

it into his account, it is given fleeting attention versus the emphasis on elite discourse. But what were African elites responding to and how did they depart, both structurally and rhetorically, from the previous era?

Similarly, when writing about the speeches of African leaders such as Konare in Mali and Houphouet-Boigny in Côte d'Ivoire, Strauss repeatedly stresses their rhetorical commitment to inclusivity and dialogue. But from where did this trend emerge? Did they converge on them independently, or do they reflect a common dilemma of postcolonial African states, one that each sought to overcome in his own way once entrenched in power? In my reading, figures like Houphouet-Boigny and Nyerere embraced the task of de-ethnicisation from different political positions – Houphouet-Boigny arriving there as a solution to the challenge of economic growth and Nyerere coming from a more normative position. But without a deeper discussion of the world that colonialism wrought, we are provided little context for appreciating the actions of these leaders in their times.

What also of the role of democratisation? While in Mali, inclusivity and democratisation proceeded apace, neither Houphouet-Boigny nor Nyerere were democrats. Indeed, democratisation and inclusivity often appear to be in an unresolved tension. Can a leader be both pro-inclusivity and anti-democratic? Is democracy innately pro-inclusivity? Or, as several Ivoirian scholars such as Francis Akindes have suggested, is democratisation itself responsible for upending the nationalist framework that Houphouet Boigny devoted much of his life to creating? If so, what lessons does the Ivoirian example offer to post-genocide states like Rwanda? A deeper engagement with African scholars might have allowed Straus to address these questions without sacrificing the lucidity that he brings to an admittedly difficult subject.

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Democratic Contestation on the Margins: Regimes in Small African Countries

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That small African countries are relatively under-studied is as clear as it is undesirable, and therefore this examination of democratic contestation in six such countries is a timely and worthwhile contribution. Framed by Levitsky and Way's (2002) concept of Competitive Authoritarianism, these six case studies offer rich and detailed information about the nature of politics in countries that tend to receive relatively scant attention (Botswana, Benin, Burkina Faso, Togo, Djibouti and Guinea-Bissau). By imposing the framework of Competitive Authoritarianism, the editors cajole the contributors into focusing

on five common 'arenas of democratic contestation': the electoral arena; the legislature; the judiciary; the media; and civil society. This is useful because it facilitates comparison across the cases, which the editors do in the concluding chapter, albeit somewhat briefly.

The editors' primary aim is to 'draw attention to the democratic performance of less populated African nations', and in this regard they are certainly successful. Moreover, this set of detailed and clearly structured case studies represents a valuable resource for scholars searching for information on these relatively under-examined countries. That being said, it is hard not to feel that the volume could have been a little more ambitious, both conceptually and theoretically. While the Competitive Authoritarianism framework provides welcome structure and clarity across the case studies, it also highlights at least two important issues that remain unacknowledged, and which in turn raise further questions.

The first of these issues concerns the substantial variation that is evident across the cases. Five of the six cases are coded as being Competitive Authoritarian, and yet as the case studies make clear, there are marked differences between these countries, across all five of the arenas. This raises a question about how useful the concept is, if it encompasses such a broad variety of regimes. For example, is it helpful to label not-quite-democratic Botswana and not-quite-authoritarian Togo in the same way? More interestingly though, it makes one wonder how this variation can be explained. Although the editors speak to this briefly in the concluding chapter, they could have gone much further in this regard.

The second issue concerns the subjectivity of coding the cases. Given the numerous arenas of contestation, and the amount of possible variation within each, it is not clear what the precise criteria for coding regimes as Competitive Authoritarian actually are. Again, this raises further questions. For example, Benin and Botswana are both close to democracy, so what would it take for either of them to cross the threshold away from Competitive Authoritarianism? Would we need to see development in just one, in some, or in all five of the arenas? The same question might be asked of Togo and Djibouti, which fall at the authoritarian end of the spectrum. Therefore although the theoretical framework is helpful, these illuminating cases raise important and searching questions of it, which this volume might have attempted to grapple with more thoroughly.

The editors are right in stating that the case studies in this volume can help inform democratic theory. Given that they have clearly thought a lot about this in the context of Africa, it seems a shame that they themselves did not go further theoretically, in an area that seems ripe for development. Nevertheless, the case studies in this worthwhile volume offer much for scholars of African politics to learn from and lean on.

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