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DEMOCRATIC EXPERIMENTS IN AFRICA

*Regime Transitions in
Comparative Perspective*

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

140. Young, *African Colonial State*, p. 41.
141. Krasner, "Approaches to the State," 225.
142. Reuschmeyer, *Capitalist Development and Democracy*, p. 7.
143. Krasner, "Approaches to the State," 225.
144. *Ibid.*
145. Catherine Boone, *Merchant Capital and the Roots of State Power in Sénégal, 1930-1985* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 4.
146. See Joel Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).
147. Malloy and Seligson, *Authoritarians and Democrats: Regime Transition in Latin America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987) p. 239.

NEOPATRIMONIAL RULE IN AFRICA

Throughout this book we ask whether regime transitions in sub-Saharan Africa resemble democratization in other parts of the world. The nature of political authority and its embodiment in political institutions differ in Africa in several significant respects from other world regions that have undergone fundamental change in recent years. We contend that these differences critically affect the dynamics and outcomes of distinctive democratization processes in the sub-Saharan region. This chapter introduces this thesis by briefly reviewing the nature of formal and informal political institutions in postcolonial Africa. We then develop several hypotheses linking these institutions to specific traits of regime transitions in Africa in the early 1990s. We cast the argument comparatively in order to highlight differences among political regimes, both between Africa and the rest of the world but also among African countries themselves.

NEOPATRIMONIAL RULE

The institutional hallmark of politics in the *ancien régimes* of postcolonial Africa was neopatrimonialism. The term is derived from the concept of patrimonial authority, which Max Weber used to designate the principle of authority in the smallest and most traditional polities.¹ In patrimonial political systems, an individual rules by dint of personal prestige and power; ordinary folk are treated as extensions of the "big man's" household, with no rights or privileges other than those bestowed by the ruler. Authority is entirely personalized, shaped by the ruler's preferences rather than any codified system of laws. The ruler ensures the political stability of the regime and personal political survival by providing a zone of security in an uncertain environment and by selectively distributing favors and material benefits to loyal followers who are not citizens of the polity so much as the ruler's clients.

Weber distinguished patrimonial authority from rational-legal authority, in which the public sphere is carefully distinguished from the private sphere; written laws and bureaucratic institutions routinize the exercise of authority and protect individuals and their property from the whims of capricious leaders. His definition of patrimonialism may provide an accurate description of the political systems of small, isolated communities with rudimentary economies, including African chiefdoms in the precolonial era, and the practices of patrimonialism may persist at the local level in a number of different settings.² But it does not adequately characterize any of the national political systems existing in our times, the smallest and poorest of which possess bureaucratic institutions and written laws. Yet, it is clear that some nations in the developing world, most notably in sub-Saharan Africa, retain in modified form many of the characteristics of patrimonial rule. As a result, political scientists have found it useful to characterize as *neopatrimonial* those hybrid political systems in which the customs and patterns of patrimonialism co-exist with, and suffuse, rational-legal institutions.³

As with classic patrimonialism, the right to rule in neopatrimonial regimes is ascribed to a person rather than to an office, despite the official existence of a written constitution. One individual (the strongman, "big man," or "supremo"), often a president for life, dominates the state apparatus and stands above its laws. Relationships of loyalty and dependence pervade a formal political and administrative system, and officials occupy bureaucratic positions less to perform public service, their ostensible purpose, than to acquire personal wealth and status. Although state functionaries receive an official salary, they also enjoy access to various forms of illicit rents, prebends, and petty corruption, which constitute a sometimes important entitlement of office. The chief executive and his inner circle undermine the effectiveness of the nominally modern state administration by using it for systematic patronage and clientelist practices in order to maintain political order. Moreover, parallel and unofficial structures may well hold more power and authority than the formal administration. To summarize, the characteristic feature of neopatrimonialism is the incorporation of patrimonial logic into bureaucratic institutions.

Insofar as personalized exchanges, clientelism, and political corruption are common in all regimes, theorists have suggested that neopatrimonialism is a master concept for comparative politics, at least in the developing world. Robin Theobald argues that "some of the new states are, properly speaking, not states at all; rather, they are virtually the private instruments of those powerful enough to rule."⁴ Christopher Clapham claims that neopatrimonialism is "the most salient type [of authority]" in the Third World because it "corresponds to the normal forms of social organization in precolonial societies."⁵ We make a finer distinction – namely, that although neopatrimonial practices can be found in all polities, it is the *core* feature of politics in Africa and in a small number of other states, including Haiti, and perhaps Indonesia and the Philippines.⁶ Whereas personal relationships occur on the margins of all bureaucratic systems, they constitute the foundation and superstructure of political institutions in Africa. As a

result, scholars of African politics have embraced the neopatrimonial model,⁷ or they have analyzed the same general phenomena under related theoretical labels, including "personal rule," "prebendalism," and the "politics of the belly."⁸

Does it make sense to speak of neopatrimonial institutions? Can the practices we have described be viewed as defining rules and norms that shape individual behavior and structure societal relationships? Jackson and Rosberg answer "no," stating that in Africa, "the rulers and other leaders take precedence over the formal rules of the political game ... the rules do not effectively regulate political behavior."⁹ Neopatrimonialism *does* undermine formal rules and institutions, and it may be true that in the despotic tyrannies of a small number of leaders like Idi Amin or Macias Nguema, politics becomes almost entirely arbitrary and unpredictable. Nonetheless, we argue that when patrimonial logic is internalized in the formal institutions of neopatrimonial regimes, it provides essential operating codes for politics that are valued, recurring, and reproduced over time.¹⁰ In Africa, these same practices exist across more than 40 countries and have persisted after the death or retirement of the first generation of national leaders. The broad routinization of an established set of behavioral norms and procedures is testimony that neopatrimonial practices are more than the idiosyncratic expressions of individual leaders. In particular, it is possible to discern at least three – albeit informal – political institutions that have been typically stable, predictable, and valued in Africa's neopatrimonial regimes.

PRESIDENTIALISM

The first such institution we call *presidentialism*. Presidentialism implies the systematic concentration of political power in the hands of one individual, who resists delegating all but the most trivial decision-making tasks. In Africa, personal dictators emerged from either the army or a dominant political party, but they consolidated power by asserting total personal control over formal political structures.¹¹ As a result on consolidation, presidentialism contributed to the weakening of already frail structures within the military, the judiciary, and the civil service. Ironically, the disempowerment of formal institutions vis-à-vis the presidency was accompanied by the multiplication of public offices and the increasing size of governments in postcolonial Africa. It was not unusual for cabinets to include some 35 to 50 offices; yet ministers were virtually powerless, because all significant decisions were made in the president's office or through personal emissaries. As Hastings Banda put it in 1972, "Nothing is not my business in this country: everything is my business, everything. The state of education, the state of our economy, the state of our agriculture, the state of our transport, everything is my business."¹²

Although presidentialism promoted some formal institutions – notice the predilection for presidential constitutions – we are referring to the informal dimensions of the term. Across Africa, power was deeply personalized. Political life was structured around dyadic exchanges between strongmen and their acolytes, which

together comprised clientelist pyramids and factional networks. Strongmen also exerted considerable discretion over national patterns of domination. Over time, rulers like Kenneth Kaunda in Zambia, Sekou Touré in Guinea, and Felix Houphouët-Boigny in Côte d'Ivoire left a deep personal imprint on national politics, molding their countries' political rules and rhetoric. The personalization of power was both cause and consequence of the political longevity of neopatrimonial rulers. They were more likely to remain in power than leaders in other regime types; regular coups d'état and the appearance of political instability notwithstanding, the average African leader from independence to 1987 still retained power considerably longer than counterparts in postcolonial Latin America or Asia.¹³

Neopatrimonial rulers were also likely to promote a cult of personality. They dominated the national media, which described their every public action with gushing enthusiasm; their likenesses graced the currency, their portraits hung in every public building, and the national printing press periodically published collections of their speeches and writings. As Ellis writes, "The cultivation of religious and cultural symbols ... [was] calculated to demonstrate to the Togolese that Eyadéma was semi-divine and that his government was endowed with supernatural authority."¹⁴ After a time, the style and symbolism of national politics came to reflect the personalities of the leader. Under the guise of his policy of *authenticité* for example, Mobutu convinced Zairians to abandon their Christian first names, adopt *abacos* (the special collarless jackets he liked to wear), and address each other as *citoyen*.¹⁵

Moreover, like a traditional monarch, the neopatrimonial leader often cultivated the image of the pater familias, who was directly responsible for the people's welfare and was willing to entertain and redress individual grievances personally, without the intermediation of the state apparatus. Paternalistic rhetoric was used to legitimate nondemocratic authority. As Schatzberg has argued, "The imagery and language of father and family are widespread in Africa because they strike a resonant and deeply embedded cultural chord."¹⁶ This paternalism was present in official discourse, which often encouraged a view of the ruler as that of a stern but fair father figure.

In addition, supreme leaders openly encouraged public expressions of personal beneficence. Houphouët-Boigny, for example, engaged in regular "dialogues" with groups of citizens in a practice clearly meant to evoke the palaver of the traditional chieftaincies.¹⁷ In tours around the country, he would meet local elites, listen to their grievances, and promise redress. The systematic recourse to clientelism that was the hallmark of these regimes ritualized face-to-face contact between the ruler and his subjects. This paternalism cut both ways, for the state's coercive tendencies were also highly personalized, from the widely accepted rumors in Togo that Eyadéma practiced black magic against his political enemies, to the perhaps apocryphal stories that Ahidjo personally approved all exit visas for Cameroonians wishing to leave the country, or that Nguema Macias of Equatorial Guinea personally participated in the physical torture of his political enemies.¹⁸ Here too, rumor and exaggeration were encouraged by rulers eager to cultivate a larger-than-life image.

As a result of presidentialism, African political regimes were distinctly non-bureaucratic, despite the fact that they possessed a large state apparatus with all the outward trappings of a formal-legal order. Nor could they be viewed as corporatist, a label that is sometimes given to the authoritarian regimes of Latin America or Asia. Leaders of postcolonial African countries may have pursued a corporatist strategy to the extent that they attempted to direct political mobilization along controlled channels. But African leaders rarely used bureaucratic formulas to construct authoritative institutions and seldom granted subsidiary spheres of influence to occupational interest groups within civil society. African regimes did not display the formal governing coalitions between organized state and social interests or the collective bargaining over core public policies that characterize corporatism. At best, African efforts to install corporatist regimes constituted a policy output of an ambitious political elite rather than a reflection of strong class interests within domestic society.

Moreover, power was absolute. Personal rulers dominated their political systems to a much larger extent than is the case in bureaucratic polities. Power was not restrained by legal niceties or systems of checks and balances. That does not mean that these rulers were omnipotent; typically the weak and ineffectual state apparatus responded to their orders fitfully, and the rulers were often constrained by the need to maintain balance across complex ethnic or clan divisions. Yet it does mean that rulers and their closest cronies were not bound by the dictates of the law and tried to emasculate or eliminate formal institutional checks on the executive. The independence of the legislative and judicial branches was severely limited, and neopatrimonial rulers were typically deeply suspicious of any form of institutional pluralism. As a result, neopatrimonial regimes were typically highly exclusionary and the strongman tended to rule by decree; institutions of participation existed in name only and could not check the absolute powers of the chief executive. The strongman may even have preempted his own removal from office by declaring himself president-for-life. As we shall see later, there was, nonetheless, a wide and significant variation in the degree to which plural and participatory institutions managed to endure in these regimes.

In sum, neopatrimonial leaders consciously promoted an image of omnipotence, which exaggerated the already considerable degree to which they dominated national politics. Both the reality and the myths of presidentialism suggest that the personal interaction between the "big man" and his extended retinue defined African politics, from the highest reaches of the presidential palace to the humblest village assembly.

CLIENTELISM

A second informal institution of neopatrimonialism was *systematic clientelism*. Neopatrimonial strongmen all relied on the award of personal favors. Within the state, these favors typically took the form of public sector jobs; within society, the distribution of public resources through licenses, contracts, and projects. In return for material rewards, clients mobilized political support and referred all decisions

upward in a mark of loyalty to patrons.¹⁹ This happened at every level; at the top, the ruler's faithful political aristocracy was rewarded with prebendal control of public offices, monopoly rents, and the possibility of creating its own clientelist networks. These positions as a result demonstrated a seemingly inexorable increase over time. In Côte d'Ivoire, Tëssy Bakary notes, the number of departments, sub-prefectures, and communes went from 4, 19, and 17 at independence to 36, 137, and 135, respectively, by 1987. Similarly, the average size of cabinets increased by a factor of 2.5 during the same period, the Economic and Social Council went from 25 to 120 members, and the single party's political bureau increased from 15 to 302. This inventory does not include positions in the diplomatic service or the parastatal sector, also in rapid expansion during this period.²⁰ Typically, these positions came with various perks such as official house and car, staff, and pension. Nor were patronage and clientelist benefits limited to the political aristocracy; Bates and Collier report that Kenneth Kaunda controlled 40,000 patronage positions in Lusaka alone during the 1980s, through the United National Independence Party (UNIP), which he dominated.²¹

Systematic clientelism led neopatrimonial rulers to promote state intervention in the economy. The fact that political authority rested on the selective allocation of state resources to individuals created a powerful incentive for extensive regulation of economic activity, through which the incumbent elite gained control over a wide range of monopolies and economic rents. In sum, public resources were privatized to the benefit of the coterie of presidential loyalists. To a certain extent, these dynamics describe all types of political regimes, but African neopatrimonial regimes were distinctive in the extent to which systematic clientelism was generalized. A fiscal study of Cameroon estimated that various exemptions granted by the government and tax fraud resulted in a revenue shortfall equivalent to 18 to 22 percent of gross domestic product (GDP).²² A study of tax administration in the Gambia estimated the losses associated with tax evasion at 70 percent of total public revenue, noting that only a fifth of all registered companies filed income tax returns.²³ In other words, by setting high rates of taxation, governments created various economic rents that could be used to dispense political favors. In other countries, it was not unusual for one third of all imports to benefit from a special political exemption from import duty. Indeed, in neopatrimonial regimes, virtually all economic policy was motivated at least in part by the economic rents provided to the state elite.

STATE RESOURCES

A third informal institution was the *use of state resources* for political legitimation, and it was closely linked to the reliance on clientelism. Neopatrimonial leaders made little distinction between the public and private coffers, routinely and extensively dipping into the state treasury for their own political needs. President Ahidjo of Cameroon kept a large proportion of his country's oil revenues in a personal offshore bank account, to be spent during the course of the year as he saw

fit. Houphouët-Boigny regularly pocketed a tenth of his country's cocoa exports, spending it on grandiose prestige projects that flattered his image as the country's founding father.²⁴ Mobutu amassed a huge personal fortune, widely assumed to be roughly equivalent to Zaire's national debt, largely by extracting a cut from the country's diamond and copper exports.²⁵ When state coffers ran dry by 1992, however, Mobutu returned the favor by using this "rainy day fund" to meet the army's wage bill, suggesting that the purloined spoils had never been meant to serve as personal enrichment for its own sake.

As a consequence of both clientelism and the use of state resources, neopatrimonial regimes demonstrated very little developmental capacity. Lacking political legitimacy, rulers survived through coercion and clientelism but often failed to exercise complete control over the polity. The large state apparatus they had created as much for patronage as anything else was costly as well as inept, undisciplined, and unresponsive to their orders. Public investment was inadequate because a disproportionate share of public monies went to pay a bloated salary bill for the large number of offices reserved for the political class. In sum, there was a contradiction between the regime's redistributive practices and long-term accumulation.²⁶ Typically, public infrastructure was poorly maintained and state agents lacked operating funds; office equipment was old and run down, the few state cars that were functioning were privately appropriated by top officials, and gas coupons were sold for profit or not budgeted for. As a result, the state was barely proficient at even basic functions and was further undermined in the 1980s by the growing fiscal crisis, which resulted in sharply reduced real salaries. In effect, the neopatrimonial state exercised only limited effective sovereignty over the national territory; outlying regions were not fully policed and the state could neither enforce its own laws and regulations nor prevent fraud along its borders.

Moreover, the constant redistribution of state resources for political purposes led to endemic fiscal crisis and diminished prospects for sustained economic growth.²⁷ The dynamics of neopatrimonial rule ensured that African states routinely outspent their revenues by a large margin. Pervasive rent-seeking and political manipulation of economic policy resulted in a state apparatus that was both too large relative to the economy and too weak to effectively collect revenues.²⁸ The high-level corruption in Nigeria during the early 1990s led to the disappearance of oil revenues for the state that were worth as much as a tenth of GDP each year.²⁹ Indeed, the recent history of Africa was characterized by a decline in state revenues as a proportion of the economy, particularly as the continent's economic crisis worsened during the 1980s. By 1980, central government revenues amounted to 18.3 percent of gross national product in the 23 African countries for which there were data, compared to an average of 30.5 percent in OECD countries.³⁰ Because of this low extractive capacity, most African states came to rely increasingly on foreign aid to pay for basic functions. In Zambia, for instance, aid was equivalent to 32.7 percent of GNP by 1993, whereas government revenues amounted to 11.9 percent of GDP in 1991, down from some 27 percent in 1980.³¹

Concomitantly, neopatrimonialism created an economic climate of uncertainty and risk that scared away investors or directed them toward short-term speculation. The viability of existing enterprises was undermined by the exactions of state agents, as well as by the doldrums in the economy. As a result, African economies suffered from a shortage of long-term private investment, which further condemned them to slow economic growth. The state's need for revenues, coupled with an inability to confront the politically powerful, led it to tax excessively a narrow range of economic agents. For most of Africa's postcolonial history, that meant the taxation of the cash-crop-producing peasantry, which responded by decreasing its output or smuggling agricultural products to neighboring countries.³² The case of Ghana was egregious: In the world's largest producer of cocoa at independence, with a peak of 560,000 tons in 1965, cocoa production declined to 249,000 tons by 1979, largely because state taxation undermined producer incentives. By 1970, the government passed on less than 37 percent of total cocoa export receipts to the producers themselves, down from 72 percent in 1960.³³

INSTITUTIONAL VARIATIONS IN AFRICAN REGIMES

That virtually all African regimes could be viewed as neopatrimonial should not obscure the significant variation in political institutions that evolved across the different states in the region. Typologies of sub-Saharan political regimes have been advanced in the African politics literature to capture such institutional differences.³⁴ Following Dahl's classic formulation, we find it useful to distinguish among neopatrimonial regimes according to the extent of political competition (or contestation) and the degree of political participation (or inclusion).³⁵

POLITICAL COMPETITION

First, Africa's neopatrimonial regimes varied in the extent to which at least some members of the political system were allowed to compete over elected positions or public policy. Even when state elites worked to eliminate, control, or coopt opposition parties, they sometimes tolerated pluralism within the single party or in the lobbying activities of nonstate associations. At one extreme, opposition parties were formed and even allowed into the legislature in a small number of countries. At the other extreme, some governments banned any and all questioning of the policies formulated by an inner group of politicians. In between, islands of contestation were tolerated, either independently of the state or formally under the authority of the ruling party.

A cursory examination of electoral competition since African independence confirms this variation. Elections in Africa are generally depicted as empty and largely symbolic exercises designed to legitimate officeholders. And, indeed, following a lone competitive election at independence, that is apparently what

many African elections became. Between independence and 1989, 106 presidential and 185 direct parliamentary elections were held in the 47 countries of sub-Saharan Africa (Table 1). In the presidential elections, the winning candidate on average reportedly received 92 percent of the vote; moreover, in 64 of those elections, the winner officially received above 95 percent of the votes, whereas the opposition candidate won at least a quarter of the vote in only 10 cases. Thus, for instance, Houphouët-Boigny won all six of the presidential elections held in Côte d'Ivoire between 1960 and 1989, with a reported average of 99.7 percent of the vote. A bit more competition was tolerated in parliamentary elections, perhaps because they threatened less the power of the ruler, but even here the winning party won an average of 83 percent of the votes and 88 percent of the seats. In 29 countries, opposition parties were never allowed to win a single seat over the course of 150 separate elections. Since these averages include the relatively open elections held right at independence, they really do suggest that, at least in terms of political competition, elections were largely empty rituals.

Indeed, in many of the countries of the region, rulers could not countenance electoral challenge and used elections in an entirely self-serving manner. As Chazan noted, "The essential purpose of the ballot in this type of election is to provide the existing government a semblance of popular approval."³⁶ In fact, governments in these countries were quick to discontinue elections when they threatened to lead to the expression of discontent. But elections were not necessarily completely meaningless in political terms. They provided opportunities for the strongman to tour the country, dispense favors, hone the regime's ideological rhetoric, and, as we show in the next chapter, mobilize a measure of political participation through the ruling party. But generally they did not include meaningful political competition.

Nonetheless, one can distinguish at least three forms of limited electoral competition in postcolonial Africa. First, a small number of regimes consistently sustained multiparty politics from independence onward. Botswana, the Gambia, Mauritius, Sénégal (at least since 1980), and Zimbabwe all provide examples of stable, functioning multiparty rule, in which reasonably free and fair elections were held on a regular basis. It is easy to see flaws in these democracies; with the exception of Mauritius, the stability of democratic rule was facilitated by the presence of a dominant party, which was never seriously challenged; thus, the majority party in Botswana, the Gambia, and Sénégal won an average of 85.8 percent, 81.7 percent, and 86.8 percent, respectively, of seats contested in multiparty elections. In all cases, the opposition was harassed, and patterns of electoral abuse witnessed elsewhere on the continent were not entirely absent. Nonetheless, these states had begun to institutionalize multiparty electoral competition before 1989.

Second, some countries experienced brief interludes of democratic rule between longer periods of authoritarianism. Excluding the five countries just discussed, we found 19 elections in 12 countries since 1970 in which an opposition party won at least one seat. These elections typically occurred in countries charac-

| Country | Presidential Elections | Winner's Share (mean % votes) | Legislative Elections | Winner's Share (mean % seats) |
|--------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| Angola | 0 | — | 0 | — |
| Bénin | 3 | 84.2 | 5 | 100.0 |
| Botswana | 0 | — | 5 | 85.8 |
| Burkina Faso | 2 | 77.3 | 3 | 57.0 |
| Burundi | 1 | 99.6 | 2 | 81.8 |
| Cameroon | 6 | 97.6 | 8 | 90.9 |
| Cape Verde | 0 | — | 2 | 100.0 |
| Central African Republic | 3 | 80.5 | 3 | 95.3 |
| Chad | 2 | 96.2 | 2 | 100.0 |
| Comoros | 2 | 99.7 | 3 | 73.7 |
| Congo | 2 | 100.0 | 5 | 100.0 |
| Côte d'Ivoire | 6 | 99.7 | 6 | 100.0 |
| Djibouti | 2 | 87.3 | 2 | 100.0 |
| Eq. Guinea | 2 | 97.9 | 2 | 100.0 |
| Ethiopia | 0 | — | 6 | 100.0 |
| Gabon | 5 | 99.6 | 7 | 95.1 |
| Gambia | 2 | 65.7 | 5 | 81.7 |
| Ghana | 2 | 75.5 | 4 | 76.1 |
| Guinea | 5 | 99.7 | 4 | 100.0 |
| Guinea-Bissau | 0 | — | 0 | — |
| Kenya | 0 | — | 6 | 99.1 |
| Lesotho | 0 | — | 1 | 38.3 |
| Liberia | 6 | 82.6 | 6 | 89.8 |
| Madagascar | 5 | 86.8 | 7 | 74.2 |
| Malawi | 0 | — | 4 | 100.0 |
| Mali | 2 | 99.9 | 5 | 100.0 |
| Mauritania | 4 | 97.7 | 4 | 100.0 |
| Mauritius | 0 | — | 4 | 57.3 |
| Mozambique | 0 | — | 0 | — |
| Namibia | 0 | — | 1 | — |
| Niger | 3 | 99.8 | 3 | 100.0 |
| Nigeria | 2 | 40.6 | 3 | 56.5 |
| Rwanda | 5 | 97.3 | 5 | 100.0 |
| São Tomé | 0 | — | 0 | — |
| Sénégal | 6 | 87.7 | 7 | 93.4 |
| Seychelles | 3 | 95.6 | 3 | 100.0 |
| Sierra Leone | 2 | 97.6 | 6 | 62.5 |
| Somalia | 1 | 99.9 | 4 | 78.7 |
| South Africa | 0 | — | 8 | 71.8 |
| Sudan | 3 | 98.2 | 8 | 70.6 |
| Swaziland | 0 | — | 1 | 87.5 |
| Tanzania | 6 | 94.9 | 5 | 100.0 |
| Togo | 5 | 98.3 | 4 | 100.0 |
| Uganda | 0 | — | 4 | 68.4 |
| Zaire | 3 | 99.1 | 5 | 92.8 |
| Zambia | 5 | 83.4 | 6 | 89.9 |
| Zimbabwe | 0 | — | 1 | 80.0 |
| Total/Average | 106 | 92.0 | 185 | 88.0 |

terized by political instability and fragmentation in which a succession of military and civilian rulers failed to overcome the complex ethnoregional divisions that undermined regime legitimacy. These elections were often tainted by accusations of fraud, and their deficiencies contributed to the delegitimation of the democratic order, but they did include real political competition. Nigeria's Second Republic, for example, held multiparty elections in 1979 and 1983. In each, there was considerable malpractice both before and during the polling, and the September 1983 elections were marred by extensive violence and increased ethnic tensions. The December 31, 1983, coup that ended the Second Republic actually singled out these electoral problems as justification for military intervention.³⁷

Third, and more ambiguously, some of Africa's single-party regimes institutionalized limited but real competition within the ruling party. The party presented more than one candidate for each parliamentary district or held competitive primaries before legislative elections. In these cases, the electorate had a chance to vote an incumbent representative out of power. Detailed analysis of these elections was beyond the scope of our study, but we identified 14 countries with at least one intraparty competitive election (including Cameroon and Togo in the 1980s) and a smaller number of countries (notably Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia in the 1970s, and Côte d'Ivoire after 1980) in which rules of intraparty competition were in place for several elections. The impact on the political class was occasionally quite marked; for example, in the 1985 Ivoirian parliamentary elections, only 64 members of the outgoing parliament were reelected in a field of 546 candidates for 175 seats. Similarly, in the 1985 Togolese elections, only 20 out of 66 deputies were reelected. In the 1988 Zambian elections, two sitting senior ministers were defeated.

Granted, such competition was always controlled. Neopatrimonial rulers used emerging electoral institutions to assert presidential prerogatives over the single party and to discipline the political class.³⁸ Even when the strongman did not intervene in the selection of candidates, the electoral turnover of legislators clearly weakened party notables relative to the president. The attractiveness of intraparty competition may well have derived from the fact that it facilitated the circulation of elites and introduced fresh blood into the system, yet never shook the legitimacy of the regime or of the ruler himself.³⁹ And because a member of parliament could expect a generous salary and allowances, it also enabled the patron to redistribute desirable patronage positions. Indeed, the size of legislatures was expanded to accommodate the demand for paid posts; the average African legislature grew from 89.5 seats to 140 seats between the first parliamentary postindependence election and the end of 1989. This inflation was very clear in Côte d'Ivoire, for instance, where the parliament grew from 70 to 175 seats between 1960 and 1989, and in Zambia, where it grew from 75 to 136.

The extent to which controlled intraparty competition actually added to the competitiveness of the regime was uncertain, but it was potentially significant. It allowed a measure of parliamentary accountability to voter concerns as incumbents and challengers struggled to demonstrate an ability to bring home the bacon. Barkan captures well these dynamics in the Kenya of the 1970s when he

writes that elections amounted to "local referenda on the ability of individual incumbents to secure state resources for their home areas.... Because elections were truly competitive, incumbents were held accountable for their activities and forced to be attentive to the concerns of their constituents."⁴⁰

Elections provided one indicator of the degree of competition, but there were others as well. In particular, it was possible to notice key differences among African regimes in the degree of institutional pluralism that survived in civil and political society through the 1970s and 1980s. Most African regimes tried to eliminate, weaken, or take over any nongovernmental institution that might contest their legitimacy and authority. These included opposition political parties, which were illegal in 32 states as late as 1989. Also included were a wide variety of nongovernmental organizations, such as farmer associations and producer cooperatives, trade unions, professional groups, and business associations, as well as media organizations. As a result of state-directed repression and cooptation, civil society was generally weak and less developed in Africa than elsewhere in the developing world.

Nonetheless, the available data on associational life suggests striking contrasts within Africa. In 1989, four countries in the sub-Saharan subcontinent did not have a single registered trade union, and only one officially sanctioned union was tolerated in an additional total of 18 countries. At the other extreme, 16 African countries could claim at least five legally registered trade unions. Similarly with business associations: The 16 countries with only one or fewer such groups could be contrasted with the nine countries in which at least 10 business bodies were officially registered. Such examples could be multiplied – for example, with reference to churches and the press. They suggest that, in associational life as in the conduct of national elections, the degree of institutionalized political competition in Africa was far from constant across African regimes.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

African regimes also varied in the degree of political participation allowed. Because of limited institutional pluralism, decision making in public affairs was typically restricted to elites with a narrow social base. Only rarely was the population at large consulted about public policies, and then through a single party or approved membership associations. Kasfir has argued that most African regimes tried to circumscribe political participation, by "shrinking" the public arena in the years after independence.⁴¹ Relative to the heady days of the independence struggle that may well be true. Nonetheless, most regimes continued to allow some participation and were much more likely to clamp down on competition.

Here, too, significant differences are apparent from a survey of the countries in Africa. We tabulated the number and frequency of elections, and recorded the officially reported voter turnout rates. To repeat, between independence and the end of 1989, there were 106 presidential and 185 direct parliamentary elections

in the 47 countries of the sub-Saharan region, for an average of 2.30 and 4.02 elections, respectively (see Table 1). These averages mask sharp differences; thus, 16 countries never held a single presidential election, but 12 held four or more. Parliamentary elections were more evenly distributed; 13 countries held two elections or fewer, and 20 held five or more. We should not forget that the very choice not to hold direct elections was a way of limiting participation in some countries.

Some sense of the extent of political participation can be obtained with reference to voter turnout rates: first, the proportion of registered voters that was said to have turned out; and second, the proportion of the total population that reportedly voted.⁴² Here, too there was surprising variation. The range across all countries for which we have data are an average 85.2 percent and 39.3 percent, respectively, for presidential elections and an average 77.8 percent and 33.5 percent for parliamentary elections. But these voter turnout rates are difficult to interpret; officially proclaimed, they were clearly manipulated in many instances. Nonetheless, the data did not suggest the kinds of obstacles to widespread participation that scholars have reported for Latin America.⁴³ In fact, there were virtually no *de jure* limits on the franchise in postcolonial Africa. In contrast to the historical record in Europe or Latin America, African states never instituted literacy, gender, property, or income requirements for the right to vote.

If anything, reported participation rates were suspiciously high and suggest considerable fraud, at least in some countries. What are we to make of the official results for elections in Côte d'Ivoire and Cameroon, for example, according to which well over 90 percent of registered voters – or roughly two thirds of the adult population – voted six times in less than three decades in noncompetitive contests? Even allowing for fraud, however, participation rates did vary, particularly the percentage of the adult population voting. For instance, in the 1988 presidential election in Sénégal, 59 percent of all registered voters cast a ballot, but this amounted to little more than roughly a third of the total population. Less than half of the adult population voted, on average, in 10 countries holding at least one election, according to official numbers. Low turnout may well have been a way for voters to show their dissatisfaction with available candidate choices, or it may have reflected more mundane apathy, reinforced by the practical difficulties of registering and casting a ballot.⁴⁴ In any event, and except in the racial oligarchies of South Africa and Namibia, low turnout did not necessarily imply governmental attempts to limit the franchise, as in other parts of the world.

How can we explain these differences in degrees of political competition and participation across countries? A full explanation is well beyond the scope of this study, but some national patterns are evident. First, variation can be traced to the political dynamics of the immediate postindependence years; the circumstances in which different leaders consolidated power partly determined the degree of pluralism that came to characterize the existing regime.⁴⁵ When a dominant party emerged early during the period of competitive party politics at indepen-

Table 2. *Elections in Which Winning Party Failed to Gain a Majority of Seats*

| Country | Election | Seats/ Total | Winning Party | Outcome in Parliament |
|--------------|----------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------------------|
| Sudan | 1958 | 63/173 | UMMA | dissolved 1958 |
| Nigeria | 1979 | 168/449 | NPN | dissolved 1983 |
| Lesotho | 1970 | 23/60 | BNP | dissolved 1970 ^a |
| Sudan | 1986 | 100/260 | UMMA | dissolved 1989 |
| Sudan | 1965 | 75/173 | UMMA | dissolved 1968 |
| Uganda | 1963 | 37/82 | UPC | dissolved 1969 |
| Sierra Leone | 1963 | 28/62 | SLPP | — |
| Sudan | 1968 | 101/218 | UDP | dissolved 1968 |
| Sierra Leone | 1967 | 32/66 | APC | military coup ^b |
| Mauritius | 1976 | 34/70 | MMM | — |
| Burkina Faso | 1978 | 28/57 | UDV-RDA | dissolved 1980 |

^aElectoral results are invalidated and election is suspended by sitting prime minister.

^bMilitary coup is reversed following junior officer countercoup, which restores Siaka Stevens's All People's Congress government to power in April 1968.

dence, that party was typically able to integrate, coopt, or eliminate other political parties and to install stable civilian single-party rule, at least until the first leader retired. This was the pattern in countries like Tanzania, Côte d'Ivoire, and Zambia. In the absence of a dominant party from the independence struggle, ensuing regimes were characterized by considerable instability and a greater reliance on coercion, notably through military intervention.⁴⁶

A closer look at electoral data confirms that close elections that did not decisively promote one political party over the others were associated with political instability in postcolonial Africa. Table 2 lists all elections held in sub-Saharan Africa between independence and 1989 in which the incumbent party did not win a majority of seats. In each case, except following elections in Sierra Leone in 1962 and Mauritius in 1976, the parliament was dissolved extralegally within the next couple of years. It is difficult to separate cause and effect. Minority governments were more likely to be contested, particularly in ethnically divided countries, and to result in party fragmentation. Intense partisanship and infighting, fueled by the zero-sum struggle for state resources, often mobilized ethnic identities and led to societal polarization. On the other hand, in countries like Tanzania, ethnic fragmentation did not lead to political conflict, for the ruling party was able to garner support throughout the country.

Partly overlapping this first set of factors, distinct variants of neopatrimonial regimes emerged as a result of specific historical attempts to overcome tensions created by ethnic, linguistic, and regional heterogeneity, which varied markedly

across states. Very few regimes in Africa adopted a discourse of exclusivity, preferring to expend resources to promote cultural assimilation and a sense of nationhood.⁴⁷ Participatory rituals were considered useful precisely because they provided rulers with carefully controlled opportunities to demonstrate broad-based legitimacy.

Rulers used a variety of mechanisms to attempt to maintain national cohesion and their own popularity. Within a number of countries, for instance, great efforts were made to equilibrate public expenditures across regions. Rothchild notes for Kenya and Nigeria during the late 1970s and early 1980s that public expenditures were patterned on a "proportionality principle" to achieve fairness among provinces, and his survey of the senior staff of the Ghana civil service in 1972 showed "remarkably close parallels between the ethnic proportions in the civil service and the society at large."⁴⁸ Sometimes rulers agreed informally to rough ethnic, communal, or regional quotas for official positions. Even more commonly, leaders extended material inducements to a smaller set of social elites in order to promote various kinds of accommodation within the political class, arrangements that resulted in relatively high levels of elite participation and competition.⁴⁹ In these regimes, rulers promoted intermediaries who represented specific subnational constituencies at the top of the government.⁵⁰ These served as the rulers' emissaries and ensured that constituencies received fair shares of state benefits. The ruler might devolve this role to traditional chiefs in recognition of their authority, or he might designate members of the political class, notably through appointments to cabinet-level positions. If the latter, cabinet reshuffles were interpreted in terms of an elaborate ethnic calculus in which each group was assumed to be entitled to a recognized ratio of seats.

The ethnic calculus led to constant pressure to increase the number of important offices, so that the demands of diverse groups could be met. Even as it expanded competition within the political elite, the proliferation of positions complicated the supremo's ability to manage the regime. Could the members of the political aristocracy be trusted? Would they eventually wrest away the clientelist networks and rents on which rule was founded? Neopatrimonial leaders responded to such fears by systematically promoting the turnover of officeholders: No minister, backbencher, parastatal manager, governor, or prefect could ever be allowed to forget that a position was owed to the strongman, who could and would take it away sooner or later. Particularly vulnerable were men and women who had committed *lèse majesté* by developing independent networks of influence and power.

This dynamic helps to explain why so many rulers were willing to introduce competition within the single party; the introduction of such reforms in Cameroon, Togo, and Côte d'Ivoire during the 1980s signaled in each case a clear executive attempt to weaken the political class. More generally it explains one of the striking characteristics of these regimes: the rapid turnover of personnel. Thus, during Ahidjo's 24 years in power, he had 8 different ministers of finance, 11 ministers of agriculture, 12 ministers of the national economy, and 9 ministers of foreign affairs.⁵¹

Managing the political class by the circulation of officeholders strengthened the hand of the supremo but had the inbuilt disadvantage of generating an entire class of discontented elites. Leaders could always bring purged barons back to defuse emerging problems; a case in point is Mobutu's on-again, off-again relationships with Nguza Karl-I-Bond and Etienne Tshisekedi, in which the two men were repeatedly brought back from disgrace and even prison to occupy high-level positions in Mobutu's cabinet. Nonetheless, over time, the ranks of the discontented swelled, particularly after the economic and fiscal crisis erupted in the 1980s and began to necessitate the state's retrenchment and its acceptance of a freer civil society. As Heilbrunn notes, "Disaffected elites resented their exclusion from the patronage networks of authoritarian regimes and hence established independent bases of power in voluntary associations beyond the immediate reach of the state."⁵²

These practices did increase political participation and competition in some states. All African neopatrimonial regimes, it should be emphasized, however, promoted social stratification and inequality. In some cases, the intermediate barons served their communities well and promoted significant reallocation of state resources across the territory. Nonetheless, their interest in representing a constituency was often essentially fictitious, and the effective redistribution that took place was limited to a relatively small elite. As Schatzberg writes, using neopatrimonial metaphors, "A major social and political divide thus occurs between those who can 'eat' and those who cannot; between those who command the forces of the night and those who are its victims.... In most cases, the 'winners' ... are usually inside the state, while the losers are usually on the outside looking in."⁵³

Other regimes pursued approaches that relied more extensively on a mixture of ideology and coercion to maintain national unity and political stability. As a result, they were less likely to tolerate participation and competition. This was often the case for military regimes. Military coups were more likely in countries that had failed to emerge from independence with a stable government, often because of factional disputes within the political class.⁵⁴ Once the military intervened a first time, it suppressed formal institutions of competition and participation, which it argued had caused the instability and which it probably viewed as a threat to its own hold on power. Newly installed military regimes invariably outlawed political parties and independent associations, closed parliaments, and circumscribed the jurisdiction of civilian tribunals.

Yet military leaders soon found it difficult to rule without recourse to civilian institutions. Almost immediately, they were forced to call on civil servants to provide the technical expertise necessary to keep the government running. Over time, they began to adopt many of the institutional practices they had initially derided. Following Mobutu's lead, such rulers distanced themselves from the military and sought to civilianize their regimes, including by perfecting neopatrimony. Nonetheless, countries that had lived through military rule for any length of time were likely to have lower levels of political competition and political participation. Some military regimes, notably radical regimes such as that of Ethiopia under Mengistu or of Burkina Faso under Sankara, continued to rely

less on material inducements or more strictly limited their beneficiaries throughout their tenure.⁵⁵ Even as these regimes proved willing to increase levels of participation somewhat, notably by creating single parties or by convening sham elections, they continued to eschew virtually any form of significant competition.

FIVE MODAL REGIMES

It is now possible to identify modal variants of African political regimes that embody distinct combinations of political participation and political competition. These regimes are distinguished by whether the population was broadly or narrowly mobilized (participation) and by the plurality of political associations (competition). Figure 5 identifies five modal regime variants that together collectively exhaust the range of political arrangements predominant in postcolonial Africa. It places them in a property space defined, following Dahl, by the extent of participation (*x* axis) and competition (*y* axis). The figure also shows where African regimes stood in relation to Remmer's four ideal regime categories: exclusionary and inclusionary authoritarianism, and exclusionary and inclusionary democracy.⁵⁶

For the most part, African postcolonial regimes were variants on a neopatrimonial theme. At least three modal forms – military oligarchy, plebiscitary one-party system, and competitive one-party system – featured "big man" rule. Between them, these three types (*n* = 40) accounted for most of sub-Saharan Africa's political regimes in 1989 (see Table 3). Even Africa's multiparty systems (*n* = 5), in which chief political executives were checked to a degree by opposition parties and competitive elections, showed tendencies toward personal rule. Only the settler oligarchies of South Africa and Namibia (*n* = 2) clearly departed from Africa's neopatrimonial norm; with their stronger, centralized state and military apparatus and their closer adherence to legal-rational administrative procedures, they more closely resembled the bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes that had been common a decade earlier in Latin America and Southern Europe.

We do not offer these modal regimes as immutable categories. Actual African regimes reflected their own peculiar postcolonial histories that encompassed shifts from one regime variant to another. For example, Zaire transited from military oligarchy to plebiscitary one-party system after Mobutu created in 1966 the Popular Revolutionary Movement (MPR) as the country's sole political party; Cameroon transited from a plebiscitary to a competitive one-party system in 1985 when Biya introduced multiple candidate lists for municipal and legislative elections; and Zimbabwe transited from a settler oligarchy to a formal multiparty system with independence in 1980. In part as a result of such changes, actual regimes displayed characteristics of more than one type, combining features of each at one time or another. In fact, this possibility is inherent in the logic of our framework, which proposes neopatrimonial rule as a master concept that embraces a variety of subsidiary regime types. We now describe each of these variants.

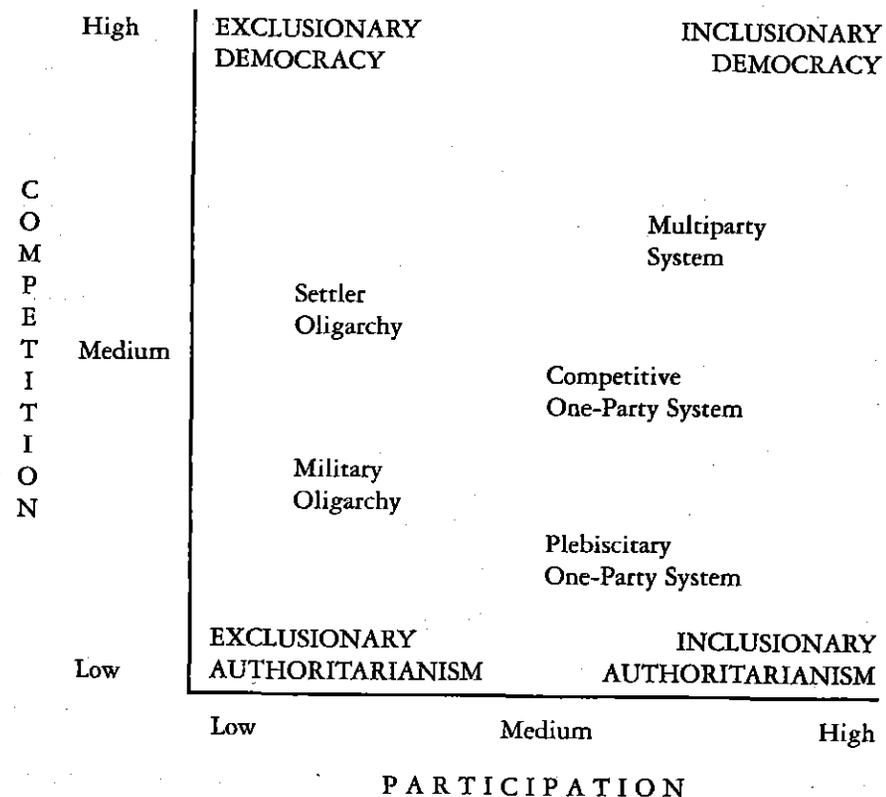


Figure 5 Modal Regimes in Sub-Saharan Africa, Independence to 1989

THE PLEBISCITARY ONE-PARTY SYSTEM

This form of neopatrimonial regime allowed extremely limited competition but encouraged a high degree of political participation. Mass participation was orchestrated from above and channeled through symbolic rituals of endorsement for the personal ruler, his officeholders, and his policies. Voters were simultaneously mobilized and controlled through one-party "plebiscites," which included elections and officially sponsored rallies and demonstrations.⁵⁷ Electoral turnout rates and affirmative votes for the president typically exceeded 90 percent, results that suggested genuine participation, even if electoral competition was highly restricted by the government. Between elections, the regime employed a party machine to distribute patronage to a fairly wide array of economic and regional interests. Despite these participatory rituals, the plebiscitary one-party system was decidedly undemocratic

Table 3. Modal Regimes by Country, Sub-Saharan Africa, 1989

| Plebiscitary One-Party Systems (n = 16) | Military Oligarchies (n = 11) | Competitive One-Party Systems (n = 13) | Settler Oligarchies (n = 2) | Multiparty Systems (n = 5) |
|---|-------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Angola | Burkina Faso | Cameroon | Namibia | Botswana |
| Bénin | Burundi | Central African Republic | South Africa | Gambia |
| Cape Verde | Chad | Côte d'Ivoire | | Mauritius |
| Comoros | Ghana | Madagascar | | Sénégal |
| Congo | Guinea | | | Zimbabwe |
| Djibouti | Lesotho | Mali | | |
| Equatorial Guinea | Liberia | Malawi | | |
| Ethiopia | Mauritania | Rwanda | | |
| Gabon | Nigeria | São Tomé | | |
| Guinea-Bissau | Sudan | Seychelles | | |
| Kenya | Uganda | Sierra Leone | | |
| Mozambique | | Tanzania | | |
| Niger | | Togo | | |
| Somalia | | Zambia | | |
| Swaziland | | | | |
| Zaire | | | | |

ocratic because it precluded genuine political competition. Opposition political parties were proscribed, and only one candidate from the official party appeared on the ballot.

The one-party plebiscitary regime in Africa was characteristically headed by a first-generation leader, either civilian or military. If civilian, the leader was usually the grand old man of nationalist politics who had won independence in the early 1960s; if military, he commonly had come to power in the first round of coups in the late 1960s or early 1970s. This latter group of leaders typically tried to civilianize and legitimize the regime by abandoning military rank and uniform and attempting to construct mass-mobilizing political parties. Examples included Mobutu in Zaire and Kérékou in Benin. As a result, by 1989 the plebiscitary one-party system had become the most common type of neopatrimonial regime in Africa.

THE MILITARY OLIGARCHY

By contrast, the military oligarchy was an exclusionary form of neopatrimonial rule. Elections were few or entirely suspended; all decisions were made by a narrow elite behind closed doors. There was a visible personal leader, but power was

not completely concentrated in the hands of one man; decisions were made somewhat more collectively by a junta, committee, or cabinet that often included civilian advisers and technocrats alongside military officers. There was a degree of competitive debate within the elite, and objective criteria were brought to bear in assessing policy options. Implementation occurred through a relatively professional civil or military hierarchy, and executive institutions were maintained in at least a token state of readiness and effectiveness.⁵⁸

The military oligarchy tended to be led by a younger generation of junior military officers who had come to power in a second, third, or later round of coups during the late 1970s and 1980s. The military retained a much larger role in the polity than was the case in plebiscitary regimes, even when the latter were headed by leaders who had emerged out of the military. Political participation was severely circumscribed, not only because elections were eliminated in the early years of military rule but also because existing political parties and most civic associations were banned. In radical regimes such as those in Burkina Faso or Congo, the military filled this political space with so-called people's committees to disseminate its message.⁵⁹ Although military oligarchs sometimes espoused a populist ideology, their methods of rule did not include genuine participation, at least until such time as these leaders began to make good on promises to return to civilian rule.⁶⁰ This reflected the military's deep distrust of politics and politicians.⁶¹ The military oligarchy variant of neopatrimonial regimes was exemplified, among others, by the governments of Jerry Rawlings in Ghana (1981–92) and Ibrahim Babangida in Nigeria (1985–93).

THE COMPETITIVE ONE-PARTY SYSTEM

This less common variant of the one-party system was as inclusive as the plebiscitary variant, but (as the label suggests) it was somewhat more competitive. It was distinguished from the military oligarchy in its toleration of limited political competition at the mass as well as elite levels. Elections in these neopatrimonial systems allowed for two or more candidates in party primaries or parliamentary elections. Voters possessed a restricted electoral choice among candidates from a single official party with an established policy platform. To be sure, candidates who enjoyed the support of the ruling strongman stood at an advantage in elections, but this did not always reliably protect them against defeat at the hands of voters. Even though personal rulers attempted to depoliticize society and manipulated electoral rules, voters seemed sufficiently attracted by the available choices to sustain genuine turnout figures at relatively high, though declining, levels.⁶² Such regimes were also relatively stable, resisting military intervention.

As an aspect of institutional longevity, the competitive one-party regime was characteristically headed by a nationalist founding father like Kaunda of Zambia

or Houphouët-Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire.⁶³ Sometimes the original ruler engineered a smooth but nondemocratic leadership transition to a handpicked successor (as to Moi in Kenya or Mwinzi in Tanzania).⁶⁴ In these regimes, long-serving leaders had consolidated and institutionalized support in ruling parties and were, or considered themselves to be, politically secure.⁶⁵ A degree of pluralism was tolerated, so that significant opposition to the government was allowed on the fringes of the single party and in the press and among civic associations, which were strong by African standards.

THE SETTLER OLIGARCHY

As we have mentioned, the settler form of rule did not share the core features of Africa's neopatrimonial regimes. Instead, it resembled the bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes constructed by Europeans in those parts of the colonial world where settlers gained *de facto* control of the state.⁶⁶ Settler oligarchies approximate exclusionary democracy. The dominant racial group used the instruments of law to deny political rights to ethnic majorities, usually through a restrictive franchise and emergency regulations backed by hierarchically organized coercion. At the same time, however, settlers reproduced functioning democracies within their own microcosmic enclaves, with features like elections, leadership turnover, loyal opposition, independent courts, and some press freedoms, all reserved exclusively for whites. Thus, at the same time that they permitted quite far-reaching measures of political competition, these regimes proscribed access to the political process by limiting participation. The classic case is of course South Africa, which with Namibia was the only remaining settler oligarchy in Africa by 1989, though half a dozen other African countries in the eastern and southern subcontinent shared a settler colonial heritage. Because of their peculiar institutional origins, one would expect settler oligarchies to display distinct transition dynamics, discussion of which is reserved for Chapter 5.

THE MULTIPARTY SYSTEM

Multiparty regimes display relatively high levels of both participation and competition. Because they have met the minimal requirements for the installation of a democratic order, we do not include them in the following discussions of the dynamics of recent regime transitions. In these regimes, voters enjoy guarantees of universal franchise and equality before the law that are largely enforceable, and a plurality of political parties is free to contest elections that are largely open. The shortcomings of African multiparty systems, which are discussed more fully elsewhere (see Chapter 7), include weak opposition parties, intimidation of opposition supporters by incumbent governments, and an absence of leadership

turnover. The multiparty systems of Botswana, Sénégal, and Zimbabwe are all imperfectly democratic in these respects, and when unchecked, their leaders show marked tendencies to lapse into neopatrimonial habits. African multiparty systems can be thought of as hybrid regimes in which the formal rules of electoral democracy vie with informal personal ties of "big men" to define and shape the actual practice of politics.

TRANSITIONS FROM NEOPATRIMONIAL RULE

We are now ready to assess the extent to which the neopatrimonial nature of regimes in Africa affects the process of democratization. On the one hand, one would expect transitions from neopatrimonial rule to have shared characteristics – for example, centering on struggles over the legitimacy of dominant, personalistic leaders. On the other hand, one would also expect the dynamics of political change to be highly variable, reflecting the different institutional regimes devised by strongmen. Hence the need to emphasize both the commonalities and variations in transition dynamics and outcomes.

Bearing this in mind, let us now turn to our central questions:

- How does neopatrimonialism influence whether transitions ever begin?
- How do they subsequently unfold?
- How do they eventually turn out?

We pursue a twin track of comparative analysis. In this chapter, we compare political transitions in Africa with those in other regions of the world where political authority is not neopatrimonial. In the following chapters, we ask whether the differences in the degree of political competition and participation present among African states since independence can help to explain differences in transition dynamics and outcomes.

The recent literature on democratization in Europe and Latin America converges on a common account of regime transition.⁶⁷ According to this scenario, transition begins when a moderate faction within the state elite recognizes that social peace and economic development cannot adequately legitimate an authoritarian regime. These softliners promote a political opening by providing improved guarantees of civil and political rights and later conceding the convocation of free and fair elections. The greatest hazard to democratic transition comes from a backlash by elements of a hardline faction within the political elite, manifest in threats by the military to execute a reactionary coup. To forestall hardliners, government and opposition leaders meet behind the scenes to forge a compromise pact to guarantee the vital interests of major elite players, thereby smoothing the way to democracy.

We propose that political transitions from neopatrimonial regimes depart from this model scenario in the following major respects.

Transitions from Neopatrimonial Regimes Originate in Political Protest

As argued earlier, neopatrimonial practices cause chronic fiscal crises and inhibit economic growth. In addition, however much leaders strive for ethnic balance, neopatrimonial rule tends toward particularistic networks of personal loyalty that grant undue favor to selected kinship or subnational groupings. Taken together, shrinking economic opportunities and exclusionary rewards are a volatile recipe for social unrest. Mass popular protest is likely to break out, usually over the issue of declining living standards, and to escalate into calls to remove incumbent leaders. Unlike corporatist rulers, personal rulers cannot point to a record of stability and prosperity to legitimate their rule.

Endemic fiscal crisis also undercuts the capacity of rulers to manage the process of political change. A critical moment arrives when public resources dwindle to the point at which the government can no longer pay civil servants and the latter join antiregime protesters in the streets.⁶⁸ Shorn of the ability to maintain political stability through the distribution of material rewards, neopatrimonial leaders resort erratically to coercion, which in turn further undermines the regime's legitimacy. The final showdown arrives when the government is unable to pay the military.

As a result of twin political and economic crises, regime transitions are more likely to originate in society than in the corridors of elite power. The existing literature is inconsistent on this point. O'Donnell and Schmitter assert that "there is no transition whose beginning is not the consequence – direct or indirect – of important divisions within the authoritarian regime itself."⁶⁹ Yet the same authors note that authoritarian rulers usually miss opportunities to open up when the regime is riding a wave of economic success, instead, "attempt[ing] liberalization only when they are already going through some serious crisis."⁷⁰ We read this to mean that political liberalization is as much an elite *response* as an elite initiative. It also begs the question of how leaders apprehend the existence of a "crisis"; presumably, elites are awakened to the necessity of reform by an outpouring of protest. Indeed, O'Donnell and Schmitter elsewhere concede that ordinary citizens commonly take a leading role in transitions: Whereas "political democracies are usually brought down by conspiracies involving a few actors ... the democratization of authoritarian regimes ... involves ... a crucial component of the mobilization and organization of large numbers of individuals."⁷¹

The well-known distinctions between top-down, bottom-up, and negotiated transitions are helpful here.⁷² One might be tempted to predict that, since personal rulers centralize so much decision-making power in their own hands, neopatrimonial regimes would undergo elite-initiated transitions.⁷³ But the evidence presented in the next chapter indicates that transitions in Africa seem to be occurring more commonly from below. In general, neopatrimonial rulers are driven by calculations of personal political survival: They resist political openings for as long as possible and seek to manage the process of transition only after it has been forced on them.