

BOOK REVIEW

Carl LeVan. *Contemporary Nigerian Politics: Competition in a Time of Transition and Terror*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019. vi + 238 pp. List of Figures. List of Tables. Bibliography. Index. \$94.99. Cloth. ISBN: 9781108472494.

In *Contemporary Nigerian Politics: Competition in a Time of Transition and Terror*, Carl LeVan uses the 2015 presidential election as the basis for a broader analysis of the nature of political struggles and competition in Nigeria's restored elective system. The theme of the work is a timely one that shows the pathway of democracy's development in the country almost two decades after military rule ended.

The book is comprised of seven chapters, with the first chapter focusing on the politics that undergirded the restoration of elective rule and the post-military governance of the first sixteen years. Chapter Two addresses issue-based politics and the campaign of the opposition party for the 2015 elections. The emphases of Chapters Three, Four, and Five are the various considerations that influenced voter choices in the 2015 elections and the electoral outcome. Chapter Six discusses the major security challenges to the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria, while Chapter Seven is the conclusion. LeVan believes that party messages can shift voter preferences and that the opposition party's victory in the 2015 elections followed this trajectory.

Theoretically, LeVan engages Nigerian politics from the perspective of democracy consolidation scholarship. He focuses on the elite pacts that facilitated the military handover of power and on democratic institutions such as political parties and elections, along with their implications for the long survival of Nigeria's restored elective system. According to LeVan, the 2015 presidential election was the decisive consolidation event for Nigeria's post-military democratization. The importance of this election for him is that the victory of the opposition party marks a tipping point for the elite pact that ended the military rule. Specifically, the 2015 presidential election outcome negated the transition agreement. LeVan's main claim is that the defeat of the ruling party in that election and by extension the end of the transition pact marks the end of the transition from dictatorship. By making that claim, this work of obvious rigor panders to the notion that the substitution of one

set of elite consensus for another and peaceful deals on the exchange of power translates to democracy.

The book examines electoral contests and party politics among the major parties following the end of military rule. It argues that the politics of the dominant People's Democratic Party (PDP) was guided in large part by the transitional compacts of the major political interests. The result of these compacts was that the first post-military presidential ticket was awarded to the Yoruba ethnic group, which had become restive due to the cancellation of the June 12, 1993, elections which were believed to have been won by one of their own. Going forward, the party made an agreement to alternate power between the north and south of the country. Also, the pact sought to weaken the military's institutional influence on politics.


To weaken the military politically, there was a massive retirement of politically connected officers. Purging the army of the politicized officers was a strategy intended to reassure the existing military that they had the support of the ruling party. This also included promotions and improvement to the resources of the military as incentives for loyalty and proof against coups. The PDP took steps to reduce the anxieties of the retiring officers about any rights abuses that may have been committed during the military rule. Finally, the party also supported new career paths for the retiring officers.

In spite of these elite deals, the ruling PDP could not hold power beyond 2015 because, according to LeVan, it failed to manage a stable elite consensus. This relates in particular to Jonathan's succession of the late President Yar Adua and his efforts to retain the presidency contrary to the north/south power shift deal. The party was also unable to manage fundamental challenges to state survival emanating from excluded groups such as the Igbo, the Niger Delta inhabitants, and the northern poor.

The author used a mixed research method with a few regression analyses and a predominantly qualitative presentation of his findings, drawn from interviews and secondary sources on the political parties and their main campaign issues. This method gives the work a touch of intellectual sophistication. The vastness of qualitative data and their analysis attests to the rigor of the research. However, beyond an intellectual circle, the inferential statistics of the author's quantitative analysis means very little to the general reader.

In addition, while LeVan devotes much time to the complex power maneuvers of the elite, the analysis disregards the majority underclass who should be the focal point of a democracy study. They only materialized in the author's discussion of institutional stress points, which are the agitations and crises that threaten the institutional survival of the state. Indeed, the work fails to recognize the massive effort of civil society organizations, the activist press, and even individuals and groups. These groups and individuals contributed to moderating the power struggles and led to some changes to the rules, resulting in enhanced quality of the political competition. Furthermore, the book's argument that transition ended in 2015 sets it up for criticism, because

it tends to imply that the PDP will never return to power to revive its pacts. It also implies that the post-2015 ruling party is free of elite deals, despite the fact that it is indeed a coalition of several interests. In spite of its flaws, the book is rich in details, incisive in analysis, and a good read for political scientists, Africanists, and general readers.

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For additional reading on this subject, the ASR recommends:

- Demarest, Leila, and Arnim Langer. 2019. "Reporting on Electoral Violence in Nigerian News Media: 'Saying It as It Is'?" *African Studies Review* 62 (4): 83–109. doi:10.1017/asr.2018.150.
- Madueke, Kingsley L. 2019. "The Emergence and Development of Ethnic Strongholds and Frontiers of Collective Violence in Jos, Nigeria." *African Studies Review* 62 (4): 6–30. doi:10.1017/asr.2018.115.
- Rabinowitz, Beth S. 2018. "More than Elections: Rural Support and Regime Stability in Africa." *African Studies Review* 61 (3): 27–52. doi:10.1017/asr.2018.36.