

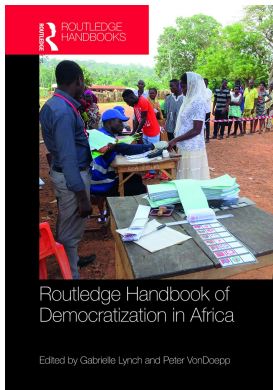
This article was downloaded by: 10.3.97.143

On: 07 Dec 2023

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



Routledge Handbook of Democratization in Africa

Gabrielle Lynch, Peter VonDoepp

Pathways to democracy

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315112978-3>

Nic Cheeseman

Published online on: 22 Jul 2019

How to cite :- Nic Cheeseman. 22 Jul 2019, *Pathways to democracy from:* Routledge Handbook of Democratization in Africa Routledge

Accessed on: 07 Dec 2023

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315112978-3>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: <https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms>

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

2

PATHWAYS TO DEMOCRACY

Nic Cheeseman

One of the most important and contested discussions in political science relates to the extent to which the past shapes the present and, by extension, the future. In other words, how far can past events be used as a guide to current trajectories—as suggested, for example, by path-dependent theories that focus on how decisions made yesterday shape the choices that political actors face today? What are the most important factors that determine whether a given country (or institution or process) takes one particular pathway rather than another? And to what extent do these processes actually determine what comes next rather than simply make certain outcomes more or less likely? To put this another way: what difference does individual or collective agency make, and are historical critical junctures really critical?

These questions are particularly pertinent when it comes to the issue of democratic consolidation for three reasons. First, democratization is clearly a process that takes many years (some would say generations or centuries) and so it is particularly amenable to thinking in terms of path dependency (Schedler 2002). Second, the human temptation to read teleological progress towards higher levels of democracy and development into contemporary events means that we need to be constantly on guard against subconsciously introducing a form of inevitable path dependency into our thinking about democratization (Cheeseman 2015). Third, much of the most interesting research that has pursued variants of this kind of analysis, such as historical institutionalism, has looked at democratic transitions and related processes. Important publications that falls into this category includes Riedl's (2014) work on the authoritarian origins of contemporary party systems, Lindberg's (2006) argument that repeatedly holding elections promotes democratic consolidation, and LeBas' (2013) research on the factors that enabled some opposition movements to more successfully make the transition to effective opposition parties.

Although most of this work highlights the centrality of long-term institutional legacies, relatively little attention has been given to the question of how, methodologically speaking, this kind of analysis can best be conducted (Lindberg 2009 is an important exception). There have also been relatively few efforts to go back and actually test whether some of the patterns/predictions identified actually hold true in a wider universe of cases, or once sufficient time has passed for relevant processes to play out. In order to begin to address these weaknesses in the literature, this chapter begins by setting out some of the main ways that Africanist political scientists have thought about path dependency in recent times. It then proceeds to summarize

an argument presented in *Democracy in Africa* (Cheeseman 2015) and to assess the extent to which the constraints identified in that book have continued to shape the trajectories of the states that were discussed.

Finally, the chapter concludes by arguing that work on political institutions has tended to focus too heavily on either formal institutions, such as constitutions and legislatures, or informal institutions, such as widely held norms, with insufficient attention being paid to how the two interact (Cheeseman 2018).¹ This is unfortunate, as the prospects for institutionalization—i.e., for formal institutions to operate on the basis of their official rules—depends on whether formal and informal institutions are competitive and complimentary (see also Burbidge and Philp, this volume). Consequently, the chapter argues that any path-dependent frameworks that we build that do not take informal institutions into account can only provide a partial guide as to likely democratic trajectories of African states.

Approaches to path dependency

Institutional analysis has a long history, which cannot be fully recounted here.² However, it is important to note that in response to criticism that previous forms of institutionalism were too static and overlooked critical questions about how institutions shape human behavior, a new wave of literature known by the umbrella term “new institutionalism” emerged from the 1970s onwards. For example, *rational choice institutionalists* looked at how organizational rules shape the incentives facing individuals when the choices they face, and hence how institutional design can shape human behavior (Shepsle 1989). Although influential, this approach also received criticism for ignoring the impact of history and culture, and the way in which these factors shape institutional performance. Seeking to stress the historically rooted nature of contemporary institutions (Thelen 1999), a second group of researchers set out to demonstrate that the behavior of individuals was not only shaped by “rational self-interest but also by previous experience, societal expectations and historical trends” (Cheeseman 2018, 368). Thus, what became known as *historical institutionalism* recognizes the importance of tradition, but also the possibility that tradition itself can be reinvented and cast anew.

Perhaps because the divide between history and politics has been less clearly drawn in African studies than in other disciplines, due to both the continued relevance of the colonial past to the present and the fact that the gap between historical and political science methods was relatively small until the last twenty years, historical institutionalism has proved to be the most popular approach to understanding path dependency on the African continent. For example, Arriola’s (2009, 2013) work has revealed strong continuities in the financial systems operating on the continent. More specifically, Arriola shows that the economic profile of the first executive (prime minister/president) exerted an important influence over government policy in this area. Where leaders came from communities heavily involved in the export sector, they tended to liberalize financial systems, safe in the knowledge that it would be their own communities that would benefit from these reforms, boosting the profits they could generate through trade. By contrast, leaders from non-exporting communities tended to fear financial liberalization because it threatened to empower other ethnic/religious groups and hence rival leaders. In turn, Arriola demonstrates that the greater availability of credit makes it easier for opposition leaders to raise funds to sustain their campaigns and build alliances, thereby increasing the prospects that durable opposition coalitions will emerge. Thus, his research shows us how a set of economic institutional decisions made in the early independence era have a meaningful impact on the potential for transfers of power in contemporary multiparty Africa.

For those who are drawn to explaining “the past of the present” (Cooper 2002), one of the main questions is how to best explain institutional continuity and change. Perhaps the most influential conceptualization of change within the historical institutional framework is through the metaphor of “punctuated equilibria” (Mahoney 2000). This term, which originated in evolutionary biology, denotes processes characterized by long periods of relative organizational stability (i.e., in the form and structure of organisms) that are unsettled by moments of significant change.³ On this understanding, evolutionary change occurs when the status quo is upset by an external shock (such as the introduction of a new predator) that changes the challenges a particular animal or plant faces in its everyday battle for survival. Once this happens, members of the community that are better adapted to the new challenge will outlive those who are not—because, for example, a physical characteristic makes them less vulnerable to attack—which in turn makes it more likely that these positive characteristics will be passed on, leading to processes of adaptation and evolution.

Unsurprisingly, this idea quickly caught on with social scientists trying to explain processes of change and continuity. What the notion of punctuated equilibria provided, perhaps better than any other approach, was a way of explaining both institutional stability and evolution within one analytical framework (Romanelli and Tushman 1994). However, the actual term “punctuated equilibria” was soon dropped, in part because of its close association with evolutionary biology and in part because there are, of course, important differences between the evolution of organisms and political institutions. Most notably, while evolution occurs without any organism making a conscious choice to “adapt,” the individuals operating within political bodies have choices about how they respond to external shocks, which in turn have significant implications for how they play out. Thus, political scientists began to talk of “critical junctures” that “close off alternative options and lead to the establishment of institutions that generate self-reinforcing path-dependent processes” (Capoccia and Kelemen 2007, 341).

A common way of conceptualizing this process is to regard existing institutions as “sticky,” in that they are often expensive and difficult to change, but that these constraints can be loosened by moments of crisis or the occurrence of an external shock. In other words, critical junctures occur when a certain combination of changes relax the constraints under which political actors operate, creating the opportunity for old trajectories to be disrupted and new rules or structures to be imposed that then condition what is possible in the future. However, conceptualizing a particular process in terms of critical junctures and path dependency does not, on its own, explain what facilitates either continuity or change. For that we need to know exactly what makes a critical juncture possible, and how different types of critical juncture give rise to different political futures. More specifically, we need to understand exactly what set of factors interrupt periods of continuity and generate moments in which greater change is possible. In other words, what is the political science equivalent of the external shock that renders certain characteristics more important to the survival of an organism and so encourages a step change in evolution? Significantly, this is an area in which historical institutionalists have not always had a strong enough—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say an explicit enough—answer (Krasner 1988).

When it comes to democratization, three main factors appear to be particularly likely to facilitate critical junctures. The first are foundational moments at the birth of a political order, in which a new set of rules needs to be written. This might happen when political leaders have to build a new set of institutions following a prolonged and destructive conflict. For example, Hughes and Tripp (2015) have pointed out how civil wars are sometimes followed by breakthroughs in female political representation, most often through the adoption of legislative quotas. Second, and relatedly, processes of elite negotiation over the constitution in the context

of a pronounced political or economic crisis may create the opportunity for a small number of actors to reshape the landscape with little scrutiny. In such situations, the collapse of established ways of conducting politics can lead to a period of negotiation—what Rustow calls the “decision phase” (1970, 355)—in which elite actors are able to exert disproportionate influence.

Both of these explanations are intuitively appealing, but they also beg some critical questions: when do we see old institutions collapse? When are elites empowered to build new ones? And exactly how do decisions made in these moments shape future events? The answers to these questions return us to the notion of an external shock. This is the third type of factor that is particularly likely to bring about a critical juncture. In the political context, such a shock might be a period of economic collapse that undermines the credibility of former arrangements or an event that generates far-reaching social changes, such as a war or famine.

In the African context, there are a number of events or developments that could be said to have played this role. Perhaps the clearest example is colonial rule, when new institutions emerged that are relatively easy to identify because they resulted from the introduction of external political and economic structures that—in most cases—had few direct antecedents. For example, Boone (2018) has argued that the type of land system imposed by colonial powers—either “neo-customary,” in which each “tribe” was expected to manage its own land, or a “statist” model controlled by the government—has played a profound role in shaping economic and political developments ever since.

The task facing those seeking to understand continuity and change in contemporary Africa is therefore to apply similarly rigorous analysis to advance our understanding of the politics of the continent since the 1990s. This will involve engaging with the question of what facilitates a critical juncture, how such junctures constrain future events, and why change occurs at certain points in history rather than others.

The 1990s as a critical juncture

It is easy to see why the early 1990s are often referred to as a critical juncture in the literature on Africa. Between 1989 and 1999 almost every state in Africa introduced multiparty elections of some kind, with the notable exception of Eritrea, which remains a one-party state. These changes were driven by three main processes. First, the strength of opposition to authoritarian rule—which had always been present but fluctuated over time—grew in response to political stagnation, poor economic management, and generational change (Ndegwa 2002). Second, economic downturn from the late 1970s onwards undermined the capacity of leaders to coopt their rivals and to demobilize critical social movements, fund public services and the security forces, and feed inclusive patronage networks. Thus, many African governments increasingly found that they could not afford to either assist or repress their citizens, undermining the potential to use either coercion or cooptation to sustain authoritarian rule. At the same time, dwindling state revenues left African governments increasingly dependent on loans from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, leading to a serious debt crisis that empowered Western states to set demanding economic and political conditions in return for their assistance. Third, the end of the Cold War meant that the foreign policy priorities of major powers ceased to be dominated by competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. In turn, foreign donors began to demand not just economic liberalization but regime change, withholding aid in order to force multipartyism in Kenya (1992) and Malawi (1993). Under these conditions, many governments decided that they had no option but to legalize opposition parties (Cheeseman 2015).

These post-Cold War geopolitical effects represent the kind of external shock that often appears in accounts of evolutionary biology. It was genuinely external, in that African states had little impact on the end of the Cold War; and it led to a fundamental reshaping of the political landscape in which, within the space of just a few years, the balance of power between ruling parties and the opposition shifted dramatically. However, it is important to remember that of these three processes, the first two represent the long-term drivers of change, while the third is better thought of as an important catalyst. Thus, while we cannot explain the timing of the transition to multipartyism without reference to shifts in the international community, this factor alone tells us little about the potential for genuine democratization.

The academic literature has already highlighted a number of significant political and economic critical junctures that emerged from this period of political change. For example, Lindberg (2006) has argued that the reintroduction of multiparty politics played a profound role in shaping the political trajectory of the continent because the repeated holding of elections promotes a process of democratization no matter what their quality. Put another way, for Lindberg elections are not simply an indication of democracy, but play an important role as a casual driver of democratic consolidation. In his initial formulation, repeatedly holding elections is shown to increase the quality of civil liberties in a state, with three consecutive elections representing a particularly significant threshold. Although Lindberg later refined this argument in work co-authored with van Ham (2018), accepting that in fact elections only have this effect above a certain quality threshold, he remains committed to the conclusion that by reintroducing multiparty elections, the political upheaval of the early 1990s created the possibility for further democratic reforms.

Empirically well-grounded as it is, Lindberg's analysis raises a number of interesting and challenging theoretical questions. If the early 1990s represented an important moment in which existing political structures were weakened, allowing political leaders to forge new futures, why was it the case that only some African states subsequently reaped the potential economic and political benefits? In other words, what explains why some states have undergone "democratization by elections" while others have not?

One answer advocated in *Democracy in Africa* (Cheeseman 2015) was that the three trends set out above did not apply equally in all cases. While some states featured particularly strong civil society movements, for example as a result of the evolution of a large trade union movement, others had seen civic groups eviscerated by authoritarian violence. In turn, while some governments were genuinely bankrupt by the 1990s, resource-rich governments had a constant flow of funds that they could use to pay public workers and coopt rivals. And while international actors pushed hard to force multiparty elections in some countries, geostrategic concerns, alliances, and a lack of leverage meant that they did not do so in others (Cheeseman 2015, Chapter 4). Compare, for example, Benin and Togo. As Nwajiaku (1994) has argued, while the French government was happy to demand democratization in cash-strapped Benin—which had sought to distance itself from French influence in the 1980s—it turned a blind eye to the violent reassertion of control by General Gnassingbé Eyadéma in resource-rich Togo, whose political leaders had strategically married into the French elite. As a result, while the political tsunami of the early 1990s swept away not only the Beninois government, but also the political system that it had founded, in Togo, President Eyadéma was able to retain political control, governing until his death in 2005.

The extent to which the three processes played out in a given country shaped the type of political transition that occurred, and this in turn shaped the prospects for democratization (Figure 2.1). Put simply, where economic decline had been particularly severe, civil society and the opposition were united and powerful, and international actors were willing to push for change, overwhelming pressure for reform led to *transitions from below* in which incumbent

Mode of Transition	Main Features	Typical Outcome
From above →	Limited reform enacted and controlled by the incumbent elite	→ Incumbent victory, limited openings, and dominant-party state
<p>Stale-mate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↗ Externally managed ↘ Externally triggered ↘ Domestically triggered ↘ Negotiated 	Stalemate between warring parties broken by internationally managed peace process and elections	→ Extremely fragile democratic gains dependent on continued international engagement
	Stalemate between government and opposition broken by pressure for elections from international actors	→ Weakly grounded democratic gains, emergence of electoral-authoritarian regimes
	Stalemate between government and opposition broken by "corrective coup," paving the way for multipartyism	→ No immediate gain but greater potential for reform, depending on will of the new ruling junta
	Stalemate between government and opposition leaders broken by elite compromise between moderates from both sides	→ Protection of core interests of all parties, stable democratic gains
From below →	Overwhelming pressure for change led by domestic protest movement	→ Incumbent defeat, potential for democratic consolidation

Figure 2.1 African transition trajectories
 Source: Cheeseman (2015, 96).

governments were removed from power in transitions, as in Benin and Zambia. Moreover, these transitions were particularly likely to lead to sustained processes of democratization because they gave rise to more extensive constitutional reform that institutionalized more effective protection for opposition parties and placed new checks and balances on the executive.

By contrast, where the opposition was weak and fragmented, the economic situation less desperate, and foreign powers less committed, leaders were empowered to make only the minimal set of reforms necessary to sustain domestic and international credibility. Precisely because these *transitions from above* were controlled by the ruling party, and in conditions in which they had little to fear from domestic rivals, they did not reshape the rules of the game and therefore did not create the conditions for rapid democratic gains—at least in the short term. Tanzania in the 1990s and Senegal in a process that actually began in the 1970s under President Léopold Sédar Senghor are classic examples of this kind of transition.

In between these two extremes sit a set of transitions in which pro-democracy forces were unable to secure the emergence of a new democratic dispensation, but governments also proved unable to fully control the pace of change. In these cases of *stalemate*, a period of political deadlock was typically resolved in one of four ways: a “corrective” coup to force the introduction of multiparty politics, resulting in *domestically triggered elections*; the application of economic and political pressure from international actors to force the hand of the government, leading to *externally triggered elections*; the imposition of a form of external tutelage in the shape of peacekeepers and administrators, generating *externally managed elections*; and a period of talks between the main domestic parties, leading to a *negotiated settlement*.

There is not the space here to go into all of these kinds of transitions, so I will focus on the negotiated and externally triggered varieties, as they have the clear implications for the democratic project. Examples of the former process are rare in sub-Saharan Africa, in part because weak institutions and a history of neopatrimonial politics dissuade leaders from making political deals that they do not trust each other to honor (Bratton and van de Walle 1997). However, where negotiated transitions do take place, they tend to generate distinctive political settlements, giving rise to conservative but stable political frameworks. This is because the negotiation process enables both the ruling party and the opposition to safeguard their core interests, which precludes the more radical solutions that might be advocated by hardliners on both sides, and ensures that a range of elites have an incentive to defend the agreement (Cheeseman 2015).

This was clearly the case in South Africa, where prolonged talks between the ruling National Party and the opposition African National Congress led to an end to the white minority rule of the apartheid system and the drafting of a new constitution that guaranteed minority rights and with a power-sharing agreement ensured that both sides would be represented in the first majority rule government. Along with a number of other factors—the granting of amnesty to those who had committed abuses under the former regime and the decision of the new president, Nelson Mandela, not to immediately replace the upper echelons of the security forces—figures from both parties had good reasons to support the new system. However, the same tendency towards moderation that enhanced political stability also placed constraints on the extent of economic transformation, because it took policies such as rapid land redistribution off the table (Webster and Adler 1999).

By contrast, the process of democratization for states in the category of externally triggered transitions is likely to be particularly vulnerable to subversion in the absence of international engagement, because domestic forces on their own proved insufficient to force the government to reintroduce multipartyism. As a result, the prospects for stalled processes of democratic reform are especially high for states in this category. This was the case in Togo, as discussed above. It has also been true of Malawi and Kenya, countries whose experiences

under multipartyism have been very different, but where competitive elections continue to be held in contexts that are far from being fully democratic (Cheeseman, Lynch, and Willis 2014), resulting in periodic political crises around disputed polls and periods of democratic backsliding.

It is important to note that there are two arguments at play here when it comes to the type of transition that a country experiences and its likely future pathway. The first is that the mode of transition is indicative of the capacity of governments to withstand the pressure placed on them to democratize. Transitions from below tend to occur when there is a more united opposition and a more effective civil society, two factors that are likely to constrain the government in the future, limiting the abuse of power. In other words, the mode of transition is significant because it signals the relative balance of power between government and opposition, which is one of the most important dynamics shaping the prospects for democratization.

The second claim is that the mode of transition tells us whether the rules of the game were reshaped in the early 1990s in ways that locked democratic gains into the political system. As Riedl (2014, x) has argued:

initial stages of democratic opening provide an opportunity for authoritarian incumbents to attempt to shape the rules of the new multiparty system in their own interests, but their power to do so depends on the extent of local support built up over time.

While the leaders of ruling parties experiencing transitions from above and externally triggered transitions were empowered to ensure that they continued to benefit from the formal rules of the game, those operating in the context of transitions from below and negotiated transitions were more precarious. There were two ways in which this was significant. First, in the Francophone states that held national conferences to agree on a new political dispensation, these leaders were more likely to have to make far-reaching concessions to the extent that democratic openings were built-in to the new framework, enhancing the prospects for further political liberalization. Second, in Anglophone states where constitutional review was much less common, weak incumbents were often pushed into allowing more independent electoral commissions and a freer media. These changes typically enabled opposition parties to secure a stronger foothold within the system, and established the principle of more (although by no means fully) independent political institutions.

We therefore have two good reasons to think that the kinds of transitions that countries experienced in the early 1990s can serve as a useful guide to their democratic trajectory thereafter.

Transitions reevaluated

To what extent have recent developments in these states confirmed or contradicted this analysis? It is important to remember that the kind of path dependency imagined within the historical institutionalist school does not deal in causal determinacy. Rather, it is based on likelihood—in other words, certain processes or decisions render some pathways more likely than others, but they do not make them certain. Indeed, a number of different factors can knock a country or an institution off a projected trajectory. Further economic and political shocks have the capacity to act as fresh critical junctures, shaping the prospects for democratization. Similarly, transfers of power and changes of leadership can result in a new balance of power between the government and opposition—and may also bring to office someone more/less willing to protect human rights.

Economic changes—such as finds of oil, gas, and diamonds—may also be significant in reshaping the balance of power, both between domestic and international actors, and between the government and domestic civil society groups. The same effect can also be generated by the emergence of new economic partners willing to provide support in the absence of a commitment to democracy, as has happened in Africa in the past twenty years with the rise of China, and to a lesser extent Brazil, India, Saudi Arabia, and Russia. It is also clear that profound socioeconomic shifts can strengthen or undermine the strategic importance of trade unions and related groups, radically altering the capacity of civil society groups to hold governments to account.

The fate of some of the countries discussed in the previous section demonstrates how significant these kinds of development can be. Take the example of Zambia. In some ways, the country appears to have followed the projected trajectory of a transition from below. Following the Movement for Multiparty Democracy's (MMD) defeat of the incumbent United National Independence Party (UNIP) in 1991, MMD's defeat by the Patriotic Front in the elections of 2011 means that Zambia is now one of a small handful of countries that have passed Huntington's (1993) well-known "two turnover" test for a consolidated democracy. However, despite the ability of opposition parties to win power, Zambia continues to oscillate between democratizing moments and authoritarian episodes. This uneven progress is at least partly related to the changing conditions in the country in the 1990s. The victory of the MMD was so comprehensive that it was able to emerge as a dominant party in its own right, taking almost three-quarters of the seats in parliament. At the same time, a combination of economic liberalization and economic downturn undermined the strategic influence of trade unions (Akwetey 2001).

The cumulative impact of these economic trends reshaped the balance of power in complex ways. The relative weakness of formal democratic structures continues to be a major concern under the country's sixth president, Edgar Lungu. While elections remain highly competitive, with the margin of victory for the winning party regularly falling below 10 percent, Lungu has used his control over the security forces and the courts to repress critics and retain power. Most notably, following a long-running dispute about the credibility of the 2016 presidential election—which the opposition claims was rigged—the leader of the United Party for National Development (UPND), Hakainde Hichilema, was arrested on trumped up charges of treason.

While Zambia demonstrates the vulnerability of democratic trajectories to disruption, in the many cases of transition from below the pathways anticipated in *Democracy in Africa* appear to have held, at least in terms of the overall quality of democracy. For example, the new political dispensation created by the *transition from below* in Benin has continued to support a process of democratic consolidation. While politics continues to be characterized by personal networks and regional considerations, the most significant institutions continue to be respected. This is not because the country's democratic foundations have not been tested, but because leaders who have sought to consolidate control in their own hands have ultimately found the costs of repression to be unpalatable.

For example, rumors that President Thomas Boni Yayi (2006–16) was hoping to build support for an unconstitutional third-term in office in the mid-2010s led to widespread concerns that the country could experience a "hegemonic rupture" as "past agreements on how to share power are torn up by a President determined to capture all economic and political opportunities for himself" (Banégas 2014). This fear appeared to be well-founded when the government proposed a constitutional amendment that it claimed would strengthen democracy by empowering the electoral commission, but was really motivated by a different clause that would have enabled the president to contest for another two terms. However, in stark contrast to

Uganda and Rwanda, where leaders were able to use their tighter control of the political system and ability to deliver political stability in countries with a history of conflict (Khadiagala 2017) to implement similar proposals fairly easily, in Benin the initiative led to “uproar” and “strong collective action” in the shape of a “Don’t touch my constitution movement” (Banégas 2014).

As in previous moments in which Benin’s new legal and political framework appeared to be under threat, public disapproval demonstrated the high cost of undermining democratic norms. Following a poor performance by the ruling party in legislative elections in 2015, Boni Yayi quietly shelved the idea of a third term and stood down as scheduled the following year. This is not to say that Benin is a consolidated democracy—far from it. Under President Boni Yayi’s tenure, the judiciary was frequently manipulated for political ends and the executive often abused its considerable power to disadvantage opponents. However, the economic and political fundamentals that led to a transition from below continued to hold, protecting the country’s democratic gains.

Tanzania’s *transition from above* has also continued to follow the pathway indicated in Figure 2.1. The ruling *Chama Cha Mapinduzi* (CCM) has continued to dominate the political landscape, and while the opposition party, *Chadema*, was widely expected to perform better in the 2015 general elections than ever before, the presidential poll was ultimately won by the CCM’s candidate, John Magufuli, with a commanding 58.5 percent of the vote. Subsequent analysis has suggested that although *Chadema* fought a more effective campaign, backed by the financial resources of its candidate, Edward Lowassa, the absence of strong civil society organizations through which the opposition could mobilize, coupled with CCM’s dominance of the media and ability to use state officials and infrastructure in support of its campaign, ensured that the ruling party was once again able to control the pace and scope of the country’s political transition (Paget 2017).

Moreover, the subsequent actions of President Magufuli—a self-styled “outsider” with a penchant for populist politics—have demonstrated the vulnerability of transitions from above to elite manipulation. Facing relatively few checks and balances, and an opposition that still lacks the capacity to effectively withstand government control, Magufuli’s intolerance of dissent and determination to force through certain reforms has led to a period of democratic backsliding. Journalists who criticize the president have been arrested, media owners have been threatened, and opposition parties have been banned from holding rallies, leading to a growing atmosphere of fear that has, in turn, undermined the political space available for the opposition (Paget 2017).

Externally triggered transitions have followed a similar path, as anticipated in the previous section. In both Kenya and Togo, governments have continued to hold competitive elections but often under problematic conditions, leading to accusations of electoral malpractice and prolonged political protests. In the Kenyan context, democratic breakthroughs, such as the introduction of a new constitution that devolved power away from the presidency in 2010, have consistently been undermined by a lack of political will to enforce key provisions (Brown and Raddatz 2014). Although this could have represented a critical juncture, the continuation of informal practices that undermined the impact of the new rules suggests that early hopes for rapid democratization will be disappointed—a point to which we will return below. At the same time, electoral disputes stemming from the determination of the ruling party to retain power at all costs have undermined confidence in the democratic process and resulted in fierce and often violent clashes between opposition supporters and the security forces. In 2017, for example, the Supreme Court ruling that President Uhuru Kenyatta’s victory was illegal and that the election must be re-run contributed to a prolonged dispute between opposition leaders and the government that resulted in around seventy deaths (Human Rights Watch 2017).

Meanwhile, in Togo, President Faure Gnassingbé inherited his position when his father died in office in 2005, and has continued with many of the repressive strategies that have kept his family in power for more than fifty years. The abuses committed under his rule, and the absence of presidential term limits which means that Gnassingbé can remain in office indefinitely, led to concerted protests and formation of a fourteen-member opposition coalition to demand his resignation in 2017 (Shaban 2017). As a result, Freedom House, the US think tank and democracy index, ranked Kenya and Togo as only “partly free” from 2014 to 2018.

Finally, the continent’s most famous negotiated transition, South Africa, has also continued to demonstrate the two key characteristics set out in Figure 2.1—relative political stability and what Webster and Adler (1999) have referred to as “class compromise.” Indeed, if anything the contradiction between the radical hopes of the liberation movement and the more moderate pact made with white capital and big business has become ever-more apparent. According to Gumede (2008), many on the left of the ruling party hoped that President Jacob Zuma, who came to power in 2009, would be more responsive to their concerns. Instead, the “pact” between African National Congress (ANC) leaders and the business elite has grown deeper and more problematic. More specifically, Zuma’s time in office cemented this relationship through the creation of new patrimonial ties between the president’s allies and influential business families such as the Guptas (Lodge 2014). In turn, this has led to increasing criticism of the lack of genuine socioeconomic transformation under the ANC.

In this regard, it is particularly telling that the figure who emerged to dislodge Zuma and take over the presidency of both the party and the state, Cyril Ramaphosa, has been deeply invested in the current political settlement. Although Ramaphosa rose to prominence as an anti-apartheid activist and a trade unionist, he subsequently made use of the economic opportunities generated by the transition to majority rule to take up lucrative positions such as prominent roles with Standard Bank and SAB Miller, as well as the chairmanship of MTN and the Bidvest Group. As Onishi (2018) has argued, having accumulated an estimated wealth of US\$550 million, Ramaphosa has a vested interest in blocking economic redistribution, even if he has made some populist statements regarding the need to fast-track land reform.

On the basis of these cases, the recent experience of African states appears to demonstrate the continued value of historical institutionalist frameworks that focus on the mode of transition to multiparty politics that countries took in the early 1990s. However, the example of Zambia, along with the uneven progress of Benin, also serve as an important reminder that these pathways are not set in stone and remain subject to disruption by new economic conditions, international contexts, and changes of leadership.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed some of the scholarship on institutional continuity and change in the African context, as well as the way the past shapes the present when it comes to processes of democratization. Throughout, I have argued that careful historical institutionalist analysis has much to tell us about the varied political trajectory of different states. However, in doing so I have also repeated one of the main weaknesses of scholarship in this area thus far, which is that it tends to overlook the significance of the relationship between formal institutions and their informal counterparts. For example, the key structures and processes included in Figure 2.1 are all formal, i.e., they are officially codified institutions such as constitutions and elections. Considerably less attention has been paid in this chapter to informal institutions: the informal norms and customs that also guide political behavior (Cheeseman 2018). This is

unfortunate because, as North (1991) has argued, no formal institution can be considered truly consolidated until it is underpinned by a set of supportive informal norms. In other words, the institutionalization of key democratic bodies requires both the expansion of their capacity and a growing adherence to their rules and mission. As a result, we can only fully understand Africa's democratic pathways if we factor in the complex interplay between informal and formal processes.

There are two reasons that the significance of informal institutions is often overlooked in path-dependent accounts of democratization in Africa. The first is that they are hard to capture and thus hard to compare. The second is that the prevailing trend in African studies has been to see informal institutions as being in direct competition with the formal rules of the game (Cheeseman 2018). This is the conceptualization offered within the neopatrimonial framework, for example, in which patrimonial forms of "traditional" authority are typically viewed as being in conflict with, and preventing the effective functioning of, the "modern" state (Chabal and Daloz 1999; see also Burbidge and Philp, this volume). But while this kind of competitive relationship may be common, Helmke and Levitsky (2006) have demonstrated that it is only one of a number of possibilities.

In a typology based on the Latin American experience, Helmke and Levitsky identify three other kinds of relationship: accommodating, substitutive, and complementary. The latter two categories are particularly significant for our purposes, because when formal institutions are new and vulnerable their survival may depend on the existence of complementary informal institutions that support them, or substitutive norms that can fill in for the formal rules when they are weak. A good example of the former is the growing norm in favor of presidential term limits in much—though by no means all—of the continent (Posner and Young 2018; Dulani, this volume). A good example of the latter is the way that political elites in Nigeria have invested in the practice of "zoning," the norm that power should be shared between leaders from the north and south of the country in order to manage the ethno-regional tensions generated by multiparty political competition (Cheeseman 2018).

Taking the role of informal institutions into account is not only important because it helps us to develop a better understanding of processes of democratization in Africa, but also because institutional change does not always take the form of the kind of "big bang" transformation that tends to be prioritized within historical institutionalist accounts. In addition to high-profile moments of political reconfiguration, we need to better understand more gradual processes of institutional strengthening and decay—of creeping authoritarian rollback and incremental democratic consolidation. As I have argued more extensively elsewhere (Cheeseman 2018), these more gradual processes of change are heavily shaped by the relationship between informal and formal institutions. It is therefore only when we integrate existing analysis of path dependency with the kind of framework proposed by Helmke and Levitsky that we will be able to fully account for the continent's democratic successes and failures.

Notes

- 1 Institutions are here understood to be "humanly devised constraints that structure political, economic, and social interactions" (North 1991, 97). They may be formal (codified, official, "bricks and mortar") such as legislatures and constitutions, or informal (norms, customs, established practices).
- 2 This section summarizes a much longer analysis in Cheeseman (2018, Introduction and Conclusion).
- 3 A paper by Eldredge and Gould (2014), originally published in 1972, is typically cited as the first authoritative statement of this concept.

References

- Akwetey, E.O. 2001. "Democratic Transition and Post-colonial Labour Regimes in Zambia and Ghana." In *Labour Regimes and Liberalization: The Restructuring of State-society Relations in Africa*, edited by Björn Beckman and Lloyd M. Sachikonye, 23–48. Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications.
- Arriola, Leonardo. 2009. "Patronage and Political Stability in Africa." *Comparative Political Studies* 42 (10): 1339–62.
- . 2013. *Multi-Ethnic Coalitions in Africa: Business Financing of Opposition Election Campaigns*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Banégas, Richard. 2014. "Briefing: Benin: Challenges for Democracy." *African Affairs* 113, no. 452: 449–59.
- Boone, Catherine. 2018. "Property and Land Institutions: Origins, Variations, and Political Effects." In *Institutions and Democracy in Africa: How the Rules of the Game Shape Political Developments*, edited by Nic Cheeseman, 61–91. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bratton, Michael, and Nicolas van de Walle. 1997. *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in a Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, Stephen, and Rosalind Raddatz. 2014. "Dire Consequences or Empty Threats? Western Pressure for Peace, Justice and Democracy in Kenya." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 8, no. 1: 43–62.
- Capoccia, Giovanni, and R. Daniel Kelemen. 2007. "The Study of Critical Junctures: Theory, Narrative, and Counterfactuals in Historical Institutionalism." *World Politics* 59, no. 3: 341–69.
- Chabal, Patrick, and Jean-Pascal Daloz. 1999. *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument*. Oxford: James Currey.
- Cheeseman, Nic. 2015. *Democracy in Africa: Successes, Failures and the Struggle for Political Reform*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- , ed. 2018. *Institutions and Democracy in Africa: How the Rules of the Game Shape Political Developments*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cheeseman, Nic, Gabrielle Lynch, and Justin Willis. 2014. "Democracy and its Discontents: Understanding Kenya's 2013 Elections." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 8, no. 1: 2–24.
- Cooper, Frederick. 2002. *Africa Since 1940: The Past of the Present*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Eldredge, Niles, and Stephen Jay Gould. 2014. "Punctuated Equilibria: An Alternative to Phyletic Gradualism." In *Essential Readings in Evolutionary Biology*, edited by Francisco Ayala and John Avise, 238–72. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Gumede, William M. 2008. "South Africa: Jacob Zuma and the Difficulties of Consolidating South Africa's Democracy." *African Affairs* 107, no. 427: 261–71.
- Helmke, Gretchen, and Steven Levitsky. 2006. "Introduction." In *Informal Institutions and Democracy: Lessons from Latin America*, edited by Gretchen Helmke and Steven Levitsky, 1–30. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Hughes, Melanie M., and Aili Marie Tripp. 2015. "Civil War and Trajectories of Change in Women's Political Representation in Africa, 1985–2010." *Social Forces* 93, no. 4: 1513–40.
- Human Rights Watch. 2017. "Kenya: Police Killed, Beat Post-Election Protesters." *Human Rights Watch*, October 15, 2017. www.hrw.org/news/2017/10/15/kenya-police-killed-beat-post-election-protesters.
- Huntington, Samuel. P. 1993. *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Khadiagala, Gilbert M. 2017. "Security and Governance in the Great Lakes Region: An Introduction." In *War and Peace in Africa's Great Lakes Region*, edited by Gilbert M. Khadiagala, 1–16. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Krasner, Stephen. D. 1988. "Sovereignty: An Institutional Perspective." *Comparative Political Studies* 21, no. 1: 66–94.
- LeBas, Adrienne. 2013. *From Protest to Parties: Party-building and Democratization in Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lindberg, Staffan. I. 2006. *Democracy and Elections in Africa*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- . 2009. "The Power of Elections Revisited." In *Democratization by Elections: A New Mode of Transitions*, edited by Staffan. I. Lindberg, 25–46. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Lodge, Tom. 2014. "Neo-patrimonial Politics in the ANC." *African Affairs* 113, no. 450: 1–23.
- North, Douglass. 1991. "Institutions." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 5, no. 1: 97–112.
- Nwajiaku, Kathryn. 1994. "The National Conferences in Benin and Togo Revisited." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 32, no. 3: 429–47.
- Mahoney, James. 2000. "Path Dependence in Historical Sociology." *Theory and Society* 29, no. 4: 507–48.

- Ndegwa, Stephen. N. 2002. "Decentralization in Africa: A Stocktaking Survey." World Bank Africa Working Paper Series 40, Washington, November 2002.
- Onishi, Norimitsu. 2018. "Meet Cyril Ramaphosa, South Africa's New President and a Mandela Favorite." *New York Times*, February 15. www.nytimes.com/2018/02/15/world/africa/south-africa-cyril-ramaphosa.html.
- Paget, Dan. 2017. "Tanzania: Shrinking Space and Opposition Protest." *Journal of Democracy* 28, no. 3: 153–67.
- Posner, Daniel, and Daniel Young. 2018. "Term Limits: Leaders, Political Competition and the Transfer of Power." In *Institutions and Democracy in Africa*, edited by Nic Cheeseman, 260–79. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Riedl, Rachel Beatty. 2014. *Authoritarian Origins of Democratic Party Systems in Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Romanelli, Elaine, and Michael Tushman. 1994. "Organisational Transformation as Punctuated Equilibrium: An Empirical Test." *Academy of Management Journal* 37, no. 5: 1141–66.
- Rustow, Dankwart. 1970. "Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model." *Comparative Politics* 2, no. 3: 337–63.
- Schedler, Andreas. 2002. "The Menu of Manipulation." *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2: 36–50.
- Shaban, Abdur Rahman Alfa. 2017. "Togo govt hit with fresh round of opposition protests." *Africa News*, December 28. www.africanews.com/2017/12/28/togo-govt-hit-with-fresh-round-of-opposition-protests.
- Shepsle, Kenneth A. 1989. "Studying Institutions: Some Lessons from the Rational Choice Approach." *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 1, no. 2: 131–47.
- Thelen, Kathleen. 1999. "Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics." *Annual Review of Political Science* 2, no. 1: 369–404.
- van Ham, Carolien, and Staffan Lindberg. 2018. "Elections: The Power of Elections in Multiparty Africa." In *Institutions and Democracy in Africa: How the Rules of the Game Shape Political Developments*, edited by Nic Cheeseman, 213–37. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Webster, Edward, and Glenn Adler. 1999. "Toward a Class Compromise in South Africa's 'Double Transition': Bargained Liberalization and the Consolidation of Democracy." *Politics & Society* 27, no. 3: 347–85.