Restricted Spaces: Civil Society and Authoritarianism in Africa

April 26-27, 2019
ILR Conference Center
Cornell University
Restricted Spaces

Civil Society and Authoritarianism in Africa

Hosted by the Institute for African Development, Cornell University

The Institute for African Development (IAD) focuses Cornell University’s interests, research, and outreach on the study of Africa. It also seeks to expand the depth and breadth of teaching on Africa within the University community and to build a faculty and student constituency that is knowledgeable about issues in African development.

IAD’s mission is to serve as a base for Cornell’s initiative of strengthening the study of Africa, thereby creating an enabling environment for the University to play a key role in the creation of policies that influence the continent’s development.

IAD mobilizes support from a broad constituency and is committed to promoting the study of Africa in a global perspective by collaboration and academic linkages with other departments, academic units, and institutions both within and outside of Cornell University.

Co-sponsors:
SAHEL Consortium
Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies

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Civil Society and Authoritariansim

Conference Abstract

Many governments around the globe have intensified restrictions on civil society. Authoritarian governments, in particular, are becoming more forceful in limiting civic space and in violating international norms which protect freedom of association. From 2015 to 2016 alone, 64 restrictive laws were adopted on civil society in both democratic and undemocratic countries (International Center for Not-for-Profit Law). The Washington-based International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, or ICNL, has identified 120 laws and regulations that have been enacted by 70 governments since 2012 that curtail NGOs’ access to financing, limit the ability of citizens to form and operate them, or prevent public protests, among other hurdles.

“We’ve seen a paradigm shift in the view of civil society in the past 20 years,” says David Moore, ICNL’s vice president for legal affairs. “There is a perception, promoted by some governments, that civil society is somehow ‘other,’ seeking to undermine national goals and priorities.” According to the USAID Sustainability Index for Sub-Saharan Africa “in many countries, civil society, especially those engaged in advocacy or human rights work, face significant and often vague restrictions on their operations.”

Because of an absence of an agreed-upon international definition of terrorism, counter-terrorism legislations have been adopted by over 140 governments since September 11, 2001. Legislations from various avenues seek to restrict civil society activities by requiring governmental notification and approval to intrusive oversight.

Democracy is defined more by the ability of the people to defend their participatory rights when these are being grievously violated by government than by free and fair elections and other institutional forms. As its sociological counterpart, civil society is an essential element in fostering and maintaining democracy. Civil society does more than act as a counterforce against the abuse of power by government. It also improves the quality of governance by (a) a democratic government, faced with the checking force of an activist and virile civil society cannot but be responsive to the needs of the people for good governance; (b) a strong, powerful civil society can also exert a moral and disciplinary influence in ensuring the observance by government of standards of public morality and accountability, and (c) an active civil society can identify, package, and articulate the interests, needs and demands of the society or of particular sectors in it, and by forcing them upon the attention of the government, thereby facilitating “political communication” between the state and society, especially as regards demands which otherwise might remain dormant or be expressed in fragmentary or ineffective ways.” It has been observed that “building and sustaining a free society is like a three-legged stool: One leg is a democratic government, the second leg is a free market economy and the third is civil society-civil associations, religious institutions, voluntary efforts NGOs, and individual acts of citizenship that together weave the fabric of democratic life. According to a recent study by Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) (March 2018) “there is an abundance of evidence that a diverse and dynamic civil society is vital to the health and strength of democracy, and to the national security of a country. Civil society plays an integral role in countering violent extremism and terrorism through delegitimizing terrorist narratives.”

The rise of authoritarianism and the resulting restriction of space for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) create fertile ground for violence and conflict. In some parts of the world, such as in the Sahara-Sahel region, militarization and fragmentation of societies is intensifying (Metelits, 2016).
and destroying already fragile local economic infrastructures, causing massive displacements and insecurity.

The seeming retreat of the international community in promoting and defending democratic values has brought about a rise in populism. The pushback against so-called external interference and CSOs has become the order of the day and nationalism is emerging as an alternative to globalization.

Against this background, the Institute for African Development in collaboration with the SAHEL Consortium and the Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies will discuss and present papers on various sub-themes (see below) at the symposium:

- International NGOs and Local Government Relationships
- Nature, Role and Importance of Civil Society in a Democracy
- Weaknesses of Civil Society in African Countries
- Civil Society, and a Free Society
- Governance and Constitutional Restraint
- NGOs and Public Interest Litigation
- NGOs Role in Elections and Election Monitoring
- Political Institutions and Democracy
- Backsliding Democracy in Africa and NGOs
- The International Community, Humanitarian Responses and NGOs
- Civil Society, Displacement and Security
Welcome Remarks:

Kifle Gebremedhin, Professor, Biological and Environmental Engineering, Cornell, and Chair, Advisory Board, Institute for African Development

Muna Ndulo, Professor, Cornell Law School, and Director, Institute for African Development

2:30pm-4:30pm  Session I:  Inclusive and Participatory Governance
Moderator: Marcel Kitissou, Adjunct Professor, Africana Studies, University at Albany, Visiting Fellow, Institute for African Development, Cornell, and Founder, the SAHEL Consortium

Democracy off the Rails:
Proximity to Infrastructure and Perceptions of Democracy
Erin Accampo Hern, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Economy, The College of Idaho

The African Struggle for Democracy and Human Rights
Edward Kannyo, Professor, Department of Political Science, Rochester Institute of Technology

Shrinking Civil Society Space in Africa:  Current Dynamics and their Impact on the Sector
Kelly Ann Krawczyk, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Auburn University

Anticolonial Legacies and Illeberalism in Africa: Explaining the Marginalization of Associational Life in Uganda
Joshua Rubongoya, Professor, Department of Public Affairs, Roanoke College

Reception
Civil Society and Authoritariansim

Saturday, April 27, 2018
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8:00–9:00 am
Breakfast (open to all)

9:00–11:00 am
Session II: Civil Society, Restricted Spaces and Democracy
Moderator: Mecke Nagel, Professor, Philosophy and Director, Center for Gender and InterCultural Studies, State University of New York - Cortland

The African Union and Restricted Spaces for Civil Society in Regional Governance in Africa
Thomas K. Tieku, Associate Professor, King’s @Western University

Gender Equity and Women’s Rights: Restricted Spaces and Democratic Participation
Chiseche Mibenge, Director, Community Engaged Learning in Human Rights, Stanford

Undermining Civil Society: The Case of Mali
Kassim Kone, Professor, Dept. of Sociology/Anthropology, State University of New York at Cortland

Towards a More Inclusive Participatory Governance: The Case of Cameroon
Julius A. Agbor, Associate Professor of Finance and Economics, Vanguard University

11:00–11:15 am
Coffee/Tea Break

11:15–12:30 pm
Session III: Restricted Spaces, Conflicts and Foreign Intervention
Moderator: Kifle Gebremedhin, Professor, Biological and Environmental Engineering, Cornell, and Chair, Advisory Board, Institute for African Development

Horace Campbell, Professor, Department of Political Science and African American Studies, Syracuse University
Saturday, April 28, 2018
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Legacies of Rebel Governance and CSO Leader Behavior in Post-Conflict Settings
Justine M. Davis, PhD candidate, Department of Political Science, University of California, Berkeley

The African Union and Restricted Spaces for Civil Society in Regional Governance in Africa
Andreas Herberg-Rothe, Professor, Faculty of Sciences and Cultural Studies, Fulda University

12:30–2:00 pm  Luncheon Keynote Address
Reflections on Civil Society, the State and the Future of Democracy in Africa
Nicolas van de Walle, Maxwell M. Upson Professor of Government, Cornell University

2:15–4:30 pm  Session IV: Restricted Spaces, Governance and Elections
Moderator: Muna Ndulo, Professor, Cornell Law School, and Director, Institute for African Development

Cameroon in Restless Times: Backsliding Democracy in Central Africa?
Oliver Ruppel, Professor of Law, Stellenbosch University, South Africa

NGOs as Platforms for Citizens’ Participation in Elections: Methods, Engagement and Impact
Franklin Oduru, Deputy Executive Director and Director of Programs, Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), Ghana
Monitoring the Zombie Observers: Recent Trends of Electoral Fraud by Africa’s Authoritarian Regimes
Nikolas Emmanuel, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Soka University, Japan

Development, Democracy and Restricted Spaces
Dawn Hersey, PhD student, Department of Political Science, State University of New York at Albany

Amidst Restricted Spaces: The Evolving Autonomy of Electoral Commissions in West Africa’s Democracy Growth
Maurice Ogbonnaya, Senior Research Fellow and Deputy COO, Political Parties Leadership and Policy Development Center
New Publications from IAD/Cambridge Scholars

Financing Innovation and Sustainable Development in Africa
New 2018
Edited by Muna Ndulo and Steve Kayizzi-Mugerwa

This book derives from a symposium on development financing held at Cornell University in April 2014. Using multifaceted and multidisciplinary analytical approaches, it considers the role of the banking system, the stock market, credit access, external aid, and sovereign wealth funds in the evolving development finance architecture. Further, the volume looks at China’s role as an aid donor, the impact of BRICs partnerships in South Africa, the role of NEPAD in mobilizing resources for infrastructure development, and the links between law, trade, and regional integration. The study concurs with previous analyses that greater access to credit by the poor represents the most effective way of fighting poverty and raising the standards of living in Africa. Cornell’s Institute for African Development and the African Development Bank (AfDB) were cosponsors of the 2014 symposium.

Steve Kayizzi-Mugerwa is Advisor at the Independent Evaluation Office of the International Monetary Fund in Washington, DC. Previously, he was Acting Chief Economist and Vice-President at the AfDB. He is co-editor of Inclusive Growth in Africa: Policies, Practice, and Lessons Learnt (2017).

Muna Ndulo is Professor of Law, Elizabeth and Arthur Reich Director of the Leo and Arvilla Berger International Legal Studies Program, and Director of the Institute for African Development at Cornell University. He is an internationally recognized scholar in the fields of constitution-making, governance, human rights, and foreign direct investment. He has published over one hundred journal articles and fourteen books.

IAD/CSP 2018, 314 pages, 978-1-5275-0556-8, 1-5275-0556-1
Institute for African Development - Additional Activities

Seminars
Throughout the academic year, IAD sponsors a series of weekly seminars on current issues affecting Africa. The seminars, as well as the annual symposia, are designed to bring awareness to the wider community of the panoply of critical issues confronting Africa, to help shape debate, to influence policy direction, and to help stem the tide of simplification and misconception pervasive in commentaries relating to Africa.

Special Speaker Series
The IAD Special Speaker Series brings to Cornell eminent persons, leading politicians, scholars, diplomats and representatives of international organizations who contribute to the intellectual and scholarly environment by lecturing on global issues with an African focus.

Distinguished Africanist Scholar Program
IAD collaborates with other Cornell departments and units to host renowned scholars to participate in the IAD Distinguished Africanist Scholar Program. While at Cornell, the Scholar gives a public presentation that provides new perspectives on contemporary African issues and challenges. In addition, the Scholar participates in one or more classes as appropriate for his or her broad span of competence and experience.

Visiting Scholars Program
The Visiting Scholars Program makes it possible for scholars working on African issues to undertake research at Cornell’s vast libraries and research facilities while at the same time contributing to the richness of IAD’s programs and publications.

Publications
The Institute for African Development publishes conference proceedings and other scholarly titles, occasional papers, and newsletters. The annual symposium brings awareness to the wider community of critical issues confronting Africa while at the same time helping to shape debate and influence policy direction. Conference proceedings are published as part of the IAD/Cambridge Scholars Publishing Book Series and sometimes with other publishers.

The Occasional Paper series is a biannual publication of multi-disciplinary, policy-oriented articles in all fields of African studies relevant to development. Manuscripts are reviewed by peers on the basis of scholarship, extent of original research, rigor of analysis, and significance of the conclusions as well as the scholarship relevance to issues affecting Africa.

Africa Notes, the newsletter of the Institute, is published four times a year and is available online. It can also be ordered by writing to us at ciad@cornell.edu.