover, the challenge of economic mismanagement and dependency is a critical issue. Many African leaders have struggled to implement sound economic policies that promote sustainable growth and development. Instead, economies of resource-rich African states often rely heavily on a single sector, such as oil or mining, making them vulnerable to global market fluctuations. The prioritisation of resource extraction over diversified economic development and their inability to diversify economies, encourage industrialisation, and develop robust domestic markets continue to hamper progress.

Thus, the following questions remain critical: What are the theoretical and normative links between inclusive development and democracy? Why are African countries lacking in dividends of democracy? Why are military governments becoming popular in the Sahel region? Why do African countries lack effective and visionary leadership? Why is the ethos of democratic governance not enshrined in African countries? What is wrong with the current models of democracy in Africa? Why are the youth and women marginalized? Despite the efforts of the AU and RECs to promote democracy and drive Africa's development project, how can we understand the current economic and political landscapes in Africa? What is the future of democracy in Africa?

3. Justification and Objectives

Despite significant progress in establishing democratic institutions, democratic governance remains unconsolidated in most African countries. Thus, these countries' economic crises and developmental struggles could be located in different contexts. Many African countries continue to grapple with issues such as electoral violence, weak governance structures, and limited political participation. Tenure elongations have also been identified as one of the motivations for military coups in the Sahel. African heads of state have explored this gap in the Lome Declaration to perpetuate themselves in power by imposing a caricature of constitutional changes on the people. Further, inclusive and sustainable democracy ensures that all segments of society, particularly marginalised groups such as youth and women, benefit from economic growth and social progress. Africa faces some emerging challenges,

including rising insecurity and violent extremism, the impacts of climate change, states' complacency towards the fourth industrial revolution, and shifting geopolitical dynamics. These challenges have profound implications for both democracy and development. As Africa continues to navigate the complexities of democracy and development, the role of the AU and the RECs becomes increasingly significant. There is a need to reinvent democracy and governance in Africa to make them transformative and reimagine the roles of the AU and the RECs.

Further, African governments have failed to create the required political environment for rapid economic transformation that works for the people and is owned by the people. The biggest economies in Africa, including South Africa and Nigeria, have recorded high unemployment rates of over 25 per cent for the youth. Inflation continues to rise across Africa, while the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have deepened poverty within both the rural and urban poor. These lingering challenges provide a conducive environment for military interventions in politics. Both constitutional and unconstitutional tenure elongations, a lack of effective governance, acute greed, and corruption among political elites, including the plummeting and wastage of Africa's mineral and human resources, further slid the continent into socio-economic and political regression.

Therefore, the objectives of the symposium are to:

1. Critically assess the state of democracy in Africa, identify obstacles to democratic consolidation, and share best practices for strengthening democratic governance on the continent.
2. Highlight the importance of inclusive policies and practices, discuss strategies for reducing inequalities, and promote social inclusion as a cornerstone of sustainable development.
3. Assess the contributions of the AU and the RECs in fostering democratic governance and inclusive development, exploring ways to enhance their effectiveness, and encouraging greater collaboration among member states.
4. Discuss how global issues intersect with Africa's development agenda and explore innovative recommendations to address them.
5. Bridge the gap between academic research and policy-making by presenting evidence-based insights and recommendations for effective policy-making and implementation.
6. Genuinely interrogate the future of democracy in Africa amidst the waves of military coups, massive disenchantment, mass movements, economic crisis, marginalisation of women and youth, and rising conflicts across Africa.
7. Proffer effective and sustainable policy frameworks for the AU and RECs to strengthen their interventions for inclusive democratic governance and development.

4. Key themes and topics for the symposium

While the concept note has raised several questions and problematises the motivations for the symposium, we are interested in papers that respond to the questions by making important and innovative intellectual interventions and policy recommendations. The topics or themes should focus on the following:

1. **Rethinking Democracy in Africa: Theories and Practice**
2. **Democratic Governance and Consolidation:** Interrogating the current state of democracy in Africa
3. **Indigenisation of Democracy and Economic Frameworks in Africa**
4. **Strengthening Democratic Institutions Beyond the State:** roles of civil society, mass movements, social/mass media, and traditional authority.
5. **Democracy and Leadership Questions/Unconstitutional Governments:** (AU, RECs and the Unresolved leadership questions, unconstitutional tenure elongations, civilian autocracy, and military coups.

6. **Electoral Processes and Integrity:** periodic elections, free & fair elections, transparency and credibility.
7. **Inclusive Development and Social Equity:** strategies for inclusive economic growth and reversal of inequality - policies and practices for social inclusion, including Education and skill development.
8. **Women, Youth, and Inclusive development and sustainable Democracy**
9. **AU, RECs, NEPAD-AUDA and APRM:** democracy promotion and facilitation of inclusive development
10. **Democratic Governance and Development:** Emerging Challenges and Opportunities: climate change, Fourth Industrial Revolution and digital transformation.
11. **Resource Management, Democracy, and Economic Development**
12. **Foreign Actors (states and non-states) and the Quest for Sustainable Democracy and Inclusive Development.**
13. **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), Official Development Assistance (ODA), and Inclusive Development.**

5. Expected Deliverables

Four sets of outputs are expected from this project:

1. It will offer the AU and RECs the necessary intellectual resources to strengthen their performances on democratic promotion and attainment of inclusive development.
2. It will establish a Community of Practice (CoP) on African Union Studies and provide a platform for strengthening this particular field of study.
3. The project will lead to the publication of TWO edited books on the symposium's theme.
4. It will generate public debate through various media outlets, including Radio, TV, Newspapers, and social media.
5. It will culminate in publishing a policy brief on the symposium's theme.

6. Submission Modalities

Two types of submissions are permissible. First, submission for a single-authored or co-authored paper. Second, a submission for a panel discussion with more than three papers. In both cases, abstracts of papers to be delivered will be required. **All abstracts (200 words) should be submitted to the project coordinator at: africanunionstudies@gmail.com.** Upon receipt, all submissions will be reviewed, and feedback will be provided to only authors of those abstracts that would have met the requisite standard for the symposium. The full paper (7000-8000 words) will undergo internal and external peer reviews for quality control. Accepted papers will be presented at the symposium and be considered for publication in the edited book.

Abstracts should be submitted by 30 August 2024. Feedback on abstracts will be sent to successful authors by **05 September 2024.** Full papers should be submitted by **25 October 2024.**

7. Participation, Format, and Language

The symposium will involve 150 participants drawn from governments, national and regional policy practitioners, academia, civil society, the private sector, the African diaspora, foreign partners, etc. It will be convened in a **Hybrid Format** involving both a physical meeting and a virtual platform. The symposium format will include plenary and break-away sessions. One or

more keynote speakers will set the tone for the deliberations during the symposium. English and French will be used for abstracts and papers. The symposium will also be conducted in both English and French. All publications emanating from this initiative will be in both English and French.

8. Venue and Dates

The proposed venue for the Symposium is the Radisson Blu Hotel Sandton, Johannesburg Gauteng, South Africa between the 4th to the 6th of November 2024.

9. Management and Coordination Arrangements

The Chair of the Symposium Organising Committee is Dr. Adeoye O. Akinola, Heads of Research and Teaching and African Union Studies Unit at IPATC, email: aoakinola@uj.ac.za. He will be supported by Mr Abdaramane Wone, Communication Officer at TrustAfrica, email: wone@trustafrica.org; and Ms Ratidzo Makombe, Researcher at IPATC, email: ratidzom@uj.ac.za

10. About the IPATC: <https://ipatc.joburg/>

Prof. Siphamandla Zondi is the Director of the IPATC. The Institute was established at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) in 2016 as one of the University's flagship centers of excellence to conduct research and contribute to UJ's decolonisation efforts. The IPATC provides a forum for scholars, practitioners, and civil society actors in Africa and its diaspora to dialogue and contribute to the rigorous production and dissemination of Pan-African knowledge and culture. The Institute seeks to promote original and innovative Pan-African ideas and critical dialogue in pursuit of global excellence in research and teaching and to contribute actively to building an international profile for UJ on Pan-African issues. IPATC prioritises five key mandates: research, strategic engagement with policymakers, public engagement, teaching, and capacity building.

11. About TrustAfrica: <https://trustafrica.org/>

Dr. Ebrima Sall is the Executive Director of TrustAfrica. It is a Pan-African foundation headquartered in Dakar, Senegal. It was founded to strengthen African agency in addressing the continent's most pressing challenges. TrustAfrica operates from a conviction that Africans must work together to set their development priorities, informed by the aspirations of African citizens.

TrustAfrica's programs have focused on strengthening democracy and democratic governance, promoting equitable development, and advancing African philanthropy. Its governance work has included promoting democratic elections, supporting social movements and facilitating citizen participation, promoting transparency and accountability in governance, strengthening constitutionalism and the rule of law, upholding basic human rights, and fighting against the culture of impunity. Under its Equitable Development cluster, TrustAfrica has championed economic and social policies that lead to more inclusive and equitable economic development. This includes initiatives to promote smallholder agriculture, focusing on women small-scale farmers. Through its African Philanthropy program, the organisation has worked towards strengthening and broadening knowledge and understanding of African philanthropy's context, narratives, practice, and potential to advance social justice in Africa.

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