

# Africa: Dictatorial and Democratic Electoral Systems since 1946\*

Matt Golder<sup>†</sup>  
Leonard Wantchekon<sup>‡</sup>

August 17, 2004

Forthcoming in:  
Colomer, Josep. ed. 2004. Handbook of Electoral System Design.  
London: Palgrave.

---

\*We would like to thank Michael Nest for his useful comments.

<sup>†</sup>Department of Politics, New York University, 726 Broadway, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10003; E-mail: [mrg217@nyu.edu](mailto:mrg217@nyu.edu), url:[homepages.nyu.edu/~mrg217](http://homepages.nyu.edu/~mrg217)

<sup>‡</sup>Department of Politics, New York University, 726 Broadway, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10003; E-mail: [leonard.wantchekon@nyu.edu](mailto:leonard.wantchekon@nyu.edu)

## 1 Introduction

Elections have been an integral part of African politics since independence (Nohlen, Krennerich & Thibaut 1999, Ellis 2000). There have been 321 legislative and 167 presidential elections in Africa between 1946 (or independence) and 1996. These elections have occurred in both democratic and authoritarian periods. Although elections have been relatively common in Africa, very little scholarly attention has been paid to them. The dearth of electoral studies focused on Africa compared to other regions of the world can partly be explained by the widespread establishment of single-party regimes in the 1960s. It was not until the reemergence of democratic multi-party elections following the third wave of democratization in the 1990s that African electoral studies began to grow (Bratton & van de Walle 1997, Cowen & Laakso 1997, Wiseman 1992, Barkan 1995, Sisk & Reynolds 1998, Manning 2002). This chapter represents an addition to this growing literature by providing an overview of elections and electoral systems in Africa. While focusing primarily on the electoral institutions employed in democratic elections, we also consider the role of elections in authoritarian periods. We describe the particular electoral rules employed, investigate why they were chosen and examine their impact on African party systems.

## 2 An Overview of African Elections

Authoritarian government has dominated the post-war history of independent Africa. In fact, there have only been 189 country-years of democracy in Africa compared to 1823 country-years of dictatorship between 1946 and 2000. Moreover, dictatorships still outstrip the number of democracies in Africa by a considerable margin despite the transitions to democracy that occurred in the early 1990s. Table 1 indicates the number of legislative and presidential elections that have occurred in democratic and authoritarian periods in each African country. It is interesting to note that only Eritrea and Somaliland have failed to experience a legislative or presidential election in the time period considered here. This suggests that elections have played an important role in African politics during both authoritarian and democratic periods.

## Insert Table 1

Much of the recent research on African elections fails to provide a consistent definition of which elections should be considered democratic. In fact, the elections that are treated as democratic often vary from author to author. Clearly, this is problematic if one wants to develop testable and generalizable conclusions regarding African democratic elections. In this paper, a regime is classified as a dictatorship if the chief executive is not elected, the legislature is not elected, there is no more than one party, or there has been no alternation in power (Przeworski et al. 2000). In other words, a regime is democratic if those who govern are selected through contested elections. Countries are coded based on the regime that existed at the end of the given year. This coding of democracy correlates highly with other attempts to classify democracy (Bollen 1990, Coppedge & Reinicke 1990, Gastil 1990, Gurr 1990). The coding results in 47 legislative and 25 presidential elections being classified as democratic. Thus, the vast majority of elections in Africa have occurred under dictatorship.

The number of elections considered democratic here is much lower than that often seen in other studies of African elections. For example, Mozaffar (2001) is not unusual in classifying as many as 91 legislative elections as being democratic between 1946 and 2000. The classification used here omits elections such as those in Botswana that are typically considered democratic. The problem with the elections in Botswana is that the same party has been ruling since independence. Thus, there is some uncertainty as to whether elections are held in Botswana only because the ruling party is certain to win them and whether the ruling party would yield office if it ever lost. Holm (1988) notes that ‘the resulting conflict could well force the BDP [Botswana Democratic Party] to choose between losing in parliamentary elections and abandoning elections as a method of leadership selection. Given the paternalistic attitude of the BDP from President Masire down, the latter choice would not be surprising.’ If there is no alternation in power, regimes are treated as dictatorships. The benefit of our classification of African regimes compared to those used elsewhere is that it is consistent, stated clearly and based entirely on observables rather than subjective judgements.

### 3 Electoral Institutions under Dictatorship

The renewed interest in African elections is obviously related to the transitions to democracy and multi-party systems that occurred in the 1990s. However, it is important to remember that the vast majority of African elections have occurred under authoritarian rule. Thus far, we have accumulated little systematic knowledge concerning the role that elections play under dictatorship. African dictators often held elections, had legislatures and organized political parties. It remains an open research question as to why these seemingly democratic electoral institutions were chosen given that ‘parties do not compete, elections do not select, and legislatures do not decide’ in dictatorships (Gandhi 2004). We do not pretend to provide an answer to this question here. Instead, we provide a brief historical description of the electoral institutions chosen during authoritarian periods and pinpoint some of the implicit explanations that exist in the literature in the hope that other scholars will conduct more detailed theoretical and empirical analyses in this area.

Electoral experience on the part of Africans was largely absent during the colonial period (Wiseman 1990). The few notable exceptions tended to be found in francophone Africa, where the ideology of cultural assimilation occasionally permitted African electoral participation. For example, French colonial settlements in four Senegalese communes were allowed to vote for a deputy in the French National Assembly after 1848 (Ellis 2000, Cowen & Laakso 1997). However, it was only in the final years of colonialism following World War II that African electoral participation became more widespread as the French and British attempted to mollify emerging nationalist movements (Ellis 2000, Nohlen, Krennerich & Thibaut 1999). The British began establishing fledgling parliamentary systems that would eventually form the basis for independence. The French ordinances of 1945 established electoral colleges by which Africans could elect representatives to the Constituent Assembly so as to participate in the writing of the Fourth Republic’s constitution. This was followed by the introduction of universal suffrage and a high degree of internal autonomy in francophone Africa in the Loi Cadre of 1956. The French ultimately hoped to maintain their influence in Africa by establishing a French dominated federal community. The first African elections based on universal suffrage and unrestricted party formation were held in the late 1950s just before the formal date of independence for most countries (Cowen & Laakso 1997). Similar electoral reforms to those in-

stituted by the French and British occurred much later in the Belgian and Portuguese colonies. It is clear to see that the colonists only brought democracy to Africa as they left (Adejumobi 2000).

Multiple parties competed in the early elections following independence and voters often had a considerable range of choices. For example, Wiseman (1990) states that there were 130 different parties in Somalia at one stage following decolonization in 1960. However, these multi-party systems did not last long and were soon replaced by single-party rule in the 1960s. In countries such as Togo, Benin, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Zambia, Tanzania, Angola and Sudan, one party rule was introduced *de jure*. Tanzania and Kenya both used acts of parliament to make opposition parties illegal. In other African states, a *de facto* one party system emerged after smaller parties dissolved voluntarily and their leaders and voters became absorbed into the ruling parties (Wanyande 2000, Adejumobi 2000). This was the case in the Gambia, Botswana, Mauritius, Zimbabwe and Senegal. Many African dictators continued to hold periodic elections throughout these authoritarian periods. Legislatures were often retained and parliamentary systems became increasingly presidential in nature. A handful of countries did temporarily return to multi-party politics (Ghana 1969, 1979, Nigeria 1979, 1983, Burkina Faso 1970, 1978, Uganda 1980, Central African Republic 1981, and Sudan 1986). However, multi-party systems did not reemerge with any real frequency in Africa until the 1990s.

African dictators attempted to justify the shift towards single-party rule in several ways. For example, some claimed that single-party systems were more suitable for the nation building projects that became necessary following decolonization; multi-party politics would only lead to ethnic conflict and division (Adejumobi 2000). Others stated that single-party rule was required to help economic development. This notion was supported at the time by scholars who thought that dictatorships were necessary to generate development and that 'political participation must be held down, at least temporarily, in order to promote economic development' (Huntington & Nelson 1976, Galenson 1959, De Schweinitz 1959). Still others simply claimed that multi-party politics was foreign to Africa and was an unnatural imposition by the former colonial powers (Hanna 1964). In many cases, these justifications simply hide the obvious fact that ruling elites and dictators wanted to retain power and saw multi-party elections as too risky.

The question is why these dictators chose to have a single party, hold elec-

tions, and maintain legislatures at all; they could have simply relied on the use of force. After all, other dictators did eschew these institutions. For example, Sultan Sa'id ibn Taymur al Sa'id ruled Oman for 38 years without any parties or legislatures (Gandhi & Przeworski 2001). A scholarly consensus on the answer to this question has not yet emerged. What is clear is that dictators saw elections as a tool to control the population. Milton Obote, a former Ugandan president, clearly made this point when he stated that elections are a way of controlling the people rather than being a means through which they could control him (Cohen 1983). Wanyande (2000) is correct in stating that single-party elections are meaningless as measures of popularity and legitimacy. Instead, it is more useful to see elections in African dictatorships as a means for recruiting the political elite or as ceremonial performances that help enforce citizen obedience, induce complicity, and socialize the electorate (Chazan 1979, Cliffe 1967). The maintenance of legislatures allows outsiders to achieve policy compromises and share the privileges of power, while parties act as a stable system of patronage to reward their own clientele and coopt political opponents (Nohlen, Krennerich & Thibaut 1999, Gandhi & Przeworski 2001). While these claims about the role of electoral institutions under dictatorship are often case-specific and anecdotal, they generate the testable hypothesis that dictatorial survival should be positively related to the presence of these institutions. Gandhi (2004) uses a duration model to examine the impact of elections, parties and legislatures on the survival of 512 dictators between 1946 and 1996 in 138 countries worldwide. She finds that the ideal institutional arrangement for dictatorial survival is to have a single party with periodic elections; having a legislature also helps. It seems that in many cases, African dictators chose the ideal institutional arrangement for maintaining their power.

The introduction of one-party rule has had several important consequences for the development of African politics. The most obvious is that there was little alternation among parties and government during the authoritarian period.<sup>1</sup> In fact, there was no alternation in national government in Africa until the electoral victory of the Mauritian socialists in 1982 and 1983. The lack of real choice often led to low electoral participation and turnout in elections during this period (Adejumobi 2000, Cohen 1983). More significantly, the absence of formal competition was often used to justify military coups. For example, the 1966 army coup in Ghana was justified on the grounds that the army and police had used the only means available for removing a dictator; only undemocratic methods could be used in the pursuit of the ultimate goal of democracy.

Single-party rule has also had much longer lasting consequences as well. Many ruling parties have been able to maintain their control on power despite the reemergence of multi-party systems in the 1990s. Opposition parties have often been too weak and fractionalized from decades of suppression and intimidation to be electorally competitive. In fact, ruling parties have continued to alter electoral rules to maintain their hold on power (Adejumobi 2000). This helps to explain why there were opposition boycotts of some sort in 11 of the 15 founding elections that occurred between 1995 and 1997 (Bratton 1998). Ruling parties have also been able to use state resources and exploit the patronage networks that had been developed to coopt opposition groups during the period of single-party rule. This is not to say that there has been no alternation in power following the emergence of multi-party elections. After all, regime change did follow the founding elections in Cape Verde, Sao Tomé and Príncipe, Benin, Zambia, Mali, Congo (Brazzaville), Madagascar, Niger, Lesotho, Burundi, Central African Republic, South Africa and Sierra Leone. However, second elections have not been marked by leadership alternation and ruling parties have been able to retain and consolidate their grip on power (Bratton 1998, Ellis 2000). In fact, clear presidential turnover occurred in only two cases (Benin 1996, Madagascar 1997). In both cases, members of the elite in the former dictatorship were returned to power. Former ruling parties continue to enjoy legislative majorities in most of sub-Saharan Africa (Manning 2002). This is quite intriguing and leads some to wonder whether in many cases multi-party elections are simply another form of manipulation by political elites foisted upon reluctant incumbent regimes by donor governments and financial institutions (Cowen & Laakso 1997, Adejumobi 2000). More systematic research is required to fully understand why some former dictatorial elites have been able to return to power in Africa (and Eastern Europe).

## 4 Electoral Institutions under Democracy

Having examined the electoral institutions employed under dictatorship, we now turn to the choice and impact of electoral systems used for the 47 legislative and 25 presidential elections that took place during democratic periods in Africa. These elections occurred in just 20 African countries (See Table 1).

## 4.1 Choice of Electoral Institutions

One feature that distinguishes democratic electoral systems is whether the regime is presidential or parliamentary. Several different criteria have been proposed for classifying these regimes (Shugart & Carey 1992, Lijphart 1992). We follow a fairly minimalist definition, where a presidential regime is one in which the government serves at the pleasure of the elected president. The president may be directly or indirectly elected; the important feature is that the president selects and determines the survival of the government. A parliamentary system is one in which the government serves so long as it maintains the confidence of the legislature. A system in which the government must respond both to the legislative assembly and to an elected president is classified as mixed. Typically, these mixed systems are characterized by a president who is elected for a fixed term with some executive powers and a government that serves at the discretion of the legislature. This classification scheme follows the recommendations of Przeworski et al. (2000).

Insert Table 2

Table 2 illustrates the type of regime employed by African countries during democratic periods by colonial background. The regime adopted by African countries on independence was primarily parliamentary in former British colonies and presidential or mixed in the colonies of other countries. Many of the former French colonies have adopted the mixed system that has characterized the French Fifth Republic since 1958. The only country to have a democratic parliamentary regime that was not a former British colony is Cape Verde. As Table 2 illustrates, many of the parliamentary regimes in anglophone countries became presidential during the authoritarian period of single-party rule. By the 1990s, presidential regimes had come to dominate African democracies (Southall 1999, Wanyande 2000); the only democratic African countries that were parliamentary as of 2000 were Mauritius and Cape Verde. The predominance of presidentialism raises concerns about the survivability of Africa's democratic regimes given the strong empirical evidence that parliamentary systems survive longer than presidential ones (Cheibub 2002, Mainwaring 1993, Linz 1990, Stepan & Skach 1993). The fact that the longest surviving democracy in Africa (Mauritius) is parliamentary may perhaps be no coincidence. Although Botswana is not considered a democracy in this analysis, it is interesting to note that it too has retained a



parliamentary regime and been able to maintain a multi-party system since independence (Southall 1999).

The vast majority of African presidents are elected using absolute majority rule. In other words, a candidate must win over 50% of the popular vote to become president. If no candidate overcomes this threshold, then there is a runoff between the two candidates who received the most votes in the first round. In many cases, a second round has not been necessary with one candidate winning an overwhelming majority. A qualified majority system was used in the 1996 presidential elections in Sierra Leone. In these elections a candidate had to win 55% of the vote in order to be elected in the first round (Nohlen, Krennerich & Thibaut 1999). The only democratic presidential elections that employed plurality rule between 1946 and 2000 occurred in the Congo (1961), Malawi (1994, 1999), Nigeria (1979, 1999) and Zambia (1996). Most states that had used plurality rule to elect presidents during the authoritarian period adopted absolute majority rule following their transition to democracy. Only Zambia has actually switched from using an absolute majority requirement (in 1991) to using plurality rule (in 1996).

Having focused on presidential elections, we now examine the electoral institutions that characterize the democratic legislative elections in Africa. Traditionally, legislative elections have been distinguished by whether they use majoritarian or proportional electoral systems (Duverger 1954, Taagepera & Shugart 1989, Lijphart 1998). The problematic nature of this simple dichotomy has become increasingly clear over time with the emergence of numerous countries using more complex electoral systems that employ multiple tiers and/or a combination of electoral formulas (Massicotte & Blais 1999, Shugart & Wattenberg 2001). We classify legislative electoral systems into three main types: majoritarian, proportional, and mixed. Majoritarian and proportional systems employ a single electoral formula in one or more electoral tiers. A mixed system combines a majoritarian and proportional formula. Table 3 illustrates the electoral system used in democratic legislative elections in Africa by former colony.

Insert Table 3

It is clear that the particular electoral system adopted by each country is heavily influenced by its former colonial ruler. For example, all of the majoritarian systems that employed plurality rule are former British colonies

except for the Congo in 1963. Mauritius is somewhat unusual for a British colony since it employs plurality rule in multi-member districts and allocates up to eight ‘best-loser’ seats in order to ensure a fair representation for each community. The democratic elections in Comoros, the Central African Republic and Mali all employed the absolute majority runoff formula used in Fifth Republic France. The electoral system in Mali differed slightly from that in France since it used multi-member districts. The former colonies of Portugal and Italy introduced proportional systems. Cape Verde and Sao Tomé and Príncipe both adopted the d’Hondt quota that was being used in the Portuguese metropole. All of the other proportional systems in Africa employ the Hare quota except for South Africa, which allocates 200 seats using the STV-Droop quota at the national level and 200 seats using the same formula in nine regional constituencies. Two African countries have used mixed systems that combine majoritarian and proportional electoral formulas. Madagascar allocated 82 seats by plurality rule and a further 78 by the Hare quota in 1998. Niger employed plurality rule to allocate eight seats and the Hare quota to distribute 75 additional seats in 1993 and 1995.

Why did African countries choose the electoral institutions that they did? Clearly, the answer relates to the colonial heritage of each country. However, this answer is only somewhat informative. After all, electoral rules typically represent negotiated settlements between conflicting parties over institutional design (Kaminski 1999).<sup>2</sup> Mozaffar (1998) argues that anglophone countries employed plurality rule for the multi-party elections of the 1990s because of the institutional incentive structure that had developed under colonial rule and that continued to exist during the authoritarian period of single-party rule. The British had been relatively tolerant to the formation of autonomous associational life compared to other colonial powers and this led to the creation of localized associations dealing with agriculture, welfare and industry. This, combined with the introduction of plurality rule elections at independence, encouraged the elites to develop strong links with the constituencies based on patronage and pork-barrel servicing. Plurality rule was maintained following the reintroduction of multi-party elections in the 1990s because authoritarian incumbents and opposition groups expected to be able to retain their respective local power bases. Mozaffar claims that electoral institutions were different in the former French colonies because associational life had typically been organized into state-sponsored peak associations. This organization structure meant that there was little incentive for elites to develop strong constituency ties. The inclusion of these associations in choosing the new electoral institutions in the 1990s ‘led to a

strategic convergence on proportional representation.’ It is important to note, though, that former French colonies such as the Central African Republic, Comoros, Mali and Congo retained majoritarian electoral systems.

The conclusion that electoral systems result from strategic negotiations between conflicting parties can most clearly be seen in those countries where democratic multi-party elections emerged following civil war or unrest.<sup>3</sup> For example, groups with conflicting interests in Namibia and South Africa were forced to make compromises during constitutional negotiations in order to achieve transitions to democracy. Both countries eventually introduced proportional electoral institutions. Consider the South African case. The National Party that held economic and political power recognized that it did not have a realistic hope of governing under a majoritarian system due to the presence of a permanent black majority. As a result, it sought a power-sharing formula during the negotiations prior to the first democratic election in 1994. In particular, it wanted to replace the current plurality rule electoral system with a proportional one that would guarantee representation to the white, colored and Indian minorities that it hoped to represent (Southall 1999). In contrast, the ANC was committed to majoritarian rule through a one-person, one-vote electoral system in an attempt to entrench the power of the majority. In order to ease the transition to democracy, both sides were ultimately forced to compromise. The National Party accepted that it would not have a veto in the post-election cabinet and scrapped its insistence that an upper house with veto power be mandated by the constitution. In return, the ANC agreed that the National Party would be part of the government for five years, that cabinet decisions would be made in the spirit of consensus, that 60% of the Parliament would be needed to approve the final constitution, and that cabinet seats would be guaranteed to minority parties that won more than 5% of the seats in the lower house (Wood 2000). Most importantly, the ANC agreed to a proportional representation electoral system.<sup>4</sup>

Table 3 suggests that electoral systems chosen by African leaders have been relatively stable. Majoritarian systems employing plurality rule have been maintained in most of anglophone Africa. Only Sierra Leone, Namibia and South Africa have introduced proportional formulas. There has been little experimentation with alternative electoral systems in other regions of Africa as well. In fact, electoral system reform has been on the table in very few African countries (Mali, Benin and South Africa). This is somewhat surprising if one compares African democracies to those in Eastern Europe.

Although the third wave of democracy swept across both regions at roughly the same time, East European elites have consistently and frequently experimented with their electoral systems (Golder forthcoming, Kaminski 2002*a*). This might suggest that African democracies have somehow managed to reach an equilibrium in multi-party competition (Kaminski 2002*b*).

However, it is important to remember that some authoritarian elites that failed to achieve satisfactory results at the polls simply ignored the election results. For example, the military nullified the Nigerian presidential elections of 1993. Losing parties also failed to accept the results of the elections in Angola (1992), Burundi (1993) and Lesotho (1997). In Algeria, the military interrupted the electoral process prior to the second round of the 1991 elections when it appeared that the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was going to win an overall majority. These examples suggest that many African countries failed to reach an equilibrium in multi-party competition. It may be the case that Table 3 gives a false sense of stability in that it excludes precisely those cases where the losers were unwilling to abide by the electorate's decision.

It may also be premature to suggest that a long-term equilibrium has been successfully achieved in those countries where the losers have accepted the election results. To accept the electoral returns suggests that losing parties prefer the current institutional arrangements to open opposition and attempting to overthrow the government by extra-constitutional methods (Przeworski 1991). However, it is unclear whether this situation will last in all of these countries. The specific combination of ethnically-based parties with plurality rule and geographically-located ethnic groups that characterizes certain African countries has generated situations in which losing parties may have little or no chance of ever holding executive power. Winning parties or alliances have been elected to power with overwhelming legislative majorities in these circumstances and the number of competitive districts is almost non-existent in certain countries (Sisk & Reynolds 1998). For example, Frederick Chiluba's Movement for Multiparty Democracy won 125 of the 150 parliamentary seats in the Zambian elections of 1991. In effect, several African political systems have become *de facto* one-party states with opposition parties 'frozen' in permanent opposition. If the costs to rebellion ever decrease or the benefits from holding office increase, it may well become preferable for these parties to rebel rather than fight a futile battle on the electoral front.

## 4.2 Impact of Electoral Institutions

This section briefly examines the impact of electoral institutions on African party systems. In particular, it investigates their impact on the number of parties in a given country. While there is an extensive empirical literature analyzing the link between various aspects of electoral systems and the number of parties, this research has focused almost exclusively on Western Europe or OECD countries (Sartori 1976, Taagepera & Shugart 1989, Lijphart 1998). Little systematic analysis has been conducted on the impact of electoral institutions on the number of parties in the African context.<sup>5</sup> This is important since there is other empirical research to suggest that the number of parties has a significant impact on stability (Mainwaring 1993), political violence (Powell 1982), and party system extremism (Cox 1990).

The literature that focuses on electoral institutions suggests that greater electoral system permissiveness should be associated with a larger number of parties. This is because voters have less incentive to vote strategically when electoral systems are permissive. Equally, political elites have less incentive to withdraw in favor of better placed parties (Duverger 1954, Cox 1997). Thus, disproportional systems are likely to be associated with few parties and proportional systems with many. The proportionality of an electoral system is typically measured in terms of its district magnitude (the number of seats allocated in a constituency). Table 4 indicates the average effective number of electoral and legislative parties by average district magnitude.<sup>6</sup> Empirical research in other regions of the world suggest that disproportionality also seems to vary systematically across electoral formulas. For example, it appears to decrease as one moves from plurality rule to absolute majority rule to the d'Hondt quota to the Hare quota. Table 5 indicates how the effective number of electoral and legislative parties varies with these electoral formulas. In each of the tables, theory would lead one to expect that the number of parties should increase as one moves from the left-most column to the right-most column.

Insert Tables 4 and 5

It is fairly clear that there is no monotonic increase in the number of electoral and legislative parties as district magnitude increases. Similarly, the number of parties does not increase as the electoral formula becomes more

permissive. Thus, it seems that electoral institutions do not (yet) have the same impact on the number of parties in Africa as they do in other regions of the world.

There are at least two explanations for this result. Each explanation has contrasting implications for the distinctiveness of African party systems. It may simply be the case that there has been insufficient time for the strategic incentives generated by electoral institutions to be fully felt. After all, there is only a handful of countries that have held more than two consecutive elections. The fact that political parties and voters have little experience with electoral politics serves to weaken the incentive structure of the electoral system. Voters can only act strategically when they know who the trailing parties are and when they have public information about the preferences and intentions of other voters (Cox 1997). This is unlikely to be the case in new democracies since voters have no past electoral performance by which to judge the electoral viability of particular candidates. Moreover, opinion polls are often inherently uncertain and unstable in such an environment. This uncertainty may explain why in some African countries so many opposition parties put up candidates in the founding elections. The point is that this uncertainty should decline as the number of elections increases. This should lead to a ‘shake-down’ process in the party system by which voters desert parties that are not electorally viable and party elites begin to better coordinate their electoral strategies. Thus, one should expect to see the smaller African parties disappear as they are absorbed by larger parties or merge to form more electorally attractive organizations. This line of reasoning suggests that the strategic incentives created by electoral institutions will be more fully felt over time and that African party systems will eventually come to resemble those in other regions of the world. This is the same process that seems to be occurring in the new democracies of Eastern Europe.

The second explanation suggests that electoral institutions fail to have an effect on the number of parties because African party systems are rarely nationalized.<sup>7</sup> Electoral institutions primarily create incentives for strategic behavior at the district level (Cox 1997, Cox 1999). Thus, one would expect to see few parties in a single-member district; the number of parties should be higher in constituencies with larger district magnitudes. One would only expect to see this empirical prediction at the national level if the party system was nationalized (Chhibber & Kollman 1998). Thus, the empirical evidence linking electoral system permissiveness to the number of parties in

West European and OECD countries implicitly indicates that these particular party systems are nationalized. In contrast, many African parties have regional fiefdoms in which the party wins almost all of the seats. Consider the elections of 1994 in Malawi where single-member districts and plurality rule were employed. The three main political parties were overwhelmingly dominant in their core regions and exceedingly weak in the remaining two. The Alliance for Democracy won every seat in the northern region, the Malawi Congress Party won 75% of the seats in the central region, and the United Democratic Front won 95% of the votes in the southern region (Reynolds 1995*b*). Although there was almost exactly one electorally viable party in each district, there appears to be three national parties once these districts are aggregated up to the national level. This example helps to explain why it is difficult to evaluate the impact of electoral institutions by focusing solely on the number of African parties at the national level. The fact that political parties are typically based on ethnic groups that are often geographically-concentrated helps to explain why many African party systems are not nationalized. These party systems are unlikely to become nationalized until ethnic mobilization stops being the most stable source of material benefit and security for most voters (Cohen 1983). This explanation suggests that African party politics may well remain distinct compared to other regions of the world.

## 5 Conclusion

Elections in Africa have evolved considerably from the colonial period when only European settlers in a few countries were able to participate. The limited electoral opportunities for natives that had been introduced by the colonial powers in an attempt to undermine and co-opt nationalist movements between 1946 and 1957 were eventually expanded to include multi-party elections with universal suffrage in the independence years (1957-65). However, the democratic institutions that were introduced after independence soon broke down under the combined weight of regional and ethnic conflict, military coups and the increased political influence of the former Communist bloc. Single-party regimes became the norm across Africa and elections resulted in a concentration of political power and limited political representation. Elections during this period essentially served as a mechanism for co-opting political rivals and endowing authoritarian regimes with a public

sense of legitimacy (Collier 1982). It was only with the end of the Cold War and the emergence of domestic protest movements that multi-party democracy was restored in several Africa countries in the 1990s. The resurgence of democracy in francophone Africa can also be traced to the Baule summit in 1989. It was here that the Mitterrand government switched from a policy of intervention in African internal politics to one of disengagement.

While African electoral systems appear to be greatly influenced by colonial legacies, it would be wrong to underestimate the extent of strategic negotiation that goes on between political elites when determining electoral system choice. This is most obviously the case in countries that have experienced civil war, internal unrest or rising ethnic tensions. The uncertainty generated by the rapid return to multi-party elections in the 1990s has led to a high degree of political fragmentation in many countries. This uncertainty, along with the need to build bases of electoral support quickly, has typically resulted in a strategy of ethnic mobilization (Posner 1999). The combination of ethnic mobilization and geographically concentrated ethnic groups has often led to the emergence of regional parties. This development is encouraged in those countries that have adopted plurality rule electoral systems. The fact that electoral institutions have often created incentives to place ethnic identity at the center of African politics is clearly significant. This is because there is good reason to believe that ethnic politics lies at the heart of Africa's growth tragedy (Easterly & Levine 1997).



Table 1: Legislative and Presidential Elections in Africa  
(Democratic Elections 1946-2000; Dictatorial Elections 1946-1996)

Country	Democratic Periods	Democratic Elections		Dictatorial Elections	
		Legislative	Presidential	Legislative	Presidential
Algeria	Never	0	0	6	6
Angola	Never	0	0	3	1
Benin	1991-2000	3	2	5	3
Botswana	Never	0	0	6	0
Burkina Faso	Never	0	0	4	3
Burundi	Never	0	0	3	2
Cameroon	Never	0	0	8	6
Cape Verde	1991-2000	2	2	3	0
CAR	1993-2000	2	2	3	2
Chad	Never	0	0	3	1
Comoros	1990-1994	2	1	5	3
Congo	1960-1962	3	2	4	0
	1992-1996				
Djibouti	Never	0	0	4	2
Egypt	Never	0	0	13	8
Equat. Guinea	Never	0	0	6	4
Eritrea	Never	0	0	0	0
Ethiopia	Never	0	0	6	0
Ethiopia2	Never	0	0	1	0
Gabon	Never	0	0	9	4
Gambia	Never	0	0	6	4
Ghana	1970-1971	1	1	4	3
	1979-1980				
Guinea	Never	0	0	6	4
Guinea-Bissau	Never	0	0	4	1
Ivory Coast	Never	0	0	7	8
Kenya	Never	0	0	7	6
Lesotho	Never	0	0	2	0
Liberia	Never	0	0	9	8
Libya	Never	0	0	5	0
Madagascar	1993-2000	2	1	8	7
Malawi	1994-2000	2	2	7	0
Mali	1992-2000	2	2	5	2
Mauritania	Never	0	0	5	3
Mauritius	1968-2000	7	0	0	0
Morocco	Never	0	0	5	0
Mozambique	Never	0	0	4	1
Namibia	1990-2000	2	2	0	0
Niger	1993-1995	2	1	6	4
Nigeria	1960-1965	3	2	4	2
	1979-1982				
	1999-2000				
Rwanda	Never	0	0	5	3

Table 1: Legislative and Presidential Elections in Africa  
(Democratic Elections 1946-2000; Dictatorial Elections 1946-1996)

Country	Democratic Periods	Democratic Elections		Dictatorial Elections	
		Legislative	Presidential	Legislative	Presidential
Sao Tome & Principe	1991-2000	3	2	2	0
Senegal	Never	0	0	7	6
Seychelles	Never	0	0	6	3
Sierra Leone	1961-1966 1996-2000	2	1	5	2
Somalia	1960-1968	2	0	2	1
Somaliland	Never	0	0	0	0
South Africa	1994-2000	2	0	11	0
Sudan	1956-1957 1965-1968 1986-1988	2	0	6	4
Swaziland	Never	0	0	5	0
Tanzania	Never	0	0	7	7
Togo	Never	0	0	6	4
Tunisia	Never	0	0	10	6
Uganda	1980-1984	1		3	2
Zaire	Never	0	0	7	4
Zambia	1991-2000	2	2	7	5
Zimbabwe	Never	0	0	9	2
	Total	47	25	284	147

Data are taken from Przeworski et al. (2000) and Golder (forthcoming). The legislative elections of 1958 in Sudan, 1963 in Congo and 1969 in Somalia are treated as democratic. Although Przeworski et al. code these years as dictatorships, these elections actually occurred prior to the transition to democracy (Gandhi 2004). Ethiopia2 is Ethiopia after Eritrea's secession.

Editor's note: Table 1 includes several democratic elections that do not appear in the General Tables. The General Tables only classify elections as democratic if they occur in countries with more than one million inhabitants and have been given a score of 3 or lower by Freedom House since 1972.

Table 2: Presidential, Mixed and Parliamentary Regimes in Democratic Africa, 1946-2000

Regime	British	French	Portuguese	Italian	Other
Presidential	Ghana (1979-80) Malawi (1994-2000) Nigeria (1979-82) (1999-2000) Uganda (1980-84) Sierra Leone (1996-2000) Zambia (1991-2000)	Benin (1991-2000) Congo (1960-62)			Namibia (1990-2000)
Mixed		CAR (1993-2000) Congo (1992-96) Comoros (1990-94) Madagascar (1993-2000) Mali (1992-2000) Niger (1993-95)	Sao Tomé & Principe (1991-2000)	Somalia (1960-69)	South Africa (1994-2000)
Parliamentary	Mauritius (1968-2000) Ghana (1970-71) Nigeria (1960-65) Sudan (1956-58) (1965-68) (1986-88) Sierra Leone (1961-66)		Cape Verde (1991-2000)		

Data are taken from Przeworski et al. (2000) and Golder (forthcoming).

Table 3: Legislative Electoral System Type in Democratic Africa  
(Election Dates in Parentheses)

Electoral System	Majoritarian	Proportional	Multi	Mixed
British	Ghana (1979)	Sierra Leone (1996)		
	Malawi (1994,1999)			
	Mauritius (1976,1982,1983, 1987,1991,1995, 2000)			
	Nigeria (1964,1979,1999)			
	Sierra Leone (1962)			
	Sudan (1958,1986)			
	Uganda (1980)			
	Zambia (1991,1996)			
French	CAR (1993,1998)	Benin (1991,1995,1999)		Madagascar (1998)
	Comoros (1992,1993)	Madagascar (1993)		Niger (1993,1995)
	Mali (1992,1997)			
	Congo (1963,1992,1993)			
Portuguese		Cape Verde (1991,1995)		
		Sao Tomé & Príncipe (1991,1994,1998)		
Italian		Somalia (1964,1969)		
Other		Namibia (1994,1999)		
		South Africa (1994,1999)		

Table 4: Average Effective Number of Electoral and Legislative Parties by Average District Magnitude (Number of Elections in Parentheses)

	Average District Magnitude			
	1	2-5	6-10	> 10
Electoral Parties	4.54 (12)	3.84 (14)	3.96 (6)	2.50 (5)
Legislative Parties	3.67 (18)	2.92 (17)	3.60 (7)	2.31 (5)

Table 5: Average Effective Number of Electoral and Legislative Parties by Electoral Formula (Number of Elections in Parentheses)

	Electoral Formula			
	Plurality	Absolute Majority	d'Hondt	Hare
Electoral Parties	2.91 (19)	6.73 (4)	2.49 (5)	6.47 (7)
Legislative Parties	2.61 (23)	4.57 (8)	2.1 (5)	4.55 (9)

Data are taken from Golder (forthcoming).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Some have argued that competitive politics simply shifted to within the party during authoritarian periods. For example, Hayward (1987) claimed that in ‘Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, surprisingly large numbers of incumbents have been defeated by voters unhappy with their performance.’ In some estimations, as many as one half of the incumbent deputies and at least one quarter of the government’s ministers were removed in some elections in Kenya and Tanzania.

<sup>2</sup>The debate in the literature as to whether African countries *should* employ proportional representation or majoritarian rule ignores this point (Reynolds 1995*b*, Reynolds 1995*a*, Barkan 1995). Particular institutions may simply not be sustainable as an equilibrium in certain societies. Instead, it is better to begin by examining the type of electoral institutions that might be acceptable to the relevant parties.

<sup>3</sup>The importance of strategic negotiations in choosing electoral rules can even be seen in authoritarian periods. For example, regional leaders in Benin adopted a rotating presidency in 1969 in an attempt to keep a lid on rising ethnic tension. The ‘Conseil Présidentiel’ was essentially a power-sharing arrangement similar to the one introduced in the former Yugoslavia after Tito’s death in 1980.

<sup>4</sup>A similar compromise occurred in Namibia. The 1989 elections were supposed to elect a constituent assembly that would write a constitution for an independent Namibia. These elections were conducted under the authority of the South African administration as *de facto* rulers and the UN Technical Assistance Group as representatives of the international community. The South African administration employed a proportional electoral system in an attempt to restrict SWAPO to less than two thirds of the National Assembly. This would prevent SWAPO from being able to write a constitution without the agreement of any other parties (Southall 1999).

<sup>5</sup>Mozaffar (1998, 2001) represent important exceptions.

<sup>6</sup>The effective number of electoral parties is calculated as  $1/\sum v_i^2$ , where  $v_i$  is the percentage of votes won by the  $i^{th}$  party. The effective number of electoral parties substitutes the number of seats won by a party for the number of votes it won (Laakso & Taagepera 1979). Data are missing for the number of electoral parties in 10 cases: Central African Republic (1993), Comoros (1993), Congo (1992,1993), Madagascar (1993,1998), Niger (1995), Somalia (1969) and Sudan (1958,1986).

<sup>7</sup>We consider a nationalized party system to be one in which the parties are relatively competitive throughout the country.

## References

- Adejumobi, Said. 2000. Elections in Africa: A Fading Shadow of Democracy. In *Government and Politics in Africa: A Reader*, ed. Okwudiba Nnoli. Harare, Zimbabwe: AAPS Books pp. 242–261.
- Barkan, Joel. 1995. “Elections in Agrarian Societies.” *Journal of Democracy* 6:106–116.
- Bollen, Kenneth. 1990. “Issues in the Comparative Measurement of Political Democracy.” *American Sociological Review* 45:370–390.
- Bratton, Michael. 1998. “Second Elections in Africa.” *Journal of Democracy* 9:51–66.
- Bratton, Michael & Nicolas van de Walle. 1997. *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Chazan, Naomi. 1979. “African Voters at the Polls: A Re-examination of the Role of Elections in African Politics.” *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Political Studies* 17:136–158.
- Cheibub, José. 2002. “Minority Governments, Deadlock Situations, and the Survival of Presidential Democracies.” *Comparative Political Studies* 35:284–312.
- Chhibber, Pradeep & Ken Kollman. 1998. “Party Aggregation and the Number of Parties in India and the United States.” *American Political Science Review* 92:329–342.
- Cliffe, Lionel. 1967. *One Party Democracy: The 1965 Tanzania General Elections*. Nairobi: East African Publishing House.
- Cohen, Denis. 1983. Elections and Election Studies in Africa. In *Political Science in Africa: A Critical Review*, ed. Yolamu Barongo. London: Zed Books pp. 72–93.
- Collier, Ruth. 1982. *Regimes in Tropical Africa: Changing Forms of Supremacy, 1945-1975*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Coppedge, Michael & Wolfgang Reinicke. 1990. “Measuring Polyarchy.” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 25:51–72.
- Cowen, Michael & Liisa Laakso. 1997. “An Overview of Election Studies in Africa.” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 35:717–744.
- Cox, Gary. 1990. “Centripetal and Centrifugal Incentives in Electoral Systems.” *American Journal of Political Science* 34:903–935.
- Cox, Gary. 1997. *Making Votes Count: Strategic Coordination in the World’s Electoral Systems*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Cox, Gary. 1999. “Electoral Rules and Electoral Coordination.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 2:145–161.
- De Schweinitz, Karl. 1959. “Industrialization, Labor Controls and Democracy.” *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 7:385–404.
- Duverger, Maurice. 1954. *Political Parties*. New York: Wiley.
- Easterly, William & Ross Levine. 1997. “Africa Growth Tragedy: Policies and Ethnic Division.” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 112:1203–1250.
- Ellis, S. 2000. Elections in Africa in Historical Context. In *Election Observation and Democratization in Africa*, ed. Jon Abbink & Gerti Hesseling. New York: St. Martin’s Press.

- Galenson, Walter. 1959. *Labor and Economic Development*. New York: Wiley.
- Gandhi, Jennifer. 2004. Political Institutions under Dictatorship PhD thesis New York University.
- Gandhi, Jennifer & Adam Przeworski. 2001. "Dictatorial Institutions and the Survival of Dictators." Paper presented at the 2001 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco.
- Gastil, Raymond. 1990. *Freedom in the World: Political Rights and Civil Liberties*. New York: Freedom House.
- Golder, Matt. forthcoming. "Democratic Electoral Systems Around the World, 1946-2000." *Electoral Studies* .
- Gurr, Ted. 1990. *Polity II: Political Structures and Regime Change, 1800-1986*. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research.
- Hanna, William. 1964. *Independent Black Africa: The Politics of Freedom*. Chicago: Rand McNally.
- Hayward, Fred, ed. 1987. *Elections in Independent Africa*. London: Westview Press.
- Holm, John. 1988. Botswana: A Paternalistic Democracy. In *Democracy in Developing Countries: Africa*, ed. L. Diamond, J. Linz & S. Lipset. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers pp. 179–216.
- Huntington, Samuel & Joan Nelson. 1976. *No Easy Choice: Political Participation in Developing Countries*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Kaminski, Marek. 1999. "How Communism Could Have Been Saved: Formal Analysis of Electoral Bargaining in Poland in 1989." *Public Choice* 98:83–109.
- Kaminski, Marek. 2002a. "Do Parties Benefit from Electoral Manipulation? Electoral Laws and Heresthetics in Poland, 1989-93." *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 14:325–359.
- Kaminski, Marek. 2002b. "General Equilibrium Model of Multi-Party Electoral Competition." Unpublished manuscript, New York University.
- Laakso, Markku & Rein Taagepera. 1979. "Effective Number of Parties: A Measure with Application to Western Europe." *Comparative Political Studies* 12:3–27.
- Lijphart, Arend. 1998. *Electoral Systems and Party Systems: A Study of Twenty-Seven Democracies, 1945-90*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lijphart, Arend, ed. 1992. *Parliamentary versus Presidential Government*. Oxford University Press.
- Linz, Juan. 1990. "The Perils of Presidentialism." *Journal of Democracy* 1:51–69.
- Mainwaring, Scott. 1993. "The Presidentialism, Multipartism, and Democracy: The Difficult Combination." *Comparative Political Studies* 26:198–228.
- Manning, Carrie. 2002. "Assessing African Party Systems after the Third Wave." Paper presented at the University of North Texas Conference on Parties and Elections in New Democracies.
- Massicotte, Louis & André Blais. 1999. "Mixed Electoral Systems: A Conceptual and Empirical Survey." *Electoral Studies* 18:341–366.



- Mozaffar, Shaheen. 1998. Electoral Systems and Conflict Management in Africa: A Twenty-Eight State Comparison. In *Elections and Conflict Management in Africa*, ed. Timothy Sisk & Andrew Reynolds. Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press pp. 81–98.
- Mozaffar, Shaheen. 2001. “Institutions, Context and Outcomes in Africa’s Emerging Democracies.” Presented at the 2001 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco.
- Nohlen, Dieter, Michael Krennerich & Bernhard Thibaut. 1999. *Elections in Africa: A Data Handbook*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Powell, G. Bingham. 1982. *Contemporary Democracies: Participation, Stability and Violence*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Przeworski, Adam. 1991. *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Przeworski, Adam, Michael E. Alvarez, José Antonio Cheibub & Fernando Limongi. 2000. *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Material Well-Being in the World, 1950-1990*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Reynolds, Andrew. 1995a. “The Case for Proportionality.” *Journal of Democracy* 6:117–124.
- Reynolds, Andrew. 1995b. “Constitutional Engineering in Southern Africa.” *Journal of Democracy* 6:86–99.
- Sartori, Giovanni. 1976. *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework of Analysis*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Shugart, Matthew & John Carey. 1992. *Presidents and Assemblies: Constitutional Design and Electoral Dynamics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Shugart, Matthew & Martin Wattenberg, eds. 2001. *Mixed-Member Electoral Systems: The Best of Both Worlds?* New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sisk, Timothy & Andrew Reynolds, eds. 1998. *Elections and Conflict Management in Africa*. Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press.
- Southall, Roger. 1999. Electoral Systems and Democratization in Africa. In *Voting for Democracy: Watershed Elections in Contemporary Anglophone Africa*, ed. John Daniel, Roger Southall & Morris Szeftel. Brookfield USA: Ashgate pp. 19–36.
- Stepan, Alfred & Cindy Skach. 1993. “Constitutional Frameworks and Democratic Consolidation: Parliamentarism versus Presidentialism.” *World Politics* 46:1–22.
- Taagepera, Rein & Matthew Shugart. 1989. *Seats and Votes: The Effects and Determinants of Electoral Systems*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Wanyande, Peter. 2000. Democracy and the One-Party State: The African Experience. In *Government and Politics in Africa: A Reader*, ed. Okwudiba Nnoli. Harare, Zimbabwe: AAPS Books pp. 107–121.
- Wiseman, John. 1990. *Democracy in Black Africa: Survival and Revival*. New York: Paragon House Publishers.
- Wiseman, John. 1992. “Early Post-Redemocratization Elections in Africa.” *Electoral Studies* 11:279–291.
- Wood, Elisabeth. 2000. *Forging Democracy from Below: Insurgent Transitions in South Africa and El Salvador*. New York: Cambridge University Press.