

# POWER DEBT & DEMOCRACY

A YOUTH GUIDE TO CONSTITUTIONALISM IN AFRICA



AFRICAN NETWORK OF CONSTITUTIONAL LAWYERS  
RÉSEAU AFRICAIN DE DROIT CONSTITUTIONNEL  
REDE AFRICANA DE JURISTAS CONSTITUCIONALISTAS



# Democracy is more than Elections

When leaders stay too long, when elections feel meaningless, or when governments borrow secretly, young people often pay the price.



## THE BIG IDEA

Democracy is not just about voting, it is also about whether citizens can peacefully change leaders, whether power is checked, whether opposition voices are heard, and whether public money is managed openly.

### IN SIMPLE WORDS

**Constitutionalism** means everyone must follow the constitution - including presidents, ministers, police, parliament and courts. **Power has limits, Government should serve the people, not protect itself.**



Vote



Voice



Rights



Money



Accountability

“  
A strong democracy gives people a real  
voice—not just a ballot paper.”

**ASK YOURSELF:** Do elections in your country give people real choices?

# Why should leaders change?

**One of the strongest signs of a healthy democracy is the peaceful transfer of power.**

Democracy works best when citizens can choose leaders and replace them peacefully when they believe change is needed.



## What Are Term Limits?

**Term limits** are constitutional rules that limit how long a leader may remain in office. For example, a president may only serve two elected terms. These rules prevent excessive concentration of power.

### THINK ABOUT IT

Imagine a school president changes the rules to remain in office forever. Would elections still matter? Would students trust the process? Would other voices be heard? **The same principle applies in national politics.**

## Why Term Limits Matter

- ✓ Encourage accountability
- ✓ Create opportunities for new leadership
- ✓ Strengthen public trust
- ✓ Reduce political tensions

## Benefits of Peaceful Power Transitions

- Real voter choice
- Stronger institutions
- Better accountability
- Greater stability
- Increased trust in democracy

“  
*No public office should become a lifetime seat.*”

# Democracy should not mean Winner gets everything



## Winner- Takes- All

- Power is concentrated in one person or group
- Other voices are ignored or silenced
- Institutions are captured and weakened
- Corruption and abuse of power flourish
- Citizens lose trust and stop participating.

## Inclusive Democracy

- ✓ Power is shared and balanced.
- ✓ All voices are heard and respected.
- ✓ Institutions are strong and independent
- ✓ Accountability and transparency thrive
- ✓ Citizens are engaged and trust grows.

## WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?

- Set and respect term limits.
- Strengthen Independent Institutions
- Protect freedom of expression.
- Ensure fair access to power
- Promote civic education
- Support active citizen participation.
- Hold leaders accountable.
- Put the people first, always.

“Democracy works better when power is shared, checked, and questioned.”

**ASK YOURSELF:** Who gets excluded when one political group controls everything?

# Debt Today can Shape your Tomorrow

When governments borrow money today, young people may live with the consequences tomorrow.



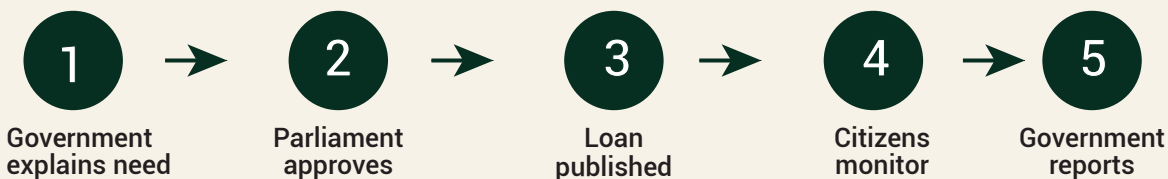
## IN SIMPLE WORDS

**Public debt** is money that a government borrows and must repay, usually with interest. Borrowing is not always bad. Governments can borrow to build roads, hospitals, schools, energy systems, water projects, or respond to emergencies.

## BADLY MANAGED DEBT CAN LEAD TO:

- High Taxes
- Reduced Education funding
- Reduced healthcare funding
- Fewer jobs & youth programs
- Rising cost of Living
- Less climate & development funding

## HOW PUBLIC BORROWING SHOULD WORK



## YOUNG PEOPLE CAN DEMAND DEBT JUSTICE

**OPEN** - Citizens should know what government is borrowing

**APPROVED** - Parliament should review major loans

**ACCOUNTABLE** - Leaders should explain how borrowed money is used.

**FAIR** - Future generations should not carry unfair burdens.

**USEFUL** - Borrowing should serve public needs, not private gain.

## QUESTIONS YOUNG PEOPLE CAN ASK

- ❓ What is loan for?
- ❓ Who approved it?
- ❓ Where can citizens read the loan agreement
- ❓ How will it be repaid?
- ❓ Will it improve jobs, education, health infrastructure, or climate resilience?



“Our constitutions should protect not only Today’s Leaders but tomorrow’s generations”

**ASK YOURSELF:** Who will pay the price if public debt is not transparent and accountable?

# About the Project

This youth digest is part of the project “Strengthening Constitutionalism for Democracy and Freedom in Africa.”

The project is part of a wider effort to strengthen constitutionalism and the rule of law in Africa by supporting dialogue, targeted reforms, and youth action against democratic backsliding.



## WHAT IS DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING?

Democratic backsliding is when democracy starts moving backwards. Elections may still happen, but leaders slowly weaken the rules, institutions, and freedoms that make democracy real.

## WHY CONSTITUTIONALISM MATTERS

### CAMPAIGN NOTE

Constitutions are not just legal documents. They shape power, rights, public money, and our future.

This digest is part of the Why Constitutionalism Matters campaign which aims to help young people understand, claim, and defend the constitutional principles that protect democracy and accountable government.

**ASK YOURSELF:** *What role can I play in protecting democracy in my community?*

# A Call to Action

## #MyConstitutionMyVoice

Constitutions only matter when people know them, claim them, and defend them.

Young people can protect democracy by defending term limits, demanding transparency, resisting democratic backsliding, and holding leaders accountable.



Know your  
Constitution.



Use your  
voice.



Question  
power



Defend  
democracy.

*Your Constitution.*  
*Your Voice.*  
*Your Future.*

**ASK YOURSELF:** *What action can I take today to defend democracy tomorrow?*



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## African Network of Constitutional Lawyers (ANCL)

The African Network of Constitutional Lawyers (ANCL) is a pan-African network of legal scholars, practitioners, judges, academics, and constitutional experts committed to advancing constitutionalism, democracy, the rule of law, and human rights across Africa.

ANCL promotes constitutional dialogue, research, capacity building, civic education, and policy engagement to strengthen democratic governance and accountable leadership throughout the continent.



## National Democratic Institute (NDI)

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization working to strengthen and safeguard democratic institutions worldwide.

NDI supports citizen participation, accountable governance, transparent elections, inclusive political processes, and democratic resilience through partnerships with civil society, governments, political actors, and citizens.

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*For More information scan the qr code*

