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REGIONAL COOPERATION ON DEMOCRATIZATION AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN AFRICA

Gilbert M. Khadiagala

MARCH 2018



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The Carnegie Endowment is grateful to the Robert Bosch Stiftung and the UK Department for International Development for their support of the Rising Democracies Network. The opinions expressed in this paper are the responsibility of the author.

Summary

While the African Union (AU) is leading overarching efforts to establish continent-wide norms for acceptable political conduct, regional institutions are also contributing substantially to democratization and peacebuilding in their neighborhoods. Bodies such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have been actively managing conflicts and preventing movement toward authoritarianism. However, country-level commitment to democratic governance remains uneven and inconsistent. Addressing the region's security and governance challenges calls for further integration and cooperation, which will require significant resources and new notions of sovereignty with responsibility.

Regional Initiatives

- The AU wields considerable normative power in advocating constitutionalism, democracy, and the rule of law. Its involvement has provided legitimacy to successful efforts to reverse unconstitutional changes in government in various states.
- Yet most interventions aimed at resolving conflicts and/or restoring democracy are led by regional economic communities (RECs), which can muster greater resources and draw upon local expertise.
- Among the RECs, ECOWAS has been the most effective, with Nigeria serving as a strong anchor and advocate for democratization and peacekeeping. ECOWAS has intervened against, sanctioned, or condemned actions taken by most of its member states over the past two decades. It has organized peaceful resolutions and restored constitutional governments in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, and Gambia, among others.
- Although other bodies, such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the East African Community (EAC), have also organized collective stabilization efforts and sought to advance democratic governance, they have been less successful.

Continued Obstacles

- Apart from ECOWAS, regional bodies often lack strong champions for democratic norms. Both SADC and EAC tolerate authoritarian members and have witnessed the erosion of democracy in potential anchor states like South Africa and Kenya.
- Regional institutions are unable to fulfill their core mandates largely because they are underfunded by global standards and tend to lack common identities or shared values.
- Little cooperation among the RECs occurs. Several of them, such as the Arab Maghreb Union and the Economic Community of Central African States, show minimal interest in democratization or peacebuilding.
- In most African regions where states face long-running conflicts and politicians are fearful of relinquishing sovereignty, progress toward integration and multilateralism remains limited.
- Enduring solutions to Africa's security and political problems will require placing regional institutions at the center of stabilization efforts. But they cannot play a leading role without further buy-in from individual states and renewed international engagement.
- In addition to infrastructure development, trade facilitation, and peacekeeping, external actors need to invest in ideas, activities, and programs that foster linkages among African states.

Introduction

African regional institutions are playing major roles in democratization and conflict management. This reflects, in part, efforts since the early 2000s to transform the African Union (AU) into a strong, collective security and norm-building mechanism. It also stems from the growing role of Africa's regional economic communities (RECs), notably the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). They have contributed to democracy promotion and conflict management initiatives, including peacemaking and peacekeeping, in numerous countries, including Burundi, the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Gambia, Lesotho, Mali, South Sudan, and Somalia. Overall, this growing wave of regional efforts dovetails with the continent's frequent calls to find local solutions to African problems.

However, although the AU and RECs have articulated norms and institutions on democratic governance and security, these norms have yet to be firmly accepted and implemented. Regional institutions are attempting to make normative and behavioral alterations in circumstances where the values of democratization remain contested and where resource constraints limit their ability to implement these norms. Paradoxically, while regional institutions are weaker in Africa than elsewhere, the continent's states are continually resorting to them for collective problem solving. Regional approaches are strongly needed in Africa to overcome economic fragmentation and political vulnerabilities, but nationalistic tendencies hamper the capability of African institutions to become loci of meaningful integration. Resolving these weaknesses largely hinges on African initiatives to solidify the normative foundations of regional institutions and strengthen their capacities to achieve outcomes. It also hinges on forging a consensus that democratization is an essential tool for conflict management.

Regional approaches are strongly needed in Africa to overcome economic fragmentation and political vulnerabilities.

Before looking to the future, it is useful to examine the long-term trend in Africa toward greater regional cooperation on democratization and conflict management, the normative frameworks and instruments adopted by the AU and RECs, and the implementation efforts by the AU and RECs in specific countries. Understanding these trends offers insights into the broad evolution of African regional institutions primarily because norm building is contingent on advancing integration. These norms are also critical to establishing firm foundations for the future. In this regard, African regions that have made gains in breaking multiple barriers to integration are most likely to invest in collective endeavors to promote democratization and stabilization.

The Path Toward Greater Regionalism

With fifty-five interconnected states, diverse actors in Africa have long sought to surmount the deficiencies of weak states by building collective norms and institutions for security, prosperity, and unity. The major push for continental identity and unity began in the 1960s under the auspices of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and various economic integration schemes. Over time, however, civil wars, pressures for democratization, and the relative disengagement of external actors from Africa drove actors to focus more on developing regional institutions that could prevent instability and end conflicts. In the early 1990s, continental movements called for stronger African institutions with greater resources and responsibilities, as well as popularized the significance of democratic governance, constitutionalism, and human rights as normative frameworks that underpin regional integration.¹

[Regional] mechanisms and norms are burdened by weak implementation, insufficient buy-in, and an absence of strong leadership.

In repositioning regional institutions as agents for democratization and conflict resolution, there was growing recognition among African countries that narrowly defined sovereignties that dominated the post-independence period were inhibiting cooperation and integration. Moreover, conflicts had become increasingly regionalized, requiring collective approaches and responses. Through new notions of nonindifference and sovereignty with responsibility, African states began to

move toward renegotiating sovereignties in the context of regional institutions.² This trend has invariably yielded tentative steps toward regionalization, as reflected in norms and restraints that continental and regional institutions have imposed on African states. Proponents of strong regionalism also allege that with more African ownership of its governance and security problems, the continent should be able to elicit more resources and greater commitments from international partners for mutually beneficial initiatives.³

Means of Establishing Norms and Mechanisms

African regional organizations have increasingly become the arenas for resolving conflicts and forging norms on governance and democratization. Barely twenty-five years old, these roles have evolved alongside the acknowledgment of African agency in security and stabilization. Two dominant patterns have characterized these efforts. First, Africa has tried to strengthen the capacity and mandates of the AU and its affiliated institutions to lead these continental efforts. Second, there have been similar initiatives in most of Africa's RECs that aim to craft rules and normative experiments for stabilization and democratization. At both the continental and subregional levels, these mechanisms and norms are burdened by weak implementation, insufficient buy-in, and an absence of strong leadership.

Unlike other organizations in previous decades, the AU has actively shaped the African conflict management and democratization landscapes. The AU's continental reach and membership provide it a wide umbrella to articulate common positions, shared values, and aspirations. However, some member states still regard the AU as distant and alien, denuding it of legitimacy and hampering its effectiveness. Africa's RECs have emerged as the most promising local institutions for conflict management and democratization because of their long-standing promotion of economic integration, but their record is lopsided. Many African subregions have organizations that exist in name only. For instance, intrastate conflicts and leadership animosities have prevented the evolution of steady regional institutions in Central and North Africa. Even regions with the most advanced institutions, such as SADC and EAC, still lack credible, strong players to lead the creation of mechanisms and norms on democracy and conflict management. Without strong continental and subregional institutions, African attempts to articulate and project shared frameworks will remain ineffective.

African Union

Replacing the OAU with the AU in 2002 was a fundamental step toward greater regional cooperation on democracy and conflict. Article 3 of the AU's Constitutive Act stresses the advancement of collective efforts to achieve unity, peace, security, and stability; the promotion of political and socioeconomic integration; and the strengthening of democratic principles and institutions, popular participation, and good governance.⁴ To bolster democracy and constitutionalism, the Constitutive Act adopted measures to prevent the overthrow of governments—by military actors or civilians—that were reluctant to leave power. Commonly known as the provisions for unconstitutional changes of government, these measures include the suspension of governments'

memberships that come to power by force. These normative principles marked the initial shift from the previous OAU policy of noninterference to the AU policy of nonindifference and intervention.⁵ In 2002, the AU adopted the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council (PSC), which gave the council power to institute sanctions when unconstitutional changes of government occur. The protocol identified the spate of military coups and constitutional reversals and the lack of strong democracy, rule of law, and human rights institutions as the causes of insecurity, instability, and violent conflicts in Africa.⁶

The AU's comprehensive framework on democracy and constitutionalism—called the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance (ACDEG)—was adopted in 2007 and enacted in 2012. The ACDEG combines continental commitments to democracy and governance in a legally binding instrument. As stated in Article 2, the charter's main objectives, among others, are to promote adherence by parties to the universal values and principles of democracy and respect for human rights; promote adherence to the rule of law premised upon the respect for, and the supremacy of, the constitutions and constitutional order in the political arrangements of parties; and encourage the effective coordination and harmonization of governance policies among parties with the aim of promoting continental and regional integration.⁷

Democracy and governance issues have also been articulated in various AU institutions and platforms, including the Pan African Parliament; the Economic, Social and Cultural Council; the New Partnership for Africa's Development; the African Peer Review Mechanism; and the African Court of Justice and Human Rights. In 2011, to avoid duplication of these initiatives, the AU launched an agenda called Shared Values and created the African Governance Architecture (AGA).⁸ The AU has defined the Shared Values as a set of core principles for Africa to govern by: basic right to life, participation in governance, equality of persons, justice, adherence to the rule of law, sovereignty, and the interdependence of states.

The AGA, part of the AU Department of Political Affairs, seeks to foster operational linkages by coordinating and harmonizing existing governance institutions and mechanisms. The AGA is also engaged in advocacy campaigns to ensure that member states implement the normative frameworks and imbed the values of constitutionalism in national legislation and governance practices. Equally vital, the AGA works alongside the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) to deepen the nexus of democracy, security, and development. As the central institution for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflicts, the APSA is a core component of the PSC. Although the linkages among the AGA, APSA, and other AU institutions have yet to be clearly elaborated, the continental normative frameworks for democracy and conflict resolution are steadily gaining traction. The AU's achievements in implementing some of these provisions has helped to incrementally popularize these norms.

Regional Economic Communities

As a complement to the AU, RECs have been established to promote the implementation of democratic norms and conflict mechanisms. But the effectiveness of these communities varies greatly according to leadership dynamics, political and cultural cleavages, and the depth of integration. ECOWAS, SADC, and EAC have made greater strides in economic integration, the institutionalization of democratic norms, and peace and security than others, such as the Economic Community of Central African States, IGAD, the Arab Maghreb Union, and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa. In addition to lacking historical ties of integration, the latter regional institutions face civil conflicts, interstate strife, and an absence of anchor nations to lead integration efforts.

In West Africa, from the early 1990s, ECOWAS (under Nigeria's leadership) pioneered the practical implementation of normative frameworks for security and political cooperation. The 1991 ECOWAS Declaration of Political Principles envisioned a region governed by common values, including democratic accountability and respect for human rights.⁹ Spurred on by military interventions in Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, ECOWAS also adopted the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security, which enabled the body to proactively intervene in the conflicts of member states.

To strengthen the 1991 collective security protocol, ECOWAS signed a supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance in December 2001 that elaborates a set of shared “constitutional convergence principles.” These include the separation of powers; independence of the judiciary; free, fair, and transparent elections; zero tolerance for power obtained by unconstitutional means; popular participation in decisionmaking; adherence to democratic principles and decentralization of power at all levels of governance; freedom from ethnic, religious, regional, or racial discrimination; and freedom of association and of the press.¹⁰ Should a member state be found in violation of a principle, the protocol authorizes the use of sanctions, including the state's suspension from ECOWAS decision-making bodies.¹¹ As Jean Bossuyt notes, the ECOWAS protocol on security and democracy “conferred a clear (and quite unique) mandate to the regional organization to be a guarantor of peace and a guardian of the effective application of democracy and human rights norms in a region with a relatively large number of fragile states.”¹²

Meanwhile, Southern Africa has benefited from a long history of interstate collaboration and the presence of South Africa, the regional anchor state. Article 5 of the SADC Treaty mandates that member states promote “common political values, political systems, and other shared values which are transmitted through institutions, which are democratic, legitimate and effective.”¹³ In

The effectiveness of these [regional economic] communities varies greatly according to leadership dynamics, political and cultural cleavages, and the depth of integration.

addition, the Protocol on Politics, Defense, and Security Cooperation directs member states to promote the development of democratic institutions and practices and encourage universal human rights. SADC has also established the Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections, which, along with the mandates of the SADC Electoral Advisory Council, were put in place to foster participatory and accountable elections.¹⁴

In East Africa, EAC has set up mechanisms for peace, security, and democratization. The EAC Treaty obliges member states to abide by operational principles related to democracy, the rule of law, social justice, and universally accepted standards of human rights. These principles are reiterated in the EAC's Draft Protocol on Foreign Policy. In addition, the EAC Forum of National Electoral Commissions has established common standards and principles to determine the credibility and legitimacy of electoral processes.¹⁵ Given the prominence of regional security threats, particularly from Somalia and South Sudan, EAC is also focused on defense and security collaboration. In February 2014, Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda signed a mutual defense pact that establishes a framework for joint military exercises and intelligence sharing.¹⁶ In the Horn of Africa, IGAD has the Protocol on Democracy, Governance and Elections, but it has not gained traction because of the priority accorded to security and stabilization issues in the region.

AU-REC Coordination

The AU and RECs signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in January 2008 to ensure coordination on peace, security, and stabilization initiatives. This MOU mandates that the AU chairperson and PSC work closely with individual RECs to promote the core values and principles that member states have signed onto. In addition, it emphasizes the RECs' valuable role in implementing the APSA. The APSA Roadmap 2016–2020 prioritizes the AU's partnerships with the RECs. While relations between them have not always been as smooth as envisaged in the MOU, the AU has long maintained its practice of deferring major decisions to the RECs because of their grasp of cultural and political dynamics in their subregions. The APSA Roadmap recognizes the RECs' comparative advantage in supporting peace and stabilization efforts and requires that the AU and RECs work together to identify their respective roles and responsibilities in responding to different aspects of a conflict.¹⁷

African Union Efforts on Conflict Prevention and Management

The PSC's mandate, as Africa's leading conflict management institution, is to pursue sustainable peace through conflict prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping, and postconflict reconstruction. The PSC draws support from the

Continental Early Warning System, the Panel of the Wise, and the African Standby Force (ASF), among other systems and bodies. Over the past two decades, the PSC has had a mixed record in managing conflicts because of limited organizational and financial resources and the intractable nature of some conflicts. As Paul Williams notes, “the AU’s practical capabilities in the field of conflict management suffer from a persistent capabilities-expectations gap, falling well short of the ambitious vision and rhetoric contained in its founding documents.”¹⁸ The PSC’s successes have emanated from its ability to mobilize international resources and build partnerships with the RECs to address conflicts in Burundi, the CAR, Mali, Somalia, and Sudan.

The AU has had a stronger record in preventing conflict through the popularization of normative frameworks on constitutionalism, democratic governance norms, and the rule of law and through enforcement, including condemnation and sanctioning.¹⁹ Over the past decade, the AU has been actively implementing the provisions for unconstitutional changes of government. Its successes in condemning and/or reversing unconstitutional changes in government in Burkina Faso (2015), the CAR (2003), Côte d’Ivoire (2010), Guinea (2009), Guinea-Bissau (2003, 2012), Mauritania (2005), Madagascar (2001, 2009), Niger (2010), and Togo (2005) have helped build an African norm around constitutional legality.²⁰

Even though the RECs took the lead in these efforts, the AU, in most cases, was critical in providing broad continental legitimacy to these interventions. On the eve of its formation, the AU condemned and sanctioned Madagascar because Marc Ravalomanana had declared himself president after refusing to participate in an election runoff in 2001.²¹ Ravalomanana was barred from attending the inaugural AU summit in Durban in July 2002. Together with SADC, the AU took the same position in 2009 when Ravalomanana was ousted in a military coup. The memberships of the CAR and São Tomé and Príncipe were also suspended in 2003 under the same AU provision. In the CAR, the suspension affected then president François Bozizé, who had overthrown the government of Angé-Felix Patassé; the CAR was subsequently readmitted after its elections in 2005. In São Tomé and Príncipe, there was a short-lived military seizure of power, which was reversed when the AU held talks with the military on restoring democratic rule.

The North African uprisings that toppled regimes in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia presented the AU with a dilemma: should they be recognized as popular, legitimate seizures of power or condemned as unconstitutional changes of government? In Libya, even though the AU condemned the Western intervention that ended Muammar Qaddafi’s regime, a consensus emerged among AU institutions in favor of incorporating uprisings against illegitimate governments as an acceptable mode of constitutional change. Despite this consensus, however, the AU faced a quandary following the ouster of then Egyptian president Mohamed Morsi by the military in July 2013. At first, the AU suspended

Egypt's membership, but it reversed this position a year later due to Cairo's diplomatic offensive and Egypt's strategic leadership role in Africa.²²

This challenge has not been isolated to North Africa. This same issue was highlighted in November 2017 when Zimbabwe's military ousted then president Robert Mugabe and replaced him with a new leader, President Emmerson Mnangagwa. In this case, the AU first threatened to impose sanctions but retreated when Zimbabwe's military initiated the transition to a new leader. Likewise, although the 2007 Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance prohibits "any amendment or revision of the constitution or legal instruments which is an infringement on the principle of democratic change of government," the AU has been ineffective in censuring countries where presidents have changed constitutions to extend their tenures or delay holding elections.²³ As of 2017, Burundi, Cameroon, the DRC, Rwanda, Togo, and Uganda have amended their constitutions on the AU's watch.

Actions by Regional Economic Communities

There is significant unevenness in Africa's integration schemes due to the differing regional impacts of colonial legacies, the depth of socioeconomic and cultural interactions, and the role of anchor countries in boosting cooperation. Regions with relatively strong integration arrangements established during colonial days—such as East, West, and Southern Africa—have managed to build more solid ties than those without these legacies. In addition to colonial history, the EAC and SADC have benefited from cultural contiguities and a history of labor mobility that have strengthened recent initiatives to further integration. In West Africa, since the 1970s, Nigeria has played a vital role in reducing the enormous barriers among former French, British, and Portuguese colonies in a grand experiment that is reflected in ECOWAS. But Nigeria has not led on all issues; rather, it has drawn on the energies and skills of like-minded states such as Ghana and Senegal to build a consensus on regional integration. Even though West Africa's geographical vastness has slowed the expansion of economic ties, ECOWAS has pursued dynamic policies geared toward establishing uniformity in political governance, democratization, and conflict management.

West Africa

Long before the much-heralded intervention in Gambia in January 2017, ECOWAS had established a solid reputation for developing regional mechanisms to promote peace and democratic governance. As stated above, Nigeria's leadership efforts to stabilize the region at critical junctures since the early 1990s has formed the basis for a collective security system that has expanded into democracy promotion. In a region that has had a disproportionately large

number of military coups, the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance has been vital in deterring additional ones. This protocol established what have become constitutional convergence principles that require power to be acceded or maintained through free, fair, and transparent elections and not through unconstitutional means.

Although controversial, ECOWAS military interventions in destabilizing civil wars in Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, and Sierra Leone resulted in the creation of crucial mechanisms for regional security. In 1990, to secure peace in Liberia, ECOWAS took the unprecedented step of creating a peacekeeping force, the Economic Community Cease-Fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). With Nigeria shouldering most of the military and financial burdens, this intervention was largely a peace enforcement exercise, which ended with the election of Charles Taylor as president in 1997. In a new phase of the civil war (1998–2003), ECOWAS also played a proactive role, laying the foundation for the deployment of the United Nations Mission in Liberia, which supervised the 2005 elections that marked the war's end.

ECOMOG played a similar role in Sierra Leone between 1997 and 1999 to prevent the rebels of the Revolutionary United Front from destabilizing the country's legitimate government. Again, ECOMOG's engagement laid the foundation for the United Nations (UN) to complete stabilization efforts.²⁴ Similarly, in Guinea-Bissau, ECOWAS helped two military factions struggling for power eventually agree to form a government of national unity in December 1998.²⁵

These peacekeeping and peace enforcement experiences subsequently motivated ECOWAS to broaden its obligations to defend the core values of constitutional convergence by mediating disputes and managing electoral violence and political instability in Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Niger, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Mali, and, most recently, Gambia. In all these instances, ECOWAS defended the regional norms of democracy by condemning human rights violations, mediating electoral disputes, and assisting with constitutional reforms alongside the AU and other international actors.²⁶ As Gilles Yabi states, ECOWAS has been “needed as a crisis manager, mediator, and guardian of democratic standards.”²⁷

Guinea-Bissau

Guinea-Bissau has witnessed the longest engagement with ECOWAS (1997–present) because of deep-seated conflicts between the country's military and civilians that have resulted in coups, attempted coups, army mutinies, and assassinations. The prevalence of drug trafficking has further contributed to these toxic power struggles. Although Guinea-Bissau held democratic elections in 2000 and 2005, perennial clashes within the country's leadership forced

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ECOWAS to establish a permanent presence by sending special envoys to work with the UN to mediate the tensions and assist with security service reforms. In 2009, when the chief of staff of the armed forces General Batista Tagme Na Waie and president João Bernardo Vieira were assassinated on consecutive days, ECOWAS deployed military and police contingents to protect state institutions and initiate negotiations for a new government.²⁸ These efforts lasted for only a few years, however, as the military launched another coup on the eve of the 2012 presidential election. In response, ECOWAS imposed targeted sanctions against junta leaders and diplomatic, economic, and financial sanctions against the country. It also dispatched a peace operation, ECOWAS Mission in Bissau (ECOMIB), comprising troops from Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Togo.²⁹ ECOMIB demonstrated the determination of regional leaders to retain a decisive role in the resolution of the conflict in Guinea-Bissau.

In 2016, with the resurgence of leadership conflicts between the president and prime minister, ECOWAS added troops to ECOMIB and sent mediators to resolve the political deadlock. The outcome was the October 2016 Conakry Accord, in which the parties agreed to reach a consensus on the choice of the top leadership. However, little has been done to implement the accord. In June 2017, ECOWAS decried the impasse in Guinea-Bissau and threatened to impose targeted sanctions against the leadership.³⁰ In all these years of protracted engagement in Guinea-Bissau, ECOWAS has demonstrated resolve to steer the parties toward stability. As Yabi states:

The overall perceptions of the role of ECOWAS among the political, institutional and civil society players in Guinea-Bissau in recent years are very positive. The organization has always stood by the country each time the political or security situation deteriorated. Military missions conducted by ECOWAS Chiefs of Defense Staff of countries of the region with a view to maintaining dialogue with the authorities of the Guinea Bissau army . . . amply testify to the regional organization's solidarity with the country. The role of discrete mediation among the political and military players locally played by the special representatives of the President of the [ECOWAS] Commission in Bissau is also acknowledged and hailed in a context where the crises are almost always linked to personal antagonisms.³¹

Guinea

Although not as prolonged, ECOWAS's intervention in Guinea (2007–2009) tested its sustained commitment to hold parties accountable to regional values of democracy and constitutionalism. Guinea's crisis emanated from widespread protests against the dictatorial regime of former president Lansana Conté and the violent response of the security forces. As the crisis escalated in mid-2007, ECOWAS condemned the government's measures and established a liaison office in Conakry to mediate between the opposition and the government.³²

These initiatives, however, were interrupted by a military coup following Conté's death in December 2008. ECOWAS suspended Guinea's membership, imposed sanctions and, in negotiations for a new government, proposed the establishment of a joint civilian-military transition council that would organize elections to restore constitutional order. ECOWAS also proposed establishing a framework to coordinate dialogue between the council and external actors, which led to the creation of the International Contact Group on Guinea (ICG-G). During the intervention, ECOWAS sought to prevent coup leaders from participating in future elections in accordance with the AU's provision on unconstitutional changes of government. ECOWAS had to raise the pressure in September 2009 after the security forces committed atrocities against civilians protesting against the military's delays in holding elections. More threats of an arms embargo and diplomatic pressure through the ICG-G paid off when, under very difficult circumstances, Guinea held democratic elections in 2010, marking the end of military rule and its isolation from ECOWAS.³³

Niger

No less challenging was an intervention in Niger, where ECOWAS confronted efforts to extend the presidential term limit. Despite opposition from the parliament, the courts, and civil society, in October 2009, president Mamadou Tandja held a referendum on a new constitution that secured him a third term in office. ECOWAS suspended Niger's membership and dispatched a mediation team to reconsider the decision. But before the talks could advance, the Nigerien army overthrew Tandja in February 2010 and promised to restore civilian rule and make Niger a model democracy. In light of these developments, ECOWAS adopted a soft approach when the military rulers engaged opposition parties and civil society to restore democratic rule.³⁴ In March 2011, ECOWAS lifted sanctions on Niger after successfully restoring constitutional legality.

Côte d'Ivoire

The 2010–2011 electoral standoff in Côte d'Ivoire provided ECOWAS another opportunity to consolidate the norms of constitutionalism and democratic governance. When the country lapsed into a civil conflict in the early 2000s, ECOWAS deployed a peacekeeping mission, the Economic Mission in Côte d'Ivoire, which led to the start of the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire in April 2004. An ECOWAS-mediated 2007 peace agreement created a transitional power-sharing agreement between northern rebel forces and the government led by president Laurent Gbagbo. But when the latter refused to accept defeat in the November 2010 elections or hand over power to the opposition leader, Alassane Ouattara, a stalemate ensued, threatening to plunge Côte d'Ivoire into a renewed civil war. From the outset, ECOWAS took a hard-line position

against Gbagbo, warning that if he did not accept the results, it would have “no other option but to take all the necessary measures, including the use of legitimate force, to realize the aspirations of the Ivorian people.”³⁵ As it did in Guinea, ECOWAS brought the AU and UN on board to coordinate common positions and increase the pressure. The crisis was resolved in April 2011 when French troops captured Gbagbo and Ouattara was inaugurated. One observer of ECOWAS’s role noted:

ECOWAS played a principled, consistent and fair role in resolving it, as it had been there since 1999. ECOWAS defined the negotiation process and monitored the implementation of the [1997] Ouagadougou peace agreement. No other organization in Africa would have been able to deal with the complex situation . . . and that is because ECOWAS had the experience of Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea-Bissau.³⁶

Mali

ECOWAS played an equally high-profile role in Mali in March 2012, following a military coup that stemmed from dissatisfaction with the government’s lackluster approach to a rebellion from the north. ECOWAS swiftly suspended Mali’s membership, applied diplomatic sanctions, and froze access to ECOWAS bank financing. In conjunction, ECOWAS led negotiations in April 2012 for a plan to return the country to civilian rule. As a first step, the military junta agreed to restore constitutional order by handing over power to an interim civilian government.³⁷ Unfortunately, in May 2012, Tuareg rebels took advantage of the weak civilian government and declared a new state in northern Mali. In response, ECOWAS made contingency plans to deploy troops to support the transitional government’s campaign against the Tuareg rebels. Although ECOWAS did not deploy forces independently because of a lack of resources, its forces constituted a major portion of the AU-led International Support Mission in Mali. As Simone Haysom notes, “ECOWAS’ prominent role was not just determined by its history but also by the maneuvering it was able to do in order to secure UN backing, support from non-ECOWAS neighboring states and financial backing for its strategy from key Western states.”³⁸

Burkina Faso

In 2014, a bid by then president Blaise Compaoré to change Burkina Faso’s constitution to extend his twenty-seven-year rule was met by violent protests, forcing him out of office. When power passed to the military after Compaoré’s departure, ECOWAS mediated the development of a framework for a civilian-led transitional government.³⁹ However, the ECOWAS agreement collapsed when the presidential guard mounted a coup against the interim government and arrested its leaders in September 2015. Amid widespread outcry from opposition and civil society leaders, ECOWAS dispatched a new peace mission

to initiate a political dialogue among all stakeholders.⁴⁰ The ECOWAS mediation team, led by Senegalese President Macky Sall and then Beninese president Thomas Boni Yayi, produced a draft agreement on the withdrawal of the junta and reinstatement of the interim civilian government, but it contained several controversial provisions, including postponing reforms of the presidential guard until after the election and granting amnesty to the coup leaders. Political parties and civil society groups denounced the agreement because, according to one of the leaders, “ECOWAS was forcing the Burkinabe people to negotiate with terrorists.”⁴¹ ECOWAS subsequently backed down on the controversial provisions, leading to the arrest of the coup leaders and the restoration of the interim government. The latter organized elections in October 2015, which marked the end of the transition to democratic rule.

Gambia

The many intervention experiences that ECOWAS had accumulated throughout the region proved valuable in mediating Gambia’s postelection crisis in January 2017. The crisis arose from then president Yahya Jammeh’s reluctance to transfer power to opposition leader and president-elect Adama Barrow. Although Jammeh had initially conceded defeat, he reversed this decision, citing “serious and unacceptable abnormalities.”⁴² ECOWAS condemned the reversal, warning that it would take all measures necessary to enforce the results of the election; the AU and UN endorsed this position. ECOWAS also promoted diplomatic initiatives led by various presidents to persuade Jammeh to leave power on the official handover date of January 19, 2017. These initiatives were backed by contingency military preparations for an ECOWAS Mission in The Gambia (ECOMIG). The UN Security Council authorized Senegal’s request on behalf of ECOWAS to deploy ECOMIG on January 18. Under Operation Restore Democracy, ECOMIG was empowered to “facilitate the exit of Yahya Jammeh, restore the popular will of the Gambian people as expressed in the December 9 elections and create conditions for normalizing the political and humanitarian situation in Gambia.”⁴³ Barrow was sworn in as president on January 19, a decision endorsed by the UN Security Council. The combination of the deployment of 7,000 ECOMIG troops and additional diplomatic pressure forced Jammeh into exile in Equatorial Guinea on January 21, 2017, averting a drawn-out constitutional crisis.⁴⁴

ECOWAS’s Strengths

The decisiveness ECOWAS displayed in Gambia stems from years of learning by doing and a commitment to the core values that the region has coalesced around. Amid the difficult regional terrain of authoritarianism and instability, ECOWAS has gradually emerged as the guardian of democratic standards that have become widely accepted as regional public goods.⁴⁵ In addition,

ECOWAS has kept the peace with, and garnered the muscle to rout out, dictators because the credentials of its regional leaders have been largely uncontested, furnishing broad legitimacy for interventions. Also, the condemnations and sanctions that ECOWAS has applied over almost two decades have had a self-reinforcing effect, whereby only four countries out of fifteen—Benin, Cape Verde, Ghana, and Nigeria—have escaped some form of regional censure.

The ECOWAS Commission has taken seriously the notion of people-centered integration, allowing more civil society groups from the region to participate in matters of governance, peace, and security.

Although ECOWAS, like most African RECs and the AU, continues to rely on donors to finance its operations, it is the only REC that “has put in place a 0.5 per cent levy on all goods imported into the region, which it uses to fund ECOWAS activities and decrease its dependency on foreign funding.”⁴⁶ Finally, the ECOWAS Commission has taken seriously the notion of people-centered integration, allowing more civil society groups from the region to participate in matters of governance, peace, and security.

For instance, a group of civil society organizations called the West Africa Network on Peacebuilding (WANEP) is an integral part of the ECOWAS early warning system. WANEP has national chapters in all ECOWAS states and comprises over 500 organizations across West Africa that are advocates of peace, democracy, and sustainable development.⁴⁷

Southern Africa

ECOWAS’s victory in Gambia led observers in Southern Africa to probe the relative ineffectiveness of SADC in promoting democratic values despite its protocols.⁴⁸ One analyst suggested that “Southern Africa needs ECOWAS, not the dilatory SADC.”⁴⁹ These criticisms capture a host of problems related to the institutionalization of Southern African mechanisms for democracy and stability—notably a lack of regional leadership, the legacy of liberation movements, and limited experience in carrying out interventions to bring stability and reinforce norms. As a result, regional norms in Southern Africa have not taken root and democracy in many countries has steadily declined.⁵⁰ SADC’s inability to influence the recent events that led to the political demise of Mugabe in Zimbabwe illustrates its weaknesses in the region.

Lesotho

In SADC’s formative years, the organization’s determination to build common political values was exemplified by its intervention in Lesotho, a nation that has witnessed political violence and several coups. Since the mid-1990s, SADC has intervened in Lesotho five times to avert political chaos and preserve democratic order. In early 1994, even before taking office in South Africa, Nelson Mandela engaged then South African president F.W. de Klerk, Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe, and Botswanan president Ketumile

Masire to respond to fighting among military factions allied to political parties in Lesotho. Although fears of a coup were averted when South Africa threatened to close the border, in August 1994, the Lesotho king (in what amounted to a royal coup) dissolved the government, including parliament. On behalf of SADC, Botswana, South Africa, and Zimbabwe engaged in coercive diplomacy to force a return to constitutional rule. These leaders became the guarantors of democratic rule and participated in efforts to reform the Lesotho military.⁵¹

While the Lesotho intervention affirmed the principles of democratic governance and constitutionalism that were to govern regional interstate relations, SADC had to intervene again in 1998 when Lesotho descended into anarchy following a contentious election. The unrest led to a mutiny by the army, further compromising constitutional order and stability. To contain the violence, the Lesotho prime minister requested that Botswana's and South Africa's militaries intervene. SADC personnel faced significant logistical and operational problems in addition to denunciations from opposition parties, but they eventually disarmed the mutinying soldiers and restored order.⁵²

Violence in Lesotho resurfaced again following another controversial election in 2007, after which various political factions contested the legitimacy of the results. SADC appointed Masire to mediate a political settlement that brought about new electoral reforms prior to the 2012 elections. But these elections constituted a mere lull in the political stalemate because political alliances continued to fragment and the military's role in politics deepened. In August 2014, one faction of the army attempted a coup, which led the prime minister to flee to South Africa. The coup attempt was thwarted by SADC's diplomatic intervention and the deployment of a security force to protect the prime minister who returned to power. SADC also appointed a mediator, then South African deputy president Cyril Ramaphosa, to facilitate dialogue between the parties at the center of the perennial power struggles.⁵³

Although Lesotho since has held two peaceful elections under SADC's watch, the partisanship of the military has remained a major source of instability, as reflected by the assassinations of the heads of the Lesotho Defense Forces in June 2015 and September 2017.⁵⁴ Both assassinations resulted from the unresolved power struggles among political actors that tend to inevitably involve the military. In the aftermath of the September 2017 assassination, SADC deployed a contingent force of military and civilian experts to support the ensuing government's investigations and reforms.⁵⁵ Despite these efforts, however, successive governments have failed to implement SADC's official recommendations to professionalize and depoliticize the security services as a long-term solution to the cycle of violence in Lesotho.⁵⁶ Perhaps to underscore SADC's frustration with the country, then South African president Jacob Zuma stated in September 2017 that "as SADC, we cannot and shall not be in Lesotho forever. We desire to have Lesotho off the SADC agenda soonest."⁵⁷

Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe, a critical player in SADC's formative bids to stabilize Lesotho descended into authoritarianism and state-organized violence itself from the early 2000s, dealing a severe blow to SADC's subsequent attempts to build an incipient regional framework for democracy and stability. Until the military ouster of Mugabe, Zimbabwe's problems symbolized SADC's failure to advance democratization in the region. These failures are also attributable to South Africa's inability to display strong leadership—like Nigeria has done in West Africa—partly because of the liberation camaraderie among Southern African leaders that prevents criticism of egregious behavior.⁵⁸ The Mugabe government increasingly resorted to violence when he lost a constitutional referendum in 1999 to extend his mandate; this loss coincided with the rise of a new opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). SADC, under the leadership of then South African president Thabo Mbeki, stood by as conditions in Zimbabwe deteriorated in the lead-up to legislative elections in 2000 and presidential elections in 2002. In both elections, Mugabe effectively used the security forces to deny the opposition victory.⁵⁹

Mbeki's approach to Zimbabwe, dubbed quiet diplomacy, was roundly condemned by the Zimbabwean opposition, which expected South Africa and SADC to exert peer pressure and live up to the latter's protocols on democratic governance. Mugabe was roundly defeated in the first round of the 2008 elections, but the opposition boycotted a runoff to prevent further brutality against its followers. Against the groundswell of international opposition to

quiet diplomacy, SADC prodded Mbeki to embark on a diplomatic initiative to reconcile the opposition and the government that led to a brittle power-sharing transitional government in February 2009. Later, under Zuma's leadership, SADC tried to put pressure on Mugabe to initiate reforms that would strengthen democratic governance, but it was too late. On the eve of the 2013 elections, SADC pleaded with Mugabe to implement fair electoral rules, but he rebuffed this plea, instead threatening to withdraw from the organization.⁶⁰ Under Mugabe,

Zimbabwe exerted a disproportionately influential role in SADC decisions that undermined regional norms of democracy and accountability, including a decision to curtail the ability of the SADC Tribunal to arbitrate on cases of human rights violations.⁶¹

The army's successful intervention against Mugabe in November 2017 put SADC in an awkward position. Years of SADC support for Mugabe had led opposition forces to increasingly distrust the organization, so when it tried to mediate between the army and Mugabe, it was not seen as a credible actor. Most citizens viewed SADC's last-ditch intervention as an attempt to save Mugabe. With no visible role in the momentous political transformation, SADC had to

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watch from the sidelines as the army teamed up with one faction of the ruling party to orchestrate Mugabe's removal. Marginalized from Zimbabwe's political scene, SADC is unlikely to play any role in the decisive debates about democratization in the post-Mugabe era, particularly as the army has gradually become the long-term arbiter of national politics.⁶²

Madagascar

One of SADC's rare successful interventions to restore constitutional order took place in Madagascar between 2009 and 2013. SADC intervened when the elected government of Marc Ravalomanana was ousted in a 2009 coup orchestrated by Andry Rajoelina and the military. Soon after Rajoelina took power and constituted a High Transitional Authority government, SADC and the AU suspended Madagascar's membership. SADC also appointed former Mozambican president Joaquim Chissano to lead a joint mediation team with members from the UN, the AU, and the International Organization of La Francophonie. The core objective of the negotiations was to launch an inclusive dialogue for a return to constitutional normalcy.⁶³ After relentless diplomatic engagement, SADC mediators announced in September 2011 the Roadmap for Ending the Crisis in Madagascar, which proposed a transitional government that would establish a framework for democratic elections. In July 2012, with the parties deadlocked on implementation of the road map, Zuma mediated talks in Seychelles between Ravalomanana and Rajoelina that prepared the way for elections in October 2013. The election of Hery Rajaonarimampianina as president after a December 2013 runoff contest, an outcome endorsed by international observers, lent some credence to SADC's (and South Africa's) efforts to promote democracy in the region.⁶⁴

Democratic Republic of Congo

In recent years, the DRC has emerged as one of SADC's major obstacles in promoting peace, stability, and democratization. After significant investments in ending the DRC's civil war in the early 2000s, South Africa and SADC have prioritized securing a stable environment and a friendly government in Kinshasa. This is evident in, for example, South Africa's endorsement of the DRC's flawed 2011 general elections, which controversially kept President Joseph Kabila in power.⁶⁵ Facing a relentless rebellion in the eastern DRC, Kabila appealed to SADC to intervene in 2013, and this resulted in the deployment of a SADC Force Intervention Brigade (FIB), comprising Malawian, Tanzanian, and South African troops under UN authorization. The FIB brought relative stability to the region, but SADC did not match these military gains with diplomatic pressure on Kabila to undertake political and governance reforms.⁶⁶

Without regional pressure, Kabila embarked on a campaign to retain power beyond his two-term mandate, which was set to expire in December 2016. His

Domestic political paralysis [in South Africa] has invariably weakened South Africa's leadership on compliance with and the implementation of regional norms, particularly in a region where these norms are not widely embraced.

bid to remain in office prompted massive protests that were violently crushed by security forces.⁶⁷ To avoid further violence, the Catholic Church mediated a political settlement between the government and opposition parties, which resulted in an agreement on December 31, 2016.⁶⁸ The key provisions of the

agreement were Kabila's pledge not to manipulate the constitution to obtain a third term and to hold elections before the end of December 2017. But soon after signing the agreement, Kabila reneged on his commitment to hold elections, charging that "I didn't promise anything! I'd like elections to take place as soon as possible. But we want perfect elections, not just any kind of elections."⁶⁹ At an August 2017 summit meeting in Pretoria, Kabila won SADC's endorsement; according to Zuma, SADC stated that it "might not be possible to hold elections in December 2017, due to a number of challenges currently receiving attention."⁷⁰ Subsequently, Kabila announced a

new election date before the end of 2018, although most observers believe that he is preparing to change the constitution to obtain an additional term. A Congolese analyst criticized SADC's role in the conflict:

SADC's position is perpetuating unnecessary ambiguities and contradictions on the rule of law and the future of the DRC. SADC cannot provide moral support to a regime that has shown little respect to its own Constitution. SADC's tacit support, especially South Africa's support, to President Kabila is pushing him to choose the path of stonewalling and suppression inside the DRC. The result is disregard for human rights, transparency and accountability, and good governance.⁷¹

SADC Shortcomings

SADC's tepid support for regional norms has coincided with the deterioration of democratic principles across the region. While many countries have recently applied for membership, SADC has increasingly displayed a failure to consistently and collectively promote legitimate governance, largely because South Africa's democracy is in crisis.⁷² Even though South African opposition parties have made significant electoral gains over the past few years, the country's democratic weaknesses have arisen because of bitter factional conflicts in the ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC). During Zuma's near-decade in leadership, the ANC became faction-ridden, leading to a significant loss of popular support. Moreover, reports of massive corruption and abuse of state institutions have undermined South Africa's reputation as the African model of a well-governed state. Domestic political paralysis has invariably weakened South Africa's leadership on compliance with and the implementation of regional norms, particularly in a region where these norms are not widely embraced. The democratic recession in South Africa has extended

further north to Malawi and Zambia, countries that led the region's democratic transitions in the early 1990s. The political breakthrough in Zimbabwe; the election of a new ANC leader, Cyril Ramamphosa; and the leadership transition in Angola are the only positive developments in a region that has seen democratic norms steadily decline.

East Africa

The EAC and IGAD have overlapping memberships in East Africa and the Horn of Africa, where diverse histories, cultures, and conflict dynamics have compromised efforts to build regional institutions for stabilization and democratization. There are three dominant regional patterns. First, the region has countries that are still at war (Somalia and South Sudan) or countries where a large portion of the population has violently contested state legitimacy, as exemplified in Darfur. Therefore, as most of these states struggle to recover from civil conflicts, they can hardly invest in domestic institutions of democratic governance, let alone regional ones. Second, some countries that have emerged from civil conflicts—Eritrea, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Uganda—have leaders who have not developed open, competitive political systems and have instead imposed constraints on civil liberties and civic participation. Invoking the model of developmental states elsewhere, these countries have tried to build strong states at the expense of participatory institutions; they have countenanced authoritarian forms of governance to legitimate their power. Third, in contrast to their neighbors, Kenya and Tanzania stand out for having more open and competitive political systems.⁷³

These diversities are compounded by the difficulty of finding a strong leading country, such as Nigeria or South Africa, to consistently anchor norm building for democratic governance and constitutionalism; where there is leadership on regional issues, it tends to revolve around a coalition of countries that do not necessarily share the same values. In addition, the entanglement of these countries in the instabilities of the Gulf region has made it difficult for them to forge autonomous policies on security and stabilization.⁷⁴

South Sudan

Under the leadership of Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda, IGAD mediated peace agreements in Sudan and South Sudan and in Somalia. The protracted negotiations by IGAD and its external partners produced the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement that led to the birth of South Sudan in July 2011.⁷⁵ When South Sudan reverted to war beginning in December 2013, IGAD re-emerged to negotiate a new internal agreement in August 2015 among the South Sudanese parties. More vitally still, with the continued fighting in South Sudan, IGAD alongside the AU and UN have attempted to deploy a peace support operation that will help manage the humanitarian crisis that has engulfed the new state.⁷⁶

Somalia

Similarly, IGAD initiatives in Somalia culminated in the formation of the Transitional Federal Government in 2004 and laid the foundation for the IGAD Peace Support Mission to Somalia (IGASOM), the precursor to the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). For many years, Burundian and Ugandan troops formed the core of AMISOM, but Uganda started to withdraw its troops in December 2017, raising doubts about the mission's future.⁷⁷

Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda

As one of Africa's oldest regional economic institutions, EAC was dominated primarily by Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda before Burundi, Rwanda, and South Sudan were admitted in recent years. Geographical contiguity and shared British colonial history lent coherence to EAC, but the imperative of enlarging the organization's membership was spurred by the desire to create a larger economic space and to help new members—most of them bedeviled by civil conflicts—to find a political home where the region could begin to collectively construct common values and standards of governance and constitutionalism.⁷⁸ EAC also offered membership to new states as a way to encourage them to peacefully resolve domestic conflicts; holding out the carrot of membership gave EAC some leverage in pressuring Burundi and South Sudan to start to resolve their internal disputes democratically and peacefully.

However, progress on cultural and infrastructure cooperation, investment, and trade has not translated into corresponding institutional norms on democracy and governance, despite existing protocols in these domains. Political differences continue to dominate the region. As mentioned above, Kenya and Tanzania are the only countries where power has changed hands through democratic elections and where multiple nonstate actors have influenced domestic debates. Yet Kenya's 2017 electoral convulsions are threatening its image of political stability and may potentially reduce the number of stable democracies in East Africa. While Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda have held elections, they have not made much difference on leadership rotation or political competition. Uganda was one of the first countries in Africa to successfully change its constitution to abolish presidential term limits in 2005, and Rwanda followed suit in 2015.⁷⁹ In Burundi, a commission set up in 2015 to review term limits claimed that citizens did not want such limits. In September 2017, Uganda's parliament rammed through constitutional amendments that make it possible for President Yoweri Museveni to run for election in 2021 when he will be more than seventy-five years old.⁸⁰

The lack of convergence around regional norms was demonstrated when Burundian President Pierre Nkurunziza changed the constitution in 2015 to stay on past his mandated term limit. In the aftermath, EAC was unable to pronounce itself credibly on the matter because it had no legitimacy to promote a norm that only two countries in the region had adhered to. Using military and

security forces to intimidate opponents, Nkurunziza successfully defied the region and the AU and was reelected in July 2015.⁸¹ EAC gave the task of mediating the Burundi crisis to Museveni, who had no legitimacy or leverage in the conflict. At the height of the crisis, the PSC proposed the deployment of 5,000 troops to Burundi to check human rights violations, but it pulled back because of opposition from the Burundian government and a lack of support from the EAC. The absence of credible external pressure emboldened the government to skirt negotiations with its opponents. As Lesley Connolly has observed:

In East Africa . . . there is a tension between the notion of democratic culture and presidents who remain in power for decades. Several EAC heads of state are clinging to power through constitutional revisions or threat of the use of force. Denouncing Nkurunziza's attempt to violate the presidential term limit would thus discredit their own legitimacy at the national level. This dynamic has largely accounted for the absence of international consensus with respect to the situation in Burundi.⁸²

Conclusions

Broad efforts to fashion common norms and values in Africa reflect the growing salience of regional arenas for policymaking. But there are many barriers to integration as a whole and to coordinated initiatives on democracy and governance. Most of these obstacles reflect traditional tensions between national sovereignty and intergovernmentalism. Even African states that increasingly seem unable to adequately manage contemporary problems on their own tend to invoke the language of national independence and self-determination. Overcoming issues of sovereignty requires building routine and regularized interactions in subregional domains, including investment in common citizenships and identities. EAC and ECOWAS have advanced further toward the free movement of people, potentially expanding the contours of integration.

Furthermore, many of Africa's RECs will likely remain unable to surmount their political and economic weaknesses unless their members can resolve their current intra- and interstate conflicts and leadership contests. The dilemma for these regions is stark: while they urgently need conflict resolution and democratic governance institutions that could contribute to stabilization and recovery, they lack these institutions precisely because of continued conflicts. The AU, as a continental institution, often intervenes to make and keep peace in these troubled regions, but it has no resources of its own to make a difference in what are intractable conflicts. For this reason, helping to end African conflicts should be part of political stabilization efforts that may ultimately reignite momentum for integration.

Relatively strong regional institutions are emerging in Africa where actors have built on history, culture, and contiguity to forge common identities and collective means of managing the complex problems confronting the continent.

The articulation of regional norms works well where there is an existing density of interstate relations and where states have respect for regional institutions. Undoubtedly, the AU retains the continental leadership and imprimatur for setting the policy parameters vital to norm articulation, but ultimately, the AU is hampered by a lack of resources and isolation from the regional contexts where these norms are needed most. As the examples of ECOWAS intervention in conflicts in West Africa since the 1990s have demonstrated, regional norms can be strengthened through gradual learning, iteration, and cumulative experiences. While ECOWAS's successful experiences in Gambia may be instructive to other African RECs still struggling with solidifying common values and practices, there have been few instances of cross-regional learning.

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In recent years, there have been attempts to draw lessons across Africa on mediation and early warning practices but not on regional preparedness and resolve to enforce compliance of democratic and governance norms. With more interventions by these institutions, trends and patterns may emerge that could inform future interventions.

Due to the long-standing relative ineffectiveness of regional actions, it is important for African countries to make bold efforts to develop institutions based on shared values and identities. These efforts will need to be accompanied by changes that place regional institutions at the apex of major decisions in democratization, security, and prosperity. Equally, this will entail a tremendous shift on the part of external actors who have hitherto engaged with African regional institutions sporadically and selectively. Beyond dominant preoccupations with infrastructure development, trade facilitation, and peacekeeping, external actors need to invest in ideas, activities, and programs that foster political bonds and linkages among Africa's subregions.

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