

POLITICS, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, AND GLOBALIZATION

Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, eds. *Democratization in Africa: Progress and Retreat*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press and the National Endowment for Democracy, 2010. A *Journal of Democracy* book. xxvii + 360 pages. Figures. Tables. Maps. Index. \$30.00. Paper.

How is Africa ruled? Better than before, according to Larry Diamond in his introduction. Of Africa's fifty-odd countries, *twenty* are now full-fledged "electoral democracies" and only Somalia and Swaziland have held *no* competitive elections (x).

At the same time, many of these elections have been blatantly rigged and deeply flawed. Recently, there have been five outright reversals of democracy, and a large number of countries have very low levels of democratic quality; restricted freedom and political competition, widespread corruption and clientelism, and a "big man syndrome" prevail. Elections are becoming a means of power preservation in Africa.

Most of the individual chapters of this collection of twenty-four short essays were published in the *Journal of Democracy* between 2007 and 2009, and they fall into two categories. The introduction and the first eight chapters discuss the levels and trends of democracy in Africa, and the challenges to it. The rest are dedicated to individual countries.

Without turning to a sterile discussion on the definitions of democracy (we know an elephant when we spot one), the first chapters take up issues like the untamed presidents (H. Kwasi Prempeh), the "big man syndrome" (Larry Diamond), and informal politics (Daniel N. Posner and Daniel J. Young). These are core problems to democratization on the continent. Adding to the problem is the arrival of China, which "gives new lease to authoritarian regimes in Africa" (Richard Joseph) and growth without prosperity (Peter Lewis). However, one possible remedy is addressed, namely the legislatures as "significant institutions of countervailing power" (Joel Barkan).

The country chapters address these core problems more or less explicitly. However, all sub-Saharan countries cannot be covered in a book like this, and some important countries are missing. For instance, President Laurent Gbagbo of Côte d'Ivoire is at the time of writing struggling to hold on to the presidential power he has had for ten years, despite electoral defeat. Madagascar is another case of democratic reversal. How did they end up there?

African "prophets" are nevertheless fading away. The era of the great ideologies is over, and totalitarian regimes are very few. African leaders are happy just to retain power; they do not expect to be loved, too. It is their time to eat, and eating alone does not make friends. The close to 100 percent electoral support and beyond (!), indicating that also "the singing birds and the shining stars of the skies" are voting for "the great leader," is not the African way.

The theoretic backdrop of most of the articles in this volume is what is called “new institutionalism.” But institutions do matter—indeed, “political economy analysis” is increasingly taken into consideration in much of the other literature on democracy in Africa: for instance, in considerations of the “resource curse” theory. One example of such analysis is Paul Collier’s *Conflict, Political Accountability and Aid* (Routledge, 2009), which, on the subject of democracy and conflict in Africa, suggests that there is a “threshold level of income at which the net effect is zero, being differently signed above and below this threshold” (213). This means that at low income levels the call for democratic accountability can be counterproductive.

At higher income levels, the kind of government revenue makes the difference. In natural-resource-rich economies, rent-seeking enters into the equation. Collier makes an interesting distinction between two dimensions of democracy: electoral competition and checks and balances (measuring the latter as the number of veto players in the system). He finds that “by undermining checks and balances, resource rents unleash patronage politics and in these conditions electoral competition is economically damaging” (246).

Although some of the chapters do address political economy issues, the economic power and economic interests of the ruling elites and dominating presidents of Africa remain largely absent from the analysis. So does the international economic dynamics and their effects on African presidents. The virtues of the collection are found elsewhere, in the rich accounts of democracy’s progress and retreat in Africa.

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Kennedy Agade Mkutu. *Guns and Governance in the Rift Valley: Pastoralist Conflict and Small Arms*. African Issues. Oxford: James Currey; Bloomington: Indiana University Press; Kampala: Fountain Publishers; Johannesburg: Jacana Media; Nairobi: E. A. E. P, 2008. xi + 178 pp. Maps. Photographs. Bibliography. Index. \$22.95. Paper.

The proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons (SALW) contribute to the escalation of violence in sub-Saharan Africa. *Guns and Governance in the Rift Valley* shows how this proliferation fuels deadly violence among pastoral communities in the Rift Valley region of northwestern Kenya and in northeastern Uganda. Relying on data from public health clinics in Uganda and Kenya as well as police records from Kenya, Mkutu traces and explains the rise in pastoral violence. His main argument is that pastoralists are under threat from such factors as inadequate policing, pressures on land and water supplies, and increasing insecurity from the prolifer-