



Mario Einaudi
Center for
International
Studies

No. **12-07**

Working Paper Series

Opposition Parties in Sub-Saharan Africa

Lise Rakner and Nicolas van de Walle
October 2007

To view past working papers and guidelines for submission, please visit the Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies Working Paper Series webpage at: <http://www.einaudi.cornell.edu/initiatives/working.asp>. For more information please contact Dr. Heike Michelsen, 170 Uris Hall, Tel: 607.255.8926, hm75@cornell.edu.

Opposition Parties in Sub-Saharan Africa

By

Lise Rakner and Nicolas van de Walle

Abstract

The paper argues that the scholarship on democracy in Africa has paid insufficient attention to the nature of opposition parties. It first examines opposition parties in contemporary Africa, studying trends in electoral composition and legislative politics. The paper then links informal and formal institutions, focusing on opposition parties and on the factors that may explain the strength and weaknesses of opposition parties across the region in recent years. The authors suggest a weak or even non-existent relationship between level of democratic institutionalization and the size of opposition parties across the region. Comparative and case analyses of sub-Saharan African elections confirm the weakness of opposition parties in Africa as a striking characteristic of the multi-party systems in the region.

About the Authors

Lise Rakner (Ph.D. University of Bergen, Norway, 1998) is a Professor of Comparative Politics at the University of Bergen, Norway and is a Senior Researcher at the Chr. Michelsen Institute. She has worked for more than eighteen years experience in research and policy analysis in sub-Sahara Africa. Thematically her work has focused on issues of democratization and human rights, particularly related to electoral management and political parties in sub-Saharan Africa; political economy, with an emphasis on economic reforms, taxation, business associations, and the budget processes; aid effectiveness, with a concentration on issues related to governance assessments.

Nicolas van de Walle (Ph.D. Princeton University, 1990) is the Associate Dean for International Studies, College of Arts and Sciences, and John S. Knight Professor of International Studies and the Director of the Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies at Cornell University. He is also a Non-Resident Fellow at the Center for Global Development. He has published widely on democratization issues as well as on the politics of economic reform and on the effectiveness of foreign aid, with special focus on Africa. In addition, van de Walle has worked extensively as a consultant for a variety of international and multilateral organizations, including the World Bank, USAID, and UNDP.

Contact Information

Professor Lise Rakner, Professor of Comparative Politics, University of Bergen, Norway and Senior Researcher, Chr. Michelsen Institute, P.O. Box 6033 Postterminalen N-5892 Bergen, Norway, tel. 55 57 43 70, e-mail: lise.ranker@cmi.no.

Professor Nicolas van de Walle, Associate Dean for International Studies, College of Arts and Sciences, and Director, Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies, Cornell University, 170 Uris Hall, Ithaca NY 14853-7601, USA, tel. 1-607-255-8927, Fax: 1-607-254-5000, e-mail: nv38@cornell.edu.

Opposition Parties in Sub-Saharan Africa

Introduction

The scholarly literature on political parties in Sub Saharan Africa is entering a third phase that is likely to be theoretically rewarding, particularly if certain empirical quandaries can be resolved. A first phase of interest in political parties in Africa occurred right around independence, in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Coleman and Rosberg 1964, Morgenthau 1964, Apter 1965, Hodgkins 1961). Influenced both by Leninist ideas placing political parties at the center of nation building and by the sheer romance of the moment, scholars initially hypothesized that the political parties emerging during the independence process were a modern vanguard that would spearhead the process of modernization through their mobilizational capabilities. This early phase was then considerably tempered by scholars like Sklar (1963) Zolberg (1964, 1966), and Bienen (1967, 1971), whose field work led them to very different conclusions, not least because they were in the field just as fledgling democracies all through the continent were dying and single parties were consolidating their monopoly on power. Rereading this literature today, one is struck by how little attention these scholars devoted to the legislatures or to the dynamics of legislative party systems, no doubt in large part because opposition parties were in the process of being eviscerated in one manner or another, and real effective power was moving rapidly away from the legislature into the presidency.

By the mid 1970s, only Botswana, the Gambia and Mauritius could claim an even modestly competitive party system. The subsequent consolidation of the single party, and a plethora of military regimes led scholars away from African parties, and, with the odd exception (Widner 1992), to an almost total neglect of the topic for most of the 1970s and 1980s. The second phase of interest in African political parties had to wait for the wave of democratization that restored multi-party politics to the region in the 1990s. Since then, a number of studies have emerged of parties and party systems in the region (Manning 2005, Mozaffar and Scarritt 2003, Kuenzi and Lambright 2001, Lindberg 2007, Randall and Svåsand 2002, Basedau *et al.* 2007). The literature has had the great

virtue of being theoretically comparative, as scholars have sought to apply the theoretical lessons of the study of political parties in the mature democracies of the industrialized countries.

It is the ambition of this paper to innovate in two ways. First, we focus on opposition political parties. There are remarkably few studies of opposition parties in contemporary Africa. Studies on political parties have typically focused on the parties in power (eg. van de Walle 2003) on party systems (eg., Kuenzi and Lambright, Mozaffar *et al.* 2003, Randall and Svåsand 2002, Manning 2005), or on the general dynamics of electoral competition (eg. Basedau *et al.*, 2007, Salih 2003). Studies on the opposition in Africa since the recent wave of democratization have also tended to focus on the broader category of civil society (Olukoshi 1998), and have mostly ignored electoral competition and legislative politics.

This neglect of opposition parties seems unfortunate. For one thing, the ability of opposition parties to compete politically should be quite instructive of the level of democracy that is present in the political system. Legislative dominance by one party over time is often associated with misuse of state resources and authoritarian tendencies. Electoral turnover and declining legislative dominance should therefore be considered positive for democratic competition and the institutionalization of democracy more generally. Second, the incentives and resources available to opposition parties are quite different than those available to the party in power. Though this will clearly vary across the region, opposition parties are likely to have a much more circumscribed access to state resources, and, thus, it can be hypothesized, a lower ability to resort to patronage strategies. The implications of this for both party organization and programs and the institutionalization of the party system more generally are issues that have received surprisingly little attention in the scholarship on African parties.

According to democratic theory, the presence of a stable and numerically viable opposition in the legislature is a key requisite for horizontal accountability, through legislative check on executive power. We could therefore assume that the ability of the

opposition to win elections in large part is a function of the degree of democracy existing in the political system. Based on this assumption, initially we hypothesized a positive correlation between the strength of democracy and the progress made on democratic consolidation, on the one hand, and the strength of opposition parties in the region. In fact, the data we describe below suggest a weak or even non-existent relationship. The weakness of opposition parties in Africa today is a striking characteristic of the multi-party systems in the region, and correlates only weakly with the quality of democratic performance.

Seeking to explain the weakness of Africa's opposition parties, we draw attention to the relationship between formal and informal political institutions in the region. The impact of electoral rules and other formal institutions have been a favorite object of study in the current phase of research on political parties (Bogaards 2000, Reynolds 1999, Mozaffar *et al.* 2003). Arguably, this turn to institutionalism has been a breath of fresh air for a region too often marked by the scholarly parochialism of African exceptionalism. But there are at least two reasons to worry about this exclusive emphasis on formal institutions, and to call for a third phase of research on parties. First, with the contemporary western experience as the theoretical referent, the literature has not tended to problematize the actual level of democracy in the political system. Yet, in highly imperfect democracies, in which the regime has substantial incumbency advantages and is willing to resort to various shenanigans to retain power, formal political institutions are clearly at least in part the endogenous product of the balance of political power in the system. As a result, in many African states, it is problematic to study the effects of formal institutions on political outcomes (Erdmann and Basedau 2007).

Second, and as Helmke and Levitsky (2006) have usefully reminded us in a recent edited collection on Latin American politics, formal rules interact in a variety of ways with informal institutions in all political systems to mediate how the former shape political behavior and outcomes. In some cases, informal political institutions like political clientelism undermine the formally specified political rules. In others, the working of formal political institutions is facilitated or accommodated by a set of informal rules and

conventions. According to the authors, competing informal institutions typically predominate in the new democracies, while complementing informal institutions normally prevail in the more established democracies. But as the Latin American case studies show, in emerging democracies informal institutions can have a positive effect on governance, especially in presidential systems with multiparty or fragmented party systems, and increase the likelihood of governability (Helmke and Levitsky 2006:11). If this is the case, then it is important to describe these informal political institutions and analyze their potential impact on the emergent African democracies. In studies of Africa democratic developments, we have tended to associate non-democracy with informality and democracy with formal rules. It is likely that as an electoral democracy matures, politics will depersonalize and give added weight to rule-based politics, in which formal political institutions will weigh more. Nonetheless, it is important to emphasise that democracy will thrive in Africa only if political actors develop a set of informal norms, rules and standards that uphold, legitimize and strengthen the formal rules. The real test of democratic consolidation on the continent then is whether such complementary informal norms are emerging in party competition or whether competing informality largely undermines democratic developments. Such a project, neither detracts from the recognition of the importance of the region's formal rules, nor need imply an argument about African exceptionalism.

Linking informal and formal institutions in this manner is thus the second purpose of this paper. We do so through a focus on opposition parties, and on the factors that may explain the strength and weaknesses of opposition parties across the region in recent years. We ask first, what factors explain the poor performance of the opposition in sub-Saharan Africa. Second, on the basis of the emerging case-based literature on party systems in the region we turn to assess informal and formal institutional factors that may promise to enhance opposition parties' viability and cohesion. The paper is organized in the following manner. The next section presents our findings on opposition parties in sub-Saharan Africa. Linking election statistics to Freedom House scores, we find little significant differences in the strength of the incumbent and the number of opposition parties represented in the legislature between polities with high and low political

freedoms and civil rights. In section three, we explain these findings by drawing attention to a set of formal and informal institutional impediments to the development of opposition parties in the region. Turning in the fourth section to look for potentials for opposition party growth, we first discuss two formal rules that appear to facilitate complementary informality, the two term limitation for the presidential office and the two round presidential elections. We then assess various resource bases of opposition parties. A fifth section summarizes our findings.

Opposition Parties in Africa Today

A first cut at this issue is taken through some summary statistics of electoral results. Table 1 examines the number of parties winning seats, as well as the share of total votes and total seats won by the winning party and by the second biggest party, across each country's first, second, third, fourth and in three cases, fifth elections. It also tabulates Freedom House political freedom and civil liberties scores for each country, in the year that the election was held. Finally, it calculates average "effective number of parties" scores for each election. The table shows that some 21 countries had convened 4th elections between the end of 1989 and mid 2007, providing eloquent testimony to the routine nature of elections in Africa today.

The winning party, more often than not an incumbent party, has continued to win handsome majorities of both votes and seats. Some observers might note optimistically that the winning party's margin has not increased over time. Nor does it appear that the degree of disproportionality between votes and seats is growing over time, if we compare the first and second columns. It should, however, be noted that the percentage of votes going to the winning party includes a number of missing values; these tend to come from less democratic systems, so the data almost certainly understates the level of actual disproportionality. On the other hand, given the region's significant economic problems, the persistence of poverty and the poor performance of governments, it should be viewed as remarkable that incumbents have continued to do so well, and does probably indicate the advantages of incumbency, as the literature has tended to argue.

In terms of the strength of the opposition, the most useful and least deceptive variable is probably the proportion of seats going to the opposition. The “effective number of parties” statistic is often used instead, but the emergence of the independent candidate syndrome has lessened its usefulness over time. In this case, the anomalous scores for fourth elections capture this phenomenon, which we discuss below. In brief, it is hard to distinguish between small parties and independents, both of which appear to be expanding. To cite just two examples: In the Congo-k elections of 2006, for instance, 63 independents are reported, as well as 56 parties with five or fewer seats (in a legislature of 500 deputies!). In Mauritania, the winning party claims only 16% of the seats following the 2006 elections, but there are 41 independents, and so on.

What, then, can be argued about these second parties? They appear to have gained in strength over time, if just barely, from under a fifth of total seats allocated in the first two elections, to just over a quarter in fourth elections. Still, they remain relatively small, with only 22 of the 137 elections reaching a third of the legislative seats (in comparison, the majority party had 66 % of the seats in 68 elections).

Table 1: Election Results, by number of election, 1989-2006

	N	SEATS WINNING PARTY (%)	VOTES WINNING PARTY (%)	#OF PARTIES WINNING SEATS	EFFECTIVE # OF PARTIES	SEATS 2nd PARTY (%)	FREEDOM HOUSE SCORE
1st election	41	62.4	55.4	6.7	3	18.9	8.5
2nd election	38	68	60.4	6.8	2.6	16.2	8.4
3d Election	34	64.6	53.4	6.4	2.4	21.4	7.9
4th Election	21	61.6	56.5	6.8	6.8	27.5	7.2
5th elections	3	41.9	37	9	9	27.5	5

Notes: 5th elections have been held in Benin, Niger, and Sao Tome. These totals do not include elections in Botswana and Mauritius, the two countries in the region that regularly held competitive elections for at least a decade before 1989. In Bicameral systems, the data concerns only the lower house.

Source: Author's data base of legislative elections

Table 2 divides the same data by the Freedom House scores of the country in the year of the legislative election being held. A first category of 34 elections concern the most democratic countries, categories as 'Free' by Freedom House. The second set of 55 elections is in the category characterized as hybrid regimes, mostly what Freedom House calls "partly free'. The third category of 34 elections has been conducted in the least democratic countries, according to the Freedom House score categories as 'Not Free'. As argued above, our initial expectation was that the opposition parties would do much better in the first category of countries, given the fact that political freedoms and civil rights are the highest. In fact, we do find a weak correlation between the quality of the democracy and the strength of the opposition. Still, we expected to find much sharper contrasts between the category, and the weakness of party oppositions in even the most democratic systems does appear striking.

Table 2: Election Results by level of democracy 1989 - 2006

FREEDOM HOUSE SCORE	N	SEATS WINNING PARTY (%)	VOTES WINNING PARTY (%)	#OF PARTIES WINNING SEATS	EFFECTIVE # OF PARTIES	SEATS 2nd PARTY (%)
Under 6	34	58.5	53.1	5.9	2.7	25.6
6 to 9	55	60	53	7.1	3.6	20.1
10 and Above	44	73	62.2	6.1	2	15.2

Notes: The table does not include elections after 2006, because of non-availability of Freedom House scores for 2007. Civil rights and political freedom scores have been added up. Under 6 correspond more or less to Freedom house’s “free” categories of countries.

Source: Author’s data base of legislative elections

The election statistics presented here correspond to findings by among others, Lindberg (2007) finding that of 21 electoral democracies in sub-Saharan Africa, 11 may be characterized as stable/institutionalizing- of these 11, eight are one party dominant, thus, stable party systems in Africa seem to mean stable one party dominance (Lindberg 2007: 237). From a perspective of democratic accountability, this is problematic. As reported in much of the literature on political dominance in the region, dominance is very often associated with misuse of state resources and authoritarian tendencies (van de Walle 2003, Manning 2005, Randall and Svåsand 2002). In other words, if the only political systems capable of providing mass patronage through their party system as 'electoral machines' are one party systems the question is whether multiparty democracy is really emerging in the region. In countries like Tanzania, Botswana, South Africa and Mozambique – all characterized as either stable or institutionalizing (Lindberg 2007) the dominant party has not been subjected to serious electoral contestation. The increasing degree of horizontal and vertical accountability observed in these regimes exists in the context of one dominant party that has not been subject to serious electoral challenge.

Our statistical findings hide major exceptions and developments over time within a given country and the region. Nevertheless, looking at individual electoral results and countries, we are struck by at least three signs of opposition party weakness.

The small size of opposition parties: First, as suggested in Tables 1 and 2, the leading party of the opposition is often relatively small compared to the party of government. Even in the region's most democratic countries, the opposition often has fewer than half the number of seats as the winning party: In Benin (2003), 15 seats compared to 31, for instance, in Cape Verde (2006) 29 compared to 41. Since the majority party can often count on the legislative support of smaller non-government parties and independents, these data understate the strength of the majority party relative to the opposition. Moreover, it should be noted in this respect that most of these countries have presidential constitutions with wide discretionary powers for the executive, and no requirement that the parliamentary majority be the party of the president. Yet, this has actually been the case in only a very small number of cases, most notably Niger and Sao Tome, in which successive presidents have not consistently been able to count on a stable parliamentary majority.

The limited durability of the opposition: As argued by Randall and Svåsand (2002), functioning democracies require an institutionalized party system to the extent that voters are able to choose between alternative parties and that they should be able to pass a vote on the basis of the parties' performance in previous elections. Underlining the weakness of African opposition parties, it is striking how many parties that changes from one election to the next. Lindberg (2006: 13) has compiled the number of parties registered in legislative elections in 44 sub-Saharan Africa countries. While the number ranges from a low of seven (Botswana) to the 100 registered parties in Congo (DRC), more than half of the multiparty democracies in the region are reported to have more than 15 registered parties in legislative elections. In only a handful African countries have the same parties – apart from the incumbent- contested all three (or four) elections since multiparty elections where reinstated. In Zambia only the party that won the first multi-party elections in 1991, Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) has contested all four

legislative elections since 1991. In the Gambia no parties have been represented in legislative elections in more than three elections. Even the relatively institutionalised multiparty system in Senegal has not produced a stable party system to the extent that the majority of the electorally significant parties are represented in consecutive elections.

The independent candidate phenomenon: Arguably, throughout the region, political parties appear to dominate the political scene. Nevertheless, in Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Malawi, Madagascar and the recent Uganda multiparty elections, independent candidates have constituted more than 10 per cent of Members of Parliament. In the case of the 1998 elections in Madagascar, independent candidates garnered a higher percentage of the vote (26. 8%) than the largest party¹. In Uganda's 2006 multiparty elections, independent candidates gained the same number of seats as the largest opposition party Forum for Democratic Change (FDC). With 20 % of the vote in the 2004 elections, independent candidates constituted the third largest group in the parliament of Malawi (Rakner *et al.* 2007). These totals are of course hard to interpret comparatively. The voting behavior of independent legislators and their relationship to the majority vary both within and across legislatures. While reflecting the election outcome, the numbers do not tell us much about the role of these independents in the legislature between elections. Candidates may be elected as independents, but eventually join the presidential majority and the difference between independents and parties represented by a single parliamentarian is not entirely clear.

The large number of independents serves to weaken opposition parties and their ability to contest presidential power and this high number of independents reflects several distinct reasons to run as an independent. First, a substantial number of candidates do not think that running as part of a party increases their chances of winning a seat. They choose to run on their own and count on their own prominence within the community and their own resources to win. Second, a number of independents initially sought to stand as members of a party, but lost a primary, or were not chosen by the party to be a candidate. They

¹ The numbers are reported at <http://africanelections.tripod.com/>. For a recent account of democratic developments in Madagascar, see Marcus 2005.

disagree with this decision, and choose to run as independents instead. Notably, the party that rejected them often appears unable to assert party discipline and convince the person not to run. Finally, and concurrently with both of these logics, the decision to run as an independent can be part of a strategy to negotiate one's entrance into the winning party after the election, perhaps to buttress the presidential majority. At least some independent candidates believe that winning on one's own enhances the leverage to negotiate a good deal for one's self after the election (Rakner *et al.* 2007). The case of Malawi shows that constitutional provisions (Section 65) intended to strengthen the role of parties by preventing MPs elected on a party ticket from changing party affiliation during the electoral term without having to re-contest their seat may have led to an increase in the number of independent candidates. MPs may leave their party group and declare themselves as 'independent', and MPs elected as 'independents' may join an existing party group². Thus, standing as an independent provide individual MPs with incentives in terms of striking bargains with the main party.

In sum, the scholarship on African political parties have increased markedly in the past decade and in particular and in particular, we now have a number of valuable case analyses of party systems in many of Africa's emerging multiparty systems. Nevertheless, systematic knowledge of the party-legislative relations is still scarce and we know little of how opposition parties (and independents) vote in parliament and the level of horizontal accountability. The numeric weakness of the opposition witnessed by the fact that even in Africa's most institutionalized multiparty system the opposition rarely gain more than 20 per cent of the parliamentary seats, the limited durability of opposition parties and the unclear role of independents in parliament, however, suggest that many legislatures in the region perform a relatively weak function as a check on executive power. What may explain the continued weakness of opposition parties both in relatively institutionalized multiparty systems and the hybrid regimes?

² Most of the independents elected in 2004 were previously in UDF but had defected during the nomination process for various reasons. After the election, most of them rejoined the UDF parliamentary group.

Explaining the weakness of opposition parties

The major debates on the relative merits of presidential versus parliamentary systems and the impact of electoral institutions that have marked much of the scholarship on democratization in Latin America have been somewhat less prevalent in studies of African multi party systems. Nevertheless, a number of studies have argued that the first-past-the post-electoral system provide undue advantages to the incumbent because of the disproportionate number of seats/votes gained (Olokoshi 1998). Our findings suggests that for historical and largely context specific reasons, opposition parties are similarly poorly developed in the countries that have adopted list proportional representation (PR). While this clearly does not suggest that the formal rules, regulations and policies that structure political interaction do not matter for how individual and groups act politically, it suggests that the explanations for the outputs produced must be contextualized. Based on an analysis of a number of excellent case studies produced on party system development and electoral policies in sub-Saharan Africa over the past two decades, three challenges generally appear to affect opposition parties throughout the region: Incumbency advantages related to the dominance of the executive, limited access to resources, and the low legitimacy attached to the notion of opposition politics in the region. In keeping with Helmke and Levitsky's (2006) notion of formal-informal institutional interlinkages, the dominance of the executive over the legislative office, the form of party finance available in the region, and the fact that the notion of a stable and loyal opposition generally is not accepted as a legitimate political phenomenon, may be considered as informality that largely competes with the formal rules of free and fair multiparty contestation.

The concentration of power in the presidency: Across sub-Saharan Africa, the weak institutionalisation of the parties is linked to the political framework in which the presidency is overwhelmingly important. Parliamentary office and control of committee leadership remain poor bases for parties to promote their own policies. Furthermore, in many of the countries in the region, absence of regionally elected assemblies and weak local government structures imply that there are few alternative arenas where parties can

groom prospective candidates or impact on the formulation or execution of public policies. Thus, the weakness of the parties, and in particular the opposition, is embedded in excessive power concentration in the political system.

The case of Zambia illustrates how the combination of executive dominance and the FPTP electoral system discourages the opposition from entering into coalitions. Before the 2001 elections, in spite of repeated calls in the press for the opposition to unite, attempts to form a coalition behind one candidate failed, as no one would withdraw. As noted by Burnell “in Zambia many politicians like to conceive of themselves as the president of a political party and envisage being the next republican president, and treat parties as a personal vehicle to that end” (Burnell 2001: 245). The use of the executive office to maintain control over the legislature can be witnessed by recent developments in Malawi. Shortly after the 2004 election President Mutharika, resigned and formed a new party, the DPP (Democratic Progressive Party). The President then faced a parliament in which “his” party did not have a single representative, and with the largest party seeing him as an enemy. In order to secure control over parliament, the President has sought to limit the role of parliament by drastically reducing its sittings and has used cabinet positions as a survival instrument. As a result the number of cabinet positions –and related costs- has increased from 24 (2004) to 42 (June 2007) (Gloppen *et al.* 2007). The cumulative effect has been increased costs and the paralyzing of parliament.

Access to resources: As anyone who has ever visited a party office in an African country will attest to, parties are poor, characterized by few resources, poor organizational capacity and most often lack a structure that can penetrate the national territory. While parties in Eastern Europe and Latin America have developed party structures tied to functional interests in society, such as working class parties tied to trade unions, Christian parties linked to the Catholic churches, agricultural parties tied to farming interests, few such linkages between the party structure and interest groups can be found in Africa. Incumbent parties’ strength is very often explained by their access to public funds and their use of state instruments to their own advantage (Randall and Svåsand 2002, van de Walle 2003). Thus, the extent to which opposition politicians and parties can sustain

themselves without access to central state resources is key to their ability to compete. In countries where opposition parties have been weak, there is much evidence that party finance and the party's ability to project itself throughout the territory have been a key issue (on the latter, in Togo see Toulabor 2005).

Generally, party formation remains based on personal ambitions and ethnic differences rather than issues (Burnell 2001). The level of economic development in the region, coupled with weak private sectors, have meant that in many cases investing in a political career is the most realistic channel for upward mobility. Political positions are often the route to business opportunities (licences, contracts with the state and donors) has this may be a driving force in the fragmentation of the party system. The 2006 presidential and parliamentary elections in Uganda offer some insights to constraints facing opposition parties in the face of incumbency control of state resources (Kiiza *et al.* forthcoming). The incumbent greatly affected the election outcome from deciding on the procedure itself, making certain changes, implementing measures – through the election itself. The so-called Movement system remained in operation until 23 February 2006 elections which meant that the incumbent party was funded as a government entity through the 2006 elections. The failure to ensure a distinction between the NRM-O and the state was witnessed through the use of public resources, public servants campaigning for the NRM-O, lack of balance in media coverage, and the harassment of the main opposition candidate and his supporters. As a result, none of the opposition parties were able to challenge the hegemony of NRM in a fraction of the 945.351 seats contested at various levels of government in Uganda.

The low legitimacy of legislative opposition: A third major challenge for the opposition parties concerns their legitimacy. In one manner or another, the legitimacy of the back bench is questioned in many African political systems, as the role of a legislative opposition is not yet widely accepted in the region. Surveys like the Afrobarometer point to the relatively low esteem in which political parties are held, but interestingly, opposition parties are held in particularly low esteem (Afrobarometer, 2004). Piet Konings (2004: 305-6) argues convincingly, for instance, that the SDF in Cameroon lost

popular legitimacy when it agreed to enter into parliamentary opposition, because many people, including some of its own rank and file, believed a party out of power could only participate in parliamentary processes in order to benefit from various perks and prebends. Public financing for parties inevitably leads to accusations regarding the use of that money by party leaders, and participation in legislative politics result in accusations of compromise and lack of vision. Notably, while the international donors finance as much as 50 per cent of the budget in many African countries, financial support to political parties has remained a marginal and controversial area of aid (Carothers 2006).

We know relatively little about elite behavior and why politicians either stand as opposition or chose to join the government, but it is evident that the nature of representation in sub-Saharan Africa to a large degree favours the dominant party. A number of studies have emphasised that African politicians are expected to act as spoke persons and financial providers in their communities. Within this perspective, to be in opposition is of limited political value because politicians are expected to represent their constituencies, and representation is measured by their ability to provide resources. Opposition politicians therefore have limited incentives to coalesce because individual politicians are more likely to gain access to state resources if they associate with the president's party (van de Walle 2007). Burnell notes of Zambian politics that party formation is driven by political careerism, competition over spoils and personal traits rather than serious disagreements over ideology or program (2001). Bierschenk makes much the same point concerning elections in Benin (2006). The behavior of Malawian MPs suggests that when political finances are patronage based – sometimes being in opposition/or forming an opposition party is simply a bargaining chip that is used to get into position in the next round. Such behaviour offers some instructive insights and also to a large extent explains why politicians - and parliament as an institution - is held in low esteem by the population.

In sum, limited resources, the nature and pervasiveness of executive dominance and the degree of opposition party legitimacy provide major impediments that may explain the weakness of the opposition parties in sub-Saharan Africa. Acknowledging the vast

variation in terms of democratic institutionalisation in the African region and that the degree to which informal institutions provide outcomes that largely circumvent the formal institutions varies with the quality of democracy, we now turn to ask: To what extent can we detect emerging informal norms, rules and standards that appear to legitimize and strengthen the formal rules of multiparty contestation? Addressing the problems of resources, executive dominance and lack of opposition cohesion, we suggest that shifting forms of clientelism, and the institutional rules of term limits for the presidency and two-rounds of presidential elections offer some potential for the emergence of stable and viable opposition in the region.

Potentials for the establishment of a viable opposition

Given the factors described in the previous section, it is a wonder opposition candidates ever win elections. On the whole, few of them do, but there has been some alternation across the region, and there is little doubt that parties in power can no longer simply assume electoral triumph. How will the prospects for the opposition improve? In what kinds of circumstances will opposition forces be more likely to prevail? This is clearly an area in which much more research, particularly at the individual country level, is necessary. However, there are several institutional pointers which can be put forward, tentatively, based on the research that is available.

The potential effects of term limits on one party dominance

The third wave of democratization in the African region has so far only resulted in limited increase in actual political competition. Ishiyama and Quinn (2006) show that political parties that had been dominant in the period before democratization, typically in competitive single party regimes, were systematically more likely to emerge in power following democratization, though this was tempered by the number of political parties in the system and the degree of ethnic fractionalization.

As part of the democratic transitions of the early 1990s, presidential term limits were introduced in most African countries as a response to the president-for-life situation that had been associated with the one-party state. Because of incumbency advantages, term

limits provides the best chance to limit the accumulation of power in the hands of the executive. Second, it may be argued that term limits may break an electoral authoritarian regime's descent into dictatorship (Maltz 2007). Perhaps more important in terms of the prospects for opposition parties, term limits promote the alternation of power both for individuals and political parties. This is because term limits entail the periodic exit of incumbent presidents and the successor must face the opposition who tend to fare better against successor candidates than the incumbent. Presidential term limits thus reduce incumbency advantages and improve the chances of political alternation in power. Ghana's president Jerry Rawlings set a precedent in 2000 when he retired after two terms in office and his successor lost the elections (Nugent 2001). Similarly, in Mali, the constitutional limit on two presidential terms decreased the dominance of the party the ADEMA party that came to power in the 1992 elections as a result of internal rivalry. The legislative elections that followed produced a parliament divided among a number of parties and without a clear presidential majority (Villalón and Idrissa 2005: 51). The 2002 elections in Kenya also broke the dominance of the Kenya African National Union (KANU) that had been in power since independence in 1963. President Moi had ruled since 1978. As part of a package of democratic reforms, the president agreed to term limits to the presidency in the early 1990s and under domestic and international pressure bowed to these limits in the 2002 elections. His successor candidate Uhuru Kenyatta won only 31 per cent of the vote and facing Kenyatta rather than Moi the opposition was able to stand behind one candidate than thereby break the one-party dominance that had prevailed since independence.

Most Latin American republics instituted term limits in the 19th and early twentieth Century, apparently in an effort to limit presidential powers, in what were highly presidential and personalistic regimes (see Bienen and van de Walle, 1989). This appears to have been one pragmatic solution to dealing with the "caudillo" tradition of the region. It was very hard to limit presidential prerogatives while the president was in power, but it became part of the formal rules to set a clear limit on how long the president might stay in power. It is conceivable that the same clear eyed pragmatism is developing in Africa's imperfectly democratic systems today.

Two round presidential elections

Certain kinds of electoral rules probably facilitate incumbency turn over (van de Walle, 2005). In particular, the defeats of incumbents in Benin and Senegal suggest that the two round majority system of presidential elections increases the chances of an opposition coalition forming to defeat an incumbent. In both those countries, the vulnerability the incumbent demonstrated in the first round created the sense that an opposition coalition could win the election, which encouraged a movement of defection from the presidential camp to the opposition. The brief period between the two rounds of voting facilitated deal-making to encourage this process along. In these countries, a simple majority system would in each case probably have resulted in the plurality victory of the president over several opposition candidates.

The potential of limiting incumbency advantages through shifting forms of clientelism and alternative resource bases

In an earlier essay, one of us has noted that the democratization of politics in Africa is in the process of changing the nature of political clientelism in the region (van de Walle 2007). The introduction of greater rule of law, regular competitive elections and greater vertical accountability does not necessarily eliminate clientelism, since we can see that various practices of patronage, club good provision to key constituencies and influence peddling are all common features of the most respectable democracies of the OECD countries. Instead, it is hypothesized that first, democratization shifts the locus of clientelism from the central state apparatus to the political parties. Whereas the Presidency typically controls clientelism in the authoritarian regime, the exigencies of competitive elections may force incumbents to shift clientelist practices to the parties to help them compete for votes. Secondly, it is hypothesized the movement to democratic politics increases the amount of redistribution that takes place thanks to clientelism. The need to win elections may therefore result in an expansion of clientelism away from just a small minority of elites, which was more likely to be the case in the authoritarian regime.

There are important caveats to this prediction. In Africa's poor and stagnant economies, politically motivated spending and patronage possibilities are actually quite limited. Despite misconceptions to the contrary, African state structures are comparatively small and cheap (Goldsmith 2000). Thus, the shift to electoral politics may create a need for expanding social services and patronage, but it does not by itself lessen the sharp fiscal constraints of governments that have never been very good at taxing their citizens and are relatively dependent on the donors. Nonetheless, and in comparison to the sleepy days of non-competitive single party elections and foreordained presidential referenda, the move to electoral politics certainly reinforces the importance of the party in power. To win elections, the president needs to strengthen his party, both in order to maintain party discipline and to campaign effectively. This process is not without its problems and there is plenty of evidence that incumbent parties have a hard time maintaining party discipline and are not necessarily able to campaign effectively all over the territory, notably in rural areas far from the capital. Nonetheless, access to state resources, and to the infrastructure of the state through out the territory offers a huge advantage to the party in power, compared to opposition parties, which have neither.

How do opposition parties address this weakness? At least two patterns are starting to emerge. One is the financing of parties by private business. In Madagascar, for instance, Marc Ravalomanana used his own personal fortune as owner of the island's biggest dairy company to finance his party and his own successful campaign for the presidency in 2002. In Benin, the winner of the presidential elections of March 2006, Yayi Boni had been president of the BOAD (the French acronym for the West African Development Bank, a development financial institution of the West African Monetary Union) for a decade before he ran for the Presidency. The BOAD's projects in Benin were broadly publicized in the months before the election to enhance his technocratic image and his ability to deliver the goods to the population. He also appears to have relied on the financial support of businessmen with whom he had had business relations while at the BOAD. (see Mayrargue 2006: 167-8). Morrison makes a similar argument about political candidates for election in Ghana where business men invest in candidates (Morrison 2004).

A second pattern is for opposition parties to seek office at the subnational level as a platform from which to compete at the national level. In Uganda, John Kizito Ssebaana, the head of the Democratic Party, has been Mayor of Kampala. Nicephore Soglo, leader of the opposition in Benin, following his own presidential term in office between 1991 and 1996, provides another example: He became mayor of Cotonou, the capital city, a base from which he has promoted his own son, now that his age excludes him from the Presidency. For an opposition party, control of a mayoralty provides significant resources for one's party faithful, as well as a core base of supporters, both of which are sure to prove very useful when the time comes to compete for national office. Financial resources are only a part of the motivation. Ravalomanana's entry into Malagasy politics was as mayor of the capital, Antananarivo. In his case, the political resources afforded by such a position were probably more important than the financial resources.

Concluding comments

In this paper we have argued that the scholarship on democracy in Africa so far has paid insufficient attention to the nature of opposition parties. We have presented data showing the number of parties winning seats, the share of total votes and total seats won by the winning party and by the second biggest party, across each country's first, second, third, fourth and in three cases, fifth elections. Correlating the election data to the Freedom House indicators on civic and political liberties, our data suggest a weak or even non-existent relationship between level of democratic institutionalization and the size of opposition parties across the region. Arguably, cross national data are sensitive to the limited time series, and sometimes the sheer weakness of the data put in. Nevertheless, comparative and case analyses of sub-Saharan African elections confirm the weakness of opposition parties in Africa as a striking characteristic of the multi-party systems in the region.

Our analysis of factors that may explain the weaknesses of opposition parties, have emphasized the links between informal and formal institutions. While it is clear that

reversals to authoritarian forms of rule is proving less attractive to Africa leaders both for international and domestic reasons, our analysis of the role of opposition parties in the region suggest that we should perhaps question the assumption that Africa's multiparty systems are progressing in any direction (Herbst 2001), or at least that the pace of progress is exceedingly slow. Regardless of the nature and quality of electoral institutions, and electoral system, opposition parties have remained numerically weak and fragmented. As a result, an essential element of democratic accountability has not yet emerged. It is interesting, and perhaps not surprising to note that some of the most stable political regimes in the region, and also some of the regimes now rated as "most promising" from a developing aid perspective, are one-party dominant regimes who have not experienced regime turn-over. There are a number of reasons for questioning this tendency to favor stability over power alternation. For one thing, the prospects of future power alternation changes the incentives that key actors face. If the ruling party faces a real prospect of loosing power, it may be induced to create institutions that protect it when out of power, such as a strong independent judiciary. Studies of former communist countries also suggest that business tend to invest less in buying influence in countries with party alternation. Thus, there are strong empirical reasons to believe that power alternation will increase the quality of governance through strengthening both horizontal and vertical accountability mechanisms. To emphasie the role of opposition, their role in the legislature and the formal and informal institutional mechanisms that may impede of opposition coalescing and alternatively enhance opposition, should therefore be emphasized.

References

- Anderson, David M., 2003: Briefing: Kenya's elections 2002 – The dawning of a new era? *African Affairs*, No. 102, pp 331-342.
- Apter, David, 1965. *The Politics of Modernization*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Basedau, Matthias, Gero Erdmann and Andres Mehler (eds.), 2007: *Votes, Money and Violence: Political Parties and Elections in Sub-Saharan Africa*. (University of Kwazulu-Natal Press, South Africa).
- Bienen, Henry, 1967: *Tanzania; Party Transformation and Economic Development*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Bienen, Henry, and Nicolas van de Walle, 1989. *Of Time and Power*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bienen, Henry. 1971. "Political Parties and Political Machines in Africa", in M. Lofchie (ed.). *The State of Nations: Constraints on development in Independent Africa*. (Berkeley: University of California Press), pp. 195-214.
- Bierschenk, Thomas, 2006: "The Local Appropriation of democracy: an Analysis of the Municipal Elections in Parakou, Republic of Benin, 2002-03", *Journal of Modern African Studies*. 44, 543-571.
- Bogaards, Matthijs, 2000: "Crafting Competitive Party systems: Electoral Laws and the Opposition in Africa", *Democratization*, Vol. 7 No. 4 pp. 163-90.
- Bogaards, Matthijs, 2004: Counting parties and identifying dominant party systems in Africa. *European Journal of Political Research*, 43, 193-197.
- Bratton, M., 2007: "Formal versus informal institutions in Africa", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol 18, No. 3, pp. 96-110.
- Burnell, P., 2001: "The party system and party politics in Zambia: Continuities past, present and future", *African Affairs*, No. 100, pp. 239-63.
- Carbone, Giovanni M., 2003: "Political Parties in a 'no-Party Democracy': Hegemony and Opposition Under 'Movement Democracy' in Uganda." *Party Politics* 9 (4), pp. 485-501.
- Carey, Sabine C., 2002: "A Comparative Analysis of Political Parties in Kenya, Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo", in *Democratization*, Vol. 9, No.3, pp. 53-71.

- Carothers, T., 2006: *Confronting the Weakest link: Aiding Political parties in New Democracies*. Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Chavez, R. B., 2004: *The Rule of Law in Nascent Democracies: Judicial Politics in Argentina*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Coleman James and Carl Rosberg (eds.), 1964: *Political Parties and National Integration in Tropical Africa*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964).
- Creevey, Lucy, Paul Ngomo, and Richard Vengroff, 2005: "Party Politics and Different Paths to Democratic Transitions: A Comparison of Benin and Senegal." *Party Politics* Vol. 11, No. 4, pp. 471-93.
- Dalton, R. and I. McAllister, 2007: "Political Parties and Political Development. A New Perspective", *Party Politics*, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp 139-140.
- Erdmann, Gero and Matthias Basedau, 2007. "Problems of Categorizing and Explaining Party Systems in Africa". GIGA Working Papers, German Institute of Global and Area Studies. No. 40, (January).
- Giliomee, Hermann and Charles Simkins (eds.), 1999: *The Ackward Embrace. One-Party Dominance and Democracy*, Amsterdam, Harwood Academic Publishers.
- Goldsmith, Arthur A., 2000: "Sizing up the African State", *Journal of Modern African Studies*. Vol. 38, no. 1. pp. 1-20.
- Gloppen, Siri, Lise Rakner and Lars Svåsand (2007),
- Helmke, G. and S. Levitsky (eds.), 2006: *Informal Institutions and Democracy. Lessons From Latin America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Hodgkins, Thomas, 1961: *African Political Parties*. Baltimore: Penguin Press.
- Ishiyama, John and John Quinn, 2006: "African Phoenix? Explaining the Electoral Performance of the Formerly Dominant Parties in Africa", *Party Politics*. Vol. 12, No. 3. 317-40.
- Jones, Mark P., 2004: "Electoral institutions, social cleavages, and candidate competition in presidential elections", *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 23, pp. 73-106.
- Kiiza, J, S. Makara and L. Rakner (eds.), 2007: *Electoral Democracy in Uganda: Understanding the Institutional Dynamics, Processes and Outcomes of the 2006 Multiparty Elections*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers (forthcoming).

- Konings, Piet, 2004: "Opposition and Social Democratic Change in Africa: The Social Democratic Front in Cameroon", *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*. Vol. 42, no. 3 (November), pp. 289-311.
- Kuenzi, Michelle and Gina Lambright, 2001: "Party system institutionalization in 30 African democracies", *Party Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 4, pp 437-468.
- Kuenzi, Michelle, and Gina Lambright. 2005. "Party Systems and Democratic Consolidation in Africa's Electoral Regimes." *Party Politics* 11 (4): 423-46.
- Lambright, Gina. 2007: "Elections, Accountability and Government Performance in Uganda", Unpublished paper, George Washington University.
- Lijphart, Arend, 1994: *Electoral Systems and Party Systems. A Study of Twenty-seven Democracies 1945-1990*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Lindberg, S., 2006: *Democracy and Elections in Africa*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Lindberg, S., 2007: "Institutionalization of Party Systems? Stability and Fluidity among Legislative Parties in Africa's democracies", *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 42, No. 2, (pp. 215-241).
- Lipset, Seymour Martin, 2000: "The indispensability of political parties", *Journal of Democracy*, 11 (1), 48-55.
- Maltz, Gideon, 2007: "The case of presidential term limits", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp 128-142.
- Manning, Carrie, 2005: "Assessing African party system consolidation: Ideology versus institutions", *Party Politics*, 11 (6), pp. 707-727.
- Marcus, Richard R., and Adrien M. Ratsimbaharison, 2005: "Political Parties in Madagascar: Neopatrimonial Tools or Democratic Instruments?" *Party Politics* 11 (4), pp. 495-512.
- Mayrargue, Cedric, 2006: "Yayi Boni, Un President Inattendu? Construction de la figure du Candidat et Dynamiques Electorales au Benin", in *Politique Africaine*. No. 102 (June), pp. 155-72.
- Molomo, Mpho G., 2000: "Understanding Government and Opposition Parties in Botswana", *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*. 38: 1 (March), pp. 65-92.

- Morgenthau, Ruth Schachter, 1964: *Political Parties in West Africa*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Morrison, Minion. K. C., 2004: "Political Parties in Ghana Through Four Republics", *Comparative Politics*. 36, pp. 421-442.
- Mozaffar, Shaheen, J.R. Scarritt and G. Galaich, 2003: "Electoral Institutions, Ethno-political Cleavages, and Party Systems in Africa's Emerging Democracies," *American Political Science Review*, 97, 3, pp. 379-390.
- Olukoshi, Adebayo. (ed.), 1998: "The Senegalese Opposition and its Quest for Power" in A. Olukoshi (ed.) *The Politics of Opposition in Contemporary Africa*. Stockholm: Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala.
- Pottie, David, 2003: "Party Finance and the Politics of Money in Southern Africa", *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*. 21. pp. 5-28.
- Quantin, Patrick, 2007: "Entre Déconnexion and Réductionnisme: L'Etude des partis en Afrique. Unpublished paper, FNSP/SPIRIT, University of Bordeaux.
- Rakner, Lise and Lars Svåsand, 2005: "From Dominant to Competitive Party System: The Zambian Experience 1991-2001" in *Party Politics*, Vol. 6, No.5, pp. 729-748.
- Rakner, Lise, Lars Svåsand and Nixon Khembo, 2007: "Fissions and Fusions, foes and friends: Party system restructuring in the 2004 elections in Malawi", *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 9, pp 1112-1137.
- Randall, Vicky and Lars Svåsand (eds.), 2002. *Parties, party systems and democratic consolidation in the Third world*. Special Issue. *Democratization*, 9, No.3.
- Reynolds 1999
- Salih, M.A. Mohamed, 2003: Conclusions. In M.A. Mohamed Salih (Ed.), *African Political Parties*. London, Pluto Press, 348-357.
- Sartori, Giovanni, 1976: *Parties and party systems: A framework for analysis*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Schlesinger, Joseph A., 1994: *Political Parties and the Winning of Office*. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press.
- Shefter, Martin, (1994): *Political Parties and the State: The American Historical Experience*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Sklar, Richard L., (1963): *Nigerian Political Parties; Power in an Emergent African Nation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Toulabor, Comi, 2005 : “CAR, CDAP et UFC: Le Difficile Implantation territoriale du Multipartisme au Togo”, in Patrick Quantin (ed.) *Gouverner les Sociétés Africaines*. Paris: Karthala, pp. 113-32.
- Van de Walle, N., 2003: “Presidentialism and clientelism in Africa’s emerging party systems”, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 41 No. 2.
- Van de Walle, N., 2007: “Meet the new boss, same as the old boss? The evolution of political clientelism in Africa” in Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson (eds.) *Patron, Clients and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 50-68.
- Widner, Jennifer, 1992: *The Rise of the Party-State in Kenya* Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Zolberg, Aristide, 1964: *One-Party Government in Ivory Coast*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Zolberg, Aristide, 1966: *Creating Political Order; the Party-States of West Africa*. Chicago, Rand McNally.