

some of the material out of date, *Dynamics of change in the Persian Gulf* offers a comprehensive guide to the major trends that will define the future of this vital world region. As old certainties are being shattered by the unrest across the Middle East and North Africa, it is more important than ever to identify the broad directions of travel and contextualize them within the fundamental shifts under way in the global order.

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## **Sub-Saharan Africa**

**Multiethnic coalitions in Africa: business financing of opposition election campaigns.** By **Leonardo R. Arriola**. New York: Cambridge University Press. 2013. 304pp. £19.99. ISBN 978 1 10760 543 5.

Ever since, in the early 1990s, Africa was engulfed in the so-called third wave of democratization, there has been constant debate about the nature of democracy on the continent. Whatever definition has been given, at the core of the changes that had taken place was the holding of multiparty elections. Indeed, most recent studies of African democracy have concentrated primarily on the question of the holding of regular multiparty contests and on the extent to which defeated incumbent politicians agree to step down and allow their victorious electoral rivals to take over government. The main criterion for the consolidation of democracy is deemed to be the holding of regular elections—a process that is habitually called the ‘deepening’ of democracy. The theory upon which such analysis is built is broadly institutional, meaning here that the holding of regular electoral contests is taken to instil in society and government the good habits of a democratic political culture. Thus, the more elections are held, the more democratic the country is likely to become.

Yet there soon emerged a conundrum: despite the fact that many governments in Africa were clearly deficient, and sometimes very unpopular, elections did not seem necessarily to usher in the victory of their political adversaries. In fact, even when multiparty elections were held and judged to be ‘free and fair’, incumbents were often returned to power, no matter how blatantly undemocratic they were. Ostensibly authoritarian and corrupt politicians seemed able to win elections against all the odds adduced by democratic theory. In many other cases, incumbents were able to ‘manage’ multiparty competition in such a way as to undermine the challenge of the opposition and to prevail in the elections. Much was made of the manipulation of ethnic affiliation, which Africanists tended to view as the main reason why multiparty elections did not result in a balanced democratic dispensation. Incumbents were able to intimidate or co-opt ethnic rivals, thus preserving control of a sufficiently ‘productive’ ethnic coalition to ensure electoral victory.

The recognition that elections in Africa would continue to reflect the country’s ethnic map despite the best efforts of the donors who advocated and funded elections, was an admission that democratic theory, based on ‘one person one vote’, could not explain the outcome of many electoral contests other than in ‘traditional’ terms. In other words, the holding of regular multiparty elections could not bring about greater democratization so long as Africans continued to vote along ethnic lines. In cases where one ethnic group was dominant, there seemed little prospect of change unless opposition politicians managed to put together a multiethnic coalition capable of defeating the incumbent. So the question Leonardo Arriola asks is: under what circumstances can the opposition put together such a coalition in the face of the incumbent’s policy of co-opting electoral rivals? His answer is both commonsensical and original. It is commonsensical because anyone looking at that

question would likely come up with the same answer. It is original because he identifies the key to such coalition building where few people have sought it.

Arriola's argument is simple and clear. Multiethnic oppositions can only emerge and eventually prevail in electoral contests if they can tap financing that is not controlled by the incumbent. Only when such financing is available to the challenger can (s)he 'buy in' upfront political support from politicians representing other ethnic groups. The key here is that a coalition is formed not on the basis of promises of future rewards after the elections, but on the more concrete foundation of financial commitment today. This may appear overly cynical, but Arriola shows quite convincingly that in the absence of such financing, most multiethnic coalitions are stillborn. Taking as examples Kenya and Cameroon, the author provides plenty of evidence that the successful transition to multiethnic coalitions in the former and the absence of such coalitions in the latter are best explained by his theory of 'pecuniary coalition building in multiethnic countries governed through patronage'.

*Multiethnic coalitions in Africa* is thus an extended demonstration of why other approaches have failed to answer the question at hand and how the author's theory provides a 'scientific' demonstration of the validity of 'pecuniary coalition building'. The author belongs to those political scientists who believe that it is possible to identify and test theories of causality in their discipline, much as it is done in the so-called hard sciences. For this reason he provides a quantification of the relevant variables, which he then submits to regression analysis and other statistical methods. Despite the valiant efforts made to prove the validity of his theory, Arriola concedes that he has to rely on existing databases and on the identification of convincing proxies for the variables on which there is no statistical material available. So, in purely 'scientific' terms, his theory stands or falls on the relevance and accuracy of such proxies. On the whole, the author provides a plausible and at times compelling discussion of how best to identify the countries where the incumbents have lost the capacity 'to command the political allegiance of business'. And the conclusion he reaches—namely, that economic and financial liberalization is conducive to the emergence of ethnic coalitions that will favour the greater democratization of society—follows quite neatly from the demonstration.

The book is intriguing because it makes two assumptions. The first is that, since most African societies are multiethnic, their politics are *ipso facto* based on considerations of ethnicity. The second is that the formation of multiethnic opposition is the key to the deepening of democracy on the continent. Not only are those assumptions debatable—they may or may not turn out to be causally significant—but it is also unclear that ethnic division is the main impediment to more democratic politics. Readers will not fail to wonder whether this apparently new theory of democratization in Africa is not in fact an obstacle to the understanding of politics on the continent. That this should be the case after decades of political analysis of Africa is not unconnected to the current fashion of seeking out more 'scientific' accounts of the viability of democratic politics on the continent. It is also an indirect way of validating the present policy prescriptions to the effect that economic liberalization and particularly financial deregulation are prerequisites to a more democratic dispensation in Africa.

But the question remains: is such an approach a more convincing account of the political evolution of politics in Africa? Could it be that the causal link between financial deregulation and fairer multiparty elections is in fact a way of avoiding staring the obvious in the face: that is, the fact that informal political factors (for which there are precious little hard 'data') are as important as the formal ones discussed in the book?

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