J. of Modern African Studies, 41, 2 (2003), pp. 297–321. © 2003 Cambridge University Press
DOI: 10.1017/S0022278X03004269 Printed in the United Kingdom

Presidentialism and clientelism in Africa's emerging party systems

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the parties and party systems that have begun to emerge in sub-Saharan Africa's fledgling multiparty systems. Using a data base of 87 legislative elections convened in the 1990s, the paper identifies three trends. The position of parties late in the decade is primarily tributary of their performance in the first multiparty election conducted in the early 1990s. Parties that won founding elections are almost invariably still in power. Secondly, the typical emerging party system has consisted of a dominant party surrounded by a large number of small, unstable parties. Thirdly, party cleavages have been overwhelmingly ethno-linguistic in nature, while ideological and programmatic debates have been muted and rare. The second half of the paper provides tentative explanations for these striking patterns. It emphasises the illiberal nature of most of the new African democracies, their characteristic centralisation of power around the presidency, and the pervasive clientelism that structures the relationship between the state and the citizenry. These characteristics shape the incentives faced by individual politicians and thus much of their behaviour.

INTRODUCTION

A large literature analyses the development of parties and party systems in the Western democracies.[1] Duverger's law (1964) on the impact of electoral rules is a generalisation that is still passed on to every first-year graduate student in political science. Almost as well known, Lipset and Rokkan (1967) have shown how the party systems of Western Europe emerged as a reflection of the socio-economic cleavages prevailing as democracies were extending the franchise to all segments of the population in these nation-states. Other analysts have used the Western experience to explain the nature of the relationship between parties and the citizenry. To explain why some parties use programmatic appeals to gain votes while others resort to promises of patronage, Martin Shefter (1994)

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X03004269 Published online by Cambridge University Press

has argued that parties with access to state resources (what he calls 'internally mobilised') were more likely to eschew programmatic appeals in favour of clientelism, while outsider parties, that did not benefit from such access, were more likely to adopt programmatic appeals, as their only viable strategy to gain the support of significant segments of the population.

The Third Wave of democratisation offers a fertile territory to re-examine some of these theories in the light of new evidence. The early democratisers in the Third Wave, notably those in Latin America, have already been subject to such analysis, with extremely thought-provoking results (e.g. Dix 1992; Mainwaring & Scully 1995). But there has so far been little similar research on political parties in the emerging democracies of Africa.[2] During the course of the 1990s, regular multiparty elections have become the norm for the states in Sub-Saharan Africa. All but a handful of states in the region now conduct regular parliamentary elections that allow opposition parties to be represented in the national legislature. To be sure, few of these countries can be considered to be even imperfect liberal democracies. With the exception of a small number of states, these systems can be characterised as semi-authoritarian regimes despite their regular multiparty elections, as erstwhile military and police states have learned to placate Western donors with the organisation of regular elections that do not threaten ruling elites.

Nonetheless, with over forty relatively similar political systems conducting regular multiparty elections, Africa offers an ideal terrain for comparative analysis of the role of political parties and party systems. Parties are arguably the single most important organisations in electoral politics. Their evolution provides important clues about the nature of democratic practice in Africa and the changing nature of the links between citizens and the political class.

This essay provides a general survey of Africa's emerging parties and party systems. It starts by using a data base created by the author to identify several distinctive emerging patterns in African electoral politics (see Appendix). Section 1 shows that, first, success in the first multiparty election proved to be the key to political dominance in the 1990s. Second, the emerging modal party system in the region consists of a dominant presidential party surrounded by a large number of small, highly volatile parties. Third, programmatic and ideological cleavages have not shaped political competition nearly as much as ethnic and regional factors. The second half of the paper suggests some hypotheses to explain these striking patterns, which it is hoped will be confirmed by subsequent field research. It emphasises the illiberal nature of most of the new African democracies, their characteristic centralisation of power around the presidency, and the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X03004269 Published online by Cambridge University Press

pervasive clientelism that structures the relationship between the state and the citizenry. The paper concludes by raising some implications of these findings.

EMERGING PATTERNS IN AFRICA'S MULTIPARTY SYSTEMS

Multiparty politics with more or less regular elections have become the norm in sub-Saharan Africa since the political transitions of the early 1990s (Bratton & van de Walle 1997; Diamond 1997; Herbst 2001; Joseph 1998; Wiseman 1995). Between the 1989 transition election in Namibia[3] and the end of 2000, some 87 legislative elections involving at least two parties were convened in 42 of the region's 48 states, for an average of over seven elections a year in the region.[4] All but two of these elections resulted in the representation of multiple parties in the legislature. In addition, over 65 presidential elections involved more than one candidate during this period. Only seven states in the region (Eritrea, Rwanda, Sudan, Somalia, Swaziland, Uganda, Zaire/DRC) did not convene multiparty elections. In comparison, only nine African countries had held competitive, multiparty elections in the period 1985–9. Moreover, a process of institutionalising regular elections appears to have begun: 35 countries convened second elections, usually on schedule, i.e. at the end of the constitutionally fixed term of officeholders elected during the first elections. Ten countries have also convened a third election, and Niger conducted its fourth election in the 1990s in November 1999, having held its first post-colonial multiparty election in 1993. It can thus be said that we are witnessing the routinisation of multiparty elections. This too is in sharp contrast with previous periods, in which competitively elected legislatures were more often than not displaced by military coups before they finished their term.

The nature of political parties

An analysis of political parties since the return to multiparty politics in the 1990s reveals three distinct patterns.

The key role of founding elections: First, the recent democratisation period witnessed the emergence of a number of new parties. On one level, of course, all African parties are new. Even the region's oldest political parties, dating from the time of the nationalist movements, are typically less than half a century old (Kuenzi & Lambright 2001). This contrasts sharply with many Latin American democracies where political parties have much deeper roots, e.g., in Columbia and Uruguay with party average ages of

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144 years and 112 years, respectively (Mainwaring & Scully 1995: 15). In the African cases, some parties emerged, largely *sui generis*, during or immediately before the transition to compete for power. Typical was the MMD in Zambia, created in mid-1990, just over a year before it would score a triumphal victory in legislative elections, by a mixture of disgruntled politicians of the single party, human rights activists and trade union leaders (Ihonvbere 1998).

These new parties often had origins in the civil society which was allowed to exist during the authoritarian era. Their organisational roots were in the labour unions, business associations, student groups, law societies, and church organisations, which had begun to emerge in the waning days of the single-party regimes in the 1980s. They were the quickest to take advantage of the political opening of the early 1990s and establish themselves as more overtly political organisations.

New parties and older opposition parties sometimes overlapped. Thus, many of the new parties included leaders who had a long history of opposition to the single party, but under the guise of ephemeral party structures. Joseph Ki-Zerbo, one of the current leaders of the opposition in Burkina Faso as head of the PDP (Parti pour la Démocratie et le Progrès), first gained prominence as head of the MLN (Mouvement de Liberation Nationale), an opposition party in the early 1970s. In between, he belonged to at least two other parties.

Not all of these new parties enjoyed similar electoral success. A plethora of small parties has emerged throughout the continent. For instance, in Benin, eleven parties won ten or fewer seats in the legislature and the largest party only won 12 following that country's first election in 1991. Many of these parties lead an ephemeral existence. In Benin's second election in 1995, 14 new parties that were not in the previous legislature won at least one seat, while eight parties that had been represented in the legislature won no seats. Although at least some of their officeholders may well have been elected under a different political banner, the transitory nature of the political parties competing in these elections is striking.[5]

In many respects, the region's *ex-single parties* have adjusted quite well to the transition to multipartyism and continue to play a surprisingly active role in politics. At the end of 2002, the single party in power before 1989 remained there in 15 of the region's multiparty political systems.[6] In addition, ex-single parties emerged as the leading legislative opposition party in eight of the 11 countries in which they had been ousted during the transition in the early 1990s.[7] The ex-single parties thus have proven remarkably resilient, comparing favourably for example with many of the communist parties in Eastern Europe (Geddes 1995). This resilience suggests that they

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TABLE 1
The evolution of election dynamics

	First	Second	Third
No. of elections, 1989–2000	41	35	10
No. of parties competing	13·1	11·5	28·3
No. of parties winning seats	6·3	6·5	7·7
Effective no. of parties	2·9	2·2	2·5
% of seats to winner	63·1	69·6	64·3
% of votes to winner	55·7	60·2	49·8

Source: Author's data base.

were able to use the material and organisational benefits of longstanding control of the state apparatus to achieve some significant institutionalisation. The capital they built up may depreciate over time if they remain in the political wilderness much longer, but at least through the 1990s, they proved capable of adapting to the new realities.

What then explains party success in the new democracies? The party's performance in the first legislative and particularly the first presidential election has turned out to be critical to its long-term fortunes. Indeed, a striking pattern of African transitions has been the absence of alternation. During my period of study, only in Benin and Madagascar has a party subsequently lost the electoral majority it gained in a first multiparty election. Over all, the winning party in the first election almost invariably won a more comfortable majority in the second elections, as suggested in Table 1.

The outcome of the transition election also largely determined whether a new party or the old single party would emerge in power. Whichever was able to control the chief executive's office, and attain a winning legislative majority following the first election, was then able to consolidate power. If the ex-single party managed to survive the move to multiparty politics with its hold on power intact, it was able to use all its resources to marginalise the opposition and re-consolidate power in the second and third multiparty elections. This was the case notably in Gabon, Kenya, Cameroon and Togo, where leaders were almost toppled by international pressures and mass protests in the early 1990s, but survived by skillful combinations of electoral fraud, effective campaigning, manipulation of the opposition and repression (see Clark & Gardinier 1997; Daloz 1999).

More surprising, perhaps, since they did not enjoy the benefit of longstanding organisational and patronage resources, even new parties appeared to be able to quickly consolidate power, if they won a founding

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election. Gaining control of the state apparatus provided the resources and motivations to strengthen the party's organisation. Parties that did not gain control of the presidency in the founding election were soon at a disadvantage in terms of resources, even if they were well represented on the back benches of the legislature. They were much more likely to splinter into several distinct parties and suffer defections to the government party. Defections were both less likely and much less problematic for parties in government. Thus, as the historic leaders of the MMD in Zambia broke with President Chiluba following 1993, the MMD increasingly became viewed as a Bemba and Northern Province party, if not Chiluba's personal machine. However, this narrower base did not weaken the MMD's hold on the legislature in subsequent elections, so important appears to be the appeal of state resources (Ihonvbere 1998; Posner 2003, forthcoming).

Dominant party systems: A second emerging pattern relates to the party systems that appear to be consolidating. Legislatures in Africa have quickly developed a reputation for having an excessive number of parliamentary parties.[8] Of the 87 legislative elections for which information is available, 17 legislatures included 10 or more parties, while another 14 had between seven and nine parties. The average number of parties elected to the legislature actually increased between the first and second elections, from 6·3 to 6·5 (see Table 1). This even understates the degree of apparent fragmentation, given the large number of independent candidates winning seats, a phenomenon on which I comment below.

The large numbers of small parties have only rarely brought about a crisis of governability, however. Few legislatures lacked a party with at least a substantial plurality of seats; of the 17 legislatures with 10 or more parties, the minimal winning coalition required more than three parties in only four cases. Indeed, in eight of these states, the biggest party held a simple majority of seats. On average for the region's 41 founding elections, the largest party received a comfortable 63·1% of the seats, and this increased to 69·6% for the 35 second elections and to 64·3% for third elections, that had been held by the end of 2000. Thus, the large number of parties represented in the legislature did not prevent the emergence of dominant party systems. To get a better sense of the degree of fragmentation of these party systems, a standard measure, the 'effective number of parties', was calculated in order to adjust for differences in party size across political systems.[9] The calculations reveal that 65 of the 85 legislatures had an effective number of parties of three or less, while only four had one of more than six. These numbers appear to be broadly comparable to the party systems of Western Europe. Thus, the modal party system that

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is emerging across much of the region is one with a large dominant party surrounded by a bevy of small, highly volatile parties. In 37 of the 85 elections, the second biggest party in the legislature had 15% of the seats or less.

How can this pattern be explained? Theories of political parties in consolidated democracies argue that parties are motivated by the objective of capturing political power, either for power's sake or for the nobler purpose of influencing policy (Laver & Schofield 1990). Neither ambition seems completely credible for parties that seem condemned to at most a handful of seats and a minor role in any future legislature, and which rarely express distinctive policy preferences. The large number of small parties is usually explained in two ways. A first explanation is that party fragmentation is an inevitable *transitional* phenomenon of emerging democracies, and that the number of parties will decline and consolidate into a smaller number of large parties over time, as the electoral system matures. Although the overall average number of parties went up in second elections, the effective number of parties actually declined. Twenty-three second elections resulted in a lower effective number of parties, while only seven second elections resulted in a higher effective number of parties. The evidence thus suggests that a process of consolidation may be taking place. On the other hand, Senegal, with a long tradition of multi-party rule, continues to have a large number of parties in parliament. The effective number of parties in the 1993 and 1998 elections was 1·84 and 2·10, respectively. Senegal's small parties in parliament, or those with fewer than five parliamentary seats, have risen from four in 1993 to eight in 1998. The tendency for small parties may thus be more than transitory.

A second common explanation for the number of parliamentary parties is the electoral system in place. In particular, following Duverger, we would expect systems of proportional representation to increase the number of parties in the legislature. That indeed turns out to be the case, with an average 8·55 parties in the 20 elections that used a system of proportional representation (PR), compared with an average of 4·97 parties in the 30 that used a simple plurality or 'first-past-the-post' (FPTP) system (see Table 2). The proponents of PR, it should be noted, argue that it tends to undermine the emergence of parties with large majorities and promotes medium-sized parties. In fact, however, the leading parties in PR systems still managed to corral 60·2% of the seats, not quite the 69·6% of the seats in FPTP systems, but still an impressive and fairly safe majority. In Africa, what is striking is the combination of big parties with comfortable majorities, surrounded by multiple tiny parties.

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TABLE 2
Electoral rules and party systems

	FPTP	PR	TRS
No. of cases	30	20	16
No. of parties in legislature	4·97	8·55	8·40
Effective no. of parties	1·83	3·01	3·53
% of seats to winner	69·6	60·2	61·9

FPTP: First Past the Post; PR: Proportional Representation; TRS: Two Round Majority.
Source: International IDEA (1997) and author's data base.

Low ideological salience: A third striking feature of the parties that are emerging is their programmatic homogeneity. Though this is admittedly difficult to measure precisely, the low salience of ideology for the majority of these parties is unmistakable. Many observers have noted that most parties have adopted a vague populism during elections, and pitch their campaigns around their opposition to corruption, services for the population and general, if vague, promises of a better future.[10] Ideological differences have been minor across parties, and debates about specific policy issues have been virtually non-existent. Although opposition parties may criticise the government's management of the economy or the implementation of structural adjustment programmes, party platforms diverge little and campaign speeches rarely discuss policy issues. A small number of parties have sought to make policy-based campaigns, but with a striking lack of success. For instance, the National Lima Party (NLP) in Zambia was led by several prominent national politicians, supported by the Zambian Farmers' Association, and actively presented itself as the defender of rural interests in the 1996 elections, yet failed to get one seat in the legislature. Similarly, in francophone Africa, several avowedly Marxist parties regularly fail to get more than symbolic support.

Part of the low salience of ideology may well be due to the absence of labour or church-based parties. Though unions, professional associations and the churches typically played a prominent role in the democratisation of the early 1990s, they quickly retreated from politics, once multiparty rule had been put in place. There is today no example of a Christian democratic party anywhere in the region. Similarly, there is no labour party, though the opposition alliance that has emerged to contest the Mugabe regime in Zimbabwe is avowedly labour-based. On the other hand, it has not staked out a policy position that is particularly to the

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left of the governing ZANU-PF or that puts forward labour issues (Raftopoulos 2001).

Instead, election campaigns have been conducted almost entirely on the basis of personal and ethno-regional appeals for support. Marina Ottaway (1998: 311) has argued that, with the end of the Cold War, 'the absence of ideological or programmatic differences left ethnicity as the major characteristic by which the various parties could differentiate themselves'. In most countries, the single most important factor explaining party loyalty is ethnicity or region, and ethnic identity provides a remarkably precise prediction of voting behaviour (Posner 2003, forthcoming).

In some cases, of course, regional and/or ethnic identity overlaps with specific policy positions. Thus, for instance, in Nigeria, representatives of the Ogoni ethnic group in the oil-producing area of southeast Nigeria tend to be opponents of current federalist policies. In Kenya, Cameroon, Malawi and Ghana, one ethnic minority is typically viewed as more pro-business than other groups, because of its alleged prominence in the private sector. Interestingly, the parties representing these communities have typically not adopted policy positions that reflect the putative economic interests of the group. Thus, in Cameroon, the SDF is viewed as the party of the Bamileke ethnic group. Bamileke businessmen are among the country's most prominent, and one reason often given for the reticence of the government to move forward with privatisation is the widespread view that it would provide an advantage to the Bamileke community. Yet SDF policy positions are not particularly distinct from the government's, and certainly not noticeably in favour of economic liberalism or privatisation (Eboko 1999; Mehler 1997).

Most observers have viewed the ethnic nature of African parties as a destabilising factor. However, this depends on the extent to which electoral contests are reduced to winner-take-all exercises between polarised communities, rather than providing an arena for multi-ethnic negotiations that result in broad governing coalitions, either within or across parties.[11] Across the region, it is difficult to disagree with the view that electoral politics has enhanced ethnic identities (Glickman 1995); but so far at least, the ethnic nature of parties in many countries does not appear to have resulted in a breakdown of the system, once the destabilising effects of the actual transition have passed. The two notable exceptions are Congo-Brazzaville and particularly Burundi, where the move to multiparty politics dramatically exacerbated latent ethnic tensions and the democratisation collapsed amidst murderous ethnic conflict (see Clark 2001 for Congo; Lemarchand 1996; Uvin 1999 for Burundi).

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MOVING TOWARDS EXPLANATION

What factors help to explain the modal patterns discerned in the first section of the paper? More fieldwork and hard data will be necessary before conclusive generalisations can be made. In the meantime, I offer the following tentative claims. This section hypothesises that emerging trends can be related to the illiberal tendencies of the democracies in the region, the centralisation of power around the presidency, and the clientelistic nature of these systems. I explore each of these in succession.

Illiberal democracies

First, the nature of the emerging party system is clearly conditioned by the quality of the democracy that has emerged in the 1990s. Most of the new multiparty systems fall well short of the ideals of liberal democracies. Instead, the exercise of democratic politics is often highly imperfect. Political freedoms and civil rights may be formally recognised but are imperfectly observed in practice, particularly in between electoral exercises when they are more likely to be flouted (Diamond 1996; Herbst 2001; Joseph 1998; van de Walle 2002). Elections may be nominally free, but governments engage in extensive gerrymandering, manipulation of voter registration and harassment of opposition parties. Human rights abuses are not uncommon, even if the worst abuses are rarer than in the authoritarian past. A nominally free press is harassed in myriad ways, and the government retains a radio monopoly. Certain groups, notably key members of the executive branch and the military may, in effect, be above the law. The judiciary is officially independent, but it is poorly trained, overworked and easily compromised.

The Freedom House rankings on political and civil rights in Africa demonstrate the extent to which multiparty elections can be combined with an illiberal political environment. In the late 1990s, 30 of Africa's multiparty systems were illiberal, under Freedom House's definition of 'partly free' and 'not free'. Indeed, the 12 multiparty systems in the 'not free' category may be more accurately termed 'pseudo democracies' (Diamond 1996), so egregious is the gap between democratic ideals and current practice.

Nonetheless, if we are to believe Freedom House's score of 'free', as many as a quarter of these regimes are in the process of consolidating democratic practices and can be considered liberal democracies. Moreover, the gains of Africa's democratic transitions in the early 1990s are not being eroded, as is often argued. Examining Freedom House's annual indices for political rights and civil liberties between 1989–94 and 1999–2000 does not

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suggest a clear net worsening of the quality of governance in the region since the peak of the democratisation wave. Between 1993 and 1998, political rights actually improved in 12 countries, stayed the same in 20 and worsened in 15. The 'third wave' may be over (Diamond 1996) in Africa, but there is reason to hope that the recent gains are not being eroded. Rather, the region's countries are engaged on a variety of distinct paths, only some of which include a marked decline in the quality of political and civic rights.

Although much of present-day Africa has multiparty systems, those in which the incumbent was actually ousted are far fewer. Incumbents lost power as a result of the democratic transition and its founding election in 13 countries in the sample, in addition to the countries in which regular multiparty elections preceded the 1990s. Seven of these 13 were classified by Freedom House as 'free' in 2000. This paints a somewhat more nuanced picture of the continent's situation, for it shows that the majority of the 'illiberal' democracies are countries in which the transition to multiparty rule proved to be seriously flawed. Most never really had a transition, and the turn to multiparty competition amounted to little more than an erstwhile authoritarian ruler donning the garb of democracy and tolerating regular elections as a successful strategy for holding on to power. Convening regular elections brings with it a modicum of international respectability and the resulting foreign aid, and does not threaten these leaders. Countries in which the democratic transition included the ouster of the incumbent, on the other hand, have on the whole performed better. Only two – Niger and Congo-Brazzaville – of the 13 are in the 'not free' category, both as a result of military coups that overturned most of the gains of the transition. The other 11 transition countries have seemingly been able to maintain most of the democratic gains made during the transition.

The predominance of countries in the 'not free' and 'partly free' categories gives the impression that things have got worse, and that the democratic transitions of the early 1990s have been betrayed. In fact, a majority of the countries that underwent real transitions have sustained the progress made, while even the most illiberal multiparty systems are usually freer today than they were before the democratisation wave.

Interestingly, in this respect, the patterns of competition fostered by the party system appear to have a powerful effect on both the stability of the emerging multiparty system and on the level of political freedoms that is sustained. Although the main pattern is the emergence of a dominant party, in a smaller number of countries a party system has emerged with no clear majority party. I hypothesise that a fragmented party system may

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lead to a higher probability of political instability, but also to the emergence of a relatively high-quality democracy. In other words, political competition between parties appears to be positively correlated with political and civic freedoms, as well as with a greater vulnerability to political instability. It may be that coups are more likely when party competition breeds a parliamentary stalemate. The quick emergence of a dominant party system after the transition, on the other hand, appears to result in a lower chance of military intervention, but also in executive abuses and a lower quality of democracy. The lower the level of competition, in other words, the more likely the emergence of illiberal democracy.

Observers have long noted that African political systems have not handled political competition well. Collier (1978) argued two decades ago that regimes in which no clear party emerged victorious at the time of independence were more prone to military intervention. My evidence suggests very tentatively that the competitiveness of the party system once again will condition the quality of democracy that is likely to emerge.

Data presented in Table 3 offer some tentative support for these patterns, by comparing countries in which no majority emerged in the transition elections with countries in which a party gained a clear and decisive victory. The first category of countries suggests that multiparty competition has brought with it the risk of instability in the 1990s. The military coups in Niger and Congo were a direct result of governmental paralysis due to the absence of an unambiguous majority. The elected government in CAR has now survived four military coups, thanks in large part to French intervention. At the same time, however, competition does improve the quality of the democracy, as suggested by the steady political rights scores between the date of the founding election and 1998 for the countries that maintained multiparty electoral politics. In these regimes, the erosion of rights associated with illiberal democracy does not appear to have taken place.

The second category of countries in Table 3, in which a built-in majority appears to have established itself in the early 1990s, is somewhat more heterogeneous, but suggests the opposite dynamic. In these countries, the level of political rights appears to have declined during this period, suggesting that dominant parties took advantage of their positions of strength following the first election to consolidate their hold on power at the expense of political and civil rights. Obviously, it is too early to tell whether these two sets of dynamics will be sustained in a larger set of countries over a longer time period, but the data in Table 3 is at least not incompatible with the hypothesis that party competition and democratic consolidation are linked.

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TABLE 3

Type of party system and quality of democracy[a]

Country	% of seats to largest party	Quality of democracy[c]	
		in year of election	in 1998
1. Fragmented party systems[b]			
Benin	18·8	2	2
Congo-B	31·2	3	coup
Madagascar	34·1	2	2
Niger	34·9	3	coup
Sierra Leone	39·7	4	coup
CAR	40·0	3	3
Malawi	48·0	2	2
Mean[d]		2·25	2·25
2. Party-dominant systems[e]			
Lesotho	100·0	3	4
Zambia	83·3	2	4
Seychelles	81·8	3	3
Burundi	80·2	6	coup
Cape Verde	70·9	2	2
Guinea-Bissau	64·0	3	5
Mean[f]		2·6	3·8

[a] All of these countries had first elections which were deemed free and fair.
[b] Defined as those countries where the largest party had less than 50% of the legislative seats.
[c] These scores are from Freedom House.
[d] Since we are interested in the quality of the enduring democracy, we have excluded Niger, Cango and Sierra Leone from the means, since the military intervened and democracy clearly no longer existed. All three of these states were rated 7 by Freedom House in 1998.
[e] One party-dominant systems are defined as those countries where the largest party has more than 60% of the legislative seats.
[f] See *d*. Burundi was excluded because of the military takeover shortly after election.

Presidentialism: A second hypothesis concerning the patterns that are emerging is to be found in the presidentialism of these regimes. The term can be used in two ways. First, it is a fact that of Africa's 45 multiparty systems, only Botswana, Lesotho, Mauritius and South Africa are parliamentary regimes. The other states have presidential constitutions, except for Swaziland, which is a monarchy. It should be noted that as many as half of the states in the region started out as parliamentary regimes and changed soon after independence (Collier 1978; Gonidec 1978). Indeed, most are highly presidential, with various rules that weaken the hand of the legislature and allow the president to make the key decisions without legislative approval. The weakness of political parties is a phenomenon noted by a number of observers (e.g. Mainwaring & Scully 1995), and tends to be confirmed by the African cases.

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These regimes are also presidential in another, more profound, sense. Regardless of their constitutional arrangements, it is also a fact that power is intensely personalised around the figure of the president. Not only is the political elite typically an exceptionally narrow one, it is almost entirely based in the capital city. As Wunsch and Olowu (1990: 4–5) have shown, African states after independence were highly centralised in administrative and juridical terms. Virtually all revenues were raised by the central government, with local governments having few fiscal prerogatives. Total budgetary resources allocated to local governments were typically minuscule, while only 2% of public employees did not work for the central government, a quarter of the levels prevailing in Asia and half those in Latin America.

Throughout the region, power is highly centralised around the president. He is literally above the law, controls in many cases a large proportion of state finance with little accountability, and delegates remarkably little of his authority on important matters. In most countries, the presidency emerges as the dominant arena for decision-making, to the point that regular ministerial structures are relegated to an executant's role. In Congo/Zaire, Callaghy (1984: 179) reports, the presidency controlled 15–20% of the national recurrent budget and 30% of capital outlays. In Kenya, the office of the president included a staff of 43,230 in 1990 (World Bank 1992: 51). This meant that one in six civil servants in Kenya worked for the presidency! In these cases, the 'Office of the president' became a parallel government, with considerably more executive power than the actual ministries. Middle-level managers within the presidency often wield more effective powers than permanent secretaries in the ministries, and even government ministers find themselves with little discretion over policy. Cabinet meetings are typically rare and largely ceremonial in nature, with the president giving his directives and offering advice, often less for the benefit of the assembled ministers than for the press that has been invited. A direct implication of this centralisation is that clientelistic access to state resources in Africa is also highly concentrated in the presidency. Local governments lack discretion over public resources, as do the executive and the legislative branch of government. Only the apex of the executive really matters.

What are the implications of this centralisation of power for electoral politics? On one level, it means that in many respects, legislative elections are a sideshow. To focus on them is the analytical equivalent of telling the tragedy of Hamlet through the eyes of Rosencranz and Guildenstern.[12] The critical part of the drama is taking place off stage, and legislative elections constitute a subplot, even if they link to the key aspects of the

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drama in significant ways that we need to identify. (In the same way, Hamlet would end very differently if Rosencranz and Guildenstern managed to kill him at the end of Act III, preventing him from ever returning to the Danish court to avenge his father in Act V.)

In Africa's illiberal and presidential regimes, the main drama is about control of the presidency. Legislative elections and party competition have to be understood in the context of this broader drama. The president has an incentive to ensure a friendly majority in the legislature, although he typically enjoys considerable decree powers and does not need a stable majority to rule effectively. Even in authoritarian regimes, legislative elections play several useful functions. First, competitive elections may serve to placate Western donors and make them more likely to accept the absence of real competition in the more important presidential contest. Second, legislative elections are useful to the president to discipline the presidential majority. In a wonderful analysis, Fauré (1985) showed how President Houphouët–Boigny used elections in single party Côte d'Ivoire, to weed out unpopular barons of his regime and assert his own power over the members of the party. Such tactics almost certainly continue in the present multiparty regimes.

Pervasive clientelism: A third hypothesis links the emerging party systems to the more or less systematic resort to clientelism to gain and maintain political support that we observe in these regimes. The absence or narrowness of a public realm in the Western sense, the strength of clan, ethnicity and other sub-national identities, the predilection for dyadic exchange in primarily rural societies, and the need for mechanisms of 'social insurance' in the risky and uncertain environment of low-income societies, have all been used in the literature to explain the ubiquitous presence at every level of African life of the exchange of gifts, favours and services, of patronage and courtier practices (Cruise O'Brien 1975; Ekeh 1975; Olivier de Sardan 1996; Price 1975).

These practices have often also been attributed to ethnic and clan politics, in which a position of power is valued for the resources it procures for one's family and kin. Much clientelism and corruption is legitimated by the view that it serves a kind of community purpose rather than individual enrichment (Chabal & Daloz 1999). Clearly, clientelism does reinforce loyalties to kith and kin. The redistribution that is achieved or at least perceived to be achieved by such practices serves to blunt class consciousness. Even when the exchange is largely symbolic, it links patron and client. As a result, societies with pervasive clientelism are marked by the low salience of social class identities, despite often glaring social inequalities

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(Clapham 1982). This certainly helps to explain the absence of programmatic political parties that is noted above.

As Gavin Williams (1987) and others have noted, however, 'what is striking about many African countries is how little trickles down to the worse off through the patronage network and how much sticks to a few hands at the top'. Indeed, it is ultimately more useful to think of the primary function of neopatrimonial politics in most African states as facilitating intra-elite accommodation in young, multi-ethnic and poorly integrated political systems. In what Rothchild (1985) called 'hegemonial exchange' and Bayart (1989) 'reciprocal assimilation of elites', political stability in Africa has often been constructed by using state resources to forge alliances across different social elites, often in the form of overt power-sharing arrangements. These arrangements facilitated consensus building across region and ethnicity; between the younger, more educated elites emerging from Western universities and the usually older, less-educated elites who were often linked to traditional authorities; and between the individuals who emerged to take leadership roles in the different institutions of the states, not only the politicians, but also the military brass and the church hierarchy.

Some observers (e.g. Chandra 2001) ascribe a high degree of instrumentality to voting in clientelist regimes. They argue that voters expect to gain in material terms for their vote, typically through patronage. The difficulties of the opposition to gain a sizeable share of the vote in some countries are certainly compatible with a claim of voting instrumentality, since they suggest that voters believe that voting for a loser will not be rewarded with access to state resources. Several case studies of African elections (e.g. Banégas 1998) have alleged cases of vote buying, in which significant segments of the population auctioned their votes to the candidates who were willing to pay the most, also suggesting this instrumentality.

But it is important to distinguish the African cases from the situation apparently prevailing in other 'patronage democracies'. First, African state structures are woefully small, compared with those in other, richer states. The possibilities for patronage are extremely limited, although oil wealth provides certain countries like Nigeria or Gabon with relatively larger resources. Though public employment may be a high proportion of formal sector employment, the entire civil service in Africa represents on average only 2% of the population, compared with 6·9% in Eastern Europe, for example, or 7·7% in the OECD countries (van de Walle 2001). In some African countries, it is close to just 1%. Public expenditures also tend to be relatively modest, on average amounting to about half of the

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levels prevailing in the OECD countries relative to the size of the economy. Thus, the patronage possibilities available to politicians are in fact quite limited.

Second, rather than individually excludable goods such as jobs, there is much more potential to influence voting with promises of community goods, notably in the form of social services. Indeed, perhaps the most common electoral promise made by African politicians, particularly as they venture out of the capital, is that they will provide better roads and social services to populations who vote for them. Indeed, citizens often fear that they will be deprived of these services if they do not vote for the winning candidate.

In sum, it is more useful to think of clientelistic politics as constituting primarily a mechanism for accommodation and integration of a fairly narrow political elite than as a form of mass party patronage. Most of the material gains from clientelism are limited to this elite. The stronger link between political elites and the citizenry is through the less tangible bonds of ethnic identity. Even in the absence of tangible benefits, citizens will choose to vote for individuals of their own ethnic group, particularly in ethnically divided societies. Less than the expectation that they will benefit directly from the vote, citizens may feel that only a member of their own ethnic group may end up defending the interests of the ethnic group as a whole, and that voting for a member of another ethnic group will certainly not do so.

IMPLICATIONS

I can now bring the different strands of the argument together and focus on the incentives for individual politicians. The combination of presidentialism and clientelism helps to explain the peculiar type of party fragmentation described above. These systems create disincentives for opposition party consolidation and incentives for individual 'big men' to maintain small, highly personalised parties or join the winning party. The winning party tends to become dominant since individual politicians know that they are more likely to get access to state resources if they are in the president's party. At least some politicians believe that maintaining an independent power base will improve the deal they can strike with the president. In effect, having one's own party provides additional leverage to access state resources in negotiations with the president in power following the elections.

With a dominant party in power, politicians in opposition parties have no incentive to coalesce with each other, since this would reduce their

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flexibility to strike deals with those in power and join the presidential majority. At least some ex-authoritarian leaders have encouraged this party fragmentation. Thus, in Gabon and Cameroon, the government provided finance for parties in order to enhance their fissiparous tendencies, and lessen the incentives to form anti-government coalitions. In other countries, the government appears to have tacitly encouraged or even sponsored small independent parties or independents to compete in legislative elections, presumably to divide the opposition and increase the share of the vote under its control. In these cases, the number of parties probably exaggerates the effective fragmentation of the system.

Politicians have a strong incentive to maintain the support of their own lineage or ethnic group, as their ability to capture a community's vote is what makes them useful to the presidential majority. So politicians have an incentive to mobilise ethnic identities during elections. This logic helps explain the large number of parties in countries like Burkina Faso, Madagascar (following the first election) or Benin. It also explains the volatility of the party system, with the rapid appearance and disappearance of new parties around each electoral cycle, as well as the high number of independents who emerge during the course of elections. In a logic that is driven by individual clientelist strategies rather than by institutional or legislative ambitions, politicians create parties to compete in a single election and leverage resources from the party in power, only to evaporate once the deal is struck. Clientelist politics are unstable enough for each election to engender another round of this process, in some cases with the same politicians. The consequence is that few if any parties other than the one in power undergo institutionalisation over time.

The characteristics of African parties identified in this brief survey suggest a need to rethink several of the classic functions attributed to political parties. In particular, the argument that African parties play an interest aggregation function is difficult to sustain. The interest aggregation function of parties has its origins in the patterns of political development in Europe, where political parties channelled and orchestrated the historical process of enfranchisement, as political participation was dramatically extended during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (LaPalombara & Weiner 1966; Lipset & Rokkan 1967).

In Africa, today, on the other hand, parties do not really serve to aggregate interests – rather they serve a representation function in a context of clientelistic politics that are dominated by a disproportionately powerful executive and are only imperfectly democratic. Parties gain respect and power within the party system when they can make a credible claim to represent a certain ethnic, regional or linguistic segment of the population.

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Members of an ethnic community do not always have distinct interests that can be related to distinct policy preferences. Instead, they vote to place ethnic representatives in the arenas where, they believe, the national pie is divided. That leaders represent communities well or not – and in many cases, clientelistic patronage networks do not spread across much of the community – matters less, ultimately, than that the political system conceives of elected office largely in terms of the access to the state resources that it confers.

The view of the state as the ultimate prize puts an enormous premium on competition for the presidency, control of which is most important for patronage and rent seeking. Relative to the executive branch, party competition in the legislative branch is a sideshow. The main ambition of parties is either to gain control of the state or to gain leverage over those who have it. The struggle for legislative seats is of course a struggle for majority status, but it is also a struggle for the attention of the executive. This is particularly true for small parties, often of ethnic minorities, which know that they cannot aspire to majority status. For them, legislative elections are a way to be identified as a distinct community that needs to be accommodated.

In the early 1990s, Africa was full of hope and optimism as pro-democracy movements succeeded and dictators fell. Clearly, multiparty politics is now the norm in much of Africa. However, by the end of the 1990s it was clear that the mere presence of multiple political parties does not ensure democracy. The old single parties have demonstrated a remarkable ability to adapt to the new environment. Where they never conceded control of the executive, the multiparty system is being constructed in such a way that it does not threaten that control. Elsewhere, where there has been a real alternation, the situation is more promising. Still, even there, the nature of clientelistic politics militates against party institutionalisation.

If the analysis by Martin Shefter cited above is correct, at least some African opposition parties will come to realise they cannot compete on the field of clientelistic politics, and will move instead to more programmatic discourse to mobilise the votes of citizens. They will adopt aggressive policy positions on economic issues, for example, and eschew the kind of ethnic-driven clientelism that is their hallmark today. The fact that the experiments in this direction have been such dismal failures so far points to the difficulties involved. For one thing, the political salience of ethnicity undermines programmatic appeals. If other parties adopt appeals to ethnic loyalties and clientelism, it is very hard for a programmatic party to win. Voters will seek to exchange their vote for the favours of a clientelist party because they know they will benefit from the programmatic party whether

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or not they voted for it, while they also know they will get no access to state favours if another ethnic-clientelist party that they do not support wins.

In the absence of such an evolution towards programmatic party politics, however, the region will continue to be characterised by its weak parties, and this is cause for pessimism in even the most competitive systems in the region, undermining the process of democratic consolidation in which parties play such a critical role.

NOTES

1. See, for instance, Aldrich 1995, Katz 1980, Lijphart 1994, Mair 1997, Sartori 1976.

2. Exceptions include Buijtenhuijs 1994, Kuenzi & Lambright 2001, Kumado 1996, Lanegran 2001, and Randall & Svåsand 2002.

3. That election is usually held to constitute the beginning of Africa's democratisation wave. See Bratton & van de Walle 1997 for a general analysis of democratisation in sub-Saharan Africa.

4. I exclude the North African countries from the analysis and use the terms Africa and sub-Saharan Africa interchangeably.

5. On Benin's electoral politics in the early 1990s, see Noudjenoume 1999. Kuenzi, Lambright & Nishikawa (2002: 9–10) estimate the 'Pedersen Index' of party volatility – defined as the net change in the share of seats won by each party from election to election, and find levels of volatility in sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s that are three times higher than those prevailing in the stable democracies of Western Europe.

6. Including Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nigeria, Seychelles, Tanzania, Togo and Zimbabwe. I have excluded countries in which civil war prevailed during this period, as well as Benin and Madagascar, where defeated incumbents regained power in a second multiparty election, but with a new political party, although it must be recognised that in both cases, the personnel of the new party overlapped considerably with the old.

7. This category includes Cape Verde, CAR, Congo-Brazzaville (until the 1997 civil war), Lesotho, Malawi, Niger (until the 1996 coup), São Tomé, and Zambia. Note that successor parties to the old single party effectively regained majorities in Benin and Madagascar, while in Mali a successor party to the UDPM, dissolved following the 1991 military coup, emerged in the 1990s as the dominant opposition to ADEMA.

8. Only parliamentary parties, or those parties winning at least one seat in the legislature, are examined.

9. The standard formula developed by Laakso & Taagepera (Lijphart 1994: 120) for the effective number of parties was used. The measure is used by political scientists because it takes into account the relative weight of different parties. Thus, a country with three parties of equal size would be defined as having three parties, while one with two big parties and one small one would be viewed as having less than three 'effective' parties. The formula, which is based on each party's share of the seats, is: $N_s = 1/\Sigma(s_i^2)$, where s is the share of seats won by party i.

10. See, for instance, Lindberg 2001 and Nugent 2001 on Ghana; Mayrargue 2002 on Benin; Di Lorenzo & Sborgi 2001 on Niger; Burnell 2001 on Zambia; Kaspin 1995 on Malawi; or Buijtenhuijs 1994 on Chad.

11. A number of studies explore these issues. See Reynolds 1999 and Sisk & Reynolds 1998 for two recent examples.

12. I am referring of course to Tom Stoppard's post-modern farce, 'Rosencranz and Guildenstern are Dead'.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X03004269 Published online by Cambridge University Press

APPENDIX

Legislative elections in sub-Saharan Africa, 1989–2000

Country	Date of election	Number of competing	Number of parties winning seats	% of seats won by winning party	% of votes won by winning party	Effective number of parties	Free and fair?
Angola	29.09.1992	19	12	58·6	53·7	2·242	2
Benin	17.02.1992	23	16	18·8	18·9	8·761	2
Benin	28.03.1995	31	18	25·3	14·6	6·699	2
Benin	30.03.1999	28	16	32·5	22·7	5·930	2
Botswana	15.10.1994	9	2	67·5	54·7	1·782	2
Botswana	24.10.1999	4	3	82·5	54·2	1·420	2
Burkina	24.05.1992	27	10	72·9	48·5	1·821	0
Burkina	11.05.1997	12	4	91·0	68·6	1·202	0
Burundi	29.06.1993	6	2	80·2	72·55	1·465	2
Cameroon	31.03.1993	6	4	48·9	45·5	2·544	0
Cameroon	18.05.1997	13	7	60·6	48·0	2·323	0
Capeverde	1.01.1991	2	2	70·9	66·4	1·703	2
Capeverde	17.12.1995	5	3	69·4	61·3	1·763	2
CAR	22.08.1993	12	9	40·0	–	4·767	1
CAR	13.12.1998	–	11	43·1	–	4·231	2
Chad	23.02.1997	44	10	50·4	40·0	3·078	1
Comoros	22.11.1992	21	14	16·7	10·4	16·012	1
Comoros	20.12.1993	9	9	66·7	–	2·159	0
Comoros	1.12.1996	–	3	90·7	–	1·208	0
Congo	26.07.1992	20	19	31·2	–	5·529	2
Congo	2.05.1993	–	–	–	–	4·628	1
C. d'Ivoire	25.11.1990	7	3	93·1	71·7	1·150	1
C. d'Ivoire	26.11.1995	6	3	85·1	64·9	1·360	0
C. d'Ivoire	10.12.2000	6	6	42·7		2·800	0
Djibouti	18.12.1992	2	1	100·0	74·6	1·000	0
Djibouti	19.12.1997	4	1	100·0	78·6	1·000	0
Eq. Guinea	21.11.1993	7	4	85·0	69·8	1·366	0

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Country	Date of election	Number of competing	Number of parties winning seats	% of seats won by winning party	% of votes won by winning party	Effective number of parties	Free and fair?
Eq. Guinea	7.03.1999	3	3	93·8	85·5	1·130	0
Ethiopia	5.06.1994	–	–	88·5	–	–	2
Ethiopia	28.06.1995	44	27	32·2	–	–	2
Ethiopia	14.08.2000	36	26	90·0		–	1
Gabon	16.09.1990	36	8	52·5	–	3·002	0
Gabon	15.12.1996	–	13	70·0	–	1·949	0
Gambia	29.04.1992	–	3	69·4	58·1	1·944	2
Gambia	2.01.1997	4	4	77·3	52·2	1·600	0
Ghana	29.12.1992	3	3	94·5	77·5	1·118	1
Ghana	7.12.1996	8	4	66·5	53·0	1·877	2
Ghana	7.12.2000		4	45·0	50·0	2·170	2
Guinea	11.06.1995	11	9	62·2	53·5	2·340	0
Guinea Bis	3.07.1994	9	5	62·0	46·4	2·280	1
Guinea Bis	28.11.1999		8	37·0		3·660	1
Kenya	29.12.1992	8	7	53·2	–	2·838	0
Kenya	29.12.1997	–	10	51·4	–	3·118	0
Lesotho	28.03.1993	12	1	100·0	74·8	1·000	2
Lesotho	23.05.1998	13	2	97·5	–	1·052	2
Liberia	19.07.1997	11	4	76·5	75·3	1·658	2
Madagascar	2.06.1993	29	23	34·1	–	6·526	2
Madagascar	17.05.1998	10	9	42·0	–	4·877	2
Malawi	17.05.1994	8	3	48·0	46·4	2·692	2
Malawi	15.06.1999		4	51·0	47·3	2·680	0
Mali	8.03.1992	13	10	65·5	48·4	2·240	2
Mali	30.04.1997	12	8	87·1	75·3	1·311	1
Mauritania	3.03.1992	9	3	84·8	67·7	1·387	0
Mauritania	11.10.1996	14	3	88·6	67·6	1·271	0
Mauritius	15.09.1992	16	5	45·5	55·4	2·606	2
Mauritius	20.12.1995	24	5	90·9	65·2	2·343	2
Mauritius	11.10.2000	43	5	77·0	51·7	2·597	2

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X03004269 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Mozamb.	27.10.1994	14	3	51·6	44·3	2·136	2
Mozamb.	3.12.1999	12	2	48·5	53·2	1·990	2
Namibia	11.01.1989	12	7	56·9	57·3	–	2
Namibia	7.12.1994	8	5	73·6	73·9	1·706	2
Namibia	30.11.1999		5	76·4	76·1	1·660	1
Niger	14.02.1993	9	9	34·9	30·7	4·230	2
Niger	12.01.1995	9	9	34·9	–	4·154	2
Niger	23.11.1996	–	7	71·1	–	1·917	0
Niger	24.11.1999		5	45·8		3·330	1
Nigeria	4.07.1992	2	2	53·0	50·6	2·004	0
Nigeria	7.03.1999		3	57·0	57·1	1·170	1
Sao Tome	20.01.1991	4	3	60·0	54·4	2·305	1
Sao Tome	19.02.1994	5	3	49·0	42·5	2·702	2
Sao Tome	8.11.1998	–	3	56·4	–	2·358	2
Senegal	9.05.1993	9	6	70·0	56·6	1·844	1
Senegal	24.05.1998	17	11	66·4	50·2	2·103	1
Seychelles	23.07.1993	5	3	81·8	56·6	1·443	2
Seychelles	20.03.1998	5	3	88·2	61·7	1·271	2
S. Leone	27.02.1996	17	6	39·7	35·9	3·819	2
S. Africa	26.04.1994	19	7	63·0	62·65	2·214	2
S. Africa	2.06.1999		13	66·5	66·4	2·150	2
Tanzania	19.11.1995	12	5	79·6	59·2	1·539	0
Tanzania	29.10.2000		5	90·1		1·210	0
Togo	6.02.1994	25	5	43·2	–	2·671	0
Togo	21.03.1999		1	97·5		1·050	0
Zambia	31.10.1991	6	2	83·3	74·1	1·385	2
Zambia	18.11.1996	9	4	87·3	61·0	1·309	2
Zimbabwe	28.03.1990	5	2	97·5	80·5	1·052	1
Zimbabwe	9.04.1995	7	2	98·3	81·4	1·035	1
Zimbabwe	25.06.2000		2	61·3	48·6	1·920	0

Sources: *Journal of Democracy* (various issues), *Africa South of the Sahara* (*Europa Guide*, various years), Nohlens *et al.* 2000, author's files.
Coding: Free and Fair? 0 = no; 1 = partly; 2 = yes.