

**African
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Democratic
Research

Elections in Africa 2015:

A reflection on elections as a democracy indicator and currency for change



Often, elections in Africa are characterized by incumbent victories and extended term limits. 2015 portrayed the power still wielded by incumbents through their disproportionate influence in elections and control of resources and electoral commissions. Out of a dozen elections, all but Nigeria's and Burkina Faso's - with Lesotho being hung - resulted in incumbent party victories.

Background

Voting is the only widely recognized and transformative action citizens in constitutional democracies have to choose and confer leadership legitimately. It is the only tyranny that is acceptable – the tyranny of a majority. Throughout time, since the Athenian era, democracy has evolved – with elections now accepted as the sole midwife for democratic succession.



It is during an election that general citizenry may vote out incompetent leaders for new ones. It is also during an election that leadership is re-appointed – as in most democracies – only for legitimate second terms. Most African states have been, since their independence or beginning of their constitutional rule - going to the ballot periodically to keep the door for change open and cement the creed that the era for supreme leadership is long gone.

Competitive and periodic elections are the only currency to a functional democracy. Many African states are still transitioning into fully fledged democracies; this transition is far from smooth. Election credibility still seems farfetched even in countries with reputable constitutions and hold elections periodically without fail.

2015 saw to the first peaceful transfer of power between civilian presidents in Nigeria, whereas leaders retained power in Sudan, Togo, Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire. In Ethiopia, candidates aligned to the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) won all seats in the House of Peoples' Representatives, meanwhile Lesotho witnessed a hung parliament. In Tanzania's first most competitive election, an opposition coalition failed to unseat Africa's longest serving ruling party. Burundi remains in crisis after Pierre Nkurunziza secured his third term as president in violation of the Arusha Accords. Burkina Faso voted peacefully for the first time since protests led Blaise Compaoré to flee the country in October 2014.

In most of these countries, the African Union (AU) observer missions gave the election outcomes a stamp of approval, save for Burundi. In essence, the tension between

monitoring elections and sovereignty still trumps the real value of observer missions. For the AU to deploy successful observer missions there is an urgent need to give more authority to the AU as an observer institution to not only confer legitimacy, but also actively nullify an election outcome and demand a re-run.

Press Freedom

Elections, as a mechanism for orderly political succession in a democracy, demand for guaranteed freedom of press. States like Burundi and Lesotho that systematically muzzle press freedoms are more prone to pre and post-election implosions.

As such, freedom of press and speech should be protected at all costs if citizens are to be given a fair opportunity to elect a leader. Legitimacy of any election is jeopardized if freedoms are infringed upon and if institutions to protect these freedoms are toothless.

The role of press freedoms is critical; without press freedom citizens don't have an informed opinion of the political party options or what they offer. In most cases, nations muzzling press freedom do it deliberately to also avoid exposing human rights abuses.

The 2015 election year had tense prospects, especially in Nigeria, Burundi and Burkina Faso. Profiling countries that held elections in 2015 might help draw a better picture of the 2016 election year and its prospects.

Elections in 2015

Lesotho
Type of Government: Parliamentary Constitutional monarchy
Head of State: HM King Letsie III
Head of Government: Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili
Date of election: 28 February 2015
Opposition Parties:
All Basotho Convention led by Tom Thabane

Lesotho Congress for Democracy - Mothetjoa Metsing

Basotho National Party - Thesele Maseribane

Ruling Party: Democratic Congress (DC) – Pakalitha Mosisili (leads a coalition government)

Press Freedom:

Although the constitution guarantees freedom of expression and informational exchange, the Lesotho constitution subtly muzzles press freedom. Multiple laws, including the Sedition Proclamation and the Internal Security (General) Act of 1984, prohibit criticism of the government, provide penalties for seditious libel, and endanger reporters' ability to protect the confidentiality of their sources. The 1967 Official Secrets Act and the 2005 Public Service Act prohibit civil servants from disclosing information, limiting the transparency of government institutions and making it difficult for journalists to conduct investigations¹.

Election results:

Candidate	Party	Constituencies
Tom Thabane	All Basotho Convention	40
Pakalitha Mosilili	The Democratic Congress	37

¹Freedom House. 2014. Lesotho Freedom of the Press. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2013/lesotho>. (Accessed on: 10 January 2016)

Election Observers:

UN - “The Secretary-General congratulates the people of the Kingdom of Lesotho on the peaceful conduct of the parliamentary elections on 28 February”².

SADC - “Based on its observations, the SADC Electoral Observation Mission concludes that the 2015 National Assembly Elections in the Kingdom of Lesotho were peaceful, transparent, credible, free and fair, thus reflecting the will of the people of the Kingdom of Lesotho”³.

Burundi

Type of Government: Republic

Head of State: Pierre Nkurunziza

Date of Election: 21 July 2015

Opposition Parties:

Alliance for Democratic Change (ADC) - Said Miraji Abdallah

Movement for Solidarity and Democracy (MSD) - Agthon Rwasa

Ruling Party: National Council for the Defense of Democracy-Forces for the Defense of Democracy (**CNDD-FDD**) –Pierre Nkurunziza

Overview of Freedoms:

Despite attempts by the government to restrict independent media, the popularity of stations such as Radio Publique Africaine RPA, Radio Isanganiro, Radio Bonesha, and Radio Télé Renaissance allows for the airing of some diverse viewpoints. However, journalists who criticize the government are often marginalized and accused of being supporters of the opposition.

² Sputnik. Ban Ki-Moon commends Elections in Lesotho after 2014 political crisis. Available at: <http://sputniknews.com/politics/20150302/1018931702.html#ixzz3yKvGYOFO>. (Accessed 21 January 2016)

³ Mail and Guardian. March 2015. Lesotho elections transparent and fair. Available at: <http://mg.co.za/article/2015-03-02-lesotho-elections-transparent-and-fair-says-sadc>. (Accessed 22 January 2016).

Legitimacy of the Election: On 5 May 2015 the Constitutional Court ruled that Nkurunziza was eligible to stand for a third term⁴. This ruling followed the court's Vice President Sylvere Nimpagaritse fleeing the country saying that most of the court judges believed that Nkurunziza standing for a third term was unconstitutional.

Election results:

Candidate	Party	Votes	%
Pierre Nkurunziza	CNDD-FD	1 961 510	61, 41
Agothon Rwasa	Abigenga Mizero Y`aburundi	536 625	18, 99
Gerard Nduwayo	UPRONA	60 380	2, 14
Jean Minani	Frodebu Nyakuri	38 554	1, 36
Jacques Birimana	FNL	28 609	1, 01

Election observers:

The Secretary-General of the UN is deeply concerned over the prevailing political and security environment in Burundi. He appeals to the Burundian authorities to seriously consider the proposal put forward by the Joint International Facilitation Team to postpone the elections further in order to create a conducive environment for inclusive, peaceful

⁴ Reuters. 2015. Burundi court clears president to run again, angers protesters. Available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-burundi-politics-idUSKBN0NQKT20150505>. (Accessed on: 10 January 2016).

and transparent elections, in line with the recent decisions of the African Union Peace and Security Council and the Summit of the East African Community⁵.

Sudan

Type of Government: Federal republic

Head of State: Omar Al Bashir

Date/s of Election: 13-16 April. Elections were originally scheduled for 2 April, but were delayed by 11 days.

Opposition Parties:

Democratic Unionist Party - Al-Sayyid Muhammad Othman Al-Mirghani

National Consensus Forces - Faoul Abu Issa.

Ruling Party: National Congress Party NCP –Omar Al Bashir

Press Freedom:

Sudan ranks number 172 out of 180 countries when it comes to press freedom according to Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index⁶. Several Journalists are either on death row or frequently disappear.

Legitimacy of the Election:

The majority of opposition parties boycotted the elections, although a total of 44 parties put forward candidates. The Presidential election results confirmed Bashir would extend his 25-year reign, despite an International Criminal Court warrant for his arrest on charges of war crimes in the

⁵ UN. June 2015. Statement. Available at: <http://www.un.org/sg/statements/index.asp?nid=8760>. (Accessed 25 January 2016).

⁶ Press Freedom Index. 2014. Press freedom index 2013. Available at: <http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index-2013.1054.html>. (Accessed on: 8 January 2015).

African country's Darfur region.

Election results:

Candidate	Party	Votes	%
Al Bashir	National Congress Party	5 252 478	94.05
Fadul Al-Sid Shaaid	Federal Truth Party	79 779	1.43
Fatimah Mahmoud	Sudanese Socialist Union Party	47 653	0.83

Election Observers:

“UEOM is satisfied that voting went on peacefully in Sudan; calls on Sudanese political leaders to strive for genuine and inclusive national dialogue after the elections”⁷.

Ethiopia

Type of government: Federal Republic

Prime Minister: Hailemariam Desalegn

Date of the election: 24 May 2015

⁷ African Union. Press statement. Available at: <http://pa.au.int/fr/content/aeom-satisfied-voting-went-peacefully-sudan-calls-sudanese-political-leaders-strive-genuine>. (Accessed 22 January 2015).

Opposition parties and their leaders:

Unity for Democracy and Justice – Leader: Birtukan Mideksa

United Ethiopian Democratic

Oromo Federalist

Democratic Movement – Chair: Bulcha Demeksa

Ruling Party: The Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in power since overthrowing the military government in 1991.

Rebel threat: The Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) is a separatist group in the Ogaden region conducting a low-level guerrilla campaign since 1994⁸.

Press Freedom:

Authorities use arbitrary arrests and politically motivated prosecutions to silence journalists, bloggers, protesters, and perceived supporters of opposition political parties. Security forces respond to peaceful protests with excessive force, and detainees routinely allege torture and ill-treatment. Repressive legislation restricting non-governmental activity, something in violation of international standards, remains⁹. Ethiopia also passed an Anti-Terrorism Proclamation which loosely defines “terrorist acts”.

Legitimacy of the election:

Semayawi Opposition Party: “This 100 percent win by the regime is a message of disgrace”¹⁰. This is the general sentiment from opposition parties who viewed the election process as rigged.

Many claims of beatings and arrest in the month leading up the election by opposition parties have been reported. An independent report claims more than 190 protesters were killed when the winner was announced¹¹

⁸ BBC Africa. 30 July 2015. Ethiopia country profile. Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13349398> (Accessed on: 29 December 2015).

⁹ Human Rights Watch. 2015. Ethiopia. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/africa/ethiopia> (Accessed on: 12 January 2016).

¹⁰ Sudan Tribune. 30 May 2015. *Ethiopia: Opposition party rejects election result*. Available at: <http://sudantribune.com/spip.php?article55160> (Accessed on: 5 January 2016).

Election results:

EPRDF won 100% of the vote¹².

Election Observers:

President Obama: The elections put forward a democratically elected government¹³,

Freedom House: “President Obama unfortunately was fundamentally wrong in his comments about the parliamentary elections of Ethiopia held in May, in which the ruling Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) won every seat”¹⁴.

Ivory Coast

Type of government: Presidential representative democratic republic

Head of State: Alassane Outtara

¹¹ BBC. 22 June 2015. *Ethiopia election: EPRDF wins every seat in parliament*. Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-33228207> (Accessed on: 29 December 2015),

¹² Lefort. R. 7 July 2015. Open Democracy. *Ethiopia after its electoral drama: second “renewal” imminent?* Available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/ren%C3%A9-lefort/ethiopia-after-its-electoral-drama-second-%E2%80%9Crenewal%E2%80%9D-imminent> (Accessed on: 06 January 2016).

¹³ New York Times. July 2015. Obama calls the Ethiopian election democratically elected. Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/28/world/africa/obama-calls-ethiopian-government-democratically-elected.html?_r=0. (Accessed 25 January 2015).

¹⁴ Freedom House. 28 July 2015. Ethiopia Wins Misplaced Praise from U.S. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/article/ethiopia-wins-misplaced-praise-us> (Accessed on: 16 December 2015).

Date of the election: 25 October 2015

Opposition parties and their leaders:

Front Populaire Ivoirien(FPI) – Led by: Pascal Affi N’Guessan

Parti démocratique de Côte d’Ivoire (PDCI) –Henri Konan Bédié

Coalition nationale pour le changement (CNC) –Kouadio Konan Bertin

Ruling Party: Rassemblement des Républicains (RDR) - Alassane Outtara

Press Freedom:

Although the constitution provides for freedom of the press, the government has restricted media freedom in the name of patriotism and national unity since the onset of civil conflict in 2002. Even after the 2007 Ouagadougou Political Agreement between the government and the rebel New Forces, national reconciliation has remained incomplete; elections have been repeatedly postponed, and the government continues to harass, intimidate, and jail journalists reporting on sensitive topics¹⁵.

Freedom House labeled the country as ‘Partially Free’ from ‘Not Free’ in 2010; suggesting efforts are being made to make people accountable for civil war atrocities and human rights violations.

Election results:

Candidate	Party	Votes	%
Alassane Ouattara	Rally of the Republicans	2,118,229	83.6
Pascal Affi N’Guessan	Ivorian Popular Movement	201 121	9

¹⁵ Freedom House. 2010. *Cote d’Ivoire: Freedom of Press 2010*. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2010/c-te-divoire> (Accessed on: 12 December 2015).

Election observers:

US Ambassador Terence McCulley: We believe the election was free peaceful, transparent, credible and inclusive¹⁶.

Guinea

Type of government: Republic

Head of State: Alpha Conde

Date of the election: 17 October 2015

Opposition parties and their leaders:

The Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea (UFDG) - Cellou Dalein Diallo

Ruling Party: Rally of the Guinean People (RPG) - Alpha Conde

Press Freedom:

- Press freedom labelled as “Not Free” and overall Freedom rated “Partly Free” by Freedom House¹⁷.
- Guinea’s recent past has been marred by the violent repression of demonstrations in which hundreds of people have died. New legislation needs to ensure force is never used as a measure of intimidation to gain votes.

¹⁶ IOL. October 2015. Ivory Coast Elections Credible. Available at: <http://www.iol.co.za/news/africa/ivory-coast-election-credible-1.1936289>. (Accessed 23 January 2016).

¹⁷ Freedom House. Guinea. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/guinea>. (Accessed 24 January 2016).

Election legitimacy:

Opposition parties felt elections were not representative of the peoples' vote and refused to recognise the poll result and called on supporters and other candidates to protest.

Violence before the vote saw more than a dozen people killed and many injured due to allegations of voting fraud and rigging.

Election results:

Candidate	Party	%
Alpha Conde	RPG	58
Cellou Dalein	UFDG	31

Election Observers:

UN, US and French diplomats: Breaches and irregularities were observed in a certain number of constituencies, preventing a significant number of votes from being taken into account¹⁸.

AU: "Irregularities do not invalidate the fundamental legitimacy of the election"¹⁹.

Zambia

¹⁸ BBC. 19 October. *Guinea ruling party 'wins' parliamentary poll*. Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-24590091> (Accessed on: 11 December 2015).

¹⁹ Reza. A . 21 October 2015. *Election Fatigue*. LRB Blog. Available at: <http://www.lrb.co.uk/blog/2015/10/21/alexandra-reza/election-fatigue/> [Accessed on: 11 December 2015]

Type of government: Representative democracy/Republic

Head of State: Edgar Lungu

Date of the election: 20 January 2015

Opposition parties and their leaders:

Patriotic Front (PF) – Edgar Lungu (Leading party)

Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) – Nevers Mumba

United Party for National Development (UPND) – Hakainde Hichilema

Forum for Democracy and Development (FDD) – Edith Nawakwi

Press Freedom:

According to Freedom House, Zambia declined from ‘Partly Free’ to ‘Not Free’ due to the government’s increased harassment of independent news outlets and journalists, the blocking of critical websites, and politicized decisions to deny nationwide broadcast licenses to certain radio stations²⁰.

Election legitimacy:

President of the United Party for National Development, Hakainde Hichilema claimed that there were stolen votes and requested that votes be verified.

Election results:

Candidate name	Party	Votes
Edgar C. Lungu	PF	807 925
Hakainde Hichilema	UPND	780 168
Edith Z. Nawakwi	FDD	15 321
Nevers S. Mumba	MMD	14 609
Tilyenji C. Kaunda	UNIP	9 737

²⁰ Freedom House. 2015. Zambia. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2014/zambia>. (Accessed on: 11 December 2015)

Election Observers:

The African Union Elections Observation Mission (AUEOM): “Mission concluded that the election was conducted peacefully in a manner that enabled qualified Zambians to exercise their right to vote”²¹.

Togo

Type of government: Republic

Head of State: Faure Gnassingbé

Date of the election: 25 April 2015

Opposition parties and their leaders:

National Alliance for Change (ANC) led by Jean Pierre Fabre

Alliance of Democrats for Integral Development led by Tchaboure Gogue

New Togolese Commitment led by Gerry Tamaa

Citizens’ Movement for Democracy and Development led by Mohamed Tchassona Traore

Ruling Party: Union for the Republic (UNIR) - Faure Gnassingbé

²¹ AU. AUEOM Report on Zambia. Available at: <http://pa.au.int/en/sites/default/files/FINAL%20AUEOM%20REPORT%20ZAMBIA%20%202015-%20Revised.pdf>. (Accessed 24 January 2016).

Press Freedom:

Although the government has not officially censored individual expression, self-censorship is encouraged because of the impunity that the perpetrators of crimes against journalists have typically experienced. Impunity is a prevalent issue in many areas of Togo, as crimes often go unpunished, and the press is frequently a victim. In April 2009, the High Authority of Audiovisuals and Communications - which was established to provide for the freedom of the press - issued a ban on all radio and television programs in which the opinion of the public was expressed²².

Election results:

Candidate	Party	Votes	%
Faure Gnassingbé	Union for the Republic (UNIR)	1 221 756	58.75
Jean-Pierre Fabre	National Alliance for Change (ANC)	732 026	35.21
Tchaboure Gogue	Alliance of Democrats for Integral Development	83 803	4.03
Gerry Tamaa	New Togolese Commitment	21 581	1.04
Mohamed Tchassona-Traore	Citizens' Movement for Democracy and Development	20 064	0.96

²² Freedom of speech and press. 2015. Available at: <https://humanrightstogo.wordpress.com/current-human-rights-situation/freedom-of-speech-and-the-press/>. (Accessed on: 13 December 2015).

Election Observers:

ECOWAS, West Africa's regional bloc: said its observer mission "...had not seen any incident that might undermine the vote and declared the process 'free and fair'"²³.

Nigeria

Type of government: Federal republic

Head of State: Muhammadu Buhari

Date of the election: 28 March 2015

Opposition parties and their leaders:

All Progressive Congress (APC) led by Muhammadu Buhari

People's Democratic Party (PDP) led by Goodluck Jonathan

African People's Alliance (AFA) led by Adebayo Ayeni

Allied Congress Party of Nigeria (ACPN) led by Ganiyu Galadima

Citizens Popular Party (CPP) led by Sam Eke

²³ ECOWAS. Togo election 2015. Available at: <http://ecoslate.github.io/-p=5416.htm>. (Accessed 22 January 2015).

Election results:

Candidate	Party	Votes	%
Muhammadu Buhari	All Progressive Congress	15 424 921	53.96%
Goodluck Jonathan	People's Democratic Party	12 853 162	44.96
Adebayo Ayeni	African People's Alliance	53 537	0.19
Ganiyu Galadima	Allied Congress Party of Nigeria	40 311	0.14
Sam Eke	Citizens Popular Party	36 300	0.13

Press freedom:

The government stepped up its interference with Nigeria's vibrant and active media sector in 2014 as reporters examined the military's performance against the Boko Haram militant group and political corruption scandals ahead of the 2015 national elections. Security forces seized and destroyed the pressruns of several newspapers in a coordinated operation in June, and local cases of harassment, obstruction, and intimidation of the media were reported in a number of states²⁴.

Election Observers:

ECOWAS EOM: election had criteria of being free and transparent despite pockets of incidents and logistical challenges²⁵.

²⁴ Freedom House. 2015. Nigeria. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2015/nigeria>. (Accessed on: 05 December 2015).

²⁵ Premium Times. March 2015. Nigerian election free and fair, - ECOWAS. Available at: <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/180099-nigerias-presidential-elections-free-fair-ecowas.html>. (Accessed 24 January 2016).

Tanzania

Type of government: Federal republic

Head of State: John Magufuli

Date of the election: 25 October 2015

Opposition parties and their leaders:

Chadema - Edward Lowassa

Civic United Front (CUF)- Ibrahim Haruna Lipumba

Ruling party: Chama Cha Mapinduzi – President John Magufuli

Press Freedom:

Although the constitution of Tanzania provides for freedom of speech, several other laws induce self-censorship and limit the ability of the media to function effectively. About 40 pieces of legislation have been identified as unfriendly to the press. The National Security Act, for instance, allows the government to punish any investigative journalism that touches on information it considers classified. Perhaps the most infamous of these anti-press laws is the 1976 Newspaper Registration Act, which empowers authorities to register or ban publications “in the interest of peace and good order²⁶”.

Election results:

Candidate	Party	Votes	%
John Magufuli	CCM	8,882,935	58.46%
Edward Lowassa,	Ukawa	6,072,848	39.97%

²⁶ Freedom House. Tanzania. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2015/tanzania>. (Accessed 24 January 2015).

Election Observers:

European Union: “Election displayed insufficient transparency”²⁷.

Burkina Faso

Type of government: Semi-presidential system

Head of State: Roch Marc Christian Kaboré

Date of the election: 29 November 2015

Opposition parties and their leaders:

Union for Progress and Change (UPC) parties – Zephirin Diabre

Congress for Democracy and Progress – Maître Benewendé Sankara

Ruling party: Movement of People for Progress party - Roch Marc Christian Kaboré,

²⁷ EU. EU observation. Available at: <http://www.eueom.eu/tanzania2015/home>. (Accessed 23 January 2016).

Press Freedom:

Article 8 of the constitution and the 1993 Information Code guarantee the freedoms of expression, information, and the press. However, media outlets are prohibited from insulting the head of state and publishing or broadcasting graphic images. Libel is a criminal offense, and the burden of proof is on the defendant. Although few journalists have been charged in recent years, in October 2012 two journalists for the private weekly *L'Ouragan* were sentenced to 12 months in prison, a fine of 1.5 million CFA francs (\$2,900), total damages of 4 million CFA francs (\$7,800), and a six-month newspaper suspension for criminal defamation of the state prosecutor²⁸.

Election results:

Candidate	Party	%
Roch Marc Christian Kabore	Movement of People for Progress party	53.5
Zephirin Diabre	Union for Progress and Change (UPC)	29.6
Tahirou Barry	Parent, the Party of National Revival	3%

Election Observers:

European Union Chief Observers Judith Sarentini: stated that the election was not transparent.

Does Voting Make a Difference?

²⁸ Freedom House. 2015. Burkina Faso. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2013/burkina-faso>. (Accessed on: 06 January 2016).



Voter apathy in most African countries compounded by fraudulent regimes make the most powerful act by a citizen- voting- void. As such most citizens especially youths see no point voting as in most cases

voting proves to neither change the election outcome nor change the leadership; Zimbabwe, Uganda, Burundi, Sudan are classic such examples.

It will take an overhaul of the election bodies, the systems that run and monitor them for any election to be credible in most African countries. Beyond this, there is need for a change in the attitude of citizens when it comes to elections and election results. It might sometimes demand greater radical action be taken by citizens, such as was evident in the build up to South Africa's 1994 election, and most recently in Burkina Faso if we want to see leadership change in Zimbabwe, Uganda and Sudan.

2016 Election Outlook

Africa will experience national elections in 16 different countries: Benin, Central African Republic, Chad, Republic of the Congo, Cote D'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, The Gambia, Ghana, Mauritania, Niger, Rwanda, Sao Tome & Principe, Uganda, and Zambia.

Often, elections in Africa are characterized by incumbent victories and extended term limits. In 2016, this looks most predictable in Chad, Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, the Gambia, and Uganda. 2015 portrayed the power still wielded by incumbents through their disproportionate influence in elections and control of resources and electoral commissions.

Notwithstanding, a new trend is emerging in African elections, a trend that is challenging election outcomes; a number of opposition parties seem to increasingly make record gains across the board. Highlighted this year in Tanzania's most competitive election in history,

a power transition in Nigeria and high levels of opposition ahead of President Yoweri Museveni's anticipated victory in Uganda's February 2016 election.



Press Freedom

African countries that muzzle press freedoms; persecute journalists and opposing voices are at high risk of pre and post-election violence. Freedoms in any state mean nothing without the relevant institutions to enforce and protect them. Countries holding elections in 2016 may only have a credible election if there is no infringement with the electoral institutions, the press and no persecution of opposition. Media is pivotal; it is the only avenue for widely exposing the infringement of rights and exposing unfair practices.

The press has a key role to play in ensuring fair and transparent elections with informed voters. Freedom of expression and political debate is fundamental to free, fair and more democratic elections. In order to play their role, the media need both access to information and the freedom to freely and safely communicate their findings. They act as a watchdog, ensuring greater transparency and accountability during the election process, providing citizens with information on their candidates, party policies and the elections process, enabling them to make informed decisions when they cast their votes or engage in public debate.

African Union Election Observer Mission

Electoral observation and monitoring are designed to boost confidence in the fairness of the electoral process. To further help deter fraud in the balloting and counting procedures, and to report to the country's citizens and the international community on the overall integrity of the elections. In situations like Burundi where symptoms of irregularities were present pre-election, the AU through its observer missions' need to be empowered to act decisively to stop the election and avoid post-election implosions.

Breeding an Active Citizenry

Active citizenry in Africa is sometimes difficult in countries run by dictators due to lack of solidarity. Every citizen in any African state should demand free, fair and credible election bodies knowing they have the backing of a decisive African watchdog- the AU. Continued autocracy breeds indifference and disinterest to vote amongst a population, making it difficult to push for transformation of election institutions within states. Democracy as a system of representative government relies on credible elections. Any effort to undermine the legitimacy of any election is a dark phrase to the democracy eulogy.