

# Autocracy in Post-Cold War Africa

Brett L. Carter<sup>1</sup>

January 6, 2022

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science and International Relations, University of Southern California. Hoover Fellow, Hoover Institution, Stanford University. [blcarter@usc.edu](mailto:blcarter@usc.edu).

My training as a soldier taught me the importance of relationships of strength: that one should exploit weakness and aim for unexpected tactical maneuvers.

– Denis Sassou Nguesso

It's part of a psychological game, about the attitudes of politicians and, above all, military officers. Particularly with the [International Criminal Court], they're aware that people are watching them. People are ready to leave. At the slightest sign of trouble, people will leave the country. And possibly even Denis Sassou Nguesso.

– Wilfried Kivouvou

# Contents

<b>I</b>	<b>Foundations</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Autocrats, Institutions, and the Third Wave of Democracy</b>	<b>15</b>
1.1	The Question . . . . .	15
1.2	The Argument . . . . .	16
1.3	The Data and Empirical Approach . . . . .	23
1.4	Beliefs, Institutions, and Autocratic Survival . . . . .	33
1.5	The Third Wave, the Democratic Recession, and the Future . . . . .	38
<b>2</b>	<b>Challenges and Constraints in Post-Cold War Africa</b>	<b>43</b>
2.1	The Conventional View of Autocratic Politics . . . . .	43
2.2	Nominally Democratic Institutions as Inherited Constraints . . . . .	44
2.3	The Decline of Repression . . . . .	51
2.4	The Rise of Protest and Dissent . . . . .	59
2.5	How Africa’s Autocrats Lose Power . . . . .	66
2.6	Conclusion . . . . .	71
<b>3</b>	<b>Denis Sassou Nguesso and the Congolese Resistance</b>	<b>73</b>
3.1	History is Political and Written by the Victors . . . . .	73
3.2	The Europeans Come: 1500 to 1960 . . . . .	74
3.3	Education of a Dictator: 1943-1979 . . . . .	76
3.4	Sassou Nguesso I: 1979-1992 . . . . .	80
3.5	The Democratic Interlude: 1992-1997 . . . . .	86
3.6	The War of 5 June 1997 . . . . .	88
3.7	Sassou Nguesso II: 1997-Present . . . . .	90
<b>II</b>	<b>The Problem of Collective Governance</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Appointing and Reappointing (or, Incentivizing Compliance)</b>	<b>115</b>
4.1	The Politics of Predictability . . . . .	116
4.2	Appointment and the Loyalty-Representation Tradeoff . . . . .	117

4.3	Reappointment and the Elite Shuffle Paradox . . . . .	138
4.4	Marginalizing the Seizure Group . . . . .	146
4.5	Conclusion . . . . .	154
<b>5</b>	<b>Guarding the Guardians (or, Disincentivizing Noncompliance)</b>	<b>157</b>
5.1	Noncompliance, Private and Public . . . . .	158
5.2	Designing a Parallel Government . . . . .	160
5.3	The Politics of Stigma . . . . .	178
5.4	Conclusion . . . . .	190
<b>III</b>	<b>The Problem of Popular Acquiescence</b>	<b>195</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Organizing Regional Governments and Internal Security</b>	<b>197</b>
6.1	Simultaneously Essential and Threatening . . . . .	198
6.2	Co-Optation, Suppression, and Regional Governance . . . . .	200
6.3	Managing Regional Executives . . . . .	212
6.4	Organizing the Internal Security Apparatus . . . . .	220
6.5	When Moments of Crisis Approach . . . . .	222
6.6	Conclusion . . . . .	225
<b>7</b>	<b>Defusing the Focal Moment (or, Negotiating Election Seasons)</b>	<b>227</b>
7.1	Surviving Elections . . . . .	228
7.2	Loyalist Electoral Competition . . . . .	230
7.3	Electoral Alliances with Opposition Parties . . . . .	242
7.4	Conclusion . . . . .	258
<b>8</b>	<b>Shaping the Domestic Informational Environment</b>	<b>259</b>
8.1	Honest Propaganda . . . . .	260
8.2	Running an Independent Newspaper in a Dictatorship . . . . .	264
8.3	Dominating the Information Space with Unofficial Propaganda . . . . .	274
8.4	Exploiting Identity Cleavages . . . . .	283
8.5	Propaganda and Protest . . . . .	292
8.6	Conclusion . . . . .	297
<b>IV</b>	<b>The Problem of External Constraints</b>	<b>301</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Purchasing Influence Abroad</b>	<b>303</b>
9.1	The Origins and Persistence of <i>FrançAfrique</i> . . . . .	304

9.2	Mechanisms and Moments . . . . .	306
9.3	Democratic Norms, Human Rights, and Foreign Influence . . . . .	311
9.4	What Happens in Washington . . . . .	323
9.5	Inside the Influence Campaigns . . . . .	325
9.6	Conclusion . . . . .	340
<b>10</b>	<b>Shaping the External Informational Environment</b>	<b>341</b>
10.1	Africa's Answers to Al-Jazeera . . . . .	342
10.2	Image Laundering, its Objectives, and its Effectiveness . . . . .	344
10.3	Normalizing the Dictator . . . . .	348
10.4	Omitting Topics that Embarrass the Dictator . . . . .	356
10.5	Conclusion . . . . .	365
<b>V</b>	<b>Looking Forward</b>	<b>367</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>369</b>
11.1	The Argument . . . . .	369
11.2	The Future of Democracy in Africa . . . . .	372
11.3	A Foreign Policy for the Democratic Recession . . . . .	380
<b>A</b>	<b>Supporting Tables and Figures</b>	<b>465</b>
<b>B</b>	<b>More on Influence Campaigns in Washington</b>	<b>477</b>
<b>C</b>	<b>Main Characters</b>	<b>501</b>

# List of Figures

1.1	Oil production per capita across OPEC countries . . . . .	25
1.2	Sassou Nguesso’s real estate holdings in Paris . . . . .	26
1.3	Congo in comparative perspective . . . . .	29
2.1	Political institutions in Africa’s autocracies . . . . .	45
2.2	The life cycle of electoral protest . . . . .	48
2.3	Election seasons and protest in Africa’s autocracies . . . . .	50
2.4	HIPC debt relief negotiations across Africa . . . . .	55
2.5	HIPC debt relief negotiations and repression in Africa’s autocracies . . . . .	57
2.6	Military purges and violence . . . . .	58
2.7	HIPC debt relief negotiations and protest in Africa’s autocracies . . . . .	61
2.8	Coups and attempted coups . . . . .	66
2.9	How Africa’s autocrats lose power . . . . .	67
2.10	Protest and survival in Africa’s autocracies . . . . .	69
2.11	Regime types and autocratic survival . . . . .	69
2.12	Predicted daily probability of losing power by era . . . . .	71
3.1	Fraud in the 2002 election . . . . .	95
4.1	Composition of the dataset of political elites . . . . .	127
4.2	Congo’s ethnic and political geography . . . . .	128
4.3	Public criticism of Sassou Nguesso . . . . .	131
4.4	Evolution of the political elite . . . . .	133
4.5	In-group membership, appointment, and behavior . . . . .	138
4.6	Tenure duration and loyalty . . . . .	146
4.7	Fate of the seizure group . . . . .	148
5.1	Descriptive statistics about the parallel government . . . . .	164
5.2	Randomization inference results . . . . .	169
5.3	Understanding Sassou Nguesso’s freemasonry institution . . . . .	185
6.1	Internal security apparatus (by branch) . . . . .	201

6.2	Internal security apparatus (by region) . . . . .	202
6.3	Internal security apparatus (by rank) . . . . .	202
6.4	Survival curves for regional executives . . . . .	216
6.5	Randomization inference for regional executive appointments . . . . .	217
6.6	Organizing the internal security apparatus . . . . .	224
6.7	The internal security apparatus as elections approach . . . . .	225
7.1	Organizing loyalist competition . . . . .	234
7.2	Dynamics of electoral alliances with opposition parties . . . . .	251
8.1	Electoral constraints and pro-regime propaganda . . . . .	262
8.3	Contentious politics in Congo . . . . .	271
8.4	Coverage of Sassou Nguesso’s military operation in Pool . . . . .	280
8.5	Coverage of “peace” and “security” in <i>Les Dépêches de Brazzaville</i> . . . . .	290
8.6	Coverage of the 1994 genocide in Kagame’s <i>The New Times</i> . . . . .	291
9.1	Who funds influence campaigns and why . . . . .	315
9.2	Economics of influence campaigns . . . . .	323
9.3	Who takes money from Africa’s autocrats . . . . .	324
9.4	Influence campaigns by Sassou Nguesso . . . . .	326
9.5	Influence campaigns by Kagame . . . . .	330
9.6	Influence campaigns by Museveni . . . . .	336
10.1	Normalizing dictatorship in Africanews and Africa 24 . . . . .	352
10.2	Outward facing propaganda, regime type, and sensitive events . . . . .	354
10.3	Coverage topics in Africanews and Africa 24 by regime type . . . . .	355
10.4	Coverage of Sassou Nguesso’s military operation in Pool . . . . .	357
10.5	Coverage of the <i>biens mal acquis</i> affair . . . . .	362
10.6	Timeline of the anglophone crisis in Cameroon . . . . .	364
10.7	Coverage of the anglophone crisis in Cameroon . . . . .	365

# List of Tables

2.1	Military purges, violence, and the Berlin Wall . . . . .	59
2.2	Direct questions for the survey experiment . . . . .	65
2.3	Prompts for the list experiment . . . . .	65
4.1	Mapping the regime . . . . .	125
4.2	Mapping the regime, continued . . . . .	126
4.3	Identifying the political elite . . . . .	126
4.4	In-group status and appointment . . . . .	134
4.5	In-group status and appointment, continued . . . . .	135
4.6	In-group status and elite behavior . . . . .	139
4.7	The politics of the elite shuffle . . . . .	145
4.8	Marginalizing the seizure group . . . . .	150
5.1	Cleavages in the parallel government . . . . .	167
5.2	Stigma and elite behavior . . . . .	187
5.3	Vignettes for the survey experiment . . . . .	190
5.4	Sassou Nguesso’s parallel government . . . . .	193
6.1	Regional governance and internal security . . . . .	211
6.2	Managing regional executives . . . . .	215
6.3	Organizing the security apparatus . . . . .	223
6.4	Organizing the security apparatus as elections approach . . . . .	225
7.1	Loyalist electoral competition . . . . .	235
7.2	Electoral alliances with opposition parties . . . . .	248
7.3	Vignettes for the survey experiment . . . . .	253
8.1	Survey questions . . . . .	283
8.2	Global newspapers of record . . . . .	294
8.3	Correlates of <i>Good News<sub>it</sub></i> . . . . .	295
8.4	Propaganda and protest in Africa’s autocracies . . . . .	298



9.1	Country Sample . . . . .	313
9.2	Country Sample . . . . .	314
9.3	Country Sample . . . . .	315
9.4	The politics of Washington influence campaigns . . . . .	320
9.5	Do Washington influence campaigns predict repression? . . . . .	322
9.6	Which politicians play ball with Africa's autocrats . . . . .	325
10.1	Coverage topics in outward facing propaganda . . . . .	353