



# Presidential Elections and Incumbent Electoral Defeat in African Democracies

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Presidential Elections and Incumbent Electoral Defeat in African Democracies

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## Abstract

Africa's democratic development has been accompanied by a growing number of peaceful transitions of power from incumbent to opposition political parties at the presidential level. Existing literature lacks robust comparative analysis to factors leading to incumbent defeat. This paper uses a case study-based approach to explore the presidential elections in Nigeria in 2015, Ghana in 2016, and Zambia in 2011 to explore the historical context leading up to each election and analyze potential determinants of the incumbent's defeat. The case studies rely on primary source material including campaign and political party websites, official vote tallies from national election commissions, and peer-reviewed academic studies. Contemporaneous media accounts, reports from elections observers, and opinion/analysis articles are also referenced to identify common trends or themes that may explain electoral outcomes.

The analysis concludes that opposition parties in the cases selected obtained victory in countries with robust and independent electoral oversight commissions and with political support for the incumbent declining, due to either eroding support from the party's base or a changing voter demographic. While the economy can play a factor in an incumbent's defeat, it is often perceptions about the economy or individual economic indicators (such as rising inflation) that influence voters, rather than just the question of whether the economy as a whole is growing. Coalition building and the unification of opposition parties does not appear to be a determining factor in defeating an incumbent.

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## Chapter I.

### Introduction

Scholars have spent the better part of the three decades since the publication of Samuel Huntington's *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* attempting to better understand the factors determining success or failure of democracy on the African continent. What was once described as a continent of "single- or no-party systems, military regimes, and personal rule" (Ottaway, 1997), Africa has become majority free or partly free, as ranked by Freedom House (2017). Scholarship into African governance that once focused on the big man syndrome, natural resource curse, or undue influence of foreign aid has shifted to exploring the impact to African democracies of electoral commission independence or the peaceful transition of power to opposition parties.

Political scientists observed rising populist movements and an increasing trend towards autocratic rule across the world in 2017. One region was exempt from this trend: Sub-Saharan Africa (V-Dem, 2018). In contrast to North America, Europe, and Latin America—all of which saw declines in indicators of democratic governance—Sub-Saharan Africa showed "a small increase in the region's level of democracy (p. 18)." Twenty African countries were ranked as fully or partially democratic by the Polity IV data series in 2015, representing nearly half the population of Sub-Saharan Africa (The World Bank, 2017). The continued development of Africa's democracies has also been accompanied by a growing number of peaceful transitions of power from incumbent to opposition political parties at the presidential level.

The peaceful transfer of power from a ruling party to an opposition party is often cited as one of the hallmarks of a well-functioning democracy, with Huntington coining the “two-turnover test” as “one criterion for measuring consolidation” (1991, p. 266-7) of democracy. While by no means the only marker of democratic institutions—South Africa and Botswana, frequently named as shining stars among African democracies, would fail such a test—scholars have recognized the peaceful transfer of power as underlying evidence of the practice of free and fair elections and the viability of opposition parties: “Healthy competition among parties in a constitutional democracy can be associated with a higher quality of democracy (Kimemia, 2016, p. 13).” However, a 2010 review of Africa’s democratic elections by Nic Cheeseman concluded that “incumbents retained power in 93 percent of the elections they contested,” demonstrating that further research is needed to understand the electoral conditions that provide for opposition victories.

Existing literature lacks robust comparative analysis to explain the rare instances in which incumbents lose their bids for reelection. Cheeseman suggests three potential reasons that incumbents may lose reelection: “a complex mix of economic decline, falling support for incumbents, and the ability or inability of opposition parties to form a broad alliance” (2010, p. 139-153). The existing research on the question of why incumbents in African democracies may lose a campaign for reelection is however severely limited; Cheeseman’s own work goes on to explore elections in which the incumbent is not eligible for reelection and fails to document additional evidence to back the three existing theories of why incumbents may lose.

The trend towards increased democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa in recent years also coincides with observations of peaceful democratic power transitions in some



of Africa's largest economies: Nigeria saw the defeat of incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan to opposition candidate Muhammadu Buhari in 2015, marking the first defeat of the People's Democratic Party after 16 years of rule under the Fourth Nigerian Republic. Ghana's John Mahama was defeated by Nana Akufo-Addo in 2016, marking the first time a Ghanaian president was not elected to a second term. And in 2011, Zambia's Rupiah Banda was defeated by Michael Sata at a time when the question of China's influence on the Zambian economy had reached a national fever pitch. These three elections bring a renewed focus to the question of why incumbents may lose their reelection campaigns and also present at least some challenges to the prevailing theories: the economies in question experienced growth during the incumbent's tenure (although other economic challenges including inflation and lower than anticipated growth were present), the incumbents in each country maintained a relatively broad level of support from their base, and, in the cases of Zambia and Ghana, coalition of opposition parties does not appear to be a factor.

This thesis uses a case study-based approach to explore the presidential elections in Nigeria in 2015, Ghana in 2016, and Zambia in 2011 to explore the historical context leading up to each election and analyze potential determinants of the incumbent's defeat. The case studies rely on primary source material including campaign and political party websites, official vote tallies from national election commissions, and peer-reviewed academic studies. Contemporaneous media accounts, reports from elections observers, and opinion/analysis articles are also referenced to identify common trends or themes that may explain electoral outcomes.

The analysis concludes that opposition parties in the cases selected obtained victory following a period of reform by the national body charged with overseeing elections or where a robust and independent electoral commission body had previously implemented successful elections. Opposition parties also were advantaged by declining political support for the incumbent, due to either eroding support from the party's base or a changing voter demographic. While the economy can play a factor in an incumbent's defeat, it is often perceptions about the economy or individual economic indicators (such as rising inflation) that influence voters, rather than just the question of whether the economy as a whole is growing. Coalition building and the unification of opposition parties does not appear to be a determining factor in defeating an incumbent.

#### Literature Review

Samuel Huntington's 1991 article "Democracy's Third Wave" noted that Sub-Saharan Africa was an exception to the wave of democratization he then observed in other regions of the world. He attributed this to "dictatorships, military regimes, one-party systems, or some combination of these three" (p. 20), noting that "obstacles" to democracy "are political, cultural, and economic" in origin (p. 21). Huntington also observed a strong relationship between economic performance and democratic transition, describing poverty as "probably the principal obstacle to democratic development" and describing a "middle economic stratum" (p. 31) that would foster democratic transition. In presenting case studies on Zambia (2011), Nigeria (2015), and Ghana (2016), this research includes a brief historical overview of each nation's transition from autocratic

rule or military dictatorship to multiparty democracy with viable opposition parties to contextualize the theories suggested in Huntington's analysis.

Huntington's assertion that culture and inexperience with democratic governance contributed to Africa's democracy deficit through the last decade of the twentieth century has since been challenged. Huntington observed an "absence of weakness of real commitment to democratic values among political leaders in [...] Africa" (p. 22), in essence blaming the values of non-Western cultures for authoritarian regimes (p. 22-30). Huntington himself expresses "reasons to doubt" (p. 29) the cultural theory, and events on the continent have since refuted the argument that democratic norms are antithetical to African culture: leaders who were elected or have retired through democratic processes engage in democracy promotion and election observing missions, the African Union adopted a charter endorsing democratic rule (African Union, 2017), and communities of nations have acted when democratic norms are challenged, evidenced, for example, by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) military intervention in Gambia in 2016 to avert constitutional crisis and ensure the peaceful transfer of power.

More apt are Huntington's observations that founding rulers "tend to become staunch opponents of democratization" (p. 21) and the challenges presented by one-party rule. While Huntington notes this is an obstacle "likely to disappear" (p. 21)—the implication being these leaders will pass on and leave questions of governance to the next generation—the obstacle perpetuates itself in the form of de facto one-party states. As previously noted, countries like South Africa and Botswana are internationally recognized democracies but have had single-party rule since their independence.

Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way's 2010 article "Why Democracy Needs a Level Playing Field" concluded that "democratic competition is undermined less by electoral fraud or repression than by unequal access to state institutions, resources, and the media." Levitsky and Way state "incumbents in advanced democracies distribute patronage, engage in pork-barrel spending, and enjoy privileged access to media and finance [...] skew[ing] access to resources and the media." Incumbent party entrenchment challenges the viability of opposition parties, which often face financial collapse or desertion by supporters after electoral defeat. The researchers cite Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Senegal, and Zambia among the states that operate or otherwise largely maintain influence over national media outlets. Where smaller interdependent news outlets do exist, they are likely to reach only "a small urban elite (Levitsky and Way, 2010)."

Levitsky and Way explored the case of Botswana, where the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) has held the executive and the legislature since independence in 1966, attributing the BDP's dominance to "the ruling party's virtual monopoly over access to state institutions, finance, and mass media." The BDP benefits almost exclusively from private sector donations while opposition parties have limited means of financing, restricting their ability to organize both during and between election cycles. Private media has begun to emerge in the last two decades, but state media "remains the dominant news source." Ruling parties use the bully pulpit of the state and control messaging on state owned media while controlling the allocation of public resources in ways that are favorable to garnering or maintaining support for the party. Levitsky and Way assert that the measurement of electoral democracy is insufficient for evaluating hybrid regimes that may hold elections but otherwise limit the viability of opposition

parties, concluding that “a level playing field should be treated as a defining feature of democracy.” In exploring determinant factors of electoral defeat of incumbents running for reelection, the case studies included in this paper consider the degree to which political parties operate on a level playing field, including the role and independence of the media.

The evolution of African political parties from independence movements with autocratic tendencies to participants in multiparty democracies has in part contributed to the emergence of an “uneven playing field [...] that facilitates incumbent control over key state and societal resources (Levitsky and Way).” The challenge is driven in large part by the association of parties of independence with the state; for example, the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa is perceived among voters as the party of independence. The repeated pattern of de facto one-party rule year after year in multiple election cycles can also hinder the evolution of multiparty democracy as opposition figures grow increasingly frustrated, in some cases to the point of joining the ruling party for lack of alternatives to participate in the governing process.

Levitsky and Way’s observation that a “skewed playing field allows incumbents to thwart opposition challenges without resorting to significant fraud or repression (2010)” echoes the work of Andreas Schedler’s “The Menu of Manipulation” (2002). Schedler probes the question of democratic legitimacy beyond elections and observes a “foggy zone” in which countries adopt some measure of democratic institutions but maintain control through a “menu of manipulation.” Such menu items include limits on the media and political parties, vote buying or coercion, and manipulation of the electoral process.

Douglas Kimemia's research into ethnic and religious conflict in Africa reaches a similar conclusion to Levitsky and Way in observing that ruling parties maintain an incumbent advantage in part through control of state resources and the ability to reward key constituencies. Kimemia's research concludes "multiparty politics have increased the consciousness of ethnic and religious identities [... and] the tensions of ethnicity and religion are stirred up by politicians and their supporters, leading to political violence and instability (2016, p. 14-5)." Kimemia observes that African political parties, even within multiparty democracies, tend to focus on seeking electoral victories as opposed to ideological or policy victories. Cultural identities such as religion or ethnicity can take precedence over ideas for governing by both parties and voters. Appeals to a limited cultural group perpetuate once a party is in power, discouraging ruling coalitions with national or cross-cultural appeals and reinforcing patronage politics (p. 15-16). The case studies composed for this research explore the degree to which opposition parties differentiate themselves through alternative political platforms and articulated differences in preferred policy outcomes or whether opposition parties use personality politics or waning support for incumbents to distinguish themselves.

While Kimemia's research highlights the growing pains and a contemporaneous negative consequence of the transition to multiparty democracy in African states, the conclusions mirror Levitsky and Way's analysis that political parties seek power over policy, engage in patronage politics, and often garner support based on ethnic or religious grounds. Incumbents enjoy an electoral advantage in part because governing parties have access to state resources and the predominant access to private sector resources (such as the flow of campaign contributions) (Kimemia, 2016, p. 245). Steffan Lindberg observes

in *Democracy and Elections in Africa* that true multiparty democracies must both be subject to competition and party representation that is not “limited by geographical, socioethnic, or other forms of functional representation (p. 31-32).” The degree to which an election can be ascribed as an open, democratic process comes into question if a political party’s reach or scope is limited to a subset of the population.

Researchers have observed a lack of distinct party ideology between ruling and opposition parties in Africa’s multiparty democracies. Kimemia notes the difficulty of defining African political parties by their ideology (i.e. liberal or conservative) (p. 233) and found that parties are more alike than not in their proposed governing strategies or policy outcomes. The post-independence era was noted for ideologically based parties, notably around socialism, but has since given way to parties that are focused on “economic issues rather than governance or political institutions (p. 249).” In Steffan Lindberg’s *Democracy and Elections in Africa*, the author describes political parties as often attached to an individual—“personal vehicles pursuing clientelistic platforms (p. 12-13),”—with the effect of making it difficult for opposition figures to unite under one viable umbrella opposition party. The “person over party” politics coupled with the challenge of uniting against a strong incumbent government “has resulted in a prevalence in African countries of political parties that are one-person operations (p. 13).” The case studies in this paper in turn explore the degree to which opposition parties gain power through coalition building, cross ethnic or religious appeals, or presenting an alternative governing philosophy.

The rise of dominant political parties creates a moral hazard in which incumbents are no longer deterred from “access and use [of] public resources for partisan gain,” as

the “fear [of] reprisals while out of power” is no longer realized (Greene, 2007, p. 41). The role of the electoral commission as an oversight authority is diminished when an incumbent can exert control or influence over these bodies by virtue of their party dominance. In his conclusion to *Why Dominant Parties Lose*, political scientist Kenneth Greene advocates for “electoral management bodies with oversight and sanctioning powers, including regular audits of the parties’ revenue and expenditures (p. 309).” Absent such independence, electoral commissions may have diminished power to “restrain incumbents from overspending on campaigns and from distributing massive amounts of patronage to voters (Greene, 2007, p. 41).” Incumbent politicians and dominant parties may find incentives to influence or use state resources in a matter advantageous to their own electoral ambitions (including manipulations that remain legal or quasilegal but are not outright fraud). Steffan Lindberg observes that “electoral institutions and rights may contribute to controlling corruption, by furthering civil liberties and providing actors with incentives for improving checks and balances in their own self-interest (p. 20).” The case studies in this paper will explore the degree to which electoral commissions exert independence and enact reforms and whether domestic and international observers recognize a free and fair election process.

Steffan Lindberg’s analysis also reveals why iterative elections and party transitions are important to African democracy. His evidence suggests transitions in governing party increase with subsequent elections (p. 18). The act of holding elections may itself not always be free and fair, but Lindberg notes:

Trying to cheat is one thing and doing it successfully is sometimes quite another [...] We must also recognize that irregularities, manipulation, and fraud are not only sins of incumbents. Opposition parties in Africa are



notorious for their tit-for-tat strategies, and on many occasions, manipulations might cancel each other out (p. 35-36).

Repeated elections can increase chances that such electoral schemes are revealed to voters, who may reject the practices over time. There is some evidence that the repeated act of holding elections increases democratic norms and expectations as voters become more educated through exposure to the practice (Cheeseman, 2018). This in turn increases pressure on incumbents to ensure a freer and fairer election process open to viable opposition parties. As elections become more legitimized over time, the turnover of power to opposition parties begins to increase, further entrenching democracy when incumbents ensure a peaceful transition of power (Lindberg, p. 8) and by legitimizing the voting practice in the eyes of voters.

### Defining Democracy

Appropriate methodologies for defining democracy and identifying democratic elections remain an open debate. David Collier and Robert Adcock's 1999 article "Democracy and Dichotomies: A Pragmatic Approach to Choices about Concepts" explores the arguments for and against a dichotomous approach—labeling a country as either democratic or non-democratic—versus a graduated approach in which democracy or components of democracy are evaluated along a sliding scale. The latter approach has gained favor with most prominent NGOs and research projects: Freedom House ranks nations as free, partly free, or not free; the Polity IV Project uses a 21-point scale; and V-Dem uses a sliding point scale in evaluating seven different principles of democracy.

The V-Dem research project assess seven principles of democracy but holds that "there can be no democracy without elections. (V-Dem Methodology, p. 7)." Given that

the research of this paper explores political power transitions resulting from electoral outcomes, the standards by which an election can be judged as democratic for the purposes of this research are that i) the election is generally agreed upon as free and fair by domestic and international observers and ii) results in the peaceful transfer of political power from a defeated incumbent to an opposition political party. The admittedly broad and simplified definition is not meant to serve as a judgement on whether a nation is fully democratic or elsewhere along the sliding scale towards democracy. Rather, it is a recognition of the vital role that elections serve in a robust democracy and the ability of iterative elections to contribute towards democratization. The definition also recognizes that the peaceful transfer of power from an incumbent governing party to an opposition political party is one indicator by which voters can observe the results of democracy in action and exercise a voice in their political leadership. The peaceful transfer of power helps to engender democratic norms by recognizing the legitimacy of an election and encouraging voters to participate in and respect the democratic process.

### Approach

The following research uses a qualitative case study approach to explore the electoral defeats of incumbent presidential candidates in national elections in Nigeria (2015), Ghana (2016), and Zambia (2011). The three selected elections are ideal examples by which to consider the factors that may contribute to incumbent electoral defeat. Zambia, Nigeria, and Ghana have a shared history of British colonial rule, having obtained their independence in a six-year period from 1957 to 1963. The three nations are English speaking with multiple media outlets accessible online, amplifying the

availability of firsthand accounts and observations of conditions on the ground in the lead up to elections, election day voting, and the aftermath of the incumbent's defeat and power transition. The three elections were observed by domestic and international monitors, journalists, and citizens armed with a growing internet and social media presence, and the elections occurred within a five-year period in which continental and global conditions remained relatively stable (save for some variation in national economic conditions, which are explored in the case studies). The three nations have a history of transition from colonial to single-leader/single-party rule, followed by a transition to multiparty democracy.

The three selected case studies also have their own unique variables to consider in validating theories explaining incumbent electoral defeats. Nigeria is Africa's largest economy and most populous nation with a mixed record from international observers for the freeness and fairness of its past elections. Ghana has the distinction of passing Huntington's two-turnover test, with scholars and policymakers citing it as one of Africa's more robust democracies. Zambia has attracted the most attention of China's growing investment in Africa, both as an investor and a lender, a factor that plays an outsized role in the nation's politics and elections. The nuances of each country's economy, electoral history, election governance bodies, and religious and ethnic differences are factors that must be considered in making determinations about factors influencing elections.

Two potential approaches to investigating the proposed research questions were considered: a qualitative case study based analysis using contemporaneous evidence to identify factors and draw conclusions explaining the defeat of an incumbent or a

quantitative approach evaluating the shift in relevant democratic and electoral indicators from existing datasets (e.g., Freedom House, Polity IV, V-Dem) during the tenure of an incumbent to assess which, if any, factors play a common role in the victory of opposition candidates.

The quantitative approach presented to be a challenge given the sheer number of variables that can be evaluated and the risk of “lump[ing] together disparate phenomena, creating more noise than signal and reducing the value of any inferences (Kuperman, 2025, p. 12).” The second risk to this approach was a misalignment between actual data points and voter perceptions; for example, economic indicators may be improving during an incumbent’s tenure, but voters may perceive that the economy is not growing as quickly as anticipated or that they are left out of the gains.

A qualitative approach also presented challenges: the potential of a small sample bias not widely applicable to other transitions of power and the risk of overlooking key explanatory factors due to a less systematic analysis (Norris, 2008, p. 37-41). By exploring both a consistent set of research questions and accounting for any unique or country-specific factors that may have influenced the election, a case study approach based in contemporaneous evidence (local and international media coverage, peer-reviewed academic analysis of elections and their outcomes, political party and campaign material) can elicit a common theory or set of theories that facilitate defeat at the polls by incumbent heads of state in Africa. The countries and election years selected are ideal for this approach in that they have both common historical contexts (e.g., British colonial rule, uneven roads to multiparty democracy) and unique differentiating factors (e.g., economy, varying degrees of foreign influence) that can also be compared for analysis.

To mitigate these risks, it should be noted that conclusions drawn are explanatory of the three case studies in question, and the degree to which they apply more broadly to other elections in Africa remains a question for further research. A critical observation in reviewing the elections in question is that the politicians in each contest represent the independence movement generation that dates back more than five decades; indeed, many of these leaders were themselves integral to their nations efforts to decolonize. Inevitably, this generation of leadership will give way to a new era of leaders whose distance from the colonial struggle and whose own experiences in the uneven march towards democracy will play a greater role in how they campaign and how they govern.

The three selected case studies ultimately seek to identify a factor or set of factors that contribute to the defeat of an incumbent in presidential elections in African democracies. Each case study will begin with a brief post-independence historical overview to explore how the country made the transition from autocratic or military rule to multiparty democracy. How did these countries miss Huntington's observed third wave of democracy but become part of a new fourth wave of democracy in Africa during a time when democracy globally is in retrenchment? As previously noted, existing research and analysis on incumbent advantage in African democracies is limited. Most scholarly literature on incumbent advantage is limited to the United States and to its legislature rather than the executive. To the degree possible, the case studies explore what advantages the incumbent and his party had at their disposal as well as how those conditions have changed over time. Each case study also explores Nic Cheeseman's theories that the economy, waning support for the governing party, or the coalition of opposition parties leads to incumbent defeat.

## Research Questions

1. Can the defeat of incumbents eligible for reelection be explained by economic factors? Are some economic indicators more important than others in determining a voter's preferences? For example, do indicators such the unemployment rate or wage growth take on greater importance than the national GDP growth?
2. To what degree does the popularity of an incumbent factor into electoral defeat? Does the popularity of an incumbent candidate outweigh identification with religious, ethnic, or other social loyalties? What role does interparty support or interparty politics play in an incumbent's electoral chances?
3. What role does opposition party consolidation or cooperation play in determining an incumbent's chances for reelection? Do successful opposition parties present an alternative governing platform to voters or engage in personality politics?
4. Is electoral reform, election monitoring, and/or the independence of the electoral system a factor in an incumbent's electoral success? Have there been meaningful improvements in the viability of opposition parties or a leveling of the playing field during the incumbent's tenure?

## Chapter II.

### Case Study: Nigeria (2015)

With nearly 200 million citizens, the West African nation of Nigeria is both the African continent's most populous country and largest national economy. A former British colony, Nigeria gained independence in 1960. By 1967, civil war divided the country, with the southeastern region succeeding as the independent Republic of Biafra. The nearly three years of civil war that followed were motivated primarily over who would control the region's vast oil wealth, and the resulting humanitarian disaster led to what was at the time the world's largest relief effort by international aid agencies (Meredith, 2011, p. 202-5). Biafra, and its leader Lieutenant Colonel Emeka Ojukwu, conceded defeat in January 1970.

While Nigeria was reunified following Biafra's fall, the next thirty years saw a series of coups and failed military dictatorships fighting for control of the federal government that determined allocation of and control over the country's vast oil wealth. Nigeria's first attempt at multiparty democracy came in 1979, when military leader General Olusegun Obasanjo introduced a new federal constitution with a state system and national political parties, ushering in the Second Republic. The election that followed "was held in relatively calm conditions" amidst "promising economic prospects [...] with [oil] revenues soaring to \$24 billion a year (Meredith, p. 220)." Regrettably, the ascent of Shehu Shagari to the presidency was marked by corruption, patronage politics, and a struggle for wealth influenced by kickbacks and bribery of administration officials (p. 220-1).

Shagari received a second term in office through the 1983 elections, but allegations of rampant fraud and vote rigging were widespread (p. 221). The same year, a military coup elevated Major-General Muhammadu Buhari as leader of the Supreme Military Council, which would briefly govern Nigeria until a coup in 1985. The next decade saw the rise of a new constitution and a renewed commitment to the end of military rule in the Third Republic (p. 394-7), which also ended in yet another military coup. A Provisional Ruling Council controlled the country through much of the 1990s under General Sani Abacha. His untimely (and unseemly) death in 1998 paved the way for a new constitution under the Fourth Nigerian Republic (p. 574).

The constitution of the Fourth Republic was adopted in 1999, bookending decades of civil unrest and rule by military dictatorships. Under the newly adopted constitution, presidential elections would be held every four years, with a president limited to two four-year terms in office. Nigeria's 1998 elections marked a return to civilian rule, but were beset by rampant fraud, corruption, misconduct, bribery, and vote buying. Former military ruler Olusegun Obasanjo, who remained immensely popular in the north and especially among the wealthy, well-connected, and political elites, won with a decisive 63 percent: "Independent election observers, while judging the election to be neither 'free nor fair', concluded [...] that they reflected the will of the people (p. 579-80)."

The analysis of the 1998 election is prescient of the elections that followed. Despite oil wealth in the hundreds of billions of dollars, four decades of military rule and ethnic divisions had decimated Nigeria's standard of living. Previous military rulers and their cronies had siphoned billions in government funds, crime and corruption schemes were rampant, and the nation remained impoverished with poor health and living



conditions (p. 579-80). In a testament to how little was expected of the federal government and how big a success it was to hold a second election under the same constitution, Nigeria elected Obasanjo to a second term in 2003 (p. 587).

#### Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) of Nigeria

Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), which is codified in the 1999 constitution and charged with the organization and supervision of federal elections, also oversees the registration and oversight of political parties (Independent National Electoral Commission, 2018). In the leadup to the 1999 elections, INEC released guidelines for the establishment of political parties that allowed the People's Democratic Party (PDP), which Obasanjo represented, to formally register. The PDP evolved from a coalition of thirty political associations that had been advocating for a return to civilian rule and advising the military dictatorships that followed the Third Republic. INEC established guidelines for political parties to register in phases, using the results of local and parliamentary elections to demonstrate the constitutional requirement that political parties represent the entirety of Nigeria; that is, parties are to be representative of the entire country rather than a single state or subset of states, ethnic groups, or other identities (International Centre for Nigerian Law, 2018).

Local government polls in 1998 established PDP's dominance as the majority political party, a status it maintained for the next two decades. Despite its national dominance, the PDP was beset by infighting and the resignation of members of its senior leadership (People's Democratic Party, 2018) in Obasanjo's second term. The internal politics did not however impact its position at the polls, and Umaru Musa Yar'Adua

succeeded Olusegun Obasanjo as the titular head of the party, competing successfully in the 2007 presidential election (from which Obasanjo was term-limited from competing).

Two unique factors set the context for Nigeria's 2015 presidential election: the consolidation of three major opposition parties to form the All Progressives Congress, and the death of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua. Despite being accused of fraud, incidents of violence (Human Rights Watch, 2007), and a "charade" election (Ashby, 2007), President Yar'Adua had assumed office in 2007 following his electoral victory. Yar'Adua left Nigeria in late 2009 for medical treatment in Saudi Arabia. With concerns about a power vacuum, the Senate transferred presidential powers to Vice President Goodluck Jonathan in February 2010 (The Telegraph, 2010).

Jonathan's ascent to the presidency generated two controversies: the first concern, that his appointment to the presidency was unconstitutional and usurped the authority of the elected President Umaru Yar'Adua, was tempered by Yar'Adua's death in May 2010. After finishing out the duration of Yar'Adua's tenure, Jonathan went on to run and win another term in the 2011 election. Despite the level of violence resulting in more than 800 deaths, there was some level of optimism that the 2011 elections were better run than previous Nigerian presidential elections (Bekoe, 2011). INEC made progress in cleaning up the voter registry (making the possibility of electoral fraud more difficult), provided additional training for election observers, and poll monitors and ordinary citizens had additional freedoms to tabulate votes and report on instances of fraud or misconduct. INEC was able to undertake these reforms in part because of a budgetary change that provided for its funding "directly from the treasury rather than through any other government body" to which it might then become beholden (National Democratic

Institute for International Affairs, 2012, p. 21). While “logistical and operational problems” including uneven training and problems with voting infrastructure (p. 22) remained a challenge for the commission, INEC was credited with “broad acknowledgment that this INEC administration was more independent, professional, and forthcoming than the previous (p. 21).”

The second concern looming over the 2015 election concerned the PDP’s informal power-sharing arrangement. While the PDP had dominated Nigerian electoral politics since 1999, the party maintained an informal and unwritten power-sharing arrangement in which presidential candidates nominated by the party would rotate between Nigeria’s predominantly Muslim north and predominantly Christian south (BBC, 2011). Yar’Adua, who had served just shy of three years of his four-year term, was a Muslim from the northern state of Katsina. Northerners and supporters of President Yar’Adua viewed the possibility of a 2015 run by Johnathan as a quasi-third term in office and violation of the long-understood power-sharing arrangement. Jonathan himself sensed the political sensitivities, declaring early in his tenure succeeding Yar’Adua’s uncompleted term that he would not stand in the 2015 elections (BBC, 2011). Once it became clear that Johnathan would not stay true to his word, media outlets decried the decision (Premium Times, 2013), and Jonathan lost the support of major political backers, including former President Olusegun Obasanjo (Voice of America, 2013).

The opposition All Progressives Congress (APC) political party formed in February 2013, with an explicit mandate to focus on the 2015 presidential elections. The party united three of Nigeria’s largest opposition parties, Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), the All Nigeria Peoples Party

(ANPP). The party's political impact was almost immediate—between the legislators of the former parties who had united to form APC along with defectors from other opposition parties joining, APC had 172 of the 360 legislative seats in Nigeria's Lower House—one more than the previously dominant PDP (All Progressives Congress, 2018).

Despite the ascendancy of APC, its party platform bore little distinction from the dominant PDP:

Political parties in Nigeria still lack clear ideological foundations, internal democracy and developed party structures. Despite some attempts to present issue-based campaigns to the increasingly politically aware electorate, parties failed to offer distinguishable political platforms. The lack of a common ideological basis enabled frequent defections among parties; some aspirants changed parties several times within a short period to get their names on a ticket or to increase their chances of electoral victory. (National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, 2012, p. 29)

Even at present day, the PDP party website lacks any cohesive list of issues or party platforms. The APC party website does contain an issues page, but the commitments are either vague (promises to fight corruption) or contain little detail about how they would be implemented (commitments to increase healthcare providers or availability of electricity contain specific and measurable goals, but the party is silent on how it will reach those goals) (All Progressives Congress, 2018).

Following persistent allegations of fraud in the 2011 election (and, more broadly, every federal election under the Fourth Republic) and the spate of violence, INEC instituted reforms towards “transparent,” “free, fair, and credible” elections; one such reform was the release of an *Information Kit for 2015 General Elections* (Independent National Electoral Commission, 2015) that included all polling places and details about the implementation, oversight, and security of the polling stations by region. The effort

aimed to provide journalists and election observers with information previously not widely available and had the added benefit of contributing to a culture of educating the voter base. Disseminating knowledge about the voting process and the procedures governing elections helps to institute a democratic culture among the populace and is an important method for bolstering the credibility and transparency of elections.

National security, including the threat from terrorist groups like Boko Haram that displaced 650,000 Nigerians, resulted in a push from the military and state security to force INEC to postpone the election from mid-February to late March. Despite the threat of violence and the challenge to electoral credibility imposed by the postponement, INEC continued to push for reforms including “refinement of the electoral roll, which had over 70 million registered voters on it,” the implementation of voter registration cards, and the implementation of a multi-year strategic plan on engaging voters in the voting process (Nyuykonge and Omotola, 2015). The success of INEC in its voter education campaign and ability to move forward with reforms, even under pressure from other state actors, was a testament to the body’s growing level of independence.

The issues at play in the 2015 election were typical of Nigeria’s previous elections: concerns about good governance, corruption, “mismanagement of [natural] resources”, “rising public debt”, and a possible repeat of the violence of past elections (Nyuykonge and Omotola, 2015). The coalition of opposition parties into the APC was seen as a potential factor to break the electoral hold of the PDP. Despite the rise of the APC, as in previous elections, the contest was not a matter of grand ideas or divergent party platforms: the campaigns were described as “uninspiring” (Nyuykonge and Omotola, 2015) with PDP making allegations and spreading rumors that Bahari was ill

with cancer, lacked the basic educational requirements to be a candidate, and had, somehow, caused fuel shortages. The APC did a better job of focusing on “core issues it set out as its priorities” but also hampered on the “underperformance” of the PDP (Nyuykonge and Omotola). APC’s campaign strategy had as much to do with focusing on the perceived failures of the PDP as it did with the party articulating its own vision for Nigeria.

### Technology: Biometric Voting and Social Media

The 2015 Nigerian presidential election was held on March 28 – 29, 2015, following a six-week postponement due to security threats imposed by Boko Haram. The postponement also provided additional time for INEC to oversee distribution of newly implemented national biometric voter identification cards (Sotubo, 2015). More than 28.5 million votes were tallied in the final count, with opposition candidate Muhammadu Buhari (15,424,921 votes) of the All Progressives Congress defeating incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan (12,853,162 votes) of the People’s Democratic Party. Buhari would net 2.5 million more votes than Jonathan (with twelve minor opposition party candidates accruing just over 300,000 votes) (Independent National Electoral Commission, 2018). Buhari’s decisive victory marked the first time that the PDP had been defeated since Nigeria’s Fourth Republic was established in 1999.

Violence was widely predicted in the leadup to the 2015 election. Observers noted that the 2011 elections, which included allegations of fraud and misconduct, resulted in 800 deaths and 65,000 displacements (Orji, 2014, p. 122). Violence was attributed to four causes: The wide powers vested in the presidency coupled with the country’s oil wealth

(the president's implicit power to allocate such resources creating incentives for bad actors), existing ethnic tensions that are exacerbated during election periods, an impoverished population prone to protest, and a lack of security and law enforcement (p. 122-123). The landscape for potential violence in 2015 included lingering sentiments about the 2011 election and the internal party politics of PDP (party leadership was split over Jonathan's decision to run for another term), rising security threats such as Boko Haram, and the rise in social media (p. 124 - 128). Presciently, scholars predicted an election perceived as free and credible would offset incidents of violence (p. 127). The 2015 election was conducted largely without incident (though there were deaths numbering into the dozens in the lead up to the election, a much smaller number than the hundreds that had been killed in 2011).

The use of biometric smart card readers was a major factor contributing to the perceived fairness and credibility of the 2015 Nigerian presidential election. In advance of the election, voters received national voter identification cards tied to biometric data including their fingerprint. The Permanent Voters' Cards (PVCs) were read by a smartcard reader at election sites such that fingerprints on file could be cross checked against the voter present at the poll. The rollout of the PVCs was an acknowledgement that elections in the past had been susceptible to rigging of the vote tally and "that reliable voter registration and identification mechanisms are among the preconditions for free, fair, and credible elections (Nwangwu et al., 2018, p. 4)."

Past Nigerian elections included a wide range of electoral misconduct, in some cases perpetrated by INEC itself. In the 2003 election:

Electoral misconducts perpetrated by INEC and its unscrupulous officials include unlawful possession of ballot papers and boxes, unlawful

possession of voters' cards, stuffing of ballot boxes, forgery of results, falsification of result sheets, tampering with ballot boxes, collusion with party agents for fat financial rewards, and inconsistent application of INEC's procedures across the country (Nwangwu et al., p. 8).

The reform measures began largely because of the appointment of a new Chairmen, Attahiru Jega, in 2011 and a collective realization among governing elites that the election violence that plagued the 2011 election could not be repeated. The introduction of the biometric card readers in the 2015 election went further than a previous reform in 2011 that had digitized the voter registry but did not yet have a means of verifying a voter's identity at the polls.

Despite difficulties in rolling out the biometric technology, it was a substantive measure in preventing voters from casting more than one vote and in preventing politicians or election officials from stuffing the ballot box. At least 800,000 double registrations were cancelled through detection of duplicate fingerprints (p. 9). A test-run before the election experienced a 41 percent failure rate in matching fingerprints, leading INEC to put in place a system for casting provisional ballots (p. 10). The test-run and implementation of a consistent verification and voting process helped bolster the perceived credibility of the election:

The credibility of the elections, arising from the use of the anti-rigging technology, can also be deduced from the fact that this is the first time in the electoral annals of Nigeria that candidates would concede defeat and call to congratulate the winners. This happened first at the national level when President Goodluck Jonathan called to congratulate General Muhammadu Buhari on March 31, 2015 (p. 11).

Nigeria's 2015 presidential election marked the first transition of power from the ruling PDP party to an opposition candidate since the Fourth Republic was established in 1999, marking a historic moment in Nigeria's march towards multiparty democracy (Owen and Usman, p. 455). Although national voter turnout declined to 47 percent of the



electorate, the data point cannot be directly compared to previous elections that were fraught with manipulation of ballot boxes and voter tallies. The success of the election can be seen in the general assessments of domestic and international election monitors who declared the vote “peaceful and generally credible” and a post-election poll that saw 80 percent of respondents express confidence in INEC and its chairman (p. 13).

The electoral success of an opposition candidate was all the more remarkable in that the Nigerian presidency contains a built-in incumbency advantage, ranging from command over the army and police as well as appointments of “the cabinet and the boards of over 700 parastatals (Owen and Zainab, 2015, p. 456).” The immense powers of the presidency result in patronage politics in which political and economic elites in the country have an incentive to support the sitting president, and the incumbent has an incentive to engage in electoral fraud to maintain the immense power up for grabs. Despite the incumbency advantage, the ruling party was beset by infighting that had begun in Obasanjo’s second term and reached a fever pitch with Jonathan’s decision to seek reelection in 2011, splitting the support of political elites. The track record for the PDP’s “dismal record in economic management, addressing human development challenges, tackling corruption, and securing lives and property” (Owen and Zainab, p. 456 – 457) did the party no favors at the ballot box, and the efforts by INEC to ensure a free and fair election devoid of the vote rigging of the past presented a more level playing field for the presidential context.

While the PDP’s governing record contributed in part to its electoral defeat, the consensus among scholars and media observers is that INEC’s role in providing an open and transparent election was the precursor needed for an opposition party to succeed in

Nigeria. Infighting within the PDP also cannot be overlooked, with Nigerian scholar Ernest Aniche concurring with the conclusions of Owen and Zainab that the “lack of internal democracy” within the PDP and the “authoritarian character” of the party led to its defeat. While voters expressed concerns about the security threat from Boko Haram, ongoing government corruption, and shocks to the Nigerian economy from the declining price of oil in the global market (despite continued growth of Nigeria’s GDP during Johnathan’s term) (News24, 2015), none of these issues were new to the 2015 election. Media accounts also show that factors like tribal and religious identity of the candidates were just as important as voters made up their minds about voting.

In addition to the use of biometric voter registration cards, technology was used by average citizens in new ways in 2015 as they engaged on social media in record numbers. 70 percent of Nigerians are active on social media (p. 10), driven by the increased proliferation of mobile phone access (p. 11). Researchers “found that Twitter was ten times more active over the election period than at ‘normal’ times (Bartlett and Krasodonski-Jones, 2015, p. 5).” Just as the voter cards contributed to the conduct of a free and fair election, Twitter and other social media outlets had a similar effect in that they became outlets for transmitting and disseminating knowledge including “data about electoral misconduct” and gave users the ability to counter “rumors or misinformation (p. 6).” Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms provided broad capabilities for engagement between “citizens, citizen-journalists, bloggers and news outlets, NGOS and political campaigns” (p. 46). The technology armed these constituencies with the ability to detect violence in real-time, monitor electoral misconduct, and dispel rumors and misinformation (p. 44-45). The increased use of social media and the near instant access

to information that comes with it may have been a contributing factor, when coupled with INECs ability to promote a credible election backed by an information campaign, to reigning in the violence that plagued the 2011 elections.

Studies on campaign spending and the impact on voters reveal that traditional campaign issues such as the economy and national security played a smaller role in voters' decisions than did factors like the religion or ethnicity of a candidate. Efforts in 2015 to both enforce existing campaign finance laws and reform the laws governing fundraising and campaign spending in Nigerian politics were largely unsuccessful (Ukase, 2015). Campaign finance violations were rampant and unchecked (Sule et al., 2018). Despite the unrestrained campaign spending, political advertising appears to have limited impact on voters. Approximately half of respondents in one survey said political advertising was not a factor in their selection, with "ethnic considerations and religious beliefs" playing a larger role in their vote. (Tejumaiye et al., 2018, p. 1)." Bolstering the notion that political campaigns in Nigeria had done little to differentiate their platforms, researchers concluded "elections in Nigeria are largely negative with little emphasis on issues, political adverts have little influence on voting behavior" (p. 6), and fewer than half of ads were issue-based. Rather than attempt to swing voters on an issues-based appeal, political advertising appears to have leveraged existing notions and preconceptions, playing on personality politics rather than presenting a vision or alternative to the opposing party.

## Concluding Observations

Goodluck Jonathan's 2015 defeat to Muhammadu Buhari marked the first time in sixteen years that the People's Democratic Party had been defeated in a presidential election, ushering the newly formed unity party All Progressives Congress to power. While issues like the national economy and security were on voters' minds, personality politics including religious and ethnic considerations played an outsized role. The ability of the Independent National Electoral Commission to educate voters and introduce technology into the national voter registration and identification process coupled with the growing use of real time communication among voters on social media created a more credible and transparent environment than previous elections. The APC was also able to take advantage of the infighting and internal party politics that divided the PDP leadership. By the measure of an election that domestic and international observers agreed was free and fair, with the defeated incumbent acknowledging defeat and turning power over to his successor of an opposing political party, the 2015 election marked a historic milestone in Nigeria's transition to multiparty democracy.

While the beyond the scope of this research, some examination of the upcoming 2019 Nigerian presidential elections is worth considering. President Muhammadu Buhari was faced with a recession in 2016 and a slowdown in economic growth even as oil prices began to recover (Financial Times, 2018). His absence from the country for prolonged periods of time amidst rumors of declining health (even at one point denying rumors of his own death) (Kazeem, 2018) created a national sense of *déjà vu*. Buhari's economic stumbles coupled with his ongoing medical treatment sets the stage for a February 2019 presidential contest that will repeat the cycle of independence generation

leaders competing at the polls. Representing the PDP is Atiku Abubakar, former Vice President under President Olusegun Obasanjo. PDP infighting has continued, with Obasanjo initially refusing to back Abubakar, and the campaign mirrors 2015 in its lack of substantive policy debate. Social media is expected to play a large role in the 2019 contest by empowering citizen journalists and limiting the ability of bad actors to manipulate results at the polls, though there are increased concerns about proliferation of fake news on social media outlets. One final cause for concern is whether INEC can improve on its successes from 2015. A more educated voter population has higher expectations on INEC to implement reform and correct lingering mistakes; even a performance equivalent to that in 2015 would be seen as a potential retrenchment of newly enshrined democratic norms (Verjee et al., 2018).

### Chapter III.

#### Case Study: Ghana (2016)

Ghana, a West African country of nearly 30 million bordering the Gulf of Guinea, is one of Africa's premier democratic success stories. The country gained independence from British colonial rule in 1957, with its inaugural constitution and government established in 1960 under liberation leader Kwame Nkrumah, who served as its first president. Today, Ghana is the eleventh largest economy in Africa (International Monetary Fund, 2018) and a shining success story for its democracy, culture, and national resource exports.

The path to Ghana's thriving democracy—which has now seen the peaceful transfer of power between its major political parties in presidential elections on three occasions—was however fractured and violent. Nkrumah's rule was marked by increasingly authoritarian tendencies, and supporters of his calls for pan-Africanism and unity were beset by faltering economic conditions, corruption, and a poorly managed government (Meredith, 2011, p. 191). After losing the support of the military, Nkrumah was deposed in a coup in 1966 while traveling abroad (p. 192).

The regime that had removed Nkrumah from power would become known as the Second Republic, itself a series of leadership transitions by forced coups. The Second Republic would come to an end at the hand of Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings, who led his Armed Forces Revolutionary Council in deposing a series of regimes seen as corrupt and indebted to European colonial powers (Meredith, 2011, p. 218-9). Rawlings

would briefly cede power to Hilla Limann, only to depose him in yet another coup in 1981. Rawlings maintained rule in Ghana for the next twenty years (p. 393-4).

Despite his long hold on power, Rawlings remained a popular figure with a majority of Ghanaians (p. 394) and only begrudgingly began to implement democratic reforms in 1992. In rapid succession, he allowed for opposition political parties and the drafting of a new constitution, culminating in a November 1992 election under the Fourth Republic since Ghana's independence. Rawlings legacy remains controversial; depending on one's vantage point, he is the leader of a violent coup that saw three former heads of state executed on a beach (The Economist, 2001), a ruler who held power for twenty years while simultaneously "giving back Ghanaians their national pride" (Adedeji, 2001, p. 1), or a darling of the international community (Meredith, p. 688) credited with transitioning the nation to multiparty democracy.

It is this last accomplishment—observing the results of the 2000 election to accept both his term limited retirement after two four-year terms in office as well as the defeat of his National Democratic Congress party mate and Vice President John Atta Mills—that will mark Rawlings legacy and contribution to instituting multiparty democratic rule in Ghana. John Kufuor, representing the New Patriotic Party, and Atta Mills entered a run-off election in December 2000 (as they were the two top vote receivers but neither had cleared 50 percent of the vote). Kufuor won with 56.9 percent of the vote, receiving 900,000 votes more than Atta Mills (African Elections Database, 2012).

Atta Mills returned to defeat Nana Afukko-Addo (representing the NPP after Kufuor's term-limit mandated retirement) in the 2008 election, but with a much smaller margin than Kufuor had received eight years earlier. The run-off election separated him

by less than 41,000 votes. The 2008 election marked a milestone in passing Huntington's two-turnover test, with the first transition of power from the National Democratic Congress to the New Patriotic Party in 2001, and the second transition back to the NDC in 2017. Atta Mills died while in office in 2012, succeeding the presidency to Vice President John Mahama.

### 2016 Election

The electoral contest between John Mahama of the National Democratic Congress and Nana Akufo-Addo of the New Patriotic Party in 2016, which is the focus for this case study, marked a second milestone in Ghana's evolving democracy. The election became the first time in the twenty-four years of the Fourth Republic that a sitting president eligible for reelection was defeated. The defeat was particularly stunning in that observers of Ghanaian politics saw an air of invincibility among incumbent candidates, with voters previously echoing a "‘give him some more time’ mentality (Boakye, 2018)." Mahama also remained popular with his party following his defeat and is even seen as a potential contender in the 2020 presidential election (Adamu, 2018), with one study showing he could win his party's primary with 56 percent of the vote (Adom Online, 2018).

Echoing back to the anxieties that had befallen previous regimes, Mahama's presidency was beset by failures to "fight the canker of corruption (Boakye)." While Akufo-Addo's victory by nearly 1,000,000 (Electoral Commission of Ghana, 2017) votes paints an outsized defeat for Mahama and the NDC, the numbers are worth evaluating against the results the 2012 election:



The NPP gained just a little over two hundred thousand more than this in 2016. The NDC had a voter drop of over 800,000 from the 2012 election. [...] The NPP gained a little over 400,000 votes more than their results in 2012. This indicates that for a large number of people who saw the NDC as a wrong party to lead them in 2016, the NPP is still never an option for them (Boakye).

This analysis concludes that waning support for the incumbent, rather than a shift of voters to the opposition party, was a determining factor for Mahama's loss in 2016.

Political scientists have observed that redistricting of administrative territories for the purposes of voting or parliamentary representation can be used by politicians to influence electoral outcomes. Incumbents may, for example, seek to allocate national resources to districts favorable to their party or redistrict areas where opposition parties enjoy a strong base of support. Ghana presents as a unique example when compared to other redistricting efforts in Africa's electoral systems in that both political parties that have held the presidency used redistricting to resolve issues with malapportionment, rather than to engage in patronage politics (Resnick, 2017, p. 58). The result has created an incumbency advantage for the party in power, but given the results of the 2016 election, the advantage seems limited to parliamentary gains and not victory in the presidency.

A 2017 review in the *Journal of Democracy* further explored why John Mahama did not appear to have an incumbency advantage in the 2016 election. The authors cite "deteriorating economic conditions, opposition learning, more effective and dynamic electoral processes, and increasingly assertive voters (Cheeseman et al., 2017, p. 93)." The NPP ran on a campaign focused on turnout of rural areas, with a "No Lights No Votes" slogan designed to drum up support among voters unsatisfied with Ghana's economic progress. Economic conditions alone, however, did not account for the

electorate's decisions: repeated transfers of power at the ballot box reinforced to voters that political change is possible, voters are becoming increasingly educated and demanding more of their political leaders, and Ghana's political landscape becomes more competitive with each iterative national election (p. 94-95).

Ghanaian media outlets offered a concurring assessment in their analysis of the 2016 election. Concerns about the economy and growing perceptions of corruption weakened support for Mahama's presidency. Akufo-Addo and the NPP were able to capitalize on voter discontent by themselves running likeable candidates who could contend with Mahama's personal popularity, and a changing landscape in education levels and expectations for results among voters created circumstances ripe for change in the national leadership (Torny, 2016).

The 2016 political campaigns were conducted freely, with no restrictions placed on assembly, and both the NDC and NPP attracted larger crowds to their campaign rallies (Ayee, 2017, p. 317). The campaign messages themselves, however, often lacked substance in favor of "vilification and insults [...] symptomatic of the highly polarized and partisan nature of politics in the country (p. 317)." Like many other African democracies, Ghana lacks robust campaign finance laws or an enforcement regime. Even laws preventing vote buying lack enforcement, though vote buying at the presidential level does not seem to be widespread (as it is with parliamentary elections). The campaign time frame is unregulated, creating an environment in which incumbents can remain in a perpetual state of campaigning. There is evidence in the 2016 election that state resources including "employees, vehicles, buildings, and other assets were used for

the NDC campaign,” (p. 318) including instances of the president using official state appearances as de facto campaign events.

In reflecting on his defeat at the polls in 2016, John Mahama placed blame for his defeat on party politics, accepting no personal responsibility for the loss. He referred to the NDC’s position in the 2016 elections as “riding a lame horse into a race” and accused party members of “stealing and diverting money and resources meant for his campaign” (Boakye, 2018). The allegations are a somewhat stunning lack of self-reflection considering Mahama’s position as titular head of the party during his presidency, where he would be presupposed to control the party’s resources, candidates for office, and shared campaign messaging.

#### Electoral Commission of Ghana

The Electoral Commission of Ghana (EC) is codified in the 1992 constitution. The constitution guarantees for the body’s independence, freeing it from “the direction or control of any person or authority” (Electoral Commission of Ghana, 2018) in carrying out its duties to register voters, authorize political parties, and implement and oversee elections. The importance of Ghana’s electoral commission was underscored in President-elect Akufo-Addo’s victory speech following the announcement of the 2016 election results. Two days after the election, Chairperson Charlotte Osei declared the vote in favor of Akufo-Addo. His victory speech cited the announcement as a “constitutional obligation,” (Akufo-Addo, 2016) invoking a reverence for the commission’s role in the oversight of Ghana’s electoral process. He further went on to congratulate Osei and the electoral commission for a credible, free, and fair election.

The Electoral Commission of Ghana has long been championed by international observers for its conduct of independent and transparent elections that have engendered a culture of democratic norms (Whitfield, 2009), but the EC is also subjected to significant domestic criticism. The inaugural 1992 elections were marred by election violence, leading to an opposition boycott of the subsequent parliamentary elections (van Gyampo, 2017, p. 97-98). A 1993 law passed in response to the prior year's missteps implemented broad reforms in the conduct of elections, verifying voter identity and the accuracy of voter rolls, and a mandate for immediate declaration of results (p. 98-99).

Fingerprint scanners were introduced in the 2012 election as a means of combating voter fraud and verifying voters' identities. Nonetheless, the 2012 elections resulted in a challenge by the opposition party in Ghana's Supreme Court, asking that four million votes be discounted after issuing allegations of vote tampering (BBC News, 2013). In dismissing the case, the Supreme Court recommended additional electoral reforms involving a multi-stakeholder process "including political parties, faith-based organizations, professional bodies, and civil society organizations (van Gyampo, p. 100)." Evidence of the EC's ability to identify and implement meaningful reforms was mixed, with concerns from average Ghanaians that the EC was distracted by superficial reform efforts such as the rollout of a new logo. In particular, the EC appears to have failed in refining the voter rolls (Ayee, 2017, p. 325), a gap that leaves the vote open for abuse by allowing for fraudulent votes while simultaneously preventing all legitimate voters from exercising their rights at the polls.

Ghanaians critiqued the amount of time spent on the rollout of the new logo before the 2016 election as time not well spent (van Gyampo, p. 102-103), seeing the

branding effort as a distraction from real reform. The EC also embarked on the development of a new strategic plan to cover the years 2016 – 2020, potentially at the expense of implementing needed reforms in the leadup to the 2016 election (p. 103). Opposition parties felt slighted and perceived that the Commission was biased in favor of the ruling party (Ayee, p. 325). Efforts at voter education and transparency were severely lacking: “little or no information was provided regarding the implementation of the other electoral reform proposals for the 2016 election. The successful conduct of the 2016 general elections can therefore not be attributed to the implementation of serious electoral reform proposals (van Gyampo, p. 103)”. The EC itself boasted that twenty-seven electoral reforms recommended after the 2012 election were being implemented prior to 2016 (Electoral Commission of Ghana, 2016), but the list is light on specifics and does not go into detail about how and when the reforms would be implemented or enforced.

The peaceful, free, and transparent conduct of the 2016 Ghanaian presidential elections seems to be despite, rather than attributed to, direct actions of the Electoral Commission. Despite the successful outcome of the election from the standpoint of domestic and international election monitors (Ayee, 2017, p. 316), calls and petitions ensued to remove the leadership of the EC “over allegations of corruption, malfeasance, in-fighting among the key officials, abuse of office, [...] deep-seated hatred and internal wrangling, [...] embezzlement of funds [...] and] the awarding of contracts without an appropriate tendering process (van Gyampo, p. 104).” The EC was beset by allegations of bias, administrative oversights and failure to fully prepare for the 2016 elections, and a lack of efforts to maintain a clean voter registry. Despite the challenges and perceptions of misconduct by the EC, Ghana held a free and fair election (Ayee, 2017, p. 316) that

garnered the support of the domestic and international community and was free from the court challenges that had followed the 2016 vote.

### Legacy and Threats to Democracy

Despite the challenges they faced in the 2016 election, the Electoral Commission of Ghana had previously conducted open, free, and fair elections. In some respects, the increasing pressure on the EC to implement further reform is a result of Ghanaian voters internalizing democratic norms and raising their expectations for conduct at the polls and, in particular, the quality of the voter registry. Despite his present popularity, Mahama's 2016 campaign failed to excite the electorate, and persistent allegations of corruption coupled with a weakening economy allowed the opposition party to capitalize. Both the NDC and NPP engaged in personality politics over issue-driven campaigns, and voters growing used to enacting change at the ballot box seized on the failed promises of Mahama's administration.

Since his election, President Nana Akufo-Addo has remained relatively popular with Ghanaians and largely free from allegations of corruption or political scandals (save for allegations of plagiarizing his inaugural speech). His term in office thus far stands somewhat in contrast to the other case studies explored in this research, where political scandals and accusations of economic mismanagement have been met by heavy handed crackdowns on political opponents under the guise of rooting out corruption. The ability of Akufo-Addo's administration to get on with the business of governing is a testament to Ghana's strong twenty-five plus years of multiparty democracy.

A lingering concern is the continued independence of the Electoral Commission. In June 2018, acting on recommendations of the Chief Justice, President Akufo-Addo removed the Electoral Commission Chairperson Charlotte Osei along with two deputies (CitiNewsRoom, 2018). The controversies following Osei included the allegations of fraud and abuse of office in the awarding of procurement contracts that had been levied after the 2016 election. The National Democratic Congress spoke out against the removal (Osei had been appointed by then President and NDC party member John Mahama), and President Akufo-Addo denied any allegations of political motivation.

Osei and her removal remain something of a controversy in the Ghanaian press. Allegations that Osei was removed to favor the New Patriotic Party in the 2020 elections continue to resonate with National Democratic Congress party members, including calls for her replacement Jean Mensa to be unequivocally removed should the NDC return to power (MyNewsGh.com, 2018). Mensa generated further controversy with a decision to revert the Electoral Commission's logo to one used prior to Osei's tenure; NDC members considered the move a "needless waste of time" (MyJoyOnline, 2018) while NPP members called Osei's approved logo "occultic" (PeaceFMOnline, 2018).

While the logo controversy appears to be little more than trivial political maneuvering, calls for the NDC to replace the Electoral Commission Chairperson once back in office are of greater concern. The independence and autonomy of a national electoral commission has proven both in the case studies examined here as well as in a wide-body of established research to be integral to the conduct of free, open, fair, and competitive elections in multiparty democracies. Politicization of the EC by political actors threatens to undermine the credibility of Ghana's future elections.

John Mahama's presidency will remain historically noteworthy in the evolution of Ghana's multiparty democracy, marking the Fourth Republic's first sitting president to be defeated in an election and the first to serve only one term in office (Ayee, 2017, p. 320). His decision (and that of his party and supporters) to accept the results of the election without making baseless allegations of fraud or challenging the results in court helped further entrench the practice of democratic norms and respect for the outcome of elections. His legacy is exemplified in a photo taken at Flagstaff House (GhanaWeb, 2017), the official offices and residence of Ghana's president, in 2017. Former president Mahama joined his contemporaries—Jerry John-Rawlings, John Kufour, and the recently inaugurated Nana Akufo-Addo—for a meeting and photo opportunity that represented twenty-five years of multiparty democracy and peaceful transitions of power in Ghana.



## Chapter IV.

### Case Study: Zambia (2011)

The landlocked Southern African nation of Zambia, home to 17 million, became independent of British rule in 1964, with Kenneth Kaunda taking over as president of the then socialist nation. Kaunda's United National Independence Party (UNIP) maintained one-party rule "despite a catastrophic record of economic mismanagement over twenty-five years in office (Meredith, p.380-81)." Kaunda would finally be challenged in the early 1990s by Fredrick Chiluba, who led demands for multiparty democracy in Zambia. Chiluba cited the fall of socialism and rising tide of multiparty politics in the Eastern bloc after the collapse of the Soviet Union as evidence that single party socialist politics had failed (p. 406). Zambian citizens agreed, with popular protests breaking out in 1990 and culminating in Chiluba's formation of the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) political party in January 1991.

Facing popular opposition, Kaunda had no choice but to allow multiparty elections to move forward:

Kaunda used every trick in his arsenal to influence the vote. He kept a lid on maize prices, even though the cost of subsidies had reached \$1.5 million a day. He refused to end the twenty-seven-year state of emergency, giving him arbitrary powers. [...] He refused to update voter registration lists, effectively disenfranchising thousands. [...] He authorized government resources to be used for his own's party purposes. And he tried to block opposition access to the state media. (Meredith, p. 406).

Chiluba won the election with a resounding 76 percent of the vote, with his party receiving a similar share of seats in the National Assembly. Kaunda conceded the

election (gracefully offering a concession speech and turning over the statehouse to Chiluba), becoming independent Zambia's first president to retire through a democratic process.

Chiluba's MMD party would rule Zambia for the next twenty years. Following two terms in office, Chiluba's successor (and former Vice President) Levy Mwanawasa held office from 2002 to 2008. After being elected to a second term in 2006, Mwanawasa passed away in August 2008 following a stroke. Vice President Rupiah Banda, who had previously served for several years in parliament, assumed the presidency.

After three years in office, Banda faced reelection in September 2011. Michael Sata, representing the Patriotic Front (PF) party, challenged Banda. The formation of the Patriotic Front in 2001 is an example of the personality politics that dominate many African political parties. Sata formed the party in opposition to President Chiluba, who handpicked Levy Mwanawasa as the MMD party's successor. Sata thought his own popularity exceeded that of Mwanawasa's and took it as a personal affront that he had not been endorsed, electing to create his own political party in response (Kaluba, 2012). His motives show little evidence of concern about the direction of the party or the need for a governing platform different than that of the party he broke away from, but rather were driven by a need to be the titular head of a political party and a viable candidate for the presidency.

Sata and his Patriotic Front engaged in a decade long campaign of populist politics. During his time in the MMD party, Sata had gained "a reputation as a ferocious public speaker and a shrewd political tactician (Freedom House, 2014)." He capitalized on that reputation to deliver "revolutionary rhetoric" (Freedom House, 2014) that harped

on the failures of the MMD and corruption by its elected officials. In the 2011 election, Sata campaigned on rising the income of average Zambians, promising to root out corruption and even introduce a new constitution with the interests of the people at its core.

### 2011 Election

Michael Sata's populist rhetoric was countered with attempted character assassinations by Rupiah Banda's campaign. Neither campaign engaged in substantive policy debates but instead "candidates engaged in personal attacks as a campaign tactic rather than the discussion of political and policy issues (Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa, 2011)." The media served as something of an echo chamber for these allegations, with state media showing a bias towards the incumbent Banda. Private media likewise engaged in coverage skewed towards whichever candidate the outlet preferred, rather than attempting to maintain a neutral journalistic stance. Aside from the support of state sponsored media, Rupiah Banda did not appear to have a strong incumbency advantage. Some sources made claims of misappropriation of state resources and the threat or use of state violence, but international election observers found the claims were unsubstantiated and not widespread (Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa, 2011).

A lack of transparency or disclosures around campaign finance in the 2011 election is perhaps the biggest blemish on Zambia's democratic process. Zambia has no limits to campaign spending or laws related to the public disclosure of donations and their sources or how those donations are spent in support of the campaign (Electoral Institute

for Sustainable Democracy in Africa, 2011). Not only is the Zambian system ripe for potential abuse, campaign finances are so well hidden from the public eye that it would be impossible to fully investigate allegations of misdoing, with the possibility unethical donations and expenditures would be entirely legal even if uncovered. Likewise, Zambia has no public funding options, which some opposition parties cited as a concern in that they both were under resourced and met with resistance from donors who “fear reprisals by the ruling party (Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa, 2011).” Despite the lack of a substantive campaign and the concerns over financing, 300 international observers and 9,000 domestic observers concluded that the election was open and transparent.

Some observers pointed to waning enthusiasm for President Rupiah Banda’s administration, rather than explicit support for Michael Sata (who had already made three prior attempts at the presidency) as a key factor in Banda’s defeat (Ngoma, 2011). Another possible factor in defeat was the legacy of Frederick Chiluba, who passed away three months before the elections. Chiluba’s legacy—like that of most independence leaders and champions of African democracy—is mixed, with persistent allegations that he did not do enough to ensure a free and transparent electoral process necessary for a well-functioning democracy (Kimenyi and Moyo, 2011). Banda represented the MMD party that Chiluba had founded and was vice president to Chiluba’s hand-picked successor Levy Mwanawasa. Sata had split from the party to form the Patriotic Front, and it remains unclear to what degree Chiluba’s death was a reminder for Zambians at the voting booth of both the incremental economic and political progress the nation had made since 1991 as well as of the many undelivered promises of the MMD.

Rupiah Banda's departing remarks to the nation offer some self-reflection around his thoughts about why he lost the presidency. Banda credited MMD with bringing multiparty democracy and free market reform to Zambia but was forced to acknowledge the party had an uninterrupted hold on power since 1991 that had failed to live up to expectations: "Maybe we became complacent with our ideals. Maybe we did not listen. Maybe we did not hear. Did we become grey and lacking in ideas? Did we lose momentum? (Banda, 2011)" The framing of Banda's speech is noteworthy in that he recognizes the election results are not just a personal defeat but the end of twenty years of MMD rule. His assessment seems to suggest that voters were motivated by a desire for new leadership and that the MMD had failed to capture the hearts and minds of the populace. His analysis is light on specifics—policy prescriptions or ideas about governance—but accepts that the MMD had lost its direct connection with voters.

Going into the 2011 election, observers expected Banda to win reelection by a narrow victory as a result of incumbency advantage, Zambia's continued economic growth, and division amongst the opposition (Oxford, 2011). The United Party for National Development (UPND), which also formed as a splinter party from MMD, briefly aligned in an electoral pact with the Patriotic Front. The pact would however fall apart before the 2011 campaign, with PF and UPND running separate candidates. The breakdown of the brief alliance is noteworthy in that it helps dispel the theory that coalitions of opposition parties are a driving factor in opposition party victory at the polls. The Patriotic Front in 2011 not only defeated the incumbent MMD party but was able to do so while alienating the third largest political party.

One study exploring the question of incumbency advantage in African electoral politics concluded that “higher levels of voter information, poorer economic conditions, and a structural shift in party competition” (MacDonald, 2014) contributed to a growing incumbency *disadvantage*. That is, a more educated voter population coupled with growing dissatisfaction over economic progress proved to be a threat to incumbent politicians. The researcher also concluded that candidates tended to identify their preferences by party, rather than by individual candidate. Michael Sata’s victory made him only “the seventh opposition candidate to win executive elections in a non-founding election in Sub-Saharan Africa since 1990 (Helle and Rakner, 2012, p. 1).”

#### Electoral Commission of Zambia

The Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) was established under the 1996 constitution as an independent and autonomous body responsible for governing the nations’ elections (Electoral Commission of Zambia, 2018). The ECZ of Zambia is perhaps the least observed and studied of the electoral commissions reviewed for this research. Few peer-reviewed studies have looked at the commissions design or conduct, although one study concluded that the establishment of ECZ was a “non-issue in the liberalization process” (Basedau et al., 2007, p. 153) as former British-colonies were able to mirror the rules-based system of governance (p. 163) imposed during colonial rule. Commission members are appointed by the President and ratified by the National Assembly. To maintain an arms-length distance from these appointing bodies, ECZ deals directly with the Ministry of Finance on budgetary matters; the Ministry is

constitutionally obligated to fully fund ECZ, who is then subject to independent external audit (African Democracy Encyclopedia Project, 2016).

ECZ's constitutional mandate—in addition to the general oversight and conduct of national elections—includes a mandate to oversee the technology deployed during elections. On this front, ECZ's performance in the 2011 election was lacking. Michael Sata's victory speech before Parliament vocalized support for the ECZ, recognizing the importance of its constitutionally mandated role in ensuring a free and fair election process but also the gaps in overseeing the 2011 contest:

My commendations also go to the chairperson and staff of the electoral commission of Zambia for working tirelessly in conducting the just ended tripartite elections successfully under difficult conditions. Lack of consensus on some issues, the late delivery of electoral materials, late opening of some polling stations and delayed announcement of the election results, were some of the major challenges. My government commits itself to addressing these issues in order to enhance the capacity of the electoral commission of Zambia and bring it in line with the expectations of our democratic dispensation. (Sata, 2011)

ECZ's website was hacked before the official vote tallies had been completed and announced (Lusaka Times, 2011). Hackers posted falsified vote totals proclaiming an overwhelming victory for Michael Sata. ECZ claims to have taken down the false posts within minutes of their detection, but national media outlets had begun to report on the numbers, creating some level of confusion about where the official results stood.

As of the time of this writing, ECZ's transparency as the body of record for Zambia's elections is lacking. The ECZ website contains links to official vote tallies for previous elections, but the links redirect to a 'page not found' error. The lack of ECZ's own publicly available record keeping coupled with the confusion in the press at the time the vote tallies were officially announced makes it difficult to review an official vote tally and assess the claim made in some contemporaneous media accounts that Rupiah Banda's

waning support, rather than outright support for Michael Sata, may have been a contributing factor in his defeat. The official vote tallies announced as Michael Sata was declared winner were missing seven constituencies that were pending a final vote count (but which were presumably small enough that they would not have swayed the election) (BBC, 2011).

### The China Factor

China's growing presence and financial investment in Africa, which went from virtually nonexistent in 2003 to \$30 billion dollars annually by 2008, was one of the major issues seized on by Michael Sata's campaign. Zambia is by the far the largest recipient of Chinese aid both in percentage (35 percent compared to the second-largest aid recipient Nigeria's 17 percent) and per capita (Nigeria's population is more than ten times that of Zambia's but receives about half the amount of Chinese investment) (Sow, 2018). China's primary interest in Zambia, which also includes investments in infrastructure, is mining of copper.

Human Rights Watch concluded in 2011 that safety and labor conditions at Chinese owned mines were the worst in the country (Wells, 2011). China also has a habit of importing Chinese nationals to undertake construction and infrastructure development projects in Zambia, leaving only poorer paying, menial, and often times dangerous work to the local Zambian population. Infrastructure development projects also do not come without a financial cost to Zambia; the Chinese foreign aid model includes both foreign direct investment as well as heavily debt financed public projects that become the responsibility of the Zambian government.



Michael Sata's populist campaign capitalized on national unease about China's role in Zambia, staking out a populist and anti-foreign investment sentiment (Mutale, 2011). Observers questioned the earnestness of Sata's campaign, as in public he used fiery rhetoric to call out China and made promises to redefine their engagement with Zambia, but behind the scenes he made overtures that his administration would remain friendly to foreign investment. Sata capitalized on a successful political campaign formula, using a storytelling narrative that cast China as a villain who victimized the Zambian people with the blessings of Rupiah Banda; Michael Sata would be the hero to save the nation. He perpetuated the narrative with unproven allegations that Banda himself was a beneficiary of Chinese investment in the copper industry (Wonacott and Bariyo, 2011) while lower class citizens were harmed by China's actions.

While Sata's rhetoric engaged a populist narrative, his allegations were not entirely without merit. In the leadup to the election, managers of a Chinese owned coal mine opened fire on Zambian protestors. The Chinese nationals involved faced no charges (New York Times, 2011) after government officials dismissed the charges without a public announcement or further inquiry into the incident. *The New York Times* reported that "the shootings outraged many Zambians who resent China's enormous economic influence over their country, where most people live on less than \$5 a day, and the episode seemed to feed straight into Mr. Sata's political campaign." The outsized role of China in Zambia served as a major catalyst for Sata's victory over Banda.

## Sata Presidency and Aftermath

Though it is beyond the scope of this research, some attention is merited towards the question of whether Michael Sata's ascendancy to the presidency, breaking two decades of rule by the MMD, helped to strengthen Zambia's multiparty democracy. Regrettably, Sata's time in office was marked by a roll-back of democratic values (Freedom House, 2014) and continued engagement with populist rhetoric:

Sata lacked vision and did not produce any new ideas. He constantly looked over his shoulder and made many attempts to overturn initiatives by his more recent predecessors. He modelled his party along the lines of Kaunda's UNIP, which exacerbated political antagonisms with other parties and in fighting within his own party. He was a populist and his development initiatives emerged during political rallies in order to please the crowds. New districts and new universities were proclaimed in this fashion, with no regard to their usefulness, their affordability or the availability of funds to complete them. His most important initiative, the construction of some 8,000 km of paved roads, is flagging, with many contractors ceasing work because of unpaid arrears. (Sardanis, 2015)

Sata pursued corruption charges against his predecessor, Rupiah Banda, (Mwenya, 2014), which were perceived to be largely without merit and quietly disappeared by the time of Sata's untimely death in 2014. Banda has since gone on to receive his state issued retirement home (Phiri, 2018) and adopted the role of international statesman (Nsehe, 2016), discrediting the corruption case that Sata had made. During his tenure, Sata's Patriotic Front joined Socialists International, a coalition of political parties seeking to establish democratic socialism, and Sata was accused of economic mismanagement. In the context of Samuel Huntington's theory that economic stability is a precursor to a healthy democracy, Michael Sata's reign did no favors to Zambia's multiparty democracy.

Perhaps one promising outcome of Michael Sata's presidency, which came about after his fourth run for the office: Zambia's Parliament engaged in a youth-led debate to

consider limiting the number of times one can run for presidential office (Lusaka Times, 2018). Without passing judgement on the merit of campaign limits, one can still conclude that the engagement of young voters and politicians representing Zambia's next generation of leadership in a robust debate about the nation's multiparty democracy is a positive step forward.

## Chapter V.

### Conclusion

#### Limitations and Further Research

The conclusions reached in this research are limited, in part, by the assumption that Samuel Huntington's two-turnover test is indeed a viable factor for assessing Sub-Saharan Africa's increasing trend towards democratization. Such an assumption implicitly excludes analysis of robust democratic nations such as Botswana, which has been under the continued rule of the Botswana Democratic Party since independence in 1966, or South Africa, which has been under the continued rule of the African National Congress since independence in 1994. Applying Huntington's model to African nations also precludes analysis of how indigenous political systems, such as the *kgotla* community meetings practiced in Botswana, may themselves be an example of democratic practices even within de facto one-party states.

The research is also limited by the writer's own limitations. French and Portuguese speaking countries were omitted from the potential case studies due to language limitations. Statistical analysis of the V-Dem data set (or other relevant data sets) was considered but ultimately discarded in favor of a case study-based approach. While some researchers have refuted the reliability of existing data sets for exploring electoral competition and outcomes (Hyde and Marinov, 2011, p. 193-4), future avenues of research could use such data sets to determine linkages between party transitions and democratic indicators. Such research could take a data-driven approach to determining

whether successive transitions of power from incumbents to opposition parties is a significant factor in improving the nations quality of democracy.

Research that attempts to draw generalities about dozens of countries with disparate ethnicities, languages, and cultures is inherently challenged by the unique set of circumstances experienced in individual countries and governments. Regardless of the limitations, value remains in a comparative analysis of incumbent power transitions in African democracies given the continent's shared colonial history and nascent transitions to multiparty democracy. To mitigate that risk, the case analysis studies attempted a systematic approach to answer a common set of research questions and explore how the available source material supported or contracted the hypothesis presented.

A final challenge was the availability of consistent source material, including contemporaneous accounts, official records, and peer-reviewed academic studies, for each research question presented. Zambia proved particularly difficult due to gaps in the Electoral Commission's website as well as a lack of peer-reviewed study of the 2011 election.

## Conclusions

Incumbent defeat in presidential elections in African democracies occurs when the electoral body charged with overseeing an election exerts independence and autonomy from undue political influence and has either enacted reforms towards holding more free and fair elections or has gone through several iterative elections that observers regarded as free and fair. National economic indicators, such as GDP, are not weighed as heavily by voters as are perceptions about whether a candidate delivered on their

promises, and personality politics (including attachments to ethnic or religious identities) have outsized influence at the polls. The continued independence of electoral commissions, including implementation of robust campaign finance laws, is a critical factor in ensuring robust multi-party democracy in Africa.

The case studies examined in this research reveal a complex mix of economic indicators. All three countries had real growth in their GDP during the incumbents' time in office, but voters instead responded based on their perceptions about the economy and whether a leader had lived up to the economic growth they anticipated rather than the level of growth delivered. Voters' perceptions about the economy matched their lived experiences—Ghana and Nigeria saw growing inflation rates and rising costs of living in the leadup to their elections, and the influence of China in Zambia raised questions about whether the national economy benefited the working poor or a political elite.

As demonstrated in the case studies, however, economic conditions alone were not a deciding factor in electoral outcomes. Nigerian voters acknowledged that factors like ethnicity and religion weighed in their decision making to a somewhat greater degree than did campaign issue-driven advertising. The campaigns conducted in the leadup to the elections reviewed were contests of personality politics, with candidates eschewing issue-based debates in favor of accusations ranging from ill health, gross mismanagement, corruption, and/or undue foreign influence on their opponents. Opposition political parties did not distinguish themselves by means of an alternative governing platform but instead sought to capitalize on voters' perceptions that the incumbent party had not lived up to promises or expectations. Media commentators often remarked in the lead-up to the elections that it was the incumbents election to lose; that

is, waning enthusiasm for the incumbent did more to drive the results than did real enthusiasm or genuine support for the opposition candidate. The personalities over platforms approach played into voters' perceptions (whether grounded in reality or a byproduct of campaign rhetoric) that failures to fully implement a promised agenda or deliver on economic promises must be a deficit of personality and evidence of a candidate's corruption or influence from foreign actors.

A critical factor demonstrated in this research is the role of an independent electoral commission in a multiparty democracy. While the three nations in question lack robust campaign finance law and enforcement, they do have independent electoral bodies enshrined in their constitutions, generally regarded and respected by the public, and acknowledged by political leadership as integral to the democratic process. The ongoing issues with Ghana's Electoral Commission, raising questions about its independence and ability to implement reform going into future elections, is tempered by a body of educated voters with a nearly three-decade long record of enacting change through the ballot box. In the case of Nigeria, the culling of voter rolls and introduction of technology to combat fraud at the ballot box was as a significant factor providing for the nation's transition from de facto one-party rule. While an independent electoral commission alone does not provide for opposition party victory, it does provide the level playing field by which parties can mount a credible campaign.

Independent electoral commissions also play a key role in institutionalizing democratic norms and educating voters. By holding successive elections and making incremental progress that responds to the concerns or failures of previous elections, electoral commissions begin to gain the trust of voters, politicians, and the international

community that they are able to independently execute an election free and fair from undue influence. As seen in the case of Ghana, international and domestic perceptions about an electoral body's independence may not align, and body's that once operated with a level of independence are not immune to political manipulation. However, a voting population that experiences successive elections becomes better educated about democratic norms and can maintain pressure on political leaders, courts, and electoral commissions themselves to maintain independence and continue to implement reform. Electoral bodies also contribute to growing levels of voter education when, as in the case of Nigeria, they make efforts to demystify the electoral process, provide standard sets of procedures, and evenly apply administrative rules to all involved political parties and actors.

The growing trend of using technology to identify voters and prevent fraud or electoral manipulation is a costly effort but one that has proven worth the investment as voters respond positively to the measures with rising confidence in the electoral process. The impact of social media in the context of the case studies considered was a net positive in voters could readily disseminate information, creating hundreds of unofficial observers at ballot boxes across a nation. The looming downside of social media is the negative role that fake news and unsubstantiated rumors may play in future elections. Bad actors and unwitting audiences are engaging in widespread dissemination of misinformation that lacks journalistic or scholarly credibility (or is completely fabricated). Facebook recently announced limits to how information could be shared on its popular WhatsApp platform, which is widely used throughout Sub-Saharan Africa,



and the implications of today's social media environment on multiparty democratic elections in Africa remains to be seen.

Based on the case studies presented, there is weak evidence that opposition party coalitions contribute to electoral victories at the ballot box. Danielle Resnick reached similar conclusions in a 2013 study that concluded fluctuations in party support are often a means of personality politics of the individual leaders involved rather than a party's political platform, and coalitions often fail to hold together. In the case of Ghana, the last twenty-five years of multiparty democracy have been dominated by two political parties, both of which have rotated in the presidency. Zambia's Patriotic Front entered into a brief political coalition prior to the 2011 election but ultimately disbanded its alliance, and Michael Sata's populist rhetoric and fiery campaign speeches propelled him to the presidency regardless of the split.

Nigeria is the notable exception among these case studies in that a coalition of opposition parties formed to create the All Progressives Congress, taking a narrow lead in parliament after unification and going on to win the presidency. Based on the evidence presented in these case studies and Resnick's prior work, the Nigerian case appears to be an exception rather than a rule, and evidence there shows that waning support for and resentment against Goodluck Johnathan for seeking a de facto third term coupled with infighting of his own party may have played a greater role in his defeat than did the unification of APC.

Africa has the youngest population in the world, and how it will govern itself in the years and decades ahead as Africa's next generation of leaders takes over from the independence movement generation remains an open question. Multiparty democracy in

Africa will continue to improve if iterative election cycles are held to establish democratic norms in the voter base. The election of opposition parties coupled with peaceful transitions of power will legitimize the democratic process as voters seek and experience change through the ballot box. It will be critical for politicians to move past the personal attacks and towards more robust debate on policy substance as voters become better educated and engage with new technologies to spread ideas.

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