

Multiparty elections in Africa's new democracies

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Introduction

After a short wave of euphoric expectations of what multiparty democracy could accomplish for Africa in terms of political accountability, economic development and peace, the current perception both internationally and within sub-Saharan Africa appear to be pessimistic. To a large extent, the changing attitudes relate to the role of the electoral institutions and to what extent multiparty elections have actually had any real effect on decision-making in sub-Saharan Africa since multiparty democracy was introduced in 42 of the nations in the early 1990s.

The litmus test of the electoral process is the possibility of the minority at one point to become the majority and that - in the case of such an event - there is actually a peaceful change of government. As a result, it is not possible to conceive of democracy without elections. However, the lesson emerging so far from the sub-Saharan experiences with multiparty democracy is that it is possible to have elections but no democracy. While many African citizens are now, in principle, free to choose their own leaders, in a substantial number of cases incumbent leaders have found ways to win electoral mandates without opening for extensive political liberties and participation. Furthermore, political freedoms and civil rights may be formally recognised, but are imperfectly observed in practice - particularly in between electoral exercises. This has lead scholars to conclude that the crude simplicity of elections has benefited some of Africa's most notorious autocrats who are now able to parade democratic credentials without reforming their repressive regimes (Ake 1996). Some denote the notion that these elections constitute meaningful political exercises in terms of giving citizens meaningful choices over the distribution of resources as the '*fallacy of electoralism*' (Diamond 1996). Other disturbing trends witnessed are the qualitative decline in the conduct of elections from the first to the second elections (Bratton and Posner 1999) and the fact that the level of participation is low and declining.

The gloomy picture has fed, partly on the quality of the electoral process, but perhaps most of all on the lack of significant political change emanating from the electoral process. This is particularly related to two electoral consequences: First, with the exception of Zambia and Benin, the first elections under multiparty competitions resulted in the re-election of the incumbent party. Second, most elections in Africa have so far resulted in a party system where one party dominates over a fragmented opposition.

Why has the electoral process in the newly democratised African states had such limited impacts and what are the consequences of these limited effects?

There are obviously many factors that may account for this development and there are certainly variations from one country to another. However, on the basis of a review of the literature on elections in Africa's new democracies we will argue that in spite of electoral democracy, most African political systems tend to be dominated by one particular party. In addition, the prerogatives of the presidency are so wide that the political impact of other institutions is

much reduced. Together, these two characteristics prevent the development of institutions of restraint and appear unfavourable to the consolidation of democratic governance.

How can one-party dominance be explained, despite the reintroduction of political freedoms, substantial external financial support to these processes, and a variety of institutional reforms to back the democratic processes?

In this report we confront these pertinent questions first, by conducting a review of the literature that has focused on a) the main characteristics of the electoral arrangements of sub-Saharan African states, b) the characteristics of parties in the region, and c) the behaviour and attitudes of the electorate (Part 1). In the second part, we illustrate the general findings and conclusions of part one with an analysis of electoral policies in Zambia since the reintroduction of multiparty politics in 1991 (Part 2). In the final part, we assess the role of the international donor community in terms of electoral assistance to sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s and ask what the international community can do to improve the quality and content of electoral processes (Part 3).

Part 1: Elections in Africa's new democracies: Structures, actors and attitudes

When evaluating the consolidation of democracy in sub-Saharan Africa the nature of the electoral system and the administration of the electoral process appear particularly important. We assess experiences with the following aspects of multiparty elections in sub-Saharan Africa since the early 1990s:

- *The electoral structures.* What are the main characteristics of the electoral arrangements of sub-Saharan African states? We here describe *the type of electoral systems* that are in operation and the debate about the merits and consequences of these systems. Secondly, we assess the *administration of elections*. Third, we analyse the *process of voter registration*. Finally, we assess the experiences with *election campaigns* in Africa's new democracies.
- *The actors in electoral processes.* Democratic governance entails political representation, which in all large-scale societies usually takes place within a framework of organised political parties. We analyse the characteristics of parties in sub-Saharan states with respect to their role in elections.
- *The behaviour and attitudes of the electorate.* We analyse the level of turnout in new sub-Saharan democracies and ask how turnout levels and changes in turnout can be understood. Secondly, we assess to what extent democratic governance in general is embraced by public opinion on the continent.

1.1 The electoral structures of African democracies

In all political systems the type of electoral system that is in place has a profound impact on representation and governance¹. It has long been recognised that the electoral system is one of the determinants of how the party system is shaped. The critical issues here are the mechanism used to translate votes into seats, commonly known as the electoral formula, the district magnitude, i.e. the number of representatives to be elected from each electoral district, and the structure of the ballot, i.e. the possibility for voters to alter the ballot. Of these, the *electoral formula* is the most significant. The district magnitude is an additional characteristic that contributes to how proportional the electoral result will be, while the ballot structure only influences who among the nominated will actually be elected. This last characteristic is not dealt with in this report.

The sub-Saharan African states fall roughly into four categories with respect to the electoral formula (Table 1):

- single-member plurality systems in former British colonies, also known as the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system,
- mostly single-member majority systems in former French colonies,
- varieties of proportional electoral systems in former Portuguese colonies, as well as in a few other countries, and
- countries combining several electoral formulae.

It is important to note that when a polity adopted the electoral system of the previous colonial power, it was not a matter of simply copying the former colonial power's model; it was also a deliberate choice. The decision to retain an electoral arrangement must be seen in the same perspective: An electoral system is kept because it fits the preferences of the most important actors in the system.

As indicated by Table 1, most former British colonies are using the first-past-the-post method (FPTP). This formula implies that the candidate who wins more votes than any other candidate in his/her district is elected. This system does not require a candidate to win a majority of the votes, only a plurality. In majority systems, second elections are required unless one candidate secures a majority (50 per cent) of the vote in the first election. An effect of both plurality and majority systems is that they tend to exaggerate the parliamentary representation of the largest party. From the point of view of democratic theory these types of systems have been criticised for its 'unfair' representation of the electoral strength of parties and therefore distorting the 'real' preferences in the electorate. However, they are defended on two grounds. First, in the long run the system will be fair because it is only each *individual* election result that is 'unfair'. Over several elections, the chances are that a minority party at one time can become the majority party at the next election. Second, although the election results in overrepresentation this can be defended because it provides the governing party with a majority that

¹ The following builds to a large extent on Charlotte Larsen (2001) and contributions in Sisk and Reynolds (1999).

makes it easier to govern effectively. According to Mozaffar (1998), both authoritarian incumbents and opposition groups in former British colonies had incentives for keeping the FPTP. For the incumbent party its hold on power was entrenched, while for opposition groups with regional support, the FPTP guaranteed their continued dominance in their regions.

Table 1. Colonial heritage and electoral system*

Former Colonial Power	<i>Britain (16)</i>	<i>France (17)</i>	<i>Portugal (5)</i>	<i>Others & Non-col. (9)</i>
Electoral system				
<i>FPTP Plurality (19)</i>	Botswana Gambia Ghana Kenya Lesotho Malawi Nigeria Sudan Swaziland Tanzania Uganda Zambia Zimbabwe Mauritius	Djibouti Ivory Coast		DR Congo Rwanda Ethiopia
<i>Majority (9)</i>		Cent. Afr. Rep. Comoros Congo (Brazz.) Gabon Togo Cameroon Mali Mauritania Chad		
<i>PR Proportional (15)</i>	Sierra Leone	Benin Burkina Faso Madagascar Niger	Angola Cape Verde Guinea Bissau Mozambique S.Tome et Pr.	Namibia South-Africa Liberia Burundi Eqat. Guinea
<i>Combined Systems (4)</i>	Seychelles	Guinea Senegal		Somalia

*No. of countries in parentheses. Source: Charlotte Larsen (2001).

The transition to multi-party democracy in former French colonies involved the use of national conferences. As the incumbent regime came under pressure,

from within as well as from abroad, it called on representatives from diverse groups in societies to address the governance issues. Each of these groups, including the incumbent regime, used the national conference to structure the electoral processes in such a way that they themselves were not disadvantaged. The largest parties succeeded in securing the French electoral arrangement - two rounds in case no candidate obtains at least fifty percent of the votes in the first round - but accepted proportional elections to local assemblies.

Five countries, Angola, Mozambique, South Africa, Namibia and Sierra Leone have adopted proportional electoral systems. These countries have chosen this system to accommodate conflicting interests (ethnic or racial) of the main contending actors.

The effects of electoral formulas in sub-Saharan Africa

It has become an axiom in political analysis that the FPTP method leads to the formation of a two-party system because the logic of electoral competition creates an incentive for political activists and for voters to concentrate on either of the two parties/candidates most likely to succeed. Generally, proportional systems will in various degrees offer a closer correspondence between a party's share of the votes and its share of the seats than are the case for majority or plurality formulas. Somewhat surprisingly, maybe, the electoral formula appears not to affect the party systems in sub-Saharan Africa in this manner, as the prevalence of one dominant party and a host of fragmented opposition parties is found both in countries applying FPTP, PR and combined systems. A number of factors explain the relatively weak link between electoral formula and party system.

- In Africa the relationship between the electoral and parliamentary strength of parties is shaped in part by the *regional distribution of votes* for various parties. Where a party has a strong regional basis, its representation may be equally good under plurality systems as under proportional systems. In the case of Namibia, for example, Barkan (1998:60-61) argues that because of the regional concentration of party support the opposition parties would have gained as many, or possibly more, seats under the FPTP system than under the current PR-system. In her analysis of 80 parliamentary elections between 1989 and 2000 in Sub-Saharan states, Larsen (2001) found that 19 elections resulted in an expected parliamentary majority for the party that won a majority of the votes. However, of these 19 elections, 15 elections resulted in a vastly overrepresentation of the largest party. Lesotho stands out as a particular case in this respect. In two elections in Lesotho the winning party received 74.8 and 60.6 percent of the votes, respectively, but was rewarded with 100 percent and 97.5 percent of the seats. Six of the 80 elections in Larsen's analysis resulted in a 'manufactured majority' (that is when the largest party won a majority of seats with less than fifty percent of the votes). The most extreme case here is Burkina Faso with 48.5 percent of the votes and 73 percent of the seats.

– Combinations of single member districts with, one may suspect, ‘creative constituency design’ contribute to such results. *Constituency design* in single-member systems is an important mechanism used to influence the parliamentary representation of parties, known as ‘gerrymandering’. For proportional systems, the constituencies usually correspond to some form of administrative sub-unit in the system, such as provinces, states etc. But even in this case the representation of parties will be affected by the magnitude of the electoral districts.

– ‘*Magnitude*’ refers to the number of seats to be filled in each constituency. Although proportional systems will generally result in a better fit between a party’s share of the votes and its share of the seats, it will not be perfect. This will only happen if the whole country is one district and without any thresholds against minor parties.² In general, the more districts there are and the fewer representatives to be elected from each district, the less proportional representation. For example, in Senegal, Seychelles and Guinea, the total number of seats is divided between seats elected on a national ticket and seats elected in multi-member constituencies, all of which are large enough to ensure some degree of proportionality, while Madagascar, on the other hand, applies proportionality to constituencies with only two seats. This leads inevitably to a two-party system (Larsen 2001:95).

– A further complication in analysing the impact of the electoral formula on party representation is *the combination of parliamentary elections and presidential elections*. Larsen (2001) found that the number of parties running for office in presidential elections is related to the number of parties also running in parliamentary elections. (The impact of presidential candidates is actually more important than the impact of the electoral formula on the number of parties). Moreover, where parliamentary elections are held simultaneously with, or shortly after, presidential elections, there is a spill over effect from the presidential contest to the parliamentary contest. This is because of the importance of the presidency, which stimulates parties to compete for that office.³ The winning candidate’s party tend also to win a majority of parliamentary seats; the so-called ‘coat tail’ effect.

Thus, in sub-Saharan Africa, unlike more established democratic systems, we observe that while the electoral formula impacts on the form of representation of parties in the legislature, other factors, like the importance of presidential rule, the regional distribution of voters, and manipulation of constituency design also impact on party representation and contribute to the observed dominance of one party. As the next section will reveal, the administrative handling of elections is also a decisive factor in terms of determining party representation.

² As in Israel and the Netherlands.

³ Changes in the formulae may result in unanticipated results because such changes may also alter the behaviour of the electorate, which cannot be foreseen.

The administration of elections

The electoral process as a whole has in several places come under scrutiny because of inadequacies in the way it is conducted. What has alarmed observers as well participants is that the electoral process is seen to be an un-level playing field, tilted to the benefit of the incumbent party. Maybe as a result of these observed practices, the conduct of elections in new democracies has attracted significant international as well as domestic attention. The most visible expressions of this attention is the financial support from the international donor community to improve the organisational capacity of the institutions involved in the electoral process, the presence of election observers on election day, and the public acceptance – or condemnation – of how the election has been conducted. Yet, as Elklit (1999:40) points out, the events on Election Day come at the end of a prolonged process (which he divides into twelve steps.⁴ The democratic quality of an election is subject to the rules and their implementation also long before the electoral campaign begins. While the rules themselves may seem fair, whether or not they are observed in practice is a different matter. Potentially, all the steps in Elklit's list may distort the electoral process, but three of them seem to be particularly important: a) the nature of the electoral commission, b) the registration of voters, and, c) the conduct of electoral campaigns.

Electoral commissions

The critical institution in the conduct of the electoral process is the electoral commission. The purpose of these commissions is to implement the electoral process, but their success in doing so depends on several critical factors. Elklit and Reynolds (2000) identify five factors that are critical for what they term Electoral Management Bodies (EMB):

- organisational structure
- level of independence from the political forces
- internal motivations⁵
- staff motivations
- transparency

Elklit and Reynolds (2000) apply these factors to a study of elections in Ghana (1992, 1996), Botswana (1965-99), Tanzania (1995,1999), Zambia (1991, 1996), South Africa (1994, 1999), Mozambique (1994, 1999), Sierra Leone (1996), and Burkina Faso (1998). They point out that in five cases with low perceived legitimacy of the electoral process (Ghana 1992, Zambia 1996, Sierra Leone 1996, Burkina Faso 1998, Mozambique 1999), there was also a belief that the Electoral Management Bodies were either partisan or incompetent (or both). Some case studies, such as Ghana, may serve as an interesting example of how *changes* in the organisation of electoral commission contributed to

⁴ a) Establishment of a legal framework for the electoral process, b) Establishment of adequate organizational management structures, c) Demarcations of constituencies and polling districts, d) Voter education and voter information, e) Voter registration, f) Nomination and registration of political parties and candidates, g) Regulation of electoral campaign, h) Polling, i) Counting and tabulating the vote, j). Resolving electoral disputes and complaints, k) Election result implementation, l) Post-election handling of election material.

⁵ Refers to the organizational interests of the EMB vis-à-vis other agencies.

improving the legitimacy of the whole electoral process. According to Gyimah-Boadi (1999), the 1992 election in Ghana was shrouded in controversy and violence, causing the opposition to boycott the elections. Prior to the 1996 elections significant changes occurred, and particularly important was the creation of the inter-party advisory council (IPAC). The IPAC provided the parties that ran candidates in the election with a forum in which they could air their grievances over the execution of the electoral process. Although IPAC did not have any formal decision making function its deliberation influenced the way the electoral commission functioned, and according to Boadi, was instrumental in legitimating the process. Likewise, studies of democratic consolidation in Francophone Africa have also emphasized the important contribution of autonomous electoral commissions in the countries where the democratic processes have become regularised (Fomunyoh 2001).

The quality and capacity of electoral administration also greatly affect the level of voter-turnout through the conduct of voter registration processes.

Registration of voters

For the electoral process to operate according to expectations it requires that: a) *all* citizens that fulfil the voter qualification requirements should have the right to vote, and b) that *no one* who does not fulfil the requirements should be allowed to vote. Most African democracies do not have a permanent and continually updated roll of voters but have to create this prior to every election. A *permanent* and *automatically* updated registry of voters requires a national citizen registry that continually takes into account changes in the composition of the population as people pass away, new ones qualify for voting, others relocate in the political system and immigrants acquire citizen status.⁶ This type of registry is only available in the technologically and economically most advanced countries in the world, and not necessarily in all of them.⁷ The absence of such a registry creates a need for some ways to separate the eligible voters from the non-voters, but for every mechanism or criteria that are applied for this purpose, there is always a possibility of ending up with a less than perfect result. At the extreme, inadequacies in this process may undermine the whole legitimacy of elections as an instrument. Inadequate registration leads to a gap between the number of voters and the number of citizen fulfilling the requirements for registration of the electoral process. An example is provided from the 2000 referendum in Uganda where the electoral commission reported 92 per cent of the voters as registered. However, Bratton and Lambright (2001:439) found in a survey prior to the referendum that 83 per cent of those interviewed had registered, and that only 74 per cent of voters aged 18 to 25 had registered, many of whom expressed an interest in registering but missed it for a variety of reasons.

The problem with establishing a separate voter register is that the voters themselves have to make multiple decisions, as described later for Zambia. Both multiple efforts and the separation in time from the voting act itself reduce the

⁶ According to Nugent (2001) it is for example unclear what the total voting age population of Ghana is due to lack of updated census figures.

⁷ Not for instance in the United States.

comprehensiveness of the registration process and subsequently the turnout level. Elections that are held under such circumstances may undermine the mandate to rule, particularly if turnout in general is low and if votes are spread evenly among several parties or candidates. The net effect may be that the victorious candidate is elected with the support of a minority of the voting age population.

However, aiming for high-quality elections in countries with limited administrative capacity and poor infrastructure implies huge costs. A UNDP study compares election costs between developed and developing nations and while the comparisons do not always correspond, the variances detected are striking: Of the nine countries listed as spending more than US \$ 8 per capita on elections, four are found in sub-Saharan Africa (Lopez-Pinto 1998). Thus, some of the poorest countries in the world have the most expensive elections. Tanzania spends US\$ 8 per voter in a national election while the government's expenditure on health per capita is US\$ 2 and total GDP per capita is US\$ 200.⁸ The 1996 Ghanaian elections were successfully conducted, but it depended extensively on funding from abroad: 6.5mill USD from US Aid, Denmark paid 3mill USD, and Britain 0.8mill USD. On top of this Ghana's own contribution (Gyimah-Boadi 1997).

We note that there is a tendency across sub-Saharan Africa towards more and more sophisticated procedures for voter registration. Considering the level of controversy over the registration processes in countries as diverse as South Africa and Zambia (Gloppen and Rakner 2001), it can be argued that the registration process itself is critical to the legitimacy of the electoral process. The nature of election campaigning and the degree of level playing field between the contesting parties is another major source of controversy that potentially may affect the legitimacy of the elections themselves.

The conduct of election campaigns

One of the distinctions between democracies and pseudo-democracies is that in the former the electoral playing field is not tilted in the favour of the incumbent party. This implies that the freedom to form parties and to nominate candidates for offices is not curtailed and that once the election campaign gets started all parties and candidates are given the right to campaign freely. Unfortunately, it is during this stage of elections that many new democracies are faltering.

In most African states the most important means of communication is the radio. A majority of households have access to radio, while only a minority, primarily in urban areas, has access to television or the press. In most countries, the government controls the major television and radio channels, but in later years a number of private operators have emerged. Successful elections, i.e. those that are perceived to be free and fair, such as Ghana's 2000 elections include an unbiased coverage of parties and candidates (Gyimah-Boadi 2001). As a contrast, the media coverage of the 1996 election campaign in Gambia was definitely in favour of the incumbent, who was given 88.3% of total campaign time on radio and television (Adejumobi 2000:68). Similar excessive media

⁸ In comparison, Sweden spends less than 2 US\$ per voter on elections.

attention to the governing party took place in Zimbabwe's 1995 election (Darnolf 1997), while in neighbouring Botswana the 'media playing field' was more even. True, also in Botswana the governing party was over represented in media coverage, but not to the same extent as in Zimbabwe. Darnolf attributes this contrast to the attitude towards the role of opposition among the political leadership in the two countries. In Zimbabwe the leadership has pursued a policy of trying to eliminate the opposition while in Botswana the attitude has been to accommodate the opposition to play a role in the national political system. In addition to biased coverage of election campaigns, there are also numerous examples of government interference with the independent printed media, as the current situation in Zimbabwe illustrates.

A recurrent problem in African election campaigns seems to be the lack of separation between the incumbent party and the state apparatus itself. Incumbency has obvious practical advantages in any electoral contest and in newly democratised African states the incumbent party has not shed away from using state instruments to their own advantage. The advantage of incumbency has contributed to keeping the previous state-carrying party continuing in power, as in Kenya and Tanzania. The incumbent party makes use of the state resources for its own campaign, for instance by using government vehicles, or by unclear separation between state funds and political party funds. In Zimbabwe where state funding for parties has been introduced, the criteria for qualifying for state funding – 15 seats in parliament – effectively exclude the opposition parties.

1.2 The nature of African parties and party systems

The discussion above suggests that the electoral structures in sub-Saharan Africa have contributed to the noted tendency of one-party dominance. However, it is also evident that the democratic *actors* themselves, organised as political parties, are exceedingly weak. This weakness contributes further to incumbency dominance and weak and fragmented opposition parties. As the political opposition is rarely able to present the voters with distinct policy alternatives, a vital democratic accountability function is absent in contemporary African democracies: The prospect of the minority at one point being able to form majority government. Thus, the perception that parties are necessary for democracy to function raises further concern among students of democratisation in Africa as generally, the political parties are considered the weakest link in the chain of elements that together makes for a democratic state.⁹ Newly democratised African states – including the established multi-party systems of Botswana and Zimbabwe – are characterised by a dominant party, confronting a fragmented and unstable group of opposition parties. In de Walle and Butler's (1999:15) view: "African political parties are plagued by weak organisations, low levels of institutionalisation, and weak links to the society that they are supposed to represent" (See also Fomunyoh 2001).

⁹ Monga for instance, identifies eight problems with African politics, and the two first are the weakness of political parties and the problems involved in the electoral process, see Monga (1991).

Explaining the weakness of African political parties

When parties are characterised as weak it refers to the problem parties have first, to penetrate through their network of branches, the territory they perceive as relevant; second, to incorporate significant numbers of their electorate into more active or regularised forms of party membership or support; third, to develop and to observe regularised procedures in their different spheres of activity¹⁰, and finally, to maintain themselves over time. In the literature on Africa's democratic developments there are many explanations for why African parties are characterised as 'weak'. The most frequently mentioned factor is that the parties have seldom grown out of large social movements but are the creation of ambitious individuals.

The 'leadership fixation' of African politics

Rather than being developed as organisations, parties appear as useful vehicles for ambitious politicians. Even in the case of the only African state to maintain a continuous multi-party system and electoral turnover, Mauritius, it is claimed that parties are largely 'personalised coalitions of supporters of a particular political leader' (Carroll and Carroll 1999:181, Chabal and Daloz, 1999:151). In newly democratised African states it is claimed that:

'the democratisation of Africa has focused on the power elite, who are the natural enemies of democracy....their involvement in democracy movements is mainly a tactical manoeuvre. It is a response to internal contradictions and power struggles within a group for whom democracy is essentially a means to power' (Ake 1996:11).

This view is echoed by Decalo (1998:297) who claims that an effect of democratisation has been an opening of "political floodgates, swamping countries with scores of political parties, mostly narrow ethnic and personal power-machines and thousands of power aspirants". Supporting such claims are examples of political parties presumably formed in opposition to the ruling parties, but where the leadership of such opposition groups eventually agree to serve in the cabinet of the incumbent party: as when Edem Kodjo broke ranks with the victors of the July 1994 legislative elections in Togo to join the government of the dictator, Eyadema, or when, in Nigeria, Abiola's vice-presidential running mate, Baba Gana Kingibe, became Abacha's foreign minister.¹¹

The consequence of the personalistic nature of parties is that they are not likely to become *institutionalised* as organisations. Instead, the party leaders use the party to mobilise sufficient support from the electorate in order to bargain with other party-leaders for the dispersion of public goods; a point related to the next argument. When parties do not institutionalise it means that over time the electorate is facing a changing set of alternatives that makes

¹⁰ Mololomo and Somolokae (2000) note that one weakness of opposition parties in Botswana is that they lack standard procedures for leadership competition and for candidate nominations.

¹¹ Both cited in Michael Chege (1996).

it impossible to evaluate a party on the basis of its past performance. There are several explanations for why African politics suffer from what Ihonvberé (1998) refers to as 'leadership fixation'. One view of the personalistic nature of African parties is that it conforms to the vertical dependency structures of African societies. According to this view the principle linking elites and grass roots in African societies is patrimonialism and clientelism, not formal hierarchical organisations: "the foundations of political accountability in Africa are both collective and extra-institutional: they rest on the particularistic links between Big Men, or patrons, and their constituent communities" (Chabal and Daloz, 1999:37). Accordingly, African voters cast their vote as they do "because they must placate the demands of their existing or putative patron" (Ibid. 39). To the extent that this is the case, it means that parties are able to function as long as they can provide their supporters with some of the spoils from winning office, either in the form of positions in the public sector for individuals, in preferential treatment in bids for licenses and so forth or in the distribution of state resources to geographic areas. Fluid, personalistic parties do not care very much about presenting clearly distinguishable policy platforms, but emphasize the ability of the party leaders to run things 'better'. Thus, this type of party does not offer voters alternatives of policy packages, as in established democracies, and does not lead to party stability over time.

Executive dominance reduces the role of parties

The nature of the African state with its excessive concentration of power in the presidency further encourages coalitions around personalities. A consequence of this, in Claude Ake's view, is that the introduction of multi-party democracy without significant alterations in the structure of the state makes democratisation meaningless. Democracy would be improved, he says, by changing the distribution of power: 'In all too many cases, democratisation has been a manner of replacing a self-appointed dictator with an elected one'.¹² Walle and Butler (1999:26) argue that the importance of the state for the distribution of patronage puts an enormous premium on the executive branch and that 'party competition in the legislative branch is in many respects a sideshow'. Gyimah-Boadi (1991:43) similarly observes that even if parliaments have enjoyed a come back, they are weak as institutions: African parliaments tend to be 'negative coalitions' cobbled together to dislodge - or to entrench - incumbents, and conditioned by 'a persistent culture of authoritarianism'. Whether by design or simply by historical tradition, most African states have weak legislatures. Combined with winner take all electoral systems and central level dominance, this is not conducive to democratic consolidation (Reynolds 2000:22).

Low levels of economic development and lack of party-society links

Additional explanations for the weakness of African parties point to the low level of economic development and economic differentiation. Economic development is necessary to create a surplus which parties as autonomous

¹² Ake also proposes that the role of the legislature in the governing process should be improved, constitutionally as well as in terms of the resources available for the legislature as an institution, and that there should be stronger local and regional governments.

organisations can mobilise support from and economic diversification provides alternative clienteles for political mobilisation. The dominance of the state in the economy contributes to maintaining vertical relationships because 'key social groups and their organisations are ultimately dependent on government' (Gyimah-Boadi 1997:287). Connected to this explanation is that parties in African societies are not embedded in a strong civil society. On the contrary, civil society organisations are partly suffering from the same organisational weakness as parties, few organisational units, limited geographical penetration and donor dependency. In addition, there may be strategic reasons why civil society organisations prefer to keep an arms length distance to political parties. Uganda serves as an example of this, where according to Tripp, there is a vibrant civil society. Political parties, on the other hand, have been marginalized in performing the representative function through the ban on their active participation in elections, although they are permitted to exist as such (Tripp 2000). According to Baker (2001) Ugandan NGO's avoid as much as possible to be associated with political organisations because of the trouble this may cause them with the authorities. This form of reluctance is also present in other countries where there is a feeling that groups perceived as supporting the opposition will be negatively treated by the government (Ludwig and Rakner 2001).

The effects of ethnic identities

Many commentators associate the weakness of African political parties with the salience of ethnic identities and divisions. In some cases this is linked to the absence of class divisions or strong civil society organisations as an alternative basis for party mobilisation. Lawson (1999:12) writes, for example:

'In the absence of formal associations clearly apart from the state and capable of engaging the population, the introduction of liberal democratic procedures, at the behest of external donors, has led political parties to appeal to the only available alternative: ethnic identity'.

Walraven (2000) similarly suggests that ethno-regional and clientelist interests may represent the most rational strategy for political parties to aggregate social interests and mobilising countervailing power against governments, which then contributes to extreme party fragmentation, while Nikiwane (2000) observes that in southern Africa:

'The biggest weakness of these opposition parties is that they are regional, at best, and tribal in orientation. Their only hope was to unify their organisations. But because of their fundamental structures (parochialism), they have consistently been unable to come together, let alone to agree on unified positions'.

The link between electoral structures and party strength

Generally, in the scholarship on electoral democracy in Africa it is held that electoral systems using single member constituencies also encourage regionally based parties. Party leaders with strong regional support have an incentive to

run as independent, or on their own party ticket, if they do not succeed in being nominated by an existing party. Proportional electoral systems require a more comprehensive local organisation to be successful because the geographic area of each constituency is larger than for single member districts. Moreover, in proportional systems the stakes are not as high as in single member districts were 'the winner takes all'. Thus, proportional systems are likely to lead to more comprehensive and stable party organisations. There have been too few elections yet in African democracies to test if this expected relationship holds up in practice. However, despite the one-party dominance witnessed in PR systems such as South Africa, Namibia, and Mozambique, these polities do display more institutionalised party systems measured by the less frequent party fragmentation and proliferation between elections.

Regardless of electoral system, the electoral success of new parties challenging the incumbent government should be emphasized. Thus, the success of the MMD in Zambia was precisely because it was a coalition of groups united in the aim of ousting the Kaunda regime. Similarly, the new opposition party in Zimbabwe, MDC (Movement for Democratic Change) which managed to win 57 of the 120 seats in Parliament in the June 2000 elections, was built on a pro-democracy network embodied in the National Constitutional Assembly, which included civil society organisations like the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace; religious organisations like the Zimbabwe Council of Churches; human rights advocacy groups such as Zimrights; women's groups like the Women's Coalition; student organisations such as the Zimbabwe National Students Union; and, the powerful Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions' (Sithole 2001). The problem with such broad alliances is that they are easy to establish in order to fight an opponent, but they may also be so internally diverse that it is problematic to keep them together in the long run, as the MMD in Zambia clearly illustrate.

1.3 Behaviour and attitudes of the African electorate

The discussion above has indicated both the electoral institutions, the administrative conduct of elections, and the weakness of political parties have contributed to the fact that so far, real political changes have lagged behind elections in Africa's new democracies. To what extent has the limited *content* of electoral democracy in sub-Saharan Africa affected the legitimacy of the democratic processes?

Turnout levels in elections are frequently seen as a barometer of how well a democracy is functioning. Nevertheless, in established as well as in new democracies, the variation in the level of turnout is substantial, which may have multiple explanations. In Appendix 1, African countries are ranked according to their average turnout levels in presidential elections in the 1990s, ranging from 88% in Mozambique in 1994 in to 36% in Sierra Leone in 1996. In an analysis of first and second elections in sub-Saharan Africa Bratton and Posner (1999) found that on average turnout declined from the first to the second election, from 64.1% to 55.8%.

There are few countries with more than two multi-party elections, Ghana being one of them. In the elections of 2000 turnout declined from 77.9 in 1996 to 61.7 in the first round and further to 59.8 (Nugent 2001). The measure of turnout level is usually based on the registered electorate. If we look at turnout levels based on the voting age population, turnout is lower; pending on how successful the registration process has been and also on how well the census is able to identify to correct number of voters fulfilling the age requirement.

Moreover, participation in parliamentary elections is usually lower than participation levels for the presidency. This reflects the prevalence of the presidency as the most important political institution. The decline in turnout levels identified by Bratton occurred simultaneously with the increase in electoral victory for the winning party (or candidate), and of 16 countries that held a second election during the years 1995-97, ten were classified as having seen a deterioration of the electoral process. Low and declining participation rates across elections may indicate weak legitimacy for the political system in general or voter dissatisfaction with current leaders.

However, as we will demonstrate below, there is in general satisfaction among the African electorates with the democratisation that has taken place. Thus, the turnout level itself need not be a signal of weak legitimacy for the principle of democratic government¹³. Since there are few elections arranged under the new multi-party regimes there does not yet exist a time-series of data that could support a generally pessimistic conclusion. But the combination of declining participation and increased support for the incumbent government is a more significant and disturbing finding as it may indicate that the incumbent party has been advantaged in the electoral process.

Attitudes to democracy

Even if formal rules are in place and are being observed, for democratic consolidation to take place, the citizenry must be involved in, as well as appreciate, the democratic process. Obviously, the extent to which they do so is affected by the rules themselves, but it is also a reflection of the extent to which political participation through the electoral channel is seen as a relevant way to express political interest and to channel political demands.

Public opinion surveys conducted in sub-Saharan Africa indicate that the electorate has welcomed the change to multi-party democracy. Bratton and Mattes (2001) found that there was little "authoritarian nostalgia" and that democracy is largely described in positive terms. In five of the six countries they report on (Botswana, Ghana, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe) ¾ of the electorate or more, reject non-democratic alternatives, such as military rule or one-party state, but also in the sixth country (Namibia) a clear majority reject these alternatives.

¹³ Also established democracies display a great variation in electoral participation, across states and across time and no empirical foundation exists for linking turnout level to the 'quality' of democratic governance.

Appreciation of democracy as a governing principle is, however, not matched by how public opinion perceives *democratic performance* in their country. Bratton and Mattes found for instance, low satisfaction (15%) with democratic performance in Zimbabwe and extremely high satisfaction (84%) in Nigeria. They attribute such variations to the contextual effects of the political developments in each country at the time when the survey was conducted. Thus, in Zimbabwe the political and economic crisis was already deepening when the survey was conducted, while in Nigeria a feeling of 'democratic euphoria' dominated after the ending of the military regime. In the opinion of the authors: "[...] Africans do not seem to perceive democracy and associated rights differently than people elsewhere." Yet, they conclude that "[w]hile support for democracy seems to be a mile wide, it may be only an inch deep". This is because the willingness to defend democratic principles seems to be quite limited, although democracy's alternatives are not preferred.

There are also important national differences with respect to which aspect of democracy the respondents find important. In a study of Uganda, Ottemoeller (1998:122) finds that "Ugandans endorse democratic principles and believe themselves to be politically efficacious", but he also finds when the issue of democratic principles is replaced with questions of specific democratic rights, most Ugandans emphasis individual rights, such as freedom of expression, and express less enthusiasm for associational rights. Democracy is first of all a concept associated with rights at the local level, whereas at the national level there is greater acceptance of non-democratic forms of authority. This might explain why the Ugandan non-party form of democracy has been accepted by the population. At the local level the councils, which are part of the National Resistance Movement strategy, seems to function quite well. Nelson Kasfir (1999:206), being in general critical of the Ugandan system, nevertheless argues that:

"The village councils may turn out to have been the NRM's most important democratic initiative. So long as they remained the institutional expression of popular participation, they supplied no-party democracy with its most persuasive justification."

The discussion above has indicated that the electoral systems of sub-Saharan states are closely linked to that of the former colonial power. In most states the party system can be characterised as a form of dominant party system. This is also the case in countries that apply some form of proportional representation. With the exception of the traditional dominant parties, other parties tend to be fluid organisations dominated by strong leaders, but weak as formal organisations. We have argued that the electoral outcomes observed across Africa's new democracies must be seen in connection with the presidential system. The office of the president is politically vastly superior to other state institutions, such as parliament and local and regional governments. The predominance of the presidency turns the electoral process into a zero-sum game: who controls the presidency controls 'everything'. Combined with the strong powers of the presidency compared to other state institutions, the party system is poorly developed to hold the national

leadership to account by the electorate. The imbalances in the party system are underpinned by the incumbent party's tendency to exploit state resources for its own benefit and for the limited freedom and/or neutrality of the media institutions.

In the following discussion, we seek to go beyond the general categories applied to elections in sub-Saharan Africa and illustrate the overall findings with a case study of electoral policies in Zambia since 1991.

Part 2: Experiences with multiparty elections in Zambia

The peaceful manner in which political power was transferred from the 27-year reign of Kenneth Kaunda, leader of UNIP (United National Independence Party) to Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) under the leadership of the trade union leader Frederick Chiluba won the praise of the world community. However, both local and international election monitors judged the quality of the 1996 to be lower than the 1991 elections. The third presidential, parliamentary and local government elections held 27 December 2001 therefore represented a crucial 'test' of democratic consolidation in Zambia. These elections would indicate to the Zambian population and international community whether Zambia's democratic processes had become institutionalised to the extent that rules and regulations were adhered to and accepted by all the main political actors. Alternatively, the conduct of the 2001 elections could represent a continuation of the negative trends witnessed in the 1996 elections.

The December 27 elections did not provide any clear-cut answers to these questions. On a positive note, these elections represented the third consecutive elections, indicating that the electoral process is becoming regularised. Second, there was actually a succession in the 2001 elections as President Chiluba in the final hour decided to abide by the constitution limiting the president to two terms in office. Third, the turnout was high, as is usually the case in closely contested elections. Finally, the elections resulted in a fragmented but better-balanced parliament than in the two previous elections. MMD maintained the Presidency, but Levy Mwanawasa's mandate is relatively weak with 29 per cent of the total vote. The parliamentary elections reduced the MMD dominance as MMD now controls app. 50 per cent of the seats (including the 8 seats selected by the presidency) whereas after the 1996 elections MMD controlled 87 per cent of the seats. Thus, the outcome of the third elections confirmed the MMD as the leading party, but it lost its dominating status. The presidential contest was a three-way race between Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD), United Party for National Development (UPND) and Forum for Democracy and Development (FDD).

2.1 Administering elections in Zambia 1991-2001

However, to assess whether Zambia's multi-party process has actually become institutionalised the conduct of the actual electoral exercise must be considered. As part of this research project we compared three central aspects of the electoral processes in 1991, 1996 and 2001: The rules and regulations guiding the electoral process, the administration of the electoral process witnessed through the work of the electoral commission and the voter registration process, and the conduct of the election campaigns. Assessing the preparations and conduct of the 2001 elections compared to the previous elections, we find that the quality of the electoral process has not improved markedly from the founding elections in 1991 to the 2001 elections.

The rules guiding the Zambian elections

Both in 1991, 1996 and 2001, the rules of the electoral conduct became a source of controversy. The 1991 constitution became a rushed compromise between MMD, originally asking for a system with far greater checks on executive power, and UNIP, with President Kaunda (UNIP) wanting to maintain a hold on Zambian politics. In 1996, the controversy over the Constitutional reform, which effectively denied Kaunda the right to contest the elections, became the main dividing issue between the MMD government on the one hand and the civil society, opposition and international donor community on the other. The 1996 elections represented a reversal of the process of democratic consolidation from the founding democratic elections in 1991 as no consensus on the rules, norms and, interpretations of results could be found. The 2001 presidential, parliamentary and local government elections therefore represented a crucial test of Zambia's democracy.

Arguably, the first hurdle in this democratic 'test' was overcome, when MMD announced Levy Mwanawasa to be MMD's presidential candidate in the 2001 presidential elections, thus upholding the constitutionally defined limitation on the presidential office. The MMD party's decision to alter its party constitution to allow Chiluba to remain the President of the party split MMD. It has further created an interesting situation in Zambia with a dual leadership of the party and the nation as Levy Mwanawasa/MMD captured the majority in the December 27 presidential election. Zambia has maintained a system of plurality elections using the First-Past-The-Post method both for parliamentary and presidential elections. In 1996 the majority clause for presidential elections was removed. This had an unfortunate effect in the 2001 elections as the new president was elected on the basis of 29 per cent of the votes – only two per cent points higher than his main opponent, Anderson Mazoka (UPND).

Electoral management

The literature on elections in sub-Saharan Africa suggests that the nature of organisational structures for administering the electoral process is a decisive factor in determining whether elections will be of high quality and add legitimacy to democratic processes or not. The presence of an independent electoral commission, with autonomous funding, appointment and

organisation procedures is here considered a key factor. However, in the Zambian case, the limited autonomy and capacity of election administration has contributed to both low levels of participation and wrangles over the legitimacy of the electoral results in 1991, 1996 and 2001.

In 1991, the responsibility for election administration, polling and tabulation rested in the office of the Vice President. Due to the perceived favoring of UNIP, the Electoral Office was heavily criticised by the opposition as well as local and international election observers. In October 1996, in the 11th hour before the 1996 elections, an autonomous electoral commission was established. The new Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) was removed from the office of the Vice President and as an autonomous agency it could now appoint its own staff. However, the new ECZ was still to report directly to the President, its five commission members were to be appointed by the President and the ECZ was not given an autonomous budget. In the 1996 elections, like in 1991, the electoral commission was criticised by the opposition and observers for being bias in favor of the incumbent.

Five years after, the Electoral Commission of Zambia is still not established as a capable and autonomous body enjoying high levels of legitimacy by the various parties. Both international and local monitoring teams have pointed to the poorly administered elections, and the role of ECZ, as a major factor of concern. Unlike the case of Ghana, no inter-party advisory body was created in Zambia, and the opposition parties did not regard the ECZ as a neutral agency. The 2001 elections proved that ECZ has no powers of punishing electoral malpractice/corruption. Both the handling of the voter registration exercise and tabulation of votes in 2001 suggest that the ECZ was unprepared for the task. The poor handling of the elections by EZC can be attributed to the late disbursement of funds from both the Ministry of Finance and the EU.

However, it is also evident that EZC lacked political influence to enforce the electoral code of conduct. EZC referred to its own inability to ensure that all parties abided by the established electoral code of conduct, suggesting that it has little clout within the government and that it lacks legitimacy within opposition as an entirely neutral agency. The 2001 elections indicated that the ECZ miscalculated the time required for a person to vote. It is also evident that ECZ did not anticipate the relatively large voter turnout. The release of the electoral results proved to be another problem for ECZ.

Voter registration

A crucial factor in determining the democratic nature and quality of an electoral process is the question of whether all eligible voters have equal opportunity to take part in the elections. Thus, the actual voter turnout is a test of the validity of the elections as a democratic exercise. In Zambia, voter registration has been a conflicting issue throughout the Third Republic and the bureaucracy of the Zambian registration process is cumbersome even compared to other African countries.

In the 1991 elections in Zambia, registration of voters became highly controversial. Election mismanagement and inadequate election preparations caused the irregularities witnessed. The final polling statistics showed that only 2,9 million Zambians had registered as voters. The number of eligible voters was estimated to be app. 3,5 million, in other words 83 per cent of eligible voters were registered. In 1996, the voter registration exercise was computerised for the first time. However, the controversies around the government's handling of the contract to the NIKUV-company lead to widespread allegations of corruption and attempts of rigging the elections. In the 1996 voting exercise the numbers fell to 2,27 million registered voters of an estimated population of 4.6 eligible voters. Due to the controversies raised in 1996 over the Nikuv voter registry, the Electoral Commission of Zambia resolved to create a whole new voter registry for the 2001 elections and issue new voters cards. The registration of 2001 will be the last one to have a set final date, by which an elector has to register, as from 2002 there will be continuous registration. Initially, the 2001-registration period was set from June 21st to July 15. After a fourth extension, the registration process ended July 31st. By the time ECZ had the voter's roll finalised in October, it was reported that 2.6 million voters were registered for the 2001 elections out of a total eligible voting population of 4,687, 997 according to the 2001 Census of Statistic. This represents app. 55 per cent of the eligible voting population.

The 2001 elections further indicated that the distribution of parliamentary constituencies among the provinces does not accurately reflect the distribution either of inhabitants or eligible voters. For example Lusaka Province (where opposition candidates polled strongly) has just 12 seats for over 690,000 eligible voters whereas Luapula (an MMD stronghold) has 14 seats for around 349,000 eligible voters. Northern Province (another MMD stronghold) contains 21 constituencies for 296, 811 registered voters, compared to 19 constituencies in the UPND-dominated Southern Province with nearly 340,000 registered voters. The disparities are even more marked within provinces, for instance in Lusaka the constituency with the smallest electorate is 6,715 and the largest is 61,438 - a multiple in excess of nine. Exactly the same polling booth facilities and complements of election officers are provided for each and every polling ward. On 27 December 2001 this proved to be wholly inadequate in some cases.

Is it a problem that so few voters are registered?

We find it puzzling that none of the Zambian opposition parties have raised the low level of registered voters as a major problem and a sign of democratic deficiency. While external observers have questioned why the electoral commission (ECZ) and the government insist upon maintaining such a cumbersome and expensive registration system, we note that these issues are not raised as major concerns by the Zambian political parties. Each time this issue has been brought to the fore by donors or opposition groups, it has been dismissed by ECZ as it is believed that voting on the basis of National Registration Cards would increase fraud and multiple voting. We raise the question of whether all political parties in Zambia today find a limited electorate to be an advantage in terms of election campaigning and relate this question to the finding that vote-buying appears to be an increasing phenomena by all parties.

The election campaigns

In order to ensure a level playing field between contesting parties, the equal application of laws, equal access to media, and funding must be ensured. Furthermore, for the actual campaigns to be meaningful in terms of informing the electorate, the various contesting candidates must be able to bring their views across to all voters. Based on these criteria, the electoral campaigning in Zambia has been grossly inadequate in all three elections. In 1991 election monitors and the opposition denounced UNIP's extensive use of government vehicles for their election campaign and for transporting campaigning candidates. By the time of the 1996 elections, MMD had adopted the policies of UNIP. The 1996 elections witnessed a blatant use of state resource for campaigning by the incumbent as in 1991. According to local election monitoring groups, the level of vote buying actually *increased* markedly from 1991 to 1996.

For the 2001 elections, December 27 was chosen by the president as the election day, much to the criticism of the opposition. It was argued that this date was chosen deliberately to influence the level of participation and disadvantage the opposition in the electoral campaign. The election date was in the middle of the rainy season, which would make it impossible to campaign in many districts and also prevent voters in many peripheral areas to vote. In addition, by having the election day around Christmas, many voters would be absent from their constituencies visiting family elsewhere and therefore prevented from voting.

As in the previous elections, the 2001 campaign was subject to complaints from the opposition parties. On several occasions the government intervened in the programming of the ZNBC to block airing of items it deemed unfavourable to the incumbent party. On December 23 the state television network unexpectedly dropped a scheduled discussion program with presidential candidates who were barred by paramilitary police from entering

the station building. Since the 1996 elections several independent radio and TV stations have been established. The government also intervened here. One station, Trinity Broadcasting Network, was ordered to stop running presidential debates but later secured a court order to continue with the debates.¹⁴

The comparison of the 1991, 1996 and 2001 election campaigns reveal some interesting findings. First of all, observations by the local newspapers and civic education groups indicate that the level of vote buying, and use of state funds for campaigning purposes, has increased markedly from the 1991 elections. Local sources reported that all parties involved engage in widespread distribution of food and clothing in order to induce voters to support their candidates¹⁵. According to the ECZ these practices – now performed by all parties¹⁶ – have led to widespread voter apathy as in many instances, potential voters now demanded to be paid in order to register as a voter¹⁷, while in another case party supporters barricaded the party leadership inside the party offices for allegedly failing to pay them for turning up for the nomination process, while students complained of not having been provided with the promised free beer at the campaign meetings at the university.

There is little doubt that the MMD government has made use of its ability to control major news organisations either for its own favour or to make it difficult for the opposition to campaign. In 2001 the MMD presidential candidate also declined to engage the other candidates in public debates. Although the election campaign in general was peaceful there were several incidents of violence against opposition party candidates and their supporters; although these as well were accused of instigating violent behavior. The ECZ was unable to establish itself as an unbiased organisation, and whether fairly or not, the opposition did not trust it. To some extent therefore, the playing field was hardly even, which may have contributed to the election result.

Interpreting the results of the 2001 elections

The conduct of the elections of 1991, 1996 and 2001 indicates that Zambia's democracy is far from consolidated. If consolidation implies impartial application of rules, Zambia's democracy has some way to go still, as the violence and protests before and after the December 2001 elections indicate. Despite administrative deficiencies, most international observers in both 1991 and 1996 argued that the MMD victories represented the will of the Zambian people. This time, the conclusions that have emerged are more ambiguous.

Did the poor quality of the 2001 elections affect the outcome? As the elections were closely contested it is probable that the uneven playing field may have

¹⁴ The Monitor, December 12, 2001

¹⁵ Personal interviews Mrs. Kunda, FODEP, Mr. Mwanajiti, Afronet, Lusaka, July 20, 2001, Ms. E. Sikazwe, Woman for Change July 24, 2001.

¹⁶ "Often, villagers will not listen to what politicians have to say without getting some sort of incentive – beer or a bag of maize – and women often end up with the entire range of political chitenge", BBC report, cited on Zamnet, December 20, 2001.

¹⁷ Personal interview, chairman of the ECZ, Judge B. Bwalya, July 30, 2001.

tilted the results towards the incumbent. On the other hand, as the opposition vote was split on 10 candidates and most parties lack an effective organisational apparatus on the ground, the results could maybe be expected. We find that the most serious aspect of the 2001 elections is the lack of improvement in the quality of the electoral process. The 2001 elections were the third elections since the democratic transition in 1991. The two previous elections have granted the political leadership and the Electoral Commission experiences that should have informed the current electoral exercise. But problems of voter registration, deficient voter's rolls, inadequate constituency sizes etc. have been recurring issues since the 1991 elections. ECZ has attracted considerable criticism of its management of the elections, not least for appearing to be too pliant to the interests of the MMD. The 2001 elections suggest that ECZ is in pressing need of reform.

2.2 The role of political parties and election campaigns in Zambia

As argued above, a general trend across sub-Saharan Africa's new democracies is a party system characterised by one dominant party and a host of fragmented, unstable opposition parties. Moreover, across Africa political parties are organisationally and institutionally weak, and only to a limited degree linked to the society they are supposed to represent. Few parties represent clearly distinguishable policy platforms, and that if they do it has little relevance to what they do once in office. The Zambian case clearly illustrates these general findings.

Party developments in Zambia 1991-1996

The 1991 elections in Zambia displayed two main parties, the United National Independence Party (UNIP), who had been in government since 1964 and the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) a party formed on the basis of a broad based opposition movement against UNIP and the one-party state. Despite the weak foundations of the MMD party, the 1991 elections gave it a sweeping electoral mandate. UNIP was reduced to a regional party as its 25 parliamentary seats were all won in the Eastern Province. However, two years after the elections, senior MMD members and founders left the party arguing that corruption was rife.

The establishment of the *National Party* in 1993 was the first serious sign of an emerging opposition in the Third Republic. The MMD government's reaction indicates that it for the first time felt a serious opposition was established. The September 1993 by-elections were marked by irregularities, allegations of rigging and fraud. It was also the first time that MMD made rampant use of government resources in its political campaigning.¹⁸ A host of other parties also formed by people associated with the first MMD government like Agenda Zambia, Zambia Democratic Congress, Liberal Progressive Front and the Lima Party.

¹⁸ The MMD vice presidents dismissed these allegations by telling a Post journalist that "to demand that there must be a line between government and the party is academic. You will not find that anywhere", *The Post*, November 12, 1993.

Despite being discredited after 1991 elections, UNIP was the party with the greatest potential to become an opposition with a national support-base. The governing party's preoccupation with UNIP increased markedly as Kenneth Kaunda returned to politics and the leadership of UNIP in 1995. From here on, the governance practices of MMD declined markedly, and the constitutional amendment barring Kenneth Kaunda from contesting the 1996 elections should be seen in light of MMD's many attempts to curb UNIP's growing influence (Rakner 1998, Bratton and Posner 1999). UNIP boycotted the 1996 parliamentary and presidential elections, together with five smaller opposition parties. MMD and 11 opposition parties contested the elections and MMD increased its parliamentary seats from 125 (of 150) in 1991 to 131 in 1996. All the contesting parties were headed by individuals who had been elected to parliament on an MMD ticket in 1991. As in 1991, the election campaign focussed on personalities and emotions rather than political and economic issues. The party manifestos presented further did not indicate any ideological differences between the various contesting parties.

Party developments in Zambia 1996-2001

With hindsight it can be argued that UNIP's decision to boycott the 1996 elections was a major strategic error as it now lost its avenue to national politics and confirmed its regional platform. In the period after 1996, UNIP has not regained strength. At present UNIP is weakened by the internal infighting between two candidates claiming the presidency of the party (one the son of Kenneth Kaunda). The fact that a democratically elected president of the party (Francis Nkhoma) was removed to pave the way for Tilyenji Kaunda indicates that the Kaunda family still to a large extent controls UNIP. However, despite the instability that has characterised UNIP, the party seems to have maintained viable structures in most parts of the country. As a result, UNIP has successfully held primary elections to select its parliamentary candidates, contrary to all other opposition parties! But the conflict within the party leadership is likely to hamper UNIP's electoral success in the upcoming elections.

Unlike the early opposition parties, the first parties to form in the post-1996 elections period were *not* formed or lead by people who had been in senior positions in MMD, or active in politics in general. The National Citizens Coalition (NCC, formed 1997) and the United Party for National Development (UDND, formed 1998) are typical examples. However, as the 2001 electoral race gathered momentum, a host of new political parties have formed. The most recent party formations have been chaired by former members of the MMD National Executive Committee or Cabinet. The parties that have formed due to erosion of internal party democracy and internal splits over the third-term issue, include, the Zambian Republican Party (ZRP), the Heritage Party (HP) and the Forum for Democracy and Development (FDD). Disagreements within the MMD Cabinet over the nomination of the presidential candidate lead to the forming of the Patriotic Front as late as September.

Of the 36 or so registered political parties in Zambia, at present eleven are actively preparing to contest the 2001 tripartite elections, scheduled for December 27, 2001. It is interesting to note that of these, only two contested the 1996 elections (Agenda Zambia and MMD). Arguably, before the 2001 elections, the broad coalition that formed MMD appears to have lost a lot of support and talented candidates. Zambia has, therefore, seen a proliferation of political parties and presidential candidates. The parties preparing to contest the 2001 elections share the following characteristics:

Characteristics of parties contesting the 2001 elections

1. Apart from UNIP, NCC, and UPND, they have all emerged from MMD.
2. All eleven parties formed behind a strong leader-figure that, more often than not, contributed the bulk of the finances the parties were in control of.
3. It was virtually impossible to separate the parties along ideological or programmatic lines. According to the party manifestos, all parties aspired to continue the current economic policies, albeit manage it better than MMD has done for the past ten years.
4. The parties appeared to be based mainly in Lusaka, to the extent that few apart from the incumbent and UNIP had party structures or membership in regions outside the capital.
5. As a result, the parties adopted most parliamentary candidates centrally, and the candidates adopted are not from the local area they are asked to represent¹⁹.

The link between party system and the electoral structures

The case of Zambia illustrates how the combination of plurality elections in single member constituencies, combined with direct presidential elections, encourages the fragmented party system witnessed. The first-past-the-post system disadvantages parties with support spread relatively thinly across the country, as experienced by the LIMA party and Zambia Democratic Congress in the 1996 elections. This system again benefits politicians who in their enclaves make strong ethnic, local or regional appeals, like the National Party in the Northern Province or Agenda Zambia in the Southern Province (Burnell 2001).

The electoral system further helps explain why MMD's opponents won so few seats in 1996 despite achieving nearly 40 per cent of the vote. According to Reynolds (1999:215), under both national and lists systems of proportional representation, the MMD's parliamentary majority in 1996 would have been 36-38 seats. Furthermore, presidential systems have a 'winner-take-all quality' that discourages reasonably strong parties from co-existing. An additional constitutional factor, which works against opposition co-ordination, is the 1996 legal requirement that parliamentarians who leave a party on whose

¹⁹ The analysis of the party structure in Zambia is based on Chileshe Mulenga (2001), Burnell (2001) and The Electoral Institute of Southern Africa: "Political Parties Gear for Elections in Zambia" (<http://www.eisa.org.za>), downloaded November 16, 2001.

ticket they were elected have to re-contest their seat. This deterrent against 'crossing the floor' inhibits small parties from merging into stronger ones.

Explaining the weakness of political parties in Zambia

Overall, the political opposition in Zambia has been exceedingly weak and has failed miserably to provide checks on the powers of the executive in the 10-year period. According to one observer:

“The Zambian phenomenon whereby many politicians now like to conceive of themselves as the president of a political party and envisage being the next republican president, and treat parties as personal vehicles to that end, is the second republics most notable legacy to the contemporary party scene” (Burnell 2001:7).

The lack of ideological distinctions and grass root linkages, as noted above for African parties more generally is also found in Zambia. Generally, the democratic transitions in the early 1990s have granted increased autonomy for associations representing business, agriculture and labour. However, despite increased autonomy this influence has not translated into an increased political space for interest groups in terms of interaction with government and influence over government policymaking (Rakner 2001).

The absence of opposition parties identified by functional interests goes a long way both to explain the weakness of the political parties and the functionally based interest groups. In Zambia no ties exist between interest group and opposition parties. Rather, all interest groups are conscious of their intention to not provide any official support to opposition parties. Similarly, the only case observed in which an opposition party promoted a platform based on sectoral interests was the agriculturally based LIMA party, which emerged in the run-up to the 1996 elections. Underscoring the observation made above, LIMA failed to attract the support of even rural farmers. Business people supportive of government are awarded government contracts. In the same vein, all groups in Zambia vehemently deny being allied with any political party. Group leaders consistently report “we will work with the government of the day.” This attests to the continuing lack of political competition as well as to the reality that influence over policy rests on maintaining good relations with the *ruling* party. The prevalence of the presidency and the incumbent is clearly witnessed in the election campaigns.

Part 3: The role of the donor community in the electoral processes

Support for democracy and human rights marks a shift in donor behaviour – from previously having assumed non-interference in other countries' political affairs to accepting that getting politics right is as important as getting prices right (Danida 1999:7). The initial – rather optimistic - expectations of what

donor aid could do to strengthen democratisation processes are illustrated in the following statement:

“Just as economic conditionality can be aided by timely and well crafted international assistance, so can political development. In fact, political development is a much more flexible process than economic development and it is also cheaper financially. By helping to train legislators, party officials, lawyers, judges, journalists, civic groups, trade union organizers and election administrators, we can help “jump-start” the process of democratic development” (Diamond 1991:12).

However, linked to the increasing ‘afro pessimism’, in terms of what political reforms have actually accomplished on the continent, a sense of donor fatigue with respect to conditionality instruments and positive incentives to support democratic developments is now evident. The regression of good governance as witnessed in Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Namibia, among others, indicates that unless there is political will to democratise, donors can do very little to reverse negative developments. The question of *ownership* of the democratic processes has therefore become a key challenge for the external donor community. Democratic assistance to Zambia may serve as an example. More than for most African countries, the international donor community has applied conditionality in the context of political developments in Zambia. The 1991 political transitions were influenced by pressure for change formulated by the international donor community and nearly all bilateral donors in Zambia have made free and fair multiparty elections a condition for continued aid. However, by and large, donor conditionality has not been sufficient to check against the observed regression of democratic governance witnessed in Zambia, despite 53 per cent of the budget currently being funded by the international donor community. Experiences in Zambia from 1995 onwards indicate that even when the bilateral donor community acts coherently, the application of conditionality instruments fails to arrest negative political developments (Rakner 1998).

‘Election fixation’ among donors?

Donor support for the democratisation process has particularly focused on the elections. Election support embraces a range of activities, from legislative support, electoral commissions, technical equipment, organisation and logistics, voter registration, monitoring, voter education and observation. The greatest number of project activities are found within the areas of training and civil education and monitoring and observation²⁰. Major parts of the overall support to elections have intended to build the capacity of electoral committees through training, technical support, equipment and general budget support. The general picture emerging from evaluation studies is that international support has improved conditions for the holding of free and fair elections. External assistance has therefore added legitimacy to electoral processes and results. However, the costs of ensuring high-quality elections

²⁰ These findings are drawn from analyses of evaluations of democratic assistance. See Lise Rakner (2001b).

have turned out to be prohibitively high and have therefore caused the new democracies to be donor dependent. This has again lead to concern about the sustainability of the electoral processes. Research suggests that the quality of elections tend to drop from founding elections to the next. Bratton and Posner (1999) correlate this with the substantial external funding going into the first elections, whereas the second and third elections are supposed to be mainly conducted and financed domestically.

However, while fair elections are necessary, in themselves they are not sufficient to ensure democratic consolidation. Critics have argued that 'election fixation' has been devoid from context so that elections are monitored on the basis of whether they are free and fair without paying attention to the underlying structural biases against a free and fair election period (Geisler 1993). The 2000 elections in Zimbabwe illustrate this point. The atrocities and attacks on the opposition took place long before the Election Day and the actual polling day was relatively peaceful. Based on these findings evaluations of development support to elections suggests that donor governments' should reconsider the usefulness of sending short term election observers as proper election observation must take into account the whole process both before and after the election day. The decision by the Norwegian embassy in Zambia to fund a 18-month research project analysing the political processes before, under and after the 2001 elections is an indication of a shifting attitude among the donors with regard to election monitoring.

What should donors do?

Into the third decade of democratic reform assisted by the international donor community through various forms of aid and intervention, some general conclusions can be drawn. We find that while the changes within democracy and human rights assistance witnessed indicate ability and willingness to learn and adapt aid to new findings, the rapid changes may suggest that long-term processes of democratisation are left immaturely in fear of doing 'more harm than good'. While we do know that elections introduced at the wrong time have increased conflicts; that founding elections have been too expensive; and that election observation has been carried out devoid of political context, this should not lead to the conclusion that donors should no longer support elections.

Experiences with democratic reform and external assistance in the 1990s have made it painstakingly clear that it is not possible to equate elections with democracy. Nevertheless, the emphasis on the fallacy of electoralism in recent years should not lead to an outright rejection of support to elections for democratisation (Elklit 1999). Successful elections will be important steps toward the democratisation of societies just as flawed elections can lead to significant set backs of a democratisation process. Elections and election observation is nevertheless only one layer of the policy of promoting good governance and democratic institutions. A second layer is that of creating conditions for politics.

To build democracy is essentially an internal and long-term process. This requires patience and willingness to accept setbacks. Generally, it appears that donor assisted democratic reform projects have often over-estimated the capacity of states to absorb new policies and institutions. As with economic reforms, it has become painstakingly clear that international donors and organisations cannot force democratisation processes. Unless there is a political commitment to reform, donor assistance is unable to secure the development and functioning of the democratic institutions intended to check on the potential abuses of the executive. It is therefore necessary to expand the range of issues from the focus on elections to institutional arrangements in which elections are embedded, such as the nature of the party system (see the report by Mathisen and Svásand 2002), the legislature, and the capacity of the various institutions of government to carry out their formally assigned roles.

Thus, while donor assistance, as well as research, so far have focused primarily on 'getting the democratic institutions right' we will argue that more efforts should now be placed on the *content* of the electoral – and more generally democratic – processes in sub-Saharan Africa. To what extent are elected representatives accountable to the electorate to the extent that they promote development-oriented policies when in office? Is it possible to detect a difference in policy debates – and practices – in countries where elections are closely contested and where a vocal political opposition and civil society 'watchdog institutions' are present? Arguably, until Africa's democratic processes come to represent policy alternatives to the electorate, the legitimacy of the democratic processes will continue to be questioned.

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Appendix 1

Ranking of average turnout in the 1990s parliamentary elections.

Country (no. of elections)* Vote/Reg%

- 1 Tunisia (2) 93.5%
- 2 Burundi (1) 91.4%
- 3 Angola (1) 91.3%
- 4 South Africa (1) 89.3%
- 5 Seychelles (2) 86.6%
- 6 Malawi (2) 86.2%
- 7 Mauritius (2) 81.9%
- 8 Mozambique (2) 78.0%
- 9 Botswana (2) 76.9%
- 10 Tanzania (1) 76.5%
- 11 Cape Verde (2) 75.9%
- 12 Lesotho (2) 72.1%
- 13 Republic of the Congo (1) 70.9%
- 14 Namibia (2) 69.4%
- 15 Cameroon (2) 68.1%
- 16 Togo (1) 65.1%
- 17 Sao Tomé & Príncipe (3) 64.5%
- 18 Benin (2) 63.8%
- 19 Central African Republic (2) 63.2%

(IDEA: Voter Turnout from 1990.)

Summary

Why has the electoral process in the newly democratised African states had such limited impacts? How can the continued one-party dominance on the continent be explained despite the reintroduction of political freedoms, substantial external financial support to these processes, and a variety of institutional reforms to back the democratic processes?

The report confronts these questions by conducting a review of the literature that has focused on a) the main characteristics of the electoral arrangements of sub-Saharan African states, b) the characteristics of parties in the region, and c) the behaviour and attitudes of the electorate. In the second part, we illustrate the general findings and conclusions of part one with an analysis of electoral policies in Zambia since the reintroduction of multiparty politics in 1991. In the final part, we assess the role of the international donor community in terms of electoral assistance to sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s and ask what the international community can do to improve the quality and content of electoral processes.

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