Dear Berkeley Colleagues,

Apologies for the delay in circulating a paper in advance of my visit to Berkeley next week. I appreciate you taking the time to read and share feedback on what is more of a research proposal (with a puzzle and a set of hypotheses) than a finished paper at this stage.

To give you some context:

Although my current research agenda has moved mostly in the direction of work on migration, I left my time in government with an outstanding question that I was not in a position to answer in a compelling way. At one of my last National Security Council meetings, the intelligence community briefed a set lessons from Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) for the Middle East on the question of how to build an effective regional order for managing conflict and promoting stability. This was the first time in four years of government that I ever saw anyone attempt to extract positive (and constructive) lessons from Africa for other parts of the world!

But the briefing left me wondering how governments in SSA had managed to come to consensus around a new set of normative commitments for the region – and mechanisms for enforcing them (although inconsistently) – given the historical commitment to non-interference on the continent and the heterogeneity of political regimes. I thought it might be important to understand this issue both because of its implications for regional organization in other parts of the world, and because our understanding of state weakness in Africa (per Herbst) is in part a function of a state system that was committed to sovereignty and territorial integrity for the 40 years after independence.

The work is very early and incomplete, but I hope it provokes your thinking and I welcome the opportunity to hear your feedback.

                Sincerely,

                Jeremy Weinstein

Piercing the Veil of Sovereignty in Africa

Jeremy M. Weinstein

Stanford University

African international relations have been characterized by an abiding commitment to sovereignty and non-interference since the arrival of independence. One widely noted consequence of this regional order is that it undermined the incentives of African leaders to build strong, effective, and democratic states. But Africa's long-standing regional order is undergoing a transformation. A strong anti-coup norm has taken hold, African governments regularly launch multilateral peace enforcement missions, and fraudulent elections are increasingly met with public condemnation and, sometimes, coercive pressure. In this paper, I document changes in the institutional rules that govern international relations on the continent and the growth of African multilateral interventions to enforce these norms. I focus specifically on norms around unconstitutional changes in government and the prevention of war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity. I argue that the adoption of new norms and practices reflects an evolution in state interests. Whereas African states sought insulation from external pressure at independence, African governments now see the erosion of non-interference norms as a tool for protecting their interests, managing domestic and transnational pressures, and constraining the ways in which external actors from outside the continent interfere in domestic politics.

On January 19, 2017, troops from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) entered Gambian territory to uphold the results of a democratic election which ended the rule of President Yahya Jammeh. This military intervention followed a tense month in which Jammeh, who had led Gambia through more than two decades of autocratic and repressive rule, rejected opposition candidate Adama Barrow's victory, called for a new election, and declared a state of emergency. The response to Jammeh's tactics was swift and surprising: ECOWAS and the African Union (AU) announced they would "take all necessary measures" to ensure the transition of power, the AU declared that it would no longer recognize Jammeh as Gambia's legitimate leader, and ECOWAS assembled troops on the border. When Barrow was sworn in as President while in exile in Senegal, and facing the pressure of the ECOWAS intervention, Jammeh fled into exile in Equatorial Guinea. Importantly, the events of 2017 were only the latest example of a surprising and puzzling trend: African states are increasingly acting multilaterally, with the endorsement of regional and international organizations, to intervene in the domestic affairs of neighboring states.

This is a surprising turn of events for a continent where international relations have been characterized by an abiding commitment to sovereignty and non-interference since the arrival of independence. Though pan-Africanists such as Kwame Nkrumah sought greater unity and were open to changes in territorial boundaries, the majority of leaders were determined to protect their "hard-won independence, as well as the sovereignty and territorial integrity of our State(s)."[1] These ideas were formalized in the charter of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) – an organization which existed from 1963 until 2002 – and served the goals of the continent's founding leaders who sought protection against both external threats and internal separatist movements.

The regional order that emerged after independence largely insulated African governments from external scrutiny of their domestic behavior and the threat of interstate war, with only five interstate wars on the continent since independence; it also maintained the territorial integrity of states by refusing recognition to separatist groups.[2] Until the birth of Eritrea in 1991 and South Sudan in 2011, no new states were created, even though the geographic boundaries were artificially imposed by colonial rule without regard to the distribution of pre-existing ethnic groups and

---

[1] Wallerstein (1967), 65.
[2] Englebert (2009).

political units.[3] One widely noted consequence of this regional order is that it undermined the incentives of African leaders to build strong, effective, and democratic states.[4] By relying on international recognition from the United Nations and a commitment to non-interference from neighboring countries, leaders did not need to develop the ability to project power inside their territories, nor to negotiate with their own populations for greater legitimacy. This was a good deal for the continent's weak and often illegitimate political elites, as international legitimacy and recognition helped to keep them in office regardless of their performance.

But Africa's long-standing regional order is undergoing a transformation, even though the changes have come in fits and starts. A strong anti-coup norm has taken hold, with regional organizations regularly suspending and sanctioning military leaders who take power from civilian authorities. Indeed, the African Union (AU) moved quickly to suspend Egypt – one of the organization's five largest funders – after President Al-Sisi took power in a coup in 2013, while the United States and other Western powers dithered over the question of whether to call the transition a coup given that such a designation would have implications for bilateral relations. African governments have also assumed a leading role in peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations on the continent, carrying out 35 multilateral missions between 1990 and 2014 and not always at the invitation of the government in power. With the increasing frequency of democratic elections, African governments and regional organizations have spoken in support of free and fair elections, initiated observer missions to scrutinize electoral practices, and sometimes taken further steps (e.g. diplomatic pressure, sanctions, etc.) to facilitate the peaceful transfer of power when incumbents refused to step down. And, after decades of shielding political leaders from accountability for human rights abuses, 2017 brought the conviction of former Chadian President Hisséne Habré for torture, war crimes, and crimes against humanity by the Extraordinary African Chambers, an AU-backed hybrid court working in partnership with the government of Senegal.

Of course, for every example of African intervention, there are others where neighboring governments and regional organizations stay out or remain silent. This is to be expected in a world of sovereign states, where "at times, rulers adhere to conventional norms or rules because it provides them with resources and support… (while) at other times, rulers have violated the norms,

---

[3] Zacher (2000).
[4] Rosberg and Jackson (1982); Herbst (2000).

and for the same reasons."[5] But these changes in the regional order do raise questions that merit further examination: In what ways are the principles of sovereignty and non-interference being challenged in Africa? Does the emergence of multilateral intervention in Africa represent a structural break from the past? And who is challenging these principles, for what reasons, and to what effect?

Three common explanations that might help us understand the evolution of the African regional order appear insufficient to account for the variation we observe. Perspectives that emphasize changes in the structural balance of power and, in particular, the emergence of strong states that organize and enforce rules around international behavior cannot account for the changing behavior of states and regional organizations.[6] While the emergence of a post-apartheid South Africa and democratic Nigeria spurred a set of institutional changes on the continent, much of the activity in the past decade has taken place as South Africa and Nigeria's influence has waned. A focus on changes in the normative frameworks that govern international intervention, and the ways in which they diffuse globally, can help us understand the adoption of human rights commitments in the charters of every regional and sub-regional organization.[7] But they cannot make sense of why states act to enforce these commitments in some contexts and not in others, and why African governments have generated so much more multilateral activity than countries in other regions. Finally, the timing of this growing interventionism is not likely a function of the degree to which states are affected by the instability of their neighbors; civil wars, and their associated refugee flows, have been a persistent feature of the African political landscape since the early 1980s, yet African multilateral action is a more recent phenomenon.

Instead, I focus on two critical drivers of changing state behavior on the continent: first, the impact of a set of democratic transitions on the interests of sitting governments and the pressures placed on domestic and transnational political elites, and second, changes in the international system that increased the likelihood of multilateral foreign intervention and undermined the status quo of non-interference. The democratic transitions of the mid-1990s ushered in a period of growing civic awareness and engagement, electoral accountability, and transnational activism. In this context, political elites saw value in transforming institutions of regional governance to reflect a new set of

---

[5] Krasner (2009), 197.
[6] Mearsheimber (1994).
[7] Finnemore (2003). Simmons and Elkins (2004).

norms and practices; elites also found themselves challenged by emergent voices in civil society that saw regional institutions as a platform for shaping the behavior of national actors. But the interests of African political elites were also influenced by changes in the international system. With the end of the Cold War, Africa (more than any other region) experienced a significant uptick of multilateral intervention on the continent—including, for example, peacekeeping operations, electoral observation missions, and international judicial mechanisms.[8] African leaders responded by localizing international norms and seeking to coopt new mechanisms of norm enforcement so that they could control and reap benefits from these interventions, while also maintaining the ability to veto such engagements or to intervene selectively. While recognizing the importance of changing ideas about the appropriateness of intervention, changes in the regional order must also be incentive compatible for participating states.

Understanding the transformation of African international relations is of broader interest for three reasons. First, the systematic changes we observe in the rules, institutions, and behaviors of states in one regional community provide a useful window into how the distribution of state power, the spread of international norms, and distinct state interests intersect in shaping the evolution of patterns of international cooperation. This is highly relevant for thinking about the likelihood of systemic change in other regional communities. Second, given the importance that scholars of African state development have attached to factors in the international environment, including institutionalized commitments to sovereignty and non-interference, it is possible that these changes in African international relations may have meaningful effects on the incentives of political leaders and opposition actors contesting political space at the national level. Finally, at a time when the global buy-in to universal mechanisms of international cooperation—such as the United Nations, World Bank, and IMF—is waning, especially with declining U.S. power and leadership, the question of how regional actors will exercise greater influence in the affairs of their neighbors, and whether that influence will be used to advance long-standing international norms, is particularly salient for policymakers.

The article proceeds in four stages. First, I define the outcome of interest "African multilateral intervention" and offer evidence of significant and meaningful changes in the

---

[8] Human Security Report (2010).

institutional rules that govern international relations on the continent and the behaviors of participating states over time, across regions, and across events. Then I explore existing explanations, demonstrating how a focus on state power, international norms, and conflict spillovers cannot account for the variation we observe. Third, I explore how the interests of states vis-à-vis their international relations have changed over time, creating a demand for the renegotiation of regional structures of cooperation and new incentives to intervene multilaterally in neighboring states. Finally, I turn to a set of cases – comparing contexts that elicited coordinated African action to those that did not – to illuminate key elements of the argument about changing state interests.

The New African Interventionism

Although scholars and practitioners have explored the ways in which the politics of Africa's weak states have been influenced by external actors since independence, most emphasize the role played by former colonial powers, the United States and Soviet Union during the Cold War, and international institutions such as the World Bank and IMF.[9] When attention has turned to the dynamics of international relations on the continent, scholars have tended to focus on the construction of regional norms and institutions to preserve the sovereignty and territorial integrity of African states, or on the actions of African governments to influence the domestic politics of neighboring states via cross-border support to insurgent movements.[10] But, given recent developments, these academic perspectives on African international relations need to be updated. Over the past two decades, we have witnessed the emergence of a new African interventionism which represents a departure from past practices and demands theoretical consideration and empirical exploration.

DEFINITIONS

This article focuses attention on a specific form of African intervention: coordinated, multilateral action – endorsed by a legitimating sub-regional or regional organization – to intervene in the domestic affairs of a member state. There are a few essential elements to this definition that

---

[9] Clapham (1996). Schmidt (2013). Van de Walle (2001).
[10] Englebert (2009). Saleyhan (2009).

help us to locate contemporary African international relations in comparison to prior periods. First, the emphasis is on multilateral action taken by African governments, distinguishing interventions that serve the interests of one government from those that reflect shared interests and actions. Second, the definition emphasizes the increasing prevalence and importance of sub-regional and regional organizations that provide a forum in which states propose, endorse, and coordinate the implementation of external interventions of various forms. In these environments, the decision to intervene reflects not only the interests of member states, but also the influence of regional organizations' guiding principles and normative frameworks as well as the non-state actors – both bureaucratic and non-governmental – that engage in these multilateral forums. Third, the focus is on interventions that involve African governments working collectively to influence, and sometimes alter, the political authority structure or behavior of a sovereign state.[11] These interventions can take many forms—from diplomatic pressure and soft coercive instruments such as suspension and sanctions, to more hard-edged tools including military intervention and criminal prosecutions for human rights abuses. In some cases, especially those involving military deployments, these interventions are organized with the consent of the country in question; more often, they reflect a coordinated effort by external actors to exert pressure on a sitting government.

AFRICAN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AT INDEPENDENCE

The emergence of coordinated, multilateral interventions on the African continent is an important and surprising phenomenon given the historical record of interstate relations since independence. Norms of sovereignty and non-interference have been widely embraced in Africa and governed how states have engaged one another since the end of colonial rule. The immediate post-independence period did see vociferous debates about whether to preserve colonial-era state boundaries or to pursue a more politically unified continent, and there were a number of experiments in federation and state consolidation that quickly ran aground.[12] Yet, ultimately, newly empowered political elites coalesced around a commitment to sovereignty and territorial integrity as core principles for organizing interstate relations, rejecting deeper integration and supranational authority structures.

---

[11] Finnemore (2003).
[12] Nyerere (1963). Nkrumah (1966). Clapham (1996).

These commitments took concrete form in the design of the OAU, launched in 1963, which aimed to promote the unity and solidarity of African states; to coordinate and intensify their cooperation and efforts to achieve a better life for the peoples of Africa; to defend their sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence; to eradicate all forms of colonialism from Africa; and to promote international cooperation.[13] As with any international organization, the agreement among thirty heads of state papered over a number of fundamental tensions. While there was broad agreement on the goal of ending colonial rule in Africa (especially with the Portuguese still holding on to their colonies and white settlers in charge in Southern Africa), the OAU's founding documents expressed a commitment both to self-rule and the maintenance of territorial boundaries. This proved complicated in practice as movements for self-determination emerged in post-colonial African states, yet found little support for their secessionist aims from a set of political elites who sought mutual commitments from other governments to refrain from interference and to protect inherited boundaries.

Moreover, while the OAU embraced much of the language in the United Nations' charter about the rights of people to freedom, justice, equality and dignity, the organization itself was designed largely to serve the interests of sitting heads of state who, more than anything, welcomed insulation from external pressure and were not willing to make judgments about the legitimacy of other governments. The decision-making rules vested power in the assembly of heads of state (rather than a supranational structure or empowered bureaucracy), and the benefits of sovereignty and international recognition were allocated on the basis of control of a country's capital city. As a consequence, the incentives of governments to strengthen their control of territory or to build their popular legitimacy were undermined by the sovereignty protections of the international system.[14]

It is reasonable to ask whether these normative commitments and rules actually shaped how states behaved. Indeed, commitments to sovereignty and territorial integrity are constituent features of the international system, not only the African regional order, yet they have been ignored and/or violated by governments historically when it served their interests to do so. This shouldn't be surprising given that no meaningful enforcement mechanism exists to hold states to these commitments.

---

[13] OAU Charter.

[14] Herbst (2000). Rosberg and Jackson (1982).

Nonetheless, many have pointed to a few pieces of evidence of the strength of these norms in the decades after independence. First, there have been very few interstate wars in Africa, despite the porousness of borders and the limited ability of capital-centric governments to project power. Interstate wars have been on the decline globally since 1945, replaced by intra-state conflicts, and Africa has experienced only five: the war over Angola, involving the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, and South Africa; the Ogadeen war of 1977-78 between Somalia and Ethiopia; the Ugandan-Tanzanian war of 1978-1979; the war over the Aouzou Strip fought between Chad and Libya; and the border war between Ethiopia and Eritrea between 1998 and 2000. Each of these wars was relatively short, and civil wars have been far more common and destructive.[15]

Second, even with a high prevalence of civil war, Africa has also experienced far fewer secessionist conflicts than other parts of the world. This is true even though we might have expected a higher level of secessionism in Africa given its arbitrary borders, ethnic heterogeneity, regional inequalities, and the empirical weakness of African states.[16] Of course, there have been insurgent movements that have sought self-determination—including in Nigeria, Angola, Senegal, Ethiopia, and Sudan, among others—and, at times, African governments have provided vocal and material support to these separatist groups.[17] But, by and large, borders have remained unchanged and new states have not been born, except for Eritrea and South Sudan. While some argue that this is a reflection of strong norms of restraint in the African international system, others have suggested that Africa lacks a deficit of separatist sentiment, not separatist recognition.[18]

Third, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) was long considered a toothless organization, incapable of exercising much influence on the relations among states or the politics within them.[19] This precedent was set early when the Togolese President was killed in a military revolt in January 1963. While there was strong sentiment to condemn the coup because many leaders were afraid their own militaries might turn against them, Togo was allowed to sign the OAU charter and maintain normal diplomatic relations with other African governments.[20] This inability to

---

[15] Christensen and Laitin (forthcoming).
[16] Englebert. (2009)
[17] Englebert 33. Saleyhan (2009).
[18] Englebert 34.
[19] Clapham (1996).
[20] Herbst (2000), 110.

respond to military takeovers continued with coup after coup in the 1960s and 1970s, and the OAU also proved incapable of acting collectively in response to massive violations of human rights, including, for example, in Uganda under Idi Amin and in the pogroms of Burundi in 1972-73.[21] At one point, Julius Nyerere, President of Tanzania chastised his fellow leaders for treating the OAU as a "trade union of African Heads of State."[22]

One fact that is clear, however, is that no matter how strong norms of non-interference were in the post-independence period, they did not stop African governments from providing direct material assistance to cross-border insurgent groups, whether they were seeking control of the center or had separatist aims.[23] There is strong evidence that external support has been a common feature of civil war, and we know Africa is no exception.[24] Norms of non-interference did not stop Libya from supporting separatists in northern Chad; the Chadians, Ugandans, and Ethiopians from supporting separatists in Southern Sudan; and Sudan from supporting separatists in Ethiopia.[25] The Libyans were active in support of Yoweri Museveni's resistance movement in Uganda; Charles Taylor of Liberia provided material assistance to the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone; and Rwanda and Uganda backed the Rally for Congolese Democracy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Sometimes governments were backing co-ethnics located across the border in neighboring countries; other times, they were exercising influence on national politics or economics via proxy fighters. So the impact of the non-interference norm was apparent more in the limits it placed on overt, multilateral intervention in the affairs of neighboring states, than in constraining forms of covert or bilateral influence.

INITIAL MOMENTUM FOR CHANGE

The situation began to change in the late 1970s as a consequence of the aggressive and erratic behavior of Idi Amin in Uganda. When Amin decided to declare war on Tanzania and attempted to annex the Kagera region, Tanzania invaded Uganda, joining forces with anti-Amin rebels to overthrow the regime and install a transitional government. Though the OAU condemned

---

[21] Umozurike (1979).
[22] Ibid., p. 208.
[23] Saleyhan (2009).
[24] Saleyhan, Gleditsch, and Cunningham (2011).
[25] Englebert (2009), 33.

the violation of state sovereignty by Tanzania, the intervention was quietly welcomed by many Heads of State who believed that the Amin regime needed to end. President Nyerere of Tanzania had to delicately navigate significant concern among OAU members about the violation of norms of non-interference, arguing that Tanzanian forces were merely defending Tanzanian borders while anti-Amin rebels were leading the charge against the government. But Tanzanian troops were ultimately the ones to take Kampala and install a transitional government. The Tanzanians were criticized publically by African Heads of State at an OAU meeting in July 1979 – by many who feared the erosion of norms of overt non-interference on the continent – while others spoke affirmatively of the need to transform the OAU, which in this case had failed to prevent or resolve a conflict between two African states. Nyerere challenged the gathered Heads of State who shared a commitment to fighting white rule in Southern Africa, but seemed unwilling to act collectively against a leader who had killed more Africans than Ian Smith's regime in Rhodesia or Vorster's in South Africa. In short, Nyerere said, "Being black is now becoming a certificate to kill fellow Africans."[26]

Events in the Central African Empire also brought the issue of non-interference to a head. In April 1979, Emperor John-Bedel Bokassa ordered the massacre of scores of school children who protested against his stringent and expensive school uniform program. The atrocity was covered widely in the media, following a scathing report from Amnesty International. The killings of the children were on top of a reported 400 who were killed in protests a few months earlier. With the public outcry against Bokassa's behavior, the French government could no longer remain silent. At a Franco-African Summit, the French organized an independent inquiry into the reported massacre. Bokassa and other African leaders agreed to the inquiry under the conditions that "the purpose was not to condemn or depose Bokassa but to exonerate him," but at the same time permitted the appointment of five African lawyers from Rwanda, Togo, Liberia, Ivory Coast, and Senegal.[27] The inquiry concluded that Bokassa was indeed responsible for the murders, although the question of his direct participation remained unanswered. Organized by France, the Bokassa inquiry carefully steered clear of the non-interference clause of the OAU charter, but undoubtedly set a precedent as "the first report concerning human rights problems made by African jurists who were appointed by

---

[26] George Roberts (2014).
[27] Titley (1997), 115.

African Heads of State."[28] A few years later, building on the momentum of the Bokassa Inquiry, African governments adopted the African Charter on Human and People's Rights—a positive affirmation of the region's commitment to protect individual rights and to set up mechanisms for enabling human rights protection on the continent. This charter was more than twenty years in the making, and though institutionally weak and under-resourced, the adoption of the charter reflected a recognition that African governments could no longer blindly ignore the atrocities carried out by their peers.

1990 provided the first evidence of a willingness among African governments to collectively authorize and deploy military forces. After Charles Taylor, the leader of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), invaded Liberia in 1989 to overthrow the regime of President Samuel Doe, the world stood by quietly as violence against civilians accelerated and refugees fled across borders. By contrast, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) – an organization founded to promote regional economic integration – mobilized to respond to the violence. At the invitation of President Doe, ECOWAS authorized the deployment of a military force called the ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) which was led by Nigeria but included forces from Sierra Leone, Ghana, Guinea and Gambia as well. Although some members of ECOWAS initially opposed the intervention, backing Charles Taylor instead, ultimately the mission had unanimous support from the region.[29] The NPFL declared war on ECOMOG as well, and the multilateral force quickly became an active participant in the war, especially after Doe's capture and execution. ECOMOG remained in Liberia for years, even after a UN mission was launched in 1993, until the war ended in 1997. Importantly, this was, "the first peace enforcement operation launched by an African sub-regional organization."[30] Less than a year after the operation ended in Liberia, ECOMOG forces were deployed to Sierra Leone – at the urging of the OAU – to restore President Ahmad Kabbah to power after he was removed in a military coup, in the context of Sierra Leone's long-running civil war. As in Liberia, the UN eventually launched its own mission in Sierra Leone, though ECOWAS remained active in seeking to bring an end to the conflict.

---

[28] Turack (1984), 371.
[29] Coleman (2007), p. 98.
[30] Peter Arthur (2010), p. 16.

By the turn of the new century, especially in the wake of the world's failure to take action during the Rwandan genocide, there was a movement afoot to transform what was widely considered a broken OAU. Nigeria and South Africa initiated the effort with the introduction of two significant reform packages at the OAU Summit in 1999.[31] By 2002, 53 African leaders came together to inaugurate the African Union (AU), a continental institution set up to replace the OAU. While the new institution's primary goals were largely unchanged – to promote interstate cooperation, to reduce the likelihood of conflict, and to provide a framework for African engagement in international fora and markets – there were significant changes in its normative framework and real powers. Specifically, the AU's Constitutive Act "creates room for the continental organization to interfere with some sovereign prerogatives of African states."[32] Article 4(h) reserves for the AU the right to intervene, without consent, in a member state, in order to "restore peace and stability; prevent war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity; and in response to a serious threat to legitimate order." Article 4(p) condemns and rejects unconstitutional changes in government and creates space for the AU and sub-regional organizations to take affirmative action in response to coups and other unconstitutional seizures of power. Taken together, these normative shifts – and the very real powers they ceded to the new African Union - reflected a slow but steady evolution on the continent around issues of non-interference, sovereignty, and the role of external actors in responding to domestic political developments.[33]

EVIDENCE OF CHANGING PATTERNS OF INTERSTATE RELATIONS

Of course, the critical question is whether these shifting normative frameworks are translating into new forms of African multilateral engagement. The evidence compellingly demonstrates the emergence of a new African interventionism over the past 15 years, emanating from both sub-regional and regional organizations, which distinguishes multilateral behavior on the continent from both the past and from the behavior of other regional organizations around the world.

---

[31] Tieku (2004).
[32] Ibid., p. 250.
[33] Williams (2007).

To assess the frequency and scale of African multilateral engagement, I gathered data on how African sub-regional and regional organizations have responded to coups, civil wars, and fraudulent elections in decades since independence. The data on coups come from Powell and Thyne, and have been updated through 2015.[34] For each coup, I coded three forms of intervention: (1) suspension, when an organization suspends or revokes membership in order to penalize or persuade a target state; (2) sanctions, when an organization takes action to limit or end economic relations with a target state or to punish individuals within that state and (3) intervention, when an organization uses military force to punish or persuade actors in a target state and/or to directly restore democratic rule.

(Figure 1)

Figure 1 demonstrates the frequency of coups since independence. More than 200 coups have been attempted in Sub-Saharan Africa during this period, with nearly half resulting in the successful seizure of power for at least seven days. The number of attempted coups peaked at 11 in 1966, remained fairly consistent at about five per year in the 1970s and 1980s, and has declined considerably after a slight uptick at the end of the Cold War. Though coups have become less frequent in recent decades, Figure 2 shows that successful coups are now far more likely to elicit a coordinated response by sub-regional or regional organizations. While regional actors never responded with meaningful pressure in the immediate post-independence period, the vast majority of coups since 2000 have been met with a concerted effort by states in the region to punish the perpetrators. As Figure 3 reveals, the most common form of punishment is suspension from the sub-regional or regional organization; however, these suspensions are often accompanied by economic sanctions against the targeted state or the individuals who perpetrated the coup.

(Figure 2)
(Figure 3)

Importantly, when one examines the regional distribution of coups, it is clear that West Africa is where most coups are concentrated, but also where the OAU/AU and sub-regional

---

[34] Powell and Thyne (2011).

organizations have been most assertive in their response. As a share of successful coups, however, the regional response has been pretty consistent across West, East, and Central Africa, while coups in North Africa and Southern Africa have been least likely to elicit a response. This is, in part, a function of timing, as coups have been infrequent in North Africa and Southern Africa since 2000.

(Table 1)

Turning to how regional organizations have responded to intrastate conflict, the patterns are very similar. Conflict data come from the Uppsala Conflict Data Project, and measures of international and regional peacekeeping were collected by Mullenbach.[35] Figure 4 shows that, while the frequency of civil conflict increased in the 1970s and 1980s, it was not until after 1990 that the United Nations and regional organizations began to carry out peacekeeping missions. Since the mid-1990s, regional and sub-regional organizations have led approximately five peacekeeping missions per year, and dedicated substantial troops to missions led by the United Nations.[36]

(Figure 4)

Table 2 shows that regional peacekeeping has been a major feature of conflicts in Africa and Europe, but not in other parts of the world. Though Asia has had nearly as many civil conflicts since 1990s as Africa, less than 20% have been met with a coordinated regional response, as compared to Africa where nearly 50% of conflicts have generated a regional mission. Unsurprisingly, Europe has the most established architecture for deploying regional peacekeeping forces, but African regional organizations also stand out as highly active. Table 3 demonstrates that the level of regional activity is consistently high across sub-regions, though East Africa and North Africa have been the most active, deploying regional forces in more than 50% of conflicts.

(Table 2)
(Table 3)

---

[35] Mullenbach (2013).
[36] Bellamy and Williams (2005).

16

Finally, I examine data on how African regional and sub-regional actors have responded to electoral misconduct. Using data collected by Daniella Donno and updating it through 2012, I identify those presidential and legislative elections that were "flawed."[37] For each flawed election, I record whether there was any form of enforcement by the regional or sub-regional organization: either conditionality, which captures the threat of application of punishments explicitly tied to electoral conduct, or non-conditionality/diplomatic engagement, which captures mediation missions to exert pressure and public statements that criticize electoral results.

(Table 4)

As Table 4 shows, flawed elections are a common occurrence across Sub-Saharan Africa, though most common in East and North Africa. Given the number of flawed elections, the low level of enforcement activity is striking. However, as Figure 5 suggests, the rate at which African regional and sub-regional organizations have taken some form of enforcement action began to rise in the late 1990s, though weaker forms of engagement predominate and enforcement actions are inconsistently applied across cases. African regional organizations have been far less active in responding to flawed elections than their counterparts in Europe and Latin America, though there is some recent evidence that the African Union, in particular, is grappling with how to improve its enforcement of norms around free and fair elections including through new investments in election observation.[38]

For a regional order that was long characterized by an expressed commitment to sovereignty and non-interference and a weak set of regional and sub-regional organizations, these patterns of regional intervention point to important new dynamics on the continent. Strong responses to coups, regional peacekeeping missions, and the soft enforcement of norms around free and fair elections have been on the rise since the late 1990s, led both by regional and sub-regional organizations. African organizations have developed a track record of suspending and sanctioning countries led by coup plotters, and the infrastructure for doing so is most developed in West Africa. African

---

[37] Donno (2013), p. 12. Donno defines electoral misconduct as the violence of the principles of free and fair elections with a focus on three categories: restrictions on opposition parties' and voters' freedom of movement, expression, and association; practices that create a biased playing field favoring the ruling party and; irregularities in the casting, counting, and tabulation of ballots.
[38] Donno (2013), p. 79.

organizations are far more active in peacekeeping than any other regional organizations, and though the continent lags behind Europe and Latin America in the enforcement of electoral norms, regional pressure has become far more common. Of course, the application of these pressures is inconsistently applied across target countries, but the very presence of any pressure at all is a striking change from African international relations under the OAU.

Taken together, these developments raise the question of why African governments would abandon their reasonably strong norms of non-interference, create more functional continental and regional organizations, and permit (and sometimes even embrace) the use of diplomatic and coercive power to shape the internal affairs of other African states. Moreover, the selective use of these tools of pressure challenges us to consider why some states are targeted and others are not, which governments are pushing for these enforcement actions, and what effect these interventions are having on the domestic politics of targeted states.

Limits of Existing Explanations

Perhaps the simplest explanation for the emergence of multilateral action in Africa is that it reflects the evolving interests of the continent's most powerful states. Theorists writing in the neorealist tradition have argued that international cooperation – and the international institutions that structure cooperation – is largely a function of the interests of strong states.[39] If this perspective is correct, shifts in patterns of regional organization and cooperation should reflect the goals of the continent's most powerful states, be driven by these actors, and have no independent effect on their behavior. The origins of the OAU are consistent with a focus on state interests, at least in part. However, it was the shared vulnerability and weakness of a large number of states, rather than the pursuit of influence by the most powerful, which created incentives for post-independence elites to institutionalize a norm of non-interference and to create a feckless regional body, as mechanisms for minimizing threats to their hold on power.[40]

The rise of post-apartheid South Africa as an important player in shaping African international relations after 1994 lends credence to a focus on the evolving interests of the most

---

[39] Mearsheimer (1994).
[40] Clapham (1996), Herbst (2000).

18

powerful states. South Africa was the wealthiest country on the continent in 1965, but played no formal role in the structuring of regional cooperation, beyond providing a useful target for collective action to rid the region of the last remnants of colonial rule. In 1994, South Africa remained Africa's dominant state—in terms of wealth and military power—and the end of apartheid afforded the country's new democratic government an opportunity to exercise leadership on the continent. President Mandela, in an effort to improve the image of Africa and to make South Africa an important global trading nation, embraced a foreign policy that focused on the promotion of human rights and democracy.[41] Thabo Mbeki, Mandela's successor, took this even further and assertively challenged one-party and personal rule. When his approach angered other African leaders, he embedded his defense of liberal norms in a broader vision of a holistic "African Renaissance" and created a new organization – the New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) – which sought to enlist African states in helping one another to improve the quality of governance. Ultimately, Mbeki recognized that the OAU was not reflective of these new directions, and pushed the heads of state to adopt three critical pro-democracy decisions: a commitment of the OAU to promote "strong and democratic institutions," a commitment to exclude those "whose governments came to power through unconstitutional means," and a pledge to support military regimes to move towards a democratic system of government.[42]

But South Africa was not alone in pushing for a transformation of the continent's structure of international cooperation. Nigeria's democratically elected President, Olusegun Obasanjo, offered a blueprint for the reform of the OAU which sought to establish benchmarks for judging the behavior of African leaders in four areas—security, stability, development, and cooperation.[43] His ambition was to re-conceptualize security in Africa as a collective responsibility, and to challenge the protections provided by sovereignty norms that concealed the abuses of African governments. Nigeria was also looking for ways to share the burden of peacekeeping on the continent, as domestic opposition grew to the costly missions in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Although Nigeria was the most populous country on the continent and the dominant actor in West Africa, the country's wealth had been squandered during decades of misrule, leaving the country influential but resource- and capacity-constrained. Obasanjo joined Mbeki in driving the process of reform; ultimately, the AU's

---

[41] Mandela (1994)
[42] Tieku (2004).
[43] Obasanjo and Mosha (1992).

new institutional design and legal underpinnings were broadly reflective of the core tenets of Obasanjo's reform agenda.

But this theoretical perspective falls short of providing a compelling account of the transformation of the OAU into the AU, the translation of new normative frameworks into concrete actions, and the persistence of new forms of multilateral action over time. While South Africa and Nigeria both pushed a set of liberal norms and a framework for regional intervention, neither was sufficiently powerful on the continent to exert pressure and align the incentives of other states, nor sufficiently wealthy to bankroll the new organization on their own. Cooperation from other key actors – including the organization's three largest funders, Algeria, Egypt and Libya – as well as the organization's member states more broadly, was required to advance the prioritized reforms. Moreover, while embracing new normative commitments around human rights and democracy might be relatively costless—indeed, the continent had been building out an underfunded human rights framework and architecture since the fall of Bokassa—the translation of these norms into multilateral action was not at all guaranteed. Regional organizations on other continents have been quick to embrace the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and other guiding documents, but few have built the multilateral architecture needed to advance their goals. Finally, even as the influence of South Africa and Nigeria has waned in recent years, owing to domestic troubles in both countries, the appetite for African multilateral action has not decreased. In fact, authoritarian countries such as Uganda, Rwanda, and Ethiopia, and democracies like Senegal and Ghana, have led the charge for continued multilateral intervention on the continent.

A second possibility is that African multilateral action reflects the diffusion of normative changes in how countries organize their relations with one another. The rise of African multilateral action may simply reflect a changing set of beliefs about how international relations should be structured in a region, with an emphasis on greater organization, legalization, and bureaucracy.[44] Or, alternatively, new understandings about how states should act, and the conditions under which they should intervene in the affairs of their neighbors, may have taken hold.[45] In the most widely cited theory of norm creation, constructivists identify the central role of political entrepreneurs and

---

[44] Finnemore and Sikkink (1998). Barnett and Finnemore (2004).
[45] Finnemore (2003).

activists who mobilize transnationally to generate and spread new norms that are designed to change international or domestic behavior.[46]

There are a number of reasons to believe that normative shifts are an important part of the explanation. Africa's reconsideration of norms of sovereignty and non-interference coincided with robust debate at the international level around the limits of state sovereignty as a guiding principle of international relations, especially in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide and the atrocities in the Balkan wars.[47] The concept of the international community's "responsibility to protect" was introduced, and ultimately embraced by the United Nations in 2005. Many of the normative commitments in the AU's Constitutive Act, and the associated commitments in sub-regional bodies, also trace their roots to international human rights treaties and legal mechanisms that have evolved in the post-WWII period and been actively promoted by international lawyers and civil society groups.[48] Most countries in the world are now signatories to a set of major human rights treaties, and the language in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and other conventions is integrated into the foundational documents of international and regional organizations.

In addition, a logic of appropriateness could be at work.[49] Governments and regional organizations receive a variety of signals about what constitutes appropriate behavior. The growth of African peacekeeping, election monitoring, and human rights enforcement, for example, could simply reflect an emerging understanding of what states and regional organizations are meant to do, rather than being motivated by the expected consequences of these interventions. The end of the Cold War unlocked cooperation on international peacekeeping as a new mechanism at the international level, and the growth of regional operations followed soon after.[50] International election observation emerged as a new phenomenon in the early 1990s, and a decade later the vast majority of elections were being observed with regional organizations developing their own capabilities. The use of international criminal tribunals after violence in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia created an environment in which every negotiated resolution to a civil war was expected to have a transitional justice mechanism.[51]

---

[46] Finnemore and Sikkink (1998); Keck and Sikkink (1998).
[47] International Commission on State Sovereignty (2001).
[48] Keck and Sikkink (1998). Simmons (2009).
[49] Meyer et al (1997).
[50] Doyle and Sambanis (2004); Fortna (2008).
[51] Sikkink (2011).

But a focus on norm diffusion, whether driven by transnational activists or through the passive spread of new understandings of appropriateness, is also unsatisfying. To make sense of changing international relations in Africa, we need to uncover how states came to understand a growth in interventionism as "in their interest" as compared to the norms that governed interstate relations before. While activists may have played an important role in this process, ultimately it was governments that negotiated these new normative commitments, enshrined them in treaties and agreements, and constructed regional and sub-regional capabilities to enforce them.[52] It is imperative to evaluate how the interests of states have evolved, making the continent more receptive to the new beliefs and practices that were already taking hold in the international system. Arguments about norm diffusion are also frustrating because they offer little leverage on the question of when actors take actions consistent with their normative commitments. Many of these ideas about the importance of universal rights and the conditional nature of sovereignty have spread across regions, taking root in normative frameworks and political documents, but African regional and sub-regional organizations have built a capability to take action. Though norm enforcement is inconsistent, this is also a part of the puzzle. Indeed, traditional theories of norm creation and diffusion struggle to explain why multilateral norm enforcement happens at some times and not others and is focused on some targets while others are largely immune.

A final explanation emphasizes the costs of instability as a driver of African multilateral intervention. It is widely recognized that civil wars and political instability can generate negative spillovers that impose costs on neighboring states.[53] These costs may be direct, in the form of violence, terrorism, or refugee flows, or indirect, as perceptions of instability dissuade foreign investment and keep tourists away. The desire to minimize these negative spillovers could be an important motivation for African governments to upend norms of non-interference in favor of a framework that enables multilateral action.[54] In fact, the long-standing African Union intervention in Somalia is often held up an example of collective action by the region to stem the outflow of terrorism and refugees. The major troop contributors in Somalia – Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda – are those that have experienced the most significant effects of the Somali conflict. They remain

---

[52] Finnemore (2004), p. 17.
[53] Collier et al (2003).
[54] Buzan and Waever (2003).

actively engaged in the conflict under the auspices of the AU many years after the intervention began.

Nonetheless, it is unlikely that the costs of civil conflict and political instability are the major factor driving changing African interstate relations. Civil wars have been a major feature of African politics since the 1980s, yet momentum toward an architecture of conflict management and intervention is a more recent phenomenon.[55] Refugee flows, though significant in scale, were also characteristic of conflicts in the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, some research suggests that the intra-African movement of people has actually gone down, as more opportunities for Africans to out migrate have arisen.[56] The threat posed by terrorism is probably part of the story, though it is most relevant for understanding coordinated African action against Al-Shabab, AQIM, and Boko Harram. It seems far less relevant as an explanation for the emergence of the anti-coup norm, efforts to stop ethnic violence in places like the Central African Republic, and pressure mounted in response to electoral fraud. Moreover, a focus on the costs of conflict alone cannot help us understand why norms of non-interference have been replaced by a highly organized and bureaucratic structure of norm enforcement, rather than simply giving way to more unilateral, cross-border intervention. The value of acting collectively to mitigate the potential costs of poor governance and violence in neighboring states seems a necessary condition for multilateral action, but perhaps not a sufficient one.

Although each of these explanations contributes something to our understanding of the growth of African multilateral intervention, they struggle to make sense of one of the most puzzling features of this change: African *governments* achieved a consensus on the need for new norms and practices around sovereignty and have made significant and costly investments to pursue collective action. This cannot be a function of power alone, given South Africa and Nigeria's waning influence and limited resources. The diffusion of international norms cannot explain why states saw it as in their interest to break down historical patterns of non-interference and open up the possibility of external pressure. And while the need to manage the spillovers of conflict provides an incentive for action, it does not tell us much about the form that intervention should take. To understand the

---

[55] Fearon and Laitin (2003).
[56] Flahaux and De Haas (2016).

pivotal role of African governments in this process, we need to focus attention on how state interests have evolved.

How State Interests Have Changed

One critical factor that drove changing state behavior in Africa was the growth of democracy on the continent. With the end of the Cold War – and the dissipation of the unconditional international aid flows that had sustained many autocratic regimes – African governments experienced a wave of popular protest in the early 1990s, putting pressure on one-party states to open up their political systems.[57] The subsequent transformation in structures of political power was nothing short of dramatic. Over a decade, the majority of countries instituted elections and legalized opposition parties. The number of closed autocracies plummeted almost overnight, replaced by democracies and hybrid political systems that were more open, competitive, and accountable than the regimes they replaced. Ultimately, though democracy has had its setbacks in Africa, these transitions helped to institutionalize the rule of law and to constrain the behavior of political elites. For example, while more than three quarters of African Heads of State left power through a coup, violent overthrow, or assassination in the 1960s and 1970s, irregular transfers of power dropped to just 15% of cases in the first decade of this century.[58]

Democratization – even if incomplete – had significant effects on the nature of domestic politics in Africa. First, it raised expectations among citizens that governments would protect individual rights and freedoms. This was reflected in both formal constitutional changes as well as the growth of citizen demands. Second, democratic transitions introduced and institutionalized new structures of political accountability. The idea that leaders operated with legal and institutional constraints on their political authority became more broadly accepted. Third, the opening up of political systems created space for a rapid growth in associational life and independent media, further increasing the power of citizens vis-à-vis their governments. Even where democratic transitions were stalled or reversed, expectations around the protection of individual rights and the accountability of leaders began to change substantially across the continent.

---

[57] Bratton and Van de Walle (1998).
[58] Posner and Young (2015).

Social scientists have long explored the connection between domestic regimes and international cooperation, exploring the hypothesis that democratic states behave differently in their international relations than more autocratic regimes. Part of this literature focuses, in particular, on the ways in which democratic states structure international cooperation and design regional and sub-regional institutions. I argue that the democratic transitions of the 1990s were a key factor in reshaping the incentives of African governments. Political leaders, not only in South Africa and Nigeria, saw value in institutionalizing new normative commitments – including protection from unconstitutional seizures of power and the importance of acting collectively in response to war crimes and mass atrocities – and building the international capability to act on those commitments. Sometimes, the value for leaders came from an expressive commitment to institutionalizing norms that were more reflective of evolving domestic practices.[59] More often, however, the value gained by political elites was a function of the degree to which this new regional order helped secure their own positions of power.

How does the erosion of non-interference norms serve the interests of elites in democratizing countries? As scholars have argued with respect to European normative and legal frameworks, newly empowered political elites have incentives to lock in their own legitimacy and create constraints on backsliding through international organizations.[60] These international commitments can empower new elites vis-à-vis their domestic opponents, send a costly signal internationally, and raise the costs of deviating from a new trajectory of human rights protection and democratic rule. If the sitting government, or a future government, violates these norms or reneges on internationally negotiated commitments, regional organizations are in a position to impose costs multilaterally, from private and public pressure to conditionality and expulsion.[61] For newly empowered democratic elites, many of whom had been in the opposition and victimized by prior governments, it was essential to raise the costs on the military of displacing elected leaders and increase the likelihood of collective action to prevent the abuse of human rights. This was especially true in countries without a long history of democratic and peaceful rule.

---

[59] Moravcsik (1995).
[60] Moravcsik (2000).
[61] Pevehouse (2002, 2005).

Democratic transitions also unleashed a flood of domestic deliberation and activism around human rights and state accountability.[62] The emergence of civic organizations and independent media created a constituency that was prepared to mobilize politically for the effective implementation of new international commitments.[63] These activists also operated across borders, becoming political entrepreneurs with a strategy for securing domestic progress through international frameworks and the use of the evolving regional order to hold governments to account. Though decision-making authority rested with states – and the reforms to regional institutions reflected the interests of state actors – these new forms of national mobilization and transnational activism further cemented a new trajectory for African international relations. A growing number of states saw change as in their interest, while domestic activists worked closely with counterparts across borders and in the regional organizations themselves to expand their influence.[64]

If this argument is correct, we would expect the growth of African multilateral intervention to coincide with a period of democratic transitions, to be driven by a newly empowered, democratic elite, to be most advanced in the regions and sub-regions where democratic transitions were concentrated, and to institutionalize specific changes that best serve the interests of political elites looking to signal their democratic bona fides and to constrain backsliding.

The challenge with this explanation is that the renegotiation of normative frameworks and the empowerment of regional and sub-regional organizations had to be a consensus process. It was not enough for powerful or democratic states to pursue a transformation in how issues of sovereignty and non-interference were treated on the continent. Autocrats and "pseudo democrats" needed to sign up to these changes.[65] Why was the erosion of norms of non-interference in their interest as well?

I posit that we cannot understand the changing interests of African political elites without focusing on how Africa's relationship with the rest of the world was changing. During the Cold War, African governments could rely on the political backing and financial support of Western powers

---

[62] Alter et al (2013).
[63] Simmons (2009).
[64] Barnett and Finnemore (2004).
[65] Hyde (2011).

regardless of how they governed or treated their own populations.[66] Alliances in the Cold War took precedence over concerns about repression, human rights abuse, or particular forms of government. Likewise, the standoff between the United States and Soviet Union meant that institutions of collective security were paralyzed and inactive. Given that both great powers held a veto, the United Nations Security Council could not come to agreement on the need for action in response to threats to international peace and security. As a consequence, though African governments were far from immune from Western influence and pressure during the Cold War, political elites typically could rely on an external backer to sustain their rule and were not concerned about the potential for multilateral actors to intervene in their domestic affairs.

The status quo changed dramatically in the 1990s. The end of great power conflict unlocked the United Nations Security Council, and the international community's appetite for the use of sanctions, multilateral peace operations, electoral observation missions, and international judicial mechanisms to shape domestic politics could not be sated. As civil wars raged and conflicts came to an end, the United Nations architecture for conflict management and resolution grew, and resources flowed from major donors into the international system.[67] It was also the case that Western countries – still major sources of financial assistance to African governments – began to focus more heavily on how countries were choosing their leaders and treating their own populations. Conditionality became a major feature of the relationship between international donors and African governments.[68]

In this new environment, the calculus for African governments was changing quickly. The status quo ante had disappeared and states could no longer count on external actors to set aside concerns about domestic politics and how governments were treating their own populations.[69] African political elites thus had an interest in figuring out how to manage, influence, and constrain Western intervention in the sovereign affairs of governments on the continent. Thabo Mbeki tapped into widespread anti-Western sentiment to energize a new commitment to solidarity and Pan-Africanism, imbued with the principles of human rights, democracy, and good governance and

---

[66] Schmidt (2013). Clapham (1996).
[67] Doyle and Sambanis (2004).
[68] Dunning (2004).
[69] Gruber (2000).

concrete mechanisms for introducing greater accountability.[70] This could be considered a case of norm localization in which indigenous entrepreneurs adapt and amplify international norms.[71] But I argue in this case, that the broad embrace of new normative commitments and the growing support for African multilateral capacity represented less of a commitment to the values per se, and more of a desire to put Africans in the lead of managing intervention on the continent. If African governments embraced a similar normative framework and built their own capacity to intervene, they might be able to head off pressure from outside the continent and protect one another in the event that other geostrategic considerations outweighed any concerns about human rights and democracy. Authoritarian leaders and pseudo-democrats were especially amenable to a framework governing African multilateral action that gave them a voice – and a veto – in shaping the actions of regional and sub-regional organizations.

It is also the case that this new regional order would constrain the interventionist tendencies of other African governments by creating incentives for multilateral consultation making it more costly for them to undertake unilateral action. At a time when African states looked far more heterogeneous than at independence – some were strong bureaucratic states with a growing economy, while others were weak and stagnant – the weakest governments could see their interest in formalizing a collective security arrangement that constrained the power and influence of larger and more capable African governments.

The other mechanism driving a consensus among democratic and non-democratic regimes about the value of a revised normative framework for intervention on the continent was the potential for both governments and regional organizations to tap into a significant flow of financial resources.[72] International donors were enthusiastic about investing in a new continental architecture, especially if it reflected the triumph of liberal values. In addition, if growing African capacity could offset the need to deploy the military from Western governments, especially in the aftermath of of the failed United Nations Mission in Somalia, this would be a win-win for the continent and external actors. From the perspective of African governments, the willingness of Western governments to finance African militaries – via support for international and regional peacekeeping including the

---

[70] Adebajo et al (2007).
[71] Acharya (2004); Williams (2007).
[72] This is similar to Hyde's democracy contingent benefits (2011).

direct payment of troops – helped political leaders manage that key constituency, at a time of financial strain and crisis. Moreover, as Western actors became more dependent on African governments to exercise political influence on their neighbors and provide troops to peace operations, political elites became more insulated from external pressure themselves.

If this argument is correct, we would expect that autocratic and pseudo-democratic governments also embraced Africa's new continental architecture while ensuring that the constituent institutions preserved the ability of political leaders to prevent action if they so desired. In addition, we would expect African sub-regional and regional organizations to position themselves as leaders in responding to crises, pushing the United Nations to follow rather than lead and trying to keep the rest of the world out when African governments could not come to consensus on how to engage. Finally, we would expect significant financial flows to African governments and regional organizations as a contingent benefit for the adoption of new frameworks and the building of new capabilities.

To explore the evidence for these arguments in detail, I first return to the breakdown of the OAU and the rise of the AU. The discussion of this transformation provides a deeper look at how both democratic and non-democratic states embraced a new normative framework, while preserving the ability to withhold support and block action. I then employ three comparisons. First, I examine why the adoption and enforcement of democratic and human rights norms has advanced more quickly in West Africa than in other sub-regions. The evidence suggests that the democratic transitions of the 1990s played an important role in reshaping the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and creating the conditions for active regional responses to both civil conflicts and unconstitutional changes of power. Second, I compare how African governments responded to the genocidal killings in Central African Republic and South Sudan. In CAR, African governments embraced a partnership with the international community to bring the violence to an end, while in South Sudan, the international response has been much more muted given profound disagreements among the neighboring African states and pressure from the region to defer. Third, I look at the sub-regional responses to democratic breakdown, with a focus on the assertive response to Gambia in 2016 and the weak reaction to Burundi in 2015. Both of these states were among the weakest in their region, but leaders in East Africa had strong incentives to limit African and external

engagement in Burundi given the precedent that it might set for Rwanda and Congo, while there was far greater consensus in West Africa about what to do.
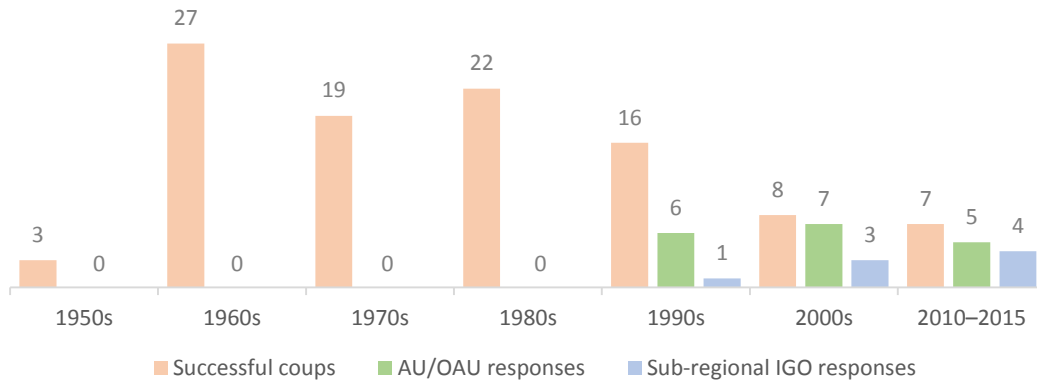
Tables and Figures
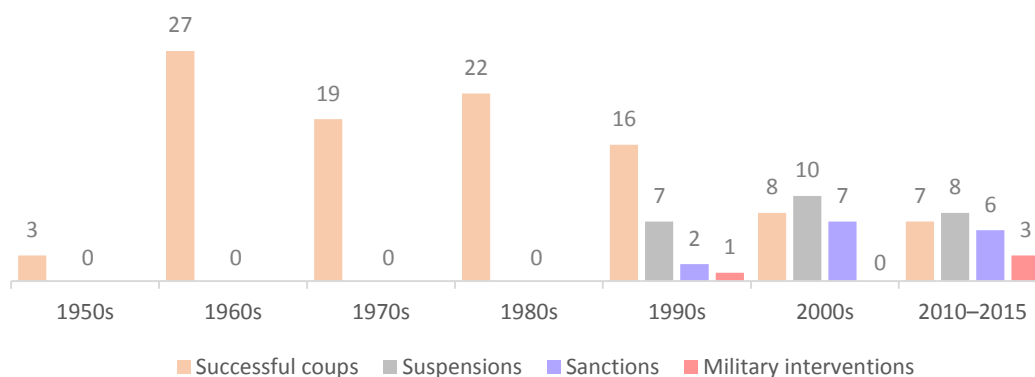
Figure 1. Coups in Africa: 1952–2015
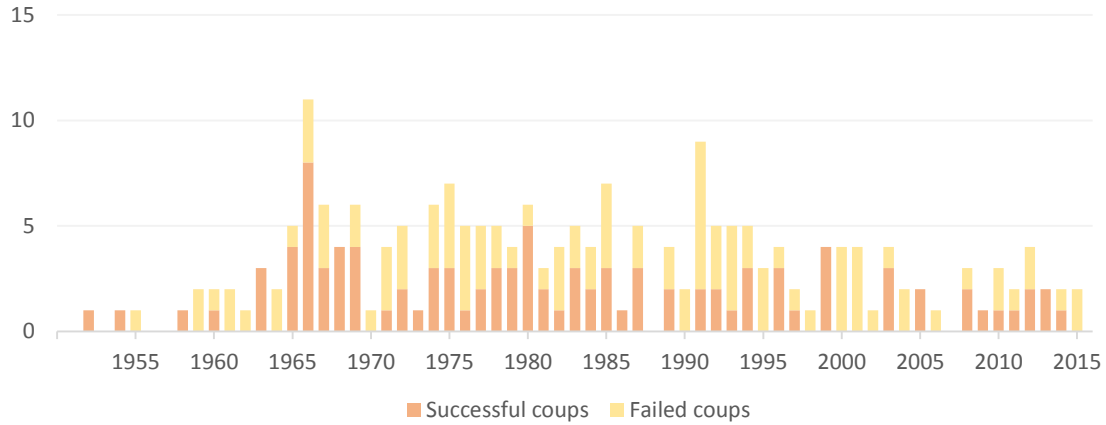
Note: the combined height of the bars corresponds to the total number of coups attempted in a given year.

Figure 2. Responses to successful coups by decade: 1952 to 2015

Note: the figure shows responses only to successful coups.

Figure 3. Types of responses to successful coups by decade: 1952 to 2015

Decade	Successful coups	Suspensions	Sanctions	Military interventions
1950s	3			
1960s	27	0		
1970s	19	0		
1980s	22	0		
1990s	16	7	2	1
2000s	8	10	7	0
2010–2015	7	8	6	3

■ Successful coups   ■ Suspensions   ■ Sanctions   ■ Military interventions

Note: the figure shows responses only to successful coups.

Table 1. Coups in Africa and regional responses: 1952–2015

	Attempted coups	Successful coups	AU/OAU responses	Sub-regional IGO responses
North Africa	28	12	1	0
East Africa	48	20	5	1
Central Africa	31	13	3	1
West Africa	95	53	12	7
Southern Africa	5	4	0	0

Note: coup responses are defined as suspension, sanctions, or military intervention.

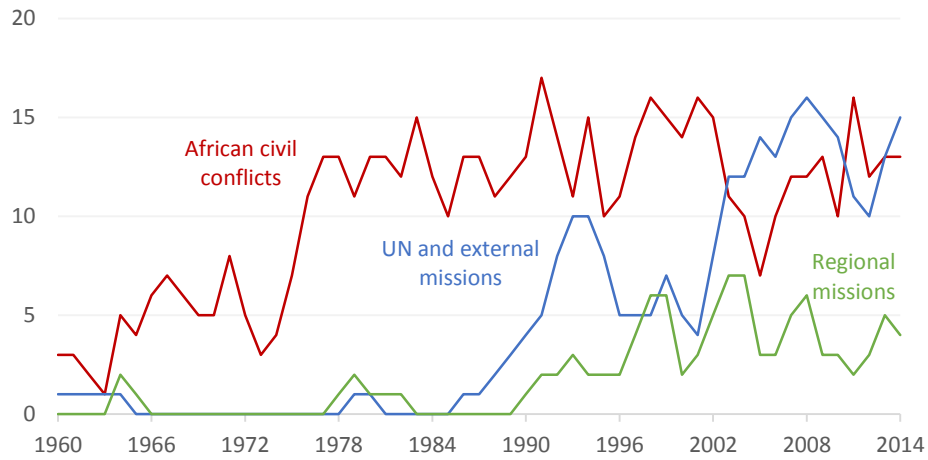Figure 4. African civil conflicts, UN and external peacekeeping missions, and regional missions: 1960–2014

Table 2. Civil conflicts and peacekeeping by region: 1990–2014

	Civil conflicts	UN and external missions	Regional missions
Africa	88	48	35
Middle East	29	4	2
Asia	85	15	16
Europe	37	17	30
Americas	13	6	3

Table 3. Civil conflicts and peacekeeping by African sub-region: 1990–2014

	Civil conflicts	UN and external missions	Regional missions
North Africa	5	7	4
East Africa	30	12	16
Central Africa	23	18	6
West Africa	29	11	8
Southern Africa	1	0	1

Figure 5. Electoral misconduct and African IGO enforcement: 1990–2012

■ Share of elections that are flawed   ■ Share of flawed elections that elicit enforcement
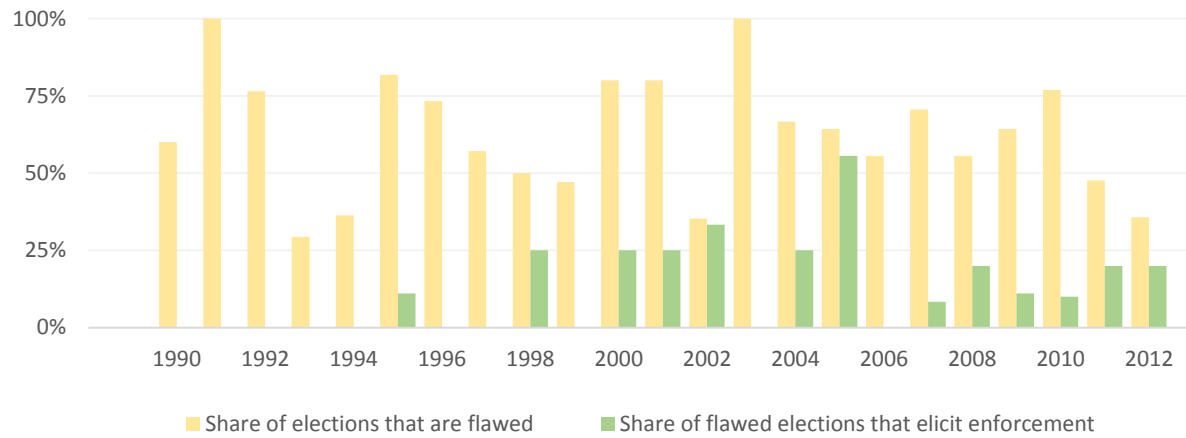
Source: Donno (2013), updated using Hyde and Marinov (2012).

Table 4. African elections and IGO responses: 1990–2012

| | Elections | Flawed elections | Share flawed | Post-election enforcement | |
				Conditionality	Non-conditionality
North Africa	33	23	70%	0	0
East Africa	73	57	78%	1	9
Central Africa	44	28	64%	0	1
West Africa	122	64	52%	4	9
Southern Africa	18	3	17%	1	0

Note: Conditionality includes the threat or application of punishments, or the promise or implementation of rewards, that are explicitly tied to electoral conduct; examples include economic sanctions and suspension from IGO membership. Non-conditionality includes mediation missions to exert pressure or resolve post-electoral conflicts, or public statements that criticize electoral misconduct (but that do not explicitly link changes in electoral conduct to punishments or rewards).
Source: Donno (2013), updated using Hyde and Marinov (2012).