

The book's multi-sited approach provides an important intervention in migration studies, encouraging us to look beyond home and host countries to consider how (aspiring) migrants understand various trajectories in relation to a wide range of possible destinations and potential means of getting abroad. The downside of this comparative approach is that juxtaposing three sites leaves little space to elaborate on the specificities of each national context. The introduction offers a brief history of each country's approach to race and migration, but tells us little about how this translates into concrete trajectories, structuring the opportunities for jobs, formal education, visas, or paths to citizenship available to migrants, and how these might, in turn, shape language practices.

Smith's writing style lends itself to use in the classroom. All transcribed passages appear first in their original language(s), then in English, providing abundant data for students to examine. She describes her research process with particular transparency – inviting the reader to the cafés where she first met interviewees or describing the awkwardness of being underdressed at a Senegalese social gathering – which can give students a tangible sense of what ethnographic research consists of and how to use it to inform linguistic analysis.

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Contemporary Nigerian Politics: competition in a time of transition and terror by
A. CARL LEVAN

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Since 1960, Nigeria's electoral history has been characterised by violence and the use of the instruments of the state by incumbents to hold on to power. The 2015 election bucked this trend and marked the first time an incumbent had been defeated. In this context, A. Carl LeVan's *Contemporary Nigerian Politics: competition in a time of transition and terror* provides answers to key questions about how this happened; what makes Nigeria's transition to democracy in 1999 different from previous transitions; and how an opposition political party cobbled together a few months before the general election of 2015 ended up defeating a ruling party that had been in power for 16 years.

The book is framed around three important conditions that LeVan argues:

shaped the post-colonial context: the precedent of military intervention and limitations on the ability of institutions to structure uncertainty; geopolitical realignments that internationally amplified Nigeria's strategic importance and domestically produced conflicting structures of interest aggregation; and the normalization of violence as these structures failed to moderate or mediate citizen demands. (5)

These conditions defined Nigeria's transition from military to civilian rule in 1999, in particular by shaping the 'coup proofing' pact between the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the military. However, elite rivalry and grassroots democratic pressure later weakened this pact and created new space for political

organising and the emergence of a new opposition party – All People’s Congress (APC).

To LeVan, the key to understanding how an incumbent party, the PDP, was defeated by the opposition APC, is a critical rethinking of existing theories about political participation in Africa by scholars and political theorists. Some of these theorists suggest that politics in Africa is principally constructed around ethnic, regional and religious cleavages with no recourse to socio-economic issues that confront the general population. By contrast, LeVan’s data – analysis of elite rhetoric and electoral behaviour, combined with interviews and ethnographic study – shows that ‘African political parties can and do run on strategies calculated and calibrated by issue appeals’ (3).

The book also shows through statistical analysis that ‘subjective evaluations of national economic performance, objective measures of economic conditions, and enthusiasm for the opposition candidate’s economic promises systematically explain electoral outcomes across states’ (3) in 2015. Thus, APC’s campaign on economic issues and electoral integrity offered a broader electoral coalition that cut across ethnic and religious divides in ways that the PDP’s traditional ethno-regional strategy could not match (2). Contrary to most literature that treats the demise of military/authoritarian regimes as the end of transitions, LeVan argues that, ‘Nigeria’s transition from dictatorship to democracy did not end until the defeat of the ruling PDP in 2015, sixteen years after the handover to civilians’ (24). Thus, the end of Nigeria’s transition in 2015 marks the beginning of a new era in the country’s electoral politics where socio-economic policies seem to be becoming an important parameter for measuring electoral success.

LeVan contends that the biggest challenges to the sustenance of democracy in Nigeria today are not from the ‘outcome or the administration of its elections, but from subnational contrarians questioning their limits entirely’ (183–4). These include groups such as Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and Boko Haram, as well as herder-farmer conflicts that may complicate the process of consolidating democracy in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state such as Nigeria.

Importantly, LeVan shifts readers’ attention to transitions not as an end in themselves but as a phase in electoral practices that will ultimately lead to enduring democratic practices. As LeVan concludes, ‘this is the beginning of a story not just about elections but about the elite politics of hope, the collective power of voters, and the boundaries of competition whose negotiation forms the foundation of democratic renewal’ (217).

While I share in LeVan’s optimism about the consolidation and renewal of democracy not only in Nigeria but elsewhere, I am also filled with a little scepticism considering the current global threat against democratic practice as a result of the rise of populism and nationalism, particularly in the USA, Europe and Latin America. If these countries and regions are models for those in transition, we may begin to see a shift in the meaning and practice of electoral democracy.

Contemporary Nigerian Politics makes an important contribution to the understanding of electoral practices in Nigeria. The book will provoke intellectual debate about the place of electoral politics in Nigeria, Africa and beyond for many years to come.

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