

## African Social Science Review

---

Volume 10 | Number 1

Article 2

---

May 2019

# Democratization or Business As Usual? Evaluating Long Term Impact of Africa's Watershed Elections

Anna Brigevich Dr.

North Carolina Central University, [abrigevich@nccu.edu](mailto:abrigevich@nccu.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalscholarship.tsu.edu/assr>

---

### Recommended Citation

Brigevich, Anna Dr. (2019) "Democratization or Business As Usual? Evaluating Long Term Impact of Africa's Watershed Elections," *African Social Science Review*: Vol. 10 : No. 1 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://digitalscholarship.tsu.edu/assr/vol10/iss1/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Scholarship @ Texas Southern University. It has been accepted for inclusion in African Social Science Review by an authorized editor of Digital Scholarship @ Texas Southern University. For more information, please contact [rodriguezam@TSU.EDU](mailto:rodriguezam@TSU.EDU).

---

# Democratization or Business As Usual? Evaluating Long Term Impact of Africa's Watershed Elections

## **Cover Page Footnote**

n/a

## Democratization or Business As Usual? Evaluating Long Term Impact of Africa's Watershed Elections

**Anna Brigevich**  
North Carolina Central University

**Abstract:** *In many African countries, “watershed” elections led to political liberalization, and to democratization in a handful of cases. However, years later, many liberalized regimes backslid into authoritarianism. This paper evaluates the long-term impact of these election outcomes. Using a transitology framework, it shows that the reforms implemented at this crucial time dictated the course of liberalization well into the 2010s. Countries where a cohesive opposition managed to wrestle power from the elites have retained their liberalization gains to date. Countries where the opposition was more disorganized and where civil society was weaker remain, at best, hybrid regimes.*

**Keywords:** African democratization, transitology, opposition cohesion, regime trajectories

The early 1990s witnessed tremendous political and economic changes throughout the world. The collapse of the Soviet Union discredited the viability of authoritarian regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America, parts of Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). This phenomena, to which I refer as the “fourth wave of democratization,”<sup>1</sup> swept away many authoritarian regimes and one-party states, and, in a number of cases, replaced them with governments determined to enact pro-democratic, liberal reforms. In South Africa, Benin, Ghana, and Senegal the transition period

---

<sup>1</sup> I borrow the term “fourth wave of democratization” from McFaul (2002), who uses it to describe regime change in the post-communist space. Typically, it has been the scholarly practice to refer to any transitions post-1970 as the “third wave of democratization” (Huntington 1991). However, I find McFaul’s term more useful for this analysis, as it focuses on the post-1989 transition period in particular, and excludes countries that attempted democratization prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

resulted in genuine democratization. However, the initial euphoria surrounding the relatively small number of genuine democratic transitions in the fourth wave quickly dissipated, as democratization scholars discovered that regime transitions were rarely synonymous with democratic consolidation (Wahman 2014). In many African cases, such as Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, and Zambia, apparent political reform has been minimal, and often confined solely to the holding of multiparty elections, many of which have been fraudulent (Lindberg 2006). Furthermore, some African regimes, such as Angola and Cameroon have not transitioned from authoritarian rule, relying on severe repression to forestall political liberalization.

Successful democratization has proven to be only one of the possible regime outcomes in the fourth wave. Authoritarian regimes still exist, although they are less common now than before the collapse of the Soviet Union (Diamond 2002). However, more prevalent than democracies and autocracies are “hybrid regimes” that exhibit elements of both authoritarianism and democracy. In these countries, multiparty elections may be held regularly, but government elites consistently manipulate these elections to make sure that the opposition has little chance of winning (Schedler 2006; Howard and Roessler 2006).<sup>2</sup> As the fourth wave of democratization draws to a close, scholars recognize that democratic consolidation is not the global norm. In fact, some argue that we are witnessing worrying democratic backsliding, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, as democratic gains have stalled out, if not reversed, post-2006 (Gyimah-Boadi 2015; Diamond 2015). If that is the case, then the watershed election period is all the more crucial to our understanding why some countries got the transition “right,” while others got it “wrong.”

This paper focuses on explaining regime variation in the fourth wave in Sub-Saharan Africa. As such, it is concerned with two puzzles. First, what leads to successful democratization: why have some countries managed transitions to democracy, while others have slipped back into authoritarianism? Second, what gives rise to and accounts for the persistence of hybrid regimes in the fourth wave?

---

2 Throughout the past decade, scholars have coined a variety of labels to describe these hybrid regimes, such as “electoral authoritarianism” (Schedler 2002), “competitive authoritarianism” (Levitsky and Way 2002), “gray zone” countries (Carothers 2002), and “semi-authoritarianism” (Ottaway 2003).

I take the fourth wave founding elections,<sup>3</sup> also referred to as Africa's "watershed" elections, as the starting point of inquiry and argue that the outcomes of these elections conditioned the success or failure of democratization decades later. Furthermore, I assert that the outcome of these founding elections was highly determined by the nature of three key groups involved in the transition process---the old authoritarian elites, opposition movements, and civil society. In this paper, I develop an agency-centered theoretical framework that tests the effects of these three groups of actors on the degree of democratization achieved since the initial transition period. My findings reveal that opposition cohesion and civil society strength increase the chances for liberalization and democratization in the fourth wave. I conclude with a brief discussion of what can be done to improve the quality of democracy in present-day hybrid and authoritarian regimes.

### **Theorizing Democratization Post-1989**

Democratization theory has evolved significantly since the 1960s, reflecting both our increased understanding of the process of democratization, as well as the incorporation of newer democratic regimes into the theoretical framework. Initially, democratization scholars (Lipset 1959; Moore 1966) argued that long-standing structural factors were the best predictors for the success or failure of democracy, and historical legacies were seen as the driving force behind regime change. Furthermore, regime transition was conceptualized in terms of change towards greater democracy. These theories worked relatively well in explaining the centuries-long process of democratization in Western Europe, where democracy developed in concert with capitalism and populations were relatively homogeneous. However, as many scholars of fourth wave transitions came to realize, traditional democratization theories offered little insight into the complex processes unfolding in the modern world.

Traditional theories could not account for the appearance of democratic movements in places where the required structural factors were largely absent. For example, the legacies argument

---

<sup>3</sup> A distinction must be made here between founding elections in general, and the founding elections in the fourth wave. In Africa, most countries held founding elections in the 1960s, following the withdrawal of colonial powers. However, with the exception of Botswana, these elections resulted in the institutionalization of an authoritarian regime, military rule, or a one-party state. Hence, no more genuinely democratic, multiparty elections were held until 1990, when a fresh wave of multiparty elections began anew. In this paper, I focus only on these post-1989 elections.

cannot explain why economically underdeveloped and resource-poor Benin developed democratic institutions following its first multiparty elections in 1991, and why the country is currently one of the strongest democracies in the region (Stroh 2018), while Togo and Chad, which share a similar economic and social structure to Benin, remain authoritarian (Hanson 2015). It became increasingly apparent that transitioning countries were not simply moving towards forms of consolidated democracy, but exhibited a wide range of regime outcomes. As a result, scholars of the fourth wave of democratization began searching for an alternative theory, one that reflected the changes taking place during the transition period. These scholars began analyzing the transition period itself and the decisions taken at the individual level by the elites, the opposition, and societal actors (Bratton and van de Walle 1992; Easter 1997; Fish 1999; Jones-Luong 2000; van de Walle 2002; McFaul 2002; Hale 2005).

One of the crucial steps towards constructing an agency-based theory to democratic transitions in the fourth wave has been the application of the transitology paradigm, initially laid out in O'Donnell and Schmitter's 1986 seminal book *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*. Largely informed by third wave transitions in Latin America during the 1970s and 1980s, O'Donnell and Schmitter analyze the interactions between the old elites and opposition groups. They argue that there is no transition whose beginning is not the consequence of important divisions within the authoritarian regime itself between the hard-liners and the soft-liners. Once these divisions become apparent, soft-liners have the incentive to either defect from the old regime or to initiate pacting, which they define as talks with the opposition movements on liberalizing the political system. As the soft-liners lower the cost for engaging in collective action, they quickly discover that former political identities reemerge and new ones expand beyond the public spaces the rulers were willing to tolerate at the beginning of the transition, (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986: 48-49). Emboldened by the thawing-out of the political system, opposition groups will press for multiparty elections. If the split between the elites is severe, it will undermine their organizational capacity, lower extent of their ability to manipulate election results, and, ultimately, harm their chances of winning the election.

The handful of successful democratic transitions of the early 1990s reinforced the notion among US policymakers and aid practitioners that countries undergoing political changes were moving towards democracy. However political scientists engaged in

the study of democracy noticed that the reality was much murkier. As Thomas Carothers (2002) points out, many of the countries that were labeled as transitioning to democracy, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, were in fact stalled democratic experiments or were undergoing a reversion to authoritarianism. As such, these countries were not transitioning at all, but were developing their own distinct form of governance that mixed authoritarianism with some elements of democracy.

Given the prevalence of hybrid regimes, it is not surprising that democracy scholars currently focus primarily on this group of countries. Although I agree with Howard and Roessler (2006) that there is a need to study these regimes in relation to one another, rather than highlighting the numerous ways in which they fall short of the standard set by advanced democracies, focusing solely on hybrid regimes obfuscates the larger transition patterns in the region. The only way to address this is to develop a comprehensive theoretical framework for regime change that encompasses all of the fourth wave regime types. In a sense, we must resurrect the transitology paradigm, while updating it to reflect the prevalence and persistence of hybrid regimes.

### **The Transitology Paradigm in the African Context**

#### *Initiating Liberalization*

The demise of the USSR serves as a critical juncture in this analysis. The Soviet collapse triggered liberalization in SSA countries in a number of ways. First, the mass protests in Eastern Europe set off similar popular protests in SSA (Bratton and van de Walle 1992) and emboldened opposition movements to push for democratic reforms in Africa (El-Khawas 2001). Unable to contain public outcries against the oppressiveness and corruption of the existing regimes, authoritarian elites were faced with one of three actions, (see Cheeseman 2015). First, institute genuine liberalizing reforms and acquiesce to future elections, in the hopes that the dictator can turn democratizer, and retain his office while maintaining a sense of wide-spread legitimacy. Arguably, this transpired in 1993 Malawi, where President-for-Life Hastings Banda held a referendum on reinstating multi-party democracy, which passed with 64% of the vote, and ended the Malawi Congress Party's 37-year monopoly on power. General elections the next year saw Banda defeated and ousted from office. This course of action was rare, as the authoritarian elites were simply hoping to ride out the maelstrom of the first multiparty elections.

Second, the elites could opt for cosmetic reforms, enough to appease the protesters in the immediate-term, but to forestall any further liberalization in the future. This was the most common of the options taken by the elites. Case and point the actions of Benin's President Mathieu Kérékou, who held a national conference to rebuild state authority in 1989, drawing together all sectors of Beninese society, but with no actual intent of democratizing (Brown and Kaiser 2007). This type of liberalization was, in many cases, sufficient to pry the regime open further than the elites originally intended, as was indeed the case in Benin, where Nicéphore Soglo, a technocrat in Kérékou's government, declared conference sovereignty, established the mechanisms for a transition to a constitutional democratic regime, and ousted Kérékou. O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986: 7) point out that if the initial liberalized practices are not viewed as obviously threatening to the regime (particularly if the elites perceive their chances of winning the first elections as relatively high), then they tend to accumulate, become institutionalized, and raise the perceived costs of eventual annulment. This then paves the way for future democratization.

The third option for elites was to reject the process of liberalization, either by instituting minor reforms and planning to outright manipulate the elections or failing to hold elections altogether (Swaziland, Democratic Republic of the Congo). In some cases (Angola, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Burundi) elections were only viable options after the conclusion of prolonged civil conflict.

Given this array of actions, the chances of democratization are clearly more likely in the first scenario. However, the second scenario also has potential for greater political change, and is determined by the uncertain dynamic of actors' intentions and actions during the transition period (Wahman 2014). The third option leaves no room for democratization, and frequently leads to violent regime overthrows.

Mass protests are only part of the story. The other motivating factor conditioning regime change was the de-legitimization of authoritarianism broadly, both in domestic and international politics. As Frederick Chiluba in Zambia famously said, if the very architects of communism cast aside the one-party regime, then who are Africans to continue to support it (quoted in Bratton and van de Walle 1992: 425). As authoritarianism came under greater scrutiny in the international realm, wealthy donors, such as the US, the IMF, and the World Bank, began demanding political reform by explicitly mandating multiparty elections. As a result, African dictators were

forced to initiate multiparty elections, whether genuine or highly manipulated, as a sign of accepting the new, more democratic rules of the game (Cheeseman 2015: 93). By May 1991, at least twenty-one African governments adopted significant political reforms to permit greater pluralism and competition, and by 1995, thirty-five out of the forty-eight sub-Saharan African countries had held multiparty elections, (see Bienen and Herbst 1996; Bratton and van de Walle 1992; El-Khawas 2001).

### *The Watershed Elections as a Critical Juncture*

For many African countries, the regime type that emerged following the first multiparty elections has persisted well into the recent years. In other words, these elections set the precedent for the manner in which the democratization process was to be carried out. As van de Walle (2002: 71) points out, “Countries where incumbents went down in the transition maelstrom are significantly more democratic today than countries where the dictator rode out the coming of multiparty politics.” The first elections set patterns that persisted throughout the decade, and were predicated on whether the opposition managed to establish themselves during these elections (van de Walle 2002; Bratton and van de Walle 1992; Lindberg 2004 and 2006). Hence, in Mali, Benin, and Cape Verde, incumbent turnover resulted in the establishment of a stable democratic regime, while in Angola, Djibouti, and Equatorial Guinea the ability of the incumbent to retain control has resulted in a constriction of the political space.

The transitology paradigm offers a fruitful theoretical framework for analyzing and comparing regime change. In this framework, the founding elections are a critical juncture in a country’s transition process; they are an important signal of an official break with the authoritarian past and a significant departure from the arbitrariness of authoritarian rule (O’Donnell 2002). At the same time, founding elections are moments of high uncertainty, and their results cannot be predicted from the existing political and social structures (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986: 61; Schmitter and Karl 1994: 4-5). During the transition, existing political institutions become temporarily suspended, and actors are forced to make hurried and confused choices. Those in power may seriously overestimate the support for the old regime, while those outside it may underestimate their capacity to draw votes from the masses (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986: 61). The outcome of these hurried decisions is often not what any one group would have initially preferred (Schmitter and Karl 1994; Fish 1999). In this highly

uncertain context, the only way to understand regime outcomes is to examine the roles that key actors play during the transition period (Fish 1999).

### *Updating the Transitology Paradigm*

There is a critical difference between the findings of O'Donnell and Schmitter and those of fourth wave scholars. In O'Donnell and Schmitter's argument, the drive towards democratization originates, at least initially, from within the old regime. Yet Africanist scholars agree that the old elites play a much more limited role in bringing about political liberalization, and typically have a negative effect on the prospects for democratization (van de Walle 2002; Bienen and Herbst 1996; Joseph 1997). However, at the core of both these arguments lies the idea that elite splits facilitate regime change by making elites less capable of fending off demands for political liberalization. As such, I do not view these arguments as necessarily incompatible. Rather, in the newer democratization theory, the burden of initiating regime change falls on other actors, (see Cheeseman 2015).

If the old elites were always resistant to political liberalization, then what accounts for the regime changes that transpired throughout SSA? Democratization scholars agree that the single most important factor leading to political liberalization and successful democratization in the fourth wave was opposition victory during the founding elections (Bunce 1999; Fish 1998; van de Walle 2002; Bratton and van de Walle 1992; Easter 1997). Victory for the opposition served to reinforce the break with the authoritarian past, and ushered in the potential for democratic reform. This is not to say that opposition victory immediately translated into democratic reform. In fact, more recent work by Wahman (2014) shows that electoral turnover does not necessarily produce democracy; both opposition victory and incumbent re-election have the potential to improve democratic governance. According to Wahman, the key factor to consider is the degree of electoral uncertainty in subsequent elections – if the degree of uncertainty is high, then both incumbent elites and a recently elected opposition-turned-government are more likely to erode democratic norms in the hopes of recapturing office. However, as the historical institutionalism literature argues (Capoccia and Keleman 2007), once initial choices are made (i.e., the decision to democratize), they close off alternative options (i.e., the reconsolidation of power) and lead to the establishment of institutions that generate self-reinforcing, path-dependent process (i.e., free and fair elections,

electoral oversight, the independence of the judiciary, etc.). For example, in Niger, victory for the opposition movement Alliance of Forces for Change (AFC), comprised of six different parties, translated into little more than intra-group squabbling in the legislature, and the consequent break-down of the political system altogether, (see Gervais 2018). It was only when the old ruling party, the National Movement for a Society of Development (MNSD), won the subsequent elections that genuine democratic reform could proceed anew. However, the case of Niger demonstrates that once regime change is initiated the chances for political liberalization increase dramatically.

Turning to the merits of electoral turnover in the watershed elections, opposition victory signals to the masses that regime change is possible, and the masses will be more likely to hold the opposition to its promise of democratic reform (Bunce 1999; Teorell and Wahman 2018). Second, the old elite will be presented with two options: disband, and permanently relinquish all hold on political power, or reform, and adhere to the democratic rules of the new game (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986; Bunce 1999). Albeit, in reality, a group of the old elites may nullify election results and hijack the government, typically in the form of a military coup, or may suspend any further liberalization. In Niger, President Ousmane refused to appoint a member of the opposition as prime minister after his own coalition collapsed. In Nigeria, the military annulled the election of Chief Abiola as president, and suspended civilian rule (Bienen and Herbst 1996). These examples highlight the tentative nature of the transition process.

Opposition victory is highly dependent on the ability of different opposition groups to ban together during election time, or opposition cohesion (Bratton and van de Walle 1992; Howard and Roessler 2006; Olukoshi 1999; Bratton and van de Walle 1997; van de Walle 2002). During the transition process, opposition groups face serious power asymmetries vis-à-vis the old elites, and opposition parties face an uphill battle in persuading voters to choose them over the incumbent (Howard and Roessler 2006: 371). Most of the resources used to fund electoral campaigns are concentrated in the hands of the old elite, while opposition parties rely on a handful of patrons, usually their leaders, to finance their activities. Writing about the general weakness of African opposition parties, Olukoshi (1999: 29) notes that as part of the strategy employed by incumbent regimes to weaken the opposition, public sector patronage was withdrawn from private sector business organizations that were sympathetic to or identified with the

opposition. As a result, opposition parties lack the sufficient resources to build a nationwide political party that has the capacity to effectively challenge the incumbent. This problem is further exacerbated in ethnically diverse states, where regional opposition parties run on platforms that appeal to only their own ethnic groups (Elischer 2013). Information asymmetries prevail as the government still has unequivocal control of the media and thus the capacity to discredit the opposition in the public eye

As a result, it is crucial that opposition groups present a united front during election time. A cohesive opposition increases the prospects for democratization in several ways. First, it takes votes away from the ruling regime and introduces the possibility of a democratic regime turnover (Bunce 1999; Fish 1999). Second, it prevents the incumbent regime from utilizing a divide-and-conquer-strategy, in which the government manipulates, co-opts, and represses less powerful opposition parties (van de Walle 2002; van Eerd 2017). Third, the government will be less likely to engage in electoral manipulation for fear of public backlash from the opposition supporters (Howard and Roessler 2006). These factors all contribute to the institutionalization of democratic practices in a previously closed political regime. Furthermore, opposition candidates, once in power, will be more likely to keep their campaign promises and to stick to the democratic rules of the game because they realize that the same electorate that voted them into office may just as easily vote them out (Bunce 1999).

Some authors argue that a vibrant civil society is necessary to secure opposition victory (Bunce 1999; Bratton and van de Walle 1992; Fish 1999). A vibrant civil society pressures the authoritarian government for reform, and actively supports opposition candidates during election time. Furthermore, by actively protesting against the government, civic groups may encourage old elites to defect to the opposition, lowering elite capacity to maintain control of the state (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986; Bratton and van de Walle 1992). On the other hand, if civil society is weak, typically due to the oppressive nature of the old regime, it will be less vocal about the need for reform, and will support the authoritarian incumbent for fear of government backlash. However, as of yet, the role civil society plays in driving the fourth wave democratization process is highly undertheorized and is absent from many explanations of regime change, (for an exception, see Lewis 2018). This is due, in part, to the belief that civil society in SSA is generally weak and plays an insignificant role in the transition process (Randall and

Svasand 2002; Bienen and Herbst 1996; van de Walle 2002; El-Khawas 2001).

There is an important distinction in the function of these two groups of actors. Opposition movements and political parties attempt to affect regime change through contesting elections and holding political office. Civic groups, on the other hand, are not involved in the government directly, but attempt to affect change through casting a vote for specific candidates and holding the political leadership accountable for their policies. Thus, it is possible to have opposition and civic groups that vary in strength and effectiveness in the same political system, and these variations contribute to the different regime outcomes that characterize the fourth wave.

### *Explaining Hybrid Regimes*

What accounts for the presence of hybrid regimes? Hybrid regimes emerge in situations where the opposition is fragmented but elite capacity is too low to fully exclude the opposition from participating in the new government or to fully consolidate authoritarian rule. Hence, this new government will be marked by deadlock, and democratic reform will be either stalled or diluted (Howard and Roessler 2006; Schedler 2006; Carothers 2002).

Within the hybrid regime category, two different election outcomes are possible, but the end result is invariably a hybrid regime. In the first group, the opposition manages to win the first multiparty elections, despite being fragmented, but is unable to work together within the new government and to keep the old authoritarian elites at bay. Although the opposition may attempt to initiate pro-democratic reform, the old elites will be able to effectively block any major changes to the political system (Bunce 1999). Furthermore, given the typically poor performance of the new government, the opposition is voted out of office in the subsequent elections, and replaced by the “reformed” old elites. This, in turn, stalls pro-democratic reform.

In the second group, the opposition loses the first multiparty elections, as a result of electoral manipulation and voter intimidation by the incumbent, but still manages to gain a minority of seats in the legislature. At the same time, the incumbent and his party perform equally poorly, and manage to hold on to office by a slim margin. As a result, the incumbent cannot prevent a significant parliamentary opposition from arising, and this opposition keeps the incumbent party in check, ensuring that at least some of the gains made during the initial transition period are preserved (van de Walle

2002). In these cases, it is clear that the incumbent cannot survive a reasonably free and fair election against a united opposition.

### **Regime Trajectories in Sub-Saharan Africa**

How similar are African regimes today to the regimes they had prior to the watershed elections and during the transition period? To test my critical juncture theory, I begin by examining the SSA country Freedom House (FH) scores one year prior to the transition period, at the transition period, and at 2014, (25 years after the collapse of the Berlin Wall). I define the transition period as the year the first multiparty elections were held. In cases where the elections for the executive and the legislature are not simultaneous, I consider the transition period to be the earlier of the two.

For most countries in SSA, the transition period spans the years 1990-1998. By that time, four countries had not held elections: The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Eritrea, Rwanda, and Somalia. All four have been mired in either civil war or international conflict (Eritrea). For the DRC and Rwanda, I identify the transition year as the period when fighting has ceased and multiparty elections called, 2006 and 2003 respectively. Somalia and Eritrea have yet to hold national-level multiparty elections. For Eritrea, I take its year of independence from Ethiopia as its transition year. For Somalia, which has experienced no variation in regime type since before the collapse of the Soviet Union, I take 1990 as the start of its regime trajectory. Furthermore, Botswana and Mauritius held free and fair multiparty elections in the years prior to the collapse of communism. For these countries, I take their transition period to be the next year post-1989 when elections were held, 1994 and 1991, respectively. As such, these years do not strictly constitute a transition period. However, the Gambia, which was rated Free prior to 1990, but then lapsed into authoritarianism in 1994, is a good example of the potential for regime volatility post-1989.

If the transition period is not relatively important, then the first multiparty elections should have little, to no impact, on the success or failure of democratization. Instead, historical and structural factors, which have developed over time, and predate the transition period, should drive the democratization process. If the transitology argument is correct, and actors, not structural factors, drive the transition process, then a country's regime in 2014 should roughly resemble its regime type during and after the transition period. Furthermore, if the founding elections represent a significant break with the past, then a country's regime type during the

transition period should look markedly different than the one it has immediately prior to the transition.

**Table 1** Regime Trajectories of Present-Day African Democracies

Year before Transition	Transition Period	2014
<b>Democracies</b>	<b>Remained Democracy</b>	<b>Remained Democracy</b>
Botswana	Botswana	Benin
Gambia	Gambia	Botswana
Mauritius	Mauritius	Cape Verde
Namibia	Namibia	Mauritius Namibia
	<b>Transitioned from Hybrid to Democracy</b>	Sao Tome & Principe South Africa
	Benin Cape Verde	
	Mali	<b>Transitioned from Hybrid to Democracy</b>
	Sao Tome & Principe	Ghana
	South Africa	Lesotho
	Zambia	Senegal
	<b>Transitioned from Authoritarian to Democracy</b>	<b>Transitioned from Authoritarian to Democracy</b>
	Malawi	N/A

Table 1 shows the regime trajectories of present-day African democracies. Only four countries were rated as Free by FH on year prior to the transition period (Botswana, the Gambia, Mauritius, and Namibia), and remained Free during the transition. Six countries improved their democratic rankings during the transition period by shifting from the Partially Free (hybrid) to the Free category, while one country (Malawi) transitioned from a Not Free (authoritarian) regime to democracy. Four of the transition democracies (Benin, Cape Verde, Sao Tome and Principe, and South Africa) remained

**Table 2** Regime Trajectories of Present-Day African Hybrid Regimes

Year before Transition	Transition Period	2014
<b>Hybrid Regimes</b>	<b>Remained Hybrid</b>	<b>Remained Hybrid</b>
Angola	Central African Republic	Comoros
Benin	Congo (Brazzaville)	Cote d'Ivoire
Burundi	Cote d'Ivoire	Guinea-Bissau
Cape Verde	Guinea-Bissau	Kenya
CAR	Lesotho	Liberia
Congo (Brazzaville)	Madagascar	Madagascar
Cote d'Ivoire	Niger	Mozambique
Guinea	Nigeria	Niger
Guinea-Bissau	Senegal	Nigeria
Lesotho	Seychelles	Seychelles
Madagascar	Uganda	Sierra Leone
Mali	Zimbabwe	Tanzania
Niger		
Nigeria	<b>Transitioned from Democracy to Hybrid</b>	<b>Transitioned from Democracy to Hybrid</b>
Sao Tome & Principe	N/A	Malawi
Senegal		Mali
Seychelles	<b>Transitioned from Authoritarian to Hybrid</b>	Zambia
South Africa	Comoros	
Swaziland	Ethiopia	<b>Transitioned from Authoritarian to Hybrid</b>
Uganda	Gabon	Burkina Faso
Zambia	Ghana	Guinea
Zimbabwe	Kenya	Togo
	Liberia	
	Mozambique	
	Sierra Leone	
	Tanzania	

democracies in the long-term, along with the four original democracies. By 2014, several countries experienced democratic setbacks, reverting to a hybrid regime (Malawi, Mali, and Zambia), while one became authoritarian (the Gambia). Additionally, three countries managed democratization well after the transition period (Ghana, Lesotho, and Senegal). Of the eleven countries that were democracies during their transition period, seven retained their Free status.

Table 2 reports the regime trajectories for present-day hybrid regimes. Prior to the transition year, 22 African countries were ranked Partly Free. During the transition 12 kept their Partly Free status, and were joined by nine previously Not Free regimes. Of these 21 hybrid regimes, twelve remain hybrids today. The transition period had a long-term liberalizing effect in Comoros, Kenya, Liberia, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, and Tanzania. Three countries transitioned to hybrid regimes from authoritarian ones following the transition period: Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Togo.

Finally, Table 3 displays the regime trajectories for present-day authoritarian regimes. The year prior to transition, 21 African countries were ranked Not Free, and twelve of them failed to liberalize during the transition period. They were joined by Angola, Burundi, Guinea, and Swaziland in the transition year. Of these 25 transition autocracies, 13 remain Not Free currently. Furthermore, there were significant political setbacks in seven African states in the long term: the CAR, Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Gabon, the Gambia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.

Overall, the FH scores reveal that the transition period did have significant and long-term liberalizing effects on 17 of 48 African countries. Furthermore, the transition period does appear to guide the trajectories of the majority of African countries today. Sixty-seven percent of SSA countries have the same regimes today as they did in the transition period. To better understand the stability/volatility of these regime trajectories, I construct a measure titled “time in stasis.” The measure looks at the percentage of time, from the transition period to 2014, that a country maintains the same regime (Free, Partly Free, or Not Free) as it had in the transition period. Higher values indicate greater regime type stability. As one can see from Table 4, 18 countries have no variation in their regime trajectory, post-transition. Overall, 69% of countries spend a high proportion of time in stasis, while roughly 16% fluctuate at a

medium level and 16% at a high level. It appears that most regimes do become locked into their regime type post-early 1990s.

**Table 3** Regime Trajectories of Present-Day African Autocracies

<i>Year before Transition</i>	<i>Transition Period</i>	<i>2014</i>
<b>Authoritarian Regimes</b>	<b>Remained Authoritarian</b>	<b>Remained Authoritarian</b>
Burkina Faso	Burkina Faso	Angola
Cameroon	Cameroon	Burundi
Chad	Chad	Cameroon
Comoros	DRC	Chad
DRC	Djibouti	Djibouti
Djibouti	Equatorial Guinea	DRC
Equatorial Guinea	Eritrea	Equatorial Guinea
Ethiopia	Mauritania	Eritrea
Gabon	Rwanda	Mauritania
Ghana	Somalia	Rwanda
Kenya	Sudan	Somalia
Liberia	Togo	Sudan
Malawi		Swaziland
	<b>Transitioned: Hybrid to Authoritarian</b>	
Mauritania		<b>Transitioned: Hybrid to Authoritarian</b>
Mozambique	Angola	CAR
Rwanda	Burundi	Congo (Brazzaville)
Sierra Leone	Guinea	Ethiopia
Somalia	Swaziland	Gabon
Sudan		
	<b>Transitioned from Democracy to Authoritarian</b>	
Tanzania		Uganda
Togo	N/A	Zimbabwe
		<b>Transitioned from Democracy to Authoritarian</b>
		The Gambia

**Table 4** Time “in Stasis” of African Regimes, Transition Period to Present

High (100% - 75%)	Medium (74% - 50%)	Low (Below 49%)
Angola - 100	Kenya - 61	Zimbabwe - 44
Benin - 100	Senegal - 59	Cote d'Ivoire - 36
Botswana - 100	Lesotho - 55	Ghana - 35
Cameroon - 100	Djibouti - 52	Malawi - 24
Cape Verde - 100	Burundi - 50	Gambia - 9
Chad - 100	Congo (Brazzaville) - 50	Zambia - 8
Comoros - 100	Togo - 50	Burkina Faso - 4
Equatorial Guinea - 100		
Madagascar - 100		
Mauritius - 100		
Mozambique - 100		
Namibia - 100		
Sao Tome & Principe - 100		
Seychelles - 100		
South Africa - 100		
Sudan - 100		
Swaziland - 100		
Tanzania - 100		
Uganda - 95		
Guinea-Bissau - 90		
Sierra Leone - 89		
Niger - 86		
CAR - 83		
Liberia - 83		
Mali - 83		
Eritrea - 82		
Mauritania - 78		
Nigeria - 78		
Guinea - 77		
Gabon - 76		
Ethiopia - 75		
N= 31	N=7	N=7
69%	15.50%	15.50%

**Table 5** Regime Outcomes as Reflection of Opposition Cohesion and Civil Society Strength

<b>Opposition Wins</b>		<b>Opposition Loses</b>	
<b>Cohesive</b>	<b>Fragmented</b>	<b>Cohesive</b>	<b>Fragmented</b>
<b>Democracy</b>			
Cape Verde (0)	Benin (2)	Botswana (2)	Senegal (0)
Lesotho (1)		Ghana (0)	
Mauritius (1)			
Namibia (1)			
S.T. & Principe (0)			
South Africa (2)			
<b>Hybrid</b>			
Niger (1)	Madagascar (2)	Burkina Faso (1)	Comoros (0)
Zambia (2)	Malawi (2)	Cote d'Ivoire (1)	Guinea (0)
	Mali (2)	Mozambique (0)	Guinea-Bissau (0)
		Seychelles (0)	Kenya (2)
			Liberia (0)
			Nigeria (1)
			Sierra Leone (0)
			Tanzania (1)
			Togo (0)
<b>Autocracy</b>			
Burundi (.)	CAR (0)	Angola (0)	Cameroon (0)
	Congo-Brazz. (1)	Djibouti (0)	Chad (0)
			DRC (.)
			Eq. Guinea (0)
			Gabon (1)
			Mauritania (0)
			Sudan (0)
			The Gambia (0)
			Uganda (0)
			Zimbabwe (1)

Finally, how well do opposition cohesion and civil society strength during the transition period predict long-term democratization in the SSA region? To measure opposition cohesion, I use the Bratton and van de Walle Opposition Cohesion measure, taken from the *Political Regimes and Regime Transitions*

*in Africa* data set.<sup>4</sup> The opposition cohesion measure is dichotomous, with countries receiving a score of 1 if the opposition was cohesive during the watershed elections and, 0 otherwise. I measure civil society strength using Freedom House's *How Freedom is Won* report, which rates the strength of civic movements during the transition period on a three-point scale. In the report, Karatnycky and Ackerman (2005) define civil society as a grassroots conglomeration of civic forces that includes civic organizations, students, and trade unions, who may turn to mass protests, strikes, boycotts, blockades, and other forms of civic disobedience to affect political change. The report codes half the countries in SSA. I rely on the Bratton and van de Walle dataset to code the remaining countries. The dataset provides information on the number of trade unions and civic organizations active during the transition period, as well as the number of political protests in each SSA country. The Bratton and van de Walle data correlates nicely with that available from the Freedom House report.

Table 5 identifies the strength of the opposition and civil society at the time of transition for present-day democracies, hybrid regimes, and authoritarian regimes. The pattern is most striking in the case of democracies versus authoritarian regimes. Present-day democracies had the largest proportion of cohesive opposition movements than either hybrids or autocracies. In most democracies, a cohesive opposition translated into an opposition victory. In only one case, Burundi, did a cohesive opposition win an election, but the regime remained authoritarian. This is reflective of the civic war that broke out shortly after the first multiparty elections. In Niger and Zambia, a cohesive opposition won the first elections, but the country remained a hybrid regime in the long-term.

If democratic regimes are marked by victorious and cohesive opposition movements, the reverse is true in autocracies. In two-thirds of present-day authoritarian regimes, the opposition was fragmented and lost the first multiparty elections. That being said, the distribution of countries across the four columns is fairly similar across hybrids and autocracies. However, the difference in civic society scores helps explain why the former liberalized more than the latter. In 56% of the hybrid regimes, civic society was moderately strong (1) or strong (2). Compare that with only 20% of authoritarian regimes where civil society was moderately strong.

---

<sup>4</sup> Bratton and van de Walle's "Political Regimes and Regime Transitions in Africa: A Comparative Handbook" is available online at the University of Michigan International Consortium for Political and Social Research.

Table 5 identifies the strength of the opposition and civil society at the time of transition for present-day democracies. In short, the analysis presented here confirms the longstanding argument made by democratization scholars that opposition cohesion is crucial to successful democratization. However, it also points to the importance of a vibrant civil society in affecting positive regime change. When coupled together, the two groups produce a democratic regime. When a cohesive opposition is absent during the founding elections, a strong civil society still has the capability of creating momentum for democratic reform, and ensuring that the old elites do not revert back to authoritarianism. In the following section, I explore these arguments in greater detail by drawing on a two demonstrate the dynamic between elites, opposition groups, and civil society, and the roles that these groups play in the transition process. Furthermore, I show how the outcome of the founding elections condition the prospects of democratization further down the line.

### **Regime Transitions and Path-Dependency**

As the above analysis suggests, there were two causal mechanisms that dictated the outcome of the first multiparty elections: opposition cohesion and civil society strength. Whether a country emerged from the transition phase as a full democracy, a hybrid regime, or an autocracy was largely predicated on the relative strength and capability of these two different sets of actors. Following the outcome of the first multiparty election, 68% of the countries found themselves “locked into” their regime type, indicating that building and maintaining democratic institutions is a path-dependent process.

Formal definitions of path-dependence are rare, and almost always subject to the scholar’s interpretation. However, more generally, path-dependence refers to the notion that specific patterns of timing and sequence matter, and that large consequences may result from ostensibly small events. Certain events have the potential to become “critical junctures,” setting the course for political development in a particular direction that becomes impossible to reverse as time goes on (Pierson and Skocpol 2002). In the context of regime transitions, path dependence implies that once a country has started down a particular track, or trajectory, the costs for reversing that trajectory are very high. As Margaret Levi points out, “There will be other choice points, but the entrenchments of certain institutional arrangements obstruct an easy reversal of the initial choice,” (Levi 1997: 28). Thus, earlier events matter more than later

ones, and different sequences of events may produce entirely different outcomes, or regime types.

In this analysis, the transition period is the “critical juncture,” and the ways in which the first multiparty elections played out dictate the long-term success or failure of democratization. Path-dependence, as a social process, is grounded in the dynamic of “increasing returns” (Pierson 2000). Institutions or processes, once established, generate feedback mechanisms that reinforces these institutions, and make switching to a different course of action extremely difficult and costly (North 1990). In the context of the fourth wave transitions, the winners of the founding elections dictate the new rules of the game: they either create new institutions and procedures that reinforce the process of democratic reform, or they resurrect old authoritarian institutions and practices that prevent further reform from taking place (Easter 1997; Jones-Luong 2000). Although, typically, civil society’s role in creating new democratic institutions is less clearly defined, the cases in this sample show that civic action can have a profound effect on the initiation of the democratization process and on the long-term adherence to the new rules of the game.

### *New Democracies*

In democracies, where a cohesive opposition won the founding elections, the new pro-democratic government set explicit limits on executive power, which constituted a definitive break with the authoritarian past. The new government was much more likely to enshrine the principle of checks on executive power in a new constitution that empowered the courts, and made the judiciary an independent actor in determining the legitimacy of executive decisions and upholding the rule of law, (see Magnusson 2001).

A cohesive and powerful opposition was much more successful in creating rifts within the old authoritarian elite and shifting the balance of power in favor of the new pro-democratic government. In such cases, during the period surrounding the founding elections, old elites sensed that the tide was turning against them, and that the opposition had gained significant support among the masses—significant enough to carry off a victory. Perceiving the probability of a loss in the founding elections, rank-and-file members of the old elite deserted their old party, distancing themselves from the party bureaucracy and realigning themselves more closely with the opposition. By doing so, these elites indicated that they accepted and supported the new rules of the game, thereby

solidifying the country's commitment to political reform, and "locking" the country into a path of democratization.

An active civil society was important for successful democratic reform in three ways. First, in most cases, the initial opening up of the authoritarian system was done in response to mass political protests against the government, which indicated to the old regime that political reform could no longer be forestalled (Bratton and van de Walle 1992). These protests signaled the breakdown of authoritarian rule and created a widespread sense that there were alternatives to the old order. These mass demonstrations indicated to the old elite that the opposition camp would have popular support during election time, and prompted the old elites to abandon authoritarianism and defect to the opposition. This is precisely why a successful democratic transition also hinges on decisive civic action, rather than solely on opposition cohesion.

Second, a vibrant civil society severely limited the options available to the old elites during the transition period. If the opposition could mobilize widespread support among the population, this raised the cost of incumbent attempts to perpetuate electoral fraud, made it less likely that fraud would succeed, and perhaps deterred the incumbent from attempting it in the first place (Hale 2005: 141). Any attempts to do so carried the risk of mass uprisings, which would be costly to suppress and threaten the country's stability. In SSA, where post-colonial rule was marred by political protests and subsequent military coups, many incumbents were cautious about perpetrating overt electoral fraud.

Finally, an active civil society was instrumental in conditioning both the opposition and the old elites to adhering to the new rules of the democratic game. Once elected to office on the promise of democratic reform, opposition parties were bound to their platforms. Because both the opposition and the old elites had accepted the standard of free and fair multiparty elections, opposition parties were aware that a failure to carry out their promises could potentially result in a loss of power in the subsequent elections. If old elites wanted to an opportunity to recoup their powerful positions, the only means of doing so was to rebrand themselves as democratizers and submit to the new rules of the game. If the old elites managed to win subsequent elections, they were conditioned to follow through with the democratic reform initiated by the opposition and civil society, or risk being ousted out of office in the following elections. Hence, we see that the extent of civic protest and active participation in the elections process is, in itself, part of the dynamic of increasing returns.

The victory of Nicéphore Soglo in the Beninese watershed elections provides an instructive example. Although Soglo rode into office on a wave of promises to reform the political system and resurrect the failing economy, his term proved highly disappointing. Shortly after taking office, Soglo's wife was implicated in corrupt activities, crime increased drastically, and the economy plunged into crisis (Magnusson 2001). Civil society took to the streets and a military coup was barely averted. On August 2, 1994, in an attempt to consolidate power and remedy the failing economy, Soglo invoked emergency powers under the constitution to execute his own budget. The national assembly was outraged by what it perceived as an abuse of presidential power. Because Benin's constitution requires the national assembly to fix a deadline limiting the validity of emergency powers, the assembly quickly voted for a deadline of August 5, and appealed the presidential action to the constitutional court (Magnusson 2001: 225). The court ruled in favor of the national assembly, asserting its new authority as the neutral final arbiter of executive-legislative disputes. This incident set an important precedent for future constraints on executive power, and demonstrated that the court was fully committed to upholding the rules outlined in the new constitution.

As can be seen above, the political environment in Benin in 1994 was highly volatile, and threatened long-term democratic stability in the country. However, despite the outbreak of protests against the Soglo government, civil society and the general populace chose to mediate its frustrations through formal institutional channels, such as political parties, government-union negotiations, and most importantly, elections (Magnusson 2001). In the 1996 presidential elections, Soglo's principal opponent was none other than a newly-reformed Kérékou, who won the elections with ease. The result was a peaceful transfer of power from one democratically elected leader to another, which demonstrates the commitment of both elites and civil society to consolidating democracy in Benin. Furthermore, although both Kérékou and Soglo contested the 2001 presidential elections, with Kérékou winning by a slim margin, both men peacefully accepted that they were barred from running in the 2006 elections due to the age restrictions outlined in the constitution.

#### *Present-Day Autocracies*

In authoritarian regimes, the opposition was highly fragmented and weak at the time of the founding elections, and was inevitably crushed by the old regime. Whatever momentum for pro-democratic reform existed prior to the elections was subsequently stomped out

by the old elite. However, in many cases, electoral victory for the old regime was not over-determined at the outset of the transition period, and regime turnover was genuinely possible even in the more repressive regimes.<sup>5</sup>

During the first multiparty elections, it was difficult for both the authoritarian elite and the opposition to effectively gauge their potential appeal to the electorate, as well as the power of their opponents. Old elites may have been uncertain about the way that the elections would play out, but sensing the disorganized nature of the opposition, remained ostensibly loyal to the old regime. I say ostensibly because I take as given the assumption that political elites are motivated primarily by career security, and the desire to maintain or advance their positions (Hale 2005; Magaloni 2006). If the elites judge that it would be more personally and politically beneficial to defect, they are more likely to do so, and in greater numbers, despite their ideological preferences over a certain type of political system.

In authoritarian regimes, the old elites adopted a wait-and-see strategy, suspending any definitive actions until after the first elections, which would send clear signals about the strength of the incumbent and the opposition. When the incumbent won the elections, be it through political manipulation or through a legitimate electoral mandate, the elites chose to throw their lots in with the winner, and accept the continuation of the old authoritarian regime. In doing so, they participated in the reinforcement of old authoritarian institutions that concentrated all the power in the executive, and allowed the incumbent to suspend further reform. These countries quickly adopted presidential systems that placed all the power in the hands of the incumbent, while stripping the legislature of any true power (van de Walle 2003).

The outcome of the first multiparty elections gave the incumbent a *carte blanche* to manipulate the political system, crafting policies that would prevent the opposition from posing an effective challenge to authoritarian rule. The new constitutions and electoral reforms in these countries prohibited any checks on the executive power and disempowered the national courts. Electoral commissions and Constitutional Courts were staffed with supporters of the old regime, (see Makumbe 2002). Voting eligibility requirements were

---

<sup>5</sup> For example, both Benin and Cameroon had similarly repressive regimes prior to the transition period, as well as highly unpopular incumbents contesting the founding elections. Yet, Benin managed a relatively fluid transition to democracy, while Cameroon remains under the oppressive leadership of Biya, despite holding regular elections.

changed to exclude any potential dissenters of the regime (Makumbe 2002; Chirot 2006).

For example, following the founding elections in Cote d'Ivoire, President Henri Konan-Bédié and his camp created the concept of "Ivoriété," which excluded those that lived in the northern region of the country, the region where he received the least electoral support. Bédié passed new citizenship laws that required proof that one's parents had been born in Côte d'Ivoire, but this was for the most part only required of northerners. As a result, many northerners were stripped of their citizenship and classified as "foreigners," (Chirot 2006: 68). Furthermore, Bédié introduced a new electoral code stipulating that a presidential candidate had to be born of Ivorian parents, thereby effectively sidelining his only serious rival, Alassane Outtara, a northerner (Bratton 1998: 58).

A passive civil society damaged the prospects for democratization. The lack of civic protest against the regime indicated to the old elites that the opposition would have a highly difficult time mobilizing an electorate to vote in its favor, and thus, kept the old elites in the incumbent's camp. Lack of civic engagement allowed the incumbent to postpone the founding elections and marshal all of his resources to rig the elections. Bratton (1998: 56) points out that, "As the 1990s progressed, leaders became adept at accommodating the international norm of competitive elections, while at the same time learning to manipulate them to their own ends. In general, the later founding elections were held in Africa, the poorer the quality of their conduct and the lower the likelihood that incumbents would lose."

The absence of strong civic organizations hurt the prospects for long-term democratization because it did not provide opposition parties with sources for mass mobilization around genuine issues of reform. Instead, as has been the case in most of SSA, opposition parties focus primarily on the politics of ethnic identity that appeal only to a small subset of the electorate (Randall and Svasand 2002: 41). The result is a highly fragmented opposition that avoids the important issue of democratic reform, and aims at securing representation and political favors for their particular ethnic or regional group (van de Walle 2003). Finally, this fragmented nature of the opposition makes it much easier for the incumbent to co-opt parties in the legislature in exchange for minor concessions, thereby lessening the odds that a cohesive opposition will challenge the government on grounds of genuine democratic reform.

Take, for example, the 1992 watershed elections in Cameroon, which pitted incumbent President Paul Biya and his

Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) against opposition leader Ni John Fru Ndi and his Social Democratic Front (SDF). At the outset, Biya was reluctant to democratize and only conceded to opening up the political space as a means of appeasing his French benefactors. At the time of the elections, domestic discontent with Biya's regime was widespread, leading many international observers to conclude that the introduction of multiparty politics would inevitably result in Biya's demise (Takougang 2003, 473). Fru Ndi was a highly popular candidate, whose 1990 unauthorized move to form the SDF, in spite of a ban on multiparty politics, earned him tremendous national appeal.

However, between 1991 and 1992, the SDF made a series of mistakes that severely undermined any leverage it had against the highly unpopular regime and fragmented the coalition of many opposition parties and civic groups, the National Coordination of Opposition Parties and Associations (NCOPA). For one, the SDF failed to successfully carry off the Ghost Town protests, a series of boycotts and demonstrations against the Biya regime, thereby creating a rift between different factions of the NCOPA, with some groups arguing that the project had run its course and should be abandoned. Two, they withdrew their representatives from the Tripartite Conference, organized by Biya with the intent of forestalling genuine reform, while two other major opposition parties signed the final Conference Accords. Most importantly, still angry over the dictatorial manner with which the Biya regime conducted the conference, the SDF refused to participate in the 1992 legislative elections. According to most political observers, Biya and the CPDM were so politically weak in 1992 that the SDF would certainly have won the majority of the seats in the legislature and would have the opportunity to directly influence the political process.

The fragmented state of the opposition was also evident in the 1992 presidential elections, in which the SDF did participate. Going into the election, Fru Ndi was by far the most popular candidate, and could have easily won the elections had Bello Bouba Maigari, a third-party candidate, thrown his support behind Fru Ndi rather than running his own campaign and splitting the opposition vote. In the end, Biya received 40% of the national vote, as compared to Fru Ndi's 36% and Bouba Maigari's 19.2 % (Olukoshi 2001: 273). Had the opposition banded together, Biya could have been easily deposed. Bouba Maigari then dealt another blow to the opposition by endorsing the outcome of the elections, while the SDF and other opposition parties were protesting the results.

Bouba Maigari's actions are telling of the way that the Cameroonian opposition parties have chosen to deal, and bargain, with Biya's regime. Following Biya's presidential victory, two high-ranking members of Bouba Maigari's party, the National Union for Democracy and Progress (UNDP), accepted cabinet posts in the Biya government. Because both men accepted the positions without the approval of the party's leadership, they were dismissed from the party. However, five years later, Bouba Maigari, himself, accepted a cabinet post in the Biya regime without party approval (Takougang 2003: 440). Even more discouraging for the state of Cameroonian opposition politics is that even the SDF, which has been fighting the Biya regime for over a decade, may be willing to be co-opted by the regime. In 2002, following the legislative elections in which the CPDM won a majority of seats, reports circulated that the SDF was willing to join the administration if it was offered six cabinet positions, including the post of prime minister (Takougang 2003: 440).

The inability of the SDF to wrestle power away from the Biya regime in the early phases of the transition period had a devastating effect on the pace and extent of political reform in Cameroon. However, the other major opposition parties are to blame as well. They have routinely allowed themselves to be manipulated and co-opted by the Biya regime, and are willing to sacrifice democratic reform in exchange for personal wealth and a greater access of power to the political system. For its part, civil society played a very limited role in the transition process. Although the masses were willing to participate in boycotts and demonstrations, they did so with little planning and for only a short period of time. The continuation of the Biya regime well into 2018 has left many people apathetic to democratic reform and has fostered a general distrust in the political process. As a result, voter turn out is very low, and civil society has retreated into the private space (Nkwi 2006).

### *Hybrid Regimes*

In hybrid regimes, where neither the old authoritarian elite nor the opposition manage to win a clear electoral mandate and are forced to govern in cooperation with the opposing side, the extent of democratization will necessarily be stalled until the opposition emerges victorious (Bunce 1999; McFaul 2002). The likelihood of opposition victory hinges on its ability to form a cohesive coalition among various opposition parties and their supporters. This is no easy task during the initial transition period, when numerous opposition parties attempt to carve out their niche in the incipient

party system. These parties are tempted to secure the spoils of victory for themselves, and may be reluctant to consider sharing these spoils with others. It becomes even more difficult to form cohesive coalitions with subsequent elections, and to convince the electorate that an opposition-led government is a viable alternative to the government of the day. This dynamic, explored below, creates feedback mechanisms that lock the country into a hybrid regime trajectory and prevents the consolidation of democracy.

In hybrid regimes, the rules of the game, as well as elite policy preferences, are ill defined, as the opposing sides attempt to accomplish their contradictory agendas within the same political space. While the opposition pushes for further democratic reform, the old elites strive to preserve the status quo and hold on to the power resources left over from the old regime (Easter 1997). This situation is complicated by the fact that both the opposition and the old elites are weak and have to share institutional power (Bunce 1999). Typically, the incumbent, or his party, managed to win the presidency in the founding elections, but failed to prevent the opposition from gaining a significant portion of seats in the legislature. Thus, while the incumbent tried to rewrite the rules of the game to consolidate his power, the opposition was strong enough to block at least some of the anti-democratic reforms. The result is authoritarian rule coupled with some democratic reform that defines hybrid regimes (van de Walle 2002).

For opposition parties, gaining unequivocal control of both the executive and the legislature is key to crafting successful pro-democratic reform. However, there are a number of reasons that opposition parties in hybrid regimes have consistently failed to win a clear victory in the polls following the founding elections. Clearly, old elites still command many of the power resources left over from the old regime, which allows them to manipulate the electoral process (Howard and Roessler 2006). Yet, more importantly, opposition parties themselves have failed to pursue an effective strategy that would give them an advantage vis-à-vis the incumbent during election time or facilitate democratic reform.

For example, in Kenya, President Daniel arap Moi barely survived the watershed presidential elections, winning only 36% of the popular vote. Although these elections were not deemed free and fair by the international community, part of the reason for Moi's victory was the highly fragmented nature of the opposition. In the parliamentary elections held that same year, Moi's party, Kenya African National Union (KANU), which had held power for forty years, received an equally dismal proportion of the vote, 24.5%. The

next largest share of votes went to the opposition party Forum for the Restoration of Democracy (FORD)-Asili, who received 20.6%. Moi went on to win the next presidential elections in 1997.

In 2002, Moi's was constitutionally barred from running for president, although some of his supporters proposed amending the constitution to allow him to run for a third presidential term. However, facing significant international and domestic pressure, Moi chose to step down peacefully, and appoint a successor, instead. Moi's successor, Uhuru Kenyatta, lost the presidential elections to Mwai Kibaki, who had run against Moi in the past two elections. Kibaki's opposition party National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) similarly won by a landslide in the 2002 parliamentary elections, proving that opposition victory is possible if the opposition parties ban together (Ndegwa 2003). The removal of Moi and KANU from office clearly shows that political liberalization is possible in hybrid regimes, given the incumbent adheres to the democratic rules of the game.

One of chief problems with the strategy of the opposition is that party platforms are typically designed solely to attract enough voters in the hopes of winning the election, but lacking in substance or a clear direction for future political reform (Randall and Svasand 2002; van de Walle 2002). As Randall and Svasand (2002: 33) write about the state of African party politics, "...it seems to be that parties care little about presenting clearly distinguishable policy platforms, and that, if, exceptionally, they do, the platform has little relevance to what the party does once in office." Although the idea of pro-democratic reform may be popular among the masses, citizens are rarely mobilized along these lines. Instead, they are forced to choose among candidates representing regional or ethnic differences, or running on their personal popularity among a small group of voters. Even when opposition candidates are elected to office, no coherent pro-democratic reform strategy emerges and no new institutions are created to "lock-in" that strategy.

Because the party system is not yet fully crystallized, and coherent party agendas not yet defined, new parties spring up regularly around election time, and further add to the fragmentation of the embryonic party system (Randall and Svasand 2002; van de Walle 2002). Seeing that significant room still exists for newer parties to put forth their agendas and carve out their own niche in the party system, many (local/regional) elites are tempted to create their own parties in order to contest elections and reap the benefits of political power, rather than joining up with the already established opposition parties. As is the case with authoritarian regimes, even

when these small opposition parties do manage to win seats in parliament, they are particularly prone to cooptation by the old elites. Thus, in hybrid regimes, the ill-defined rules of party competition that emerge following the initial transition period allow for small parties to enter the political arena and fragment the party system, thereby reinforcing sporadic and fleeting democratic reform.

If opposition parties are unwilling or incapable of working together to further the democratic agenda, where does the impetus for political reform originate? If the opposition remains fragmented following the first multiparty elections, what prevents the old elites from capturing the political system and overhauling any of the democratic gains of the initial transition? The analysis here suggests that the key causal mechanism is the presence of an active civil society.

In the beginning of the transition period, hybrid regime civic groups played a more marginal role in demanding democratic reform and opening up the political space than in present-day democracies. However, by voting in at least some opposition parties in the founding elections, civil society did indicate to the old elites that democratic reform had to be put on the political agenda. Furthermore, as in the case of present-day democracies, the threat of public backlash against overt electoral manipulation made it more likely that the old elites would avoid such behavior. Hence, in hybrid regimes, civil society serves the same functions as in democratic regimes, as it waits for opposition parties to better define their platforms, form cohesive coalitions, and present a viable alternative to the ruling government of the day.

The growth of civic activism over the past decade and a half has led to further liberalization of the political space in many hybrid regimes. While civil society may have been relatively passive in the beginning phases of the democratic transition, due to the high level of uncertainty surrounding the incumbent's willingness to use force and repression to punish regime dissenters, the recent years have seen a dramatic increase in civic protest against anti-democratic government policies. These events show the capacity of an active civil society to affect the course of the transition and improve the quality of the democratization process.

### **Conclusion**

The fourth wave of democratization gave rise to a variety of regimes across the globe. As some countries managed a successful transition to democracy, others stalled mid-process or reverted back to authoritarianism. In places like the DRC, Somalia, and Swaziland,

regime change has yet to occur. This analysis reveals that the transition period, and the events surrounding it, are a significant determinant of a country's trajectory towards or away from successful democratization. In particular, the success of the democratic transition depends largely on the level of cohesion among the various opposition parties contesting elections. Only by presenting a united front during election time does the opposition movement stand a chance of ousting the authoritarian incumbent. Furthermore, for democratization to become institutionalized, the incumbent must be ousted, even if only temporarily. This analysis also indicates that civic protest does drive the democratization process. A vibrant civil society is equally important for building and consolidating democracy, and political protest and participation in civic groups does create impetus for regime change.

These findings have significant policy implications. Foreign aid directed at democracy building should target opposition groups. Western donors must encourage diverse opposition parties to work together and construct political platforms that appeal to the whole national electorate, rather than regional segments of the population. Furthermore, if possible, donors must assist the opposition in the dissemination of factual information that highlights the benefits of democracy. Only in this way can the opposition hope to overcome the information asymmetry problem that benefits authoritarian regimes. Foreign aid should also support the development of a healthy civil society. The greatest challenge facing the revitalization of civic groups is lack of financial resources and organizational know-how. In authoritarian and hybrid regimes, most of the state's resources remain in the hands of the old elite, who will not finance organizations that are potential sites of dissent. In the meantime, many of these countries have poor economies, and their citizens struggle from day to day to make a living. Thus, without foreign aid, it is questionable whether civil society will ever become vibrant on its own.

## References

- Bienen, H. and Herbst, J. (1996). The Relationship between Political and Economic Reform in Africa. *Comparative Politics* 29(1): 23-42.
- Bratton, M. (1998). Second Elections in Africa. *Journal of Democracy* 9(3): 51-66.
- Bratton, M. and van de Walle, N. (1992). Popular Protest and Political Reform in Africa. *Comparative Politics* 24(4): 419-442.

- Brown, S., and Kaiser, P. (2007). Democratisations in Africa: Attempts, hindrances and prospects. *Third World Quarterly* 28(6): 1131-1149.
- Bunce, V. (1999). The Political Economy of Postsocialism. *Slavic Review* 58(4): 756-793.
- Capoccia, G. and Keleman, D. (2007). The study of critical junctures: theory, narrative, and counterfactuals in historical institutionalism. *World Politics* 59 (April): 341-69.
- Carothers, T. (2002). The End of the Transition Paradigm. *Journal of Democracy* 13(1): 5-21.
- Cheeseman, N. (2015). *Democracy in Africa: Successes, failures, and the struggle for political reform* (Vol. 9). Cambridge University Press.
- Chiro, D. (2006). The Debacle in Cote d'Ivoire. *Journal of Democracy* 17(2): 63-77.
- Diamond, L. (2002). Elections Without Democracy: Thinking About Hybrid Regimes. *Journal of Democracy* 13(2): 21-35.
- Diamond, L. (2015). Facing up to the democratic recession. *Journal of Democracy* 26(1): 141-155.
- Easter, G. (1997). Preference for Presidentialism: Postcommunist Regime Change in Russia and the NIS. *World Politics* 49(2): 184-211.
- El-Khawas, Mohamed (2001). Democracy in Africa: Problems and Solutions. *Mediterranean Quarterly* 12(3): 85-97.
- Elischer, S. (2013). *Political Parties in Africa: Ethnicity and Party Formation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Fish, S. (1999). Postcommunist Subversion: Social Science and Democratization in East Europe and Eurasia. *Slavic Review* 58(4): 794-823.
- Gervais, M. (2018). Niger: regime change, economic crisis, and perpetuation of privilege. In Clark, J. and Gardinier D (eds.), *Political Reform in Francophone Africa*. Routledge: 86-108.
- Gyimah-Boadi, E. (2015). Africa's waning democratic commitment. *Journal of Democracy* 26(1): 101-113.
- Hale, H. (2005). Regime Cycles: Democracy, Autocracy, and Revolution in Post-Soviet Eurasia. *World Politics* 58 (October): 133-165.
- Hanson, J. (2015). Democracy and state capacity: complements or substitutes? *Studies in Comparative International Development* 50(3): 304-330.
- Howard, M. and Roessler, G. (2006). Liberalizing Electoral Outcomes in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes. *American Journal of Political Science* 50(2): 365-381.

- Huntington, S. (1991). Democracy's Third Wave. *Journal of Democracy* 2: 30-31.
- Jones-Luong, P. (2000). After the Break-Up: Institutional Design in Transitional States. *Comparative Political Studies* 33(5): 563-592.
- Joseph, R. (1997). Democratization in Africa after 1989: Comparative and Theoretical Perspectives. *Comparative Politics* 29(3): 363-382.
- Karatnycky, A. and Ackerman, P. (2005). How freedom is won. *Washington DC: Freedom House*.
- Levi, M. (1997). A model, a method, and a map: rational choice in comparative and historical analysis. In Lichbach, M and Zuckerman, A. (eds.), *Comparative politics: rationality, culture, and structure*. Cambridge University Press: 19-41
- Levitsky, S. and Way, L. (2002). The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism. *Journal of Democracy* 13(2): 51-65.
- Lewis, P. (2018). *Africa: dilemmas of development and change*. Routledge.
- Lindberg, S. (2004). *The Power of Elections: Democratic Participation, Competition and Legitimacy in Africa*. Lund University Press.
- Lindberg, S. (2006). The Surprising Significance of African Elections. *Journal of Democracy* 17(1): 139-151.
- Lipset, S. (1959). Some social requisites of democracy: Economic development and political legitimacy. *American Political Science Review* 53(1): 69-105.
- McFaul, M. (2005). Transitions from Postcommunism. *Journal of Democracy* 16(3): 5-19.
- Magaloni, B. (2006). *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and its Demise in Mexico*. Cambridge University Press.
- Magnusson, B. (2001). Democratization and Domestic Insecurity: Navigating the Transition in Benin. *Comparative Politics* 33(2): 211-230.
- Makumbe, J. (2002). Zimbabwe's Hijacked Election. *Journal of Democracy* 13(4): 87-101.
- Moore, B. (1966). *Social origins of democracy and dictatorship*. Boston: Beacon.
- Ndegwa, S. (2003). Kenya: third time lucky?. *Journal of Democracy* 14(3): 145-158.
- Nkwi, W. (2006). The dilemma of civil society in Cameroon since 1990: which way forward?. *African Journal of International Affairs* 9(1-2).

- North, D. (1990). *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. Cambridge University Press.
- O'Donnell, G. and Schmitter, P. (1986). *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- O'Donnell, G. (2002). In Partial Defense of an Evanescent Paradigm. *Journal of Democracy* 13(3).
- Olukoshi, A. (1998). Economic Crisis, Multipartyism, and Opposition Politics in Contemporary Africa, in Olukoshi, A. (ed.) *Politics of Opposition in Contemporary Africa*. Stockholm: Elanders Gotab.
- Ottaway, M. (2003). *Democracy Challenged: The Rise of Semi-Authoritarianism*. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Pierson, P. (2000). Increasing returns, path dependence, and the study of politics. *American Political Science Review* 94(2): 251-267.
- Pierson, P. and Skocpol, T. (2002). Historical institutionalism in contemporary political science. *Political Science: The State of the Discipline* 3: 693-721.
- Randall, V. and Svasand, L. (2002). Political Parties and Democratic Consolidation in Africa. *Democratization* 9(3): 30-52.
- Schedler, A. (2002). The Menu of Manipulation. *Journal of Democracy* 13(2): 36-50.
- Schedler, A. (ed.) (2006). *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition*. London: Lynn Rienner Publishers.
- Schmitter, P. and Karl, T. (1994). The Conceptual Travels of Transitologists and Consolidationalists: How Far to the East Should They Attempt to Go. *Slavic Review* 53(1): 173-185.
- Stroh, A. (2018). Sustaining and jeopardising a credible arbiter: Judicial networks in Benin's consolidating democracy. *International Political Science Review* 39(5): 600-615.
- Takougang, J. (2003). Nationalism, Democratisation, and Political Opportunism in Cameroon. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 21(3): 427-445.
- Teorell, J. and Wahman, M. (2018). Institutional stepping stones for democracy: how and why multipartyism enhances democratic change. *Democratization* 25(1): 78-97.
- Van de Walle, N. (2002). Elections Without Democracy: Africa's Range of Regimes. *Journal of Democracy* 13(2): 66-80.

- Van Eerd, J. (2017). *The Quality of Democracy in Africa: Opposition Competitiveness Rooted in Legacies of Cleavages*. Springer.
- Wahman, M. (2014). Democratization and electoral turnovers in sub-Saharan Africa and beyond. *Democratization* 21(2): 220-243.

### **Author's Biography**

**Anna Brigevich** is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at North Carolina Central University. She received her Ph.D. from UNC-Chapel Hill in 2012. Her work investigates public opinion and party politics in the European Union, with a focus on how social identities (regional, national, European) condition support for European integration. She also conducts research on democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa. Her work has been published in *Regional & Federal Studies*, *European Union Politics* and *Party Politics*. She has worked on the Chapel Hill Expert Survey on party positions on European integration and has a co-authored article in the *Journal of European Public Policy*.