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Source: *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Jul., 1992), pp. 419-442
Published by: Ph.D. Program in Political Science of the City University of New York
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/422153
Accessed: 06/05/2009 12:10

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Popular Protest and Political Reform in Africa

Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle

By the late 1980s, Africans joined the international clamor for democracy already ringing through eastern Europe, Latin America, and parts of Asia. While popular unrest had long been an intermittent feature of African politics, the collapse of the Berlin wall—and along with it Leninist one-party rule and the bipolar world order—inspired mass protesters and challenged incumbent leaders as never before. In and around 1990, citizens took to the streets of capital cities in some sixteen sub-Saharan African countries to express discontent with economic hardship and political repression and to demand civic reforms. Governments in the region faced pressures for political change on a scale unprecedented since the dissolution of colonial rule thirty years earlier. In response, between November 1989 and May 1991, at least twenty-one governments adopted significant reform measures to permit greater pluralism and competition within the polity. Multiparty elections were actually held for the first time in a generation in five African countries. Richard Sklar's daring prediction that Africans would come to prefer the vicissitudes of democracy to the stifling abuse of "developmental dictatorships" began to be brilliantly vindicated.[1]

The dynamic process of protest and reform is nascent in Africa, and the future course of regime transitions is highly uncertain. But the moment is opportune to attempt a preliminary identification of emergent landmarks. Why have cracks appeared in the edifice of authoritarian rule in so many countries of the region? By what processes of struggle and accommodation is power being divided in monopolistic political systems? What are the prospects for the emergence and consolidation of democratic forms of governance?

In the present paper we undertake three tasks. First, we catalogue the characteristics of recent political protests in sub-Saharan Africa, focusing on the turbulent "spring" of 1990. Second, we analyze the nature of government responses, noting the range of political reform initiatives undertaken by African leaders and recording backlashes, crackdowns, and reversals where they occurred. Finally, and most important, we seek to explain why the political firmament is shifting in Africa after a prolonged period of institutional stasis.

Approach: Contingent Political Dynamics

The new literature on democracy in Africa[2] has yet to take account of the upsurge in popular protests or the context of prodemocracy movements worldwide.[3] And materials from Africa have yet to be integrated into the literature in comparative politics that examines regime transitions.[4] Scholars trace openings in authoritarian rule to a complex array of forces, some international and some internal, some structural and some contingent. For example, various writers attribute political reform to international pressures such as the modernizing impact of an expanding global economy,[5] the "diffusion effects" of successful democratic revolutions

elsewhere in the world,[6] and the political conditionality attached to donor aid.[7] Other observers focus on structural factors, tracing the momentum for political reform to long-term downturns in national economic activity, donor-imposed austerity measures, and severe contractions in living standards.[8] In addition, the venality of political elites is widely believed to undermine the popularity and legitimacy of governments.[9]

By themselves, diffusionist and structural interpretations only partly explain recent political events in Africa. This is not to deny the contextual importance of external factors; African cases can be identified where mass demonstrations in eastern Europe during 1989 almost certainly influenced the discourse and form of protest and where donor pressure for democratization induced state elites to countenance political reform. Nonetheless, we argue that external factors serve as precipitating conditions, rather than causal ones. We agree with Lowenthal's assessment for Latin America and southern Europe that, "although international factors may condition the course of transition, the major participants and the dominant influences in every case have been national."[10] Likewise, we acknowledge that both political protest and government response are shaped by the crippling effects of structural economic crisis. Yet, even within a given structure of economic constraints, any explanation of political reform must allow that elites and masses can engage in creative political behavior.[11]

We thus shift the focus of analysis to contingent, domestic political processes. We suggest that African governments introduce political reforms primarily in response to active demands, spontaneous and organized, from a loose, multiclass assemblage of indigenous protest groups. Explanation of reform outcomes requires reference to the resources, skills, and styles of leaders and their oppositions. Protest and reform occur in a dynamic, reiterative process of action and counteraction in which strategic actors take their cues from the behavior of adversaries. Indeed, these two sets of events are difficult to separate analytically. For example, state elites often initially meet popular demonstrations with a token concession or a vicious crackdown. The very inadequacy or inappropriateness of the government's response, however, may fuel more widespread and insistent unrest. In some cases, governments are willing to embark on meaningful constitutional reforms only after protesters have proven the capacity to continue to press, and escalate, their demands. From this perspective, it becomes clear that the process of political change has a life of its own which is beyond the direction of any of the protagonists. The liberalization of authoritarian rule thus occurs under conditions of

> great political uncertainty . . . subject to unforeseen contingencies, unfolding processes and unintended outcomes . . . (in which) "normal" constraints of social structures and political institutions seem temporarily suspended; actors are often forced into making hurried and confused choices; and the alliances they enter are usually fleeting and opportunistic. The end result of these interactions is often not what any one group would have preferred initially.[12]

We hold that the denouement of the protest-reform process depends importantly on the relative strength and cohesion of political coalitions within the state elite and mass opposition. On the side of the state, defections may often be fatal to elite cohesion. As Przeworski suggests, "the first critical threshold in the transition to democracy is the move by some group within the ruling bloc to obtain support from forces external to it."[13] Much

also depends on the intentions of existing political leaders and their adaptability to demands for open and responsive politics. Commonly, incumbents regard political liberalization as an unpalatable but unavoidable step to salvage political control within a destabilized state. They concede only those "manageable" reforms which they calculate are necessary to maintain themselves in power.

Reform outcomes depend also on the strength of protest forces, the critical issue being whether opposition groups can forge an alternative ruling coalition. There are several requirements. Civil society must be adequately organized into primary associations; opposition groups must share a degree of normative consensus on a new political agenda and democratic procedures; and, as Rustow has noted, a new elite must emerge "that arouses a depressed and previously leaderless social group into concerted action."[14] In the absence of such organizations, norms, and leaders, isolated efforts at political protest from below or constitutional reforms mandated from above are unlikely to amount to lasting regime transition.

Lest we are misunderstood, we should emphasize that cracks in the edifice of autocracy should not be mistaken for full-fledged transitions to democracy. O'Donnell and Schmitter have stressed that political liberalization and democratization are simultaneous, complementary, but ultimately autonomous processes: the former refers to the modification of authoritarian regimes, whereas the latter requires the deliberate construction of democratic political institutions.[15] It is entirely possible that liberalization can occur without democratization, and in some parts of Africa the disintegration of authoritarian rule may be followed by anarchy, intensified corruption, or military intervention rather than by stable and accountable governance. Previous transitory episodes of democracy following multiparty elections in Ghana (1979), Nigeria (1979), Uganda (1980), and Sudan (1986) provide inauspicious precedents in this regard. We argue that, on the evidence to date, African countries are experiencing a liberalization of authoritarian rule rather than a full-blown transition to—let alone consolidation of—democracy.

The Dynamic of Protest and Reform

In this paper, we generalize inductively from observation of two types of event: popular protests and political reforms. We wish to understand their frequency, their nature, and the relationship, if any, between them. To gather data, we systematically scanned news sources for reported incidents of protest and reform over the eighteen-month period following the fall of the Berlin wall on November 9, 1989.[16] The scope of the study was limited to regimes in Africa in which there was an unrealized potential for peaceful political change. Countries were excluded if they were embroiled in civil war, were undergoing a planned transition from military to civilian rule, or were already multiparty democracies.[17] Out of the forty-six states in sub-Saharan Africa, we thus selected a study sample of thirty "reformable" regimes.

Because the promulgation of political reform is the most important turning point in the processes under study, a word on the definition of reform is in order. A wide variety of government actions can plausibly be labeled political reforms, from adjustments in party and administrative regulations to the introduction of a new national constitution. In this study we

use a pragmatic, behavioral, and broadly inclusive definition: political reform is any measure taken by a ruling elite to increase political competition. Where state elites come to recognize mass rights, such as freedom of political expression and freedom of political association, reform can be characterized as "political liberalization." Only where free and fair elections are held to choose national political officeholders can a "transition to democracy" be said to be underway.[18]

In different African countries, there is a rich variety of issues, positions, clashes, adjustments, and outcomes in the protest-reform process. Despite such diversity, we propose below a rough sequence of stages of popular protest and government response which is common to many African countries, while noting that some have advanced further than others through the sequence.

The Birth of Economic Protests As Table 1 indicates, sixteen African countries experienced important popular protests after November 1989. Pinpointing the genesis of these events is difficult, since there is no logical place to start a chronology. African populations have not been passive in the face of declining living standards and government malfeasance; students, civil servants, workers, and professionals have regularly voiced their opinions in strikes, demonstrations, marches, and boycotts.[19] For example, Zambia witnessed violent riots in December 1986, when the price of maize meal was doubled as a result of subsidy cuts under an IMF-sponsored economic adjustment plan. Benin's capital, Cotonou, was rocked by public sector strikes all through 1989, as civil servants protested against accumulated arrears in salaries. And over the years university campuses were the scene of periodic outbreaks of dissent in many African countries. Thus, the unrest of 1990 merely followed a series of precedents.

The protests usually began with corporate demands by interest groups seeking to improve material conditions within their own sector of the urban economy. Typically, unrest originated among students demonstrating against a government decision to impose austerity measures which affected them directly. In Gabon in January 1990, for example, students took strike action over teaching shortages and poor study facilities; in Côte d'Ivoire in February 1990 several inopportune electricity cuts before mid-term exams sparked the first significant protests.

Not all student demands, however, were confined to parochial and material concerns. In Zimbabwe in October 1989 campus troubles broke out over the issue of elite corruption and quickly escalated into a critique of the government's use of state of emergency powers to quell dissent. In Kenya in February 1990, where students had long complained about overcrowded educational facilities and soaring unemployment rates, protesters decried the alleged implication of government security forces in the murder of Foreign Minister Robert Ouko.

Civil unrest gathered momentum when it became an outlet for a coalition of diverse corporate interests. Students were joined by faculty and civil servants complaining about salary arrears, subsidy cuts, or—as in Côte d'Ivoire—the possibility of a salary reduction. In Benin, public denouncements by student and civil servant groups had become endemic in late 1989 as payment arrears reached seven months. And in Zambia and Kenya, among other places, students catalyzed workers and the self-employed to join in public condemnation of the corrosive effects of inflation on living standards.

Table 1 Popular Protests in Selected African Countries (November 1989–May 1991)

	DATE OF FIRST PROTEST	SOCIAL GROUPS INVOLVED Students	Civil Service	Unions	Churches	STATE ELITE DEFECTIONS
Benin	11/89	L	H	M	M	H
Burkina Faso	9/90	L	M	L	L	L
Cameroon	2/90	M	L	L	M	M
C.A.R.	3/90	L	H	H	L	M
Comoros	1/90	L	L	L	M	L
Congo	4/90	M	M	H	M	H
Côte d'Ivoire	2/90	H	H	M	L	M
Gabon	11/89	M	H	M	M	L
Kenya	2/90	H	L	L	H	L
Niger	2/90	M	M	H	L	L
Mali	1/91	M	M	H	L	M
Sierra Leone	5/90	H	L	L	M	L
Togo	9/90	H	H	L	L	L
Zaire	5/90	H	M	L	H	M
Zambia	6/90	M	L	H	M	H
Zimbabwe	11/89	H	L	H	M	L

Key: L = Low or Absent; M = Moderate; H = High
Sources: See endnote 4.
Note: The table refers to events during the eighteen-month period from November 9, 1989 to May 8, 1991 only. Protests before or after these dates are excluded. In the case of Benin, protests lasted throughout 1989, and in the case of Zimbabwe actually began in October 1989. Mozambique and Senegal, countries outside of our sample, also witnessed significant protests during this period.

Initial Government Responses Governments responded to these initial protests with a familiar formula of threats, repression, and selective compromise. Where protests concerned bread-and-butter issues, national leaders generally tried to placate protesters with piecemeal concessions. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, President Houphouët-Boigny reduced student room and board costs by half and delayed, before eventually renouncing, the civil service pay cuts; in Gabon, President Bongo similarly announced a new public sector salary scale as well as health and social security reforms.

Where protests had clear political overtones, the government tended to resort directly to repression. President Moi of Kenya ordered paramilitary units to open fire on mourners at

the Ouko funeral and imposed bans on public demonstrations and "rumor-mongering." The Zimbabwe government closed the university and briefly detained without trial student leaders and the head of the national congress of trade unions. In northwestern Cameroon, the police killed at least six protesters while trying to disperse an illegal rally by a banned political party, the Social Democratic Front.

Some leaders quickly ran out of economic options and had no choice but to begin making major political concessions. This happened first in Benin, where the lamentable state of the economy, the withdrawal of French support, and the government's nearly complete loss of credibility led to an implosion of the regime in late 1989. President Kérékou made several efforts to placate his opponents. He allowed several independent civilian ministers into his government in August, pronounced a general amnesty in September, and renounced Marxism-Leninism in December. By then, Kérékou's own allies in the government had begun to desert him. Leading army officers distanced themselves from the regime, while part of the government-controlled trade union, the UNSTB, jumped to join the opposition.

Yet not all countries were in as dire economic straits as Benin. Most governments were able to rally their supporters as a tactic to undergird the ruling coalition and to isolate and weaken the opposition. Official marches in favor of the single-party state were organized, for example, in Cameroon (March 1990), Côte d'Ivoire (April), and Togo (May). Some regimes resorted to extreme methods of intimidation: opposition leaders were arrested in Kenya, Côte d'Ivoire, and Cameroon, and in Gabon Joseph Renjambé, secretary general of the leading opposition party, was assassinated.

The Politicization of Demands In previous years, such time-honored government tactics had usually served to quell unrest. Not so in 1990 and 1991. Instead, popular demands escalated. The question "why?" will be considered below; for the moment, suffice it to record that protesters were emboldened to broaden and politicize their claims. Spurred by deepening economic hardship and reacting against heavy-handed regime reactions, protesters began to insist on systemic political change. For the first time, particularistic interests took a back seat to general calls for the ejection of national leaders. Protesters began by linking their economic grievances to official corruption and mismanagement, which they blamed for depressed economic conditions. Slogans explicitly attributed national debt to the ill-gotten gains of state elites. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, a target of the protests was the Basilica of Yamoussoukro, the gilded replica of Saint Peter's of Rome for which President Houphouët-Boigny personally paid an "official" cost of some U.S.$145 million. In Zaire, President Mobutu Sese Seko—who had initiated a political opening by eliciting public comment on his rule—was apparently shocked to receive frank and bitter criticism from churches, students, unions, and business groups accusing him and his cronies of monopolizing power and raiding the national treasury. Striking civil servants openly displayed the slogan *"Mobutu voleur!"* (Mobutu thief!).

Opposition figures, whose courageous and underpublicized dissidence had previously seemed quixotic, now acquired a new audience. In Cameroon, the rearrest and trial of the anglophone writer Albert Mukong for "subversive acts" attracted international attention and led to a lawyers' strike. In Côte d'Ivoire, as student unrest escalated, the media helped to boost the minuscule opposition following of university professor Laurent Gbagbo. In Kenya,

when Bishops Okullo and Muge and the Reverend Timothy Njoya preached against corruption and human rights violations, they found themselves feted as leaders of an incipient social movement. In other countries as well, the church hierarchy weighed in on behalf of reform (see Table 1).

In this atmosphere, opposition politicians found it opportune to give voice to the idea of multiparty competition. In Zambia, Frederick Chiluba, chairman of the Zambia Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), paved the way for a multiparty debate by publicly asking, in reference to eastern Europe, "if the owners of socialism have withdrawn from the one-party system, who are the Africans to continue with it?"[20] Calling for a referendum on party pluralism in March 1990, Chiluba announced that "the ZCTU believes that the one-party system is open to abuse; it is not the people in power who should direct political change, but the ordinary masses."[21] In Cameroon, Yondo Black, the ex-head of the national bar, was arrested in February for attempting to form an opposition political party; his arrest led to an open call for multiparty elections by his successor at the bar, Bernard Muna. And in May 1990 in Kenya, two former cabinet ministers, Kenneth Matiba and Charles Rubia, called a press conference to demand the restoration of a multiparty constitution.

Following these initiatives, protesters in the streets did not wait long before adopting the multiparty cause. At this stage, popular demonstrations commonly escalated into the worst public violence since independence. In Zambia in June 1990 crowds led by students chanted multiparty slogans at riots in Lusaka in which a monument commemorating President Kaunda's role in the nationalist struggle was set ablaze. In Kenya, the arrest of Matiba and Rubia and the announcement of a government ban on a multiparty rally led to four days of looting in several urban centers in July 1990. Crowds in Nairobi flashed a two-finger sign indicating support for political pluralism and called for the release of political detainees. In Gabon, riots in Port-Gentil turned into open support for the *Parti Gabonais du Progrès*, a newly created opposition party. And in Cameroon from March to May 1991 demonstrators persistently called for a provisional government, an electoral commission, and a national convention to draft a new constitution.

Wherever multiparty sentiment raised its head, state leaders mounted an ideological campaign in defense of the status quo. Their rhetoric, often betraying a panicky overreaction to mass events, revived old arguments about the supposed advantages of unipartism. Kaunda of Zambia warned that party competition would constitute a return to "stone age politics" by inciting ethnic loyalties and electoral violence. In a televised speech, Cameroon President Paul Biya argued that the one-party state was the best way to deal with the country's socioeconomic problems. Moi of Kenya and Mugabe of Zimbabwe were vociferous in rejecting efforts by western governments to promote multiparty competition as interference in the sovereign rights of African states. Implicit in all such arguments was the notion, as General Kolingba of the Central African Republic put it, that "the country is not ready for (multiparty democracy)."[22] Ironically, this was precisely the argument used by colonial officials to delay granting political independence to Africans.

The Onset of Political Reforms Nonetheless, at some time during 1990 or 1991, and usually after protest demands became politicized, a substantial number of African heads of state bowed to popular pressure and embarked upon a course of political liberalization. The

content and extent of political reforms varied widely across countries, but all cases involved concession of rights to political expression, association, or contestation. We discern three types of political reforms (see Table 2): party reform, permitting greater competition within the ruling single party, usually through amendments in party structures and procedures; administrative reform, involving changes in bureaucratic practice within the existing framework of law; and constitutional reforms, to check the powers of the party or executive.

Constitutional reform was the most transformative and commonly occurred after the other

Table 2 Political Reform in Selected African Countries (November 1989–May 1991)

	POLITICAL REFORM			MULTIPARTY ELECTION
	Party	Admin	Constit	Legislative/Presidential
Benin	x	x	x	February/March 1991
Burkina Faso	x	x	x	December/November 1991
Cameroon	x	x	x	late 1991
Cape Verde	o	x	x	January/February 1991
Comoros	o	o	x	March 1990
Congo	x	x	x	late 1992
Côte d'Ivoire	o	o	x	October/November 1990
Gabon	x	x	x	September/October 1990
Guinea-Bissau	o	o	x	1993
Madagascar	x	o	x	1996
São Tomé	o	o	x	October/November 1990
Togo	x	x	x	
Zambia	x	x	x	October 1991
C.A.R.	o	x	o	
Mali	o	x	o	January 1992
Niger	o	x	o	
Tanzania	x	x	o	
Zaire	x	x	o	1992
Zimbabwe	o	x	o	1995
Kenya	x	o	o	
Sierra Leone	x	o	o	

Key: x = occurrence of reform; o = absence of reform
Sources: See endnote 4
Note: The table refers to the eighteen-month period from November 9, 1989 to May 8, 1991 only. Any political reforms initiated before or after these dates are excluded. Governments in several countries outside our sample also undertook party reform (Ethiopia) and constitutional reform (Angola, Mozambique, Rwanda).

two; on the other hand, party and administrative reforms followed no obvious chronological sequence. Leaders often began by liberalizing the institutions over which they were most confident of control. After the July riots in Kenya, for example, President Moi initiated a commission of party members to review the structure and operations of the ruling Kenya African National Union (KANU). In public hearings held countrywide, citizens raised broad political concerns, especially elite corruption, ethnic favoritism, and the need for limitations on the executive powers of the presidency. But Moi was willing to permit reforms only within KANU itself, for example by agreeing to restore secret balloting in party primaries and pledging to end the expulsion of dissidents from the party. Similar moves to liberalize the operations of the single party—both as a prelude to multiparty competition and in an effort to prevent it—occurred in Gabon, Togo, Cameroon, Madagascar, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, and Congo. In Gabon and Zaire the party was renamed. While reforms within ruling parties were genuine reforms which increased the scope for political competition, they were partial and often appeared to be little more than attempts to preempt more serious change. They rarely satisfied popular demands for political pluralism.

Political reform began elsewhere when African leaders lifted administrative restrictions on political activity by journalists, intellectuals, and opposition leaders. In Tanzania, curbs on press freedom were eased, new political publications emerged, and the government-controlled media began to carry a broader range of opinion, including relatively open debates on the merits of the single-party state.[23] In Zimbabwe, the government released all 250 political prisoners then in custody and lifted the state of emergency which had been in place since independence.

Some governments did not proceed beyond party and administrative reform, whereas others—such as Congo and Burkina Faso—passed through such reforms *en route* to accepting more sweeping dispensations (see Table 2). Elsewhere—for example in Cape Verde and Côte d'Ivoire—early constitutional initiatives to end single party rule and legalize opposition parties opened the door to general elections.

Two Steps Forward, One Step Back As well as being partial, the reform process in sub-Saharan Africa proved to be halting and contradictory. While granting minor political concessions with one hand, some leaders cracked down with the other. Concurrently with launching the party reform commission in Kenya, President Moi sought to stamp out the political debate by detaining his opponents and decreeing a halt to public discussion of multipartyism. At the same time as granting salaries and benefits to striking workers, President Bongo in Gabon banned all strikes and demonstrations and imposed a limited curfew. And in perhaps the most flagrant case of perverse reform, Mobutu of Zaire unleashed his presidential guard in a massacre of students at the University of Lubumbashi, just two weeks after announcing a return to political pluralism.

Other leaders tried to sidestep the need for meaningful reform by revolving the ranks of the political elite. They used cabinet reshuffles in an effort to prevent rivals from taking advantage of popular discontent and instigated "party restructuring" campaigns in order to ensure that local officials were correctly transmitting the official party line. In Togo, for example, President Eyadema announced an invigoration of the ruling RPT in preparation for national elections. And in Zambia President Kaunda dismissed cabinet ministers and

transferred provincial governors in an attempt to isolate dissidents and solidify political loyalty. Such measures did not amount to genuine reform because they simply rotated members of the old guard among existing political offices. At this stage, there was no structural change in political institutions and no broadening of political competition.

Even where leaders were forced to back down, the end result did not necessarily alter the status quo. Swimming against the reform tide, President Mugabe of Zimbabwe campaigned as a self-proclaimed apostle of the one-party state, taking his party's overwhelming victory in the March 1990 national elections as a mandate to convert Zimbabwe into a de jure single-party entity. Ultimately he was faced with a revolt within the ruling party, whose politburo and central committee refused to grant the necessary authority. In September 1990 Mugabe announced a revocation of plans to legalize the one-party, at the same time reconfirming his preference for party dominance at the polls.

At the extreme, a significant subset of Africa's "strongmen" continued to insist on the maintenance of authoritarian rule. In Ghana, Jerry Rawlings implemented a tightly controlled, top-down program of decentralized state building dressed in the ideological garb of guided democracy. And in Malawi, life-president Hastings Banda continued to flatly deny opportunities for political dissent outside—or even within—the governing Malawi Congress Party. This "no reform" strategy worked most effectively in those African states—like Ghana and Malawi—which did not experience significant popular protest.

Towards Constitutional Reform In many African countries, however, the reform momentum carried far and fast by May 1991. Confronted with continuing dissent, state elites began to recognize that they had lost the capacity to govern without a renewal of popular legitimacy. Citizens began to entertain the possibility, unthinkable earlier, that some single-party regimes would expose themselves to multiparty elections of indeterminate outcome.

In many places, like Benin, Congo, and Togo, the inception of meaningful reform began when top leaders agreed to convene extraordinary constitutional conventions which drew upon a national cross-section of organized social interests. The National Conference of Active Forces in Benin, containing seven cabinet ministers and participants from political, religious, and trade union organizations, won a mandate to develop a new national constitution. Elsewhere, like Mali, Cameroon, and Burkina Faso, constitutional discussions were embraced within the structures of the single party. In Zambia, constitutional proposals were developed simultaneously by a presidential commission and in the national assembly, though both were initially shunned by the opposition as being too heavily weighted toward the ruling party.

Such forums offered Africans a historic opportunity to devise governments of their own design and make formative constitutional innovations. The conferees usually proposed measures to curb the powers of the executive branch, for example by limiting the number of terms served by the national president. In Gabon and São Tomé the duration of the presidency was limited to two five-year terms. At the same time, reforms adjusted the balance of power between party and state, usually by ending the constitutional supremacy of the former. In Benin the leading role of the party within the state was officially abandoned in December 1989. In Congo the conferees forced the appointment of a new prime minister

and cabinet and passed measures to control the spending and foreign travel privileges of the presidency.

The most startling constitutional innovations, however, concerned multiparty competition. Several countries took the step of legalizing opposition political parties where they were previously prohibited. For example, in Madagascar a law allowing independent political parties was followed rapidly by the formation of four such parties. In Zaire President Mobutu Sese Seko resigned as head of the Popular Movement of the Revolution (MPR) and ended its monopoly by lifting a twenty-year ban on opposition parties. And in Niger the Higher Council for National Orientation (CSON) decided to legalize three clandestine political parties.

In perhaps one of the most remarkable turnabouts, President Kaunda of Zambia ceded to the popular call for multiparty elections. Initially dead-set against party pluralism, Kaunda first began to back down in April 1990 by agreeing to a referendum on the matter. His ploys to delay the referendum were soon overtaken by events because by September Zambian towns were witnessing unprecedented mass rallies for multipartyism, including one which may have involved over 100,000 people. In that same month the UNIP national council, the party's main policymaking body, capitulated to demands to abandon the referendum and move directly to a multiparty constitution and election.

By May 1991, exactly half of the African governments in our sample (fifteen of thirty) had scheduled multiparty elections (see Table 2). Multiparty elections had actually been held in five countries—Benin, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, and São Tomé—the results of which are discussed in the conclusion.

Analytical Issues

We now turn from description to analysis, probing the causes, nature, and implications of political liberalization initiatives in Africa.

How Did the Protests Evolve? It is tempting to attribute the eruption of political protest to structural causes: crippling economic crisis and a related loss of governmental legitimacy. From the onset of nationalist politics in Africa, leaders entered a more or less explicit covenant to reward followers with the material benefits of economic development. Especially after the suspension of meaningful competitive elections, one-party and military regimes possessed few means of renewing legitimacy except by ensuring economic growth and distributive justice. Yet, far from being "developmental dictatorships," African regimes faced a twenty-year downturn occasioned by falling export revenues, rising import prices, and rent extraction by state elites. During the 1980s, economic decline necessitated drastic austerity measures to curb imports and reduce government spending, often under conditions set by foreign donors.

Politically, austerity and corruption violated the covenant which underpinned the right of African leaders to rule and estranged them from their own political base in society. Civil servants and employees of public corporations faced an inexorable decline in living

standards; university students saw employment opportunities dwindle as automatic access to civil service jobs was eliminated; and the self-employed and the unemployed sank into acute poverty.

The economic crisis and the bitter adjustment pill are thus an ubiquitous background to the current unrest. Political protests signal popular rejection of developmental dictatorship as a model of governance. Nonetheless, it is ultimately misleading to interpret political protest in strictly economic terms. First, there is little correlation between the intensity of political unrest, on the one hand, and the severity of economic conditions or austerity measures, on the other. Some countries with very deep economic problems, such as Tanzania and Guinea-Bissau, witnessed little or no unrest, yet riots and strikes shook relatively wealthy countries like Kenya, Cameroon, Gabon, and Zimbabwe. Second, a purely economic argument fails to explain why the unrest happened when it did. Some governments have imposed austerity measures since the first oil crisis in 1973, and any account of the unrest has to explain why it did not occur before the "spring" of 1990. Lastly, economic protests previously occurred without destabilizing the incumbent regime, yet analysis must explain why governments were no longer easily able to isolate and contain disaffected groups. Thus, the economic crisis provides the context in which the political protests began but can not fully explain them.

Indeed, after 1989, protesters were galvanized in an explicitly political direction. Commonly, the issue of elite corruption served as a vehicle for transforming narrow economic grievances into broad political demands. Protesters began to draw a connection between economic failures and the lack of political accountability in single-party states. Rather than condemning the decline in commodity prices or western protectionism, they blamed patronage and nepotism for the economic crisis. Implicit in such a charge was the notion that sounder and more honest management would make economic austerity policies unnecessary.[24] Corruption by state elites proved to be a convenient target for the mobilization of broad popular antagonism, but the issue did not lend itself readily to a systematic political program. Accusations of malfeasance led inexorably to demands to expel political leaders, but little more. How to change rulers and establish more accountable forms of governance was less clear.

In this ideological and programmatic vacuum, opposition leaders raised multiparty democracy as a convenient banner under which to gather inchoate demands for change. The notion of political pluralism sparked popular support insofar as it was the antithesis of the present discredited system. Yet, as articulated by protesters in African countries, the call for multiparty democracy seemed to signify little more than a general discontent with the political status quo. As one news analysis remarked: "Many Africans are now so poor that they are prepared to back virtually any demand as long as it implies change. More political parties? Fine, as long as something changes."[25]

Were There Diffusion Effects? Many Africans long harbored deep dissatisfaction with the single-party system, seeing it as a device for arbitrary rule and private enrichment. Yet only a few intellectuals were willing to risk calling for political reform because of the danger of official retaliation. The internal security apparatus of the declining African state retained a residual capacity to instill fear, discourage open debate, and prevent popular mobilization.

Under these circumstances, there was pent-up pressure for political change which was the principal *raison d'être* of the popular protests.

We recognize, however, that events outside sub-Saharan Africa were responsible for helping to release this pressure. The international environment for political protest changed during 1989 as a consequence of democracy movements in countries as varied as the Soviet Union, East Germany, China, Algeria, and South Africa. While external events were not the main causal factor, they did influence the content of demands and the timing of protests in sub-Saharan Africa. Opposition groups discovered democracy as a potent new theme for protest, and African one-party states were further delegitimized by the collapse of authoritarian regimes abroad.

At the elite level, the fall of strongmen in eastern Europe—especially the summary execution of Nicolae Ceausescu in Romania in December 1989—revealed the vulnerability of personalistic African leaders and limited their room for maneuver. For example, Mobutu's announcement of political reform and Kaunda's turnabout on multiparty elections seemed to be attempts to forestall their own violent overthrow. Ex-president Nyerere's influential speech of February 1990—in which he pronounced that the single-party state was no longer sacrosanct—followed directly on the heels of a visit to Leipzig to terminate formal relations between the Tanzania's CCM and the East German Communist party. And the Marxist regimes of Ethiopia and Angola suddenly found themselves deprived of eastern bloc aid. At the mass level, access to information on the democracy movements in eastern Europe was often restricted in government-controlled media. But in Kenya, where the Cable News Network beamed satellite pictures of mass protest from Prague and Budapest, governments could not prevent the spread of popular sentiment in favor of political resistance.

But other external events closer to home probably had an even greater meaning for Africans. The independence of Namibia in April 1990 under a liberal constitution and a multiparty electoral system was celebrated across the continent. The prospect of meaningful political reform in South Africa—which suddenly arose with the release of Nelson Mandela in February 1990, the unbanning of the African National Congress, and the preparations for constitutional negotiations—led to a review of domestic policies, especially in the southern African frontline states. For example, the lifting of emergency regulations and the release of political prisoners in Zimbabwe in July 1990 followed closely on the heels of similar measures in South Africa.

In West Africa, the Algerian experience, in which riots in October 1988 led to the legalization of opposition parties and the defeat of the ruling FLN at the hands of Islamic fundamentalists in local elections in March 1990, was formative. The francophone countries were particularly influenced by a cultural unity forged over the years by a shared media—notably the weekly magazine *Jeune Afrique* and Radio France Internationale—and the pull of French intellectual life. The national constitutional conference in Benin, which turned into a devastating indictment of the Kérékou regime, was carried live on the national radio to neighboring Togo, Burkina Faso, and Côte d'Ivoire. Kérékou's progressive loss of control to a civilian government of neutral technocrats provided opposition groups in these countries with an appealing scenario to emulate at home. While impossible to prove, the upsurge of the protest movement in Togo seemed to be a direct result of liberalization in Benin. And in the Central African Republic, the fruitless petition of intellectuals and former

government officials for a national conference specifically invoked the prodemocracy movements in the rest of Africa.

What Is the Relationship between Protest and Reform? We now move beyond the partial explanations offered by structural and diffusionist interpretations to integrate the contingent effects of national political dynamics into the analysis. As can be seen in Table 3, there is a clear, positive relationship between popular protest and political reform in contemporary Africa. In all sixteen countries where demonstrators demanded political change, governments responded—without exception—with political reforms.

But the extent of reform initiatives—whether party, administrative, or constitutional

Table 3 Protest and Reform in Selected African Countries (November 1989–May 1991)

	POLITICAL PROTEST	NO POLITICAL PROTEST
POLITICAL REFORM	Benin Burkina Faso Cameroon C.A.R. Comoros Congo Côte d'Ivoire Gabon Kenya Niger Mali Sierra Leone Togo Zaire Zambia Zimbabwe	Cape Verde Guinea-Bissau Madagascar São Tomé Tanzania
NO POLITICAL REFORM		Burundi Djibouti Equatorial Guinea Ghana Malawi Mauritania Seychelles Swaziland Uganda

Source: Tables 1 and 2

measures—varied considerably from country to country. In thirteen African countries (see Table 2) the government made major constitutional initiatives, in nine cases in direct response to protest and in four cases on its own initiative. Zaire is in a class by itself in that Mobutu's initial promise of reform occurred before the first wave of protest: his announcements sent thousands of jubilant citizens racing into downtown Kinshasa waving branches and blocking streets, and his failure to follow through incurred strikes by doctors, nurses, and other public workers.

In practice, the beginning of a constitutional reform process was marked when leaders took one or more decisive steps: to permit outlawed political parties to operate, to convene a national forum to revise the constitution, or to schedule multiparty elections. While these reforms usually occurred sequentially, certain countries skipped stages or reversed parts of the sequence. For example, Côte d'Ivoire went directly to multiparty elections without a constitutional assembly, and Zambia announced multiparty elections before parties were legalized. And in many countries the constitutional reform process was incomplete by May 1991, with debates continuing about the precise legal arrangements for a new political order.

But the main point is that several African political leaders crossed the Rubicon by allowing regime opponents to become involved in debates about the constitutional future of the country. They set in motion a process leading inexorably to a revision of the formal rules by which national politics are played. The reform debate addressed fundamental questions about the balance of power between the state executive and other institutions in polity and society. For the first time, state elites had little choice but to surrender a degree of control and to allow a measure of uncertainty to enter the decision-making process. Heads of state came to calculate that their best chance of survival in office was to take into account the views of others.

The distance that a government traveled down the road to major constitutional reform depended on the prevailing depth of repression. In Zaire, for example, where arbitrary and patrimonial dictatorship was entrenched, the announcement of multiparty competition amounted to a major break with the existing rules of the political game. By contrast, in Zimbabwe, which had been bound by its independence constitution to allow freedom of political association, the decision to forego unipartism did not require constitutional reform and did not mark a departure from the previous regime.

The extent of reform depended critically upon the willingness of top political leaders to loosen their grip on power, if only as a strategy to preempt comprehensive reform. Thus, in six countries (C.A.R., Mali, Niger, Tanzania, Zaire, and Zimbabwe) leaders conceded administrative reforms but withheld the prospect of constitutional change. By releasing dissidents from jail and restoring a degree of press freedom, leaders created openings in the otherwise blank façade of authoritarian rule. While relatively minor, sparingly applied, and always reversible, such reform measures did amount to a liberalization of existing political regimes. The most reluctant leaders (as in Kenya and Sierra Leone) tried to satisfy protesters by limiting political debate and competition within the confines of the ruling single party.

Are there patterns to the extent of reform? Interestingly, the data do not support either a structural or diffusionist interpretation. One might argue, for example, that governments with relatively strong economies were able to avoid constitutional reform by undercutting political protest through economic concessions. But, whereas the state elites of Kenya and Zimbabwe were able to successfully employ this strategy, those of Cameroon and Gabon

were apparently unable to do so. One also might note that constitutional reform occurred disproportionately in the francophone countries of West Africa, lending credence to the notion of a diffusion effect in this region, perhaps reinforced by consistent donor pressure from France. Yet more than half of the governments which responded to protest with partial reforms also originated in this same region of Africa.

We therefore place the weight of interpretation on contingent factors such as the relative strength, skills, and cohesion of elite and opposition groups. We argue that reform at the constitutional level of politics occurs when two circumstances combine: a state elite runs out of political resources, and an alternative ruling coalition emerges with an articulate political program. We discuss these factors in the next two sections.

For the moment, let us close with a comment on the odd category of African countries in which elites dispensed political reforms in the absence of significant domestic protest. We found five countries in this category (Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, São Tomé, and Tanzania). As small countries, they followed rather than led international trends, with the lusophone countries probably imitating Mozambique in abandoning Marxism-Leninism and allowing multiparty competition. These were the only African cases in which diffusion of political ideas appeared to be preeminent in prompting reform.

Why Do Leaders Give In? What explains the decision to undertake political reform and the subsequent speed and extent of implementation? We return to the premise that leaders are motivated primarily by the desire to remain in power. They assess the political resources at their disposal at each stage of the reform process and weigh the best way to wield them for political survival. Such calculations are necessarily imperfect, given the climate of great uncertainty during periods of ferment.

The momentous decisions of African leaders in 1989–91 must be understood through this prism. In almost all cases, political reform occurred incrementally, in a series of stops and starts, with grudging elite concessions interspersed with pressure from citizens and donors, sometimes interrupted by official retrenchment. Openings in authoritarian rule often occur without express elite intent but, depending on the strength of opposition forces, can be slowed, sidetracked, or even halted by recalcitrant leaders. Elites almost invariably prefer the status quo to the unknown; only when their position becomes unsustainable do they seek instead to manage an inevitable change. This logic explains the efforts by leaders in Burkina Faso, Togo, and Zaire, among others, to preempt an outbreak of protest by promising reform.

Leaders bring different levels of skill to these tasks. Kérékou and Kaunda clearly lost the initiative by underestimating the strength of their opponents, resisting every demand, and having to back down in stages. Mobutu, the consummate tactician, was able to retain a measure of initiative by surprising his countrymen with a package of sweeping reforms of his own design. Similarly, leaders vary in their values and styles. It is widely believed that Paul Biya would sincerely like to quicken the pace of liberalization in Cameroon but that he is held back by hardliners in the army and party. On the other hand, Daniel arap Moi's instinctive response to dissent appears to be repression. Other African leaders are constrained by past commitments to an ideology of democracy, which baggage proves difficult to discard. Biya and Kaunda, who had always legitimized their rule with the

rhetoric of participation, found it more difficult to resist the sirens of multiparty elections than Rawlings or Banda, who had based their claim to rule on revolutionary purity or paternalism.

Leaders also differ in the extent to which they control institutional and financial resources. Control of resources directly affects elite cohesion, a factor which—as Nelson notes for economic stabilization—is a critical variable in explaining whether leaders are able to manage a process of reform.[26] Institutionally, leaders seek to retain the allegiance of elites within powerful entities like the army, the party, and the labor movement; defections from these key institutions help to drive the reform process (see Table 1). For instance, rumored unhappiness in the Ivorien army contributed to convincing Houphouët of the need for accommodation, while Kérékou's fate was sealed when key elements of the Benin army began advocating a return to the barracks. Whereas ruling parties remained loyal to national leaders in Kenya and Tanzania, UNIP support for Kaunda wavered in Zambia. And general and wildcat strikes by state unions became a force for reform in Congo and C.A.R.

Elite cohesion also depends on financial resources such as the discretionary revenues which derive from control of the state apparatus. The prebendal networks on which African politicians have built their power have been undermined in recent years by economic austerity and market reforms. In turn, this has made the regimes more vulnerable to unrest and less able to buy support and coopt opposition. We conclude that leaders of resource-poor states in agrarian economies like Burundi and Swaziland have steadfastly resisted reform precisely because they lacked the wherewithal to manage the reform process. By contrast, state leaders in richer countries like Zaire, Gabon, and Cameroon enjoyed a steady flow of revenues from oil and mineral exports and may have calculated that they could still dominate the political game, even during and after reform. Such strategies are not without risk for state leaders, but because executive power can almost always be used to impede opposition, some leaders come to prefer a reform process they believe they can control.

Foreign aid is an additional significant financial resource, particularly in the poorer countries of the continent. How influential is the recent talk of political conditionality by western donor agencies? We suspect that the ability of donors to influence political reform in Africa is related to the dependence of state leaders on aid resources. Leaders with independent discretionary means at their disposal are more likely to reject donor pressures to pursue inimical policies: Omar Bongo in oil-rich Gabon, for example, could afford to ridicule French pressure for political reform; in Benin, on the other hand, the desperate need to pay state employees obliged Kérékou to accept all the conditions—including the nomination of a technocrat, Nicéphore Soglo, as prime minister—which the French imposed on him.

The end of the Cold War changed the permissive attitude of western governments towards autocracy and malfeasance among strategic allies and allowed the expression of more idealistic foreign policy goals. The U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Africa Herman Cohen spoke in April 1990 of the need for African countries to move toward democracy, and the U.S. subsequently reduced or eliminated military aid to such strategic allies as Kenya, Somalia, and Zaire. Even while the U.S. was still refining its goals and methods for promoting democratization, some African governments began to behave as if political conditionality were already in place. France also reversed its long-standing attitude of intervening to support incumbent leaders against political threats in its former colonies.[27]

France's refusal to honor Houphouët's request to send troops to Abidjan in May 1990 and its open support for democratization at the Franco-African summit of La Baule in June only encouraged opposition groups and convinced governments of the virtues of accommodation.

Yet political conditionality is a highly imperfect instrument, and its impact should not be overestimated. In Kenya, the American ambassador's outspoken statements in favor of multipartyism encouraged the opposition but also contributed to the hardening of the government's stand. In other countries, token gestures made to please foreign funders did not result in significant political changes: Mobutu's promises of democratization originated in a bid to placate donors, as well as to outmaneuver his internal opposition. In the absence of strong domestic forces pushing for reform, state leaders are unlikely to succumb to international pressures. Indeed, it is time now to focus on the other side of the equation, the role of forces in civil society in bringing about political reform.

Has an Alternative Ruling Coalition Emerged? Earlier, we discussed the resources that state leaders use to modulate the pace of political reform. Yet mass protesters also bring to the struggle a range of political resources which can shape outcomes. We assume that a strong and cohesive opposition—what we call an alternative ruling coalition—is necessary to effect a sustained regime transition.

We use the term "coalition" advisedly in the African context. Broad-based, western-style social coalitions do not fully exist in sub-Saharan Africa, where formal political participation has long been restricted to a small minority. Rather, power is based on loose alliances of elite factions with followings grounded in clientelism. In the past, these regimes found grudging and passive support from an urban coalition of civil servants, unionized labor, the import trade sector, and the military rank and file. The narrowness and dependence of this clientelistic constituency explain the inability of state elites to make tough economic choices and why, when rent-seeking opportunities dry up, previously cohesive regimes incur elite defections.

As unrest spread widely across different social groups (see Table 1), conditions were ripe for the formation of an alternative ruling coalition in African countries. The opposition initially emerged on university campuses and in church congregations and drew moral and political leadership from individuals outside state patronage networks. The movement gradually attracted mass support from populations who suffered directly from cutbacks in services, subsidies, and employment. Whether the opposition movement turned into a coalition capable of seeking political power depended on two critical factors: the emergence of professional political leaders, either from "exile" outside single-party politics or from defections within the existing regime, and the creation of organizational linkages among the diverse social components of the opposition movement.

What is the nature of the opposition? The social composition of the protesters was almost exclusively urban; we found no evidence of rural unrest in any of the countries in our sample.[28] In part because recent economic adjustment measures have tended to bring relative benefit to farmers, the countryside remained quiet. Opposition efforts to gain rural support failed. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, challenger Laurent Gbagbo appealed to cocoa producers by promising to increase and stabilize producer prices, but this did not prevent farmers from overwhelmingly backing Houphouët in the November 1990 election.

Second, the protests were sustained politically by the middle classes. The urban poor expressed their desperation by engaging in looting once riots broke out, but the students, teachers, miners, and civil servants who led the protests *en masse* were relatively privileged elements. We note the leadership role of civil servants in protests in francophone West Africa (see Table 1), a factor which helps explain elite defections, the emergence of a "technocratic" opposition, and relatively rapid political reform in that region. In Kenya and Zimbabwe, by contrast, the state and national bourgeoisies appeared for the moment to prefer economic and political stability to the uncertainty of protest-led reform. The African bourgeoisie's economic dependence on the state is bound to make it highly ambivalent about fundamental political reform, a factor which impedes coalition building with more estranged social groups such as the urban poor or the peasantry.

Third, the protests took on a regional or ethnic case in several countries. Groups who were unhappy with their share of the existing economic pie played a prominent role in fomenting and spreading protest in several countries. In Kenya, for example, riots spread from Nairobi to towns in the heartland of the Kikuyu, the ethnic group that has lost most power and prestige under the Moi regime. The protests in Cameroon mobilized widespread support in the western and southern regions, but Biya retained considerable support in his home area, the Beti heartlands around Yaounde.

Who were the leaders? As the protests turned explicitly political, professional politicians began to replace student and church activists in leadership positions. Associations or parties formed around exiled dissidents and sought to register or gain recognition, sometimes from a European base. Familiar faces reappeared as former cabinet members and senior officials who had fallen out of official favor clambered to return to active politics. Thus, in Benin, previous state presidents—Justin-Tometin Ahomadégbé, Emile-Derlin Zinzou, and Hubert Maga—were among the first to begin campaigning for the presidency. And in Zambia the ruling party began to split as UNIP softliners like Humphrey Mulemba defected to join veteran politicians like Arthur Wina who had long been in the political wilderness. Whatever their political base, ambitious politicians tended to see mass protest as an opportunity to gain or recapture positions of power.

The capacity of opposition leaders to mount a credible bid against incumbent elites also hinges critically on organizational resources, such as the strength and independence of associations in civil society. Where civic organizations were officially sanctioned by the state or single party, they did not lead the protests so much as scramble to keep up with an increasingly radicalized rank and file. Trade unions, torn between the economic aspirations of their members and cozy corporatist arrangements with the state, are illustrative in this respect. Some union leaders, for example in Congo, were wary of losing the handsome membership dues and tax revenues collected under law which were threatened by political pluralism.[29] Others maintained a measure of independence from the state, notably in Zambia, where the 1990 unrest marked the coming of age of a union movement with few parallels on the continent. The head of the Zambia Congress of Trade Unions vaulted to leadership of the opposition movement by refusing to accept appointment to the central committee of the government party.[30]

Much also depends on the ability of leaders to aggregate the parochial interests of the diverse opposition elements into a coherent front. In Kenya, where churchmen and lawyers unilaterally took strong initiatives to oppose state repression, the opposition movement

lacked the coordinating hand of a unified leadership. In Zambia, however, a new alliance among workers, businessmen, and churchgoers began to take shape under the organizational umbrella of a new political party, the Movement for Multiparty Democracy.

For the most part, however, the political structures born in the 1990 protests were fragmented and sectionalized. A dizzying number of new political parties registered with the national authorities: some seventy-five in Gabon, over forty in Zaire, and more than twenty in Côte d'Ivoire. Some were parties in name only, made up of a leader and a handful of followers. Mobutu initially tried to limit registration to three parties with controlled composition and platforms; he later recanted, apparently calculating that fragmentation of the opposition was to his electoral advantage. The Gabonese government went so far as to promise generous funding to every registered party and then stood back and watched while internal squabbling and accusations of financial improprieties discredited several leading contenders. By May 1991 an alternative ruling coalition with a credible leadership and coherent program had yet to emerge in most African countries.

Conclusion: A Transition to Democracy?

From our foreshortened vantage point close to the drama of unfinished events, we hazard a guess that the year 1990 was a watershed in African politics. We suggest that this turn of decade will be recorded retrospectively as a moment as portentous for the direction of political change on the continent as 1960 ("the year of political independence") and 1966 ("the year of the military coup"). From late 1989 onward, African citizens stood up and insisted on political accountability from their rulers. Partly to accommodate these demands and partly to try to preempt them, a clear majority of African leaders (twenty-one out of our sample of thirty) adopted more liberal and competitive practices of governance.[31] There was a tentative reversal in the thirty-year trend in African politics toward political centralization, with political elites embarking on experiments to divide and distribute political power.

But we argue that, for most African countries, the partial liberalization of authoritarian regimes does not amount to a transition to democracy. By the criterion of free and fair elections, only a small minority of African regimes are indisputably embarked on a democratic route. By May 1991, multiparty elections were held or scheduled in fifteen countries (see Table 2). But the ruling elite was often careful to defer the polling date into the distant future (Guinea-Bissau and Madagascar) or to be vague about the precise timing in 1991 or 1992 when the elections would be held (Zambia and Zaire). In two of the five countries where a multiparty vote actually took place, irregularities in campaign and polling procedures called into question the fairness of the elections. In both Côte d'Ivoire and Gabon, the opposition challengers alleged intimidation and ballot rigging, and in Gabon the vote was close enough for fraud to have affected the overall election result. As we conclude below, a cohesive incumbent political elite has access to state resources which can be effectively deployed in its own favor during an election.

Nor do the results of elections to date provide any guarantee that competitive politics will be institutionalized. In both Côte d'Ivoire and Gabon, long-serving incumbent presidents were returned: a vindicated Houphouët chose to persist with his personal and imperial style

of rule; the less politically secure Bongo sought to incorporate opposition parties into the government, thus rekindling the ideology of national unity associated with single-party rule.

Multiparty elections did, however, lead to landmark outcomes in early 1991. In three African countries—Cape Verde in February and São Tomé and Benin in March—heads of state were peacefully voted out of office. Benin's presidential vote, vouchsafed by international observers, marked the first such electoral transfer of power in mainland sub-Saharan Africa in the postcolonial period.[32] In these three cases, with free and fair elections complete, the challenge becomes whether democratic institutions—in state and society—can be consolidated.

For the rest of Africa, the democratic transition itself remains at issue. For reasons that harken back to the structural, diffusionist, and contingent explanations of political change explored above, our outlook must be cautiously skeptical.

First, we note the underlying structural constraint of Africa's economic crisis. As one trenchant commentator has observed, "the effort to promote democracy in the midst of acute economic distress is historically unprecedented."[33] Whether or not current authoritarian leaders survive, the need for economic adjustment will remain. Whoever is in power will face macroeconomic disequilibria and have little choice but to proceed with administering some formula of economic austerity. Because the social costs of adjustment fall disproportionately on urban and bureaucratic interests, these groups are likely to become alienated from any government, even a democratically elected one.

It is therefore somewhat puzzling that the demands of African protesters combine corporatist claims on the public purse with calls for multipartyism and democracy. This can be partly attributed to a self-serving need to justify particularist demands. Or perhaps African populations will accept austerity policies more readily once they are openly debated and carried out by an elected government. But the demands of the protesters may also be contradictory and irreconcilable. For at least the immediate future, any African government will confront the unenviable choice between economic and political reform, between growth and democracy.

Second, we doubt that the sort of democratic outcomes recently achieved in eastern Europe will automatically spread to Africa. The breath of freedom blowing from this region is undoubtedly a source of inspiration to the educated middle and working classes in Africa's capital cities. But these classes in Africa are a social minority sitting atop agrarian societies composed mainly of poorly educated, self-provisioning peasants. In terms of social structure and (lack of) democratic experience, African countries resemble less the industrial societies of Poland, (East) Germany, and Czechoslovakia than the agrarian backwaters of Romania, China, and North Korea. It is sobering to recall that in the latter group of countries political protest either did not arise at all (North Korea), was ruthlessly crushed with state power (China), or was hijacked by an ambitious faction from within the governing clique (Romania). In none of these countries was the mass of the agrarian population sufficiently attached to democratic values or aware of events in the capital and the world to demystify the regime's account of events or to counter its crackdowns.

Finally, our analysis of the contingent dynamics of protest and reform in sub-Saharan Africa leads us to conclude that political elites continue to enjoy an important advantage over mass protesters. However weakened their political legitimacy and economic base, top political leaders can still mobilize the resources of the state against nongovernmental

opponents. From the moment that multiparty elections are announced, incumbent leaders will place obstacles in the path of opposition parties. They will harass opponents on the campaign trail, for example by preventing them from holding public meetings or restricting access to advertising and media coverage. They will make full use of state resources to further their own campaigns, for example by ferrying supporters in government vehicles to rallies and the polls. Incumbent leaders can also be expected to turn a blind eye to violent intimidation when it emanates from among their own supporters. Finally, the military is a wild card in the process of transition, sometimes intervening to either hasten or impede reform. Soldiers may oust an unpopular civilian leader and respond to popular calls for multiparty elections (as in Mali in March 1991), or they may detain opposition figures and postpone the popular vote (as in Algeria in June 1991).

In contrast to the forces of the state, opposition movements in Africa are relatively weak. Sometimes they constitute little more than a spontaneous convergence of diverse urban interests, ranging from privileged public servants to the lumpenproletariat of the shantytowns. Occasionally these elements are organized into formal associations such as churches, trade unions, and professional associations with an independent resource base and a policy voice to pursue specific interests. Only rarely are they aggregated across the breadth of civil society into an alternative ruling coalition with a sustainable multiclass social base and a coherent platform for governing.

It is extremely difficult to gauge the effectiveness of the new opposition movements in Africa. The incomplete evidence to date suggests that civic forces lack the political and organizational resources to unseat ruling parties, especially given the tremendous advantages incumbency brings to the latter. More critically, we see little sign that the opposition can promote an alternative set of political values which would result in immediate changes in governance. The roots of protest in efforts to protect corporate privilege and its narrow base among the urban bourgeoisie bespeak a conservative reaction against economic austerity. The opportunism of opposition political leaders, their patronage followings, and their links with current state elites all suggest that a change of leadership would probably perpetuate a clientelistic pattern of "politics as usual."

Nonetheless, opposition groups did prompt protest and reform, and in so doing put new issues on the political agenda in Africa. These include the recognition of basic civil and political liberties, the end of arbitrary regulation and state exaction, and greater transparency and accountability in public decision making. The projection of these governance issues into open public debate may in the end be the most significant aspect of the 1990 watershed in Africa. Although an alternative ruling coalition did not fully emerge everywhere, the political ideas to support such a coalition did make an important first appearance.

NOTES

This paper is a reformulated and updated version of a chapter appearing in Goran Hyden and Michael Bratton, *Governance and Politics in Africa*. For incisive comments on earlier drafts, the authors wish to thank Claude Ake, Tessy Bakary, Henry Bienen, Stephen Burgess, Catherine Boone, Naomi Chazan, Goran Hyden, Raymond Hopkins, Richard Joseph, Atul Kohli, Peter Lewis, Richard Sandbrook, and Richard Sklar. Research assistance was provided by Dianne Tchudziak. The authors are responsible for errors of fact or judgment regarding the rapidly changing political events surveyed here.

1. Richard L. Sklar, "Democracy in Africa," *African Studies Review*, 26 (1983), 11–24.

2. In addition to numerous country studies and journal articles, recent books include Patrick Chabal, ed., *Political Domination in Africa: Reflections on the Limits of Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds., *Democracy in Developing Countries: Africa* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1988); Fred M. Hayward, *Elections in Independent Africa* (Boulder: Westview, 1987); Dov Ronen, ed., *Democracy and Pluralism in Africa* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1986); and John A. Wiseman, *Democracy in Black Africa: Survival and Revival* (New York: Paragon House, 1990).

3. An exception is the work of the African Governance Program of the Carter Center of Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. See its two collections of papers, *Beyond Autocracy in Africa* (1989) and *African Governance in the 1990s* (1990) and the newsletter *Africa Demos*.

4. See Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, eds., *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead, eds., *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Prospects for Democracy*, 4 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); James M. Malloy and Mitchell A. Seligman, eds., *Authoritarians and Democrats: Regime Transition in Latin America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987); and Alfred Stepan, ed., *Democratizing Brazil* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). The most useful book to date on regime transitions in Africa is Ruth Berins Collier, *Regimes in Tropical Africa: Changing Forms of Supremacy, 1945–1975* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

5. Lucian W. Pye, "Political Science and the Crisis of Authoritarianism," *American Political Science Review*, 84 (1990), 3–19; see also Samuel P. Huntington, "Democracy's Third Wave," *Journal of Democracy*, 2 (Spring 1991), 12–34.

6. See Stuart Hill and Donald Rothchild, "The Contagion of Political Conflict in Africa and the World," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 30 (1987), 716–735; and D. Klingman, "Temporal and Spatial Diffusion in the Comparative Analysis of Social Change," *American Political Science Review*, 74 (1980), 123–137.

7. See, for example, Abraham F. Lowenthal, *Exporting Democracy: The United States and Latin America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), and R. Stephen Brent, "Aiding Africa," *Foreign Policy* (1990), 121–140.

8. For instance, Zakis Ergas, ed., *The African State in Transition* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987); Ravi Gulhati, *Recent Economic Reforms in Africa: A Preliminary Political Economy Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, EDI Policy Seminar Series, 1987); and Richard Sandbrook, *The Politics of Africa's Economic Stagnation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

9. Jean-François Bayart, *L'Etat au Cameroun* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale de Sciences Politiques, 1985); Richard Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Thomas Callaghy, *The State-Society Struggle: Zaire in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984). See also Richard Sandbrook, "Taming the African Leviathan: Political Reform and Economic Recovery," *World Policy Journal*, 7 (Fall 1990), 673–701.

10. Abraham Lowenthal in O'Donnell et al., foreword, p. ix.

11. On political agency see Goran Hyden and Michael Bratton, eds., *Governance and Politics in Africa* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publications, 1991), chs. 1 and 12. On "structured contingency" see also Terry Lynn Karl, "Dilemmas of Democratization in Latin America," *Comparative Politics*, 23 (October 1990), 1–22.

12. Terry Lynn Karl and Philippe C. Schmitter, "Modes of Transition and Types of Democracy in Latin America, Southern and Eastern Europe," paper presented at a workshop on The Transition to Democracy, Washington, D.C., National Academy of Sciences, October 1990, pp. 4–5.

13. In O'Donnell et al., p. 56.

14. Dankwart A. Rustow, "Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model," *Comparative Politics*, 2 (April 1970), 354.

15. O'Donnell et al., *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*.

16. The main sources were: *AFPress Clips*, *Africa Confidential*, *Africa Demos*, *Africa International*, *Africa News*, *Africa Research Bulletin* (Political Series), Economist Intelligence Unit *Country Report*, Foreign Broadcast Information Service *Daily Report*, *Jeune Afrique*, *Le Monde*, *Liberation*, *Marchés Tropicaux et Méditerranéens*, *New African*, *The New York Times*, *News from Zambia*, *Politique Africaine*, *Weekly Review*, and *West Africa*.

17. As countries embroiled in civil war, we excluded Angola, Chad, Ethiopia, Liberia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia, and Sudan. The immediate political task in these countries was to establish order before constitutional questions could be addressed. As countries undergoing a planned transition from military to civilian rule, we excluded Guinea, Lesotho, and Nigeria. A managed process of political reform was underway with a phased series of steps

including constitution writing and elections, but disallowing unplanned popular interventions. As multiparty democracies, we excluded Botswana, Gambia, Mauritius, Namibia, and Senegal. While protesters sometimes demanded further liberalization (for example in Senegal following the 1989 elections), the political reform process was essentially complete. We did include Zimbabwe, however, because protest probably slowed the regime's slide towards authoritarianism.

18. Karl and Schmitter, pp. 8–9, Figure 1.

19. See for example John Wiseman, "Urban Riots in West Africa, 1977–85," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 24 (1986), 509–518; and Achille Mbembe, *Afriques Indociles* (Paris: Karthala, 1988).

20. *Times of Zambia*, Dec. 31, 1989.

21. *Africa Confidential* (April 1990).

22. *Marchés Tropicaux et Méditerranéens*, May 18, 1990.

23. Leaders also established a presidential commission to gauge public opinion on multiparty politics and set in motion steps to make the trade union and cooperative movements independent of the party.

24. *Liberation*, Apr. 13, 1990.

25. *Africa Confidential*, July 27, 1990.

26. Joan M. Nelson, "The Political Capacity of Stabilization: Commitment, Capacity and Public Response," *World Development*, 12 (1984), 983–1006.

27. John Chipman, *French Power in Africa* (London: Blackwell, 1989).

28. The reader is reminded that we did not consider countries in the throes of civil war; organized political opposition clearly originates from rural areas in Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Somalia, and Sudan.

29. *Jeune Afrique*, Oct. 17–23, 1990, p. 30.

30. *Africa Confidential*, 31 (July 1990), 1–2.

31. If countries beyond our sample are included (that is, those embroiled in civil war or undergoing a planned transition to civilian rule), then political reforms occurred in twenty-eight out of forty-one countries between November 1989 and May 1991.

32. The main previous African example of an electoral power transfer was Jugnauth's MMM victory over Prime Minister Ramgoolam on the island nation of Mauritius in 1982. The opposition electoral victory in Sierra Leone in 1967 was disrupted by a military coup before the transition was complete. See Henry Bienen and Jeffrey Herbst, "Authoritarianism and Democracy in Africa," in Dankwart A. Rustow and Kenneth Paul Erickson, *Comparative Political Dynamics: Global Research Perspectives* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), p. 212.

33. Crawford Young, "A Look at Sub-Saharan Africa," in Nicholas X. Rizopolous, ed., *Sea Changes: American Foreign Policy in a World Transformed* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1990), p. 89.