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# The Bush Administration, Democracy Promotion and Elections in Africa

**Cover Page Footnote**

THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION, U.S. DEMOCRACY PROMOTION AND ELECTIONS IN AFRICA  
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## The Bush Administration, U.S. Democracy Promotion, and Elections in Africa

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**Abstract:** *Since the emergence of the United States as a major global power, it has claimed to be the “leader of the free world” and the “champion of democracy.” During the Cold War, the pro-democracy rhetoric was a major staple on the United States’ foreign policy menu. For example, the U.S. claimed that its support for democracy and the former Soviet Union’s endorsement of authoritarianism was the main distinguishing feature between the ideological-political systems of the two superpowers. Thereafter, each succeeding American administration recited the pro-democracy rhetoric, which was elevated to new heights during President George W. Bush’s second term. In his Second Inaugural Address, Bush declared the pursuance of a “freedom agenda” as a major cornerstone of American foreign policy. Using four allied African states of the United States—Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria and Uganda—and an adversarial state—Zimbabwe—as case studies, this article examines the relationship between the rhetoric of “democracy promotion” through the holding of free and fair elections and praxis. In other words, how did the Bush administration respond to fraudulent elections in its allied and adversarial states, against the backdrop of its policy rhetoric through the promotion of democracy globally?*

**Keywords:** United States, democracy promotion, elections, Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, Zimbabwe, authoritarian regimes, semi-authoritarian regimes

### Introduction

Since the end of World War Two, when it emerged as a “superpower,” the United States has recurrently claimed that one of the major cornerstones of its foreign policy is the “promotion of democracy” in the world. This claim has resonated in the foreign policy rhetoric of each successive administration. In particular, during the Bush administration (2001-2009), the “democracy promotion project” found expression in an overarching “freedom agenda” that was ostensibly designed to “spread democracy” around the world. In his second inaugural address, President George W. Bush articulated the “democracy promotion project” thus:

So, it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world...We will encourage reform in other governments by making clear that success in our relations will require the decent treatment of their own people. America’s beliefs in human dignity will guide our policies, yet rights must be more than the grudging concessions of dictators; they are secured by free dissent and the participation of the governed. In the long run, there is no justice without freedom, and there can be no human rights without human liberty (Bush 2005, 1).

One of the major tenets that is pivotal to the democracy promotion project is the United States’ professed unequivocal support for the holding of free and fair multiparty elections in all countries around the world. Stressing the centrality of democratic elections, former United States Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky asserted that “...free and fair elections should be guaranteed by appropriate constitutional or legal safeguards, as only with honest elections can governments be accountable to their citizens” (Dobriansky 2003, 1).

In the case of Africa, has the United States been consistent in its support for the holding of democratic elections on the continent, especially amid the emerging trend of what Schedler (2006, 2) broadly refers to as “electoral authoritarianism?” In other words, has the United States consistently applied what I term its “democratic electoral standard” to Africa? This question will be addressed by examining the Bush administration’s policy responses to elections in four of the United States’ major allied states in Africa—Egypt, Uganda, Nigeria and Kenya. For comparative purposes, the U.S.’ response to the 2008 Zimbabwean Presidential Election will be used as the measure. The rationale is that Zimbabwe has an adversarial relationship with the U.S.

### **Literature Review**

Price (2009, 15) argues that a commitment to a world-side democracy promotion has been a hallmark of United States foreign policy for many years, and was given a distinctive emphasis by the Bush administration. He posits that the support for democratic elections should be one of the major cornerstones of the United States democracy promotion agenda. However, he notes that this goal might at times conflict with overarching realist orientation of American foreign policy. For example, Price observes that the United States has to rely on friendly relations with non-democratic leaders around the world for a variety of strategic reasons (2009, 162).

Although Quirk (2008) concurs with Price (2009) that democracy promotion has been an enduring feature of American foreign policy, he, however, disagrees with some of the methods that various administrations have used to promote it. Quirk (2008), for example, contends that democracy promotion via regime change—from covert action in Iran and Chile to war in Iraq—is ill-conceived and catastrophic for the people of the countries in question. Alternatively, he suggests that United States democracy promotion could be more effective if it is done with what he calls “buy-in” from governments, and carried out in a participatory manner (Quirk 2008, 1).

Melia (2005) examines the infrastructure that serves as the crucible in which the United States pursues its democracy promotion agenda. USAID serves as the disbursement arm of foreign aid that is designed to help promote “good governance” and other elements of democracy. The State Department serves as the diplomatic conduit through which the U.S. promotes its democracy promotion agenda. The National Endowment for Democracy is designed to provide technical assistance and expertise in democratic governance, such as the conduct of free and fair elections and the strengthening civil society.

In contradistinction to Price (2009), Quirk (2008) and Melia (2005), who argue that democracy promotion is a mainstay of American foreign policy, Hook (2002), on the other hand, contends that democracy promotion serves an ambiguous combination of altruistic aspirations and concrete self-interests. Specifically, he argues that during the Cold War, for example, the United States’ democratic ideals were subordinated to the geopolitical concerns of the “superpower rivalry” (Hook 2002, 109). In the context of the post-Cold War, U.S. democracy promotion continues to be subordinated to the ubiquity of national interests—strategic and economic. In other words, when the ideals of democracy promotion conflict with American national interests, the latter takes priority.

Anyang’ Nyong’o (2008) postulates that U.S. democracy promotion in Africa is a veneer that is designed to mask the pursuance of American economic and strategic interests on the continent. He cites various examples to buttress his thesis. In the case of American strategic interests, he asserts that although Egypt is not a democratic state, it receives the largest amount of American aid in Africa. This is because of its importance to the United States’ geopolitical interests. On the issue of the promotion of political human rights, he argues that not long ago

during the Rwandan genocide in 1994, the United States did not lift a finger to intervene in the crisis. Instead, the tragedy happened in the midst of the Clinton administration, which was ironically clamoring for global peace and democratization.

Three major currents emerge from the literature reviewed. The first is that democracy promotion is indeed a cornerstone of American foreign policy, and that the United States is indeed sincere and committed to this goal. The second is that democracy promotion serves the dual purposes of American ideals and interests. The third is that democracy promotion is a hoax that is ostensibly designed to conceal the United States' enduring support for authoritarianism in Africa and elsewhere in the Third World. My study is located in the analytical and theoretical crucible that is framed by the perspective that portrays American democracy promotion in Africa as rhetoric that is contradicted by policy praxis.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for the study consists of several major terms. First, democracy (liberal) means a political system in which the government respects political rights and civil liberties, holds competitive, free and fair elections, and promotes the rule of law, among others (Diamond 2003, 34-35).

By an authoritarian regime, the study is referring to a government in which a leader or small group of leaders exercise unchecked powers. This is because the government, among other things, suppresses the political rights and civil liberties of the citizens, and does not abide by the rule of law.

A semi-authoritarian regime is one that combines the attributes of democratic and authoritarian regimes—a hybrid regime. For example, such a regime allows competitive elections, but manipulates the electoral process during one or more phases—voters' registration, the counting of the ballots, etc. The resulting effect is that the electoral playing field is then tilted in the favor of the regime, including its preferred candidates—Levitsky and Way (2002, 51) refer to this phenomenon as “competitive authoritarianism.”

### **Selected Case Studies**

#### *Background*

This study uses four of the United States' major allies in Africa—Egypt, Uganda, Nigeria and Kenya—as case studies to decipher the relationship between the United States policy rhetoric of “democracy promotion” and praxis. In addition, as has been discussed, Zimbabwe, an adversary of the U.S., is used as a comparative standard. The four countries were chosen for two major reasons. First, they are important to the pursuance of the United States' strategic interests—namely “the war on terror” (Kenya, Nigeria and Uganda), and security in the Middle East (Egypt). Second, Nigeria and Kenya are especially important to United States economic interests—the supply of oil (Nigeria) and private investments (Kenya and Nigeria). Since the elections in these four United States allied countries were declared fraudulent by both domestic and international observers, they provide excellent test cases for the United States' democracy promotion project. This is because the ultimate test of the consistency of the United States' democracy promotion project is whether the United States applies the same standards for free and fair elections to its closest allies as it does to other “non-strategic” countries, including adversarial states like Zimbabwe. In the case of Zimbabwe, it, too, like the four African allied nations of the United States had a presidential election in 2008 that was characterized as fraudulent by both domestic and external election observers. Thus, for comparative purposes, it

would be interesting to determine whether the United States consistently applied the same standard to its four allies and Zimbabwe.

During the various elections, Freedom House (2013) classified Egypt as having an authoritarian regime, Kenya, Nigeria and Uganda with semi-authoritarian regimes and Zimbabwe with authoritarian regime. Furthermore, for example, during President Mubarak's tenure (1981-2011), Egypt was consistently classified as having an authoritarian government. In the case of Kenya, it was classified as having an authoritarian regime for most of Arap Moi's presidency. In the case of Nigeria, during its tenure (1999-2007), the Obasanjo regime was classified as semi-authoritarian (Freedom House, 2013).

### *Egypt*

The 2005 presidential and parliamentary elections provided the real litmus test for the Mubarak regime's tolerance for multiparty politics as instituted by the national referendum, which was held in the early part of the year (early 2005). However, the electoral process clearly demonstrated that the Mubarak regime was not enamored with political pluralism. For example, the regime developed a battery of methods ostensibly designed to tilt the electoral playing field in favor of President Mubarak and his ruling party. The instruments of "electoral authoritarianism" included: closely controlling the licensing of political parties; monitoring non-governmental organizations; harassing previously legalized groups and parties; and carefully devising electoral rules to entice opposition elements to participate while depriving them of the possibility of winning (Hamzaway and Brown 2005, 1). Also, the election commission prevented major opposition leaders like Taalat Sadat, who could have mounted a serious challenge to President Mubarak, from contesting the presidential election. In all, only ten of the thirty presidential candidates, including the incumbent President Mubarak, were allowed by the elections commission to contest the presidential election (Hamzaway and Brown 2005, 1).

Against this background, the stage was set for the presidential and parliamentary elections on September 7 and December 9, 2005, respectively. With the prohibition by the Mubarak regime against international monitoring and the serious restrictions imposed on domestic civil society groups, the path was cleared for the final phase of a fraud-driven electoral process (Sharp 2005, 4). For instance, people were allowed to vote without voting cards, and votes were not marked with indelible ink. Voters were intimidated by officials of President Mubarak's ruling party (BBC News 2005a, 1). Furthermore, the election suffered other significant irregularities and violations of the electoral regulations as stipulated by Laws No. 173 and 174 of the Egyptian Electoral Code (International Republican Institute 2005, 1). As usual, the Mubarak regime employed the use of violence against opposition parties and their supporters (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2005, 1). The goal was to harass and intimidate them, so that they would not cast their ballots.

Finally, to no one's surprise, President Mubarak was proclaimed the winner of the presidential election with over 88 percent of the votes. Later, he was sworn into office for his fifth six-year term. Exasperated by the fraudulent electoral process, various opposition parties and groups denounced the election as illegitimate. Prominent among them was Ayman Nour, the presidential candidate of the Ghad Party, and the "runner-up" in the 2005 presidential election. Characteristically, the Mubarak regime arrested and imprisoned the Ghad Party's flag bearer for challenging the results of the election (BBC News 2005b, 1).

Similarly, the parliamentary election was plagued by fraud and violence as part of the efforts of the Mubarak regime to retain control over the Egyptian polity, despite the limited

liberalization of the political space. In various cases, operatives of the Mubarak regime took steps to prevent access to polling stations by voters. As the *Washington Post* (2005, A-20) observes, “Government security forces and gangs of thugs from the ruling National Democratic Party blocked access to dozens of polling sites where opposition candidates were strong.” Additionally, in several cases, the state security forces opened fire on citizens who tried to vote; ten people were reportedly killed (*Washington Post* 2005, A-20). Moreover, inside the election stations, government appointees blatantly stuffed ballot boxes in full view of judicial monitors (*Washington Post* 2005, A-20).

In its assessment of the Egyptian presidential election, the International Republican Institute (IRI), a United States–based and primarily United States government funded public policy organization that deals with the issues of democratization and human rights, noted that there were significant problems with the electoral process. Specifically, the IRI identified three major problems. First, Article 76 of the Egyptian Constitution, the legal architecture for multi-partyism, denied access to several political parties that were desirous of contesting the presidency—a phenomenon the IRI refers to as the “limitation of the opportunity for genuine competition for the presidency” (International Republican Institute 2005, 1). Second, IRI found significant irregularities and violations of the electoral regulations as outlined in Laws No. 173 and 174. Third, the Mubarak regime refused to allow international observers to monitor the election (International Republican Institute 2005, 1).

### *Uganda*

Realizing that he could not seek a third term, when the second one expired in 2006, President Museveni launched a campaign to amend the constitution. Amid strong opposition from various sectors of the Ugandan society, the National Resistance Movement-dominated parliament changed the constitution in order to allow President Museveni to contest a third term (Ugandan Conflict Network 2006, 1). Despite the successful “constitutional coup,” President Museveni was cognizant that his regime lacked popular support. Hence, the *sine qua non* for his continual stranglehold on political power was dependent upon the age-old control of the electoral process and the use of violence to intimidate the opposition parties and their supporters.

Accordingly, during the 2006 presidential election, the Museveni government designed and implemented various strategies intended to manipulate the electoral process. One of the primary tactics was to perversely deploy legal processes to prevent those candidates who posed a major challenge to President Museveni from contesting the presidential election. For example, Kizza Besigye, the main opposition candidate, was arrested and imprisoned on an assortment of trumped up charges, including rape, treason, terrorism and weapons offenses (Ugandan Conflict Network 2006, 1). Even after his release from prison, the court proceedings adversely affected Besigye’s capacity to wage a full-scaled campaign throughout the country. Consequently, as Odongkara (2006, 1) notes, “the political ground was not leveled as Besigye was not given ample time to campaign because he was moving between the campaign and the courts, where he faced criminal charges.”

During the campaign, the Museveni regime unleashed a wave of terror against the opposition, drawing heavily on the military and the police. During various rallies organized by the opposition parties, the military and the police used violence to disperse participants (McLaughlin 2006, 1). In one major incident, riot police in pick-up trucks fired tear gas at hundreds of peaceful opposition supporters during the final rally of the main opposition party (McLaughlin 2006, 1). The final phases of the electoral process—voting and counting—were

marked by fraud. Both domestic and international observers, including the European Union Election Observation Mission, reported that, among other things, voters who were supporting the opposition parties were intimidated, ballot boxes were stuffed, and the counting process was plagued by fraud (Human Rights Watch 2006, 1). Even the United States government, which has touted President Museveni as an “enlightened leader,” and has poured money into Uganda to the tune of about \$50 million a year, acknowledged that there were electoral irregularities (Human Rights Watch 2006, 1; McKinley 2006, 1)).

While the opposition political parties led by Besigye and his Forum for Democratic Change were protesting, the election commission declared President Museveni the winner. Subsequently, he was inaugurated for his third term. Thus, President Museveni successfully completed the process of constitutional manipulation, electoral fraud and the retention of power, thereby further undermining the democratization project in Uganda.

### *Nigeria*

The foundation for the 2007 fraudulent elections was laid by President Olusegun Obasanjo, the incumbent. Realizing that his second and final term of office was coming to an end in 2007, President Obasanjo, having learned from the successful “constitutional coups” carried out by other incumbents such as Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, launched a campaign designed to amend the Nigerian Constitution. Several methods were employed to persecute President Obasanjo’s “third term agenda,” including bribery. For instance, some members of the Nigerian National Assembly were offered plots of land and about \$500,000 each as bribes to vote in favor of amending the constitution to allow for President Obasanjo’s third term (Soares 2006, 1). Fortunately, the majority of the members of the National Assembly bowed to the will of the Nigerian people, who, wearied of the excesses of the Obasanjo regime, and desirous of the promotion of democratization, pressured their representatives to reject the third term bid.

Having failed in his bid to hold onto power, President Obasanjo made the determination that he could use the power of incumbency to manipulate the electoral process in favor of his ruling People’s Democratic Party of Nigeria (PDP). Accordingly, the principal step was to ensure that the electoral commission was supportive of his fraudulent scheme to elect his handpicked successor Umaru Musu Yar’Adua (now deceased) as the new president of Nigeria, and to ensure that his political party retained control of the national assembly and the majority of the gubernatorialships. Against this backdrop, the electoral commission, acting as President Obasanjo’s handmaid, designed an electoral process that was plagued by fraud from the onset. For instance, during the voter registration phase, the electoral commission manufactured several problems, including the failure to generate data, the allowance of illegal registration centers, allowing under-age voters to register, the development of double entries, and the failure to develop permanent voters’ registration cards (European Union’s Election Observation Mission to Nigeria 2007, 1).

Having completed the corruption of the pre-voting phases of the electoral process, the partisan electoral commission took steps to “close the deal” for the incumbent President Obasanjo and his ruling PDP during the April 14 and 21, 2007 elections, when the people voted for state governors and state houses of assembly, members of the national assembly and the president. For example, several polling stations in the opposition’s strongholds were opened late, there were no polling stations in some areas, there was a lack of ballot materials in some areas, the voters’ registration lists were not posted at the various polling stations, under-age Nigerians were allowed to vote, and several people voted more than once (European Union Election



Observation Mission to Nigeria 2007, 1). Similarly, the results collation process was deliberately marked by a lack of transparency, thereby enabling the electoral commission to manipulate the final results in favor of the ruling PDP (European Union Observation Mission to Nigeria 2007, 1).

When the final results were announced by the electoral commission, the ruling PDP was declared the winner of the presidency, the majority of the seats in the national assembly, and the gubernatorial races and the state houses of assembly. Virtually all of the domestic and international observers declared the results fraudulent, including the observation mission from the United States. The European Union Observation Mission to Nigeria (2007, 1) captured the sentiments of the domestic and international observers by asserting, "...the 2007 election process was not credible, and in view of the lack of transparency and evidence of fraud, there can be no confidence in the results..."

### *Kenya*

The failure of the Kibaki regime to fulfill the campaign promises it made during the 2002 presidential election led many Kenyans to look for an alternative to the incumbent. Much of the electorate arguably saw the 2007 parliamentary and presidential elections as golden opportunities to effect change in the political leadership of the country. Interestingly, Raila Odinga and his Orange Democratic Movement emerged as the "new agents of change." It is noteworthy that Odinga was a former ally of President Kibaki in the National Rainbow Coalition that brought the Kibaki regime to power in the 2002 elections. Subsequently, Odinga served as a cabinet minister in the first Kibaki cabinet. However, the two later ended their political relationship as the National Rainbow Coalition became fractious and eventually splintered over policy disagreements.

Thus, on December 27, 2007, thousands of Kenyans went to the polls to elect a new parliament and president. Although there were several political parties that competed in the elections, President Kibaki's Party of National Unity, an alliance of various political parties, and Raila Odinga's Orange Democratic Movement, were the two major contenders. Prior to the holding of the presidential election, all of the major polls showed that Odinga was running clearly ahead (Nyong'o 2008, 1). However, to the great surprise and consternation of the majority of the Kenyan electorate, President Kibaki, the incumbent, was declared the winner of the presidential election by the government-controlled election commission. Amid the growing wave of mass anger and disgust, President Kibaki was quickly sworn into office for a second five-year term in what Nyong'o (2008, 1) has aptly characterized as a "stealth ceremony akin to a coronation."

The independent election observers, including the European Union Election Observation Mission, described the vote counting process in the presidential election as fraudulent. In a statement, Alexander Graf Lambsdorff, a member of the European Parliament and the head of the European Union Election Observation Mission, charged, "The election had fallen short of key international and regional standards for democratic elections" (Rice 2008, 1). Specifically, the head of the European Union Election Observation Mission asserted, "there was lack of transparency as well as a number of verified irregularities that cast doubt on the accuracy of the result of the presidential election as announced by the election commission of Kenya" (Rice 2008, 1). Subsequently, in a damning admission to fraud, Samuel Kivuitu, Chair of the Election Commission of Kenya, confessed that he announced the results of the presidential election in favor of the incumbent President Kibaki under pressure from the incumbent (Ongiri 2008, 1-4).

Exasperated by the brazen act of electoral fraud, Raila Odinga, the presumed winner of the presidential election, and his supporters rejected the results of the presidential contest, and expressed their non-recognition of the illegitimate Kibaki regime. The supporters of Odinga's political party quickly organized various protests throughout the country. Determined to remain in power, the Kibaki regime in turn unleashed the military and security forces to rain violence on the protesters. The resulting tit for tat between the supporters of Odinga and the Kibaki regime plunged Kenya into a political crisis that risked degenerating into a civil war. The costs of the mayhem in both human and material terms were enormous. For example, about 2,000 people were killed and as many as approximately 300,000 were displaced from their homes (Kagwanja and Southall 2009, 259). After weeks of chaos, a peace agreement was brokered between the Kibaki regime and Odinga's political party. The crux of the accord was the establishment of a power-sharing government in which the incumbent President Kibaki remained the president, and Raila Odinga became the prime minister. In effect, although the agreement ended the violence, it did not address the fundamental problem of the continual maintenance of power by President Kibaki through a fraudulent election.

### *Zimbabwe*

The fraudulent acts that mediated the first and second rounds of the 2008 presidential election in Zimbabwe, which were held on March 29 and June 27, 2008 respectively, were reflections of the deeper crisis of authoritarianism that engulfed the country. When Zimbabwe won independence from Britain in 1980, there was the hope that it would become a model for democracy and development on the African Continent. Unfortunately, by the mid-1980s, the hopes began to fade, as President Robert Mugabe began to amass and centralize powers.

Specifically, during the 2008 presidential election, the Mugabe regime controlled the totality of the electoral process. For example, during the runoff election (Mugabe was the sole candidate because Morgan Tsvangirai withdrew to protest the various fraudulent acts that characterized the electoral process, although his name remained on the ballot), voters were required to display "pinkies marked with the telltale purple ink" (*The Washington Post* 2008, A-10). Those voters who failed to do so were beaten by Mugabe's ruling party. And it was widely believed that the military and the youth militias also were able to track individual votes by the serial numbers on the ballots (*The Washington Post* 2008, A-10).

### **United States Foreign Policy Responses to the Elections in the Case Studies**

In the case of Egypt, despite the use of violence and fraud by the Mubarak regime during the country's parliamentary and presidential elections, the Bush administration heaped praises on the regime. In a statement, the then Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice asserted that:

Egypt's presidential election represents one step in the march towards full democracy that the Egyptian people desire and deserve. The process that culminated in the September 7 vote was characterized by freer debate, increased transparency, and improved access to the media, in contrast with previous polls (Rice 2005, 1).

Clearly, Secretary Rice's statement was tantamount to the United States' acceptance of the results of the elections. In addition, the Bush administration continued to do business with the Mubarak regime, which had retained power through fraudulent means. Further, Secretary Rice's rosy assessment of the Egyptian presidential election was not borne out by the empirical evidence. For example, the International Republican Institute (2005, 1) noted in its report that the election, among other things, was marked by the "limitation of the opportunity for genuine

competition for the presidency, and there were significant irregularities and violations in contravention of the Egyptian electoral code.” To make matters worse, the Mubarak regime refused to allow international observers to monitor the election (International Republican Institute 2005, 1). Are these good examples of transparency and fair competition, and building blocks for achieving full democracy in Egypt as Secretary Rice argued? The Bush administration’s decision to help legitimize the fraudulent elections in Egypt by continuing to do business with a regime that retained power through non-democratic means was driven primarily by the fact that the Mubarak regime served American interests both within the Middle East and globally. For example, Egypt supported various U.S. political, strategic, military and economic initiatives, including the “global war on terror” (U.S. Department of State 2007, 1). Furthermore, Egypt provides logistical and intelligence assistance to the United States, and assisted in diplomatic coordination for various American policy initiatives (U.S. Department of State 2010; Dorsey 2011).

In the case of Uganda, the United States accepted the results of the country’s fraudulent and violent presidential election because the Museveni regime serves American security interest in two major ways. Uganda provides an assortment of services for the United States in the prosecution of the latter’s “global war on terror.” At the regional level, Uganda serves as a check on Sudan, a strategically located Islamic state. For example, Uganda monitors the activities of various Islamic groups in Sudan; and the interactions between these groups and the Bashir regime (Young 2010).

Interestingly, in the case of Nigeria, the former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Jendayi Frazer, admitted that the “2007 Nigerian elections were plagued by malfeasance, such as vote rigging, ballot box stuffing, and non-transparent counting” (Frazer 2007, 1). So, why then did the Bush administration continue doing business with a regime that even admitted that it came to power through fraud (tantamount to accepting the results)? In providing the rationale, Frazer argued that “Nigeria remains vitally important to U.S. security, democracy, trade and energy policy needs and objectives. Its government remains one of our most dependable allies on the continent...” (Frazer 2007, 1). On balance, while Frazer admitted that the elections were fraudulent, she justified their acceptance on the grounds of American national interests. Specifically, Nigeria provides approximately 11 percent of overall United States’ oil imports and ranks as the fifth largest source for U.S. imported oil (Frazer 2007). In the area of trade, Nigeria is the largest United States’ trading partner in Sub-Saharan Africa, based mainly on the high level of petroleum imports (Frazer 2007). On the investment front, the total stock of United States’ private direct investment in Nigeria stood at about \$1 billion in 2005 (Frazer 2007). As for American security interests, Nigeria is quite pivotal to the implementation of the Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Program. Clearly, American economic and strategic interests in Nigeria took priority over the holding of free and fair elections in the country (Kesselman et al. 2010, 408-409).

As for Kenya, the Bush administration was swift to accept the results of the fraudulent presidential election. In a statement issued by the United States Embassy in Kenya, the Bush administration asserted, “We ask all candidates to accept the commission’s final results and to urge their supporters to reject violence and respect the rule of law” (Ogosia 2007, 1). Additionally, the United States Department of State argued that it had “great confidence in the election commission of Kenya and its chair, Samuel Kivuitu” (Ogosia 2007, 1). Interestingly, the post-election violence, and the admission by four members of the Kenyan Election Commission that the presidential election was fraudulent forced the United States to rethink its

premature expression of exuberance for the re-election of President Kibaki. In a move designed to placate the Kenyan people, the then U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs accused Kenyan leaders of cheating their own people over the highly disputed presidential election that plunged the country into its biggest crisis since independence (Rice 2008). The fact that the Bush administration was more interested in a client regime retaining power than in the promotion of political democratization in Kenya, however, was reflected in its admonition to Raila Odinga to accept the results of the fraudulent election and join President Kibaki in a power-sharing government.

Why did the United States refuse to take advantage of a golden opportunity to match its democracy promotion rhetoric with praxis in Kenya? The answer lies in two fundamentals of American foreign policy. First, the Bush administration, like its predecessors, believed (by its actions) in these instances that semi-authoritarian regimes (as well as authoritarian ones) could serve American national interests better (for examples, Mobutu, Doe, Barre). This is because it would be difficult for a democratic regime to serve some of the aspects of the United States' interests, because they violate political human rights (e.g., the counterterrorism activities) and promote socio-economic exploitation and injustices (e.g., investments by U.S. businesses). Consistent with the *realpolitik* logic—when the pursuance of American national interests clashes with the promotion of ideals such as the promotion of free and fair elections—the former takes priority over the latter. Accordingly, placed in the context of the United States' foreign policy framework, the incumbent Kibaki regime is more important to serving the United States' security and economic interests than the promotion of free and fair elections and the pursuance of the broader political democratization project. Not only is Kenya a long time military partner of the United States, but the relationship is now even more important in the context of the United States "war on terror" (Volman 2007, 1-5.) As a major anchor of the United States' East Africa Counter-Terrorism Initiative, Kenya plays the role of a gendarme in helping to police the Horn of Africa, especially Sudan and Somalia. Also, Kenya provides base access to the United States for various military operations. On the economic front, Kenya is a major hub for private American investment. In 2007, for example, total American private investments in Kenya stood at about \$285 million (U.S. Department of State 2008).

In the case of Zimbabwe, the United States rejected the results of the presidential election, and imposed a broad range of sanctions on the Mugabe regime. They included travel sanctions and a freeze on the financial assets of Mugabe and his family, and his closest political aides; a freeze on all non-humanitarian government-to-government aid; and a freeze on any transfer of defense-related items and services. In March 2010, President Obama extended the sanctions for another year (Kellerhalls 2010, 1). Clearly, the United States subjected Zimbabwe, which had a fraudulent election like Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria and Uganda, to a different standard. This was because, unlike the four American allies, Zimbabwe has an adversarial relationship with the United States.

### **U.S. Foreign Policy Responses, Implications, and Stability in African Democratization**

The United States foreign policy responses to the fraudulent elections in its allied and adversarial states have major implications for democratization and stability in these countries and the African Continent in general. The United States is contributing to the undermining of the broader democratization projects in these countries by supporting its allied regimes' use of fraudulent elections as instruments for the maintenance of power. It is also undercutting the efforts of the various pro-democracy movements in these countries that are struggling against

authoritarianism. Consequently, the United States has lost credibility as a supporter of democratization in the circles of these pro-democracy movements.

Furthermore, the United States is helping to embolden the forces of authoritarianism. This is because these authoritarian regimes are cognizant of the fact that as long as they serve American interests, the United States will acquiesce in their flagrant violations of the various major tenets of political democratization, including the holding of free, fair and transparent elections. Moreover, the United States is encouraging opposition groups in these countries to resort to the use of violence. This is because by supporting fraudulent elections, the United States is helping to make the peaceful change of government impossible in these countries.

At the broader continental level, the United States responses have several major effects. At the core is the fact that the United States' action helps to set a bad precedent. This is because other incumbent regimes—both allied and adversarial authoritarian governments (e.g., Zimbabwe)—would feel more emboldened to use fraudulent means to manipulate the electoral process as methods for holding on to power. Another implication is that the contagion effect of democratic elections is stymied. That is, the capacity of the holding of free, fair and transparent elections in one African country to affect the others has been undermined and minimized.

Importantly, there is the erosion of the moral authority of the United States, especially the capacity to mobilize African states to oppose fraudulent elections in a fellow state or states that are not aligned with the United States. The case of Zimbabwe provides an excellent example of the crisis of American moral leadership in international affairs. On the one hand, the U.S. applied its democracy promotion standard to Zimbabwe for its fraudulent election, but, on the other hand, it did not apply the same standard to its four allied states. In spite of the fact that fraudulent elections are anathema to democracy, the U.S. demonstrated double standards and hypocrisy in these five cases.

More broadly, there is the problem of the United States helping to undermine and hamstring the “third wave of democratization” that began sweeping across the continent in the early 1990s. The “third wave” entails the efforts to change authoritarian African states to liberal democratic ones. By supporting fraudulent elections in its allied African states, the United States is aiding and abetting the maintenance of the authoritarian albatross on the continent.

## Conclusion

The article has examined the relationship between the United States' “democracy promotion project” and elections in Africa. This was done by assessing the United States' foreign policy responses to fraudulent elections held in four of its major allied nations in Africa—Egypt, Uganda, Nigeria and Kenya—and Zimbabwe, an adversarial state. In terms of the responses to the fraudulent elections in its allied states, the United States accepted and helped legitimize the results of these elections by continuing to do business with the regimes that remained in power (Egypt, Kenya, and Uganda) and the one that emerged from a fraudulent election (Nigeria).

Most important among the implications of the United States actions is the undermining of the efforts to establish democratic elections as the only legitimate vehicles for effecting leadership change. In terms of the larger continent, the institutionalization of fraudulent elections in one set of countries makes it difficult for democratic elections to be established as the norm on the continent. Overall, this could adversely affect the broader democratization project on the continent.

In sum, the United States did not match its “democracy promotion” rhetoric with praxis, as evidenced by its responses to the election results in the five cases. Despite the fact that both

domestic and international observers declared the elections in Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria and Uganda fraudulent, the United States accepted the results by continuing to do business with the regimes that were the by-products of the fraudulent election. Moreover, in the case of Kenya, it implored the opposition to accept the fraudulent election results. Clearly, the United States cannot promote democracy in Africa by acquiescing in the commission of electoral fraud by its client regimes on the continent, on the one hand, and then condemning more adversarial regimes like the Mugabe government in Zimbabwe for conducting fraudulent elections, on the other. Such an inconsistent approach will undermine American moral leadership, the pivot of its democracy promotion project. So, either the United States applies its democracy promotion standards consistently across the board to allies and adversaries alike or it would be well served to end the farce.

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