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Boekbespreking van: Democratic Experiments in Africa: Transition in Comparative Perspective
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Citation

Doorenspleet, R. (1999). Boekbespreking van: Democratic Experiments in Africa: Transition in Comparative Perspective. *Acta Politica*, 34: 1999(1), 94-97. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3450661>

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

cooperation, however, will have to develop theories that take into account both strongly held, deeper policy beliefs and more short-term expectations. At no point, however, should they ignore the relationship between ideas and interests.

Bertjan Verbeek

Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge University Press, New York 1997, ISBN 0521554292, \$59.95 (hardback), ISBN 0521556120, \$19.95 (paperback).

Since the early 1990s, a wave of democratization has swept across the African continent. In many countries significant political reforms were undertaken, and some authoritarian regimes even completed a democratic transition. Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle wonder whether the accepted theories on the emergence and consolidation of democratic regimes are useful in interpreting political trends in Africa, especially between 1988 and 1994.

The first chapter summarizes the different established approaches that have been used to explain the success and failure of democratization efforts. The theoretical literature offers a large variety of competing explanations. Some approaches emphasize the impact on political change of structural factors (class structure and economic wealth), other approaches focus on the influence of individual actors (choices of leaders, strength of the opposition). Another controversy involves the importance of national versus international forces. Finally, some theories focus on economic factors while others emphasize political influences. On the basis of a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the existing approaches, the authors develop their own politico-institutional approach, which emphasizes the institutional characteristics of preceding political regimes. They argue for "an approach based on domestic political factors, with attention given to both structural and contingent dimensions." (p. 20.) The second chapter gives an overall description of the neopatrimonial regimes typical in Africa. The hallmark of such regimes is a form of authority based on vertical dependency relationships between the ruler (patron) and his subordinates (clients). Personal patronage holds the system together and weakens civil society. Broadly based associational ties are virtually non-existent which is not conducive to a transition to democracy. Recent political transitions across the continent are described in the third chapter. It appears that the existence of continent-wide political trends did not mean that every African country was destined to march in lock step. On the contrary, each country is characterized by its own path of political change. Some arrived at a democratic regime while others failed to do so.

The book then shifts from description to explanation. The authors break the process of transition into three phases. They seek to explain: the level of protest on the onset

of a transition (chapter 4); the extent of political liberalization (chapter 5); and finally the move to a democratic transition (chapter 6). They have collected an enormous amount of data in order to explore the influence of several independent variables that have been raised by democratization approaches, such as socio-economic status, international donor pressure, and initiatives of elites such as organizing a national conference. In addition, they give special attention to the influence of the institutional heritage of the postcolonial African regime. This heritage is measured by how much political competition and participation were actually allowed by regimes in post-colonial Africa up to 1989.

Having compared more than 40 African countries in a quantitative study, the authors find that economic conditions do not convincingly explain protest, liberalization and democratic transitions. International factors are more helpful, but the most compelling explanation – according to the authors – centres on institutional characteristics of preceding regimes. If political participation and competition were allowed in previous regimes, then one could be optimistic about the likelihood that a regime will adopt democratic rule.

Will those new democratic regimes sustain? The seventh chapter is quite pessimistic about the prospects for democracy in Africa. It is argued that the socio-economic "prerequisites of stable democratic rule are missing in Africa. Most countries are poor, with capita incomes well below the levels commonly posited as the minimum necessary to sustain democratic rule." (p. 237.) In addition, they do not believe that international pressure will have a determinant effect on the survival of most new democracies. They foresee an endurance of neopatrimonialism: Africa's democracies will be dominated by executive presidents and their networks of personal loyalty. In conclusion, "the prospects for the deepening of democracy will hinge on the strength of the permanent state apparatus relative to the ability of nongovernmental actors to exert countervailing powers." (p. 260.) According to the authors, there are no optimistic circumstances for the survival of democratic regimes in Africa.

However, I am not convinced by this conclusion. In earlier chapters the authors found through empirical research that economics has no influence on transitions to democracy, and yet now they simply *assume* that limited economic prosperity should have a negative impact on the endurance of democracies. Why? No persuasive theoretical arguments have been given and no empirical research have been conducted to test these expectations. In this way this chapter remains highly suggestive, and the authors should be a lot more careful in making such strongly pessimistic conclusions.

Additionally, the application of the concept of democratic transitions is rather puzzling. It is true that the authors define this concept very clearly:

Democracy is defined in this study as a form of political regime in which citizens choose, in competitive elections, the occupants of the top political offices of the state. According to this definition, a transition to democracy occurs with the installation of a government chosen on the basis of one competitive election, as long as that

election is freely and fairly conducted within a matrix of civil liberties, and that all the contestants accept the validity of the election results. (pp. 12-13).

This last requirement – that the loser should accept the results – is quite unusual and the authors should have justified this choice in greater depth. In nearly all democracies, also the established ones in Western Europe, there are groups that do not accept the election results. Does this mean that such political regimes are not democratic? How large and important must such a group be before a regime is classified as non-democratic? Unfortunately, the authors avoid such a discussion. A more serious drawback, however, is that the authors do not apply their own concept in the empirical analyses. In their statistical assessment, they suddenly appear to test the impact of several factors on the *extent of democratization*, measured by the change between 1988 and 1994 in a country's political rights score (collected by the researcher Gastil of the Freedom House). This measurement cannot answer the central question concerning the influences on transitions from non-democratic to democratic regimes. A change in the level of democracy does not necessarily mean a transition to democracy. For example, Angola's democratization score did not change between 1988 and 1994, while Botswana became less democratic, and Burundi and Namibia democratized a bit. Such a score says nothing about the transition to democracy: on the basis of their own concept of democratic transition, the authors themselves classify Botswana as an established democratic regime (p. 79), Angola and Burundi as non-democratic regimes that have not made a transition (p. 120), and Namibia as a country that has made a democratic transition (p. 120). It is obscure why the authors do not use their own classification in the empirical analyses.

Nevertheless, these drawbacks are insignificant compared with the advantages of the book. This book is, as far as I know, the first broad, cross-national study aiming to explore the underlying general causes of regime transitions in Africa. Although the authors gained insights from case studies, they have tried to avoid the overgeneralization from single cases. Until now, under influence of anthropology, studies on African politics have been heavily dominated by heavy descriptions of individual cases. Sweeping generalizations about Africa as a whole are often derived from case studies of individual countries. Extrapolating from the case of Somalia or Rwanda, for instance, one might conclude that political liberalization in Africa inevitably dissolves into ethnic conflicts and warfare. Although the case study method may illuminate a wealth of fascinating detail about political processes in particular settings, it cannot establish generalizations about continent-wide trends to test explanatory theories. Only through cross-national comparison can one gain insight into the conditions that push some countries to democracy and others not. The authors employ such a systematic comparison and that is what makes the book a worthy and important contribution.

It certainly deserves a wider readership than only those scholars who are interested in Africa. The overview of the theoretical approaches is in itself a honourable contribution, because it brings order in the chaotic maze of different democratization

approaches. In addition, although the authors aim to make generalizations, they keep close to the cases. They show that adopting a comparative method does not necessarily mean that one learns little about the complex realities of each country. Researchers who are prone to generalize on the basis of broad comparative quantitative research can learn from this attitude. The book will therefore be a 'must' for anyone studying democratic transitions in all corners of the globe.

Renske Doorenspleet

Geoffrey Evans and Pippa Norris (eds.), *Critical Elections: British Parties and Voters in Long-Term Perspective*. SAGE Publications, London 1999, ISBN 0761960198, £55.00 (hardback), ISBN 0761960201, £18.99 (paperback).

The 1997 British general elections gave Labour a massive landslide of seats. Under the leadership of Tony Blair, Labour finally regained power from the Conservatives, who had been in office since Margaret Thatcher became prime minister in 1979. In *Critical Elections*, a volume edited by Geoffrey Evans and Pippa Norris, the 1997 elections are put in long-term perspective with respect to ideology, issues and social alignments. The study has resulted in a substantial insight into what happened in these elections, and what did not. Moreover, in some respects it sets an example for future studies in other countries. Hence, reading this study is not only a 'must' for those interested in contemporary British politics, it is also highly recommendable for those studying parties and voters in other countries.

The central question that recurs in each chapter is whether or not the 1997 elections mark a critical, realigning development in British politics. This question stems from the typology of elections that Norris and Evans present in the introduction of the book. They distinguish between maintaining, dealigning, and realigning elections. The latter two are divided further into deviating elections and secular dealignment, respectively secular realignment and critical elections. Critical elections are characterized, they argue, by ideological realignment, social realignment, and realignments in partisan loyalties.

Let me first discuss the so-called partisan loyalties. The analysis by Ivor Crewe and Katarina Thomson of voters' general feelings towards Labour and Conservatives suggests that the 1997 election result was due to both negative changes in feelings towards the Conservatives and positive changes in feelings towards Labour. In terms of party identification, Labour replaced the Conservatives as the 'natural majority' party. The authors argue that the findings point more to a process of realignment than to deviating elections. However, Crewe and Thomson warn that, since party identification matches closely the actual distribution of the vote, these figures may not represent long-term preferences as supposed.

Changes in partisan feelings may be due to changes among the electorate, but also