

Power and Politics in Africa

A Boundary Generator

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Series in Politics



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Kyoto, July 31, 2024

Takuo Iwata

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List of Abbreviations

AAGC:	Asia Africa Growth Corridor
ABC:	<i>Agência Brasileira de Cooperação</i> (Brazilian Cooperation Agency)
AfCFTA:	African Continental Free Trade Area
AIIB:	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
AMBF:	<i>Association des municipalités du Burkina Faso</i> (Association of Municipalities of Burkina Faso)
AMM:	<i>Association des municipalités du Mali</i> (Association of Municipalities of Mali)
ANCB:	<i>Association nationale des communes du Bénin</i> (National Association of Communes of Benin)
AOF:	<i>Afrique occidentale française</i> (French West Africa)
ASEAN:	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AU:	African Union
BRI:	Belt and Road Initiative
CDP:	<i>Congrès pour la démocratie et le progrès</i> (Congress for Democracy and Progress)
CIDCA:	China International Development Cooperation Agency
DPA:	Development Partnership Administration
ECOWAS:	Economic Community of West African States
FCBE:	<i>Forces cauris pour un Bénin émergent</i> (Cowrie Forces for an Emerging Benin)
FOCAC:	Forum of China–Africa Cooperation
FOIP:	Free and Open Indo-Pacific
GDP:	Gross Domestic Product
IAF:	Indonesia–Africa Forum
IAFS:	India–Africa Forum Summit
ICJ:	International Court of Justice
ITEC:	Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation
JETRO:	Japan External Trade Organization
JICA:	Japan International Cooperation Agency

KOAF:	Korea–Africa Forum
MPP:	<i>Mouvement pour le peuple et progrès</i> (Movement for People and Progress)
NAM:	Non-Aligned Movement
NIEO:	New International Economic Order
OAU:	Organisation of African Unity
OECD–DAC:	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – Development Assistance Committee
PPB:	<i>(le) Politique par le bas</i> (Political thing from below)
SSC:	South–South Cooperation
SSTrC:	South–South Triangular Cooperation
TICAD:	Tokyo International Conference on African Development
UN:	United Nations
UNSC:	United Nations Security Council
WABI:	West African Borders and Integration

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Introduction

This book aims to reflect on power in African politics and international relations by revisiting its origin, definition, mechanisms, and functions through theoretical (conceptual) reflections and case studies.

It is always significant to study power in African politics. Power has been the engine of politics. It is also the goal of players of political games. Power is invariably the central question in decoding political issues. More critically, power affects people's behaviors, especially those of political actors, and leads to crucial consequences. It is a prominent character of power in African politics.

What is (political) power? Power has been an essential concept in political science worldwide for at least 2,000 years. Although studies in political science have reflected on power, we have not necessarily reached a definitive conclusion on how to define the concept of power. Unanswered questions remain in political science: What is power, and how does it influence our behavior? Despite being an essential engine or mechanism in politics, power remains a subject to be tackled in political science. The concept of power is a classical but constantly renewed subject and goal in the thousands of years of political study.

In reflecting on the concept of power in African politics, this book highlights that power is an essential boundary generator that creates gaps in people's everyday lives, society, the political arena, and international relations. The book, therefore, examines power to understand African politics. Power creates, maintains, and changes the gaps and differences in all arenas of human life. Boundary-generating power fosters political dynamism, which accompanies asymmetrical political relations.

In the twenty-first century, the political situation in African countries has progressively changed, as have the economic and social circumstances. The images of politics and international relations in Africa should be re-examined as the contemporary world's political environment has changed in the globalizing post-Cold War era.

Three decades have passed since the dawn of democratization on the African continent in the early 1990s. Some African countries have attempted democratization and reshaped their political structure, and political freedom has consequently spread in these countries. Other countries, unfortunately, have experienced the revival of authoritarian regimes or serious armed conflicts in the post-Cold War era. Democratization has significantly influenced power

management in African politics. This book aims to reflect on how democratization has impacted the behaviors of political actors and citizens. The book also examines how democratization has (re-)drawn boundaries between political regimes in African countries.

Several years after the dawn of democratization, African countries began initiating decentralization reforms. Initially, decentralization was considered an administrative reform to achieve administrative efficiency by devolving financial, technical, and human resources from the central government to local governments. However, decentralization was not a simple administrative reform. It reactivated political dynamism in local communities, resulting in the redrawing of boundaries between national and local politics. Decentralization stimulated political engineering among local political actors and encouraged international cooperation among local governments.

Since gaining independence from European colonies (with some exceptions), almost all African countries have faced sovereign border issues and disputes with neighboring countries. The sovereign border has been both an old and new challenge among African countries. Most current African borders were drawn during the colonial period and inherited as sovereign borders on the day of independence. Besides conflicts and disputes, these African borders have caused inconvenience, illegal trade, and the separation of historically and culturally established communities. Many border problems between neighboring African countries remain ongoing. Borders have created, impacted, maintained, and renewed boundaries among African states, especially among borderland people.

Many challenging situations have arisen due to borders in Africa's postcolonial history. Yet African borders also provide potential opportunities to bridge neighboring countries, strengthen inter-state security, and build regional integration. Cross-border local cooperation is a potential transborder cooperation measure. The current borderlands were not necessarily border regions in the precolonial time but were trade, immigration, and cultural meeting and exchange points. Therefore, the current borderland people and communities have long shared common cultural, economic, and linguistic practices. Supposedly, decentralization accelerates cross-border local cooperation in Africa. We must also recognize the positive and potential aspects of generating boundaries.

International circumstances also affect African politics and societies. Once the United States' unipolar hegemony began fading at the beginning of the twenty-first century, (re-)emerging global powers, such as Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Russia, and Turkey, expanded their influence in Africa by enthusiastically appealing for a multipolar international order. As the world's geopolitical order has changed, transforming geopolitical power relations

affects politics and international relations in African countries. International circumstances have changed dramatically for developing countries in the transition from the solidarity of the Third World during the Cold War time to the emergence of the Global South in the era of globalization. The inter-continental relations between Asia and Africa are not exceptional but typical. Since the Asian–African conference (Bandung, 1955), Asia–Africa relations have been described in terms of solidarity and neutrality, within the Cold War context, as equal partners through South–South cooperation. However, as some Asian countries have achieved significant economic development and emerged as worldwide economic giants, the economic gap between the two continents has expanded significantly and become more apparent. The relationship between Asia and Africa has transformed from one of equal partners striving for Third World solidarity to one of asymmetrical partners in development assistance provision and reception through a more business-friendly South–South cooperation framework. Thus, South–South cooperation exposes the new boundaries in the Global South in the twenty-first century.

Since the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, we have continuously observed political changes in Africa, from state politics to people’s everyday acts. As the circumstances of politics and international relations in Africa have changed, political actors and ordinary people’s political and social behaviors have transformed. However, we have also observed enduring challenges in African politics. For example, state- and nation-building, the rule of law, freedom of expression, transparency, and human rights remain challenging issues in African politics.

Political power or engineering affects the lives of not only political actors but also powerless ordinary people, who often suffer from absurd consequences caused by power-struggling political actors. Ordinary citizens usually cannot directly protest a powerful authoritarian regime. However, they do have some modest weapons they can wield against the regime and its leader. For instance, instead of direct protest, ordinary people caricature by mocking and laughing off their leader indirectly and metaphorically. Laughter is an essential act for human beings at all times. Although laughter does not change the political situation on its own, it might undermine the symbolic power of the political authority and its leader and ephemerally invert the feeling of the power relations between the ruling and ruled actors. Although laughter has not been a traditional research subject in political studies, it should not be neglected when reflecting on the symbolic boundaries between the ruling and ruled actors by focusing on the behavior of powerless ordinary citizens.

As political challenges unavoidably relate to the practices of (political) power, we must acknowledge that power is always essential to understanding Africa’s politics and societies. Power is not only the political engine (means) but also a

goal for political actors and their supporters. Historically, power has created, maintained, and changed boundaries in and among African states and societies physically, symbolically, and spiritually. This book emphasizes that power is a (politically) human-made boundary generator in African politics and societies. This book aims to tackle how power relates to these political challenges.

A politically made boundary creates gaps that manifest, maintain, undermine, and change power relations while influencing people's lives. Political and social boundaries have accompanied many dramas in Africa. Boundaries exist in political regimes, administrative units, sovereign borders, cross-border engagements, inter-continental relations, the Global South, symbolic political acts, colonial legacy (language), and the performers in the entertainment industry, which this book addresses. Boundaries are generated and work individually and in intertwining contexts.

First, this book addresses the conceptualization of power and then examines issues concerning power in African politics. The following chapters examine various power-related subjects, including democratization, decentralization, border issues, cross-border cooperation, Asia–Africa relations, and laughter in politics. The aim is to clarify the meaning, mechanisms, and functions of power in African politics and societies after about half a century of independence. The following chapters structure this book.

Chapter 1 reflects on the concept of power as a boundary generator in African politics. The political situation has changed throughout Africa in the twenty-first century as the world has become increasingly globalized. Three decades after the end of the Cold War and the initiation of democratization in African countries, reviewing and modifying the perceptions of African politics and international relations has become more necessary. Although we have observed significant changes in African politics, some challenges remain. Issues such as state-building, democratization, the rule of law, and human rights continue to be crucial political challenges for the future of Africa. These challenges in African politics unavoidably raise questions about the concept of (political) power in terms of its definition, meaning, and function. Therefore, we recognize that power is always the core component of understanding politics in Africa, despite changes in its character according to the time and political stage. Power is not only a political engine but also the goal of political activities. The concept of power in contemporary African politics has been thoroughly discussed but is always undergoing renewal. This chapter revisits the concept of power from the general context of political science to focus on political issues in Africa. Then, it reflects on the meaning and function of power as a boundary generator in contemporary African politics.

Chapter 2 revisits democratization, which has accompanied hope and disillusionment in African countries since the 1990s. African countries and

people have experienced dramatic political transformation and turbulence from authoritarian regimes led by military leaders or the replacement of a one-party system to a multi-party system to promote political freedom and participation. However, conflicts and civil wars have also occurred in some African countries. Thus, democratization is still one of the most crucial political milestones in Africa's postcolonial political history and remains the most serious challenge in contemporary African politics. Democratization makes the boundaries between African countries clearer in terms of political development. First, this chapter briefly traces Africa's postcolonial political history. Second, this chapter examines the political impacts, problems, and challenges of democratization in contemporary African countries by focusing on the factors and actors that have been involved in democratization. Third, this chapter reflects on how democratization in Africa has been examined and understood both positively and negatively. Finally, this chapter presents a more comprehensive image of democratization to understand one of the most epoch-making political events in postcolonial African history.

Chapter 3 examines the political impact of decentralization in African countries. Decentralization is an outstanding phenomenon among the ongoing administrative and political reforms undertaken in recent decades around the world, and it has had significant political effects in African countries. In addition, urbanization amplifies the political impact of decentralization. Decentralization and urbanization have expanded the economic and political gaps between local governments in urban and rural areas as devolution has progressed from central to local governments. Decentralization encourages international cooperation between local governments and (non-)African partners. Decentralization and international cooperation between local governments have significantly influenced local politics in Africa. The decentralization process has changed the relationship between the state and local governments and between the local governments and residents, and it has drawn various boundaries in Africa's domestic politics and international relations. First, this chapter briefly traces the history of decentralization in Africa. Second, it reflects on the impact of decentralization on African politics and international relations by focusing on local elections, decentralized cooperation, and political disputes in urbanizing local governments in Benin and Burkina Faso. This is an appropriate time to examine local governments closely to understand Africa's political and social transformations through decentralization.

Chapter 4 reviews the border-related history and challenges in African countries by examining the case of Burkina Faso (former Upper Volta), which has endured complicated border disputes with neighboring countries since its independence. On the one hand, borderland regions in African countries have

attracted worldwide attention in recent years as locations for activities by jihadist groups. On the other hand, borders are recognized as providing opportunities to advance economic and political cooperation and regional integration in the twenty-first century. The African Union expects the borders to transform “from barriers to bridges” among African countries and promote international cooperation in the borderlands. At independence, most African countries inherited colonial borders that had been demarcated by European empires since the late nineteenth century. Even almost half a century after the independence of African countries, the border-originated issues of African countries continue to cause conflict in political, economic, social, and international relations, which are closely connected with security concerns, such as conflict, ethnic division, refugees, or smuggling. The geographical and administrative boundaries keep affecting African countries’ politics, economics, and international relations. This chapter examines the origin of border issues in Burkina Faso (Upper Volta) by referring to archival documents of the French colonial government. The chapter seeks to clarify the historical challenges and potential of African borders.

Chapter 5 reflects on regional security issues in West Africa, especially in Burkina Faso, focusing on international cooperation among local governments and border issues. When considering the recent political history of West African countries, domestic political disputes or conflicts are likely to become international and regional issues across national borders. Conflicts that occurred in Côte d’Ivoire and Mali in the twenty-first century directly affected the security and economic situations in neighboring countries. In Burkina Faso, which was facing a huge popular insurgency, President Compaoré unexpectedly stepped down after 27 years of his authoritarian regime. In addition to the destabilization of northern Mali, this unforeseen political turnover alarmed the international community about regional security in West Africa. The borders between sovereign states may not necessarily be barriers for extremist groups but occasionally convenient and permeable shields. By contrast, these borders remain strict and impermeable walls for the national armies of African states. First, this chapter addresses border issues in Burkina Faso. Border problems immediately translate to serious economic difficulties and security concerns for Burkina Faso as a landlocked country. Second, this chapter aims to decode security issues in West Africa while considering case studies in Burkina Faso and its neighboring countries to examine questions about borders and local governments’ cooperation with neighboring countries.

Chapter 6 reflects on Asia–Africa relations by tracing the history since independence and the Non-Aligned Movement and overviewing the current transformation of intercontinental relations. Asian and African regions dramatically expanded and changed their economic and diplomatic relations

in the twenty-first century, while the Global South became more influential in the new world economic and political order. Four major Asian countries—China, India, Japan, and South Korea—became more visible and influential in Africa. Other emerging Southeast Asian countries have subsequently followed this trend. These Asian countries have regularly hosted Africa forums for development and investment in the twenty-first century. The economic and political situation has become more diversified, accompanying significant gaps between Asian and African countries and regions. Consequently, the boundaries between Asia and Africa regarding economic development and international presence have become more visible. Asian partners have strived to implement new approaches to Africa. In the new world order, the structure of international cooperation began to transform. We observe more South–South and South–North triangular cooperation in Africa to decode the contemporary transformation of Asia–Africa relations over the years. Transforming Asia–Africa relations has accelerated a new trend in international cooperation. Unequal economic development creates a different gap and boundary between Asia and Africa by causing the emergence of a new type of donor–recipient relations.

Chapter 7 addresses laughter as a political communication intermediary in African countries by examining the meaning and potential of laughter and political satire in African politics. Political satire mirrors the political realities, trends, and changes and is often accompanied by laughter. Laughter is a symbolic weapon for both sides—the ruler and the ruled. On the one hand, powerful rulers use laughter to kill their opponents symbolically. On the other hand, otherwise powerless actors (or ordinary people) can also use laughter in a more satirical way. Although laughter does not directly change the political reality, we cannot neglect its meanings and influences in political communication. Political satire occasionally triggers an ephemeral and symbolic inversion of power in the relationship between powerful rulers and powerless people. Laughter-related acts practiced by ordinary and (politically) powerless people can undermine the symbolic power of the political authority and temporarily invert a political boundary between the ruling and ruled actors. It might induce real political change in the future. Laughter (or humor) would bring about a different way of thinking about political power among people.

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