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Short Curriculum Vitae – Hikaru Sato

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Political Change in Zimbabwe and the Democratization of Africa

In November 2017, the military staged a coup d'état in Zimbabwe, in southern Africa. This coup resulted in the resignation of President Robert Mugabe, who had dominated the country for the 37 years following its independence in 1980, and the inauguration of Emmerson Mnangagwa, formerly First Vice-President, as the new president.¹ In spite of his advanced age of 93, Mugabe continued to hold real power and was taking aiming for a seventh term in the presidential election scheduled to be held in 2018. Behind this change of government lay turmoil induced by the power struggle among those hoping to succeed him.

As the struggle for succession between his wife Grace and Vice President Mnangagwa

¹ Mugabe led the government under the parliamentary system initially established upon independence, and became president in 1987, when the shift was made to a presidential system.

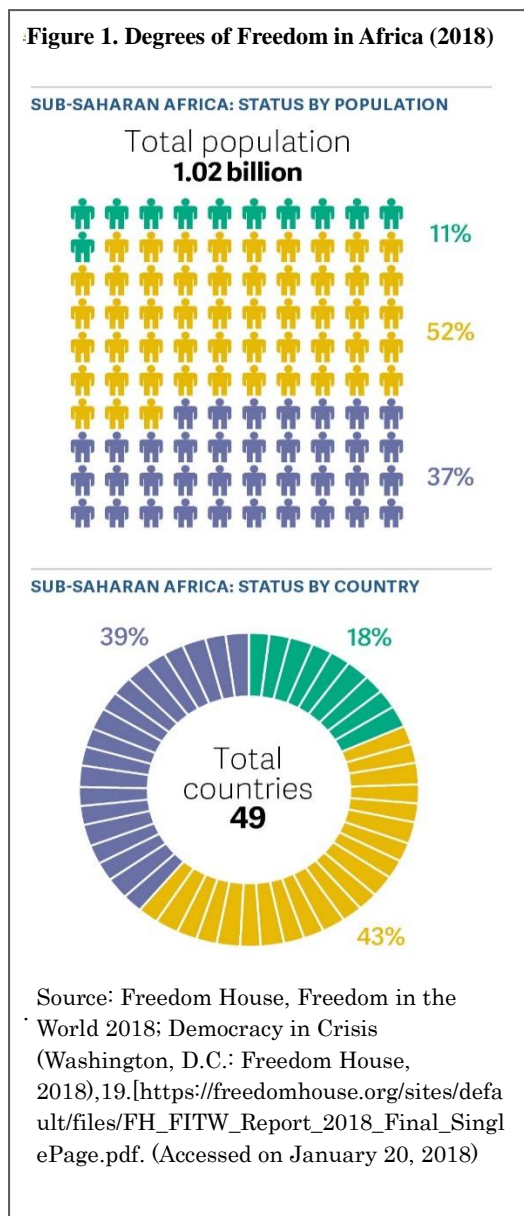
intensified, Mugabe suddenly removed the latter from his post. This move evoked fierce opposition from the supporters of Mnangagwa in response. Mnangagwa is a hero who fought in the war of liberation against the white-dominated government, and has had close ties with the military since independence, serving as the defense minister, for example. He has many supporters in the military. For this reason, his dismissal from the post of vice president prompted troops led by General Constantino Chiwenga to occupy the state-run broadcasting station, put Mugabe under house arrest, and pressure him to resign.

The reaction to the coup among citizens was mostly one of welcome. Even the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), the ruling party, which had initially supported Mugabe, removed him from the post of party head and called upon him to resign from the presidency voluntarily. His position eroded by this opposition from the military, the ZANU-PF, the citizenry, and other parties, Mugabe had no choice but to decide to resign. Mnangagwa was then sworn in as the new president, and the political unrest came to an end.

At first, the inauguration of Mnangagwa as president was welcomed by the opposition parties and many citizens, etc. There were also many who voiced expectations for the progress of democratization in Zimbabwe. President Mnangagwa, nevertheless, went on to surround himself with people who were close to him. For example, he appointed Chiwenga, who led the coup, to serve as his vice president, and put people who were formerly high-ranking military officers into key positions in his administration. In contrast, he did not cooperate with the opposition parties, which had long been oppressed by Mugabe, and did not appoint any member of the opposition to a ministerial position. As a result, expectations of the new administration changed to disappointment. As things turned out, Mugabe was merely replaced by Mnangagwa, and there arose apprehensions about a lack of change in the political structure so far.

Democratization in Africa and Political Regimes with Adjectives

Freedom House, an international human rights organization, releases rankings of the state of freedom in countries around the world every year. In sub-Saharan Africa, only



nine countries (18 percent), including South Africa, were rated as being “free”; more than 80 percent were rated as “partly free” (43 percent) or “not free” (39 percent). (See Figure 1.)² In addition, of the more than 1 billion people currently in Africa, a remarkable nearly 90 percent of them are living in environments that have some issues related to freedom.

The survey conducted by Freedom House in 2007 rated 11 countries (23 percent) as “free”, 22 (46 percent) as “partly free”, and 15 (31 percent) as “not free”.³ Although the survey method is now more detailed than it was before, comparison with the past situation suggests that the state of democratization in Africa has stagnated or is even worsening.

Much of the democratization in Africa began in the 1990s, after the end of the Cold War, the democratization of Eastern Europe, and the quickening of domestic movements for democratization. Initially, there were high

hopes both inside and outside the countries in question that democratization would erase the entrenched negative images colored by factors such as poverty and tribal strife, and

² The green figures indicate “free”; the yellow figures, “partly free”; and the blue figures, “not free”.

³ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2007* (Washington, D.C.: Freedom House, 2007). <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2007>. (Accessed on January 20, 2018)

bring change to Africa. This initial optimistic outlook on democratization, has, however, already disappeared. The number of countries that have advanced to the point of being considered truly liberal democracy is not large. Some countries have even been brought to collapse as nation-states in the process of democratization, and others have reverted to authoritarianism when their democracies failed to take root.

In particular, there has been a significant increase in ambiguous political regimes that are neither liberal democracies nor authoritarian regimes. These regimes have the rhetoric of democracies and some democratic arrangements, but limit the degree of personal and political freedom.

Some scholars suggested that these ambiguous political regimes, which emerged after movements for democratization, were in the process of transition to liberal democracies or a type of imperfect democracy.⁴ Thereafter, however, they were increasingly seen as liberalized types of authoritarianism as compared to pure authoritarianism. For example, they have been termed “hybrid regime” by Diamond, “competitive authoritarianism” by Levitsky and Way, “electoral authoritarianism” by Schedler, and “semi-authoritarianism” by Ottaway.⁵

These concepts derive from studies by different scholars and differ from each other somewhat, but virtually all have something in common. This is the characterization of these regimes by the use of forcible, unfair means to ensure the victory of the entrenched powers in elections. More specifically, while elections are held on a regular basis, the dominant party and individuals create an environment that is disadvantageous to the opposition parties. In short, elections are held, but with clever limitations on freedom and participation.

⁴ David Collier and Steven Levitsky, “Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research,” *World Politics* 49, no.3 (1997): 430-451.

⁵ Larry Diamond, “Thinking about Hybrid Regimes,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no.2 (2002): 21-35; Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no.2 (2002): 51-65; Andreas Schedler, “The Logic of Electoral Authoritarianism,” in *Electoral Authoritarianism: the Dynamics of Unfree Competition*, ed. Andreas Schedler (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006), 1-23; Marina Ottaway, *Democracy Challenged: the Rise of Semi-Authoritarianism* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for international Peace, 2003).

The state of politics dominated by one party and fragility of opposition parties

In addition to an increase in authoritarian regimes with adjectives, one-party dominant systems in many countries may be cited as another earmark of democratization in Africa.⁶ These systems, which appeared in post-democratization Africa, recognize inter-party competition, but a single party has had a majority in the national assembly for a long period, and the opposition parties are small and fragile. A major trait is that the power of the opposition parties is extremely weak and makes them unable to discharge the role of supervising the administration.

Why were these one-party dominant systems born in Africa? According to Doorenspleet, the primary factor is the connection with historical background.⁷ The origins of dominant parties in Africa lie in the organizations that led the movements for independence and democratization. Besides being widely supported by the citizenry, the dominant parties enjoy circumstances facilitating their mobilization of the citizens. A second factor is the construction of close relationships by the dominant party with more social organizations than the opposition parties. The social organizations forming the base of the dominant party generally include trade unions, student groups, and religious groups. The dominant party fought for independence and democratization with these social groups. In addition, the dominant party has stronger ties with the mass media than the opposition parties, and therefore gets far more social exposure in the news etc. than the opposition parties.

A third factor is related to external assistance and party funding. At the time of elections, the amount of funding that a party can raise is related to items such as the size of its staff involved in the campaign and its expenditures for campaign advertising on radio and TV. This funding is a crucial factor for victory in an election. Matters such as restrictions on campaign funding and availability of party subsidies vary from country to

⁶ Vichy Randall and Lars Svåsand, "Political Parties and Democratic Consolidation in Africa," *Democratization* 9, no.3 (2002): 30-52; Carrie Manning, "Assessing African Party Systems after the Third Wave," *Party Politics* 11, no.6 (2005): 707-727; Shaheen Mozaffar and James R. Scarritt, "The Puzzle of African Party Systems," *Party Politics* 11, no.4 (2005): 399-421; Renske Doorenspleet and Lia Nijzink. *One-party Dominance in African Democracies* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2013).

⁷ Renske Doorenspleet, "Political Parties, Party Systems and Democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa," in *African Political Parties: Evolution, Institutionalisation, and Governance*, ed. M.A. Mohamed Salih (London: Pluto Press, 2003), 175.

country. If subsidies are available, they are distributed corresponding to the number of seats that each party has won in the national assembly. For this reason, parties that are newly formed or do not have any assembly seats do not receive any subsidies. Similarly, the opposition parties have fewer assembly seats than the ruling party. This opens up a huge gap in subsidies relative to the dominant party. In addition, the dominant party has strong ties with external donors, too. Considering the aid from these donors as well, it is therefore in an advantageous financial position. In other words, because of its long-term domination, the dominant party is easily able to access national resources. It can make full use of these resources to win elections and thereby further solidify its long-term domination. In this way it can build a “cycle of domination”.

A fourth factor is the factionalism and weakening of opposition parties. In many countries, the opposition parties are deeply divided, and unable to form alliances to rival the ruling party. This has the effect of creating a situation favorable to the dominant party. Naturally, a single dominant party does not necessarily impede a democracy. In some cases, such as those of South Africa and Namibia, a single dominant party can coexist with a democratic system. In many African countries, however, it can be said that the combination of a powerful ruling party and fragile opposition parties is breeding the subsistence of authoritarian regimes with adjectives.

Conclusion

Zimbabwe’s President Mnangagwa has shown an inclination to hold a general election in June 2018 and to accept a group to monitor the election from entities such as the United Nations and the European Union in the interest of holding a fair election.⁸ Under the Mugabe administration, the deterioration of relations between Zimbabwe and Western countries was also a factor in the country’s slumping economic performance. The improvement of ties with the West is indispensable for future political and economic reform.

Even if elections are held in the newborn Zimbabwe, however, it is unclear whether democratization will proceed to the next stage as is hoped, to judge from the excessive

⁸ *Financial Times*, “Zimbabwe’s president seeks to build bridges with west,” January 18, 2018.

consideration for the military in governmental appointments. In fact, the new President Mnangagwa is suspected of having taken a hand in the oppression of opposition parties in the 2008 presidential election. There is consequently no telling if the June election will actually be free and fair.

And even if a free and fair election is held, there is a strong possibility that the ZANU-PF, the current ruling party, will win it. Since Zimbabwe achieved independence in 1980, the ZANU-PF has not only maintained the one-party dominant setup but also solidified its position by oppressing opposition forces together with Mugabe. Therefore, the mighty ruling party is not likely to readily relinquish power. While supervision of power by the opposition parties is essential for the progress of democratization in Zimbabwe, the opposition parties are saddled with issues such as the health problems of the leader of one and internal discord, and could not be regarded as entities to counter the ZANU-PF.⁹ The Mnangagwa administration has currently adopted a stance in favor of political reform, but it is very possible that the authoritarian regime with adjectives will end up continuing to exist basically unchanged, as in many other African countries so far, depending on the election process and action taken after the election.

⁹ *The Economist*, "Will Zimbabwe's new president make things better?" November 25, 2017. <https://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21731646-emmerson-mnangagwa-ruthless-man-he-replaces-more-grounded>. (Accessed on January 20, 2018)