

Keith Weghorst

Keith Weghorst died on March 30, 2023 after a battle with leukemia. Keith was a beloved member of the Africanist Political Science Community, and will be remembered for his kindness, sharp intellect, and above all, his joyful and open-hearted approach to living in this world. His contributions to the study of electoral authoritarianism, political parties, and electoral competition in Africa have made a lasting impact on our understanding of democratic deepening and decline across the world. Keith was assistant professor of political science at Vanderbilt University, assistant professor of political science at University of Gothenburg, and Deputy Director of the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute.

Keith's dedication to immersive field research and his creative mix of research methodologies spans all of his scholarship. His book *Activist Origins of Political Ambition: Opposition Candidacy in Africa's Electoral Authoritarian Regimes* (Cambridge University Press, 2022) explains why opposition candidates run for political office in electoral authoritarian regimes, despite relatively small chances of winning and high prospects of violence. He draws on his four years of fieldwork in Tanzania and proficiency in Swahili to argue that candidacy decisions are shaped by experiences early in life, including careers in civil society organizations and civic activism. Keith's scholarship with Staffan Lindberg finds that swing voters and opposition supporters are motivated by developmental priorities, rather than conventional clientelist motivations dominant in the political science

literature. His path-breaking research with Michael Bernhard documents the origins of party systems on the continent as well as their volatile and competitive history. His recent work with Karisa Cloward, meanwhile, explains how politicians who rose to prominence in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can disrupt African politics and development. Keith was also a beloved teacher, winner of the COVID-19 Innovative Teaching Award and Robert Birkby Undergraduate Teaching Award at Vanderbilt.

Keith's impact is felt far beyond the confines of academia. He advised the US Agency for International Development (USAID), V-Dem, Freedom House, and the International Law and Policy Institute on democracy and civil society initiatives. He volunteered extensively for the African Politics Conference Group, acting as the communications officer for nearly seven years, where he developed a new website and outreach strategies. Keith's passion for life was contagious, and he shared his love of cooking, running, kayaking, and music with those around him. He organized running groups at conferences, started a cooking blog with a Tanzanian chef, and team-taught the course "Rhythm of Change: African Politics and African Music." His greatest joy was becoming a father with his partner Kristin Michelitch of two adventurous and cheerful young daughters. He will be dearly missed by those who were lucky enough to have known him as a friend and colleague. ■

—Jeffrey Paller, *University of San Francisco*;
and Natalie Wenzell Letsa, *University of Oklahoma*



Center for the Study of Federalism

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CSF Fellows: Ann O'M. Bowman, Andrew Karch, John Kincaid, J. Wesley Leckrone, Joseph R. Marbach, Troy E. Smith, and Thomas Vontz