

The Puzzle of Electoral Continuity

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The general elections that were convened in Zambia on August 11, 2016, were the eighth multiparty presidential elections and the sixth legislative elections convened since democratization in the early 1990s restored multiparty politics in that country. Between independence and 1991, Zambia had convened only one competitive presidential election and just two legislative elections that involved more than a single party. President Edgar Lungu of the Patriotic Front (PF) party was reelected narrowly over Hakainde Hichilema of the United Party for National Development (UPND).¹ The campaign rhetoric of the two parties was sharply different. Hichilema lamented the decline of democratic norms under PF rule and criticized Lungu's management of the economy, brandishing his own record as a successful businessman to argue that he would do much better. By contrast, President Lungu highlighted the administration's record in infrastructure development and contrasted his own humble background and religious faith with his opponent's arrogance, wealth, and "godlessness" (Fraser, 2017, p. 466).

The results suggested an evenly divided country, with the eastern and northern regions voting overwhelmingly for the incumbent and the southern and western regions strongly supporting Hichilema. International observers publicly declared the election to have been free and fair, although they did lament the climate of violence in which the campaign

¹ The present account is based largely on various newspaper accounts; see also *African Arguments* (2017), Beardsworth (2017), and Fraser (2017).

proceeded, including several significant clashes between supporters of the two parties. Observers also criticized the government for having suspended *The Post*, the main opposition newspaper, in the run-up to the election. In addition, the government jailed key leaders of the UPND, accusing them of trying to create a private militia, presumably to contest the electoral results – charges that the opposition categorically denied.

Hichilema contested the electoral results vigorously, accusing the national electoral commission of having conspired with the government to alter the results. His unwillingness to accept the results led the PF to accuse him of treasonous behavior, and he was jailed from April to August 2017 in a clear attempt to intimidate him. Pressured notably by the Commonwealth of Nations and the Zambian Conference of Catholic Bishops, President Lungu did not follow through on the indictment and eventually released Hichilema unconditionally.

International reporting on the Zambian election expressed concern about the evolution of the country's democracy. The BBC's accounts of the election characteristically lamented a decline of democracy in Zambia and argued the country was at a "crossroads,"² while *The Guardian* lamented the decline of popular support for democracy in Zambia.³

When observers such as Freedom House bemoaned the global decline of democracy in 2016, the Zambian elections were invariably offered as an example (Puddington and Roylance, 2017). Yet by Freedom House's own rankings, Zambia's record as a highly flawed electoral democracy has been fairly consistent over the past two decades. It is a "partly free" regime, in Freedom House's terms, with a long record of highly imperfect elections. Since the transition to multiparty rule, incumbents in Zambia have consistently resorted to illiberal strategies to win elections, with pressure on the independent press and attempts to intimidate the opposition.

Not all elections in the region in 2016 were as problematic. Ghana's general elections in December 2016 resulted in the victory of opposition leader Nana Akuffo-Addo and his New Patriotic Party over incumbent President John Mahama and the National Democratic Congress Party.⁴

² "Hakainde Hichilema's Treason Trial Puts Zambia at Crossroads," Thursday, August 11, 2016, accessed at www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-40020950.

³ "Zambia Goes to Polls to Elect Next President after Hard-Fought Campaign," accessed at www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/10/zambia-goes-to-polls-to-elect-next-president-after-hard-fought-campaign

⁴ This account is derived from several sources, including "Ghana: A Turning Point Vote for the Black Star," (2016); Sarah Brierley and George Ofosu, "9 Things You Should Know about Ghana's Election," in *The Washington Post*, December 7, 2016, accessed at

Despite worries about violence and fraud, given the highly partisan electoral campaign conducted by the two main parties, the election proved to be trouble free, and Mahama conceded defeat soon after the National Electoral Commission announced the results. One reason for the lack of contestation was the elaborate effort by the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers, an alliance of thirty-four civic associations, to deploy a network of 12,000 election observers and then produce an immediate estimate of the results on the night of the elections. Thanks to smartphone and Internet technology, this estimate proved to be virtually the same as the official results reported by the commission and helped to legitimize it. Mahama's government had engaged in a spending splurge in the months before the elections in hopes of improving a worsening economic situation, but attitudinal surveys suggested that Ghanaians were disgruntled about the economy's slowdown and dissatisfied with the direction the country was taking. The Ghanaian general elections of 2016 were the seventh presidential and legislative elections since the return of multi-party politics in 1992.

The December 2016 Gambian elections also witnessed the defeat of an incumbent, but it occurred after a vitriolic campaign in which the government engaged in extensive intimidation of the opposition.⁵ Unlike his Ghanaian counterpart, President Yahya Jammeh refused to accept the result, vowing to remain in power, a stance that was soon buttressed by the support of the army. Jammeh had been in power since a military coup in 1994, and his rule was characterized by regular elections combined with little respect for civil and political rights. Eventually, neighboring states were able to negotiate a diplomatic exit for Jammeh from the presidency so that the challenger, Adama Barrow, could take office. However, without the intervention of the Economic Community of West African States, Jammeh would likely still be in power.

In sum, 2016 provided the full panoply of African elections, from the admirably democratic to the evidently fraudulent. In all, there were some fourteen direct multiparty national elections on the continent that year.

www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/12/07/nine-things-you-should-know-about-ghanas-election/?utm_term=.891f3ce3005c; and Sean Lyngaas and Dionne Searceydec, "Ghana Presidential Vote Hinges on Economic Perceptions," in *The New York Times*, December 6, 2016, accessed at www.nytimes.com/2016/12/06/world/africa/ghana-election-john-mahama.html?_r=0.

⁵ See "Jammeh Tilts the Playing Field" (2016); "The Gambia's President Jammeh Concedes Defeat in Election," in *The Guardian*, December 2, 2016, accessed at www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/02/the-gambia-president-jammeh-concede-defeat-in-election.

Such a busy electoral calendar was no longer exceptional in an area where elections had once been rare events. Indeed, several hundred multiparty elections have been held in forty-six of the forty-nine countries of sub-Saharan Africa⁶ since a wave of democratization swept across the region in the early 1990s. How typical were the very different 2016 elections in Ghana, Gambia, or Zambia? How have African elections changed in the past twenty-five years? How have parties and party systems evolved? Have elections helped to strengthen democracy in Africa, or have they contributed to political instability? What do Africans think of these elections? What do political campaigns actually look like?

In this book, we analyze a quarter-century of multiparty electoral politics in the region. Every year since the early 1990s, a dozen or so African countries have organized multiparty elections. Many of these elections have included illiberal practices, from voter intimidation to vote buying and violence. But, as is less often remarked upon, much has been normal about these elections. For example, political parties canvas and put up posters to make voters aware of predictable electoral pledges. Candidates engage in standard political rhetoric at mass rallies and undertake campaign stops around the country. Many candidates use social media to communicate with citizens. Voters reward officeholders who have delivered good economic performance, and they pay attention to the professional backgrounds and personal qualities of candidates in addition to their policy promises. Opposition parties win legislative seats and subnational offices, and more rarely, the presidency, albeit. Citizen participation in these elections has also been routinized, with varying but mostly unremarkable turnout rates in comparative terms. Moreover, these participation rates have remained fairly stable for more than two decades.

In summary, multiparty elections have been institutionalized during this quarter-century. However, we do not observe broader democratic consolidation in most of these countries. Instead, the democratization of the early 1990s remains incomplete in much of the region. Our referring to *multiparty* elections rather than *democratic* elections is intentional because, as we shall argue, many if not most of these elections either were not free and fair or were not organized in a democratic context. Despite much apparent change since 1990, many of the same men and rather fewer women remain in positions of power in the region. On the whole,

⁶ Throughout the text, we refer to “Africa” and “sub-Saharan Africa” interchangeably, to refer to the forty-nine countries south of the Sahara.

with a few notable exceptions, the same political class that dominated national politics before transitions continues to do so.

Some elections have been free and fair and have been held in political systems with recognized civic and political rights. More elections have been manipulated by incumbent regimes and their presidents, who can leverage the advantage embedded in disproportionate executive power or, in some instances, act in a manner that is totally at odds with the procedures and spirit of democracy. Even when elections are relatively free and fair, most African political systems continue to be characterized by abuses of power and a less-than-stellar respect for the political rights of citizens. As in the postindependence era, power has remained skewed toward the executive, and we observe limited growth and institutionalization of other branches of government in most countries.

The extent to which regular multiparty elections have coincided with undemocratic practices is suggested by the examples with which we began this introduction. Despite different electoral histories in Gambia and Zambia, both the Jammeh and Lungu regimes were resorting to well-established political practices to circumvent the will of the people as expressed through the ballot. These practices suggest that not much had changed in Africa. Yet the Gambian and Ghanaian cases show that elections of varying quality can nonetheless generate opportunities for political challengers to gain executive power.

Why has the move to routine and regular multiparty elections not promoted more political change in Africa? Why did it not generate democratic consolidation? These are the puzzles we seek to unravel in this book. Many observers may not agree with the argument we make about the role of elections in ensuring political continuity. As a result, our first task, to be undertaken in the next chapter, will be to demonstrate the high degree of electoral continuity. In the rest of the book, we will use a broad survey of electoral politics in the region to explain that continuity. Both optimist and, increasingly, pessimist observations about the region disagree with our argument of continuity. This is partly because news accounts of political trends in Africa usually overinterpret the results of an individual election in a single country and extrapolate from it a striking trend for the entire continent. For instance, in August 2016, *The Economist* published a gloomy assessment of electoral democracy in Africa. "African democracy has stalled – or even gone into reverse," *The Economist* argued, pointing to the August 2016 elections in Zambia, which it viewed as marred by fraud and intimidation by incumbent President Lungu (*The Economist*, 2016). This article contrasted starkly

with two more optimistic assessments of African democracy published in that magazine in the previous decade (see *The Economist*, 2002, 2010). Each of these three articles was based on one or two national elections in a region of some forty-nine countries. The fact that the news magazine could not decide whether democracy in Africa had not progressed or had actually regressed made *The Economist's* editorial line comparatively sanguine about Africa. Elsewhere in the press and in the foreign affairs literature, a more pessimistic view has often prevailed in which a “roll-back” of the wave of democratization is either described or predicted.

Gloomy academic assessments are even more common, and they are long-running, having started as the wave of democratization was still taking place in Africa and continuing since. Most scholars viewed the democratic reforms as too superficial, too ephemeral, and/or too unsustainable to be truly meaningful (Chabal, 1998; Joseph, 1998; Chabal and Daloz, 1999). Others, such as Ake (1991) and Monga (1997), argued that electoral democracy would not much affect the lives of ordinary Africans. Much contemporary academic commentary has argued that the level of democracy in sub-Saharan Africa has been regressing since the high point of the Third Wave of democratization (Diamond, 2015; for a discussion, see Bratton, 2013). Not only Africa but also the rest of the world has been affected by the Third Wave, from Eastern Europe to Latin America (see Gandhi and Lust-Okar, 2009; Fukuyama, 2015).

In contradicting these arguments, we employ various types of quantitative and qualitative data to show that the striking characteristic of the region that needs to be explained is how little negative or positive regime change has actually taken place since the conclusion of the democratic transitions of the mid-1990s. Once countries started holding regular multi-party elections, they have largely continued to do so. Military coups that used to lead to lengthy periods of nonelectoral politics now get overturned quickly as the result of both local and international pressures. Regular elections have become the default option of politics. In this book, we will often lament the inconsistency and thinness of democratic procedures across the continent. But let us be clear from the start: The turn to multiparty competition across the region in the early 1990s constituted a political and institutional revolution that should not be underestimated.

Equally striking is the paradoxical continuity that can be observed since the end of the transitions of the 1990s. Governments are more responsive, but the weight of corruption and clientelism on growth remains heavy. The authoritarian tendencies of the executive have not changed as much as might have been expected. The composition of the political class

remains very similar to what it has been since 1990. Although high levels of volatility continue to characterize party politics, we observe patterns of elite circulation or *transhumance*,⁷ in which the same individual politicians and networks of politicians reappear in new parties. Indeed, in a continent of youths, the political class seems to continue to be getting older.

This stasis in political life despite the introduction of multiparty elections is all the more puzzling in light of the dramatic social and economic changes that Africa has experienced during the past quarter-century at least in part, as we show in Chapter 8, because of the beneficial impact of regular multiparty elections. Two decades of steady and rising economic growth have transformed most African countries. Regular growth has swelled the ranks of the African middle class. Governments have seen their fiscal resources increase, and they have invested in new infrastructure and services and have hired more civil servants, who – in sharp contrast to the 1970s and 1980s – are more likely to get paid a living wage on a regular basis. Concurrent with the introduction of regular electoral competition have been urbanization, a rising middle class, a growing youth bulge, and the unprecedented growth of traditional and social media, as well as telephone expansion on the continent. Remarkably, urbanization continues at breakneck speed – above 3 percent annually – so towns all over the continent are expanding, and more than half of all Africans live in urban centers. The greater density of cities has created new media markets, bringing about an explosion in old and new media outlets. The increased purchasing power of Africans has also come to the attention of foreign investors, who have dramatically increased their investments in the region. In 2015, foreign direct investment levels reached a historic high in Africa, with US \$61 billion yearly,⁸ up from just above US \$1 billion a year in the late 1980s. We argue that positive economic growth rates provide fodder for incumbents to boast about their economic management, but the rise in the middle class also suggests an increase in the numbers of more informed, independent, and empowered voters.

The radical changes in the media landscape in the past quarter-century are particularly noteworthy. In 1990, the big media innovation in Africa was the emergence of satellite news channels such as CNN, which were

⁷ This French term, which designates the practice of moving livestock from one grazing area to another, is commonly used in French West Africa to refer to the tendency of individual politicians to migrate from party to party.

⁸ See “Foreign Direct Investment in Africa Surges,” in *The Financial Times*, May 19, 2015, accessed at www.ft.com/content/79ee41b6-fd84-11e4-b824-00144feabdco.

undermining government monopolies over information in new ways. During the wave of democratization that was then hitting the region, debates focused on whether the recently invented fax machine provided an advantage to prodemocracy groups, which could use faxes to better coordinate their action. By 2000, the explosion of cellphones all over the continent made this debate seem quaint, but even then, the Internet was in its early infancy in Africa. Today, the role of social media has dramatically expanded and influences all aspects of electoral campaigns and, presumably, how basic political news travels within African political systems. While political learning is happening at the elite level as well and incumbents are learning how to track, manipulate, and block access to these technologies, what seems incontrovertible is the increasing expansion of the availability of political information.

As we demonstrate in Chapter 7, over the past two decades, African citizens have gained unprecedented access to various media from newspapers to television and the Internet. These individuals are also increasingly likely to be members of a self-help association. While there is still tremendous variation across countries, we observe increases in citizens' political knowledge about municipal and legislative officials over time. Finally, we see gains in political interest in the 1990s and early 2000s, followed by a stabilization of interest that appears to have remained steady.

A usually unexamined presumption in much work on democratization in Africa is that progress or regression in democracy is happening as fast as in the socioeconomic arena. In fact, we will argue that there is a striking and paradoxical disjuncture between the great changes in African society and the relative stagnation in its politics, even as we recognize the change brought on by the introduction of hundreds of competitive elections over the past two decades. In this book, we will both document this disjuncture and investigate its implications for electoral politics.

1.2 EXPLAINING POLITICAL CONTINUITY: PRESIDENTIALISM AND THE LIABILITY OF NEWNESS

Given the regularization of multiparty elections coupled with changes in the media landscape and demographic trends that include higher growth rates, urbanization, and unprecedented access to schooling, why do we observe relative political stasis? We argue that two key factors promote continuity: presidentialism and the "liability of newness."

1.2.1 **Presidentialism**

The primary lens through which to understand political continuity is the persistence of presidentialism, by which we mean that most of the political systems in Africa remain characterized by dominant and often unaccountable executive power. Following the turn away from electoral politics after independence, African strongmen typically adopted presidential institutions, through which they personalized power to a considerable extent and weakened legislatures and judiciaries in order to escape accountability. Dominant and even abusive executive power came to characterize most African states. To be sure, the reach of these “presidents for life” was often constrained by low levels of capacity in the states they oversaw, but in political terms, the strongmen towered over the polity.

As we will discuss in Chapters 2 and 3, the transitions of the early 1990s included debates about constitutional issues and some significant changes, notably in electoral rules, but not a single country in the region decided to abandon presidentialism for parliamentary government. Not only do presidential constitutions continue to dominate the national institutional landscape, with considerable formal power vested in the presidency, but also informal institutions continue to tend to favor the executive branch of government. The executive branch continues to dwarf other branches of government in financial and political resources. Legislatures have been slow to seize the powers they have been formally granted, while the judiciary’s low levels of professionalism and resources have typically subordinated them to the executive branch of government even when the country’s constitution grants judicial independence.

Although the degree of presidentialism varies somewhat across the countries of the region, the variation is not related to other indicators of the level of democracy. We will also examine the handful of parliamentary regimes in the region, which are often the most stable and pluralistic democratic systems in the region – Botswana, Mauritius, and South Africa, for instance – but which also have exhibited a tendency toward executive branch dominance.

One of the striking trends in sub-Saharan Africa over the past quarter-century is the very low rate of executive alternation as the members of the old guard of nationalist politicians pass from the scene and the political class becomes younger. As we will argue, the rate of alternation may be increasing, but so far, in most African countries, incumbents seem to get reelected regardless of their performance in power.

This electoral success results from the uneven playing field that confronts would-be political challengers, who find that sitting presidents enjoy all sorts of advantages, from control of national institutions to access to state resources. Presidentialism exacerbates incumbency advantage in numerous ways, making it challenging for new actors to penetrate elite political circles. First, the president holds a substantial valence advantage in having more experience in office, controlling central levels of clientelistic redistribution, and maintaining relationships with donors and other important international stakeholders. This political dominance of the executive makes it difficult for voters to imagine a different leader governing with comparable resources and competence. As we show in Chapter 6, the preponderance of valence discourse in political debate during electoral campaigns favors the incumbent, particularly in relation to the central concern of economic development and public goods provision.

Second, in some systems, incumbents have consistently manipulated electoral processes to their advantage. This can happen through subtle control of the press, the use of state institutions for partisan purposes (Levitsky and Way, 2010), or more blatant forms of voter suppression and ballot rigging.

Third, many African economies remain state-centric, with relatively little dynamism in the private sector and a state that too often seeks to mitigate its low levels of capacity through a surfeit of regulatory ambitions—dynamics that may have their origin in the colonial state (Herbst, 2014). Thus dominant state executives can utilize state resources and rents, including foreign aid and mineral wealth, to their own advantage. Incumbents' control over state resources, including contracts and bidding processes, makes it difficult for moneyed challengers to emerge without ties to the president or party in power (Arriola, 2013). Some dominant parties have managed to exert a stranglehold on private sector development so that all new development goes through the party (Pitcher, 2017).

Finally, a key manifestation of incumbency advantage lies in the nature of party systems in the region, which also limit the prospects for political change. Relatively weak parties are buttressed when they benefit from incumbency and control of the executive. Though these parties often appear to be strong, they have quickly atrophied and in many cases completely disappeared if and when they have lost the benefits of state resources. While in power, however, they dominate the political scene, and regimes use incumbency advantage to weaken and fragment opposition parties. As a result, the turn to multiparty politics has only unevenly and very slowly enhanced party system institutionalization. Instead, we continue

to observe incumbent parties that dominate the legislature – thanks to the patronage of the presidency – and are surrounded by a highly fragmented opposition in what remain lowly institutionalized party systems. Thus the democratic era demonstrates a good deal of continuity with the predemocratic era even as it reinvents politics in other ways (see Chapter 4).

1.2.2 The Liability of Newness

The second process that conditions this paradoxical combination of change and continuity lies in the fact that Africa's experience with multiparty elections is still relatively recent, and its newness shapes observed political behaviors. This is what Stinchcombe (1965) called "the liability of newness," albeit in a different context. Experience levels varied across the region. In Nigeria, the Second Republic (1979–1983) provided a kind of dress rehearsal for the multiparty politics of the Fourth Republic since 1999, while subnational politics at the state level served to train and promote a diverse and younger set of politicians who had national ambitions. Civilian single-party regimes with competitive primaries in the 1970s and 1980s, such as Kenya, found it easier to evolve to multiparty politics than did regimes without any tradition of postindependence political competition before democratization.

As we have argued elsewhere (Bleck and van de Walle, 2013), few African electoral systems could rely on previous significant experience with multiparty elections after the transitions of the early 1990s. In contrast, in Latin America, long-standing party traditions go back to previous experiments with multiparty electoral competition, albeit in systems with restricted franchises (Levitsky et al., 2016). In Argentina, for instance, the end of the military dictatorship resulted in the 1983 elections that were won by Raúl Alfonsín and his Radical Civic Union Party, which had competed in elections in Argentina since its founding in 1891. Presidents have been elected in Argentina since 1854. Perhaps better for comparison with Africa would be the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, in which many of the same electoral dynamics can be discerned as the ones we will document in this book. There as well, the general absence of previous national democratic experiments can be partly to blame for the disappointing record of democratization, albeit with some important exceptions in central Europe. Apart from Czechoslovakia, the entire region had enjoyed only eight years of multiparty competition before 1990.⁹

⁹ We thank Val Bunce for bringing this fact to our attention.

Limited political experience and the absence of these structural building blocks shape both the process and the outcomes of competitive elections. Political actors stick to what they know and are wary of taking risks. For their part, new political parties with little history and few organic links to the citizens of the country struggle to develop electoral strategies or to find their natural constituencies. We argue that these fledgling electoral democracies have little or no past history of competitive elections and therefore few experienced political parties, while the structural requisites of democracy are largely absent.

Given their inexperience, political actors fall back on repertoires of strategic action from the two previous periods of political competition: the immediate postindependence era and the early 1990s when these political systems were renewed with multiparty competition. From the reemergence of the same old party system dynamics to the attempts by some of the winners of the founding election to subvert democratic principles and maintain their power or to the continuing persistence of hyper-presidential politics, the current era echoes and links back to the 1960s as well as the more recent democratization experiences of the early 1990s.

In Chapters 5 and 6, we demonstrate how incumbents benefit from the fact that opposition parties have little previous experience in power. This provides incumbents and their parties a valence advantage on most policy issues. It is challenging for most voters to assess an opposition candidate's ability to outperform the incumbent, since there is little previous evidence upon which to evaluate the challenger. The incumbent can capitalize on the great uncertainty surrounding opposition candidates.

1.2.3 Other Factors

Of course, other factors also explain the slow pace of political change in Africa. Generational change is always a delayed reaction. Many African adults were socialized in the old days, while those who have grown up in the new environment need time to emerge and take the reins. In addition, the change in urban areas is counterbalanced by the relative stagnation of the countryside, which tends to be more conservative. Africa is urbanizing rapidly, but people living in rural areas, who are far more likely to vote for the incumbent, continue to weight election results (Wahman and Boone 2018).

Changes at the international level have affected the pace of political change in the region since the mid-1990s. Africa's wave of democratization was carried out in the context of a dramatic marginalization of

Africa in the international system. International commodity prices had collapsed, and this, combined with disastrous economic policies, resulted in very weak economies in the region. As a result, African governments were bankrupt and increasingly dependent on the goodwill of their international creditors, which came to view political change as a prerequisite for economic renewal and therefore supported regime change in the region.

In sharp contrast, major changes in the international system have helped to sustain the political status quo in Africa. The commodity boom since the mid-1990s has helped to lessen African governments' dependence on foreign assistance. The promotion of the "war on terror" in the United States after September 11, 2001, and the greater prioritization of Africa on Western states' security agenda strengthened the hands of African incumbents because of the new emphasis on political stability. A number of African governments, such as those of Chad, Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia, bartered their assistance in the war on terror for greater Western complacency about their governance issues – a deal that the Western countries were happy to make. This tendency was then reinforced by the increasing role of China in Africa, providing an alternative to Western finance and thus weakening the leverage of the West in the region. Thus the international environment increased the leverage of incumbents across the region.

Finally, during the past two decades, multiparty elections in Africa have coincided with generally positive economic results, and perhaps this has enhanced stability (see Chapter 8). Since the late 1990s, economic growth and poverty alleviation have occurred after a long period of devastating economic crisis (Radelet, 2010). Before the slowdown in the global economy in 2013, Africa's economic prospects seemed to be on an upward trajectory, with Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increasing from 1.5 percent annually in the 1980s to 2.5 percent in the 1990s and to more than 5 percent the following decade, making sub-Saharan Africa the fastest-growing region of the world in the 2000s. Poverty levels also decreased during this period for the first time in the postindependence period. The World Bank (2016) reports that the share of Africans who are poor fell from 56 percent in 1990 to 43 percent in 2012. To what extent is this coincidental? To what extent has multiparty competition caused the improved economic performance? Could the causal arrow go largely in the other direction, with democratization having been sustained by good economic results? Or are these political and economic trends both caused by some other set of factors? There are theoretical and empirical

reasons to believe each of these causal explanations. Perhaps regular electoral competition has enhanced governmental accountability and thus responsiveness, as a large proportion literature has argued (Baum and Lake, 2003; Stasavage, 2005; Masaki and van de Walle, 2014). Because of the possibility of being sanctioned by the voters, government officials now have greater incentives to improve – or at least to be viewed as improving – the lives of their fellow citizens. On the other hand, perhaps democratization has been legitimated, and thus sustained, by the better economic results. The political crises of the late 1980s and early 1990s that deposed authoritarian leaders in a number of countries were brought on, at least in part, by years of economic crisis. In contrast, these leaders' more democratic successors have been sustained in power by the better economic results, buoyed largely by high commodity prices until 2013, which are largely unrelated to the regular convening of multiparty elections (Przeworski et al., 1996).

1.3 AFRICAN ELECTIONS IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

The focus of this book is on elections, not democracy, though we are keenly interested in the relationship between the two. The subject of our study is the more than 500 national-level elections that have been convened in Africa since 1990. We examine when elections are convened and which types of candidates and political parties win. We analyze the variation in incumbency advantage and focus at length on the actual campaigns: what candidates discuss and debate and how they work to gain the support of voters.

A burgeoning scholarly literature is emerging that analyzes specific African elections, notably the nature of political campaigns, voting behavior by citizens, patterns in electoral results, the role of political parties, the party systems that are emerging, and the implications for the progress of democracy in the region. Nonetheless, surprisingly little scholarship has focused explicitly on these elections and their comparative implications.¹⁰ Many studies examine single elections in single countries or discuss elections in the context of a broader discussion of, for instance, democratization in the region. There are also more targeted research results focusing on specific features of elections, from vote buying to electoral turnout to the role of violence and international observers of elections. A number of

¹⁰ Important exceptions include Lindberg (2006) and Bratton (2013).

excellent collections of essays have been published, but they contain too many unexamined contradictions between individual chapters to constitute an integrated analysis. Thus no single study provides an analytical and comparative treatment of electoral politics in Africa. The objective of this book is to provide such a study in order to summarize and analyze this literature, fill several important gaps, and generalize about the extent of our knowledge about electoral politics in Africa.

We also bring to our book the ambition to demystify and normalize African elections with the tools and analytical categories of comparative politics. Too much work on African politics has treated elections in the region as being shaped by purely African dynamics and has largely ignored the empirical electoral theories that have been used in studying other regions of the world. Too often, the literature has demonstrated a predilection for the darker or more exotic dimensions of African elections, from a focus on ethnic politics to the continuing role of traditional authorities, vote buying, clientelism, and electoral violence. Our objective is not to deny at least some African specificity – and in the pages that follow, we will critically discuss many of these phenomena – but rather to show that electoral politics in the region is not exotic or unique to Africa. Basic concepts that have been developed to study elections in well-established democracies – such as retrospective voting, political business cycles, issue framing and ownership, valence competition, and voter cueing – can be used to understand voting and party behavior in Africa. Electoral laws and other formal institutions structure African elections in much the same manner as elsewhere, as the comparative literature on institutions predict. Indeed, we will show that these theories from comparative politics help us to understand key patterns and variations in the elections we study.

It is at best reductionist to view African elections as little more than ethnic censuses in which voters respond mechanically to ethnic cues and vote for their coethnics, typically in the context of pervasive clientelism and violence. In fact, ethnic identity is never the only factor shaping the party system or shaping voter decisions, and in a number of countries, it is mostly irrelevant. Far from seeing a landscape empty of policy debates as we survey African elections, we are struck by the substantive nature of the electoral rhetoric, even if the discourse does not attain the level of a graduate seminar at a policy school – a standard that is very rarely attained in any contemporary democracy. Candidates use traditional campaign tours as well as social media to reach out to the electorate with messages that they hope will resonate.

Politicians in most African countries are certainly willing to campaign for the support of specific ethnoregional constituencies with coded language, or “dog whistles,” in much in the way that American or European politicians do. However, African politicians pursue voters through other strategies as well and understand that they must address voters’ welfare concerns and not just focus on ascriptive appeals. While violence and blatant appeals to clientelism are certainly part of the African electoral landscape, they are not the only – or often even the most important – characteristics of these elections, as their dominance in the Africanist literature might lead one to believe.

1.4 ELECTIONS AS POLITICAL MOMENTS

In very young and still unsettled electoral systems, each election provides a moment of temporary political fluidity – what could be called a “turning point,” a “crisis,” or an “unsettled time” (Capoccia and Keleman, 2007, p. 341). The term “political opportunity structure,” found in the contentious politics literature, perhaps captures the same idea, albeit in a more sociological manner. Karl (1986, p. 85, fn 5) identified a similar dynamic in electoral periods for Latin America in the 1980s, although she calls these brief periods “political moments”:

Even when organized by authoritarians, elections can shape and redefine political moments in several ways. They can narrow the options available to actors on the extremes of the political spectrum, provoke changes in the strategies of all political actors that encourage accommodation, and define new rules of the game that encourage regime liberalization – even if they were not originally intended to do so.

Regardless of terminology, we argue that elections present Africa’s political systems with relatively brief periods in which political change is more likely to occur and to put the country on a new and different political path with somewhat changed institutions. Across the continent, there is variation in the probability that elections will act as political moments leading to significant changes in government leadership and policy. On average, countries with oil rents, strong militaries backing the incumbent regime, or former revolutionary parties should be better able to weather political change. However, as the cases of Nigeria and Gambia demonstrate, even in political systems characterized by an oil economy or an authoritarian grip on power, dramatic political change can occur in the wake of elections. In this book, we seek not to predict when an

alternation is likely to take place but rather to stress that elections introduce the possibility of such change.

The relationship between elections and democratization has been the subject of much scholarly debate. Seminal work by Lindberg (2006, 2009) and Schedler (2002) first developed the influential argument that regular elections helped to promote democratization both through a process of political learning by the citizenry and political elites and because it helped to institutionalize the norms, practices, and procedures of competition and participation (see also Flores and Nooruddin, 2016; Edgell et al., 2017; Teorell and Wahman, 2017). This “democratization by elections” thesis holds either that each election advances democracy in a process of small incremental steps or that a history of elections will, over time, pave the way for an eventual consolidated democratic order (see Teorell and Hadenius, 2009).

At the other extreme, Collier (2011) and Mansfield and Snyder (2002) are among prominent scholars who have argued that democratic elections are fraught with danger for low-income countries and could be linked statistically with a rise in civil conflict, ethnic violence, and, more generally, political decline. These scholars argued that elections, far from promoting democracy, could bring about a backlash against democracy by increasing instability. We will discuss both of these arguments at length in later chapters. Here, we suggest only that our own position is somewhere between the optimism of the “democratization by elections” hypothesis and the pessimistic view that elections destabilize low-income countries. We find ourselves closer to the view of Carothers (2002): that most of these polities are actually relatively stable, in the process of neither democratizing nor regressing to their authoritarian past. The fluidity of the transition era is over; in Africa, as elsewhere, elections put in play both change agents and dogged defendants of the status quo. The relationship between democracy and elections is shaped by factors that vary across time and country from socioeconomic variables to state capacity and the international environment.

While Schedler is probably correct to argue that the long-term prospects for democracy are improved by the global legitimacy of procedural democracy, in the past twenty-five years that legitimacy has served more to ensure the regular convening of multiparty elections than to generate much discernible democratic deepening, though the latter may well be happening in a minority of countries. The other dominant argument in the literature – about the dangers of elections in low-income Africa – similarly offers the insight that electoral periods represent moments of

vulnerability for even the least democratic regimes because elections spark mass popular participation and awareness about politics. Nonetheless, as we will show in the Chapters 2–4, the striking pattern is for elections to shore up the status quo, in both the more- and in less-democratic polities. Elections have destabilized a minority of countries, but in most, they have served as relatively predictable and peaceful instruments for the maintenance of power of existing regimes.

Our argument is thus somewhat different from the “democratization by elections” hypothesis. First, our argument is about brief political openings that can lead to institutional innovation, in contrast to Lindberg’s argument, which is primarily about the behavioral effects of elections and the political learning that takes place as a result of elections. Perhaps more important, we do not believe that the change that results from an electoral political moment is necessarily positive. We eschew the teleological logic of much of the consolidation literature. Electoral moments can also lead to the rollback of previous democratic gains or the consolidation of obstacles to further opening up. The point is that elections are key moments in the life of a relatively young democracy because the choices that are open to political actors expand briefly, with lasting consequences for the political system.

Some examples will help to clarify what we have in mind. Every African country has had to decide whether or not to enforce term limits for the president (see Chapter 3). That decision, invariably made in the context of an upcoming election, forces the political system and its actors to reassess national political institutions and whether to deepen or undermine democracy. The decision is not completely context free, of course, and is constrained by economic and social legacies; but it has typically been a contingent one, in which individual actors, civil society, and political parties have weighed in heavily.

In this respect, the contrast between Benin and Togo is illustrative. President Mathieu Kerekou’s decision not to force a change to the constitution to allow him to run for a third term as president of Benin in 2000 helped to put that country on a path in which Kerekou’s decision considerably weakened the ability of subsequent presidents to force their way to a third term, as two-term president Yayi Boni discovered in 2016. In neighboring Togo, the constitution was similarly altered during the transition to electoral democracy in the early 1990s to include presidential term limits. Longtime strongman President Gnassingbé Eyadema managed to survive this transition and was elected in both 1993 and 1998 in the country’s first multicandidate presidential elections since 1961.

This was a loose interpretation of the two-term limit rule, since Eyadema had been in power since 1967. Still, in the run-up to the 2005 elections, he forced a constitutional change that ended presidential terms limits, despite opposition. In sharp contrast to Benin's political system, that of Togo has remained much more authoritarian, and current President Faure Gnassingbé Eyadema, the son of Gnassingbé Eyadema, was able to gain a third term in 2015.

The contrasting politics around the third term are not easily explained by the structural differences between two countries with very similar histories and socioeconomic legacies. Instead, the struggles over the third term should be understood as highly contingent political struggles with long-term institutional consequences for democracy in the two countries. As we will show in Chapter 3, a large proportion of the states in the region have been confronted with the term-limit debate, typically in the run-up to an election. How the debate has turned out has shaped these countries' political systems in lasting ways. Even where elites have managed to manipulate term limits, as in Togo and Burundi, these decisions have been met with tremendous popular protest and dissent.

Similarly, open-seat elections, in which no incumbent is running, provide African electoral systems a political moment in which contingent politics can push the country in different directions (Cheeseman, 2010). In some cases, the status quo has in effect won the day. In Gabon, Togo, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, the death of the long-time dictator resulted in little liberalization, as each defunct president's cronies quickly installed his son in the presidency to maintain their own power. However, in examining a broader number of cases, observers note that executives' attempts to hand power to their kin have had varied success (Brossier and Dorronsoro, 2016). In other electoral autocracies, the exit of the old autocrat has resulted in significant democratization, with a member of the opposition being elected and executive power becoming significantly more accountable. Open-seat elections have resulted in victories for the opposition and further democratization in Guinea (2008), Ghana (2000), Kenya (2002), São Tomé and Príncipe (2011), and Sierra Leone (2007). In these cases, elections created a moment of political fluidity, and the mobilization of both domestic and international opinion made a military intervention or some kind of extralegal power grab less likely. Once the moment was over, structural forces reasserted themselves but with slightly more open political institutions in place.

To be sure, there have been significant setbacks in some countries, and some cases of democratic progress have also been recorded, but we will

argue that patterns of political competition and participation have rarely changed in a sustained manner. Whatever political change is happening is occurring very slowly, in sharp contrast to the dynamism and fluidity of African society. Over the course of the past quarter-century, one can observe a process of institutionalization of electoral politics in the region but relatively little democratic deepening. That is, the striking and unprecedented convening of multiparty competitive elections has become routine and mostly accepted by both political elites and mass publics in the region, but the quality of these elections and the democratic institutions that structure them have not changed dramatically in most countries.

This combination of political stasis and rapid societal change may eventually pose risks for these political systems as citizens become ever more frustrated with the unchanging menu of political choices. But the disjuncture between political society and civil society that has marked the period under study has so far been more a curious feature of electoral politics than a source of conflict or sudden change.

1.4.1 Elections as Moments of Heightened Citizenship

The regularization of elections has generated cyclical focal points for African citizens to talk about, and sometimes to engage in, politics. Like their peers on other continents, African citizens' focus on governance, their levels of political knowledge (Andersen, Tilley, and Heath, 2005), and their partisan attachments (Michelitch and Utych, 2018) are heightened during election cycles. In sub-Saharan Africa, where legal pluralism and parallel forms of governance continue to play an important role in "lived governance," the election cycle might have a particularly crucial impact on refocusing citizens' attention toward formal institutions of governance. Election cycles make parties and electoral actors more salient, especially in countries where they are relatively weak. For instance, Michelitch and Utych (2018) show that fluctuations in partisan identification are stronger in poorer countries and in countries where parties are weaker.

The institutionalization of multiparty politics has generated new information and experiences that citizens and politicians can use to orient their understanding of governance. Election cycles, regardless of electoral quality, generate increased public debate and candidate visibility. Over time, we believe, both politicians and voters will gain experience and greater confidence about the environment in which they operate. We suggest that citizens are learning incrementally about the role of elections

and are changing their expectations about the accountability of elected officials. In this book, we highlight candidates' attempts to connect with the population and to discuss key issues that concern them. Across most of the continent, citizens continue to care about some key political issues from election to election: access to basic services and economic development, various freedoms associated with democracy and government corruption, issues related to security and sovereignty, definitions of citizenship, and the distribution of natural resources.

In Chapters 5 and 6, we link candidates' electoral rhetoric to issues that citizens care about, and we show that this rhetoric varies among countries and elections cycles, although it proves to be remarkably predictable. We demonstrate the recourse to valence arguments about policy, which we argue is a strategic response to high levels of political uncertainty. We can observe this in social media data, from the substantial number of hits on parties' and candidates' Twitter feeds and Facebook accounts and from the emergence of campaign advertisements posted to websites such as YouTube, as we discuss in Chapter 5. These socioeconomic changes both shape the electoral environment and affect the relationship between citizens and government, distinct from elections.

These moments of heightened citizenship around elections, it should be clear, do not necessarily only promote better citizenship or political pluralism. They can also promote exclusionary and demagogic politics, as when ethnic identity and conflict are exacerbated during electoral periods. Thus, for instance, in West Africa, the debates about indigeneity and citizenship that destabilized Côte d'Ivoire were clearly intensified by politicians seeking an electoral advantage (Keller, 2014).

Chapter 7 shows that citizens' exposure to diverse forms of media such as television and the Internet is increasing over time. Initial evidence from Afrobarometer tentatively suggests that increased access to media is associated with greater levels of political knowledge about municipal and legislative officials as well as increasing membership in self-help associations. African citizens who are more knowledgeable about, and actively engaged in, civil society will ultimately be more empowered voters. Further, African citizens appear to maintain steady interest and participation in politics, and there appears to be no clear patterns in protest behavior. These trends may disabuse critics of the idea that elected governments' inability to meet mass demands for development, public service provision, and job creation will generate skepticism that ultimately drives citizens out of participation in electoral channels into exclusive repertoires of contentious politics.

We caution that this process of learning will not happen equally quickly in all countries or even within countries. The diffusion of political ideas, parties' campaign efforts, and citizens' participation are shaped by electoral environments. While we emphasize trends in campaigning and electoral discourse, we also stress that there is no one "African voter." There is high variation in rates and modes of participation across countries. Longitudinal continuity in political participation rates in each country since founding elections is relatively striking, suggesting specific country-level dynamics around mobilization. In Chapter 7, we show that participation rates are not correlated with levels of democracy. Although political participation is evolving rapidly, voting behavior continues to exhibit a degree of deference to incumbents, particularly in rural areas, where local political brokers can still be relied upon to turn out the vote for sitting presidents. African citizens make decisions about when and how to participate on the basis of the unique incentives offered by the political system in these citizens' specific geographic location and during the particular election cycle.

The turn to regular competitive elections in combination with social changes such as urbanization and growing literacy has, at the same time, introduced a historically unprecedented explosion in political participation in the region at both national and local levels. Even when the playing field is far from level, with incumbents benefiting from various types of advantages, party competition has emerged in regular election campaigns and in legislative debates. An increasingly aggressive press, in traditional media but increasingly on social media as well, comments on politics and informs the public. And the public has responded, both in voting turnout and, even more, in their growing interaction with politicians, government officials, and local intermediaries. They join an increasing number of nongovernmental organizations and civic associations.

I.5 RETHINKING DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION

The evidence we present in this book that holding regular multiparty elections does not necessarily promote the stability of democracy – or its deepening – forces a reconsideration of different theories about democratic consolidation. Theoretical discussions of democratic consolidation have undergone a number of different, somewhat contradictory permutations. It has often been said that theories of democratic consolidation are teleological, in that the term denotes both a process and an outcome. The process of democratic consolidation results in a consolidated democracy,

or, as Linz and Stepan (1996, p. 14) put it, “democracy cannot be thought of as consolidated until a democratic transition has been brought to completion.” This is problematic in the sense that it leads to a conflation of two distinct dynamics of consolidation. On the one hand, consolidation is viewed as the final stage of a circumscribed transition process, taking place within a couple years at the most. Procedural definitions of democracy have been based on minimal requirements: Either regimes were democratic or they were not, depending on the presence of a small number of political institutions, including the regular convening of competitive elections with a widespread popular franchise. Early democratic data sets thus defined democracy as a 0–1 variable, allowing no middle ground or ambiguous status somewhere between full democracy and full autocracy.

Consolidation was thus seen as a relatively short-term process, after which a country would no longer regress to nondemocracy. Huntington’s (1991, p. 267) definition of consolidation as having taken place when two electoral executive turnovers have been registered in elections subsequent to the transition election has been much cited, not least because it is easily operationalized. In addition, it reflects the view that the regime coming out of the transition would be a new, distinct, and democratic one. The alternative to consolidation was a return to the old order via a military coup – the clear and obvious threat looming over most of the early democratizers of the Third Wave, such as Portugal, Greece, or Brazil, which had democratized from military regimes.

In retrospect, Huntington’s definition of consolidation presumed wrongly that competitive elections were a sufficient condition for liberal democracy as well as a necessary one. The emergence of electoral autocracies in recent years has confirmed the dangers of what Karl (1986) called the electoral fallacy about Central America in the 1980s. In Africa today, it is clear that relatively competitive elections with executive turnovers can occur in countries that lack democratic levels of civil and political rights.

On the other hand, perhaps as a result of the emergence of nondemocratic electoral regimes, most contemporary discussions of consolidation have defined it as democratic deepening by which the thin and incomplete democratic institutions created by the transition are perfected and strengthened progressively and over time. This understanding of consolidation is more vague and perhaps less operational, but it seems to fit better the reality in low-income, low-capacity democracies. As the Third Wave of democratization moved to countries with weaker structural requisites

associated with democracy, such as high levels of national income and literacy, observers were more likely to predict that the initial transition was only a first stage, resulting in a “democracy with adjectives” (Collier and Levitsky, 1997). The process of consolidation was thought to be a much longer-term process through which these adjectives would be progressively shed and thus was largely delinked from the initial transition.

Initially, Carothers’s (2002) trenchant critique that too many observers seemed to assume that all recent democratizers were still in transition and moving inexorably toward a deepening of democracy may well have been true, but a reading of the academic literature on consolidation makes it clear that few academic observers are still under the spell of “the transition paradigm”; instead, the danger of “democratic erosion” (Schedler, 1998) or “democratic backsliding” (Bermeo, 2016) is the primary lens through which these countries’ progress is assessed. With some exceptions (for instance, Posner and Young, 2007; Levitsky and Way, 2015), most contemporary observers lament the decline of democratic practices and values in the African region (for instance, Diamond, 2015; Gyimah-Boadi, 2015).

Our own view challenges both of these understandings of consolidation. For one thing, as we shall discuss at greater length in Chapters 2 and 3, only between a third and a half of the polities in the region ever undertook what could be meaningfully described as a democratic transition in the early 1990s. In the others countries, incumbents agreed to regular elections and some cosmetic political liberalization to placate domestic and international demands but did so in a way that did not threaten their own rule. In these countries, simply put, it is not clear what is being consolidated. Not only are some elections still so restricted that they cannot be associated with political liberalization, but even in cases of the introduction of regular free and fair multiparty elections, the evolution to liberal democracy is neither assured nor perhaps even likely. As we will show, political elites have been savvy in adapting their strategies to focus on power maintenance despite these substantial formal, institutional changes. We will argue that the past quarter-century suggests that regular elections are necessary but insufficient conditions for democratic consolidation.

More generally, the African experience of the past quarter-century suggests that approaches to democratic consolidation do not emphasize political continuity enough; despite the regular incorporation of multiparty elections, we emphasize regime continuity. Very few regimes have significantly deepened their democratic practice since the onset of regular

elections. But we also insist that political and civil rights have not substantially eroded, even in most of the political systems that have undergone repeated political crises. The political backsliding that legitimately attracts much hand-wringing has been limited to a small number of countries, at least during the period on which this book is primarily focused: 1995–2015.

Further, once countries begin to hold elections, elections become demanded by the population. What are the implications of this stability, notably for the process of democratic consolidation? Has stability strengthened democratic institutions and attitudes? Or does the lack of progress point to the fragility of these institutions and the thinness of the support for democracy among the citizenry? It is easy to be pessimistic about African democracy, but what strikes us is the resilience of these fledgling institutions and the unabated demand for civic and political rights coming from African citizens.

While some of these trends and continuity stretch back to an earlier time, before the transitions to democracy, this book is not arguing that elections have not affected governance in African states. As we show, compared to the pretransition period of the late 1980s, the majority of African states are performing dramatically better in terms of political liberties and civil rights. Many states continued to move in the direction of polyarchy (a term that means “government by many”) until the early 2000s. While the second decade of the twenty-first century has been associated with greater stagnation and in some instances backsliding, it is undeniable that most African citizens have greater political rights and greater accountability from government now than they did before transitions to democracy.

The apparent current stasis in the quality of political institutions is all the more paradoxical given that the region is otherwise undergoing rapid social and economic change, which we view as generally supportive of democracy. Theories of democratic consolidation rarely include a sophisticated sociology of these countries, and we know of no work that makes the same contrast that we advance between political stasis and sociological change. However, this contrast seems to us essential to understanding contemporary Africa and the long-term prospects for democracy.

1.6 ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The chapters that follow this introduction analyze a quarter-century of electoral politics in sub-Saharan Africa, from 1990 to 2015. The dates

were chosen at least in part for the unscientific reason that they encompass a complete quarter-century. Nonetheless, 1990 is a logical place to start, since the wave of democratization that ushered in the current era of regular multiparty elections can be said to have started in that year. We refer to some elections that took place in 2016, the year in which we were writing this book, not least because a number of the most recent elections provide great fodder for our analysis, but 2015 is the last year for which we had complete data as we started writing the book.

The book's materials are based on several types of data. First, the book uses the descriptive data set covering all national level multiparty elections, which allows for statistical generalizations about the region. Second, much of the book focuses on eight multiparty systems across the region (Benin, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Uganda, and Zambia). These countries were chosen to represent different regions, different colonial legacies, and different levels of democratic consolidation. In this book, we develop finer-grained data for these countries to illustrate broad trends and test some initial hypotheses. Our analysis of the issues that dominate African elections, for instance, is based on a data set of issues discussed in local newspapers during electoral cycles in these countries (Chapter 6).

Third, we have taken case studies of specific countries and elections from a wide variety of sources, based on our reading of the literature and key elections we are aware of. Too much of the scholarly literature and too many empirical conclusions about the region are based on a handful of Anglophone African countries (Briggs, 2017), and we have consciously sought to base our arguments and generalization on as broad a set of cases as possible.

We start by assessing emerging patterns in electoral results: the number of elections, reelection rates, the emerging party systems, and the strength of opposition parties and candidates, all in the context of contemporary theorizing about democratic consolidation. We ask both what impact electoral competition has on the quality of democracy in the region and whether observed patterns can be linked to the quality of democracy. We assess the progress on democratic consolidation over time and its relationship with the holding of elections. Political alternation, with the defeat of the incumbent, has happened in some countries but not in others; this turnover is not always linked to quality of democracy. We explore the role and evolution of parties in the region. The degree to which party systems are structured by ethnolinguistic factors varies as well. The book then examines candidates and campaigns before exploring a set of key

issues in greater depth. It analyzes the manner in which candidates and parties conduct electoral campaigns, the issues they use to mobilize voters, and the role of ethnicity and clientelism in shaping electoral outcomes. Chapter 7 is devoted to the micro-level behavior of Africa voters, their motivations for participating, and their attitudes about democracy. Some dynamics appear to be widely shared in the region, but there is also interesting variation across our cases, which we seek to explain. We discuss distinct patterns of mobilization in rural and urban areas, but we also show the high level of variation in voter turnout across countries. We conclude with a chapter that explores the implications of the routinization of elections on the daily lives of African citizens.

Our analysis throughout this book is structured on the broad theme of political outcomes in the region being shaped by the paradoxical interaction of change and continuity.

The book proceeds as follows. Chapter 2 examines the key trends in the evolution of electoral competition in the region. It links the democratic era back to electoral trends in Africa in the decades before the transitions. Examining the transitions, we show that few countries fully democratized in the early 1900s. We then introduce data on presidential and legislative electoral results between 1990 and 2015 in the forty-six countries of the region that conducted multiparty elections during that period. We examine the evolution in terms of margin of victory, reelection rates, strength of the opposition, participation rates, and party systems, and we argue that the stability of these regimes over time is striking and needs to be explained.

Chapter 3 expands on Chapter 2 by problematizing the quality of democracy in the region and the complex relationship between democracy and multiparty elections. We document the wide range of electoral practices that often protect incumbents in both more- and less-democratic states. The predominance of presidentialism emerges as a hallmark of these regimes, in both more- and less-democratic states – one reason why the region continues to show very little electoral alternation. We identify as many as half of the countries in the region as nondemocratic, despite the convening of regular multiparty elections, and we examine elections in these states to show how elections have become instruments for power maintenance rather than for the expression of meaningful political participation and competition.

In Chapter 4, we examine the parties and party systems that compete in African elections. The chapter starts with a brief history of parties at independence to show the continuity of certain dynamics. We find

evidence that the modal party system in the region comprises seemingly dominant parties in power surrounded by relatively ephemeral small parties in poorly institutionalized party systems. Although there are some significant exceptions that must be understood, this general pattern was quickly established in the transitional elections of the early and mid-1990s, and it has remained stable even when the party in power has changed. This seems to hold regardless of the quality of democracy in the country. In Chapter 4, we examine these patterns more carefully and characterize different theories of party development and party system institutionalization in the region. We show that access to funding has shaped the organization and leadership of parties in the region, and we argue that this is the main reason why parties in power with access to state resources have a substantial political advantage over opposition parties, though the latter can access significant public resources at the subnational level in the bigger countries of the region.

In Chapters 5 and 6, we explore the actual electoral campaigns in Africa from 1990 to 2015. In Chapter 5, we discuss the common attributes of presidential candidates and their typical electoral campaigns. We argue that it is important to understand the strategic nature and substantive issues that function underneath different rituals and the sometimes seemingly exotic practices that candidates undertake in the course of the elections. We highlight some key practices of electoral campaigns, including candidate tours, candidate endorsements, brokerage, political advertising, gifts, and violence at election time.

In Chapter 6, we focus on the electoral issues that dominate these elections. One cliché about African elections has it that they are comparatively empty of real debate over national issues but instead focus mostly on ethnically based appeals, lubricated by clientelism and vote buying. In this chapter, we show that this argument is untenable and that a number of issues can regularly be discerned in African elections even though they are often valence issues and not easily captured framework of specific political positions easily placed in a policy space of issue ownership reveals logical and predictable patterns in electoral discourse. The chapter also shows that the newness of these electoral systems and the inexperience of most African parties help to explain the political rhetoric the parties employ during elections, as they are still just learning how to mobilize voters and how to identify stable constituencies. Parties can use their structural position as opposition or incumbents to “own” specific issues, such as democracy and development. In this chapter, we also highlight six thematic areas that dominate electoral discourse in Africa: economic

development, democracy, sovereignty, domestic security, citizenship, and the distribution of natural resources.

In Chapter 7, we turn our attention to the voters themselves. We examine the evolving attitudes and behavior of African voters by focusing on the different forms of political expression (from voting to contentious politics) as well as the role of ethnicity, partisanship, religion, and other forms of group identity in explaining the choice to participate and the nature of that participation. We analyze the various factors that influence voters' decisions, including party strength and system competitiveness, incumbent performance, the role of traditional authorities and other brokers, socioeconomic variables, and associational membership. We also assess the nature of citizen support for democracy and its evolution over time.

In Chapter 8, we ask whether or not these elections matter. In addition to concluding the book, this chapter answers the "so what" question. Do elections make a difference in the lives of Africans? We marshal evidence on behalf of the argument that democratization has had a minor but significant effect in economic and political terms and that this impact is likely to increase over time. Political liberalization has increased the accountability of state officials, albeit modestly in most countries, and the need to win competitive elections has resulted in governments that are more likely to provide services to the population. The politics that is emerging in the new Africa includes more attention to citizens and the emergence of distributive politics. It also gives more power to the business community, which is ideally suited to fund political parties to advance its own policy agenda. New social coalitions are emerging across the region as a result, with potentially profound effects for deepening of democracy in the future.

We conclude with a discussion of our expectation that continuity will diminish over time as the two factors of resilience diminish: executive dominance and the liability of newness. As ruling executives leave office and successor candidates must face open-seat elections, there will be reduced incumbency advantage and heightened opportunities for alternation during electoral cycles. As opposition parties are elected to office, they will be able to leverage those experiences to their advantage.