

Political Exclusion in Africa

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Summary

The political history of Africa is a history defined by political exclusion. Groups of people and politicians have been excluded from political participation on the basis of religion, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, and disability throughout the continent. Sometimes political exclusion is a result of a bigoted ideology of a group being inferior—as was the case during the colonial period. Other times, leaders use exclusion in order to maintain power, attempting to neutralize their rivals by removing them from the political system. That exclusion often creates destabilization, and sometimes violence. In some cases, notably in Côte d’Ivoire, for example, the debate over who is “legitimate” to include in politics and who is “illegitimate” has sparked civil wars and coups d’état. However, there is a strategic logic to political exclusion: it often tempts autocratic leaders as seemingly the “easiest” way of staying in power in the short term, even if it creates a higher risk of political violence in the long run. Nonetheless, political exclusion remains a widespread feature of most African states well into the 21st century. Until African politics become more inclusive, it is likely that the volatility associated with exclusionary politics will persist even if democratic institutions become stronger over time.

Keywords: political exclusion, African politics, political violence, democracy, civil wars, coups d’état, ethnic exclusion, elections, women in politics, candidates, election rigging

Subjects: Contentious Politics and Political Violence, Governance/Political Change, Groups and Identities, World Politics

Introduction: A Continent Defined by Exclusion

The political history of Africa is a history defined by political exclusion. Whether ethnic, religious, or gender-based, African politics has been sharply divided between those in power and those who are cast aside to the periphery. Furthermore, some minority groups have largely been shut out of African politics altogether based on sexual orientation, class, or disability. From colonial masters excluding the local population to African dictators excluding their rivals from lucrative patronage networks, the continent has seen significant variation of how political exclusion functions, but the march toward inclusive politics across Africa remains woefully incomplete.

Over time, the logic of exclusion has nonetheless evolved—from the purely racist motivations of white colonial powers over African subjects or the continued apartheid regimes of southern Africa, to a logic of political exclusion increasingly motivated by a desire to stay in power against political rivals. Some scholars have pointed to the rise of regimes using “strategic exclusion” to stave off coups, only to find themselves facing a civil war (Roessler, 2016). Others have pointed to ethnic exclusion and the concept of belonging—what an anthropologist might label as autochthony—as a way to separate those who have perceived legitimate claims to state power

and those “foreigners” who do not (Geschiere, 2009; Manby, 2013; Whitaker, 2005). Such debates are compounded by colonial history, which sometimes created or reinforced ethnic identities to divide the local population and other times was deliberately vague about questions of borders, citizenship, and identity (Bayart & Ellis, 2000; Glassman, 2000).

The implications of political exclusion in Africa have been profound. In some instances, they have provoked serious political violence: scholars have established that political exclusion during elections, for example, produces a higher risk of coups, civil wars, and riots and protests (Asal, Findley, Piazza, & Walsh, 2016; Harkness, 2018; Klaas, 2015). Furthermore, the distributional consequences of political exclusion are obvious; those in power benefit disproportionately from the spoils of the state compared to those who are excluded from power (Cheeseman, 2015; Kimenyi, 2006; Min, 2015). And, of course, the persistent absence of underrepresentation of women in top-ranking positions within sub-Saharan Africa (at least through the first two decades of the 21st century) has also skewed the continent’s politics in ways that systematically undervalue women’s education and empowerment (Coffe & Bolzendahl, 2011; Tamale, 2018). The politics of exclusion has also reverberated in narratives about African politics, as the study of African politics has also been dominated primarily by white men (Briggs & Weathers, 2016).

This article explores how the logic of political exclusion has shifted over time as a result of the onset of multiparty politics on the African continent; how the politics of nationality and citizenship has been weaponized to create deep rifts within myriad African societies; how exclusion has not only produced distributional inequality between those who wield power and those do not, but also provokes political violence; how women have systematically been relegated to the political sidelines (despite some notable achievements in recent years); and why any achievements of fragile African democracy are incomplete and likely to be unstable without a politics of inclusion. Two brief case studies—Côte d’Ivoire in the 1990s and early 2000s and Madagascar in the 2000s—illustrate some key dynamics of political exclusion.

The Evolution of the Exclusion Trap From Independence to Multiparty Politics

There are two major types of political exclusion in sub-Saharan Africa: broad-based exclusion of entire subgroups of the population (such as ethnic or religious minorities) and targeted exclusion of political leaders. Sometimes the two are separate; other times they are closely linked. For example, apartheid in South Africa was aimed at broad-based exclusion, but also ensured that black politicians would be excluded from top-level politics (Fjelde & Høglund, 2016; Wilson, 2001). On the other hand, in Côte d’Ivoire, targeted exclusion of a single candidate was the goal, but thousands of would-be Muslim voters were disenfranchised as collateral damage from that policy (Akindès, 2003; McGovern, 2011).

These distinctions are important because they speak to varied motivations. Apartheid-era politics was derived not from a desire to stave off a coup d’état, but from an ideology that justified the subjugation of black Africans because they were deemed inferior. Such a racist ideology is a

fundamentally different phenomenon from efforts in, say, Zambia, to exclude Kenneth Kaunda from running for president—not because of his ethnicity, race, or religion, but because he posed a serious electoral threat to the incumbent president (Klaas, 2015; Rakner, 2003; Van Donge, 1998).

Those motivations matter because a significant amount of political exclusion is more of the latter kind than the former—a rational and strategic political calculation to maintain power in fragile African states. However, just as the contours of sub-Saharan African politics were reshaped by postcolonial independence movements churning out strongmen and later by the onset of multiparty elections across the continent, the strategic risks and rewards of exclusion have been reshaped too.

The so-called “strong societies, weak states” problem has long ensured that African militaries are major power brokers on the continent, a sort of political intermediary that often ends up being a kingmaker even in civilian-led regimes. As Donald Horowitz put it in his seminal 1985 work *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, “The strength of the military and its constant proximity to power accord it a kind of counterpoint status to political parties and civilian regimes in struggles for ethnic inclusion and exclusion” (p. 471). This dynamic often confers the role of veto player to African militaries, who have shown that they can remove leaders from power with relative ease should the leader fail to retain the support of either the army brass or the rank-and-file soldiers (Jackman, 1978; Jenkins & Kposowa, 1992; McGowan, 2003). Crucially, that risk comes from *within* the regime—the leader faces being overthrown by people who are central to the state’s survival. And it is an urgent problem because coups—as their name implies—are a rapid and often unpredictable phenomenon that can transfer power in a matter of hours. Phil Roessler calls this phenomenon the “internal security dilemma” (Roessler, 2011, 2016).

However, there is a risk from outside the state too, in the form of uprisings, rebellions, revolutions, and, most of all, civil wars. Civil war risk requires a higher level of coordination because it demands a parallel military force that typically is formed not from the military or an existing institution, but from scratch. The barriers to entry are therefore higher; it is easier to use force against a regime when you already control the coercive power of the state than if you have to mobilize fighters, buy weapons, and do so without being jailed by a state that continues to have a monopoly on coercion. Despite these barriers, incidence of civil wars in Africa has been markedly higher than civil wars in other political regions, though there is growing evidence that levels of African violence are falling and that violence on the continent is sometimes overstated (Buhaug & Rod, 2006; Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Straus, 2012).

Phil Roessler’s work makes an important contribution to this debate, as he provides a link between fields of coup research and civil war research, which are too often separated. In his 2016 book *Ethnic Politics and State Power in Africa*, Roessler makes a strong case that political exclusion is a mediating strategy that vulnerable incumbents use to stay in power. However, they approach political exclusion differently depending on which type of risk they are facing. If a rival ethnic group or political leader is powerful, it is often most cost-effective to try to buy that rival off, incorporating its leaders into the regime, or providing them with substantial political patronage in lieu of genuine political power. However, in the post-independence era, the costs of buying off “big men” increased considerably. Furthermore, as Roessler argues, the Organization of African

Unity's "capital city" rule—which held that anyone who controlled the capital city of a country was, in fact, its legitimate ruler—inadvertently increased the incentives for coups d'état (Landau-Wells, 2008; Roessler, 2016). Under those conditions, a series of African despots ruling over one-party states created a sort of Faustian bargain, bringing powerful rivals into their government in an ethnic power-sharing arrangement, but simultaneously trying to "coup proof" by packing the military with soldiers and officers from the same ethnic group as the leader himself (Belkin & Schofer, 2003; Harkness, 2016). Sometimes those efforts were successful in the short term, but they often created a double risk of violence: first, inviting the proverbial fox into the regime's henhouse, where an ambitious rival could try to hijack the state military to sponsor a coup from within; and second, creating the widespread (and often accurate) perception that the institutions of the state weren't really about power-sharing at all but were being packed by loyalists (Roessler, 2016).

Over time, then, one-party leaders in sub-Saharan Africa began to consider the merits of political exclusion. Keeping their most powerful rivals away from the levers of state power (and the military) was tempting. It would ensure that would-be usurpers did not have a reason to be in contact with soldiers or military brass on a regular basis. That would limit their ability to clandestinely plot to topple the regime. Of course, as you might expect with strategic logic for vulnerable incumbents to maintain a precarious grip on power, exclusion came with trade-offs. Excluding a powerful rival—or a major rival ethnic group—would create serious animosity. And whether greed or grievance was a motivating factor, political exclusion would increase the risk of rebellion from excluded groups (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Collier, Hoeffler, & Roehner, 2009).

In other words, leaders face a bit of a catch-22 when they decide whether to include powerful rivals (which leads to an increased risk of a coup d'état from within the regime) or to exclude powerful rivals (which leads to an increased risk of a civil war launched from outside the regime). Roessler calls this the coup-civil war trap. Even under conditions of perfect information, it would be unclear which approach was most likely to allow the incumbent to stay in power. African leaders do not, of course, have access to perfect information. As a result, leaders make strategic calculations that often turn out to be gross miscalculations. Nonetheless, some rulers have used this strategy to maintain a precarious peace. As Roessler argues, "Though mountainous terrain, ethnic enclaves, large population, and a sparse state presence may increase the risk of conflict escalation, the regime is able to overcome these unfavourable structural conditions if it can develop strong political ties with powerbrokers from the area that aid the regime with local information and leverage." In other words, properly done, this delicate balancing act of including some rivals while excluding others can yield effective results. Roessler's work goes a long way toward explaining why rulers make choices that are seemingly irrational. It also explains why, sometimes, power-sharing agreements emerge in states where the leader is vulnerable. To mitigate the risk of political inclusion, African leaders often rotated their rivals throughout the cabinet and would sometimes send them abroad or to other postings that would keep them away from the military as a means of defusing the risk of a coup (Klaas, 2015).

Furthermore, it is worth noting that under Roessler's framework, it does not make sense to be particularly inclusive toward weak rivals or small ethnic groups. After all, including them would give an opportunity for potential enemies to create allies within the military that could be used to launch a coup d'état. And, unlike with powerful rivals, exclusion does not create the same kind of civil war risk; after all, small ethnic groups and weak rivals are unlikely to be able to effectively mobilize and take control of the state by force through an armed rebellion.

Autochthony and Horizontal Inequality

Postcolonial independence in Africa created new nations where there was previously a weak link to the colonial nation-state. It is no surprise that the major task awaiting most African leaders in the 1960s was nation-building, trying to craft an identity that was about a political edifice that stretched far beyond one's local community (Emerson, 2017; Lemarchand, 1972; Miguel, 2004). However, at the same time, leaders who were constructing that new identity sometimes manipulated it for political ends, creating notions of who was a native and who was a foreigner, often based on politically convenient criteria (Geschiere, 2009; Manby, 2013). That concept of autochthony has been a hotly contested topic in African politics since independence. The contestation was made even messier by deliberate manipulation from colonial elites, the redrawing of borders, and poor record-keeping in the colonial era, which made it difficult to establish who was and was not a "native-born" citizen of a new country. And, as I explain momentarily, it became particularly contentious when multiparty politics allowed concepts of citizenship and belonging to come center stage in terms of who was allowed to run for office and who was allowed to vote.

Relatedly, a robust literature has developed around the destabilizing influence of horizontal inequality—a concept that is rooted in comparative status rather than absolute well-being. When horizontal inequality is applied to the political sphere, and some groups have been excluded from political power, it is particularly likely to spark conflict (Stewart, 2011). That is partly because political exclusion often translates to economic exclusion too. For example, using satellite technology, scholars such as Min (2015) have demonstrated that African heads of state tend to allocate government resources to areas that have a high proportion of people from their own ethnic group. That means that economic grievances are directly linked to political exclusion. Furthermore, political power is often seen as the avenue to redress other inequalities, such as comparative economic deprivation. For example, if one ethnic group is poorer than others but perceives itself as having equal opportunities to take political power, then that disadvantaged community is more likely to try to fix its problem by accessing state power and changing policy. It would be comparatively unattractive to simply attack the system that confers on them the possibility of genuine political power. Generally, this theory is more abstract than practical, as there are not many African states in which aggrieved subgroups believe that they have equal access to state power as the ruling or dominant groups within the same society. However, this theoretical scaffolding is important to mention because it plays an important role in the politics of exclusion once competitive elections became more widespread within African nations in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Huntington, 1991; Manning, 2005).

Political Exclusion in the Era of Multiparty Elections

With the early transitions of Benin and Zambia, a new era began in Africa in which leaders felt pressure from above and below to hold ostensibly democratic elections in order to legitimize their power (Cheeseman & Klaas, 2018). Of course, political exclusion around elections was nothing new. After all, one-party states are, by definition, exclusionary. Most African strongmen during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s did not allow rivals to establish political parties, or tightly controlled any other parties that did exist. The emergence of multiparty politics changed that and in the process created fundamentally different incentives around the question of whether to include or exclude political rivals who seek formal political power.

With multiparty elections, the old playbook of strategic inclusion no longer made sense. Instead, the best way to rig an election was to get rid of any strong challengers who could win a “clean” election while peppering the ballot with a splintered array of weak candidates who would almost certainly lose (Klaas, 2015). That arrangement would create the illusion of a competitive election (thereby dazzling the international community) while simultaneously ensuring that the incumbent’s position in power would be assured. It is therefore no surprise that 37% of all African elections between 1960 and 2012 featured some form of “electoral exclusion” — the phenomenon of the leader manipulating the election to prevent opposition figures from running as candidates. Over time, the type of exclusion has changed. From 1945–1989, only about half of all exclusionary elections actually allowed an opposition candidate to run at all. Most of the elections during that period—in Africa and around the world—were one-party sham contests (Hyde & Marinov, 2012; Klaas, 2015). Between 2001 and 2010, by contrast, 91% of elections that featured exclusion nonetheless allowed some opposition candidates to run. Furthermore, electoral exclusion remains prevalent across Africa because of the persistence of competitive authoritarian regimes on the continent. From 1989 to 2010, more than half of all elections in autocratic states employed electoral exclusion to win an election. For competitive authoritarian and electorally democratic states, the figure was closer to 20% (Klaas, 2015).

In a way, perhaps, it is more interesting to understand why some African heads of state do not always exclude their rivals. After all, many of the people in positions of power across the continent have been there for some time. Teodoro Obiang in Equatorial Guinea, for example, has been president since 1979—and several other African heads of state are not far behind him in longevity of their rule. So, it is perhaps perplexing that the default position is not to simply continue the one-party state and to exclude all potential rivals, thereby ensuring Saddam Hussein and Kim Jong-un–style 99% victories. Why is that not the case?

There are four main reasons. First, international standards have changed, creating a strong incentive for African presidents and prime ministers to chase international legitimacy through the ballot box. As Levitsky and Way (2005) have argued, most African states realized in the early 1990s that single-party elections were quickly becoming unacceptable and that going through at least the pageantry of democracy became a requirement to legitimately join the club of nations on

the international stage. This shift was important because creating the veneer of democratic elections became a prized goal of African autocrats, which was one of the lowest priorities they could have imagined during the Cold War era.

Second, many African leaders do not believe that they will lose a free and fair election. Until recently, reliable polling data has been extremely difficult to find in African countries heading up to elections. In some cases, as in Madagascar's 2018 election, incumbents have even banned polling, hoping to ensure that the regime could control the narrative around popularity and give the president wiggle room should results need to be falsified. But in some cases, this seemingly arrogant intuition is correct. For example, it has never made much sense for the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa to exclude the opposition Democratic Alliance (DA) from running in elections. Doing so could invite public outrage, and the ANC have long been secure (until more recently) in the knowledge that the election was not going to be competitive anyway.

Third, electoral exclusion does come with its own risks. Unlike broad-based political exclusion that continues on a daily basis, electoral exclusion is a targeted intervention. As such, it creates a focal point for public outrage, protests, and possibly even political violence. We return to this point shortly in "The Exclusion Trap and the Onset of Political Violence," because there is a strong relationship between leaders who exclude their rivals from the ballot, and those who face challenges to their rule with bullets.

Fourth, there are some heads of state in Africa who accepted the new democratic rules of the game, even if it meant losing power. Kenneth Kaunda, for example, was one of the first presidents to allow multiparty competition, lose the election, and accept the result. More recently, the 2014 elections in post-Arab Spring Tunisia also featured a new political class that accepted political competition and accepted the loss rather than excluding a rival party or candidate.

These four factors have a mitigating effect that creates incentives for inclusion during elections. However, incumbents in the multiparty era of African politics have learned how to game the system to achieve international legitimacy while still rigging the election by excluding opponents that could win. They have done so in two main ways: first, by manipulating laws to ensure that any exclusion is legal, even if it is illegitimate and second, by excluding strong rivals who pose a credible threat to the incumbent's survival, but ensuring that many weak candidates are allowed to run.

Madagascar's 2006 Elections and the Strategic Logic of Exclusion

Take, for example, the 2006 presidential elections in Madagascar. Incumbent President Marc Ravalomanana took advantage of a legal guideline that stipulated that all presidential candidates must register their candidacies in person at the national election commission. On the face of it, that doesn't seem an onerous burden. But Ravalomanana had previously forced one of his main rivals, Pierrot Rajaonarivelo, into exile in France after Ravalomanana took power in early 2002. That meant that Rajaonarivelo would have to return from exile in order to contest the 2006 election. On five separate occasions, Rajaonarivelo attempted to return to the island to register, and on every attempt, President Ravalomanana closed the airports on the island whenever his

rival's plane was approaching Malagasy airspace (Cheeseman & Klaas, 2018). This maneuver worked. The deadline for candidate registration passed. Rajaonarivelo was excluded, legally, from the election. At the same time, Ravalomanana allowed a long list of minor candidates to register. Thirteen opposition candidates ended up on the ballot, but none of them was as much of a threat as the excluded Rajaonarivelo. As a result, the incumbent, Ravalomanana, cruised to victory with 54.7% of the vote. Normally, that would not be a commanding victory, but because of the splintered opposition, the second-place finisher only received 11.7% of the vote. Ravalomanana won by more than 40 points. And because he had allowed so much political competition—and technically followed the law surrounding candidate registrations—he was able to retain power and receive the blessing and legitimacy of the international community.

“Pull” Factors for Political Exclusion in Elections

Despite the four constraining reasons listed previously, the Madagascar example provides several illustrations of the “pull” factors that draw incumbent politicians to roll the dice and try to exclude rivals from elections. In general, there are four alluring features of electoral exclusion. All of them fall under the broader literature on “strategic rigging,” which has been developed extensively by a growing number of scholars (Birch, 2011; Cheeseman & Klaas, 2018; Cheibub, Gandhi, & Vreeland, 2010; Hyde & Marinov, 2012; Lindberg, 2006; Lust-Okar, 2006; Schedler, 2002; Van Ham, 2015). The logic of strategic rigging is simple. From the perspective of an incumbent, the “best” form of election rigging is any manipulation that maximizes the likelihood of victory while minimizing the likelihood of detection and consequences. Although a full discussion of election rigging is beyond the scope of this article, the ways in which electoral exclusion has become an alluring part of strategic rigging is essential to understanding modern methods of political exclusion across Africa.

First, electoral exclusion of rivals is more straightforward than many other forms of rigging. It is easy to see why. Consider the logistical challenge of ballot box stuffing. To pull it off successfully, an incumbent must enlist agents to operate in most precincts across the country. Those agents need to be able to stuff ballots into ballot boxes without getting detected—a feat that has become increasingly complex in an era of smartphones. And they need to be careful not to “overstuff,” by putting so many ballots in one ballot box that the number is larger than the total number of voters registered for that precinct. In the 2006 Madagascar election, for example, ballot box stuffing would be a nearly impossible task, as the island has around 20,000 precincts in its presidential elections, and those precincts are spread across an enormous territory with poor infrastructure. In short, the old ways of rigging are logistically complex and riddled with ways in which the incumbent's administration can be caught in the act of rigging the vote. Exclusion is different; with a single rule change or ruling from the electoral commission, a rival can be neutralized before a single vote is even cast. That creates a much easier way of rigging, without the mess and vulnerabilities of other forms of manipulation (Cheeseman & Klaas, 2018).

Second, excluding rival candidates from elections provides a seemingly legitimate smokescreen that incumbents can hide behind. If an incumbent's henchmen are caught stuffing ballots into ballot boxes, it is impossible to pretend that it was done for legitimate reasons. On the other

hand, when rivals are excluded through court rulings (often with judges that were hand-picked by the incumbent himself) or excluded as a result of legal changes, there is a legal argument that can be made. In many cases, this is precisely why incumbents change the eligibility laws around elections—to be able to rig the vote by excluding their main rival, but doing so in a way that is legitimate according to the letter of the law, even though it is obviously illegitimate according to the spirit of the law.

Third, incumbents “get away with” exclusion routinely. The 2006 Madagascar case is not an outlier; it is the norm. Most of the time that incumbents in Africa exclude their opponents from multiparty elections, they still receive international praise. International observers praised and endorsed 60.9% of African elections between 1989 and 2010 that featured the deliberate exclusion of at least one opposition candidate (Klaas, 2015). That rate is markedly higher than in other political regions, raising serious questions about the low expectations that international observers may apply to Africa as opposed to other areas of the globe (Dodsworth, 2019; Klaas, 2015).

Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, electoral exclusion is a favorite tactic of vulnerable incumbent politicians for the simplest reason of all: it works. They win. According to my own analysis of all national presidential elections in the world between 1989 and 2010, the average margin of victory for the incumbent was roughly 30 points higher in exclusionary elections than in elections that were fully inclusive. Within Africa, the numbers are similar. That is not particularly surprising because victory with an inflated mandate is the entire point of electoral exclusion. Given how effective it is as a form of strategic rigging, it is no surprise that targeted political exclusion around elections remains a persistent feature of African multiparty politics.

In some instances, incumbent politicians do not settle for targeting a single candidate. Instead, they resort to a more extreme form of political exclusion by using ethnic party bans, removing an entire political party from electoral competition. For example, Burkina Faso’s 1997 constitution bans any party that is “tribalist, regionalist, religious, or racist” (Bogaards, Basedau, & Hartmann, 2010). Similar bans have been instituted in Kenya, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone, among others. In principle, such party bans seem praiseworthy: they are, at least on paper, intended to create institutional incentives for broad-based, inclusive politics rather than narrow appeals to race, ethnicity, or religion. In practice, though, Bogaards, Basedau, and Hartmann find significant evidence that such bans are abused to suppress rival parties and dismantle viable opposition movements.

It is, of course, important to note that targeted exclusion of opposition candidates or of political parties through bans has the net effect of excluding large swaths of the population from political representation. Because a significant number of African political fault lines are arranged on ethnic or religious lines, the exclusion of one candidate can lead to an entire community being shut out from political power. And because incumbent turnover in Africa is far less frequent than the global average, being shut out of political power can often last decades before another competitive battle for political inclusion takes place. That reality is not lost on excluded groups, which is one reason why the all-too-common exclusionary tactics around elections are likely to spark a higher risk of future political violence and conflict.

The Exclusion Trap and the Onset of Political Violence

The coup–civil war trap that Roessler outlines refers to the risks of exclusion and inclusion of rival politicians or rival subgroups in terms of power–sharing. Roessler’s work is convincing, but it has less to say about electoral exclusion—and the strategic calculations that leaders make when deciding whether to include or exclude political opponents around elections. However, recent analysis of electoral exclusion shares a common finding with Roessler and others: political exclusion increases the risks of future political violence (Klaas, 2015).

Electoral exclusion systematically increases the risk of coups d’état, civil wars, and riots and protests immediately before or after the election in which an opposition candidate is excluded from participation (Hyde & Marinov, 2012; Klaas, 2015; Whitaker, 2005). The reason for this is simple: elections can offer a “safety valve” in places with divisive or volatile politics, giving those out of power a legitimate avenue to pursue power. Of course, in places like Rwanda or Equatorial Guinea, it does not matter as much who is included and excluded around the election, because the elections are neither free nor fair. Instead, they are largely rubber stamping the incumbent’s victory with more than 90% of the vote (Lyons, 2016; Matfess, 2015). In those instances, where a legitimate *and possible* pathway to power does not exist, inclusive elections do not help diffuse tensions. However, in a large number of African elections, the opposition does perceive the electoral pathway as a plausible method of winning more power (Bogaards & Elischer, 2016; Bratton, 1998). Furthermore, all things being equal, opposition movements would prefer to topple a regime at the ballot box than with bullets. Election victories come with limited costs but large gains—especially international legitimacy and the ability to claim a popular mandate. Coming to power in unconstitutional means, by comparison, elicits international condemnation, the risk of being purged from the African Union, and the likely loss of lucrative international aid packages (Cheeseman, 2015). Furthermore, many failed coup attempts or botched civil wars end in imprisonment, torture, or death. In short, opposition movements, when given the choice and the opportunity, are more likely to pursue power by winning votes rather than battles.

However, when incumbents exclude opposition movements from elections, they close that peaceful pathway to power. It logically follows, then, that opposition movements blocked from pursuing power through the legitimate and peaceful pathway are more likely, all else being equal, to pursue power through an illegitimate and violent pathway. Previous research has shown that coup risk and civil war risk both increase within one year and two years of an election that features political exclusion of opposition candidates (Klaas, 2015). Those risks are amplified in sub-Saharan African countries relative to the rest of the world, and the risk is particularly pronounced in countries that have had recent episodes of political violence.

Several other scholars have also pointed to other ways in which political exclusion creates fertile ground for the onset of political violence (Choi & Kim, 2018; Douma, 2006; Fjelde & Hoglund, 2016; Harkness, 2018; Wimmer, Cederman, & Min, 2009). Several of them point out that political exclusion is particularly explosive when it falls along ethnic lines, as that leads to a greater sense of grievance and lowers the barriers to successful mobilization against the state. Asal et al. (2016) have also found a global relationship between political exclusion and violence that is particularly pronounced in oil-rich states; their findings are particularly relevant for African politics. Despite

these serious risks, African incumbents often exclude rival candidates or rival ethno-political groups for political expediency, for strategic logic of reducing coup risk, to win elections, or out of vengeance-style politics. Regardless of motivation, political and ethno-political exclusion remains an extremely common feature in African politics.

Case Study: Côte d'Ivoire and the Explosive Politics of Exclusion

Côte d'Ivoire is a clear example of how the politics of exclusion can simultaneously be rational in the short term and destructive in the long term. In the post-independence period, Côte d'Ivoire's growth surged—averaging 7.3% annual GDP growth in the 1960s and 1970s (Hecht, 1983). The country earned the moniker of “the Ivoirian Miracle” (Klaas, 2008; Langer, 2005). But Côte d'Ivoire's economic success would deteriorate significantly while demonstrating why the incentives for political inclusion were reversed after the onset of multiparty politics in the early 1990s.

During the one-party state era, President Félix Houphouët-Boigny created an extensive network of political patronage. He doled out the spoils of the state to the largest ethnic groups in the country—particularly those that he deemed a genuine threat to his grip on power (Crook, 1989; Sylla, 1985). He also created inclusive cabinets, ensuring that his potential rivals felt that they were part of the system. In that way, he hoped to avoid creating any incentive for them to try to destroy the system that he ruled. President Houphouët-Boigny was able to fuel this delicate patronage network through the proceeds of cocoa farming, an industry that Côte d'Ivoire cornered during this period, becoming the world's leading supplier (Chauveau, 2000). However, the combination of multiparty politics and the volatility of cocoa prices would end up undermining the Ivoirian Miracle.

By the early 1990s, the price of cocoa had fallen considerably in international trading, from roughly \$3,000 per metric tonne to just over \$1,000 (International Monetary Fund, 2007). Then, in 1993, President Houphouët-Boigny died, leading to a crisis of governance in a country that had had one ruler since independence. The fragile patronage network, which prioritized inclusive power-sharing in the government, was therefore dealt a double blow. First, the spoils were growing scarcer, making it harder to spread them around and maintain inclusive politics. Second, the lynchpin of the patronage network—Houphouët-Boigny himself—was gone.

During this period of turmoil and transition, international pressure pushed Côte d'Ivoire to democratize. In response to this pressure, the country held its first genuinely multiparty elections. Henri Konan Bédié, who had assumed the presidency upon his predecessor's death, realized that elections offered a different strategic compass than the old-style patronage networks (Dozon, 2000). In particular, he realized that he was facing a credible challenge from Alassane Ouattara, a politician from the northern (and Muslim) half of the country, who had a considerable political following (Bacongo, 2007).

As a result, rather than trying to “buy off” Ouattara or promise to include him in a future government, Bedié decided to whip up xenophobia against Ouattara as a means to exclude him from the 1995 election. Mimicking Geschiere’s concept of autochthony perfectly, Bedié began insisting that Ouattara was not fully Ivoirian and therefore that he was neither eligible to be a citizen nor to be president (Fofana, 2009). State-run media amplified the message, and the public opinion campaign laid the groundwork for a legal change that was made before the election to formally disqualify Ouattara from the ballot (Whitaker, 2005). Bedié’s tactics worked; he won reelection, and Ouattara was sidelined. But the damage to the process was done, at least in the eyes of a significant proportion of the electorate who felt that they did not have a standard bearer on the ballot because of the machinations of the incumbent president (Klaas, 2008).

Several years later, in 1999, the Ivoirian Miracle finally ended as the country descended into a long period of political violence—starting with a coup d’état on Christmas Day of that year. Bedié was overthrown. The president who took power, Robert Guéï, once again used his power to exclude Alassane Ouattara from contesting the election. Another opposition figure, Laurent Gbagbo, ended up winning the election—which was boycotted by several major opposition movements, including Ouattara’s party, the Rassemblement des Républicains (RDR).

After twice being excluded from the legitimate pathway to political power, Ouattara’s movement turned to an illegitimate pathway. The government continued to heavily discriminate against not just Ouattara but also the ethnic groups that he broadly represented in the northern regions of the country (Wimmer, Cederman, & Min, 2009). Mass graves of RDR supporters were discovered shortly after the election (McGovern, 2011). This was a far cry from the inclusive politics of Houphouët-Boigny, and, as expected, it provoked political violence not long after.

On September 19, 2002, northerners who felt excluded from the political system launched a rebellion. The rebels took control of Bouaké, the largest city in the north, and maintained significant territorial control until 2007, when a precarious peace deal was signed (Klaas, 2008; McGovern, 2011). It is impossible to fathom any explanation of that conflict that is not directly tied to the political exclusion of Alassane Ouattara and his broader political movement. Furthermore, there was another politically contentious discussion about exclusion versus inclusion in the run-up to the 2010 elections. Ouattara was eventually allowed to compete, but the contest ended in more bloodshed and a second civil war. Eventually Ouattara was the victor, though it is clear that tensions around *ivoirité* have not been fully resolved.

Though Côte d’Ivoire’s descent into political violence is not necessarily representative of all African states, it shows how the onset of multiparty politics had the potential to flip the incentives to be inclusive toward political rivals—with disastrous results.

Political Exclusion of Women in Africa

Although most scholarship on political exclusion in Africa focuses on ethno-political exclusion, there is a growing literature on the long-standing norm of gender-based political exclusion. In 1990, women comprised 5% or fewer members of parliament in 11 African countries. The

continent-wide average was below 10%. Prior to the 1990s, the figures were even worse in most African countries, as women were largely sidelined from politics altogether. Indeed, the full list of female heads of state in post-independence Africa does not take up too much space: Elisabeth Domitien (who served as prime minister of the Central African Republic from 1975 to 1976); Carmen Pereira (who served as Guinea-Bissau's acting president for three days in 1984); Sylvie Kinigie (who twice had brief stints as prime minister in Burundi in 1993 and 1994); Agathe Uwilingiyimana (who served as prime minister of Rwanda from 1993 until her assassination in 1994); Mame Madior Boye (who was prime minister of Senegal from 2001 to 2002); Luisa Diogo (who was prime minister of Mozambique from 2004 to 2010); Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (who was president of Liberia from 2006 to 2018); Cissé Mariam Kaïdama Sidibé (who was prime minister of Mali from 2011 to 2012); Joyce Banda (who was president of Malawi from 2012 to 2014); Aminata Touré (who was prime minister of Senegal from 2013 to 2014); Ameenah Gurib (who was president of Mauritius from 2015 to 2018); Sahle-Work Zewde (who was elected president of Ethiopia in 2018 and is still serving in 2019); and Saara Kuugongelwa (who was elected as prime minister of Namibia in 2015 and is still serving in 2019). That list comprises 13 heads of state or government, across six decades in 54 countries, and most of the women listed here were in office for less than two years. In short, during the roughly 3,000 African country-years that have elapsed in the post-independence period, women were heads of state for fewer than 50—about 1.6% of years in power for a group that comprises roughly 50% of the population.

By 2018, the gender equality picture had improved somewhat in many African countries. Some scholars have noted how patriarchal culture can drive down women's representation, whereas institutional arrangements like proportional representation can boost representation (Mi Yoon, 2004). Other scholars have noted that gender quotas have been successful at boosting women in government in countries like Rwanda, Mozambique, and South Africa (Tripp, 2004). And one scholar (Stockemer, 2011) has shown that higher levels of corruption correspond to a more patriarchal political system, suggesting that a knock-on benefit of anti-corruption efforts may also be women's empowerment.

As a result of these changes, several countries have world-leading rates of women's representation in parliament. In Rwanda, more than 61% of parliament was comprised of female members of parliament by 2018—a rate that far surpasses Western democracies. Namibia, South Africa, and Senegal can all boast rates of women's representation that surpass 40%, with Mozambique, Ethiopia, and Tanzania not far behind. On the other end of the spectrum, Nigeria has barely broken 5%, with 95% of the parliament still dominated by men. Benin, Central African Republic, Mali, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Botswana all have women's representation rates below 10%. The average for sub-Saharan Africa was 24% as of 2018, up from roughly 10% two decades earlier (IPU, 2019). In short, although there have been substantial improvements across the continent—particularly when compared to the one-party state era—women are still disproportionately excluded from political power in Africa. It is worth noting, of course, that this is also true in many powerful, consolidated democracies; the figure for Japan is just over 10%; the United States is just above 20%; the United Kingdom is just above 30%; and France is just shy of 40%.

However, women's representation in parliament can be a severely misleading figure when it comes to genuine women's empowerment and women's political rights in any given country. Sometimes, authoritarian governments have used gender quotas—or deliberately boosted women's representation in legislative bodies—as a means to relieve donor pressure from other aspects of their governance. The best example of this is probably Paul Kagame in Rwanda, who has (correctly) recognized that he will receive international praise and recognition for his laudable efforts to pursue greater gender equity. In the process, Kagame has become a “donor darling” (Reyntjens, 2015). However, there are legitimate reasons to believe that his efforts to do so are part of a cynical effort to diffuse criticism of his authoritarian regime from donor governments (Hagmann & Reyntjens 2016; Klaas, 2015). Indeed, it does beg the question: How “empowered” can women really be in a system that heavily restricts political freedoms and cracks down on dissent?

Of course, there are key theoretical differences between strategic political/ethno-political exclusion and the long-standing exclusion of women from politics. Gender-based exclusion is not the result of a calculation aimed at stopping coups or striking bargains with powerful rivals. Instead, it is the product of long-standing sexism that sees women as somehow outside the political sphere—as has unfortunately been the case in effectively every country on the planet until very recently. And despite some notable recent progress, there is still a very long way to go before politics can be considered generally inclusive to women across the continent.

Conclusion: Toward an Inclusive Politics?

Because African politics have been disproportionately plagued by violence compared to the rest of the world, there has been widespread interest in institutional “engineering” to try to disrupt the cycle of political exclusion. In some post-conflict nations, for example, governments have turned to power-sharing agreements to try to create “buy-in” from a wide array of actors. However, several scholars have pointed to the severe limitations of these fragile arrangements, which often end up creating a temporary band-aid solution that ends up being embedded in government (Cheeseman, 2011; Englebort, 2015; Spears, 2002; Sriram & Zahar, 2009; Tull & Mehler, 2005). Therefore, although a politics of inclusion remains a desirable goal, getting the balance right in power-sharing agreements that limit the political autonomy of political winners remains a delicate task with mixed results.

There are a few possible paths forward. Donors could put more pressure on governments to make political inclusion a central strategy of democratic consolidation, though doing so comes with all the risks associated with conditionality. Civil society groups could work with leaders to make clear that their evaluations of elections or of governance will take into account the level of political inclusion in any given election or any given legislative process. And the African Union could set clear benchmarks for political inclusion that establish consequences for those leaders who cynically exclude rivals or minority groups from political power.

Though political exclusion remains a widespread feature of governance in Africa, there are glimmers of hope. In some countries, such as Ghana, Benin, Mauritius, South Africa, and Namibia, political liberalization has led to genuine democracy. In others, such as Tunisia and Ethiopia, political reforms have created real, if fragile, progress (Freedom House, 2019). Those moves toward democracy provide the most promising pathway to creating inclusive politics because the genuine risk of alternating power because of defeat at the ballot box tends to constrain incumbents from engaging in exclusionary acts toward the losers that they may themselves face when they lose. On the other hand, for those regimes that are stuck partly between democracy and dictatorship—as is the case for much of the continent—then the incentives are far more skewed toward a winner-take-all mentality, in which victors get away with what they can while in power and do whatever is necessary to maintain power for as long as possible. For that dynamic to change, competitive authoritarianism/electoral autocracy/counterfeit democracy must be replaced by consolidated, inclusive democracy. That is the only long-term solution to defeating political exclusion.

Until then, the effects of political exclusion are clear: economic inequality, poor and uneven governance, destabilization, volatility, and violence. The task of the next generation of African leaders will be to turn the page on a violent history of exclusion and build an inclusive politics that can create widespread legitimacy and prosperity.

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