

**Sanches, E. R. (2018). *Party systems in young democracies: Varieties of institutionalization in sub-Saharan Africa*. London: Routledge. 202 pp.**

In this book, Sanches presents an encompassing study of party system institutionalization (PSI) in sub-Saharan Africa. She first revisits the current literature, identifying the research gaps, and then firmly locates the discussion in African contexts. Interested in the varieties of PSI in democratic and hybrid states on the continent, Sanches purposefully isolates the variables of academic interest. By means of an eclectic analysis, she offers explanations for this diversity. As the political scientist makes clear, the main objective of her work is to explain varieties of PSI in sub-Saharan Africa (p. 2). Her conclusions are broadly-based and implicate not only historical legacies, but also environmental and relational factors.

The book is organized so that the arguments closely corroborate current knowledge, are plainly laid out, and are yet strong. It is an obvious strength to focus on structural and systemic elements, the operationalization of which Sanches skilfully justifies. More than merely assessing the general extent of institutionalization (pp. 18-45), the author seizes the opportunity to examine the huge variations (pp. 47-71). As such, effective research techniques play a significant part and the book's methodological approach merits special attention. Quantitative and qualitative methods are mixed. The former takes advantage of primary and secondary data pertaining to 30 countries from 1966 to 2016. The author decides on a total of 11 indicators (pp. 24-29). Six of them – electoral volatility, seat volatility, percentage of votes won by new parties, percentage of seats won by new parties, patterns of alternation in government and share of seats for the most voted party – operationalize the dimension of stability in patterns of interparty competition. The rest is reserved for measuring the dimension of stable roots in society and the dimension of organizational continuity as evidenced by splits and mergers. Statistical and graphical aids are aptly used, especially in this first part of the book. Hypotheses set and tested, three findings – transition mode, political institution types and citizen-link strategies – are cherry-picked and developed in the second part (p. 71). There, the diverse case method is adopted to

address notably what mechanisms underlie PSI variance, with each of the three selected countries representing one modal type: adequate, inadequate or over-institutionalization. Testimonies are obtained through semi-structured interviews with key informants during multi-sited fieldwork and the results are analysed. Strips of direct speech are translated, teased out and economically organized to achieve the best demonstrative and illustrative effects. Finally, all is integrated, and the political scientist recapitulates her major observations and findings in response to her original suppositions. The book accumulates the double advantage of the mixed method. It is numerically representative and richly textured. Reading this volume in relation to the body of literature on party system institutionalization, it is manifest that Sanches is up-to-date with the debates. Moments of parallel discussion are plenty and instances of reflective critique are abundant. Sanches is in continuous dialogue with this community within political science and African political studies dedicated to understanding how parties and party system operate over time in different contexts.

Cape Verde, Zambia and Mozambique are centre-staged in the discussion. Accordingly, the success of Cape Verde, possessing a “perfect” ration between institutionalization, democratization and political participation, is due to a strong incumbent party, exclusive institutional rules favourable to a two-party structure, positive citizen trust and a lack of ethnic and territorial conflicts (p. 73-94). In contrast, Sanches points out that revolutionary transition, haphazard organization of the opposition party, uncontrollable inflows of political participation, social and cultural cleavages, by-election unpredictability, etc. has undermined the Zambian case (pp. 96-119). Meanwhile, the Frelimo party has held such a tight grip on Mozambique that it has become coercive, excluded alternation, and exerted effective political boundary control (pp. 121-146). In each chapter, Sanches explains generously the strategies, mechanisms, internal and external appeals that the leaders, parties and dissident groups have experimented with. One critical remark can be made about the choice of the three case studies. While agreeing with the scientific rigor of zooming in on three sub-Saharan African cases, it is still tempting to isolate Cape Verde for being a small island developing state that has kept varying distances from the African continent throughout its history. In addition, Cape Verde and Mozambique both being former Portuguese colonies, the mental tendency of the reader to categorize the two together and away from Zambia in terms of political culture is inevitable. Nonetheless, the above cannot, in any way, count as the fault of the author. Seen from a different perspective, Sanches should instead be congratulated on her academic independence and objectiveness in the selection.

Another comment concerns the abrupt enlargement and shrinkage of the discussion at the end (pp. 158-161). The cross-regional comparison with other developing countries in Latin America and Asia is rather hasty, although it must be granted that Sanches draws attention to future research. On a different note, following Sanches' lead, it may be fruitful to delve into the connections or cleavages between PSI and democratic progress in emerging African states. The author is clear from the start about the differences between the two and her priority lies with PSI (p. 4). While the present work tends to suggest a paradoxical, negative or unstable relationship between PSI and democratic progress, more can be done to shed light on the operations and cultural, social and political subtleties.

Overall, Sanches' work is a much-welcomed contribution to the current corpus of academic inquiries. It meshes and juxtaposes an array of explanatory possibilities in degree and scope (p. 18). By looking at both the quantity and quality of PSI, we can separate highly institutionalized party systems that promote political participation and democratic development from those that are equally institutionalized but advance neither participation nor democratization (p. 157). The present survey is at once ambitious and innovative. It bridges the gap between the theoretical works on PSI and the relative poverty of applications on Africa. For one, Sanches gives salience to the transition periods and the impacts on later political developments of individual states. This is a major conclusion from the quantitative strand. PSI is partly but significantly a result of new transitions (p. 70). These insights in turn serve to indigenize the current theoretical constructs and lend us tools to investigate what is described as the African "black box" (p. 161). We will also agree that *Party systems in young democracies: Varieties of institutionalization in sub-Saharan Africa* is highly pedagogical. It is written in excellent academic language, free from unnecessary jargons, precise in its propositions and reasonable in length. It will prove invaluable not only for African Studies and Political Science teaching, learning and research, but also for political and civic engagements.

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