

Electoral Politics in Africa since 1990

Democratic transitions in the early 1990s led to a significant change in sub-Saharan African politics. Between 1990 and 2015, several hundred competitive legislative and presidential elections were held in all but a handful of the region's countries. This book is the first comprehensive comparative analysis of the key issues, actors, and trends in these elections. In the book, we ask: What motivates African citizens to vote? What issues do candidates campaign on? How has the turn to regular elections affected the push for greater democracy? Has regular electoral competition made a difference in the welfare of citizens? We argue that regular elections have both caused significant changes in African politics and been influenced by a rapidly changing continent – even if few of the political systems that now convene elections can be considered democratic and many features of older African politics persist.

Jaimie Bleck is Ford Family Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Notre Dame.

Nicolas van de Walle is Maxwell M. Upson Professor of Government at Cornell University.

Electoral Politics in Africa since 1990

Continuity in Change

JAIMIE BLECK

University of Notre Dame

NICOLAS VAN DE WALLE

Cornell University



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
 978-1-107-16208-2 — Electoral Politics in Africa since 1990
 Jaimie Bleck, Nicolas van de Walle
 Frontmatter
[More Information](#)



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
 314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India
 103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,
 a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of
 education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
 Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107162082

DOI: 10.1017/9781316676936

© Jaimie Bleck and Nicolas van de Walle 2019

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions
 of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take
 place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

First published 2019

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data

NAMES: Bleck, Jaimie, 1980- author. | Van de Walle, Nicolas, 1957- author.

TITLE: Electoral Politics in Africa since 1990: Continuity in Change / Jaimie Bleck, Nicolas
 van de Walle.

DESCRIPTION: New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018. | Includes bibliographical
 references and index.

IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2018012825 | ISBN 9781107162082 (hardback: alk. paper) |

ISBN 9781316612477 (pbk.: alk. paper)

SUBJECTS: LCSH: Elections—Africa, Sub-Saharan. | Africa, Sub-Saharan—Politics and
 government—1960-

CLASSIFICATION: LCC DT30.5 .B583 2018 | DDC 324.967—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018012825>

ISBN 978-1-107-16208-2 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-316-61247-7 Paperback

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence
 or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this
 publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will
 remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page</i> vii
<i>List of Tables</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xi
1 The Puzzle of Electoral Continuity	i
2 The Evolution of Electoral Competition, 1990–2015	30
3 The Impact of Elections on Democracy	62
4 Political Parties and Electoral Competition	101
5 Candidates and Electoral Campaigns	143
6 Analyzing Issues in Presidential Campaigns	185
7 The African Voter	218
8 Do African Elections Matter?	261
<i>References</i>	285
<i>Index</i>	325

Figures

2.1	Multiparty elections and successful coups by year, 1960–2015	<i>page</i> 50
2.2	Regime trajectories in Africa, 1973–2015	54
2.3	African country Freedom House scores with substantial variation, 1996–2015	56
4.1	Legislative parties in the multiparty era	117
4.2	Share of main opposition party seats, by Freedom House score	129
6.1	Afrobarometer respondents’ top three most pressing problems	193
6.2	Issues discussed by parties in the most recent two presidential election cycles	208
6.3	Political parties’ issue statements for each election cycle	209
6.4	Incumbent and opposition statements by thematic area	211
6.5	Percentage of valence and position appeals used by parties over two election cycles	212
6.6	Percentage of position discourse by incumbents and opposition in the most recent two election cycles	213
6.7	Position statements by civil society and political parties in recent elections	215
7.1	Average presidential turnout (VAP) by average V-Dem score for electoral democracy	223
7.2	Average legislative turnout (VAP) by average V-Dem score for electoral democracy	224

viii	<i>List of figures</i>	
7.3	Turnout in the most recent local elections	227
7.4	Declared associational membership over time	250
7.5	Percentage of respondents who watch TV at least once a month	253
7.6	Percentage of respondents who use the Internet at least once a month	253
7.7	Respondents who are somewhat or very interested in politics	254
7.8	Respondents who claim to discuss political matters with friends	254
7.9	Respondents' ability to name their local councilor	255
7.10	Respondents' knowledge of their member of parliament	256
7.11	Percentage of Afrobarometer respondents who claim to have attended a demonstration	258

Tables

2.1	The evolution of electoral competition in Africa, 1990–2015	<i>page</i> 44
2.2	Sub-Saharan African countries that did not undergo presidential turnover, 1989–1995	47
2.3	Political regimes in Africa, 2015 (legislative elections/presidential elections since 1990)	51
2.4	Degree of electoral competition, democracies and non democracies, 1990–2015	52
3.1	African legislative electoral systems, 2014	73
3.2	Loss of incumbents in presidential elections, 1990–2015	75
4.1	The fate of the single party, following protest-driven democratization	120
4.2	The fate of the incumbent parties that survived the 1990s transitions by regime trajectory, 1990–2015	122
4.3	Legislative parties, by election, 1990–2015	127
5.1	Presidential candidates’ Facebook usage rankings	176

Acknowledgments

In researching and writing this book, we have benefited from the generosity and insights of many colleagues. It is impossible to thank all of the people by name who have made this a better book as a result of some form of communication with us, a quick convention chat, a longer but less focused discussion over drinks, or an email correspondence. Many African citizens in different countries put up with our questions during various forms of field work. Their comments and insights deeply enriched our understanding of electoral politics on the continent. We can also claim the privilege of being based in wonderfully collegial departments at Notre Dame and Cornell, respectively, that have provided much appreciated intellectual, material, and moral support over the years. Much of the materials in this book were first explored in undergraduate seminars we both taught on electoral politics in Africa, in spring of 2013 and 2014 (at Cornell and Notre Dame) and fall of 2016 (at Notre Dame). We thank those students, as the class discussions generated ideas and arguments in this book.

We apologize in advance to all of these people whom we have not named individually. Still, we want to acknowledge as many of our debts as we can. Many colleagues have read and commented on different parts of the manuscript over its much too long development. For their help and encouragement, we thank Val Bunce, Sidiki Guindo, Marja Hinfelaar, Emizet Kisangani, Stephan Klingebiel, Karrie Koesel, Noam Lupu, Andreas Mehler, Anne Meng, Kristin Michelitch, Muna Ndulo, Anne Pitcher, Lise Rakner, Ken Roberts, Tyson Roberts, Steven Rosenzweig, Keith Weghorst, Suzanne Wengle, and Martha Wilfahrt. The Kellogg Institute for International Studies funded a manuscript conference at Notre Dame in

late 2016 that proved to be immensely useful. This was not least because of the consistently insightful and sometimes much too nice comments from Leo Arriola, Michael Bratton, Paul Friesen, Mamoudou Gazibo, Lauren Honig, Emily Maiden, Andrea Peña-Vasquez, and Rachel Riedl, who all slogged through our very first full draft. Finally, for their close reading of the second draft and their generous comments, we are particularly grateful to Chipo Dendere, Alex Dyzenhaus, Sebastian Elischer, Adrienne LeBas, Natalie Letsa, Lindsey Pruett, Jonathan Van Eerd, and Michael Wahman.

Different parts of the manuscript were presented and garnered extremely useful feedback during presentations at Cornell, the University of Bergen, GIGA, Kansas State University, Michigan State University, Princeton, the University of Virginia, and Oxford University and at the annual meetings of the American Political Science Association and the African Studies Association.

Over the last couple of years, we have been assisted by a number of very talented undergraduate research assistants, without whom this book would not have been possible. For all their help, we thank Liana Cramer, Bright Gyamfi, Dierdre Kennedy, Thomas Mologne, Jacqueline O'Brien, Zachary Spahr, Elizabeth Steiner, Natalie Vellutini, Nicole Waddick, and Grace Watkins at Notre Dame and Enrico Bonatti, Bruno De Larragoiti, Erin Ellis, Akhilesh Issur, Sophie Lin, Temi Sanusi, and Jady Wei at Cornell.

We acknowledge permission from *Comparative Political Studies* to reuse material published in “Valence issues in African elections: Navigating uncertainty and the weight of the past,” *Comparative Political Studies* 46:11 (2013): 1394–1421, in an updated and expanded version, here in Chapter 6 and from the journal *Democratization* for material that was originally developed in our essay “Parties and issues in Francophone West Africa: Towards a theory of non-mobilization,” *Democratization*, 18:5 (2011): 1125–1145.

At Cambridge University Press, we thank Lew Bateman, who encouraged us at the beginning of the project, and Sara Doskow and her diligent and very patient team for bringing the book safely to harbor.

Finally, this book could not have been written without the help of our families, particularly our respective spouses, Idrissa Sidibe and Michèle van de Walle, life partners who provide us with respite, grounding, and sustenance for everything we do.

The book is dedicated to three early teachers and role models: Caroline Angell Bleck, Edouard Poulet, and Ruth M. Slominski.