Consolidate elites in power. These implications are also true for Zanzibar (p.214).

Finally, the author views large scale violence in both Tanzania and Uganda as unlikely in the foreseeable future because in both countries, states have consolidated their power over the last fifty years (violently in Uganda and more peacefully in Tanzania). This is not quite as true for Zanzibar, where due to the strong involvement of the mainland the process of state-building and elite consolidation has not really taken place yet. This leads to a potential danger of larger-scale violence, should the mainland one day retreat voluntarily or be forced out by domestic pressure, without a new elite taking over (p.215).

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In a survey of 74 African elections won by incumbents or their designated successors between 1985 and 2005, Leonardo Arriola estimates that a full 40 percent of these would have produced different results had opposition parties formed coalitions across ethnic lines (p. 7). In nine of these, official results themselves confirmed incumbent tallies below 50 percent. That multi-ethnic opposition coalitions are a key factor in unseating entrenched governments in Africa is widely accepted and backed up by even a cursory look at recent elections. This fact serves as the premise for Multiethnic Coalitions in Africa, which problematises the ‘how’ and ‘when’ these coalitions come into fruition and the obstacles that incumbents use to block them.

The conclusion put forward is a “theory of pecuniary coalition building,” that revolves around coalition formateur’s access to financing (p. 19). Coalitions form, that is, when they have access to sufficient capital to secure the endorsements from potential rival opposition elites who can then be co-opted into a partnership. Rather than just being one among many factors, Arriola claims that the pecuniary dimension is supreme above “electoral rules, the intensity of ethnic competition, or the intervention of civil society” (p. 178) in the formation of coalitions, and thus the likelihood of a democratic transfer of power. Hence, the study is predicated on a strictly materialist reading of African
patrimonial politics that assumes all elite loyalty is there to be ‘purchased’ in a rational-actor structure. While this rings true in the vast majority of cases, some attention in the theory to the more personal factors of coalition building – personal and family rivalry is a surprisingly common example – would have given it another dimension.

Given that opposition politicians often lack sufficient personal wealth to finance such elite recruitment, and the mere promise of later state resources while in office is problematic, Arriola’s theory has the business community filling in the gap to facilitate “upfront” payments from formateurs to potential partners in the formation of the coalition (p. 33). In this sense, *Multiethnic Coalitions in Africa* compliments the well-known ‘rhizome’ state model put forward by Bayart’s (1989) analysis, which utilises the same underground pecuniary conditions to theorise how the state maintains its grasp on power.

That the possibility of multi-ethnic coalitions is “directly linked to the business sector’s autonomy from state-controlled capital” (p. 19) adds a historical dimension to the book that traces the liberalisation of capital from the colonial era, beginning with the relationship between nationalist movements and their financiers. Those movements that were funded by export oriented indigenous businesses and maintained these connections in government were more inclined to allow for the development of independent banks (the number of which is used as a proxy to this economic-historical analysis). Leaders that deemed the proliferation of home-grown entrepreneurs as a threat to state patronage regimes restricted the development of private capital via a mix of financial reprisal regimes.

In another causal path, Arriola points out that the exogenous shift in donor funding regimes from the 1980s saw states reliant on cash crop exports, fiscally unable to resist the pressure for financial liberalisation in the way that oil and resources states could. Hence, those more prone to structural adjustment freed up space in the financial sector that impacts the freedom of capital today. This indirect link between successful structural adjustment and the likelihood of democratic regime change (p. 137) is likely to be the most contentious conclusion of the book.

The examples of Cameroon and Kenya, used as the primary case studies throughout the book, are especially useful in illustrating its pecuniary theory. Where Paul Biya was able to retain the obedience of the entrepreneurial elite that flirted with opposition coalitions throughout the 1990s, Kenya’s Daniel Arap Moi lost control of their Kikuyu equivalent in 2002 after successfully playing them off against
chief rival Mwai Kibaki for the previous decade. In both cases, the book argues that these entrepreneurs were naturally inclined to oppose the incumbent regime after severe economic mismanagement.

As Arriola notes, the nature of African political finance is such that open data sets on campaign contribution are hard to come by. Hence, he is forced to infer much of the funding relationship between entrepreneurs and political elites, and its flow between formateurs and coalition partners. However he accounts for this with impressively thorough investigation: in Kenya’s case, the bold assertion that Mwai Kibaki was able to offer direct payments to his alliance partners before the election, is backed up by mysterious bankruptcy court settlements and interviews with political operatives (pp. 204-205), that were quite convincing (I was sceptical that such a thing could be proved).

The book balances both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the elite bargaining process well. However it would be well complimented by a qualitative angle from the ground up, addressing the public narratives around the partnering of individual elites and their ethnic communities, which may not matter as much in the coalition building process as in their cross-ethnic electoral success. In Kenya’s 2002 election for example, why did the predominantly Kikuyu areas vote for one Kikuyu (Kibaki) over another (Uhuru Kenyatta)? But providing such a context is less the author’s omission than the reader’s responsibility. Overall Multiethnic Coalitions in Africa is cogently argued, thoroughly researched, and makes profound impact on the continuing discussion on Africa’s multifarious democratisation.

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Investment in most of African countries’ agriculture has not kept pace with the force of globalization evident in other economic sectors, despite liberalization measures and introduction of various incentives aimed at attracting large scale investments. This, however, seems beginning to change with the increasing international and local farmland acquisitions over the past few years – a phenomenon widely reported as ‘land grabbing’ but far less comprehensively accounted for.