Political Parties[1] and Multi-party Elections in Southern Africa

by Wole Olaleye
email: **wole@eisa.org.za**

There is a general agreement among political analysts that democratic consolidation would be impossible without the effective participation of political parties. Political parties are the sole means of translating electoral outcomes into effective action, and they are a major component in legitimizing control of political office. The literature on new democracies emphasizes the organisational and structural obstacles faced by political parties in the process of democratic consolidation. Organisationally, political parties in Southern Africa are characterized by the following: a lack of capacity to mobilize and organize; clear and innovative policy programs; under-representation of women and minority groups. Structurally, political parties often face disempowering electoral systems and constitutional arrangements which work against the development of vibrant and stable multi-party electoral democracy. These obstacles are often a creation of design and specific founding political environment. Many governing political parties in Southern Africa are strongly influenced by histories of imperialism and colonialism, which often defines political parties as national movements or congresses protesting colonial rule. Liberation/nationalist parties are often tightly organized, sometimes lack coherent programs, and concentrate on the contestation of elections. This brief explores the organisational arrangements of political parties, and how this factor affects the contribution of political parties to democratic consolidation through multi-party electoral democracy in Southern Africa.

Clapham (1993)[3] surveying the prospect of democratic consolidation in sub-Saharan Africa concluded that the capacity to develop a party that is both integrative between communities and competitive between different political parties is the key to democratic consolidation. Mainwaring and Scully (1995)[4] in a study based on 12 Latin America states further conclude that high level of party system institutionalization fosters democratic consolidation. Similarly Dix (1992)[5] argues that in assessing the prospect for democratic survival and consolidation that much depends on political parties. How can one define the position in Southern Africa?

Organisationally, most political parties in Southern Africa have caucus/branches/cells/militia widely spread across its states. These are composed of individual members who pay subscriptions (either monthly or annually), trade unions, co-

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[1] Political parties generally refer to organisations that mobilize voters on behalf of a common set of interests or ideologies. Parties play an important role in political life by setting policy agendas, nominating candidates for public office, monitoring the work of elected representatives and organizing and directing human and material resources toward a common goal.

[3] C. Clapham, "Democratization in Africa: Obstacles and Prospects', *Third World Quarterly*, vo1 4, no 3

[4] S. Mainwaring,. and T.R. Scully, **Building Democratic Institutions: Party System in Latin America**, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995.

[5] R.H. Dix, 'Democratization and Institutionalisation of Latin American Political Parties', **Comparative Political Studies**. vol 24, 1992.

operatives, professional groups, students bodies, civil society organisation representing specific interest (women, disable, indigenous/ethnic and landless groups). The wide spread of political parties applies mainly to political parties that grew out of nationalist or liberation movement[6]. Newly founded political parties are often characterized by weak organisation, low levels of institutionalization, and inadequate links to the society that they profess to represent, especially in the rural communities. Also depending on which political parties controls or has the majority of political support in a particular locality, such areas are often declared as a "no-go area" for other political parties. These phenomena are closely related to the political party finance[7] and campaign regulations that exist in many countries in Southern Africa. The countries that provide state funding for political parties in the region include: Malawi, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. Botswana, Lesotho and Zambia do not provide political party funding. Most importantly, those countries that provide party funding limit it to election campaign activities, while others extend funding beyond elections activities. The lack of, and the frequency of change to party financing and campaign regulations highlight one of the critical obstacles to opposition parties in the region. Incumbent parties are those mostly advantaged, using state resources for party financing. In all the general elections conducted in the region, there is no country where the ruling parties have not been accused of corruption, use and abuse of state resources for electioneering. The financing and campaign regulation of political parties is both a necessity and a problem in consolidating multi-party electoral democracy within the region.

Although political parties profess to be democratic and decentralized in character, the practice in reality is to the contrary. The observable trend among political parities in the region is that of highly hierarchical and centralized organisations where all decisions come from the top downwards and their application is implemented and controlled by the rank and file. Internal party democracy leaves much to be desired - many political parties are little more than personal space for charismatic political godfathers. In South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia, Lesotho and Angola, party members have little or no control over party leadership recruitments, nominations and policy formulations. Although preliminary elections do take place, they take place in an unsustainable political environment, characterized by a great deal of violence, bribery and corruption, electoral fraud and lack of transparency. Top political leadership positions are often not open for political competition. This kind of personality control creates little or no accountability between party representatives and the electorate whom they represent. Representatives' main accountability mechanism is to the party lords, and switching allegiance constitutes an increasing worrying trend in the region. For example,

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[6] For example TANU in Tanzania now called Chama Chamapinduzi (CCM), Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) in Botswana, South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) in Namibia, Frelimo in Mozambique, the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, the MPLA in Angola and the Zimbabwe African national Union (ZANU-PF) in Zimbabwe. In Malawi (Malawi Congress Party - MCP), Zambia (United National Independence Party – UNIP), Botswana (Basutoland Congress Party – BCP) governed for nearly three decades before being defeated in competitive multi-party election.

[7] Narrowly defined as money for electioneering (M. .Pinto-Duschinsky, 'Financing Politics: A Global View', *Journal of Democracy*, vol 13, no 4, 2002) because it is often difficult to distinguish between the campaign cost of political parties and the routine expenses (i.e. cost for maintaining office, conducting policy and other related research, conducting political education, voter registration and other regular party functions) party funding is adequately referred to as political finance.

with the introduction of the new floor-cross legislation in South Africa, many party officials both in the lower and upper houses of legislatures have already switched to different political parties without loosing their parliamentary seats. The extent to which party recruitments and nominations are based on socialization into democratic norms and practices is highly questionable, especially given the lack of internal democratic practice that exists within political parties.

Relating to this issue is that of major groups (i.e. women, youth, gays and lesbians, and the disables) representation and participation within political parties. Women, for example, represent a major group in the process of democratic consolidation through multi-party elections. Scores of political parties seriously lack representation in this regard, given that women constitute the majority of voters and party representatives, yet women remain marginalized from the main arena of political activity (parliament and cabinets).

Table 1 Women Representation in SADC[8] Parliaments

Country	Date of last Parliamentary Election	No of Women in Parliament and %	Ruling Political Party
Angola	1992	34 (15%)	MPLA
Botswana	1999	8 (18%)	BDP
DRC	1993	XX (XX%)	Trans. Govt.
Lesotho	2002	10 (9%)	LCD
Malawi	1999	16 (8%)	UDF
Mauritius	2000	5 (8%)	MMM & MSM
Mozambique	1999	71 (28%)	Frelimo
Namibia	1999	19 (19%)	SWAPO
Seychelles	1998	8 (24%)	SPPP
South Africa	1999	119 (30%)	ANC
Swaziland	1998	7 (7%)	Monarch
Tanzania	2000	45 (16%)	CCM
Zambia	2001	16 (10%)	MMD
Zimbabwe	2000	13 (9%)	ZANU-PF

Source: Own compilation

NB: MPLA: Movement for the Popular Liberation of Angola; **BDP**: Botswana Democratic Party; **LCD**: Lesotho Congress for Democracy; **UDF**: United Democratic Front; **MMM**: Mauritian Militant Movement; **MSM**: Militant Socialist Movement; **FRELIMO**: Front for the Liberation of Mozambique; **SWAPO**: South West Africa People's Organisation; **SPPP**: Seychelles Peoples' Progressive Party; **ANC**: African National Congress; **CCM**: Chama Cha Mapinduzi; **MMD**: Movement for Multi-Party Democracy; **ZANU-PF**: Zimbabwe African National Union Popular Front.

In examining the above table (1), one sees that the representation of women in SADC parliaments stands at a mere 18%, which is nowhere close to the 30% target set by the SADC's Gender and Development Declaration to be reached by 2005. South Africa (30%) and Mozambique (27%) are the only countries in the region to meet the target, which still amount to under-representation of women in legislation. The under-representation of women in elections remains a critical issue on the consolidation agenda.

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[8] Southern Africa Development Community

There is a growing trend across the region among political parties towards a convergence in policies and ideologies. An analysis of the various political party manifestos reveals similarities across major policy issues. The convergence of policies in South Africa between the African Nationalist Congress (ANC) and the Democratic Alliance (DA) is a good illustration of this trend. As result, political parties become less differentiated from each other and competition between political parties is based on ethnic cleavages and personalities, instead of clear distinguishable policy platforms. Election campaigns are motivated around personality issues, claims, and counter claims pertaining to the merits of the individual candidates. Mauritius, apparently the longest multi-party democracy in the region, parties has only the loosest commitments to particular policy positions.[9] In cases where political parties have attempted political campaigns on policy platforms, the result has been undesirable. For example, the National Lima Party (NLP) in Zambia, which campaigned as a defender of rural interests, and was supported by the Zambian Farmers' Union, failed to win one seat in the 1996 general election[10]. What does this say for democratic consolidation? Does it mean that differentiated policy platforms amongst opposition parties have no place within multi-party electoral democracy?

One of the essential components in a healthy multi-party democracy is a strong political opposition that acts as a check on the abuse of power by the ruling party and protector of minorities' rights. In Southern Africa, political opposition has failed in many respects to provide a viable opposition to the ruling political parties. Often due to their own internal weakness, lack of legitimacy, fragmentation within political opposition and the dominance of the ruling party, opposition parties are unable to provide sustainable and effective strict representation and to build a credible coalition able to defeat the dominant party in competitive elections.

Table 2 Legislatures Characterized by Dominant Political Parties

Country	Ruling Political party	Date of last parliamentary election	% of ruling party seats
Angola	MPLA	1994	58
Botswana	BDP	1999	57
Lesotho	LCD	2002	66
Mozambique	Frelimo	1999	53
Namibia	SWAPO	1999	76
Seychelles	SPPP	1998	88
South Africa	ANC	1999	66
Swaziland	Monarch	1998	100
Tanzania	CCM	2000	89.1
Zimbabwe	ZANU-PF	2000	53.0

Source: EISA website (http://www.eisa.org.za) and own compilation

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[9] Barbara Wake Carroll and Terrance Carroll, 'The Consolidation of Democracy in Mauritius', **Democratization**, vol 6, no 1, 1999.
[10] N. Van de Walle and K.S. Butler, 'Political Parties and Party Systems in Africa's Illiberal Democracies', **Cambridge Review of International Affairs**, vol 3, no 1, 1999.

Table 2 represents how dominant political parties feature within different parliaments in the region, and constitute a major threat to democratic consolidation. Lesotho (66%), Namibia (76%), Seychelles (88%), South Africa (66%) and Tanzania (89%) have the most dominant political parties in the legislatures. Dominant parties have often systematically outlawed every attempt by opposition parties to gain equitable and proportional access to political power through various laws in South Africa (Friedman 1999; Southall 2001)[11], Botswana (57%), Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe (53%) and decree (in Swaziland). Amongst the reasons mentioned by Molomo and Somolekae[12] for BDP dominance in Botswana's politics, is that the rule for state funding is heavily skewed towards the ruling party. This disadvantages opposition parties with limited organisational networks to gain the necessary electoral support. In fact, many of the parties that have maintained political dominance were voted to power in elections that have often been described as demonstrating the will of the people to govern. For most part, these parties were often not seamlessly monolithic parties, but the result of calculated and strategic alliances of political groupings, civil society agencies and trade unions. One-party dominance will continue to be a critical challenge for multi-party democracy in the region in years to come. What will happen to democracy when [if] dominant political parties start loosing their grip on power? Will multi-party electoral democracy be eroded when political opposition starts mounting challenges to the hegemony of ruling power? According to Randall and Svasand (2002)[13] one-party dominance is not a contradiction to democratic governance. It is a structural feature of a party system that is not conducive to democratic consolidation, especially where mechanisms for political participation are restricted and democratic norms are weakly institutionalized.

In conclusion, it is the mechanism of participation through effective and active political party competition that will ultimately determine whether or not democracy will be widely accepted by all the pertinent actors as the only viable system in Southern Africa. The normalization of multi-party electoral democracy through behavioural, attitudinal and institutional changes must become a key feature of political party competition. This going necessitates the expansion of citizens access, development of democratic citizenship and culture, broadening of leadership recruitment and training, and the functioning of mature political elites.

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[11] S. Friedman, 'No Easy Stroll to Dominance: Party Dominance, Opposition and Civil Society in South Africa', in H. Giliomee, and C. Simkins, (eds) *The Awkward Embrace: One Party Domination and Democracy*, Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1999; R. Southall, 'Opposition in South Africa: Issues and Problems' in R. Southall (ed), *Opposition and Democracy in South Africa*, Great Britain: Frank Cass, 2001.

[12] Mpho G. Molomo and Gloria Somolekae, *Sustainable Electoral Democracy in Botswana: An Analysis **of** Recent Elections in the SADC Region.* Proceedings from International IDEA Conference, 'Towards Sustainable Democratic Institutions in Southern Africa', Gabarone, 8-10 May 2000.

[13] Randall, V. and L. 2002 'Political Parties and Democratic Consolidation Africa', in **Democratisation**, Vol. 9, Nno. 3, 2002.