

ARTS, CULTURE, AND CIVIC EDUCATION IN AFRICA

By Dr. Stephanie M. Burchard

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Scene from *Half of a Yellow Sun*. In Nigeria, the release of the highly anticipated film was delayed for several months by a state review board amid concerns that the depiction of the rarely discussed 1960s civil war could incite violence. (Source: (AP Photo/ Yellow Sun Ltd.)

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THE DILEMMAS OF TRAINING AFRICA'S MILITARIES

By Alexander Noyes

On August 6, 2014, at the conclusion of the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit, President Obama announced two new initiatives aimed at bolstering Africa's security forces: the African Peacekeeping Rapid Response Partnership ([A-Prep](#)) and the Security Governance Initiative ([SGI](#)). After the announcement, Alex de Waal and Abdul Mohammed [argued](#) in the *New York Times* that President Barack Obama's strategy of training and equipping African militaries was contributing to the "militarization of Africa's politics" and that "America's diplomacy is becoming a handmaiden to Africa's generals." Should the international community train and support Africa's militaries, or does this practice simply help authoritarian leaders stay in power, as may be the case in Rwanda and Uganda, or increase the risk of military coups, as seen in Mali in 2012? [more...](#)



President Barack Obama speaks at a news conference at the end of the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit at the State Department in Washington, Wednesday, August 6, 2014. (Source: AP Photo/Charles Dharapak.)

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The Institute for Defense Analyses is a non-profit corporation operating in the public interest.

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IDA's Africa team focuses on issues related to political, economic, and social stability and security on the continent.

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Civic Education

Since the 1990s, many international organizations have incorporated civic education as part of their democracy promotion programs. Civic education can be an [effective tool](#) that increases issue awareness and political participation, especially if citizens are already interested in learning more about various issues such as voting rights and human rights.

Unfortunately, while many governments tout the benefits of civic education, they often fail to adequately fund it. Kenya may be illustrative. The 2013 Kenyan election was a watershed moment for the country's history. After the post-election violence of 2007–8, the new constitution devolved power to the county level and created new county-level assemblies and a Senate. Under the new dispensation, voters would be casting six separate ballots. There were significant concerns over the [complexity of the new system](#) and repeated calls for extensive civic education programs. Although more than [\\$95 million was spent](#) on the adoption of biometric voter registration, relatively little was spent on civic education programs. The Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) launched its official program only [one month before](#) the election. Materials that were distributed around the country were printed only in English and Swahili even though more than 40 languages are spoken in Kenya.

Societal Needs and Priorities

The incorporation of popular culture to increase the appeal of civic education programs is not a new phenomenon, but recent examples may provide insight into what domestic groups feel are today's pressing issues. These examples may also shed light on gaps in existing civic education programs and serve to highlight areas that are not being given sufficient attention by government-initiated programs.

- On August 18, the Legal and Human Rights Center, a nongovernmental organization dedicated to promoting human rights and the rule of law in Tanzania, announced that it would be distributing a [new song and film](#) to citizens around the country to make them aware of the constitution-writing process currently taking place in the country. The launch of the campaign was attended by several high-profile Tanzanian artists.
- In Kenya, Malaria No More [released a song](#) called "Malaria Ni Hatari." The song, which was recorded by popular Kenyan musicians, included in the lyrics different ways to prevent malaria.
- In West Africa, the Senegalese [Y'en A Marre](#) movement is in the process of releasing a song on ways to [prevent the spread of the ebola virus](#). To provide clear and accessible information to the Senegalese population, the group has recorded an audio track and an accompanying music video in Wolof, the dominant language. This proactive step may be motivated by the chaos currently taking place in [Liberia](#), which is due in no small part to fear and misinformation.

- In Nigeria, the release of the film adaptation of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Half a Yellow Sun* was delayed for months. Censors were worried that the film could [undermine national unity](#) in the country and potentially incite violence. The film, set against the backdrop of the 1960s Biafran civil war, touches on controversial subjects not often discussed in Nigeria, including the barbarism of the war, in which it is believed that more than 2 million Nigerians lost their lives. In response to the delay, Adichie wrote an [op-ed in the New Yorker](#) in which she claims there is a culture of silence regarding the past. The movie opened at the beginning of August. It set a new [box office record](#) for sales. The success of the film may be a reflection of what Nigerians are craving now: information on the country's history. This is especially poignant as some of the issues facing the country in the 1960s concerning national unity and Nigerian identity are as relevant now as they were then.

Conclusion

It remains to be seen whether popular culture can fully bridge the gap in civic education found in many African countries, but the very trend of artists stepping in to do what governments have been unable or unwilling to do is promising. If such actions prompt governments to take a more active role in providing information to their citizens, so much the better.

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Researchers Differ – Some Support Military Training Assistance

Recent academic research on this question does not offer definitive findings or guidance. On the one hand, a number of norm-based statistical studies—worldwide in scope—suggest that U.S. military training and professional education programs may do more good and less harm than is sometimes thought.

A 2010 [study](#) by Tomislav Ruby and Douglas Gibler in the *European Journal of International Relations* found, "contrary to popular opinion, United States Professional Military Education (PME) provides an important stabilizing force, especially in emerging democracies. . . . The foreign military officer returns as a professional soldier, better educated, and more likely to be sympathetic to democratic values." They also conclude that PME has led to a decrease in military coup propensity. None of the three cases analyzed by the authors were in Africa, but the study does mention the example of Mali as a success. This is perhaps problematic, given that two years after the study was published, Captain Amadou Sanogo of Mali, who had [received](#) U.S. training, staged a military coup.

A 2006 [study](#) by Carol Atkinson published in *International Studies Quarterly* also found "U.S. military-to-military contacts to be positively and systematically associated with liberalizing trends." She found similar results in a broader 2010 [study](#) that also included civilian cultural exchanges.

Others Cite Negative Consequences of Training

On the other hand, a recent [working paper](#) by Jesse Dillon Savage and Jonathan Caverley examined the topic using a newer data set and came to the opposite conclusion: training through the U.S. International Military Education and Training "alters the balance of power between the military and the regime resulting in greater coup propensity" once soldiers return to their home countries.

A number of case studies focusing on Africa are also largely pessimistic about the impact of foreign military training in Africa. A 2014 [article](#) by Danielle Beswick in *African Affairs* found that international military-capacity-building programs in Rwanda had significant downsides, "including security risks for African states and communities that may find enhanced military capacity used against them, and also political risk to donors' domestic and international reputations in the event of misuse." Another 2010 [study](#) by Jan Bachman and Jana Hönke published in *African Affairs* examined the domestic effects of international counterterrorism support in Kenya and also concluded that such programs were "appropriated for illiberal purposes" by domestic politicians.

Conclusion

These academic research efforts, although inconclusive, starkly illustrate the dilemmas and trade-offs international actors face in training and equipping Africa's militaries in an effort to help fight extremism and bolster regional peacekeeping capacity. Joined by other allies, namely [France](#) and the United Kingdom, the Obama administration has decided to amplify military training efforts in Africa, as evidenced by the launch of A-Prep and the SGI. Given this commitment, steps should be taken to help mitigate the potential pitfalls of military training outlined above. Comprehensive, transparent programs that go beyond the military and address the reform and democratization of African security institutions are likely to be needed.

SGI is an excellent start in this regard, as the program [focuses](#) on improving “the systems, processes, and institutions that reinforce democratic security sector governance.” The [initiative](#), which spans six countries in Africa, has been allocated \$65 million in its first year. While it is impossible to ensure that hard military skills, once acquired, will be used solely for their intended purposes, expanding programs such as the SGI to include more countries—with associated increases in resourcing—could in the long term help build more stable civil-military relations and accountable systems of security governance in Africa.

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