

Review of: "Against Jump-Starting Western-Type Democracy on Africa's Socio-Political Tarmac"

Wim Blockmans¹

¹ History, Leiden University, Netherlands

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

The paper's general idea is highly relevant and might be rephrased in more general terms as questioning the conditions for the consolidation of democratic institutions in different types of societies. One has to be aware of its emergence in Europe only under particular circumstances and that it is not equally stable in various countries. The introductory reference to ancient Greece (reduced to Sparta) and the name-dropping of Western philosophers and politicians from Machiavelli to Lincoln are too superficial to be convincing. On the other hand, it might be worthwhile to briefly discuss the circumstances under which democratic institutions have been introduced in Africa: in the process of decolonization that became generalized after WWII. As that war had been launched by dictatorial regimes, 'democracy' was in the post-1945 era euphorically seen as a warrant against the re-appearance of aggressive dictatorship. However, also in Europe, democratic tendencies emerged only in some countries and under specific conditions; even today, it is functioning in various ways. The paper appears to reflect an ideal type of democracy that 'worked' or 'refused to work', while realities are much more complex.

The paper convincingly points to the necessary 'decolonization of the mind'; its argument might be strengthened by also referring to the global economic and military powers intervening in Africa. The paper's central argument in favour of African traditions is operationalized by reference to specific regulations such as majoritarian rule and permanent versus terminal 'reign'. It omits the European settings such as regional governments and proportional representation by coalitions, and the differentiation of powers in the legislative, executive, jurisdictional, economic, religious, and cultural spheres.

In sum: the paper addresses a crucial theme, and its leading idea might be right, but its construction is not convincing. For its general context, it might have been inspired by the book by the New York-based political scientist David Stasavage, *The Decline and Rise of Democracy* (Princeton UP 2020), which on pp. 54-56 discusses empirical data about 'Council governance' in the world over centuries.