

Despite Idrissa's remarks in the introduction to the bibliography, the book purports – qua title so to say – to be somewhat comprehensive and thus much more than a mere 'guide of sorts'. This implied promise is, of course, hard to fulfil. Yet considering the format of the *Historical Dictionary* series, which takes the discrete modern nation state as its unit of analysis, this unfulfilled promise is perhaps a welcome counterpoint to the potential reification of its very unit of analysis.

There is no doubt that the *Historical Dictionary of Niger* serves as an ideal entry point and stepping stone for further research into issues related to Niger. Although some areas are covered more intensely than others (there is more on party politics than on Nigérien music, poetry and film-making, for example), I strongly recommend it to students and scholars interested in Niger.

MIRCO GÖPFERT

Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main

Political Leadership in Africa: leaders and development south of the Sahara by

GIOVANNI CARBONE & ALESSANDRO PELLEGGATA

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. 386. \$99.99 (hbk).

doi:10.1017/S0022278X21000239

Postcolonial identities and developmental discourses have largely been shaped and re-shaped around the image, personalities and, often, myths of political leaders who ushered their new nation states to independence and beyond. Africa has been no stranger to this phenomenon over the last six decades or so since its decolonisation commenced, largely in conjunction with its democratisation. The weakness of political institutions and, as a result, economic and administrative institutions, has compromised the 'stickiness' of democracy and the extent of progress in national development and social welfare. The curious juxtaposition of leaders holding on to power for protracted periods in many countries, even as others witness an almost intractable susceptibility to regular coups d'état, is at the heart of the 'leadership trap' in postcolonial Africa.

Giovanni Carbone and Alessandro Pellegata's *Political Leadership in Africa* is a unique and much-needed attempt at reconciling the lack of attention that political science and development studies tend to place on political leadership as a theme, with the centrality that political leaders command in public discourse and popular perception. The theoretical gaps in understanding how leadership and processes of selection and removal influence and interact with the political economy of development are reflected in the paucity of data that may enable the empirical analysis of this relationship.

Through the course of this highly readable book, Carbone and Pellegata present an engaging account of the shifting dynamics of political leadership in Africa. Cutting across successions, dynasties, constitutions, multiparty transitions during the 1990s, military coups and their socio-economic impacts, and the tricky question of mandating term limits, the book empirically examines the link between leadership and economic growth, social welfare, state consolidation and anti-corruption measures. Carbone and Pellegata's empirical evidence confirms the higher frequency of coups in West and Central Africa compared with Southern Africa, while the latter witnesses the highest number of multiparty elections and fewer

instances of violent and military-led regime change. Building on their own econometric analysis, they also update existing scholarship on categorisations by reducing the erstwhile focus on informal, neo-patrimonial modes of leadership and dropping features like ‘prophets’ and ‘tyrants’ to adapt to an evolving African political landscape where institutions and democratic legitimacy have acquired increasingly greater salience. The authors also discuss the role of interim leaders, a relatively less analysed topic.

The most important contribution of the book, however, is the Africa Leadership Change (ALC) dataset. This focuses on how individual political leaders across all African nations between 1960, or the subsequent year of independence, and 2018 attained and lost power and, in turn, how these conditions influenced their incentive structures while in office. Capturing practically all manner of leadership changes, ranging from multi-party electoral (incumbent or otherwise) to non-electoral (peaceful or violent), the ALC dataset helps unpack the relationship between political leadership and processes of socio-economic development. It goes down to extremely granular levels of specificity, differentiating between natural deaths, resignations, coups, guerrilla takeovers and foreign interference. It also accounts for presidential, parliamentary, monarchical and other intermediate forms of government, as well as the different modalities of electoral change, be it change within incumbent party leadership post-election, or succession across party lines. The ALC dataset informs the book’s main empirical analyses that confirm the positive developmental value of electoral competition and change of guard by due process, evident in trends such as decreasing corruption, and increasing leaders’ accountability, checks and balances by opposition parties, provision of public goods by incumbents, socio-economic progress and state efficiency.

However, Carbone and Pellegata clearly limit the scope of the dataset by assuming a leader to be the holder of a country’s top decision-making position. Their assumptions do not account for situations where the buck may not necessarily stop with the top-most official position, as with Paul Kagame who was Rwanda’s supreme authority despite being vice president from 1994 to 2000. Elite-oriented frameworks such as political settlements have been increasingly critiqued by poststructuralist perspectives over the past decade, leading to blended theories such as Danny MacKinnon’s concept of ‘scalar politics’. With greater interest in challenging pre-conceptions of scale, and with localisation increasingly shaping contemporary developmental discourse, there may be room for future disaggregation to other levels of leadership, even if restricted to the top-most subnational or local positions of authority. The structure and logic of the ALC dataset are sound – it can be readily merged with existing global databases such as the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict dataset and the World Bank’s World Development Indicators. Yet expanding the ALC dataset to subnational units of leadership might be of even greater value to international development actors, and to more grounded and localised studies of specific African regions.

It is also worth drawing special attention to the richness and expanse of Carbone and Pellegata’s literature review, which provides a masterful round-up of the ebb and flow in the importance of leadership as a subfield within the study of politics, ranging from Carlyle’s ‘great men in history’ treatise, to Tolstoy and Marx’s ‘leaders-do-not-matter’ theories. They contextualise the unease with which many scholars have viewed the relationship between leadership and democracy at a conceptual level, while noting a resurgence of interest in leadership as a theme

considering contemporary phenomena such as mass communication and unstable political parties and formations. The evolution of thought behind the shift in focus from deeply individualised studies of national leaders' personalities to studies that ground political leadership in how it impacts policy and socio-economic development has been captured well.

Carbone and Pellegata also posit an empirically justifiable and elegant new typology for African leaders. Presented as a neat flowchart, it categorises them as 'transients' if their stay in office is less than a year. If their term of office exceeds a year but the leader does not possess multiparty electoral legitimacy for the bulk of their time in office, then they are categorised as 'autocrats'. In cases where both of these conditions are satisfactorily met but the leader's actual rule does not abide by democratic standards, they are termed 'hegemons'. Finally, if each of these conditionalities holds true, then they are classified as 'democrats'. This is an eminently useful and more contemporary addition to the existing literature and will no doubt help ground future studies of African politics and leadership in a coherent typology. Overall, Carbone and Pellegata have made an invaluable contribution through this book, which will serve as an important reference for researchers and, equally, ought to be essential reading for political science and development studies courses.

UJJWAL KRISHNA
La Trobe University