

the initial dictator leaves office. By unpacking the elite power dynamics that underpin autocratic institutions, Meng usefully moves the authoritarianism literature beyond explanations that often treat institutional choice as exogenous.

Moreover, Meng's account emphasises the wide variation in institutionalisation across Africa, challenging past paradigms that tend to paint African regimes as overwhelmingly personalist or neopatrimonial. Meng's new data on successor policies, term limits and cabinet appointments from 46 African countries – plus short case studies of Cameroon and Cote d'Ivoire – help to illustrate how different power distributions and institutional environments emerge in different contexts. The book also boldly suggests that institutionalisation, not democratisation, was 'the real story of Africa in the 1990s' (15): popular uprisings compelled leaders to accept formal limits on their power, which constrained leaders but helped stabilise dictatorships in the long term, helping to explain the continent's halting progress toward democratisation since the 1990s.

Despite these important strides, some questions remain about the causal process undergirding Meng's claims. For example, the observational data use African coup leaders and independence-era 'founding fathers' as proxies for strong dictators, but Meng does not pin down precisely the mechanisms (charisma, popular support, etc.) that give these leaders leverage over elites. Moreover, Meng emphasises that a leader's strength is *relative* to other elites but leaves the source of elites' power underspecified. If institutionalisation requires elites to pose a credible threat to the dictator, how does this threat emerge? One suggestion for future research is to examine how social networks may underpin elite power: whether seeking to sideline a rival, approve/block a policy measure, or oust a dictator via coup or party vote, elites depend on having reliable allies to achieve their aims. Relatedly, additional process-tracing that builds on Meng's case snapshots would help pin down the calculus of dictators and regime elites as they negotiate institutional arrangements. In rather durable dictatorships such as Kenyatta's Kenya or Nyerere's Tanzania, Meng's theory would have predicted that powerful independence-era leaders would *not* have adopted executive constraints. But the fact that both established formal succession rules and filled Vice President and Defence Minister positions – Meng's two key measures of institutionalisation – suggests the need for a closer look at these cases and others, perhaps using archival or other historical materials, to validate or amend the logic presented in the book.

Notwithstanding these quibbles, *Constraining Dictatorship* is a theoretically rich and methodologically impressive contribution to understanding autocratic politics in Africa and beyond.

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France's Wars in Chad: military intervention and decolonization in Africa

by NATHANIEL K. POWELL

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The impact of French military interventions on state formation in Chad has been a significant topic of academic research in the social sciences. Powell's argument in

France's Wars in Chad draws its authority from a compelling rendition of historical details. Indeed, the author provides the first such account based on the under-explored files of the 'chargés de missions géographiques' in the Cooperation Ministry section of the French National Archives.

Powell's account covers the first two decades following Chad's independence from France (1960–1982) and considers how the former coloniser became entangled in Chadian wars through its military interventions. His argument that France's military interventions weakened the ability of the Chadian state to stand on its own is certainly not new. Other scholars before him, such as Nolutshungu (*Limits of Anarchy*, University Press of Virginia, 1995) for example, have argued that international interventions resulted in a 'dependent sovereignty', meaning that for the governments in Chad, 'the more they are defended, the more they remained in need of defense' from foreign states (12). Instead, I locate the novelty of the book's contribution in the subtle argument that France's military interventions have failed to reinforce the institutional capacity of the Chadian state because they did nothing 'to alter the configurations of political imbalances and the fundamental substructure of power relations' among Chadian stakeholders (162).

Powell argues that French officials' predilection for the military option, instead of political solutions to Chadian wars, in great part emerged from the gradual construction of the geopolitical image of Chad as the keystone to France's ambition for global power. For example, French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing considered winning the wars in Chad as a 'survival test', and diplomats in the Foreign Ministry believed that failure to succeed 'would mean the onset of gangrene' in other parts of francophone Africa (199). The book suggests that even if France intervened at the behest of Chadian governments to quell armed rebellions, the strategic moves of officials in Paris were instead driven by regional threats. The French were especially uneasy with Gadhafi's Libya's expansionist ambitions towards Chad, Sudan and Egypt's use of proxy armed groups in the wars to settle their own scores with Libya, or Nigeria's emerging assertion of power in the region. Ultimately, the fascination with regional geopolitics meant France invested little effort in building the institutional capacity of the Chadian state, which could only remain militarily dependent on its former coloniser.

Powell shows that the significant geopolitical place occupied by Chad within France's diplomatic and security apparatus had evolved very little during the two decades. Despite the succession of presidents from different political ideologies – from the right-wing Charles de Gaulle and Georges Pompidou to the centre-right Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and the left-wing François Mitterrand – they harboured the same interest in intervention in Chad. The origin of this policy continuity certainly lies with the role of French diplomatic and military attachés found both in France and in Chad, at the French embassy and within the Chadian administration. With a great deal of detail, Powell shows how diplomats such as Louis Dallier or military advisors such as Camille Gouvernec or Pierre de Tonquedec used their positions to shape France's policy towards Chad. Here, Powell's original argument shines the spotlight on the contribution of people at the intermediary level in shaping France's Africa policy. Therefore, he distances himself from accounts relying on the dominant role played by the powerful advisor Jacques Foccart and his personal relationships with most of the presidents in francophone Africa.

Powell's book has also attempted to make the case for the agency of Chadians in influencing the French decision-making process. For example, he describes how

government officials deliberately made unnecessary concessions to the rebellion during the Benghazi agreement, only to turn around and blame the rebels for breaking the terms of the agreement, thus leaving France with no choice but to mount Operation Tacaud in 1978.

Powell's argument is rich in anecdotes, such as the story of the French ambassador who kept an undated and signed letter from President Tombalbaye so that he could post it to his superiors in case Tombalbaye was under immediate threat and unable to request military assistance himself. Or how President Goukouni Weddeye had once stayed awake all night with his Kalashnikov, fearing that the French had staged a coup against him. The story turned out to be a false alarm sent by Chadian soldiers who had misapprehended French military movements at the capital's airport on that night.

However, for a book concerned with France's intervention and its impact on state formation in Chad, it is surprising that Powell does not provide any account of the connection between the colonial and the post-colonial, even more so because of the decades under study. An exploration of decolonisation in Chad would have set the stage for readers unfamiliar with Chadian politics to first understand Chad's dependence on external military support and, second, the preponderant role of France in its domestic politics.

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Undoing Coups: the African Union and post-coup intervention in Madagascar

by ANTONIA WITT

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What does it really mean to 'return' a country to 'constitutional order'? This is the central question that Antonia Witt addresses in her book *Undoing Coups: the African Union and post-coup intervention in Madagascar*, aiming to unpack the politics and contested interactions among multiple, entangled national, regional and international actors, as well as their interplay with different norms and legitimacies in processes of transnational order-making. Arguing for the need to bridge the divide, and problematic division of labour, between African studies and international relations (IR), Witt proposes a detailed case study (10ff.) and the concept of 'transboundary formations' (first advanced by Robert Latham, Ronald Kassimir and Thomas M. Callaghy) (38ff.), to overcome top-down and/or normative perspectives on African interventions, a limited understanding of concrete actors and the role of African agency in global politics, and a lack of theoretical orientation in academic literature on African regional organizations (ROs) in peace and security. In this way, the book contributes to an emerging body of literature that seeks to highlight, further specify and theorise 'non-Western' agency in (global) IR scholarship (14).

Based on extensive interviews and multi-sited field research, Witt takes a deep dive into post-coup interventions in Madagascar, between 2009 and 2014. Interestingly, contrary to what the title suggests, the book is actually not only about the African Union (AU) and its emerging policies and concrete efforts in response to