

## Comparative Lessons for the Study of African Politics

Panel Chairs:

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The third wave of democratization has affected every world region, though not in the same way or to the same extent. So far, regional similarities and differences have tended to be obscured. Most of the literature consists of case studies, region-wide analyses, and large-*N* global investigations. Cross-regional or interregional comparisons are rare. Building on the recent interest in Comparative Area Studies, this panel seeks to put the study of African politics in an explicitly comparative perspective, asking what lessons other regions hold for this continent.

Africa's political landscape has changed dramatically since the end of the Cold War. Following the collapse of old regimes, African countries embarked on transitions that were initially welcomed as the beginning of a continent-wide wave of democratization. However, Africa confirmed that elections do not equal democracy, as political transitions soon took various divergent routes. In several cases, change only affected the surface of politics, with old and new incumbent elites maintaining their grip on power. In other cases, elections did advance democratization, even when voting was at times flawed, by favouring the rooting of a logic of free and fair competition.

To explain the mixed record of democratization in Africa, scholars have typically privileged an area study approach, more or less explicitly assuming that there is something unique about democratization in Africa. Without dismissing the specificities of the sub-Saharan region and their influence on political development, the time is ripe for putting Africa within a Comparative Area Studies framework. To understand what, if anything, is special about democratization in Africa, we could learn a lot from political developments in other regions that have experienced similar processes of change, and have dealt with similar challenges.

The Panel welcomes Paper proposals that try to analyse African politics in light of the findings and conclusions from post-communist countries, Asia, Latin America, or the MENA region. We are particularly interested in empirical contributions and are open to a broad range of methods, approaches, and case selection. Papers could deal with either democratic progress, regression or authoritarian resilience; they could focus on either specific actors (e.g. ruling elites and opposition parties), institutions, or structural factors. Questions that could be addressed include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Why are illiberal regimes seen as a problem for Eastern Europe but less for Sub-Saharan Africa?

- Why are autocracies in the Middle East seen as stable whereas many dictatorships in Africa are thought of as subject to the democratizing power of elections?
- Why are there no “colour revolutions” in Africa?
- What do African “big men” and Asian “strongmen” have in common?
- How relevant is the Latin American phenomenon of “hyperpresidentialism” for Africa’s presidential regimes?
- What can “patronal politics” in post-communist Eurasia tell us about neo-patrimonialism in Africa?

The Panel proposal will be submitted to the Open Section. Paper proposals should include an abstract (max 500 words) and 3-8 keywords. Proposals should be sent to [andrea.cassani@unimi.it](mailto:andrea.cassani@unimi.it) and [visbogaards@ceu.edu](mailto:visbogaards@ceu.edu) by February 10. The Panel and Paper proposals will be submitted collectively by the Panel Chairs by February 15. Presenters and Authors of Papers should have or create an ECPR account.