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Cheeseman, Nic (Ed.). *Institutions and Democracy in Africa: How the Rules of the Game Shape Political Developments*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Year: 2018. ISBN-10: 1316602559; 394 pp.

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Introduction

"Treating the continent [Africa] as if it is 'institutionless' ignores the important ways in which formal institutions have shaped their informal counterparts over the last hundred years under governments both democratic and authoritarian, and in the states that are both strong and weak." (Cheeseman, 2018: 18).

I read this book, which contains 15 chapters, with very great interest. Having done some work on how companies deal with politicians in Africa, it was fascinating to read from experts in the field how formal institutions function in Africa at the macro level. The book, which the editor divided into four thematic sections, convincingly demonstrates the evolution and status of formal political institutions *de jure* and *de facto* profoundly affecting the political space and democratization process of African countries.

Selected Themes

I would have been pleased to dedicate a separate section for each chapter but for the sake of space limitation, my summary focuses on political institutions. Political institutions emanate from the constitution, the supreme law of a nation that defines the scope of power and responsibility of the state and its citizens. African countries have been undertaking this very important exercise at different points of time since their independence as part of state formation and national reconciliation. Constitutions are as good as the process they resulted from, their content and their implementation. In Chapter Five, Muna Ndulo illustrates the progress made by South Africa and Kenya in defining a new constitution that is distinct from their colonial heritage. The distinction is in terms of both transparency and inclusiveness in the constitution-making process, as well as in their contents: protecting human rights, acknowledging and accommodating diversity, devolving power to the lower administrative tier, and maintaining judicial and legislative independence.

One of the challenges of putting constitutions into practice in Africa is the executives' tendency to abuse their political power and their fallback into a neo-patrimonial system. Many of the party leaders project a strong persona leadership style without a comprehensive party statute to ensure continuity. As a result, parties face obstacles to guarantee succession and to practice intraparty democracy in deliberating policy frameworks and reforms. Ian Cooper in Chapter Eight offers an account of many political parties in Africa that survived the departure of their founding members; examples include the ANC of South Africa, CCM of Tanzania, EPRDF of Ethiopia, and SWAPO of Namibia. Indeed, there are signs that many political parties are getting rooted to their

constituencies, and bureaucratizing and elaborating their statutes to become democratic and transparent.

A robust political system requires a level playground for opposition parties, political space to promote their political agenda, build their constituency, and participate in a regular and fair election. Carolien van Ham and Staffan Lindberg in Chapter Nine provide empirical evidence that holding regular and fair elections significantly determines the level of civil liberty in a country. While the number of elections matters especially in the first five rounds and when the elections have shown substantial competition and freedom of participation, pure nominal elections have no effect on civil liberties. These two factors determine the extent to which political players and institutions that oversee the election process learn from their mistakes and improve in the subsequent election. A multi-party system that is inclusive to different opposition groups gives a space for different ideas to be discussed, criticized, and digested. It gives hope to opposition parties and to the people that the state can be challenged during the campaign and in parliament after the election. Inclusive political systems reduce civil wars and coups d'états. In Chapter Ten, Brian Klaas discusses the consequences of excluding oppositions from elections in Madagascar in 2006 and in Ivory Cost in 2000 that both led to coups d'états. According to Klaas, 75% of African countries now have inclusive elections, a remarkable progress compared to the situation in 1980s.

To further widen the political space for opposition parties and enhance democracy, having a president term-limit is important. Given the advantage the incumbent political party has in elections, term-limits give a checkpoint for the leading party itself to exercise intraparty democracy, to make reforms, and to set rules for its internal succession process. For opposition parties, competing with a newly elected incumbent party leader, who is comparatively less entrenched, increases the hope to win and it also reflects on the fairness of the election process. Since presidential term-limits are enshrined in the constitutions and are inherently visible to international audiences, opposition groups, and citizens, any form of compromise would be very difficult. Daniel Posner and Daniel Young in Chapter Eleven show that out of 36 instances of presidents who faced term-limits in Africa, 20 presidents respected the term-limit and relinquished power, 5 attempted to override it without success, and 11 succeeded in overriding it. These are interesting statistics on two levels; on the first level, it shows that a large number of presidents have accepted this limit, providing evidence of the further opening up of the political space and the strengthening of political institutions, and on the second level, it also points to a potential divergence among African countries in their democratization processes and political institution-building trajectories.

Having independent legislative and judiciary systems plays a significant role in strengthening the democratization process. Legislators, who can disclose corruption, scrutinize government budget and its implementation as well as demand basic services for their constituencies improve state accountability. Michaela Collord describes the cases of Kenya and Tanzania legislators' increased independence and their role in enhancing executive accountability in Chapter Twelve. Judiciary independence to protect freedom of expression and the right to organize, as well as to enforce electoral rules, plays a significant role in improving civil liberty. In this respect, Peter Vondoepp's Chapter Thirteen describes many instances in which courts protect these civil rights and constrain executives in, for example, Uganda, Kenya, and Malawi.

Concluding Remarks

The discussion in the book is principally about the mechanisms by which formal institutions are designed and enforced to limit the executives' power and its abuse in Africa. However, for the state to deliver what is promised in the social contract, it, on the one hand, needs resources to oil the state machinery and, on the other, it requires expertise to design the bureaucracy and run the different branches of the government. Many African states have limited resources and human capital. The need for African states to switch to alternative sources of funding such as development assistance would likely shift state accountability from citizens to donors. Similarly, the lack of human capital generally leads to an inefficient bureaucracy, a weak judiciary, and legislative bodies and they also give rise to weak civil organizations. Thus, state capacity and legal frameworks to limit executive power are intertwined. An inclusive analysis and additional studies to disentangle the effects of the two on the level of democracy may enrich our understanding of the institutional development in Africa.

On the whole, the collection of essays in the book persuasively document the progress made by African nations in strengthening formal political institutions and points out those factors such as corruption and clientelism that remain challenging. It also provides a broader picture of the impact of non-political institutions such as land rights and financial institutions on the development of political institutions. In the main, the book reveals that there is a lot to learn about African political systems by using the formal institutional lens and by appreciating the potential divergence between African countries in their political institution-building trajectories than in conflating them as one and the same.

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