Excerpts from the Introduction to:
Dictators, Democrats, and Government Performance for African Development

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As de-colonization neared its end in the 1950's, a wave of optimism swept across Sub-Saharan Africa. In Nigeria, the jewel of Britain's African colonies, citizens anxiously embraced the promise of political sovereignty. At his inauguration as governor-general in 1960, Nigeria's great nationalist, Nnamdi Azikiwe, recited a poem by the African-American author Langston Hughes, called "Youth," which begins, "We have tomorrow bright before us like a flame/Yesterday a night-gone thing a sun-down name." Hughes sat in the audience with thousands of Nigerians, all welcoming a new dawn.[1] The incoming government promised massive investment in education and socio-economic development. Voters had peacefully exercised their rights at the polls, foreign investment was pouring in, and the economy was expanding.

When a new political generation gathered in the capital half a century later to commemorate that momentous day, militants detonated two bombs near President Goodluck Jonathan, killing a dozen people. Only minutes before, Jonathan had cautiously reflected on Nigeria's previous five decades, declaring, "There is certainly much to celebrate: our freedom, our strength, our unity and our resilience." One newspaper called the 2010 bombing "perhaps one of the most unfortunate incidents in the 50 years of Nigeria's post-independence history."[2] Another Nigerian commentary bluntly asked, "Has Nigeria achieved the greatness it was clamoring for at independence? Or is Nigeria a fool at fifty?"[3]

The answers offered in this book will disappoint the cynics and surprise the optimists. It is true that the United Nations counts Nigeria among the world's most underdeveloped nations,

[1] "Zik Becomes His Excellency," *West Africa*, 19 November 1960, p. 1299.
[2] Abba Gana Shettima, "Nigeria: Abuja Bomb Blasts – Agony of a Confused Nation," *Daily Trust*, 8 October 2010.
[3] Lawan Yakubu, "A Requiem for Nigeria?" *Daily Trust*, 8 October 2010.

where approximately 90 percent of the population lives on less than $2 per day, and the average life expectancy is less than forty-eight years. Economic growth since the transition to democracy in 1999 masks significant governance failures, including increases in economic inequality and extreme poverty (United Nations Development Programme 2009). The country also has little to show for the estimated US$300 billion it has earned from oil exports since the 1970s. When Transparency International, a global non-governmental organization that monitors corruption, ranked Nigeria just ahead of low achievers such as Zimbabwe and Mauritania in a 2010 report, an editorial in one of Nigeria's leading newspapers lamented, "The fight against corruption has remained a problematic one, with sloganeering by successive governments and very little else to show for it."[4]

But President Jonathan's reflections on the 50th anniversary of independence were not unfounded. After all, Nigeria survived one of Africa's most brutal civil wars and five military coups. It emerged from this violence to become an important regional and global leader in peacekeeping and diplomacy. The youth literacy rate stands at 87 percent, up from 65 percent in 1985. In the early years after independence, only 5 percent of the nation's children were enrolled in primary school; enrollment rates now reach 100 percent in some parts of the country. In contrast to the high inflation that crippled Nigeria's booming oil economy in the 1970s and the subsequent borrowing that funneled export income into interest payments, consumers today face more predictable prices and the government has rid itself of almost all foreign debt.

Nigeria record seems to validate the claim that development comes through good public policy. Increased literacy and school enrollment owe much to policies instituted in the 1970s, when the federal government called education the "greatest investment that a nation can make

[4] Editorial, "The Transparency International Corruption Report," *Daily Trust*, 1 November 2010.

for the development of its economic, political, sociological and human resources."[5] Federal budget deficits and inflation became less volatile after a reform-minded public finance team renegotiated or paid off the country's debts in 2006. Nigeria's many failings must be viewed alongside developmental successes that punctuate its post-colonial history.

The question that drives this book is: what factors affect the Nigerian government's ability to formulate policies conducive to development? Polices are binding decisions about public resources, and good government performance means that policy outputs serve a greater common good over the long term. Comparative studies often blame ethnic diversity, foreign debt, authoritarianism, or an economy dependent on natural resource exploitation for policy failures in the developing world. Research on Africa very often adds colonial legacies to this list. Nigeria possesses many of the qualities associated with policy failure, including a string of dictatorships, high foreign debt, tremendous ethnic diversity, and a robust oil economy. While these characteristics are certainly relevant to understanding Nigeria, none of them fully explain variations in government performance.

Drawing on a historical study of Nigeria since independence, I argue that the structure of the policy-making process explains variation in government performance better than other variables. I use the concept of "veto players" to capture this underlying structure, identifying political actors operating in both formal and informal political settings with the leverage to block policy change and extract concessions. Using qualitative and quantitative data gathered during extensive field research, I then empirically link Nigeria's veto players to patterns in government performance from 1960 to 2007. Focusing on policies which the development literature associates with long term economic development, I distinguish between national collective goods, non-excludable public policies that inherently benefit the country on the whole, and local

[5] Editorial, "Hard Road for Education," *West Africa*, 21 May 1979, p. 871.

collective goods that are more particularistic and might be targeted to specific communities or interests.

Even after taking into account intervening variables for dictatorship, debt, and oil revenue, I show that the number of veto players systematically explains Nigerian government performance in these two broad categories of public policy. But the number of veto players has differential effects, which leads to an important insight: conditions which impair the delivery of national collective goods also tend to improve the delivery of local collective goods. Nigeria, like many African countries, therefore faces what I refer to as a "Madisonian dilemma," since it has to balance contradictory effects implicit in the structure of the policy process. Resolving this dilemma remains a perennial challenge due to cultural and demographic pressures to make the policy process representative. For example, Nigeria has arguably complicated matters by adopting some institutions to explicitly represent identities and others intended to transcend them.

The approach here differs from many single country studies, since it does not attempt to explain maldistribution or patronage other than what is reported in aggregate national-level figures. Similarly, it does not attempt to document the *quality* of governance or changes in the level of corruption. I instead focus on how the underlying structure of the policy process affects the government's ability to deliver policy benefits consumed at different levels. Government performance in these terms refers to policy outputs directly linked to government decisions, such as hiring more instructors to teach in public schools. Following Baum and Lake (2003), it also includes more indirect policy outcomes. After all, even if the government is not a direct provider of the goods and services in question, it still regulates them and monitors performance. By conceptually organizing regimes based on centers of power, my causal explanation transcends

blunt distinctions between democracy and dictatorship, and contributes to emerging literatures on authoritarian institutions, political development, and ethnic politics. Veto player analysis therefore offers a new way of thinking about the causes of suboptimal government performance in Africa and beyond.

GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE IN THE LITERATURE

In order to situate this book's central argument about veto player theory in a proper context, it is important to review four standard explanations for poor government performance in Africa. Each of these explanations faces limitations. I begin with a discussion of modernization theory, which argues that economic and social progress lead to democratization. This theory has experienced a revival over the last decade, although the persistence of illiberal regimes in a surprising number of countries across the developing world has kept the debate over modernization theory's explanatory value alive. A second, common explanation attributes performance failures to the relative wealth of the state. Governments with little income have weak capacity due to few resources to enact good public policies, while governments with substantial revenue from natural resources perform poorly because citizens lack political leverage to hold government accountable. In this construction, Africa's poor countries are doomed either way. A third explanation blames ethnic diversity for breeding parochialism and clientelism, outcomes that distort the distribution of resources and ultimately undermine long-term economic growth. Finally, there is the bad leadership explanation. Political commentators, casual observers, and scholars often attribute governance successes or failures to leaders' personal qualities. There is reason to be skeptical of this formulation. As Tanzania's first president, Julius Nyerere, said in 1968, "Leadership cannot replace democracy" (Nyerere 1973). This blunt assessment of leadership as process still rings true, affirming the possibilities of comparative politics by

emphasizing the need to understand the systemic factors that impact decision making by individuals. "For policies to be effective," writes a leading Nigerian political scientist, "the process through which they are made and executed has to be rational, sequential and deliberative" (Jega 2007, 105).

[EXCERPTS DELETED]

AN ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATION

Madison argues that the causes of factions, which include above all the unequal distribution of property, cannot be removed. Therefore, "controlling the effects" of factions is among the principal tasks of government. "Each department should have a will of its own," he explains in the *Federalist Papers*, famously arguing that "ambition must be made to counter ambition."[6] Starting in the 1990s, political scientists have used this central insight as the basis for developing veto player theory. Yet Madison's foundational legacy is largely taken for granted and the literature rarely mentions him. In one sense, this is unsurprising because veto player theory is intended to operate in a comparative framework and overt references to Madison could be misinterpreted as narrowing its scope to just the American experience. In a broader sense though, veto player theory and even comparative politics more generally, have unpaid debts to Madison (Samuels and Shugart 2010).

George Tsebelis makes the contemporary case for veto players as a comparative tool, arguing that conventional categories such as presidential/parliamentary, unicameral/bicameral, or majoritarian/proportional often defy clear demarcation. For example, despite innumerable national differences, this theory allows meaningful comparisons between political executives in

[6] Federalist No. 51.

Peru and France who, without formal institutional authority, often exercise effective vetoes over policy. Policy making is therefore better understood in terms of a continuum reflecting the number and type of divided interests. These veto players are thus "individual or collective actors whose agreement is required for a change of the status quo" (Tsebelis 1995).

His work has spawned dozens of studies over the last fifteen years that have tested or extend this framework in various ways. With a few notable exceptions,[7] virtually all of this research has focused on developed countries. "It may be that there is much less faith in institutional approaches among those who do not work on developing countries," explains a recent literature review on veto players, which is unfortunate in light of the theory's "proven use" (Hallerberg 2010, 35). While veto player theory has formed the basis of a highly integrated niche literature on the developed world, it has been less convenient to apply in regions where key concepts are difficult to measure and quantify. Despite an appreciation for the idea that veto players are more than numbers on a chart, that they represent some underlying social contract concerning the distribution of political authority, operationalizing this idea remains a challenge.

Most veto player studies are also limited by their focus on explaining policy stability rather than change (Konig, Tsebelis, and Debus 2010; Gelbach and Malesky 2010). This focus is unnecessarily narrow, since some literature does link veto players to other types of outcomes. If veto players can extract policy concessions, then their impact should be seen in their ability to demand targetable policy outputs that function as side payments to political allies – in addition to their ability to block policy change (Cox and McCubbins 2001; Lyne 2008). Indeed, one study looking at institutional actors in seventy-eight countries found that as the number of "veto points" increases, governments embark on more costly "white elephant" projects that benefit narrow constituencies (Henisz and Zelner 2006). Research on African power-sharing agreements

[7] See for example Cheesman and Tendi (2010) and MacIntyre (2001).

suggests that veto players may also impact the likelihood of renewed political violence (Cheeseman and Tendi 2010). The literature explores how veto players limit opportunities for selfish behavior, but typically through the lens of policy stability. Scholars try to gauge the extent of veto players' "commitment" or "resoluteness" when it comes to maintaining the status quo (Haggard and McCubbins 2001). Accountability is framed as a safeguard against impetuous policy shifts driven by a small number of cohesive political actors.

Madison, however, recognizing the risks of making policy too difficult to change and argued for a strong, but bicameral, legislature. The division of the legislature was intended as a form of horizontal monitoring—separate and sovereign authorities to create checks and balances within and across government. Though he was no populist, Madison at the same time feared that inadequate control of delegated authority would disenfranchise the poor majority or enable the executive to spend recklessly. He appreciated the importance of accountability with a vertical dimension as well. In contemporary veto players literature, these ideas are represented in the form of strong unions, independent judiciaries, or influential militaries who shape policy choice (Tsebelis 2002; Andrews and Montinola 2004). In this book I bring such actors close to the heart of veto player theory. An analysis rooted in these foundational principles advances the study of Africa, where nationalists won their freedom in the 1960s, where social movements were surprisingly effective building capacity for vertical accountability in the 1980s, and where restraining executive authority stands out as perhaps the central problem of institutional consolidation today (Barkan 2009; Diamond and Plattner 2010). I build upon veto player theory by integrating the social bases of authority into the analysis of elite behavior. I find that the number of veto players does not only impact policy stability, the usual focus of veto player studies, it also has differential effects on local and nationally-oriented public policy outputs.

Since most veto player studies also focus on developed democracies, this book also aims to contribute to emerging comparative scholarship about authoritarianism. This research, which now complements democratization as a significant field of inquiry, strives to disaggregate authoritarian regimes in order to understand how they govern. By examining alternative bases of accountability, policy control, and civic participation, this "analytic authoritarian" literature has exposed how seemingly different regimes face surprisingly similar pressures to represent societal interests. For example, twenty-nine years into his tenure as president of the Ivory Coast, Félix Houphouët-Boigny asserted, "There is no number two, three or four...In Côte d'Ivoire there is only a number one: that's me and I don't share my decisions" (Meredith 2006, 379). In my view, the analytic authoritarian literature questions this excessive bravado. It explores how political institutions such as legislatures or mass political parties can and do constrain dictators (Wright 2008; Brownlee 2007; Frantz and Ezrow 2011). Autocrats govern through a variety of collective decision-making mechanisms, challenging the myth of the "solitary autocrat" (Gandhi 2008). Repression has its limits. Autocrats face real "audience costs," the political risks of coercion compared to cooptation (Weeks 2008). Burkina Faso's dictator, for example, has survived several waves of mass protests since coming to power in 1987 by employing strategies of conciliation rather than coercion.[8] Unlike much of the democratization literature, which uses a wide array of ideal types to analyze illiberal regimes, veto player theory supports a comparative analysis by conceptualizing political authority on a continuum.

[EXCERPTS DELETED]

[8] Adam Nossiter, "In Burkina Faso, Leader Keeps Cool Under Fire," *New York Times*, 10 May 2011.

The Structure of the Book

During the 1990s, a new dictator sent Obasanjo to prison, where the retired general changed his mind about democracy. After he was released, Obasanjo ran for office and became the first democratically elected president following the 1999 transition. During his eight years in office, he clashed continually with the National Assembly which tried to impeach him numerous times, oversaw two flawed elections, and witnessed the rise of Islamic law in the north and new violent rebellions in the south. He also increased social spending, oversaw economic reforms, paid off the country's foreign debts, and restored Nigeria's international reputation. What does this decidedly mixed record teach us about the factors that determine government performance? This book digs beneath the standard political and cultural formulations to understand the underlying dynamics that guide policy making.

The first chapter uses veto player theory to develop an alternative explanation for government performance. I detail the criteria for identifying veto players. In my formulation, political actors possess veto authority when they possess motives to challenge the status quo, the organizational means to internally coordinate preferences, and they demonstrably block policy in one major area such as federal budgets or constitutional reform. While veto players are often associated with formal institutions, I draw upon scholars who explore how authority coalescing from the bottom-up can form alternative centers power with veto authority. This incorporates some informal institutions into the model. I then argue that the conditions which increase policy stability and credibility also make it more difficult for political actors to coordinate their interests. This should impact policies with non-excludable benefits at the national level since it is more difficult for veto players to agree that their interests are better served by these broad, collective policies. The number of veto players should also theoretically impact the overall levels

of more particularistic goods since each actor can use its leverage to demand excludable benefits. Throughout the book I describe these two distinct policy outcomes as national collective goods and local collective goods, respectively.

In Chapter 2, I count the number of veto players in each Nigerian regime between independence in 1960 and the end of President Olusegun Obasanjo's second term in 2007. This exercise codes the study's independent variable. Anecdotes from interviews with primary sources vividly illustrate why regimes with more veto players face bargaining problems. I explain how veto authority develops, sometimes from the top down and sometimes from the ground up. I pay special attention to policy actors who have gained power since Nigeria's 1999 transition, the country's longest experience with democracy since independence. I argue that violent agitation for Islamic law in the north and militant demands for control over oil resources in the south stem from efforts to maintain a federal bargain between two distinct geopolitical regions. This analysis roots macro-level political leverage in geography, culture, and history, and it explores the endogenous factors that shape institutions.

In Chapter 3, I define government performance, specify different methods of measuring performance, and perform two sets of statistical tests. Building on the theory of public goods and relevant critiques, I elaborate on the distinctions between local and national collective goods. With respect to collective goods distributed on a national level, it is costly to exclude some citizens from enjoying their benefits. I operationalize these variables with original empirical data on budgetary policy, inflation, education, and judicial resolution of property rights cases. With respect to collective goods distributed on a local level, it theoretically is possible to target delivery and exclude some constituencies. I operationalize these variables with original data on

capital and recurrent spending. I draw upon speeches and government documents to show that these performance indicators all reflect government policy priorities.

I then formulate twin hypotheses: A "coordination hypothesis" predicts that regimes with additional veto players will face bargaining problems that impede the delivery of national-level collective goods. A "log roll hypothesis" predicts that additional veto players will correspond with greater overall levels of local collective goods. Statistical tests with original data show that additional veto players do increase coordination problems, but they also foster policy stability and accountability. In a practical sense, having more veto players makes it more difficult to enact policies at a national level because it is difficult for veto players to agree on broad, collective policies. Regimes with the most veto players have larger budget deficits, higher inflation rates, higher student/teacher ratios, and less efficient judicial resolution of property rights cases. But having more veto players actually lowers the overall delivery level of local collective goods. Tests show that these regimes are more likely to restrain capital and recurrent spending. This is because each player has the leverage to demand favors but faces greater scrutiny from political counterparts. I attribute these performance outcomes to the improved monitoring generated by additional veto players. All of these results remain robust after including controls for the conventional explanations for government performance. The evidence indicates that Nigeria faces a "Madisonian dilemma," where the conditions that foster accountability simultaneously contribute to coordination problems.

Chapter 4 provides a succinct qualitative analysis to compliment the statistical tests. Rather than attempting to link specific veto players to explicit policy preferences, the more modest goal is to associate particular veto player regimes with government performance. The analysis identifies statistical outliers and some inconsistencies within each cluster of variables

measuring local and national collective goods. By showing *which* veto player regimes struggled to deliver national collective goods, and which regimes successfully limited policy log rolls, this chapter specifies the effects of Nigeria's Madisonian dilemma at different points in time. The chapter also offers a check against a relatively small sample size, since none of the variables has more than 47 years of data.

To probe the comparative potential of the model beyond Nigeria, Chapter 5 investigates the individual, collective, and institutional factors guiding the policy process in two other African cases, Ghana and Zimbabwe. Rather than attempting to code veto players or establish causal relationships, the chapter builds on "post-paradigmatic" research approaches (Lichbach and Zukerman 2009). By focusing on discovery, explanation, and evidence, ontology and understanding trump the parochialism that sometimes traps political science in paradigms. Within discovery lies possible "core difficulties" that present barriers to the accumulation of knowledge. Within explanation lies causality in a "middle range" which avoids universalistic theoretical ambitions but still aims to account for a range of phenomena. And finally, within evidence resides "stylized facts" which deepen understanding of established causal relationships such as those I identify in Chapter 3. Where variables serve as evidence, here research looks to prevent them from becoming "reified social facts" which overextend their applications beyond the environment which gives them meaning. In this way, context and structure enrich theory development and empirical testing. Tools such as case studies and narratives thus serve a variety of roles within this broader post-foundational approach to political research (Lichbach 2009).

The narratives identify "analytical equivalents" and historical junctures when the policy process expanded or contracted. The study of Ghana focuses on a period of institutional consolidation in the 1980s when the country showed signs of breaking with post-independence

patterns of impetuous economic policy making. The Zimbabwe narrative traces the path to the 2008 power-sharing agreement and identifies the sources of political reconfigurations in economic liberalization, coalitions for institutional reform, and new electoral challenges. By the time the country arrived at this critical historical juncture, elites had destroyed the institutions capable of arbitrating among different political factions, and the regime was beholden to a variety of independent-minded allies.

The final chapter, "Madison's Model Unbound," explains how this study adds to our understanding of informal institutions, federalism, and authoritarian governance. Even during regimes that formally limited states' power, subnational actors sometimes constructed authority from the ground up. Conversely, sometimes institutions designed to counterbalance interests fail to exercise this power. I also identify factors that potentially limit the model's generalizability. For example, Nigeria differs from many countries in its minimal dependence on foreign aid and its relatively unusual political equilibrium between the northern and southern regions at the heart of its federal system. New actors such as militant movements demanding "resource control" in the oil-rich Niger Delta and Islamic movements such as Boko Haram in the north are straining the historical bargain at the core of Nigeria's nationhood, which will be 100 years old in 2014.

There are positive signs that Nigeria's political system is becoming more broadly accessible and that its institutions are creating incentives for political organizing that cut across this highly sensitive regional cleavage. When a succession crisis ensued following the death of President Umaru Yar'Adua, a northerner, in 2010, the presidency unexpectedly shifted to a southerner, Vice President Goodluck Jonathan. The resolution to the crisis demonstrated a commitment to constitutional terms of separate sovereignty, public authority grounded in distinct branches of government, and protecting national interests that cut across regional concerns.

Similarly, southerners rose to defend presidential term limits in 2006, even though a southern politician stood to gain most immediately from constitutional modifications that would have allowed him to stay in office. Madison claimed, “The safety and happiness of society are the objects at which all political institutions aim, and to which all such institutions must be sacrificed.” Nigerians strengthened their political institutions by defending them, and politicians and civil society activists continue to fortify them in ways that demonstrate creativity and hope.

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