
African Union, Promotion of Democracy and Anti-Corruption Initiatives in Africa

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Abstract

The African Union (AU) has been pursuing one of its primary objectives of promoting democratic principles and institutions by ensuring good governance through the curbing of corruption. It is uncertain whether the democratic approach has rubbed off on its anti-corruption initiatives, given the recent performance of most AU member states on many global surveys of corruption, development and governance evaluation indexes. The paper, therefore, examined the extent to which the AU's stance on democratic promotion has impacted on its anti-corruption initiatives in Africa. The study is qualitative and relied on data sourced from secondary sources, while content analysis was adopted for data analysis. The findings acknowledge AU's committed advancement of democracy in Africa through its different anti-corruption frameworks. But in spite of the slight improvements of some African counties on different corruption perception indexes, corruption persists in the governance of many AU member states. The study further shows *inter alia* that the AU's anti-corruption initiatives have not effectively reflected the adopted measures due to uncommon democratic ideals, legitimisation of autocratic regimes, and the fact that many African states fail to uphold their obligations under the AU's anti-corruption convention. The study contends that AU's anti-corruption bodies should ensure and encourage member states to internalise and uphold existing governance norms and accountability measures, while implementation mechanisms should be strengthened.

Keywords: African Union, Anti-Corruption, Corruption, Democracy, Governance.

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Introduction

Although there is evidence of significant difference between countries in terms of corruption levels and where it is most likely to be found, surveys show that Africa has the highest prevalence of corruption of any region in the world (Lodge, 2019). The incongruity between colonial and succeeding postcolonial states and the precolonial political environments forced on them could be the historical roots of contemporary Africa's corruption and regional variance. Thus, in an acknowledgement of the problem of widespread corruption in Africa, Hope (2000) and Schuster (2002) remark that corruption has reached cancerous proportions, severely affecting socioeconomic development and poverty alleviation; and it is so pervasive that it has been dubbed the "AIDS of democracy," destroying the future of many African societies.

According to Lodge (2019), Africa's anti-corruption efforts are limited by the degree to which political power is exercised through patronage and the emerging initiatives used by the established international institutions/organisations, such as International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), United Nations (UN), European Union (EU), and African Union (AU), etc to reduce it. Since the founding of the AU, which supplanted the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 2002, the organisation has worked to combat corruption in the context of promoting democracy through a variety of initiatives (Falola, 2002). Democracy and good political governance are prominently mentioned in the AU Constitutive Act and are the first thematic areas under the African Peer-Review Mechanism (APRM), through which AU has undoubtedly made substantial efforts to promote democracy. AU also enacted a number of other instruments, including the African Charter for Democracy, Elections, and Governance (ACDEG) to encourage democracy and sound political governance among its member states (Mangu, 2014).

It is not surprising that the AU has continued to promote anti-corruption programmes among its member states, having acknowledged that the maintenance of democracy in Africa would be challenging without significant reduction in governance corruption. In order to tackle the pervasive corruption on the African continent, AU enacted the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption (AUCPCC) in 2003. For the purpose of evaluating AU's performance, it becomes instructive to look back at the Union's accomplishments during its 20th anniversary celebration in 2022, especially in the field of fostering democracy among member states within the context of its anti-corruption strategy.

Notwithstanding the successes in promoting democracy, as of 2022, there was no conclusive proof of any patterns in the success or failure of AU's anti-corruption initiatives. Therefore, it is still unclear whether this pro-democracy stance has permeated into its anti-corruption policy and programmes, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, given the performance of the majority of the countries in recent and previous global surveys of

corruption, development, and governance evaluation indexes. Therefore, some queries may be raised to direct our inquiry in this paper.

In light of this paradoxical circumstance, how much has AU's promotion of democracy through ACDEG assisted anti-corruption initiatives in Africa? What steps have the African Union Advisory Board on Corruption, currently known as the African Union Advisory Board against Corruption taken to enforce the corruption convention? What are the constraints and policy alternatives for advancing democracy in Africa, while utilising AU's anti-corruption initiatives? Based on the aforementioned concerns, this paper examines AU's promotion of democracy via ACDEG and its measures in relation to key anti-corruption initiatives, with a focus on sub-African countries. To accomplish this, the paper employs a desk-based research technique that includes literature review and examination of some selected anti-corruption initiatives by the AU.

Corruption and Democracy Nexus: Conceptual Framework of Analysis

There have been numerous attempts to define corruption because it is a difficult problem with many facets (Gardiner, 2005). The most widely used definition, especially the one favoured by Transparency International, UN, and numerous research publications, characterises corruption as the misuse of authority for personal gain (Boehm, 2015).

The phrase "abuse of entrusted power for private benefits" emphasises that corruption involves the delegation of power and a tension between private and public interests. Within the public sector, the idea of delegation is quite clear, regardless of the political system. Every regime needs an executive branch, and both democracies and autocracies are capable of engaging in these types of corrupt activities. At first glance, an autocrat might even be more interested in preventing administrative corruption because these are rents he cannot personally benefit from (Lambsdorff, 2007 cited in Boehm, 2015). In exchange, citizens in representative democracies give politicians who they elect into public office temporary power to govern for the good of all. However, elected officials have shown the potential to abuse the power that has been given to them. But since there are no formal rules governing the delegation of political power, the problem of high political corruption level is less clear-cut in non-electoral countries. It is necessary in these situations to revert to less precise concepts like legitimacy and public interest (Boehm, 2015).

Perhaps even more intricate and challenging is the concept of democracy. Using the Greek terms 'dêmos' (people) and 'kratos' (power), democracy can be defined as a political system in which the people hold and exercise power, or in which the power of public authorities is founded on the will of the people (Djounguep, 2022). However, the concept of democracy has undergone a remarkable historical evolution in terms of meaning and power, as well as substance and relevance, thereby giving rise to various schools of thought. The definition put forth by Schumpeter (1942 cited in Boehm, 2015) is a widely used one. He defines democracy as an institutional framework for making political decisions in which

people are given the authority to make choices through a contest for the support of the populace. This indicates that, as noted by Acemoglu and Robinson (2005), the idea of democracy is in fact connected to a specific set of institutions, including free and fair elections, political accountability to the people, and open entry into politics. Sodaro (2004, 31) defines democracy as:

[...] the essential idea of democracy is that the people have the right to determine who governs them. In most cases they elect the principal governing officials and hold them accountable for their actions. Democracies also impose legal limits on the government's authority by guaranteeing certain rights and freedoms to their citizens.

A list of ten prerequisites for democracy is provided by Sodaro (2004, 207-2020). They include the following items: state institutions, elites committed to democracy, homogeneous societies, national wealth, private enterprise, a middle class, support of the underprivileged for democracy, citizen participation, civil society, and a democratic political culture, as well as education and freedom of information, and finally, a supportive international environment.

Regardless of whether we fully concur with this list, democracy is unquestionably not a "either/or" choice but rather a matter of degree. Different levels of democracy can be seen among nations. The existing indexes that attempt to quantify democracy reflect the idea that democracy is a matter of degree. With the exception of the methodology used by Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibu and Limongi (2000) which creates an index classifying countries as either democracies or non-democracies, all other indexes classify countries on a scale based on a variety of criteria. The Freedom House Indicator, Polity IV index created by the Center for Systemic Peace, and Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index are the most commonly used indicators of that type.

In addition, the idea that politicians should be answerable and accountable to citizens is unquestionably a key component, if not the most important component, of representative democracies. Vertical accountability is commonly used to distinguish it from horizontal accountability in which some state bodies, such as supreme audit institutions, regulators, or the judiciary, control and penalise other government bodies in form of checks and balances (Boehm, 2015).

As a logical extension from the conceptual clarification of the relationship between corruption and democracy as espoused here, some have suggested that democracy is a potent tool for reducing corruption (Langseth, 1999, Treisman, 2000; Chowdhury, 2004; Kolstad and Wiig, 2004). Others claim that there is a "rosy view" of reality regarding the "democracy-corruption nexus" (Trange, 1994). The empirical data are not yet conclusive (Rock, 2007). A substantial body of research shows an empirical connection between democracy and decreased corruption (Langseth, 1999; Treisman, 2000; Chowdhury, 2004;

Kolstad and Wiig, 2004). Others, however, contend that the evidence is insufficient (Case, 2002; Rock, 2003; Mohtadi and Roe, 2003; McLeod, 2005). Some claim that there is simply no connection between the two variables (Ades and Di Tella, 1999; Fisman and Gatti, 2002). While it is unrealistic to assume that any approach can eliminate corruption altogether, the question is whether the promotion of democracy by AU has aided anti-corruption initiatives in Africa.

State of Democracy in Africa and its Promotion by the African Union

The state of democracy in Africa is also one of the most contentious and difficult issues confronting the continent (Cheeseman, 2019), which explains why academics and political leaders have expressed opposing viewpoints. For some analysts, democracy in Africa is a risky experiment that too frequently fails, and they would like to give up on it (Cheeseman, 2019). This has been explained in part by the fact that there is no one-way to organise democracy and that democratic expression must be in line with the realities and historical, cultural and social specifics of each people, while still adhering to universal principles (Djounguep, 2022). As a result, in Africa, the concept of democracy is not most widely accepted and owing to this, some AU members believe they are eminently democratic, while others do not. This divide exists within the larger African community. Several speeches by African leaders have displayed such “cognitive dissonance” and “representational discordance” (Djounguep, 2022).

To be sure, former President of the Republic of Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou lays down two terms of incumbency as the criteria for democracy and peaceful transition (The National Democratic Institute (NDI), 2019). Rwandan President, Paul Kagame states on October 1, 2021 at the 14th World Policy Conference in Abu Dhabi that a theoretical democracy cannot be discussed if it is not based on what the actual citizens of that place crave for themselves, their families, and their societies (Kagame, 2021). With its singular focus on individual freedoms, identities, and desires, even at the expense of the common good, contemporary liberal democracy can, in some cases, be confusing as far as Kagame is concerned (Kagame, 2021). The political, social, and economic foundations for Africa’s long-awaited development, according to the President of the Republic of Ghana, Nana Akufo-Addo, are provided by democracy and freedom. The great energy and potential of the African people will be unleashed as the region prepares to create a magnificent new civilisation (Guzman, 2018).

However, other narratives advocate that if the struggle is continued relentlessly, as it is being pursued and championed by the AU, democracy will eventually become entrenched within African societies. Clearly, African democracies stand out not because they encounter so many difficulties but rather because they have been able to adapt and advance despite the lack of many of the alleged “pre-conditions” for democratic consolidation. Political scientists have proffered a lengthy “wish list” of elements that make it simpler to establish and consolidate a democracy. Coherent national identity, powerful

and independent political institutions, a developed and independent civil society, the rule of law, and a robust and successful economy, are at the top of the list (Cheeseman, 2019). According to Adam Przeworski, who made a great case for it, nations that had a GDP per capita of over \$6,000 when they introduced democracy succeed almost universally, while nations with a GDP per capita of less than \$1,000 mostly failed. Few African nations met any of the "wish list" criteria in the 1960s or the 1990s, or even today (Cheeseman, 2019).

Nonetheless, many African countries have made significant progress toward establishing stable and accountable multiparty democratic systems as a result of AU's and other African regional organisations' focused engagement in defending democracy (Campbell and Quinn, 2021). As part of its mission to advance democracy and responsible governance across the African continent, the AU has created a number of normative frameworks and policies that directly and indirectly address coups and other unconstitutional regime changes. Most notably, the Lomé Declaration for an OAU Response to Unconstitutional Changes of Government from 2000 and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance, both identify military coup as a major threat to peace and security on the continent and specify measures to be taken against conspirators and nations that support them (Maluleke and Bennett, 2022).

Specifically, the AU's choice to support liberal democratic ideals has helped to safeguard democracy in Africa. The AU has made efforts to reject unconstitutional changes of government (UCG), particularly coups d'état, and the organisation has prohibited military regimes from taking part in its activities in accordance with its anti-UCG norms, which have been in place since the AU's formation in 2001. At a summit in Addis Ababa on February 6, 2022, representatives from AU member nations unequivocally reaffirmed this and denounced a wave of military coups and putsch attempts that had occurred across the continent (DW, 2022; Tessema, 2022). Due to these rules against unconstitutional political changes, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, and Sudan were suspended from the AU. The regional posture against coups has thus played a significant role in preventing overt military coups until recently, despite some inconsistencies (Ani, 2021; Abebe and Fombad, 2021). Additionally, in 2017, the Zimbabwean military chose to pressurise President Robert Mugabe to resign while swiftly uniting behind a civilian leadership, despite being aware of AU and SADC's positions against military coups. For regional actors, deciding whether the Zimbabwean situation was a coup or not was a bit complicated by the realities of a people-led protests in the country, which had heralded Mugabe's 'resignation' (Ani, 2021).

Thus, AU's persistence and demand for better democratic governance, including peaceful and credible transfers of power, anti-corruption department, transparent and accountable exercise of power, the progressive realisation of the fundamental rights and freedoms enshrined in national and international legal frameworks, are causing a significant number of African countries to democratise against all odds (Aniekwe, Oette and Vandeginste, 2019). Also, AU's African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG), which was established in 2007, requires state parties to establish and strengthen

democratic institutions, the rule of law, human rights and independent electoral systems (Kioko, 2019). In essence, AU's current efforts to promote democracy in Africa are reflected in the ACDEG, which is also the binding regional instrument adopted by the member states in an effort to comprehensively address all of the requirements for the establishment of liberal democracy (ActionAid Nigeria, 2019). The AU has therefore appropriately used a multi-layered approach to leverage democracy in Africa through the adoption of the charter. The charter demonstrates AU's decision to support liberal democracy and a representative form of government (ActionAid Nigeria, 2019). Realistically, AU through ACDEG has been able to promote democracy among the member states and has had notable impacts in ensuring good governance and regular elections in Africa (Tromme, Banoba, Burrows and Law, 2019).

Again, the AU through its other bodies such The African Youth Charter, Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community, African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, African Charter on Human and People's Rights, African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, Revised African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, Protocol to the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community relating to the Pan-African Parliament, The African Health Strategy 2007-2015, has been able to blaze the trail in promoting democracy by ensuring good governance and accountability of member states (Tromme et al., 2020).

However, to achieve the objective of this paper, AUCPCC vis-à-vis the African Union Advisory Board on Corruption (AUABC) which has been assisting in the enforcement and implementation of anti-corruption measures, African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), the 2018 African Anti-Corruption Year, which are the flagbearers of the AU anti-corruption initiatives (ActionAid Nigeria, 2019; Campbell & Quinn, 2021) are overviewed and their relevance highlighted. The emerging issues regarding the foregoing are the focus of the paper's interrogation in the next section.

Overviewing Pervasive Corruption and its Devastating Effects in Africa

According to the Chairman, Transparency International, Ugaz (2015, 1), "corruption creates and increases poverty and exclusion. While corrupt individuals with political power enjoy a lavish life, millions of Africans are deprived of their basic needs like food, health, education, housing, access to clean water and sanitation." Corroborating Ugaz (2015), Tromme et al. (2020) notes that corruption in African countries has hindered economic, political and social development while corruption in Africa has been referred to as "undeclared pandemic" (Mhaka, 2022, 1). Thus, the biggest issue facing most African nations today in terms of governance and development is without a doubt, corruption (Lodge, 2019). A report by the AU High-Level Panel on Illicit Financial Flows and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) reveals that the continent loses more than \$50bn every year in illicit financial outflows as governments and multinational

companies engage in fraudulent schemes aimed at avoiding tax payments to some of the world's poorest countries (Anderson, 2015).

Again, the AU's high-level panel report on illicit financial flows and that of the UNECA on illicit transfers from African nations both report that such financial outflows have tripled since 2001, when \$20 billion was siphoned off (Anderson, 2015). The report states that between 1970 and 2008, the continent suffered losses totaling about \$850 billion. During that time, an estimated \$217.7 billion was illegally transferred out of Nigeria, while Egypt lost \$105.2 billion and South Africa lost more than \$81.8 billion (Anderson, 2015). Thus, the progress, stability and development of the continent as being championed by the AU are all negatively impacted by corruption. The direct consequences of this are that foreign investments are discouraged, resource allocation is distorted, markets become more competitive, business costs rise, and the net value of public spending decreases; all of which slow economic growth. Additionally, the ugly trend encourages the misuse and inefficient allocation of limited resources, while lowering the level of tax revenues and quality of services and public infrastructure (African Union, 2018a).

On the political front, corruption weakens governmental institutions and undercuts the rule of law, respect for human rights, accountability and transparency. As a result, public trust in the government is damaged, and good governance is jeopardised. Because it worsens income inequality, poverty and has a negative impact on society's high moral standards, corruption has negative social costs as well. Corruption generally poses a threat to long-term economic growth, world peace, and good governance.

That is why the Preamble to the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption (AUCPCC) also expresses concerns about the detrimental effects of corruption and impunity on the political, economic, social, and cultural stability of African states; and its catastrophic effects on the economic and social development of African peoples. Additionally, it admits that corruption hinders the development of the continent's socio-economic system as well as accountability and transparency in the management of public affairs. It is therefore not a coincidence that different anti-corruption initiatives such as AUCPCC, African Union Advisory Board on Corruption (AUABC), African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), and the 2018 African Anti-Corruption Year, among others, have been unfolded to tackle corruption in Africa.

African Union Anti-Corruption Initiatives in Africa

It is apposite to state that the foundation has been laid by the African Union in terms of policies and strategies aimed at preventing and combating acts of corruption in Africa. At the continental level, several frameworks (as identified above) have been initiated and some of these policies and frameworks are the subject of our discussion in this section.

African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption (AUCPCC)

The AUCPCC is a shared roadmap for member states to implement governance and anti-corruption policies and systems on a national and regional level, which was adopted on July 11, 2003. Strong provisions in the convention may help to significantly reduce corruption issues across the continent. It offers a consensus-based framework to deal with cross-border issues, makes it easier for nations to work together and provide one another with legal assistance, and harmonises the institutional and legal framework for preventing and combating corruption.

There are several advantages to the AUCPCC. It has several provisions on the prevention and criminalisation of offenses (such as active and passive bribery, domestic and foreign bribery, embezzlement, money laundering, and illicit enrichment), while it also emphasises access to information and the role of the media, and contains strong language on the involvement of civil society (Article 12), and provides the framework for improving international relations. It also contains a mandatory stand-alone article on political party funding (Article 10).

The Convention contains both mandatory and optional provisions. For instance, the AUCPCC mandates measures against private-to-private corruption (Article 11). Additionally, it places various restrictions on public officials' immunity and requests asset disclosures from them (Article 7). It is also distinctive in that it contains a stand-alone article on the fundamental guarantees of a fair trial (Article 14). According to Article 19, the AUCPCC is committed to improved cooperation to prevent corruption in international trade transactions, in development aid and cooperation programmes, and through increased cooperation between law enforcement agencies for the asset freezing and asset forfeiture procedures (Hatchard, 2014; Bello, 2014).

The African Union Advisory Board on Corruption (AUABC)

AU established the African Union Advisory Board on Corruption (AUABC) in 2009 as an autonomous organ in accordance with Article 22 of the convention to ensure that the AU convention was properly implemented. In order to prevent, detect, punish, and eradicate corruption and related offenses in Africa, it is crucial that state parties to the AUCPCC adopt measures and actions (Duri, 2020).

Its mandate includes encouraging the adoption of anti-corruption measures in member states, monitoring the implementation of those measures, and routinely providing the Executive Council with progress reports on each member state. The board has created a strategic plan for the years 2018 through 2021. Its specific goals are to support AUCPCC, advance and encourage strong domestic legislation, encourage the adoption of a uniform code of conduct for public servants, and create and carry out plans to deal with the

corruption element of IFFs (AU Advisory Board on Corruption, 2017). As of May 2022, the Convention had been ratified by forty-seven (48) countries (African Union, 2022a).

African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM)

The African Union established the African Peer Review Mechanism in 2003 as a means of combating corruption. Although the APRM includes elements of monitoring government anti-corruption activities and performance against convention requirements, it is not intended to serve as a review process for pertinent anti-corruption conventions in the Africa region (Duri, 2020). The 2017 review of Sudan, for instance, looked at the country's anti-corruption laws and policies and suggested Sudan consider creating an independent anti-corruption agency and improving its national anti-corruption strategy (APRM, 2017). Uganda was also urged to thoroughly examine institutional arrangements, mandates, and capacities of public institutions with anti-corruption mandates in its second review. It was also encouraged to develop strategies to increase societal engagement in tackling corruption (APRM, 2018).

African Anti-Corruption Year

A component of the AU's anti-corruption initiatives is the 2018 African Anti-Corruption Year. It showed that African leaders were committed to working together to fight corruption (AU, 2018b). The goals of the anti-corruption year included monitoring the status of the ratification and implementation of anti-corruption instruments, providing technical assistance to member states, and contributing to the fight against corruption. The private sector, civil society organisations, and information and communications technology are given more room to participate in measures to combat corruption. President Muhammadu Buhari, who was in charge of creating the 2018 theme, presented the progress report on the anti-corruption year's implementation (AU, 2019; Duri, 2020).

The Gains of the African Union's Democratic Promotion via Anti-Corruption Initiatives in Africa

Generally, the thematic analysis of the available literature indicates that there have been notable advancements in the last 20 years in the fight against corruption by AU. AU member states have been more than willing partners in this endeavour, and they have taken initiatives and measures to give expression to the AUCPCC at their level, particularly through the establishment of national anti-corruption institutions as highlighted in the preceding section. Even though corruption remains a problem on the continent, significant progress has been made and some noteworthy accomplishments have been noted (African Union, 2022b). Kukutschka (2023, cited in Rigwell, 2023) claims that some African countries, including Angola, Ivory Coast, Ethiopia, and Senegal have made notable strides and are moving up on the TI's "Corruption Perceptions Index 2022". Consequently, 7 of the 24 nations that seemed to be making progress are in fact African. While still being at

the bottom of the index, the region is one where we can also witness development. In actuality, many of these African nations have strengthened their anti-corruption commitments; due in large part to African Union's efforts to combat corruption as well as other efforts.

AU anti-corruption initiatives have influenced the enactment of anti-corruption Act and national anti-corruption strategies including the protection of witness and informants. For instance, in Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria and South Africa (Wentzel, 2022), AU's framework for the protection of whistleblowers have enhanced their efforts in that direction. Efforts have also been made through the AU's anti-corruption initiatives to ensure that laws on declaration of assets by senior public officers are strengthened with different variations in many countries such as Nigeria, South Africa, Ghana, Uganda, Gambia, Cameroon, Kenya, Tanzania, Liberia, Cape Verde, Sao Tome and Principe and the Central African Republic among others (Chêne, 2008; The Institute of Economic Affairs, 2016). However, Kenya, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Gabon, and Senegal are among the nations that do not allow for the public disclosure of income and asset declarations (Chêne, 2008).

Specifically, the gains of the AU's anti-corruption commitment have resonated in the criminalisation of money laundering and illicit enrichment offences. For instance, both offences have been criminalised in Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa and Tunisia among others. However, Ghana and South Africa have not criminalised illicit enrichment per se; they have both established legal mechanisms for addressing the issues (Tromme et al., 2020). For instance, in Ghana, the domestic framework that has been established in line with Article 16 of the AUCPCC is enshrined in the Economic and Organised Crime Bill and the Mutual Legal Assistance Bill (Ackon, Dagadu and McDave, 2022). This has also been strengthened by enactment of the Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act of 2003, The Economic and Financial Crimes (Establishment) Act of 2004 and finally, the Money Laundering (Prohibition) Act of 2004 (Nkhoma, 2019 cited in Ackon et al., 2022). For instance, according to the report by pro-democracy group, Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), Nigeria's anti-corruption agencies have recovered roughly N900 billion (about \$2,2 billion) in stolen assets over the last two decades (Sanni, 2021).

The theme of the 2021 African Anti-Corruption Dialogue was "Regional Economic Communities: Critical Actors in the Implementation of the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption." The dialogue serves as a forum for discussion and reflection among all parties (civil society, the media and critical stakeholders) involved in the fight against corruption about the function of regional economic communities in advancing that cause. The reflections made it easier to identify and communicate the obstacles to and successful strategies for collaborating with regional economic communities to combat corruption (African Union, 2021).

The strengthening of accountability systems such as the Audit, Accountant-General and Parliamentary accounts committees been the pre-occupation of the AU's anti-corruption bodies in the member countries; while African Union's Heads of State and Government unanimously adopted the Common African Position on Asset Recovery (CAPAR) in 2020, as proposed by the Federal Republic of Nigeria's government at their 33rd Assembly in Addis Ababa. The CAPAR serves as Africa's basis for legal instrument and technical framework for negotiating the return of stolen assets and illicit capital flights taken illegally from the continent's shores and hosted in foreign jurisdictions. In this direction, some African countries such as Ethiopia, Nigeria and Mali have succeeded in recovering some of their stolen assets from foreign jurisdictions and more African countries are at different stages of the return process (African Union, 2022c).

Challenges of AU in Promoting Democracy and Anti-Corruption Initiatives in Africa

In spite of the modest gains made by the AU in promoting democracy and anti-corruption drive, many roadblocks still remained to be dismantled to genuinely achieve its objectives in both areas; some of the main challenges are discussed here. Undoubtedly, as discussed in the previous section, some of AU's member states believe that they are eminently democratic, while others do not as evidenced in the body language and a number of speeches that display such logical disagreement and illustrative contradictions (Djounguep, 2022). Therefore, the AU must strike a balance between its theoretical goal of advancing democracy and its practical objective of avoiding giving in to the pressure of realpolitik and leaders who contradict each other, exemplified by leaders who defend the military intervention in Chad while denouncing the coup in Mali (Maluleke and Bennett, 2022).

Secondly, despite the AU's efforts to advance democracy in Africa and encourage accountability culture, despotic regimes at one extreme, operational multiparty system, and numerous forms of flawed democracy in the middle, make up the majority of African states (Glen, 2012). This range includes failed or disintegrating states like Somalia and Democratic Republic of Congo, nations in instability or transition after upheavals like Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, as well as Nigeria, which is attempting to maintain democratic gains despite a violent religious insurgency, dictatorial regimes like those in Zimbabwe, Sudan, Chad, and Rwanda, and established, functioning democracies like South Africa.

Thirdly, the AU's efforts to promote democracy seems to have lost value as a result of the frequent coups d'état, uprisings, autocratic regimes with long-term rule aspirations, and protracted economic hardships in many African states. However, Ani (2021) argues that uprisings are reflective of a new trend of democratic horse-trading, where regular populations are united against governing structures that fail to benefit their citizens socio-economically. Despite this, some concerns have been raised about AU's initiatives failing to result in the germination of democratic seeds or its consolidation in many African countries (Mbaku, 2020). Recent events, including a failed coup attempt in Sudan (Ani, 2021) and a successful coup in Burkina Faso (Booty, 2022) have heightened global fears of

democratic regression in Africa, where coups were once considered an aberration or a misnomer. Prior to the coups, the continent had already witnessed seven popular uprisings spurred by military actions and inactions, including political elite manipulations that resulted in changes in government in Libya in 2011, Egypt in 2011, Tunisia in 2011, Burkina Faso in 2014, Zimbabwe in 2017, Sudan and Algeria in 2019 (Ani, 2021).

Fourthly, though elections are commonplace in Africa, the credibility of these elections is the subject of controversies. Thus, the AU has also had to deal with the challenge of overseeing elections that are not credible, but which frequently presented a false sense of security. Although the AU frequently issues warnings about the risks of dubious electoral and constitutional processes, neither the Union nor any other relevant sanctions have examined any constitutional amendments that have impacts on democratic change. Because of this, some regimes manipulate elections and/or constitutional changes to hold onto power and support their claims to leadership in a society where democratic elections serve as the fundamental yardstick for legitimacy. For instance, one of the most popular strategies for regimes to hold onto power while appearing to follow formal democratic procedures is the removal of term and age limits from constitutions. These developments enabled powerful leaders in Rwanda, Uganda, Republic of Congo, Gabon, Chad, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, and Guinea-Bissau to be re-elected over and over again (Ani, 2021). Furthermore, these institutions are doing little to prevent government crackdowns or address the flood of mass infringements committed by ordinary citizens during protests against democratic destabilisations, which have resulted in political uncertainty and insecurity in many AU member states (Ani, 2021).

Lastly, as the primary normative instrument for establishing governance standards on the continent, the African Charter, which was adopted in 2007 and came into force in 2012, has only been ratified by 30 member states to date. Thus, it has remained difficult for the AU to adopt and execute policies that would leverage democracy among its member states. There is widespread agreement among scholars that AU has not successfully pursued its goal of peace and security by vigorously promoting democracy on the continent, despite the fact that the organisation has not been completely silent in this regard (Maluleke and Bennett, 2022). Also, within the ambit of the AU's anti-corruption initiatives, the available literature reveals that AU states parties have to a large extent made significant efforts to combat corruption as required by the convention. The challenges of AU's anti-corruption initiatives in Africa are still profound regardless (Maluleke and Bennett, 2022).

According to TI (2021), many African governments are falling behind on their commitments under the AU's anti-corruption convention. In essence, challenges still persist in the areas of money laundering, illicit enrichment, political party funding, lack of expertise and tools and limited autonomy of justice authorities, methodology adopted by the AUABC, poor implementation drive, AUABC's inadequate resources, among others. Again, illicit enrichment is a crime under AUCPCC, though member states do enough to enforce the laws, the offence is notoriously difficult to prosecute because many suspected

offenders are high profile and well-connected figures, who often enjoy political immunity and, on many occasions, judges are unduly influenced during their trials (TI, 2021). For instance, a serving Federal High Court judge in Nigeria received \$260,000 over the course of two years and was unable to identify the lawful source of the deposits. Yet, the Appeal Court dropped all accusations for procedural reasons (Ramon, 2017). The situation in Nigeria has warranted criticisms from analysts, who query, for instance, the outrageous cost of nomination forms for political parties' primary elections. The ruling All Progressives Congress set the cost of nomination forms for President at N100 million, Governorship at N50 million, Senate at N20 million, House of Representatives at N10 million, and State Assembly at N2 million. People's Democratic Party, the main opposition party, put the cost of its Presidential nomination forms at N40 million, Governorship at N21 million, Senate at N3.5 million, House of Representatives at N2.5 million, and State House of Assembly at N1.5 million (Itodo, 2022). The AUAC's institutional capacity is not only weak because it is not being fully independent and inadequately resourced, but also challenged by the actual implementation of its anti-corruption initiatives such as on access to information in most state parties, part-time nature of the board cum limited tenure and the challenges being faced in the effective assessment of the actual implementation of the convention (TI, 2021).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper examines African Union's efforts to promote democracy and how they have affected its anti-corruption initiatives in Africa. It acknowledges that AU's commitment to advancing democracy in Africa through its various frameworks has brought about some progress. However, the organisation's anti-corruption initiatives have clearly not effectively reflected its measures. As a result, despite minor improvements in various corruption perception indices reported by TI and other associated global anti-corruption organisations, corruption persists in many member countries. Hence, a lack of common democratic ideals, the legitimisation of autocratic regimes, and the fact that many African states are failing to uphold their obligations under the AU's anti-corruption convention have all served to limit and undermine anti-corruption activities. Thus, the AUABC's methodology, lack of implementation drive, and insufficient resources are just a few of the major challenges confronting its anti-corruption initiatives on money laundering, illicit enrichment, political party funding, lack of expertise and tools, and limited autonomy of justice authorities. It is therefore, recommended that AUABC addresses all identified impediments and demonstrates the necessary political will to overcome them. Furthermore, AUABC and other relevant anti-corruption bodies under AU should ensure and encourage member states to internalise and enforce existing governance norms and accountability mechanisms. Again, while AUABC's implementation mechanisms should be strengthened, they should also be synchronised with AU's Agenda 2063. The Agenda is a shared framework for Africa's inclusive growth and sustainable development over the next fifty years. And, in

order for Africa to be transformed into a future global powerhouse, the Agenda should prioritise anti-corruption drives.

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