

**THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA  
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2022 ALUMNI LECTURE  
ON THE TOPIC**

**LIBERAL DEMOCRACY; THE NEW UTOPIAS AND THE AGE OF  
DISORDER**

**BY  
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**TIME: 5:00 PM**

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**INTRODUCTION**

Madam Chancellor,  
Madam chair of the University Council  
Madam Vice Chancellor,  
Pro-Vice Chancellors,  
Provosts,  
Registrar,  
Deans,

Members of Faculty,  
Madam president of the Alumni Association  
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is always humbling to return to the familiar grounds of the University of Ghana after so many years. Let me first and foremost express my deepest gratitude to the Alumni Association of the University of Ghana for the honour done to me by asking me to deliver this lecture. Each time I set foot on this campus, I have many fond memories. In introducing me, Paa Kwesi mentioned some of those memories. My year as president of the SRC was a great learning experience, this was a period during which the ideological debates taking place in the world, found their way into our lecture rooms.

As I reflect on my years of work, I have come to accept that the political system by which a country conducts its affairs; be it autocracy, monarchy, theocracy or Liberal Democracy, hugely impacts its development, the attitude of its citizens, and the prosperity of its people. I, therefore, find the invitation to present this paper, a rare opportunity to reflect on one of the dominant political systems: LIBERAL DEMOCRACY.

This lecture, *Liberal Democracy: The New Utopias and the Age of Disorder*, is happening at a time when the world is undergoing profound geopolitical changes, which are already causing realignments that could mark the beginning of a new international order. The controversy over the success or failure of Liberal Democracy is not lost on me. However, like Pontius Pilate, I will wholly wash my hands off that debate and not pass any judgment in this lecture. Rather, I seek to assess the historical circumstances that birthed modern liberal democracy among other competing ideas, the ideals it promises, and whether the practice of those

ideals has held steadfast over the years or requires some adjustments in view of the changing environment we find ourselves in today.

Specifically, I argue that the very achievements of liberal democracy constitute its strongest fault lines. Today, most Liberal Democracies are in trouble- from the dissatisfaction of citizens (delivery gap); citizens' expectations for participation in governance, amid a changing redefinition of what constitutes the powers of decision-making, with citizens actively trying to shape governance direction, away from the historical situation where once elected, Governments were generally empowered to take decisions and be assessed every four or five years. Also, the speed of information/ disinformation with a vast universe of social media and the burgeoning of groups, taking advantage of the power of information and global financial integration to compete for power, with governing elites or in the case of populists, nationalists and religious fundamentalists trying to subvert Liberal Democracies and remake the State in their own images.

I also argue that each of these groups offers new utopias that the liberal State is failing to accomplish— ensuring social mobility, addressing growing inequality, restoring social protection, and finding a balance between progress and the survival of our ecosystem. Surprisingly, the factors driving these new groups seeking to subvert Liberal Democracy are a result of the political economy of Liberal Democracy— globalization, automation, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the changing nature of work, social media and the historical burden of changing systems, without revolution.

And so, as I go through this presentation, I want the following questions to be on your mind, with the hope that we may find answers at the end of the lecture:

1. Is it the case that the transformation needed, if any, would require a new system of democracy?
2. What would that new system of democracy, if at all, look like and how can societies build consensus for that change?

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have organized my thoughts into three parts to keep you with me on this journey.

In the first part, I discuss the second World War and the competition of political ideologies which followed the armistice. I assess separately, how African countries experimented with these competing ideologies after securing independence.

In the second part, I examine the period after the Cold War and new predictions for the future outlook of countries' political systems, including the prediction of Francis Fukuyama, author of the End of History and the Last Man, who famously predicted the lasting triumph of Liberal Democracy in the new Century.

I proceed in the third part to describe the manifestation of Fukuyama's prediction. In this age of Liberal Democracy, I explore the spread of Liberal Democracy and the challenges its propagation faces. I further assess the practice of Liberal Democracy, its key tenets and the emerging assertion that Liberal Democracy is failing.

Finally, I discuss the popular emerging alternatives, the way forward and my concluding thoughts on the subject.

## **PART 1- POST WORLD WAR II AND THE COMPETITION OF IDEOLOGIES**

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As a result of lessons learnt from World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union recognized that the Second World War was disintegrating the prevailing global balance of power, giving them each the opportunity to re-engineer the political and economic order in several countries afflicted by the war, to gain more influence globally. Historically known as the Cold War, the race between Liberal Democracy and Communism thus began in earnest with the United States determined to curtail the spread of communism and promote Liberal Democracy as the best form of government. Between these two superpowers, the geo-political tension caused other countries, undesirous of being drawn into another war, to form the Non-Aligned Movement.

In Africa, World War II had kindled a new level of political awareness and consciousness among nationalist movements. The conscription of African forces to fight for their colonial masters pierced the cloak of invincibility that Africans had for so long regarded their colonial masters with. As Vincent Khapoya puts it, *“ The Africans noticed that, in war, the white man bled, cried, was scared, and when shot, died just like anyone else...it dawned on the African that beneath the skin, there was no difference between him and the European”*.<sup>1</sup> Beyond the self-found awareness among Africans, the justifications of Europe and Britain for resisting German Imperialism presented a dialectic challenge to their maintaining of colonies after the war. After all, if it was wrong for Germans to rule Europe and Britain, then why should Britain and Europe rule Africa? For some Countries in Africa, it took sustained nationalist campaigns, military action and some incidents of violence such as the 1948 riots to force Britain to relinquish its hold. European Countries such as France

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<sup>1</sup> Vincent Khapoya, “African Nationalism and the Struggle for Freedom,” *The African Experience*, (2013): 150.

were equally hesitant to release colonies, as the cheap labour and ready colonial markets were considered central to the post-war recovery plans of these European Powers.

African countries that managed to gain their independence were immediately thrown into the raging ideological war between the United States and the Soviet Union—a choice between Liberal Democracy and Communism. Many of the African Countries who attained independence did not achieve political stability immediately after independence. The experimentation by Africans, of which political system would secure prosperity for them, remained a roller coaster throughout the Cold War.

Our own history as a nation typifies this rolling experiment. We started with democracy, transitioned to a one-party state that leaned towards socialist ideals, experienced a military junta, returned to multi-party democracy, more military junta, and finally multi-party democracy – all within the period of the cold war. Africa's journey to finding a prosperous system of governance was long drawn and continues till date as will be seen subsequently in this presentation.

## PART 2: POST-COLD WAR AND PREDICTIONS OF NEW WORLD SYSTEMS

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Even though other political systems existed, such as Islamism and Traditional Monarchies in the Arab world, the widespread character of the Cold War left a huge writing on the wall about which political systems would influence the new world order. It was going to be Liberal Democracy or Communism. The desperation of these superpowers to court African Countries, divided Africa into three groups, the Casablanca group, the Monrovia group, and the Libreville group. These groups took entrenched positions on Cold War related matters and its influence on the agenda for Africa. At the height of the Cold War, the Soviet Union's communism had gained strong roots in China, Eastern Europe and several other African Countries had aligned themselves with the USSR. Surprisingly, by 1991 when the USSR was formally dissolved, a series of revolutions had resulted in the overthrow of almost all the communist parties in the Eastern Bloc; a situation that left the United States as the only remaining superpower with the concomitant results that democracy and capitalism had trumped Communism. Francis Fukuyama, who was an analyst at the US State Department, argued that Liberal Democracy and its associated capitalist economic system would become dominant because of two factors. The first was that humans want to live in a system that allows them to freely choose their beliefs and way of life. The second was the dynamism and efficiency of capitalism, which was giving the West a winning edge in the Cold War, both in living standards and high-tech weaponry.<sup>2</sup> He therefore predicted that Liberal Democracy was the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western Liberal Democracy as the final form of human government.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, although

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<sup>2</sup> National Populism The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy (Roger Eastwell, Matther Goodwin) pg 71

<sup>3</sup> National Populism The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy (Roger Eastwell, Matther Goodwin) pg 71

other systems of government still existed, no more wars were going to be fought over which political ideology should prevail; neither would there be any globally driven agenda to spread any political system because Liberal Democracy had settled any argument of utility in other systems. This presentation by Fukuyama has been hugely criticized by John Meishner in "Roots of liberal Hegemony" as a fundamentally flawed argument as the world for instance has not been completely peaceful as predicted, and Liberal Democracy is not on a march as there are reasonably other attractive alternative models in our world today.



### **PART 3: THE TRIUMPH OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY; THE AGE OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY**

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To Fukuyama's credit, there was a wave of democratization across the world following the end of the Cold War. Of the 75 countries rated as autocracies in 1987, only 15 (20%) were still rated that way three decades later.<sup>4</sup> Democratic index by other agencies such as Freedom House and the Economist Intelligence Unit point to similar trends of increased democratization of authoritarian regimes after the Cold War. Across Europe, the Soviet Union and Africa, Countries held elections to transition from authoritarian rule to democracy. Notwithstanding the ubiquity of Liberal Democracy in this period, the adoption was by no means homogenous. The democratization path of each country greatly impacted its eventual practice of Liberal Democratic ideals. As will be seen subsequently, these democratization paths account for some of the democratic backslidings that the world has witnessed in recent times, especially in Africa. I will at this point endeavor to set out the ideal reflection of a pure Liberal Democracy in order to highlight the dissimilar democratization that occurred within this period.

William Galston posits that, Liberal Democracy as a political system borrows from four main concepts<sup>5</sup>: The Republic, Democracy, Constitutionalism and Liberalism.

Put together, William Gatson characterizes Liberal Democracy as a

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<sup>4</sup> Pew Research Centre. < <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/05/14/more-than-half-of-countries-are-democratic/>>

<sup>5</sup> The populist challenge to liberal democracy. William Gatson (2018) < <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-populist-challenge-to-liberal-democracy/>>.

“political order that rests on the republican principle, takes constitutional form, and incorporates the civic egalitarianism and majoritarian principles of democracy.

It becomes apparent from this characterization that, Liberal Democracy is a blend of various ideals and practices. Of significance also, is the recognition that these ideals have in practice evolved, taking on new manifestations alongside global evolution. To this end, the practice of Liberal Democracy in the United States under Roosevelt or Churchill of Britain is not comparable to present-day democracy under Biden or Rishi in Britain. Some of these evolutionary phenomena are said to contribute to the decline of Liberal Democracy itself. But before venturing into that assessment, the multi-layered character of the ideals of Liberal Democracy inherently conflicts with how some societies are organized culturally, religiously, socially, and politically. This has stifled the propagation of Liberal Democracy and resulted in some countries who profess to be formally democratic practicing some but not all of the ideals. Consider the Middle East, dominated by the religious practice of Islam and Sharia law in a number of governments. While there is no doubt about the religion’s respect for all persons’, its conceptualization of equality is asymmetric to that of Liberal Democracy. A case in point is women’s right to drive in Saudi Arabia and recent protests over mandatory hijab wearing in Iran, which resulted in several deaths and large scale imprisonments.

In the face of these challenges, indexes such as full democracies, flawed democracies, hybrid democracies and false democracies have been developed to sufficiently cover any country practicing some variant of democracy, albeit not perfect.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Despite global concerns about democracy, more than half of countries are democratic. Drew Desilver <<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/05/14/more-than-half-of-countries-are-democratic/>>

Now I proceed to the vexed question of what is accounting for the disruption in Liberal Democracies and a slow but increasing democratic backsliding?

Globalization and Technology remain at the fore of Liberal Democracy's disruption. The globalization of the economy and of communication has eroded and deconstructed national economies and limited the capacity of the nation-state to respond within its own ambit to problems that are global in origin, such as Financial Crises, Human Rights issues, Climate Change, Criminal Financial Networks or Terrorism. The paradoxical thing, as I noted in my introduction, is that nation-states, practicing Liberal Democracy, were responsible for instigating the globalization process in the first place, by dismantling regulation and borders. Professionals with better education and broader possibilities are connecting with one another across the planet to form new kinds of social classes. This separates the cosmopolitan elites who create value in the global marketplace from local workers, who are devalued by industrial off-shoring and relocation. It goes further than that; the unfettered logic of the market accentuates differences between capacities based on what is or is not useful to global capital networks, production and consumption, such that beyond mere inequality, we are seeing real polarization, whereby the rich become richer, above all at the very apex of the pyramid, and the poor even poorer. This dynamic is played out both in national economies and on a global scale, such that despite hundreds of millions of people worldwide being lifted from poverty and integrated into new forms of industrialization to revitalize and broaden the global market, fragmentation within every society and between every country is becoming ever more acute.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Rupture: The Crisis of liberal Democracy. Manuel Castells. Pg 33

National governments – almost without exception – have chosen to hitch their wagons to globalization, to avoid being left behind from the new economy and the new distribution of power. To increase the competitive capacity of their countries, they created a new form of state: the network-state, based on the institutional articulation of nation-states, which do not disappear, but instead become nodes in a supra-national network in which sovereignty is partly surrendered in exchange for participation in managing globalization.

The further nation-states distance themselves from the nations they represent, the more the state and the nation dissociate from one another. This leads to the crisis of legitimacy in the minds of many citizens, who are kept at the margins of the fundamental decisions that affect their lives, which are now taken elsewhere, outside of institutions of direct representation.

On another hand, the digitalization of all data and the modal interconnection of messages have created a media universe in which we are all permanently immersed.<sup>8</sup> Our construction of reality, and consequently our behaviour and decisions, depend on the signals that we receive and exchange within that universe. Technology has placed decision-makers in representative democracies under the prism of not only the people who elected them but the entire world in respect of all their actions. The practice of foreign citizens showing solidarity to subjects of unpopular government actions has become common. I dare say, that some of history's tragic incidents, such as Apartheid in South Africa may have ended faster in the current age of digital information.

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<sup>8</sup> Rupture: The Crisis of liberal Democracy. Manuel Castells. Pg 50

The delivery gap between citizens' expectations and the outcomes of Liberal Democratic governments also accounts for the declining scale of Liberal Democracy. As one analyst poignantly puts it, "Contemporary Liberal Democracy... rested on a tacit compact between peoples on the one hand and elected representatives together with unelected experts on the other. The people would defer to elites as long as they delivered sustained prosperity and steadily improving living standards. But if elites stopped managing the economy effectively, all bets were off".<sup>9</sup>

The long tradition of an 'elitist' conception of democracy has, for several decades, created the atmosphere for populists who promise to speak on behalf of people who have been neglected and held in contempt by technocratic political and economic elites.<sup>10</sup> In recent years, this tension has been worsened by a growing disconnect between the rulers and the ruled. Across the West, liberal democracies are increasingly dominated by highly educated and liberal elites whose backgrounds and outlook differ fundamentally from those of the average citizen, a development that has been exacerbated by the rise of a new 'governance elite' connected through informal and formal networks that cut across elected national governments.<sup>11</sup>

There is a gradual collapse of the political model of representation and governance. In recent years, we have seen extensive grassroots mobilizations against the current system of party politics and parliamentary democracy under the slogan 'they don't represent us!' It's not about a rejection of democracy, but rather of Liberal Democracy as it exists in each country, in the name of "real

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<sup>9</sup> The populist challenge to Liberal Democracy. William Galston < <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-populist-challenge-to-liberal-democracy>>.

<sup>10</sup> National Populism The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy (Roger Eastwell, Matther Goodwin) pg 72

<sup>11</sup> Supra.

democracy" as the the Gilets Jaunes movement proclaimed in France, the FNDC in Guinea, or Y'en a Marre in Dakar, Ouagadougou and Kinshasa.

The consensus appears to be that the fundamental agents of politics, the political parties, although may differ in terms of policies, agree on maintaining their monopoly on power within a pre-established framework of possibilities. Politics is professionalizing, and politicians are becoming a social group that defends their common interests above those of the people they purport to represent. They make up a political class that, with honourable exceptions, transcends ideologies and protects its oligopoly. Furthermore, by their very nature, parties undergo a process of internal bureaucratization, predicted by Robert Michels as far back as the 1920s, limiting their renewal to leadership contests and distancing themselves from any oversight or decision-making by their members.

In most countries in the world today, including Europe, the United States and many African states, more than two-thirds of their people think that politicians do not represent them, that the parties (all of them) prioritize their own interests, that the resulting parliaments are not representative and that governments are unjust, bureaucratic and oppressive. In the almost unanimous perception of citizens, the most poorly viewed profession is that of a politician, and all the more so because they endlessly seem to reinvent themselves and rarely return to ordinary life as long as they can prosper among the winding little alleyways of politics. This widely held feeling of rejection of politics in its current form does differ in nature between countries and regions, but tends to be ubiquitous.<sup>12</sup> The African situation is troubling, as the delivery gap has not only led to a belief that elected representatives do not represent citizens, but is also actively cutting out the entire

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<sup>12</sup> Rupture: The Crisis of Liberal Democracy. Manuel Castells. Pg 26-27

system of Liberal Democracy through coups that were supposed to be a thing of the past. West Africa's latest successful coup, in Burkina Faso, Guinea and Mali has renewed unease about coups returning and democracies receding in West Africa. The situation in Central Africa is not better. Granted, there has only been one coup recently in the region, which happened in Chad, but regimes in Congo Brazzaville (25 years), Rwanda (22 years), Cameroon (40 years) and Equatorial Guinea (43 years), have been in power for unreasonably long periods. Another factor that has contributed to the current democratic backsliding is the weak democratization process coupled with the authoritarian tendencies of democratic leaders. This problem is particularly prevalent in Africa. Notably, several of the democracies in Africa evolved out of nationalists movements and military rulers. Academics have noted that those countries that lacked organized opposition and civil societies in their nascent democratic period created dominant political heads during the transition to Liberal Democracy. These figures exercised excessive control over the democratization process, preventing any true democratization in order to perpetuate their rule. This takes the form of term amendments, to enable them either to contest further rigged elections or to put in place skewed succession plans in favour of relatives, among others (as seen in Togo and Gabon). These leaders pretend to practice democracy, but it remains superficial – that elections are held periodically but without the crucial ingredients of democracy like informed and active participation, respect for the rule of law, independence of the judiciary and protection of civil liberties. As a result, their democracy is merely cosmetic<sup>13</sup> as even the elections are often characterized by intimidation, massive rigging, and monetisation. Liberal Democracy has been characterized as functionally ineffective in many parts of Africa.<sup>14</sup> Its capacity to even prevent

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<sup>13</sup> Why West Africa has had so many coups and how to prevent more. The Conversation. Published February 15, 2022

<sup>14</sup> Supra 99

dictatorial rule has come under scrutiny as noted earlier. Within this context, Liberal Democracy has been criticized as being a creation of the West unsuitable for practice in Africa hence the need to consider alternatives.

The perceived democratic illegitimacy among leaders has led to the generation of a discourse of fear and to political ideologies that propose going back to the drawing board. Back to the state and citizens as the decision-making centre, over elected elites, economic oligarchs and global networks. Back to the nation as a cultural community, to the exclusion of anyone who does not share the values of those defined as 'native'. Back, too, to the patriarchal family unit, as the primary institution of daily protection against a world in chaos. The new legitimacy, promises a new utopia through a rupture with the deep-rooted institutional order and with the culture of the cosmopolitan elites.<sup>15</sup>

This is the common thread running through the diverse protests and developments transforming the established political order in different countries. We find it in the improbable rise to power of a character as bizarre and narcissistic as Trump to the office of President of the United States. We find it in the unthinkable secession of the United Kingdom from the European Union. We find it again, in the recent election of an extreme right-wing leader in Italy.

Today, the ravages of Brexit coupled with other global happenings have left the British economy in the throes of astronomical energy prices, the highest cost of living in decades, high-interest rates, and a shortage of workers in jobs erstwhile done by EU immigrants. The official residence of the British Prime Minister has become a short-term hotel accommodation, seeing three Prime Ministers within three months and four Chancellors in four months.

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<sup>15</sup> Rupture: The Crisis of liberal Democracy. Manuel Castells.



It is thus apparent that the promise of a new utopia and a disruption of prevailing democratic structures endears to citizens looking for alternatives even if they have no guarantee of the outcomes of such new systems.

*What then are the alternatives to Liberal Democracy and the way forward?*

In certain areas of the world, particularly China and Russia, authoritarian regimes have established themselves as effective alternatives to Liberal Democracy. The Middle East is governed either by theocracies in countries such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, or dictatorships in Egypt and Syria, apart from Israel which exists in a constant state of war with its occupied territories. In Europe, neofascist movements have sprung up in Poland, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, and even in Germany, as an identity-driven reaction against the European Union.<sup>16</sup>

Among these plethora of alternatives, Populism and authoritarian regimes with supposed strong leadership have been touted to best remedy the fault lines of democracy.

Critics argue that liberals have prioritized individuals at the expense of community, have focused too heavily on dry, transactional and technocratic debates and have lost sight of national allegiances while obsessing over the transnational ones.<sup>17</sup> National Populists on the other hand prioritize the culture and interest of the nation, and promise to give voice to a people who feel that they

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<sup>16</sup> Rupture: The Crisis of liberal Democracy. Manuel Castells. Pg 14-15

<sup>17</sup> National Populism The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy (Roger Eatwell, Matthew Goodwin) pg 19

have been neglected, even held in contempt by distant and often corrupt elites.<sup>18</sup> National-populist leaders feed on this deep dissatisfaction, but their path into the mainstream has also been cleared by the weakening bonds between the traditional mainstream parties and the people, or what we refer to as dealignment. The classic era of Liberal Democracy was characterized by relatively stable politics, strong mainstream parties and loyal voters; we have seen it now come to an end. Many people are no longer strongly aligned to the mainstream and the bonds are breaking. This dealignment is making political systems across the West far more volatile, fragmented and unpredictable than at any point in the history of mass democracy. Politics today feels more chaotic and less predictable than in the past, because it is. This trend too was a long time coming, and it still has a long way to run.<sup>19</sup>

Some national-populist leaders, like Hungary's Viktor Orbán, speak of creating a new form of "illiberal democracy" that raises worrying issues about democratic rights and the demonization of immigrants. However, most national-populist voters want more democracy – more referendums and more empathetic and listening politicians that give more power to the people and less power to established economic and political elites.<sup>20</sup> National populism also raises legitimate democratic issues that millions of people want to discuss and address. They question the way in which elites have become more and more insulated from the lives and concerns of ordinary people. They question the erosion of the nation state, which they see as the only construct that has proven capable of organizing our political and social lives. They question the capacity of Western societies to rapidly absorb rates of immigration and 'hyper ethnic change' that are largely

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<sup>18</sup> National Populism The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy (Roger Eatwell, Matthew Goodwin) pg 72

<sup>19</sup> Supra pg 15

<sup>20</sup> Supra pg 8

unprecedented in the history of modern civilization. They question cosmopolitan and globalizing agendas, asking where these are taking us and what kind of societies they will create. And some of them ask whether all religions support key aspects of modern life in the West, such as equality and respect for women. There is absolutely no doubt that some national populists veer into racism and xenophobia, especially towards Muslims. But this should not distract us from the fact that they also tap into widespread and legitimate public anxieties across a range of different areas.<sup>21</sup>

From this lens, populism is not a threat to democracy itself, but rather to the dominant liberal variant of democracy.<sup>22</sup> Among the four (4) key concepts of Liberal Democracy discussed earlier, populism accepts the principles of popular sovereignty and democracy, understood in straightforward fashion as the exercise of majoritarian power. However, populism remains cynical about constitutionalism, to the extent that formal, bounded institutions and procedures obstruct majorities from working their will.<sup>23</sup>

The challenge with populism is the assumption of homogeneity in the will, judgments and values of the people.<sup>24</sup> This assumption of uniform virtues of the people results in the expression of dissent being labeled as an enemy of the people. The reality remains, that plurality is the order of the day and within the masses, desires and wants are not uniform, making it difficult to act in a manner that will always be popular. In the end, what becomes the will of the people, is likely to be tainted by the will of the leaders of such populists' movements.

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<sup>21</sup> National Populism The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy (Roger Eatwell, Matthew Goodwin) pg 9

<sup>22</sup> The populist challenge to Liberal Democracy. William Galston. < <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-populist-challenge-to-liberal-democracy>>.

<sup>23</sup> Supra

<sup>24</sup> The populist challenge to Liberal Democracy. William Galston. < <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-populist-challenge-to-liberal-democracy>>.

On another hand, authoritarian regimes have been around as long as Liberal Democracy itself. There is abundant evidence on its benefits and harms. The incorporation of elections into modern authoritarian regimes do not detract from the dangers it presents given the concentration of power in such leaders.

Liberal Democracy has shown that civil liberties without economic prosperity leads to public outcry and the search for alternative systems of government. However, economic prosperity without civil liberties also leads to revolts for just and equal societies. Thus, the Utopias promised by these alternatives, exclude particularly, room for dissent, an area which Liberal Democracy in its worst form caters for.

The other danger with these alternatives is that they are often built around personalities and until we discover the elixir of immortality, we are unable to predict how long the system endures after the demise of the figurehead.

However you look at it, Liberal Democracy appears to provide a better and enduring vehicle for participation in governance and economic success.

Before sharing my concluding statement, I must acknowledge recommendations made by many scholars regarding the challenges hindering the growth of Liberal Democracy in Africa. These include but are not limited to:

1. The importance of Constitutional Reforms and Civic Education of Citizens to demand accountability from governments.
2. The strengthening of anti-corruption institutions.
3. The promotion of inclusive politics.
4. The institutionalization of Preventive Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution.

5. The targeted efforts to increase women and youth representatives in government while addressing the threat of violent extremism and terrorism,
6. Finally, the reform of the existing United Nations Peace and Security architecture.

And so I come back to the two questions I asked at the beginning of this lecture?

1. Is it the case that the transformation needed, if any, would require a new system of democracy?

My answer is YES. Transformation is required because the fault lines identified in this lecture will continue to exist and the failure of Liberal Democratic countries to remedy these fault lines only provide more capital for emerging alternatives to subvert Liberal Democracy itself.

2. What would that new system of democracy look like, and how can societies build consensus for that change?

My response is as follows:

1. That new democracy must be even more democratic, in the sense that its institutions must be more representative, less distanced from the deep interests of the societies they represent. It must also be less elitists in outlook whilst taking into account some of the pertinent concerns expressed by nationalist groups.

2. Liberal Democrats must recognize that a focus on economic growth does not automatically result in a fair distribution of wealth across social status.<sup>25</sup> An all-inclusive growth, must therefore be deliberately pursued to avoid the deepening classism created within the current system.
3. Finally, liberal democratic institutions must work towards a quicker delivery of outcomes.

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## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

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In this presentation, I have recounted the birthing circumstances of Liberal Democracy, its practice after the Cold War and the challenges currently being encountered decades later.

I have highlighted the growing disconnect among elected representatives and the electorates; the impact of globalization and technology in alienating the average citizen from governance and at the same time, arming them to better influence the elected representative.

I have demonstrated the effect of continuous insulation of citizens that has resulted in unexpected outcomes in global politics, particularly, the case of Trump, Brexit and the return of coups in Africa – leading to the emergence of new movements seeking to fill the void left by Liberal Democracy.

I have considered two of these alternatives, National Populism and Authoritarian regime and assessed their claim of being better and the dangers they present in the current dispensation.

In sum, I have sought to say that the promises of Liberal Democracy at the end of the Cold War and its returns have compelled a reconsideration of other political ideologies or systems contrary to the prediction of Fukuyama at the end of the Cold War.

I am very mindful of the times we are in hence must clarify that I am not saying Liberal Democracy has failed beyond redemption. Neither am I saying that any of

the emerging alternatives such as authoritarian rule or populism presents a better chance of remedying the pitfalls of Liberal Democracy.

In fact, available evidence indicates that despite the widespread dissatisfaction with the performance of democratic institutions in Europe and North American countries, the median support for representative democracy stands at 80%, although about 70% support referendums in which citizens vote directly on major national issues.<sup>26</sup>

I conclude finally, by agreeing with an observation by a Senior fellow of Brookings institution that:

“Liberal Democracy is fragile, constantly threatened, always in need of repair but Liberal Democracy is also strong, because, to a greater extent than any other political form, it harbors the power of self-correction. Not only do liberal-democratic institutions protect citizens against tyrannical concentrations of power, they also provide mechanisms for channeling the public’s grievances and unmet needs into effective reforms... Human choice, not historical inevitability, will determine Liberal Democracy’s fate”.<sup>27</sup>

I am grateful for this invitation and thank you for your attention.

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<sup>26</sup> Richard Wike et al., “Globally, Broad Support for Representative and Direct Democracy,” 16 October 2017, [www.pewglobal.org/2017/10/16/globally-broad-support-for-representative-and-direct-democracy](http://www.pewglobal.org/2017/10/16/globally-broad-support-for-representative-and-direct-democracy)

<sup>27</sup> The populist challenge to Liberal Democracy. William Galston. < <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-populist-challenge-to-liberal-democracy>>.