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# Political Leadership: Bane of African Development.

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## Abstract

This paper Political Leadership: Bane of African Development discussed the importance of good governance and its impact on the socio-economic and political development of African countries and conversely its underdevelopment und consequent stagnation. The study employed the use of quantitative method of collecting secondary data. The system analysis approach was also adopted as the theoretical framework. It is a global system, but it is also used to analyze the place of regions and single states within it. The study showed that, political leadership in Africa with few exceptions based on empirical observation and documented evidences since the hard won political independence from colonial Europe has become one of Africas source of problem confronting the states and their resources became the primary purpose of political contestation and the establishment of a political culture based on ethnicity, regionalism and authoritarian pattern of governance The solution is, for African leaders to learn and imbibe the leadership qualities of late Nelson Mandela, Nyerere and Kwame Nkrumah, who carried their citizens along and were devoid of ethnicity, regionalism and personal aggrandizement. They sacrificed their lives for their countrymen and fought against imperialism and are counted as patriots.

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# Political Leadership: Bane of African Development

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This paper "Political Leadership: Bane of African Development" discussed the importance of good governance and its impact on the socio-economic and political development of African countries and conversely its underdevelopment und consequent stagnation. The study employed the use of quantitative method of collecting secondary data. The system analysis approach was also adopted as the theoretical framework. It is a global system, but it is also used to analyze the place of regions and single states within it. The study showed that, political leadership in Africa with few exceptions based on empirical observation and documented evidences since the hard won political independence from colonial Europe has become one of Africa's source of problem confronting the states and their resources became the primary purpose of political contestation and the establishment of a political culture based on ethnicity, regionalism and authoritarian pattern of governance The solution is, for African leaders to learn and imbibe the leadership qualities of late Nelson Mandela, Nyerere and Kwame Nkrumah, who carried their citizens along and were devoid of ethnicity, regionalism and personal aggrandizement. They sacrificed their lives for their countrymen and fought against imperialism and are counted as patriots.

**Keywords:** Political Leadership, African Development, Corruption, Political Will, Political Culture

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## Introduction

It is often asked whether leaders are born or trained. Leadership is a position of authority. However not all people in leadership position would necessarily have the leadership qualities, they only use their position in that a leadership position commands respect and a listening ear. For anyone one who desires to be a leader must also be able to be a servant. A leader must have a vision and a high sense of patriotism and goal he would strive to achieve even if nobody follows him**.** He is somebody whose convincing argument will make one do something he doesn't like, but at the end like it. The true leader ignores arguments and instead concentrates on developing the leadership qualities necessary for success, some of which are honesty, forward looking competence, inspiring intelligence etc. In the current political dispensation, power is attained through the democratic process as most African countries are democracies, in other words leaders are elected into political offices through the ballot. It is therefore expected that the most qualified political leaders are elected if democracy is to be made to work. However, not all elected leaders deliver the dividends of democracy.

Many of the leaders who came to power boasted of being patriots and democrats. They promise to build bridges where there is no river. They personalize power that discourages the growth of wider forms of trust and reciprocity. In most cases they mismanage the resources of their own countries, siphon them abroad and more often than not leave a legacy of hunger and starvation, dilapidated infrastructure, low level of education, deplorable health conditions, low growth rate, despicable living conditions and unending conflicts, criminalities and a culture of corruption. In all these, only few are made to answer any questions on their misdeeds not to talk of accountability.

## Political Leadership as a Concept

According to Leon Dion (1968), Political leadership represents but one of the many categories of leadership, and it is a more elusive one at that. To understand it, we must probe the general concept of leadership—unfortunately one of the many uncertain categories in social science. Concern about leadership extends far back into the history of social thought, and conceptions of it have fluctuated from the hero concept to that of the leadership of the common man. Today, views on leadership are more ambiguous than ever. On the one hand two world wars and the



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tragedy of fascism-nazism have created a widespread mistrust of leaders, but on the other hand, the increasing complexity of society today produces a widespread demand for leaders.

Many sociologists and psychologists will even argue that there is little room left for personal leadership in contemporary society which changed so many social and interpersonal functions through standardized organizational devices. But almost every generation has heard the complaint," Ours is a society without leaders." What is perhaps peculiar to our times is the intense preoccupation with the problem of leadership—a preoccupation manifested in literature, in training courses, in employment questionnaires, and many other ways. It is simply gratuitous to assume that social evolution has made personal leadership superfluous. Social evolution may, however, have brought changes in the nature and conditions of leadership. Kinship, guild, caste, church, and family have in the past constituted the main centres of association and authority, but he who wants to discover leadership today must look instead at large-scale organizations, voluntary groups, and the communications media. The concept of leadership is as much confused as clarified by social theory. Eugene E. Jennings, for example, tells us that in empirical studies leadership is an" omnibus term" applied indiscriminately to such varied roles as playground leader, committee chairman, club president, business executive, politician, and the like.

For the purpose of this paper, a leader has to have some of these qualities. Thus, a leader will say in the open what he says in the secret. A leader corrects the followership when they go wrong. A leader punishes whoever violates a laid down rule or blueprint for development, or whoever sabotages its interest. A leader guarantees freedom of expression of his citizens and respect ideas that are useful to the growth and development of a nation. Like a military commander, a leader leads from the front and not from the rear. He takes the blame when he goes wrong. This is the case of Idris Debby of Chad Republic who died in the course of defending his country.

## Politics

As a concept, we define politics as a set of activities associated with the governance of a country or an area, organization or movement, it involves making decisions that apply to members of the group. It refers to achieving and exercising positions of governance – Organized control over a human community. Harold, L & Abraham, K (1968) defines politics as who gets what when and



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how. Ordinarily we equate politics with party politics and politician with party politics, engaged in the politics of their respective parties born out of disagreement on the policies and programs each party owns and propagates, and therefore, they conflict on the issues. As a result, politics emphasizes disagreement. Disagreement, which is so prominent in party politics in its wider sense, follows that men have diverse views, interest, characteristics, they differ in their views on the nature of man and his role in the world. Conflicting interest based on age, employer. Employee, rich and poor, cautious, or impetuous, timid and brave and so on. These variables in so far as it is reflected in disagreement provide the basis for politics(Anup, C.K., & Chand, S, 2010).

## Democracy

The term democracy means different things to different people. Indeed, there is a wide range of perspectives as to the meaning and content of democracy as well as to the conditions of its realization, "all of which vary depending on the philosophical, ideological, political, cultural, social and economic perspective.

Democracy is a system of separate branches of government that ensures political power is not concentrated in the hands of a single branch, a society in which people take their civic duties seriously, such as by voting, staying informed and advocating for issues they care about. people are allowed to earn a living in a free marketplace. It is a system that provides young people with skills and information so they can make informed decisions and secure economic independence. All people are treated equally by the law, regularly schedule elections in which all voters have an equal opportunity to participate and where final results reflect honest vote totals. The right to act, speak and think as one wants without interference by the government, news media is not controlled or restricted by the government, judges have freedom to decide cases impartially, based on their interpretation of the law and the facts. Leaders in Africa should "walk the talk" and practice what they preach. All this rot has flourished because Africans have no shared value standards or binding rules and principles. For some of them democracy is a foreign concept Marume, S. B. M., (1988). The populace have been used as pawns by politicians who manipulate them for personal aggrandizement.



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## Good Governance

Africa is a continent endowed with resources of different sorts, be it mineral resources like gold, diamonds, uranium, phosphate, phosphorus, limestone, bauxite, columbite, coal, iron, lithium, tin etc (www.statista.com). The human resources are there, able bodied and willing people are readily available to tap these resources for the growth and development of Africa. What is lacking among the African leaders however, is the political will as well as the patriotism to deal with the structural constraints such as the global economic inequalities, debt regimes and institutional fragility which interact with leadership choices. Africa's and third world struggle for the balance of economic power has since failed and a more wider gulf has been created.

Nigeria for instance, with the control of about 70% of the total resources in Africa which could have dis-stablized world powers if they know, are always advised by foreign advisers to invest overseas. Raw materials are ferried outside the country for processing. With all the resources in Nigeria, it could become the fourth greatest economy in the world. Today, Nigeria has, with a population of between 200–250 million people has only about $500 billion GDP, while Singapore with a population of about six million has a GDP of $564 billion. The US as of early 2026, has a Gross Domestic Product of $30.6 Trillion, while China, which is the second largest economy has approximately $19.4 Trillion.

This is the practice of good government (Bratton, M., and Rothschild, D., 1992), and it remains essentially a fragile process that depends on “the restraint of the ruler” and “the tolerance of the ruled”(Barkan, 1922). The concept of good governance refers to the task of running a government (or any other appropriate entity, like a business) and, since the late 1980s, the crisis on the African continent has been identified as one of governance (World Bank, 1989). This is because the strict observance of these concepts of politics, democracy and good governance has not been ingrained in the hearts of our leaders to bring about effective and desired leadership style.



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## African Characteristics Leadership Style

Nearly everyone today professes to be a democrat. Political regimes of all kinds throughout the world describe themselves as democratic, yet what these regimes say and do is often substantially different from one another. Political leaders that brought independence to Africa such as Mugabe and other departed nationalists leaders boasted of being patriots and democrats in their own right. They have rhetorically manipulated their subjects by their emphasis on issues of sovereignty, independence, self-determination and patriotism only for their own interests. They talk populist while they are capitalist. There is extensive personalization of power that discourages the growth of wider forms of trust and reciprocity (Venter, D, 2011). For instance, Kamuzu Banda of Malawi, during his reign had the audacity to ask why there is political opposition in Malawi when God has no opposition in heaven. However, there are also leaders like President Paul Kagame of Rwanda, Traore of Burkina Faso and South Africa who are making alot of progress in their leadership, and also the former president Obasenjo of Nigeria.

In Africa, there is widespread abuse of fundamental human rights by errant rulers, and human right abuses caused many citizens to withdraw from politics, or evade rather than engage political authorities. Generally, they have been reluctant to speak out for fear of being jailed or mistreated and, instead, have increasingly exercised the option to “Vote with their feet” in order to escape repressive political presentation even if the constitution guarantees freedom of expression. Such are the allegation in the recent elections in Uganda and Cameron Republic where oppositions are maltreated.

Africa is home to unelected and uncountable governments that manifest themselves in a reluctance to decentralize or delegate authority and a tendency to curb any independent political activity, outside an institutional network controlled by the ruling party (Chabal, P. and Dalaz. 1999). This lead to a situation in which the apparatus of the state primarily becomes the means for the elite to acquire wealth, rather than serving as a collective mechanism to promote social justice and sustainable economic development. This had led to widespread and even endemic corruption. The continent needs to answer Ugandans' president question in his published article, “what is Africa’s problem? But for the purposes of this paper, political leadership is the precise answer. Africa needs political leaders that respect and follow the provision of their constitution



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and who cultivate a culture of constitutional democracy and good governance in the continent, since political leaders are the primary holders, controllers and distributors of power and resources in a particular institution (i.e. Institutional power) and/ or territory (i.e geo- political power).

Political leadership in Africa empirically since the hard-won political independence from colonial Europe, has become one of Africa's sources of problems. Some scientists and critics such as Naomi Chazan, Nzongola Antalanja and Paul Viotti observed that the lamentably slow pace of African economic development narrowed by rampant hunger, massive unemployment, disease, poverty and deprivation are quite often blamed on imperialism and colonialism ( www.ofrjournals.org.67). This historical aspect is true because after the Berlin conference of 1884-85, Africa was partitioned by the Portuguese, Italians, Spanish, French, British, Germans, Belgians and Dutch colonialists and imperialists whose major interest was to exploit the continents rich mineral resources, the fertile soils and an illiterate community that provided unquestioningly cheap labour then. Although the age of European colonization is now over the signs of those times are still visibly clear. For instance, Africans have little time to prepare for independence, the incoming elite inherited alien structures. It inherited state structure developed through coercive mechanism and centralized political and economic controls such as the army, police and the bureaucracy. This resulted in the establishment of a political culture based on ethnicity and authoritarian pattern of governance. Controlling the state and resources became the primary purpose of political contestation. It's equally true that Africa is, however, generally underdeveloped, where political violence, intolerance, repression and dictatorships are common. Africa is also a continent of great potential with magnificent environmental heritage and the possibility of significant improvements. Perhaps unfamiliarity with modern governmental machinery, unaccustomed to parliamentary democratic debate and the process of multi-party constitutional system, many African states had too quickly abandon democracy. In some cases, this is due to the total dominance of a single political party, which outlaws opposition parties but is more normally produced by a military coup de tat. Nearly all African states have experienced political tolerance and dictatorship at some stage during their short period of independence. Many are still ruled without democracy. There have been numerous accusations of human rights



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violation in these states. In some cases, government forces have been responsible for horrific attacks and massacres of defenseless and innocent citizens a case of rape have been reported for example, the genocide in Rwanda that killed about 800,000 defenseless civilians and the Gukurahundi in Zimbabwe between (1983-87 Keller, E.J. 1995).. Africa is undoubtedly a beautiful and potentially wealthy continent, but its endemic problems and recurring political violence have locked it into a vicious cycle of poverty which will prove difficult to break. It is difficult for the losing political parties to concede defeat after election and to hand over power to incoming visitor. This has resulted in what it termed "negotiated democracy" where losers seek political power through negotiation, compromise intimidation, which resulted in favour of the continent of "coalition government", thus doing violence to democracy (Marume, S. B. M., 1988). For instance the case of 2008 presidential election results in Zimbabwe which took two weeks to be announced, the protracted 2007 Kenyan election which resulted in ethnic clashes which claimed more than 1000 lives. Other instances include that of Laurent Gbagbo and Alhassan Ouattara in Cote d'ivoire in 2011 and Yaya Jammeh Vs Adama Baro of Gambia in 2017. Patrice Lumunba, in one of his public lectures in Island Club, Ikoyi Lagos, 2025, Said "Some of the problems of election in Africa, is the problems of how to count votes. In Africa, nobody fails or wins election".

There is something peculiar about election defeat in Africa. Political power, leadership and governance. African leaders still blame colonial legacy for problems bedeviling Africa at the moment. Political leadership and governance after sixty years of independence and more, Africa still point a finger to the west, but how clean are African leaders hands and this is the big question that needs to be answered. Thus, besides imperialism and colonialism dictatorial rule by Africans themselves characterized by injudicious plunder of national resources, absence of the rule of law, rampant corruption, and repressive legislation against the media. For instance, the access to information and protection of primary Act (AIPPA) and public order and security Act (POSA) in Zimbabwe which limit the freedom of association and expression. The judiciary's brutal suppression of the opposition parties and dissenting voices retards the development of individual African states (Marume, S. B. M., 1988). In Swaziland, King Mswati outlawed opposition parties, power and authority revolves around him. Instead of constructing and



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consolidating their hard won political independences, many African leaders have quickly become tyrants, dictators and one party state system. For instance, the de facto one party state by Zimbabwean African Union Peoples Front (ZANU-PF) between1985-1995. Many opposition leaders have been charged for treason, notably among them, late Mr. Morgan Tsvangirai of Zimbabwe, Uganda and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) opposition leaders have been arrested for challenging the sitting presidents. This is true of North Africa, for instance, Hosni Mubarak which is Afro- Arabic, and black Africa, West, East, Central and South Africa. This type of leadership has led to the Arab revolution in the recent years. Africa, therefore has a problem. (Marume, S. B. M., 1988). Misguided by some foreign ideologies, for instance, Marxism-leninism. Communism. Socialism. Humanism, Ujamaa. Most new African leaders have descended quite quickly on opposite political parties, civic societies, individuals, universities and colleges like a tornado, arresting. detaining, torturing, kidnapping and killing of Africans by Africans on the nefarious pretexts of protecting national sovereignty.(www.ofrjournals.org.67) The consequence is predictable. Thugocracy, anarchy, rape murder, disappearances, massive hunger, disease and poverty among the masses who are not allowed to question any decision made by the ruling elite, it was therefore planting a culture of silence, for instance Kenya and Zimbabwe have resembled a state of nature where life is mostly, brutal and short. There is a survival of the fittest scenario that degenerated to a state of war because of intolerance and politics of exclusion between rival parties. African history is littered with cases of misrule, dictators, and tyrants as well as instances of inappropriate political policies.

## Power and Resources in Africa

It is also observed that some of African remaining absolute monarchies, who have come to power at the death of their father. For instance, king Mswati and the late Ghaddafi have amassed a lot of money, making themselves some of the richest leaders in the World. There is evidence that some of them led opulent lifestyles such as Inte Mobutu Seseseko of Zaire (DRC). Yet their people whom they rule with iron hand are among the poorest in the World and cannot afford to put food on the table for their families due to anti people policies crafted by the same leaders who claim to be populists during the day and yet are capitalist during the night. When they are deposed or when they die in office, most of them leave a legacy of tribal divisions and luxury



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among the people (Marume, S. B. M., 1988). For instance, Mobutu Seseseko was wealthy but the generality of Congolese were wallowing in abject poverty, or Dos Santos of Angola whose daughter is the richest woman in Africa. What is even particularly striking is that some of these dictators want their sons, their wives and daughters to succeed them.

## How the African Political Leadership Style Affects African Development

Most African Leaders, who come to power, whether through the barrel of the gun or through popular democracy or election, hardly have any political will of confronting the socio-economic problems of such African nations. In most cases the reason do not transcend acquiring ill-gotten wealth. Fame and the defence of ethnic nationality, and in some cases settling scores – an opportunity to deal with real and imagined enemies.

Furthermore, the style of political leadership that are so far being exhibited by African leaders is in the exploitation of their positions as the commanders in chief of the Armed Forces of their respective countries to perpetuate themselves in power. Having all the forces of coercion at their disposal they use them to perpetuate themselves in power. Sometimes, they use the legislative arm of government to amend their constitution to suit that purpose. This was attempted by Former Chief Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria in 2007 after he completed his two-four year term of office. How would Africa develop, when the official tenure elapse and one has exhausted his ideas (that's if he had one before coming to power) and yet doesn't want to go so that fresh minds will be fielded? Also, the case of Gnassigbe Eyadema of Togo whose son fraudulently succeeded him at his death, Faure Eyadema and the case of Edris Debby of Chad who was killed in the battlefront and was succeeded by his son, Mohammed Debby. His father ruled Chad for 30 years. Omar Bongo ruled Gabon for 42 years; his son succeeded him and ruled for 14 years before he was overthrown

Another bane of African Development due to leadership style is in electoral malpractices and the "sit tight" syndrome often exhibited by African leaders even when they loose election. They claim to be democrats when they are actually not, they preach equality, freedom and fundamental rights but they practice the opposite. For instance, in 2012 former Laurent Gbagbo of Cote d' Ivoire who was the incumbent, lost election to Al-hassan Ouattara but refused handing over



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power to the winner of the election. The same goes to former Gambian leader Yaya Jammeh who lost election to Adama Baro. It took the intervention of the African Union and ECOWAS to be able to settle the conflict. How would true democracy, which is a cardinal means of development visit Africa?

Other democracies like Nigeria, adopted the winner takes all syndrome which implies restricting all political offices and government machineries under the control of party supporters without allowing any opposition to occupy any government position no matter his knowledge and experience. A lot of African leaders today are the architects of their misfortune through corruption and outright embezzlement. Some like former Mobutu Sese Seko are richer than their countries. A lot of them have been discovered to have stashed their country's monies abroad Former Nigerian Military dictator, Abacha. Some federal ministers in the seventh republic like Diezani Allison Madueke, others like President Jacob Zuma of Former South Africa and Dos Santos of Angola, whose daughter is the richest woman in Africa.

## Recent Wave of Change Over of Governments in Africa

Based on data compiled by American researchers Jonathan M. Powell and Charlton H. Thyne, At least 45 out of 54 nations on African continent has experienced at least a single coup attempt since 1950.

Democratic government in West Africa and Central Africa are being increasingly challenged by military. Since 2020, there's been 10 attempted coups mostly in West and central Africa, a rapid undoing of democratic system in the region. But in those countries, citizens have taken to the streets to cheer the disruption of democracy. In total, seven countries or more are under the military in Africa.

A. **MALI:** In May 2020, a group of Mali soldiers removed President Boubakar Keita over protests of deteriorating security and allegations of corruption, nine months after, counter coup of Assimi Goita.

B. **CHAD:** In April 2021, Chad's army took power after the pressure, Edris Debby was killed in the battlefield while visiting troops fighting rebels in the North.



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C. **GUINEA**: September 2021, special forces commander, Mamady Doumbouya overthrew President Alpha Conde, a year earlier, Conde had changed the constitution to circumvent limits that would have prevented him from contesting for a third term, triggering widespread rioting.

D. **SUDAN:** October 2021, General Abdulfattah al-Burhas in Khartoum destroyed a whole country in which the army and civilians had shared.

E. **BURKINA FASO:** In January 2022, removed President Roch Kubore, blaming them for failing to contain violence by Islamic militants. In September of the same year, there was a second coup by army captain, Ibrahim Traore, who forcefully deposed Paul Henry-Daniba.

F. **NIGER:** July 26 2023, Niger President Bazoum Mohammed was overthrown by the military led by General Chiani based on poor governance, corruption and degraded Security situation.

G. **GABON:** August 2023, loud sounds of gunfire was heard in the city of Libreville which brought to a nearly 56 years of the rule of the Bongo family in Gabon. Ali Bongo, the erstwhile leader was accused of election fraud and corruption in the oil rich but poverty stricken country. He was alleged to have owned 70 different accounts in different banks of the world and 39 assets all over France. Borders were closed and Bongo under detention. Gen. Brice Nguema took over power as the transitional leader.

Why have coups become popular in Africa?

a. Disenchantment with Democratic leadership

b. Deteriorating economic condition

c. Poor governance and degraded security situation

d. Mali and Burkina Faso blamed France for their situation

e. Election matters e.g. in Gabon



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## Conclusion

When social scientists speak on African plunder, poverty, hunger, unemployment and desperation, there is no way one cannot point at the continents dictators and their misrule. It is most inconsistent, inconceivable, tragic, despicable and ironic that African liberators adopt some of the repressive legislation that was used against them by the colonialists during the struggle for political independence. In the end there is a scenario in which African nationalist leaders removing colonial rule only to replace it with brutal, murderous, repressive African tyranny in a modern African country and in a contemporary African continent. The extant developments in Africa with the foregoing unconstitutional wave of changes of governments stick out a mile as to the preference of military regimes over democracy.

## Recommendations

Africa has traditionally been the cradle of great leadership. Many African leaders are all known around the world including Nelson Mandela, Kwame Nkrumah Steve Biko and Julius Nyerere to name a few. Africans contribution to leadership philosophy has also been remarkable. Two examples: was the birth place of Ubuntu the belief, in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity, it also gave rise to Satyagaraha and the notion of passive resistance which Ghandi developed while living in Africa. Both are known around the world. Today, through the demand for effective leadership and systematic leadership development in Africa is growing more rapidly than ever before. A critical shortage of upcoming leaders is responsible for the under development of organizations in many African countries. They are under performing compared to their potentials and could improve their performance by strengthening their leadership. We recommend therefore that;

1. Good governance, the rule of law and system of accountability are essential to ensure that resources are subject to public scrutiny and used effectively and efficiently. Kofi Anan, the former Secretary General of the UN concurred with this when he said, the continent needs determined political leadership to set and desire plans for equitable growth and poverty reduction.



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2. African leaders should have the political will to be able to confront African problems head long. As at present, lack of political will is the issue in many African countries, the fundamental principles of democratic governance are consistently, deliberately, and openly being violated (Venter, D., 2011). Therefore, Africa needs good leadership to consolidate democracy and good governance.

3. African leaders should embrace the nascent democratization process in order to carry and sustain the followership. Coherent efforts must be made on the part of the leadership to discourage dictatorial tendencies of leaders who prefer to die on the jobs. Leadership by example does encourage followership and it is only this style that can sustain the African countries and prevent the authoritarian leadership, which has characterized Africa since independence.

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