

10

# Things to know about elections and democracy

**Alina Rocha Menocal**

# 1

## Most countries today are formal democracies

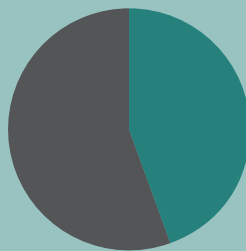
An astonishing political transformation has taken place around the world over the past three decades. Today, a majority of countries are considered formal democracies.

Even the Middle East, a region that long seemed immune to democratisation, is in the midst of momentous change. The Arab Spring swept from office long standing authoritarian rulers in **Tunisia**, **Egypt**, **Libya** and **Yemen** who cumulatively had been in power for a total of 129 years.

By the end of 2011, the only countries considered autocracies were: **Azerbaijan**, **Bahrain**, **Belarus**, **China**, **Cuba**, **Eritrea**, **Iran**, **Kazakhstan**, **Kuwait**, **Laos**, **North Korea**, **Oman**, **Qatar**, **Saudi Arabia**, **Swaziland**, **Syria**, **Turkmenistan**, **United Arab Emirates**, **Vietnam**, and **Uzbekistan**.

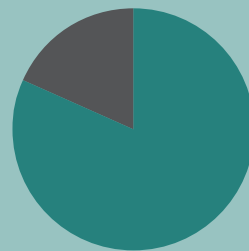
Sources: **Economist Intelligence Unit** (2011) *Democracy Index 2011: Democracy Under Stress*. London: Economist Intelligence Unit; **Chilton, Cyana** (nd) 'The Chronology of Political Change'. Blog post. Woodrow Wilson Center.

1985



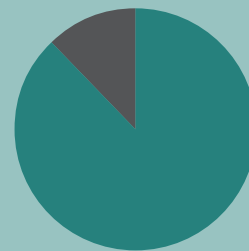
44.7%  
55.3%

2000



81.9%  
18.1%

2011



87.8%  
12.2%



Formal  
democracy



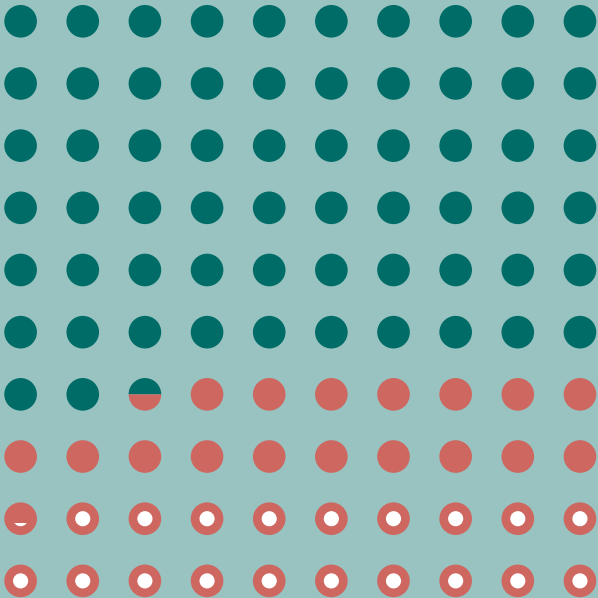
Autocracy

# 2

## Over one in three live in authoritarian systems

According to the Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2011, 62.4% of the world population live in democracies of some form, while 37.6% of the world population still live in authoritarian systems. **China** alone accounts for 51.3% of people not living in formal democratic systems.

Source: **Economist Intelligence Unit** (2011) *Democracy Index 2011: Democracy Under Stress*. London: Economist Intelligence Unit.



Formal  
democracy



Autocracy



China

# 3

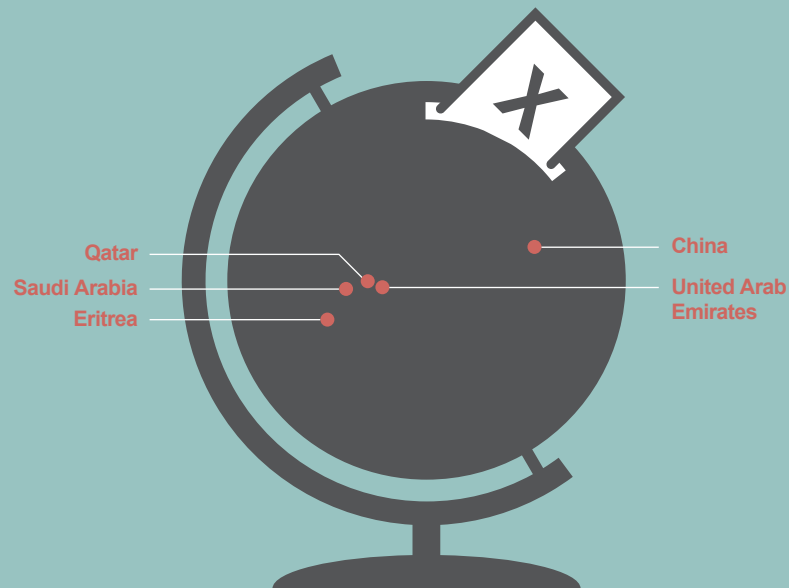
## Elections have become almost universal

In country after country, people have risked their lives to call for free elections, and elections have been held in all but **five** countries from 2000-2012. Clearly, there is a lot more to democracy than elections – but elections are among its most visible elements, and they have become almost universal.

The only five countries in the world (with populations greater than 500K) not to hold elections between 2000 and 2012 are: **China, Eritrea, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates**.

Sources: **Hyde, Susan** (2011) *The Pseudo-Democrat's Dilemma: Why Election Observation Became an International Norm*. New York: Cornell University Press; **Personal communication with Susan Hyde**, Associate Professor of Political Science and International Affairs, Yale University (22 February 2013).

## 2000-2012



ONLY **5** COUNTRIES HAVE NOT HELD ELECTIONS

# 4

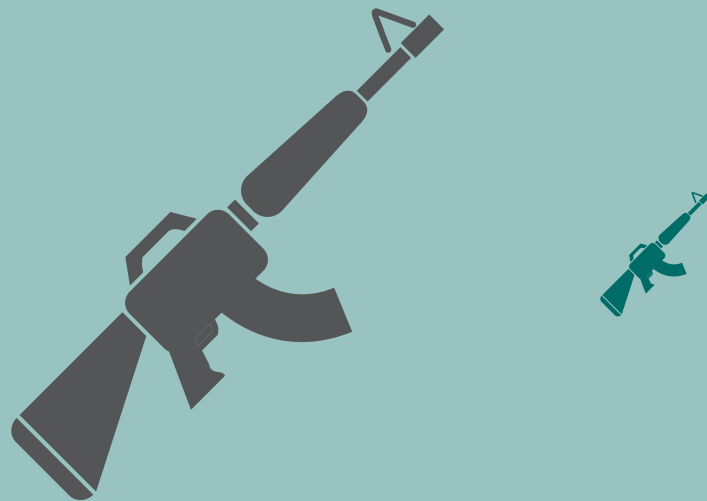
## Most leaders in Africa are replaced by ballots, not bullets

While in the 1960s and 1970s approximately 75% of African leaders were ousted through violent means (coup d'états, rebellion), in the period 2000-2005 this number had dropped to 19%.

Source: **Posner, Daniel N. and Young, Daniel J.** (2007) 'The Institutionalization of Political Power in Africa'. *Journal of Democracy* 18(3):126-140.

### AFRICAN LEADERS REMOVED BY VIOLENT MEANS

| 1960-1979 | 2000-2005 |
|-----------|-----------|
|-----------|-----------|



75%

19%

# 5

## But elections are not always peaceful

While elections may be essential in promoting legitimacy, stability and development, they can also be deeply problematic. Elections can spark violent conflict, especially when they generate ‘winner takes all’ dynamics that raise the stakes of political competition. As the example of **Kenya** in 2007 illustrates, this can be especially treacherous where ethnicity or other fault lines of conflict such as region or religion determine political allegiance. For example, a recent study has estimated that between 1990 and 2007 **one in five** elections in Sub-Saharan Africa suffered significant violence and only about **40%** were entirely violence-free. Significant violence here refers to violent repression (e.g. long-term high-level arrests of party leaders, consistent use of violent intimidation, limited use of murders and assassinations, and torture) and/or highly violent campaigns, in which there are repeated, coordinated physical attacks leading to 20 or more deaths.

Source: **Straus, Scott and Taylor, Charlie** (2009) *Democratization and Electoral Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa, 1990-2007*. Madison: University of Wisconsin.

## SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA 1999-2007



**1 IN 5** ELECTIONS SUFFERED GRAVE VIOLENCE



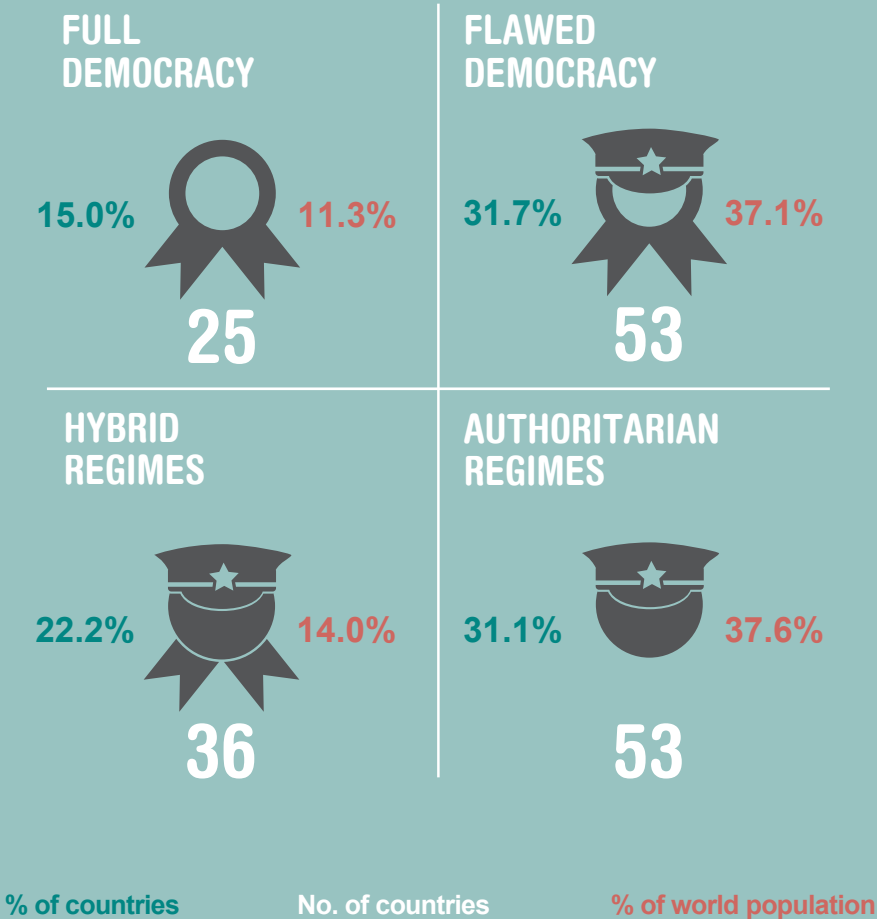
ONLY ABOUT **40%** WERE VIOLENCE FREE

# 6

## The quality of many of these democracies remains deeply flawed

Moreover, across much of the developing world, these democracies are democratic in form but not necessarily in substance. They have institutions that are often hollow, weak and ineffective; and their ability to perform remains mixed. These incipient democracies, which have been variously described as ‘illiberal’, ‘delegative’, or, more generally, ‘hybrid’ regimes or ‘anocracies’, constitute ambiguous systems that combine rhetorical acceptance of liberal democracy, the existence of some formal democratic institutions and respect for a limited sphere of civil and political liberties with essentially illiberal or even authoritarian traits.

Sources: **Economist Intelligence Unit** (2011) *Democracy Index 2011: Democracy Under Stress*. London: Economist Intelligence Unit; **Rocha Menocal, Alina and Fritz, Verena with Rakner, Lise** (2008) ‘Hybrid regimes and the challenges of deepening and sustaining democracy in developing countries’. *South African Journal of International Affairs* 15(1):29-40.



# 7

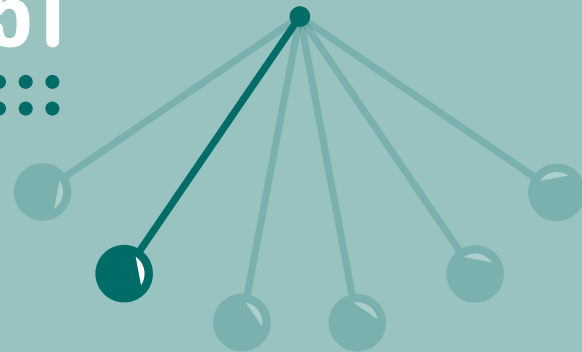
## Alternations of power remain remarkably limited in Sub-Saharan Africa

While multi-party democracy has become the norm across sub-Saharan Africa, the alternation of power between parties remains rare, which speaks of the considerable advantages (both legal and extra-legal) that incumbents hold. Since 2000, only fourteen of 51 states have seen power transferred between political parties (**Benin** 2006, **Cabo Verde** 2011, **Comoros** 2006, **Ghana** 2008, **Liberia** 2005, **Malawi** 2012, **Mali** 2002, **Mauritania** 2007, **Mauritius** 2000 and 2005, **Sao Tome and Principe** 2001, **Senegal** 2012, **Sierra Leone** 2007, **Zambia** 2011).

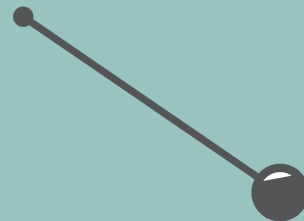
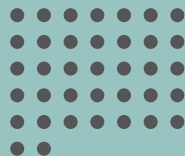
Source: **Atwood, Richard** (2012) *How the EU can support peaceful post-election transitions of power: lessons from Africa*. Brussels: Policy Department, Directorate-General for External Policies, European Parliament.

## ALTERNATION OF POWER IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA SINCE 2000

14/51



37/51





# 8

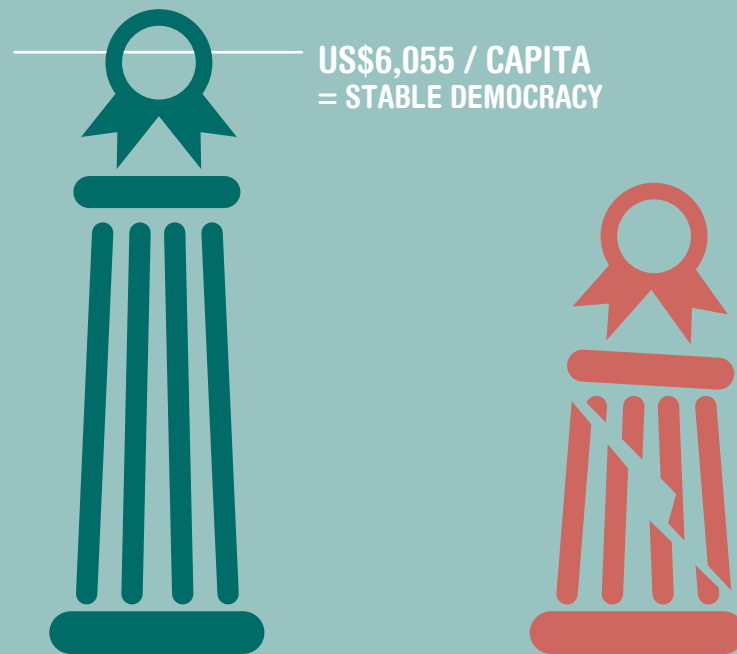
## The wealthiest countries tend to be democracies

The positive correlation between (high levels of) wealth and (established) democracy, first captured by Martin Lipset in a famous essay in 1959, is one of the strongest and most enduring relationships in the social sciences. Today, outside the petro-states, the **top 25** richest countries in the world (as ranked by the World Bank) are also fully established democracies.

In fact, a democratic regime has never fallen after a certain income level is reached (US\$6,055 per capita in PENN World Table dollars) – which was **Argentina** when it fell to bureaucratic authoritarianism in 1963. But correlation does not mean causation, and the debate about whether development leads to democracy or vice versa is ongoing.

Sources: **Przeworski, Adam, Alvarez, Michael E., Cheibub, Jose Antonio, and Limongi, Fernando** (2000) *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950-1990*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; **The World Bank**. (2011) *World Bank Development Indicators 2011*; **Rocha Menocal, Alina** (2012) 'Analysing the relationship between democracy and development'. *Commonwealth Good Governance 2011/12: Democracy, development and public administration*. London: Nexus Strategic Partnerships for the Commonwealth Secretariat.

## TOP 25 WEALTHIEST COUNTRIES ARE ALSO DEMOCRACIES



# 9

## The total number of women elected to parliament has almost doubled since 1997

As of April 2013, the **top 10** countries in descending order in terms of the percentage of women in the lower or single House are: **Rwanda, Andorra, Cuba, Sweden, Seychelles, Senegal, Finland, South Africa, Nicaragua, and Iceland.**

Notably, some of the oldest and most established democracies in the world outside of Scandinavia have considerably fewer women in parliament than more emerging democratic systems. The **United Kingdom** ranks **58th** in the world, with **22.5%** of members of the House of Commons being women, while the **United States** comes in **78th** place, with **17.8%** women in the House of Representatives.

Source: **Inter-Parliamentary Union** (2013) *Women in National Parliaments*.

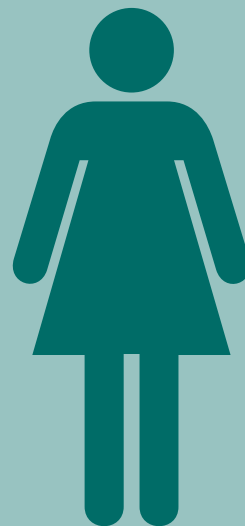
### WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT

JAN 1997

APRIL 2013



11.7%



20.8%

# 10

## Expensive elections are not necessarily better

The cost of the 2012 elections in the **United States** (including public and private funding) came to USD\$ 6,000,000,000 – which is roughly the equivalent of the entire annual GDP of some countries, including **Kosovo**, **Rwanda**, **Niger**, **Malawi** and the **Kyrgyz Republic**.

That makes **UK** election spending look microscopic by comparison. A total of £31m (\$49m) was spent by all parties in the last general election in the UK in 2010 - making US spending 120 times as much, and 23 times as much per person.

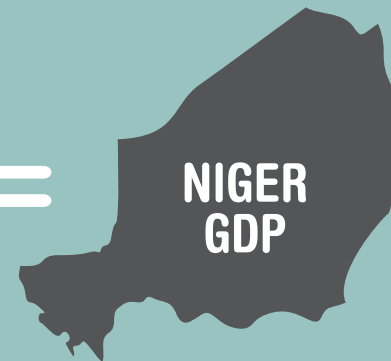
The costs of the 2007 elections in **Kenya** were also exorbitant – coming to US\$13.74 per registered voter (or US\$ 29 per cast ballot). The elections in **Ghana** in 2008, by comparison, came to US\$0.70. Yet, expensive as they were, elections in **Kenya** proved unable to channel conflict peacefully and unleashed a terrible wave of violence, while those in **Ghana** transpired without major incident.

Sources: **Cordelia Hebblethwaite** (2012) 'US Election: How can it cost \$6 bn?' *BBC News Magazine*, Washington DC (2 August); **Dialogue Africa Foundation** (2009, revised edition) *Kriegler and Waki Reports on 2007 Elections – Summarised version*. Nairobi: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

## US ELECTIONS 2012



=



US\$ 6BN

## UK ELECTIONS 2010



US\$ 49M



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This document was revised in August 2013. In the original version, the text of fact 2 stated that China alone accounts for 19.3% of the people not living in formal democratic systems. China's population is in fact 19.3% of the total world population, and constitutes 51.3% of people in non-democracies. This is accurately captured in the graphic itself, and the text has been updated to reflect this.