

**researching the dynamics of leaders' replacement: the Africa leadership change (ALC) dataset**

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**Abstract**

African politics long revolved around 'personal rulers' who either overstayed in office or were quickly ousted by coups. The multiparty reforms of the 1990s were meant to change and regularise the way in which African rulers access and are removed from office. There is, however, a dearth of systematic data through which the evolution and implications of leadership transitions can be examined. We thus built a comprehensive Africa Leadership Change (ALC) dataset covering all 54 countries in the continent from 1960 to 2015. The dataset provides information for all leaders who held power in the region, the modes of access to leadership and several other key election and regime variables. An exploratory analysis illustrates how Africa's reforms affected the dynamics and timing of leaders' replacement, as well as their socio-economic implications. A comparison

with existing datasets shows that ALC is more suitable for investigating leadership transitions in Africa.

**Keywords:** Africa; coups d'état; dataset; leadership; multiparty elections; political alternation

Political leaders are pivotal figures in the political life of all countries. Despite this unmatched centrality, contemporary political science has long failed to pay much direct attention to the concept of political leadership (Blondel, 1987:1; Lyne de Ver, 2008: 9; Bell, 2014; Rhodes and 't Hart, 2014: 17). Biographic narratives have been the most common way to address the topic, resulting in little theorisation and relatively scant comparative work. While political leadership long struggled to gain centre-stage in mainstream political science, however, it became a cornerstone in the study of African politics, which, from the outset, appeared to revolve to an extraordinary extent around a country's ruler. The aim remained primarily descriptive and interpretative, rather than explanatory, but with an underlying understanding that national leaders played a key role in the socio-economic development of their countries (Goldsmith, 2001). The systematic investigation of leadership-related issues, however, requires purposely collected and methodical information on African power-holders. Currently, this systematic information is either not available or lacks the kind of detail and coverage necessary to account for the various and changing leadership dynamics that have characterised the continent.

In this ~~paper~~ article, we introduce the Africa Leadership Change (ALC) dataset, an original collection of data that fills a gap in the existing literature and offers a new tool for researchers to examine the role of leaders in the continent's political, economic and social processes.<sup>1</sup> We use our data to conduct an exploratory analysis and illustrate how, over the past twenty-five years, Africa's multiparty reforms have altered the modes and the timing of

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leaders' replacement. We compare ALC with existing datasets and show how our dataset is more suitable and effective in accounting for the dynamics of leadership change in contemporary Africa. Finally, we exemplify the potentially crucial implications that the new arrangements for leadership selection and replacement have for African development by briefly considering the relationship between leadership turnovers and social outcomes.

### **POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN AFRICA: THE RATIONALE FOR A NEW DATASET**

On 13 January 1963, the President of Togo was overthrown and killed by his soldiers. Sylvanus Olympio had ruled the country for less than three years when he became the first victim in a series of ninety-two coups d'état that rocked Africa over the following sixty years. One of the perpetrators of Olympio's murder, Gnassingbé Eyadéma, took over as new head of state a few years later. Like Olympio, he would also die in office. Yet this only happened in 2005, after thirty-eight uninterrupted years of ruling.

The cases of Olympio and Eyadéma in Togo exemplify the two major political syndromes in the politics of post-colonial Africa. In many countries, the military took power not long after independence (McGowan, 2003). Embryonic armies were able to claim a governing role in the fragile context created by ethnic fragmentation and widespread expectations of rapid economic development. Once soldiers were in power, they were often overthrown by further military interventions, as occurred, for instance in Burkina Faso, Benin, the Comoros, Ghana, and Nigeria: countries that suffered between four and seven coups d'état each.

The second political syndrome of post-colonial Africa was the excessively long periods in office of many of its power-holders. During its fifty-five years as an independent nation, for example, Cameroon only saw one succession in the presidency, in 1982, when

Ahmadou Ahidjo peacefully handed over power to Paul Biya, the country's current leader. Zimbabwe (independent since 1980) and Eritrea (since 1991) have yet to see the back of their first leaders. In some cases, the first syndrome evolved towards the second syndrome. Omar al-Bashir took power in Sudan in 1989 through a military intervention and, after more than twenty-six years, he still holds the country's top job. Elsewhere, long tenure in office was buttressed by the establishment of one-party systems, as with Kenneth Kaunda and his United National Independence Party in Zambia.

In much of Africa, these recurring leadership dynamics tended to hinder a country's progress. For thirty years after independence, African states became synonymous with non-performing authoritarian rule. In a context of prevailing economic stagnation, politics in the region was overtly dominated by personalities, rather than by formal norms, organisations and institutions. A copious literature on Africa's 'personal rulers' has produced both conceptual frameworks – revolving around the related notions of a [prebendalism](#) [private use of state offices](#), clientelism, political corruption, predatory politics and even warlordism – and empirical analyses accounting for the pervasiveness of neo-patrimonial politics in state apparatuses that displayed a widespread 'confusion between office and officeholder' (Bach, 2012: 28; Mazrui, 1967; 1970; Jackson and Rosberg, 1984; [Joseph 1984](#); Bayart, 1993; Bratton and van de Walle, 1994).

Economic and state weaknesses intertwined, reaching their zenith between the 1980s and the early 1990s, when many African countries suddenly embarked on a process of widespread constitutional reform that introduced multiparty elections across the continent (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997). Although in several countries, including Chad, Ethiopia and Gabon, incumbent leaders allowed voting only insofar as they were able to ensure a favourable outcome, within a few years Africa's political landscape was radically altered. From Mali to Mozambique, elections contested by multiple parties became the norm in a

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continent that had long steered clear of them, leading to an ‘increasing institutionalisation of political power’ (Posner and Young, 2007: 129).

The early 1990s in Africa thus represent a political watershed when compared to three preceding decades of one-party and military authoritarianism. The constitutional reforms of the late twentieth century were meant to change the way in which, and the timing with which, national leaders were selected, held accountable and replaced. To the extent that they help to rotate power (by establishing term limits; favouring leadership successions within the ruling group; allowing for opposition victories; and, more generally, by holding rulers accountable, for instance), multiparty elections can contribute to the de-personalisation of power.

Yet the extent to which the reforms actually affected the evolution of leadership in Africa and the effect this produced on government performance and national development remain open questions. Our original collection of data on leadership dynamics is instrumental to answering these crucial questions empirically, by highlighting major trends in leadership-change patterns and by offering a basis for investigating their social, economic or political causes and consequences (something we address elsewhere: see [Pellegata and Carbone](#) and [Pellegata](#), forthcoming). The ALC dataset builds on the assumption that individual leaders, institutional frameworks and government policies are inextricably intertwined. Political leaders are understood as rational actors who aim at maximising their tenure, or control of government for the political force they belong to. Institutions determine the way and extent to which they can achieve this goal. The shape and effectiveness of government policies is crucially affected by the inducements that state leaders face within a given institutional framework. Institutional reforms, in other words, alter a ruler’s incentives to provide effective public policies.

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## THE AFRICA LEADERSHIP CHANGE (ALC) DATASET: STRUCTURE, SCOPE AND CODING RULES

The ultimate purpose of the ALC dataset is to comprehensively account for the ways leaders reach and leave power in the region, to record how these practices have evolved since modern independent countries emerged on the continent and to allow for investigations into their broader implications. Thus, the dataset covers all leaders that held office in all fifty-four African states from 1960 (or subsequent year of independence) to 2015.<sup>2</sup>

There is no classic definition of political leadership of the kind to be found for other core political-science notions such as state, democracy or political party. The perspective we adopt as a starting point is in line with what Ahlquist and Levi (2011: 6) define as a structural theory of leadership, whereby **the leader is someone who occupies a particularly important position in some predefined institutional structure. By virtue of her position, the leader is by definition salient**. A country's political leader is thus the person that occupies the top decision-making position in a country's political and governing hierarchy, be this a president (e.g. Nelson Mandela in South Africa, 1994–9), a prime minister (e.g. Meles Zenawi in Ethiopia, 1995–2012), a near-absolute monarch (e.g. Mswati III in Swaziland, 1983 to date) or the chief of a military junta (e.g. Jerry Rawlings in Ghana, 1981–92). In the overwhelming majority of cases, the identification of who is primarily in charge is noncontroversial and normally depends on the form of government and regime in place. For transitional governments, we look at the interim executive and who heads it. In a limited number of cases, a country's leader may not be the official head of the state or government. Paul Kagame, for example, was formally the vice-president of Rwanda between 1994 and 2000, yet nobody doubts where political authority lay in Kigali during that time. Of course, the extent to which power is actually concentrated in the hands of a leader and the way he or she wields it are empirical questions, in answer to which reality presents vast and complex variation.

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Since our primary focus is on the dynamics of leadership change – that is the ascent to and the abandonment of power – rather than the careers of individual leaders, our dataset adopts country-years as units of analysis. We began to compile it by recording the entire series of leaders that held power in each country on the continent and by reporting their birth and death dates, the dates on which they took and left power, and the length of their tenure. We then coded with a simple dummy variable every country-year in which one or more *leadership changes* took place. As an overarching concept, we find this generally preferable to the terms ‘transition’ or ‘turnover’ that are adopted by Goldsmith (2001; 2004) and others, since the former is widely employed in the political regimes literature while the latter is used in the study of electoral alternation between different political parties or forces (Horowitz *et al.*, 2009).

We separated *non-electoral leadership changes* from power transfers that occurred via *multiparty elections for the executive* (i.e. *electoral changes*). Within the first set of cases, we further distinguished between *peaceful* and *violent* non-electoral leadership changes. The former include handovers due to *natural death* or *voluntary retirement/resignation*, whereas the latter include *coups d'état* (which, even when they are bloodless, rely at least on the threat of the use of violence) and *guerrilla takeovers*, as well as a few cases of *foreign impositions*. For coups, guerrillas and external impositions the dataset also records the possibility that the *incumbent was assassinated*.<sup>3</sup>

*Electoral changes* require a multiparty election for the executive to take place: that is, an election that is contested by at least two legally admitted parties or candidates. In identifying leadership changes that occurred through multiparty elections, we firstly considered whether the vote represented a ‘founding’ election, i.e. when a multiparty system is introduced for the first time or re-introduced after a regime interruption. Then, we divided electoral leadership changes into those instances in which new leaders belonged to the same

political force as their predecessors – named electoral successions – and those in which an opposition candidate took over – classified as electoral alternations. These two coding rules allowed us to assign every electoral leadership change to one of four different categories. The first is *electoral succession (in transition)*, i.e. when a new leader takes power by winning an election in the context of a transition to multipartism, with the outgoing unelected leader not running, and either the new leader is the candidate of the outgoing leader’s party or there is no candidate affiliated to his/her party or sponsored by the outgoing unelected leader. Cases such as Nigeria 1979; Lesotho 1993; Sierra Leone 1996; or Niger 1999 fall in this category. Also included are instances in which an unelected leader formally leaves power less than six months prior to a multiparty election – yet remains a leader *in pectore*, if not *de facto* – only to be able to contest the coming election (Comoros 2002; Mauritania 2009). The second category is *electoral alternation (in transition)*, which denotes leadership changes where a new leader takes power by winning an election, in the context of a transition to multipartism, by defeating an outgoing unelected leader or a candidate from his/her party or sponsored by him/her. This happened, for example, in Zambia in 1991; in Madagascar in 1992; in the Central African Republic in 1993; and in Malawi in 1994.

*Electoral succession (elected-to-elected)* identifies a handover in which a new leader belonging to the outgoing elected leader’s party takes power by winning a multiparty election other than a founding election, as in Zambia in 2002; Malawi in 2004 and Mozambique in 2005. Leaders who replaced elected leaders as their lawful constitutional successors, for example, following natural death in office (Gabon 2009; Ethiopia 2012), are themselves considered elected leaders. Finally, *electoral alternation (elected-to-elected)* occurs when a new leader not belonging to the party of the outgoing elected leader, or not sponsored by him/her, takes power by winning a multiparty election other than a founding election. Cases in point are Senegal 2000; Madagascar 2002; and Kenya 2002. This fourth category also



includes those peculiar but rare cases where an election held in an established multiparty system is contested neither by the outgoing elected leader nor by a candidate sponsored by him/her or fielded by his/her party, as in the Comoros in 2006; Cape Verde in 2011; or Kenya in 2013. These situations typically occurred under conditions of low party-system institutionalisation and high volatility. While the new leader does not formally defeat a *status quo* candidate nor party, we believe that the notion of electoral alternation captures the essence of these cases better than that of electoral succession does.<sup>4</sup> Figure 1 is a diagram of the core structure of the ALC dataset.

Figure 1 about here

Leaders who remained in power for less than twelve months are coded as *interim* leaders. Minor interruptions (less than twelve months) in a leader's stay in office, due to an interim leadership interlude, did not lead to a new tenure count. We further distinguished between interim leaderships ending with a legal or non-violent replacement (*interim regular*) and those resulting in a violent change, be it a coup, a guerrilla takeover or a foreign imposition (*interim irregular*). We also coded whether presidential term limits were envisaged in a country's institutional set up, whether a leader respected or tried to circumvent them, and, in this latter case, whether he/she failed or succeeded (*beyond term limits*). For each country included in the ALC dataset, Table A1 in the Appendix reports the overall number of leaders in power since independence (including interim leaders), their average duration in office, the total number of multiparty elections the country held, and the number of electoral, peaceful non-electoral and violent leadership changes and political alternations, respectively.

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Otherwise, implication is that all countries have 'unusual cases'

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In order to provide the broader picture for elected rulers, we also entered a number of election-related variables, such as turnout in presidential and legislative elections, vote shares for the winning presidential candidate and for his/her main challenger, and vote and seat shares for governing parties and for the main opposition parties for every electoral round. Finally, we included politico-institutional regime variables that accounted for the presence of multipartyism, the form of government (parliamentary, presidential or semi-presidential), the presence/absence and the degree of democracy (PolityIV and Cheibub *et al.*, 2010), a country's colonial legacy (whether from Belgium, France, Great Britain, Italy, Portugal, Spain), and the sub-region to which it belongs (North, Central, West, East and Southern Africa).

The sources that we used to compile the ALC dataset included the African Elections Database, the World Leaders Index, the Parline Database of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the World Bank's Database on Political Institutions, and Nohlen *et al.*'s handbook on elections in Africa (1999).<sup>5</sup> A number of more specific sources were also employed for closer examination of individual cases.

## **THE IMPACT OF REFORMS: CHANGING TRENDS IN AFRICAN LEADERSHIP HANDOVERS**

The present section illustrates the potential use of the ALC dataset. In particular, it shows how ALC allows scholars to identify and detail sub-Saharan Africa's key leadership patterns and the changes that they have undergone over time. Figure 2 reports the share of electoral, peaceful (non-electoral) and violent takeovers over total leadership changes for the 1960–89 and 1990–2015 periods. It clearly highlights that the multiparty reforms of the 1990s represented an important historical break in Africa, creating a political environment that was, at least formally, very different from the one that had preceded it (Lindberg, 2009;

Cheeseman, 2014). In 1960–89, new leaders reaching power via elections only represented 5.3 per cent of total leadership changes; after 1990, however, this share rose to 45.8 per cent, which made multiparty elections the most common way to replace a leader in Africa. Violent and irregular changes, which made up half of all cases (48.1 per cent) during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, were down to less than a quarter (22 per cent) of all leadership changes in multiparty Africa. By the 2000s, in particular, coups d'état accounted for only about one in ten changes of leaders.

Figure 2 about here

Figure 3 furnishes deeper insight into the extent to which multiparty elections have become the predominant way to replace rulers in Africa. For every decade, the figure shows the number of elections won by an incumbent (including previous authoritarian rulers who stood for office under the new multiparty set up of 1990s); those secured by a chosen successor (electoral successions); and those won by opposition candidates (electoral alternation). Leadership changes via multiparty elections were an extraordinarily rare phenomenon in Africa prior to 1990. Only six cases of electoral succession (in transition) and three cases of electoral alternation (Mauritius 1982; Sierra Leone 1967; and Somalia 1967) occurred in that period. The fact that in Sierra Leone and Somalia successful opposition candidates were quickly overthrown by coups d'état, leading to the abolition of multipartism, says a great deal about the prevailing politics. On the contrary, a massive shift brought about as many as thirty-seven electoral successions and forty alternations in office from 1991–2015. Unsurprisingly, successions and alternations in the 1990s largely occurred in the context of regime-transitions, with many sitting authoritarian leaders failing to secure an electoral mandate. In more recent years, on the other hand, successions and alternations have mostly

taken place in a context of institutionalised electoral competition, with newly elected leaders replacing elected incumbents. In 2011–15, African political systems experienced nine electoral turnovers, one of them during a regime transition. If this trend is confirmed, by 2020 the continent will plausibly reach a record number of electoral alternations in the space of a single decade.

Figure 3 about here

Multiparty openings have not only affected the way in which Africans replace their leaders but also the duration of the latter in office. The ability of many African rulers to overstay in power was apparent in the gradual increases, year after year, in the first three decades after independence. Incumbent rulers in 1990 had been in power for 11.7 years on average, representing a peak for the entire 1960–2015 period. After that, stay in office in new multiparty Africa stabilises at slightly lower than 10 years. This value is influenced upwards by longstanding rulers from the single-party and military era who were still hanging on to power in spite of constitutional reforms. Leaders who had reached office via elections, on the other hand, typically stayed on for ten years at most.

Table 1 sheds additional light on the length in office of leaders who took power before 1990 and after 1990 (excluding interim leaders). A striking difference is apparent. While rulers starting their tenure between 1960 and 1989 stayed on from a minimum of one year to Omar Bongo's record of almost forty-two years (with a mean of 9.3 years and a median of 5.0 years), those reaching power in 1990–2015 remained in office between one year and twenty-five years (for Chad's Idriss Déby), with an average of 4.6 years and a median value of 3.0 years.<sup>6</sup> To fully appreciate the difference between the two periods, we also need to look at the standard deviations for the two periods under examination. For leaders who reached office

between 1960 and 1989, the standard deviation is 10.3. This high degree of variation is largely due to the considerable number of coups that characterised the first three post-independence decades. Yet this value goes down to less than half (5.1) when we turn to 1990–2015, pointing to a context in which leaders’ length in office stabilises around a value lower than in the previous period.

Figure 4 shows that the average stay in power of elected rulers, just above six years, is about 40 per cent shorter than the ten years or so that unelected office-holders typically spend in office (as confirmed by a t-test with significance at  $p < .01$ ). Among the latter, in turn, those who reached power through coups or guerrilla takeovers have an even longer average duration – almost eleven years – compared with those who reached it in a peaceful way (about nine years).

Table 1 around here

Figure 4 around here

African post-colonial power-holders were noted for holding on to office for too long or else being all too frequently overthrown by their own armies. Leadership dynamics on the continent thus displayed an incoherent and noxious mix of immutability and unpredictability. Over the past twenty-five years, however, previously lacking selection and replacement procedures have been introduced and implemented across the continent by means of multiparty elections. This has resulted in a sharp drop in violent takeovers; an unprecedented rise in leaders taking the electoral route to power; markedly reduced variability in duration in

office; more frequent leadership successions managed within the ruling group; and growing opportunities for opposition leaders to win power peacefully. While in the context of a gradual process of institutionalising political leadership, flaws and challenges remain widespread, African power-holders now generally operate in an evidently different environment and their government actions likely respond to new incentives.

### **THE COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE OF THE ALC DATASET**

To the extent that leadership-selection and -removal processes involve electoral competition, there is a partial conceptual overlap with democratic procedures. But the ALC dataset tells us more than pointing to the presence or absence of democracy. When a country is deemed democratic by Polity IV or Freedom House, for example, we know its leaders are chosen through competitive elections. But when a country is deemed undemocratic, the question remains of how its power-holders are selected and replaced – whether through (non-democratic) elections, a coup, a peaceful non-electoral handover and so on. Our dataset provides the answers to this important issue.

The ALC dataset also helps us gain a more fine-grained understanding of some crucial dynamics in contemporary African politics, namely, the relationship among democracy, electoral successions, and electoral alternation. It shows whether a proper democratic process is a pre-requisite for a leader's succession in office or for opposition forces to win power through elections, or whether, on the contrary, successions and alternations in power can also take place in regimes that are only partly free or that are not electoral democracies. This is particularly relevant to Africa, where most countries adopt multiparty elections short of democratic standards and fall into categories that the literature has variously labelled 'electoral authoritarianisms', 'competitive authoritarianisms' or, more simply, 'hybrid

regimes' (Diamond, 2002; van de Walle, 2002; Schedler, 2006; Levitsky and Way, 2010; Cassani, 2014).

Electoral successions, for example, often happen under regimes that are hybrid, as Table 2 shows. Fifteen out of twenty-four electoral successions at transition times took place in countries that did not make the 6-point threshold on Polity IV's -10 to +10 scale.<sup>7</sup> When Kofi Busia became prime minister of Ghana by winning the 1969 election and replacing an unelected leader, for example, the country's score only climbed from -3 in 1969 to 3 in 1970–1971. Once elections were introduced and regularised, the vote often helped set an endpoint to the tenure of elected leaders, even in hegemonic-party regimes, as those elected had to comply with presidential term limits. Ten out of sixteen handovers of power from an elected incumbent to another elected leader belonging to the same political party occurred under conditions deemed less than democratic (i.e. Polity2 < 6). Tanzania in 2005, for instance, had a mere -1 on the Polity scale even after Jakaya Kikwete succeeded Benjamin Mkapa through a vote.

When we turn to alternations in office, on the other hand, it appears that African opposition leaders are only able to win power either at the time of transition elections or in sufficiently democratic regimes (Polity2 ≥ 6). All the fifteen electoral alternations during transitions (i.e. an opposition leader defeating a non-elected leader at the polls) occurred between 1991 and 2006. Six were in countries that did not satisfy democratic standards: electoral change, in other words, coincided with the introduction of hybrid regimes. For example, even after Ange-Félix Patassé defeated incumbent military ruler André Kolingba in the 1993 election, the Central African Republic only scored 5 on the Polity2 scale. On the other hand, twenty-four of the twenty-seven events of post-transition electoral alternations happened in 1991–2015, virtually all under democratic regimes. A partial exception is Côte

d'Ivoire. In the 2010 poll, Alassane Ouattara defeated president Laurent Gbagbo and yet the country retained a modest 4-point Polity2 rating for the following three years.

Table 2 about here

Besides democracy measures, some other datasets exist that overlap with our work, including Hyde and Marinov (2012)'s *National Elections across Democracy and Autocracy (NELDA)*, Geddes *et al.* (2014)'s *Autocratic Regimes Dataset*; and Lindberg (2006)'s *Elections and Democracy in Africa* dataset. The primary aim of NELDA is to provide detailed information on the degree of competitiveness of national elections around the world for the 1960–2012 period. ALC shares a number of significant features with NELDA. Both datasets adopt a minimal definition of democracy and consider elections to be competitive irrespectively of the political regime under which they are held and of the outcome they produce. Like ALC, NELDA also allows scholars to identify episodes of electoral succession and alternation, albeit only by re-aggregating different variables included in the dataset. Besides the fact that NELDA does not provide details on election results, the crucial difference with ALC is that NELDA only considers electoral leadership changes, omitting all kinds of non-electoral change (except for post-election coups preventing the winner from taking office).

The recent Autocratic Regimes Dataset is another valuable effort that focuses on regime continuity and change in an innovative way, particularly in avoiding a residual classification of autocracies. But what concerns its authors is not leadership changes *per se*. The latter may or may not coincide with regime transitions – the central concept of this dataset – since autocrats may be replaced without their ousting altering the substantive,



specific interests represented by the ruling leadership group, and thus the informal rules and ultimate nature of the regime.

Finally, Lindberg's dataset considers the role of elections and government turnovers, similarly to NELDA, but concentrates on contemporary Africa. It covers forty-seven countries for the 1989–2006 period, with some selected data for the 1969–88 period, and includes a number of interesting election-related variables that we decided to omit, such as violence during election campaigns or opposition boycotts. On the other hand, the time and geographical range of Lindberg's dataset is more limited, as ALC covers the whole continent over the entire post-independence period. Like NELDA, Lindberg's focus and scope are not just narrower than those of the ALC dataset: they are also qualitatively different. Our aim is to provide a more comprehensive account of the alternative modes in which African rulers reach power – not just elections – including violent takeovers and peaceful non-electoral transfers of power.

The *Archigos* dataset, collecting data on all political leaders of all independent countries in the world for the period 1875–2014, comes closest to our effort (Goemans *et al.*, 2009). Similarly to the ALC dataset, the focus is on 'the manner by which rulers enter and leave political power', as well as some of rulers' personal features and rulers' post-tenure fates. Compared to Archigos, however, our ALC dataset is more specifically designed to investigate and understand leadership dynamics in Africa. Our aim, in particular, is to take better account of (a) the different ways in which leaders reached and left power in the post-colonial period (1960s–80s) as opposed to the post-democratic reforms period (1990s to date); and (b) the prevailing dynamics in contemporary African regimes, which are now virtually all multiparty systems (implying elected leaders), but differ as to whether multiparty arrangements are embedded in democratic, hybrid or authoritarian realities. For these purposes, we choose country-years rather than individual leaders (as Archigos does) as our

units of analysis. This approach allows us also to account for the evolution of the source of an individual leader's power during his stay in office, for example when a sitting military leader turns into an elected president, as did Jerry Rawlings in Ghana between the 1980s and the 1990s. The inclusion of regime variables such as the form of government or the level of democracy is instrumental. ALC thus makes it possible to track processes of political institutionalisation and provides a better basis on which to examine how different sets of incentives affect leadership behaviour and performance.

A brief comparison with Archigos may help illustrate the advantages of the ALC dataset for studying African leadership. In accounting for the succession of leaders, the main distinction that Archigos draws is the one between regular and irregular transfers of power (as well as recording cases of direct foreign imposition). Regular ways of reaching power are based on existing institutional arrangements and conventions, including electoral mechanisms, hereditary succession or designation by an outgoing leader. Removals from office can also be regular (voluntary resignation or electoral defeat, for example) or irregular (the result of natural death in office; domestic revolts; armed rebellions; military coups; power struggles within the government or the military; or foreign intervention or threat of intervention). The ALC dataset makes a more precise distinction. Besides recording violent leadership changes (coups, guerrilla takeovers and foreign impositions), it indicates whether a leader's regular accession to power occurs through elections or, alternatively, through a peaceful but non-electoral transfer of power. Between 1960 and 2015, there were eighty-four leadership changes through elections and 116 peaceful non-electoral changes in Africa. Archigos does not distinguish these very distinct modes of leadership change, which are grouped together in the 'regular' transfer of power category. But they are crucially different phenomena, particularly when one wants to examine whether and how the spread of multiparty elections in the region has modified leadership selection processes over the past

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I think these sentences may be misleading.

In first, two kinds of irregular removals are contrasted to regular ones, but calling them 'additional possibilities', sounds like they are 'additional *regular*' removals instead.

Second, saying irregular exits are *further* classified' sounds a little as though these are 'sub-classifications' and not additional ones. Furthermore, 'foreign intervention' sounds as if it is the same as 'deposition by another state' in the first sentence, so this appears twice.

I'm fairly sure that neither these implications was what you meant but please check my changes to clarify them *are* what you meant.

**Commentato [a14]:** Yes. The correction you have made is ok for us.

two decades. Table 3 shows that African cases coded ‘regular entry into power’ by Archigos are actually a very heterogeneous set – and indeed somewhat misleading if one is to understand these leadership dynamics in Africa – as evident when they are re-classified according to the ALC coding rules.

Table 3 about here

The ALC dataset also goes a step further. While elections are now adopted virtually everywhere on the African continent, the question, as we mentioned, is whether voting makes a meaningful difference for leadership selection and removals, whether electoral leadership changes only occur under political party continuity, whether ballots actually allow opposition candidates to win office, whether this only happens at the time of regime transitions, and so on. Addressing these issues is beyond the scope of the Archigos dataset, but it is crucial for understanding Africa’s evolving political regimes. The ALC dataset thus records all necessary information that allows scholars to investigate the dynamics of leadership selection and replacement.

The collection of data that ALC provides can be employed for scientific investigations with diverse goals, well beyond the above descriptive use. A key concern that drove our effort – and thus a prospective application in the use of our dataset – is the need to investigate the causes and consequences of leadership changes. The impact of leadership dynamics, in particular, can be assessed by looking at the development progress of different countries under distinct types of rulers (or, for that matter, of a single country under distinct rulers). Does the sheer fact that a leader formally has an electoral mandate, and will face voters again, make a difference in his/her performance? Are leaders who operate in a context where being ousted by voters is a demonstrated possibility more attentive to meeting the latter’s needs? To

the extent that holding elections in which incumbents have to face one or more opponents injects into the political system an incentive for him/her to pay some attention to the concerns of voters, we should expect multiparty mandates to foster better government performances. Of course it can be argued that in many African nations elections are far from competitive and may, rather, be a tool for the preservation of authoritarian rule (Carothers, 2002; Levitsky and Way, 2010). We will not enter this debate here but simply show how the ALC dataset can help in answering questions of this kind. Its data, for example, separate non-elected rulers from elected leaders as well as, among the latter group, leaders elected in democratic settings from leaders elected under non-democratic conditions. As Figure 5 shows, elected leaders as a whole are systematically associated with higher average growth rates, when compared to unelected ones, in virtually every single decade from 1960s on. Interestingly, since the 1990s, elected rulers in polities deemed undemocratic have economically outperformed their democratic peers. This seems to suggest that elections, even when they are neither free nor fair, tend to improve the ability of African citizens to hold their leaders accountable and to obtain improvements in their governments' performances.

ALC also codes the advent of opposition leaders that attain power via an election victory. The risk of losing power through elections reinforces the incentives for vote-seeking presidents to expand the number of those benefiting from government policy, provide public goods and increase the level of social welfare. Once again this appears to be supported by preliminary empirical evidence (Figure 6): social welfare outcomes, here measured through primary school enrolment rate, are furthered when rulers from opposite political forces alternate in office by winning elections. Fully autocratic regimes lag behind multiparty electoral regimes in terms of social outcomes. But the latter are not a homogeneous set. On average, multiparty regimes where elections have never produced government turnovers have lower social welfare performances, in terms of primary school enrolment, than multiparty

**Commentato [a15]:** No, the term democratic is correct. With this figure we would like to show two main aspects:  
- Leaders that contest and win elections in multiparty contexts perform better than leaders that reach power with irregular means in closed authoritarianisms regarding economic growth.  
- When we unpacked multiparty contexts and we distinguish between leaders elected in multiparty BUT NOT democratic systems and leaders elected in multiparty AND democratic systems, since 1990s the former outperform the latter.

**Commentato [DS16]:** QUERY TO AUTHORS:  
If elected leaders in *undemocratic* polities are nevertheless somewhat accountable, surely elected leaders in *democratic* polities are even more accountable? Is it possible that you meant 'non-democratic peers', here, not 'democratic'?

regimes that have experienced one case of alternation in office and, in particular, those that experienced more than one. A ‘double government turnover’ rule seems at work not simply with regard to regime consolidation but also to government performance. While we must not draw conclusions from a similarly untested co-variation, it illustrates and hints at a possible causal relationship and a promising path for empirical research.

Figure 5 and 6 around here

## **CONCLUSION**

The role of individual rulers has historically loomed large in African polities. Despite the abundance of analyses on the subject, however, there is a scarcity of systematic and comprehensive data for comparative investigations into such issues as how rulers acquire power, the length of their stay at the top, the room for violent power seizures in the era of multiparty elections or the actual possibility of opposition forces winning office. The African Leadership Change (ALC) dataset aims at filling this gap. Besides its use as a tool for gauging the main historical and emerging leadership trends in Africa, the dataset enables researchers to investigate the causes and consequences of different types of leadership, including, for example, their impact on regime survival, on the economic performance of governments, on the peaceful resolution of conflicts or the consolidation of fragile states. Given its standard country-year structure, ALC can be easily merged with many other datasets, such as the World Bank’s World Development Indicators, the Quality of Government dataset (Teorell *et al.*, 2015) or the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict dataset (Gleditsch *et al.*, 2002). African leaders are central to the politics, policy-making and development of the region. Understanding the changing ways in which they are elevated to power or ousted from office is an important

vantage point from which to gain fuller understanding of the political motives for their actions, policies and performances.

### **Acknowledgment**

This work is part of a research project on The Economic, Social and Political Consequences of Democratic Reforms: A Quantitative and Qualitative Comparative Analysis (COD), funded by a Starting Grant of the European Research Council (Grant Agreement no. 262873, 'Ideas', 7th Framework Programme of the EU).

### **Notes**

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<sup>1</sup> While our primary focus is on the sub-Saharan region, we decided to extend coverage by including information on Africa's five Mediterranean countries, so that the dataset can offer a complete picture of the continent if and when needed.

<sup>2</sup> We included internationally recognised African states only from the ~~time~~time they reached formal independence, in line with other comparative political and economic datasets, such as NELDA; PolityIV; and World Development Indicators. This means that, for instance, ALC does not include pre-1990 Namibia (when it was *de facto* a province of South Africa) nor territories claiming independence, such as Somaliland. South Sudan was part of Sudan until it gained formal independence in 2011. Since Zanzibar was an independent country only between December 1963 and April 1964, we did not include it in the dataset (from 1964, Zanzibar has been considered part of Tanzania, which is already covered by ALC for 1961–1963).

<sup>3</sup> Since the murder of a leader is not necessarily the consequence of a coup or a guerrilla takeover (for example, the 1966 assassination of the South Africa's Prime Minister Balthazar Johannes Vorster), ALC includes a dummy variable (*incumbent assassinated*) that codes all leaders' assassinations irrespective of the modes of leadership changes associated with each of these instances.

<sup>4</sup> Similar situations are quite common among Eastern European countries characterised by new and extremely fragile and volatile party systems (see Latvia in 1993; Poland in 2001) and also occurred in Italy in 1994, with the collapse of the traditional party system. However, scholars who study party competition and cabinets in Europe would hardly have had doubts about considering these government changes as political alternations. The ALC codebook, which details all the variables included in the dataset and the coding rules we adopted, also describes the unusual cases of leadership changes that occurred in each country, if any.

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<sup>5</sup> The African Elections database can be found at <http://africanelections.tripod.com/>; the World Leaders Index at <http://www.worldleadersindex.org/homepage.html>; and the Parline database at <http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/parlinesearch.asp>. The Database of Political Institutions can be downloaded from the World Bank's website (<http://www.worldbank.org/>).

<sup>6</sup> Note that it is not just the post-1990 group for whom the number of years in office as of 2015 is likely not to be definitive: while the latter group understandably comprises a larger number of incumbents, both this and the pre-1990 group include a similar number of those incumbents who tend to raise average values, i.e. leaders who have been in power for ten years or more and are still in office (seven in the 1960–89 group; nine in the 1990–2015 group).

<sup>7</sup> A score of 7 or more on the Polity scale is often taken as the threshold necessary for a country to be classified as democratic. Yet the authors of Polity IV at times lower this threshold to 6 points. Marshall and Cole, for example, explain that 'countries with Polity scores from +6 to +10 are counted as democracies in tracking Global Trends in Governance' (see Marshall and Cole, 2011: 9). We believe that in the African context, which has been historically dominated by non-democratic rule, a score of 6 signals a remarkable democratic achievement.

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#### Key Quotes

[the Africa Leadership Change \(ALC\) dataset offers a new tool for researchers to examine the role of leaders in the continent's political, economic and social processes \(p. 2\)](#)

[African power-holders now generally operate in an evidently different environment and their government actions likely respond to new incentives \(p. 13\)](#)

[Compared to Archigos our ALC dataset is more specifically designed to investigate and understand leadership dynamics in Africa \(p. 16\)](#)

[elections, even when they are neither free nor fair, tend to improve the ability of African citizens to hold their leaders accountable and to obtain improvements in their governments' performances \(p. 19\)](#)