

INTERVIEW WITH CAROLYN LOGAN

IDENTITY AND POLITICS IN AFRICA



Elections Today: *Some say people's political life is a reflection of their self-identity, which in turn can have many layers: citizenship, nationality, tribe, ethnicity, occupation. Has the role of tribalism in African politics been exaggerated?*

Carolyn Logan: Let's first consider how Africans identify themselves. Much of the interpretation of African political and social behavior still focuses on ethnic or tribal identity, and occupation and economic class are often regarded as "modern"

sources of identity that have not taken root in Africa. The results from the 12 countries included in Round 1 of the Afrobarometer survey (1999-2001) suggest that this is far from the case. We asked people to tell us which group, besides their nationality, they identify with first and foremost. Contrary to common perceptions, the largest proportion of respondents identify with their occupation (27%), although language, tribe or ethnic group ranks a close second (25%). Religion is the third most common source of identification (17%) followed by the quintessential "modern" source of identity: class (13%).

But the relatively low level of self-identification based on ethnicity does not necessarily mean that it is unimportant to the practice of politics. For example, one analysis of the survey results found that ethnicity is a significant predictor of party support in most Afrobarometer countries (See Pippa

INTERVIEW WITH SUSAN K. ROTH

DOES TECHNOLOGY INCLUDE OR EXCLUDE?



Elections Today: *How are universal accessibility standards defined for election-related technologies?*

Susan K. Roth: Universal accessibility implies that all members of the voting-age population, including those with visual, physical or cognitive disabilities, should have access to election-related technologies. This includes access to information at all stages of the voting process. The goal is to promote

independent, private voting for millions of disabled Americans.

Federal standards primarily address technical aspects of computerized voting equipment (*Voting System Standards*, Federal Election Commission, 1990). Recently the FEC initiated a project to develop usability standards for voting systems that may also address accessibility. More progress has occurred at the state level. Texas, for example, is recognized as a leader in requiring that voting systems be accessible to disabled voters.

States are currently implementing the *Help America Vote Act* (HAVA), federal legislation prompted by issues raised in the last U.S. presidential election that was finally signed into law in October 2002. HAVA requires that at least one

INTERVIEW WITH DIANE RICHLER

INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY AS A LITMUS TEST



Elections Today: *As its president, can you tell us what is Inclusion International?*

Diane Richler: Inclusion International is a grassroots human rights organization of families, self-advocates and committed citizens, dedicated to protecting the rights of the 60 million people with an intellectual disability around the world and enabling them to live meaningful lives in the mainstream of society. Inclusion International was founded in 1960 and now has 200 member

organizations in 115 countries. Each of these members is itself a federation of local associations. Our member in Brazil alone is made up of over 1600 local chapters!

Until 1996 we were known as the International League of Societies for Persons with a Mental Handicap. Our name change reflects an increased involvement in our organization by persons who have been labeled as having an intellectual disability or mental handicap and who did not want to be part of an organization that perpetuated labeling of people and the stigma attached to the label. Our new name describes our mission. We want communities and societies to be fully inclusive, and we focus on helping them to become more inclusive.

ET: *What prevents inclusion for individuals with an intellectual disability?*

Norris and Robert Mattes. "Does ethnicity determine support for the governing party?" Afrobarometer Working Paper No. 26, at www.afrobarometer.org). However, this study also found that the strength of this association again varies cross-nationally, with the linkages strongest in societies divided by many languages and weakest in countries where ethno-linguistic groups are more homogeneous. Our findings therefore suggest that while the importance of ethnicity in African politics may well have been exaggerated in the past, it also cannot be ignored. It is one important variable in the mix of factors that explain political attitudes and behavior on the continent.

ET: *How strongly does Islam emerge as a political force in Africa, based on the Afrobarometer survey results?*

CL: We have focused our analysis of Afrobarometer data on the relationship between attachment to Islam and support for a democratic system of government (See "Islam, Democracy, and Public Opinion in Africa," Afrobarometer Briefing Paper No. 3, at www.afrobarometer.org). Some influential observers, such as Samuel Huntington, have alleged that Islam and democracy are incompatible. To test this, we compared beliefs between Muslims and non-Muslims in four Afrobarometer Round 1 countries with sizeable Muslim populations: Mali, Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda. Across these four countries, the survey population is almost evenly divided between Muslims (46%) and non-Muslims (54%).

The results reinforce findings from surveys in Central Asia and the Middle East: Although adherents of Islam in Africa

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The best method for developing accessibility standards is to involve special populations in the testing and evaluation of voting technologies.

accessible voting system be made available in each polling place by 2006. Mandated state planning groups must include representatives of the disability community. Challenges remain, however, such as the need to increase the accessibility of polling places, identify the most accessible, cost-effective voting systems for purchase, and educate poll workers on a continual basis about accessibility issues.

DR: Often, exclusion of persons with an intellectual disability is the result of direct discrimination. For example, recently, a clinic in Central America had drugs to treat only two of three children in need, and the child with an intellectual disability was denied the medical treatment simply because of being judged less worthy on the basis of his disability. In other cases, the discrimination is systemic, as when teacher training does not help to prepare teachers to address a wide range of learning styles in a classroom. Often, the policies of governments and funding bodies inadvertently promote exclusion by failing to take into account the needs of persons with an intellectual disability in their planning. For example, when modernizing a judicial system, it is important to ensure that persons who do not communicate in traditional ways will be able to give testimony in court. Without this kind of planning, people with

The disabled should be involved in the ongoing development of federal standards and state and federal legislation. According to Jim Dickson, Vice President for Governmental Affairs of the American Association of People with Disabilities, "Standards will be periodically set to modernize what accessibility means under law, and there will be periodic opportunities to write into federal standards for accessibility."

The best method for developing accessibility standards is to involve special populations in the testing and evaluation of voting technologies. A recent voting technology fair organized by the office of Manhattan Borough President Virginia Fields in collaboration with the

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intellectual disabilities will continue to be victims of abuse and be excluded from the due process that could protect them.

ET: *How do you promote inclusion?*

DR: We try to engage in policy at all levels and to work in collaboration with other members of civil society, with

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occasionally display distinctive political attitudes, they do not differ much from non-Muslims on the subject of democracy, and their differences with others do not always run in an anti-democratic direction. We found that Muslims are nearly as supportive of democracy as non-Muslims. Some 71% of Muslims, and 76% of non-Muslims, agree that “democracy is always preferable to any other form of government.” Also, the frequency of religious observance (only measured among Nigerian Muslims) shows a strong and positive relationship with support for democracy (54% among those who never attend, compared to 71% among those who attend weekly or more). This important finding clearly calls into question any effort to stereotype all mosques as hotbeds of anti-democratic rhetoric or to portray fervent Muslims as automatically opposed to democracy.

But perhaps most significantly, the data reveal that more than religion, modernization affects support for democracy. The difference in support for democracy between Muslims and non-Muslims is just 5 percentage points, but that between the least educated and most educated is 19 points. This comparison suggests that considerations of religion may be less important to the fate of democracy than certain attributes of modernization.

ET: *Many African nations are artificial outcomes of colonial regimes. How deep is the loyalty and identification with these nations? Is there a sense of belonging that goes beyond tribe, religion or ethnicity?*

CL: Afrobarometer findings clearly indicate that the Africans we have surveyed do indeed feel a strong sense of loyalty and identification with their nations. For example, in Round 1 we asked respondents whether or not it makes them proud

Susan K. Roth, Continued

Center for Independence of the Disabled in New York produced valuable feedback on the accessibility of voting systems and identified possible areas for improvement. A report is available at www.cvfieldsmbp.org.

ET: *How can well-defined standards help technology work for political empowerment and social integration?*

SR: Standards provide a benchmark for measuring performance relative to a defined goal or outcome. If the goal is to increase participation for all eligible voters including those with lower education levels, standards should require that ballot language be clear and unambiguous, instructions for use of voting equipment prominently displayed adjacent to the ballot, including instructions for changing one’s vote, and the operation of

voting equipment should be obvious. Technology that prevents overvoting and warns voters about undervoting will assist those with lower education levels as well as all voters. Providing voters with the opportunity to correct errors before leaving the polling place and implementing provisional voting are factors that will increase voter confidence in the system and promote accurate election results—results that reflect intentions of the voter.

HAVA has drawn attention to some of these issues by mandating provisional voting (allowing voters to cast a vote provisionally if there is a question about eligibility, voting district, etc.) and “second chance” voting. This provides voters with the opportunity to verify votes selected, receive notification of over-voting, and correct errors.

Empowering voters involves more than technology. Providing pre-election education in the appropriate language, offering

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governments and with multi-lateral agencies to develop practical approaches to ensure inclusion. At the local and national levels, some of our members provide direct support and services to persons with an intellectual disability and their families while other members play roles as advocates. Sometimes our advocacy is directed at addressing specific cases of abuse. More often, we attempt to demonstrate how inclusion can be facilitated


and work with generic service providers, governments and funders. After we identified electoral rights as one of the key indicators of citizen participation in the early 90s, we had several meetings with IFES and others to discuss the issue. We were delighted to see IFES become a global leader in promoting the electoral rights of persons with disabilities.

ET: *Does this approach work for other disenfranchised groups?*

DR: Not only does this approach work for other groups, but we have been delighted to see others benefit from our efforts. When we work to make classrooms more inclusive of children with an intellectual disability, quality improves for all children. Bringing together mothers of children with a disability in regions where women have not been active politically has helped to empower those mothers. Encouraging our members to work with

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attached to their group identity or their national identity, on average nearly two-thirds (64%) express greater attachment to their *national* identity. Another question asked respondents to choose between the statement that “Even if there are conflicts among different groups, [our country] should remain united as one country,” versus the alternative that “The differences among [our people] are too strong; for the sake of peace, the country should be broken apart.” Across seven countries, an overwhelming majority of 89% opted for unity, and these strong majorities hold even in countries such as Uganda (96%) that have long been torn by internal conflict. 

to be called a Tanzanian, a Zambian, etc. Across the 10 countries where this question was asked, fully 94% agreed that it does, and of these, 70% agreed strongly. This even slightly surpasses the 91% who said they were proud to be a member of their self-defined identity group.


Early results from seven countries in Round 2 provide further evidence of the strong sense of attachment Africans feel to their countries. When asked whether they feel more strongly

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nonpartisan assistance at the polling place, involving children in mock elections, and introducing families to the process of voting through civic education are factors that could increase participation and empower voters regardless of economic or education level.

ET: *Can societies based on pre-literate, oral traditions make the leap to the Internet age? Can this political evolution be rushed, or are we realistically looking at a digital divide that will linger for generations?*

SR: This is a complex issue. As oral traditions bind together pre-literate societies, electronic and digital communications create a global culture of the technologically advantaged. Use of advanced systems requires a relatively high level of education, economic infrastructure and access to technology. Computerized voting systems were intended to enhance vote tabulation and offer added security over systems relying


on manual tabulation. It is possible to involve pre-literate societies in the world of technology-mediated elections if the context is considered. For example, images displayed on touch screens or smaller handheld wireless digital systems might substitute for more complex voting systems used in developed countries, if minimal infrastructure is present. Illiteracy is probably a more significant factor in hampering the democratic process and the ability to make informed choices, so there is an ongoing need to educate pre-literate populations. Through a collaborative effort, sensitivity to cultural traditions and the application of appropriate technologies, it might be possible to help pre-literate societies build a bridge to the 21st century in terms of civic participation. 

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both government and opposition parties helps to build stronger democracies.

ET: *What specific barriers are you working on now?*

DR: We currently have four priority areas: children and families, inclusive education, poverty reduction, and values and ethics. In each of these areas we are creating Global Knowledge Networks through a project called Building Inclusive Futures. This is an Inclusion International initiative designed to address the social, economic, political and cultural exclusion of people with intellectual disabilities and other marginalized groups through policy dialogue, development and change. This initiative has been supported by the Canadian International Development Agency.

DR: We are encouraging our members to become involved before, during and after elections in order to ensure the full political participation of persons with an intellectual disability and their families. Before elections, many of our members have sponsored forums with the various political candidates and have succeeded in securing commitments to a policy of inclusion whether they subsequently form the government or are in opposition. During elections, we encourage voting and try to work with the authorities to eliminate specific barriers to the voting process. After elections, we work to establish mechanisms of collaboration with the government to ensure participation in the formulation and implementation of policies as well as social audits to monitor government commitments. 

ET: *What are you doing, and what can others do, to promote electoral and political inclusion?*

Diane Richler is President of Inclusion International, www.inclusion-international.org.