



Political Parties in East Africa:

Diversity in Political
Party Systems



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Report prepared for the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) as part of its global Programme on Research and Dialogue with Political Parties

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Preface

Strong and sustainable democracy is dependent on the existence of well-functioning political parties. Political parties are crucial actors in bringing together diverse interests, recruiting and presenting candidates, and developing competing policy proposals that provide people with a choice. In a democracy there is no substitute for open competition between political parties in elections. Throughout the world, however, political parties find themselves in crisis, unpopular and increasingly distrusted. They are suffering from declining membership, internal management practices that are often weak and not sufficiently democratic, and party system regulations that often set far-reaching limits to the way in which parties are allowed to operate. In Africa, political parties face challenges similar to those faced elsewhere in the world, challenges that are further exacerbated by diverse and complex political and developmental challenges.

By building systematic, comparative knowledge on political parties, International IDEA aims to support the strengthening of institutional arrangements that make parties more effective players in the political system. International IDEA's series of reports on political parties in Africa is based on research and dialogue with political parties in thirty African countries. In Southern Africa the study covered twelve countries—Angola, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In West Africa, the study was conducted in thirteen countries—Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. In East Africa, five countries were covered—Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda.

The research was conducted using three approaches. The first was to examine the socio-political and economic environment in which the parties function, and study



the margins within parties are allowed to carry out their political and electoral activities in the respective countries. The second dealt with the legal provisions that regulate parties. The provisions include those covering the founding of parties, their registration and internal functioning, the rules and regulations for contesting elections, the conduct of election campaigns and the agencies that monitor the conduct of parties. The third approach constituted an in-depth analysis of the organizational structures of the parties and the way in which they actually function.

The series of reports is expected to address a serious gap in existing knowledge regarding the external political party regulatory environment; party structures and internal organization; and policy and programmes development. The reports provide a unique overview of the challenges to and opportunities for strengthening political parties and party systems within the framework of democratic consolidation and development. International IDEA hopes that the findings and recommendations presented here will contribute to the building of sustainable multiparty democracy in Africa.



Vidar Helgesen
Secretary General
International IDEA




Foreword

In the 17th century, in his *Second Treatise of Government*, John Locke wrote that governments are constituted to protect individual rights and property, and just governments rest on the consent of the governed. Democracy is thus based on the sovereignty of the ruled, not that of the ruler, as was the case even before the Glorious Revolution in Britain in 1668, the French and American revolutions, and the spread of democratic constitutionalism to the rest of the world. Samuel P. Huntington considers that spread to have occurred spasmodically in three historic waves—following the First World War (1914–8); after the Second World War (1939–45) and decolonization in Africa and Asia; and after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 (Huntington 1991).

But how has that sovereignty of the ruled been expressed over the years? In small communities, public gatherings sufficed to make laws and enforce them. But the more complex a society becomes, the more necessary it is to delegate the daily functions to representatives of the people, preferably through an electoral process in which all qualified citizens have an equal say. The process of electing these representatives, and their coalescing into a government to execute the mandate of the people, is what eventually led to the birth of political parties. In Western Europe that period coincided with the Industrial Revolution. In most of Africa it coincided with the struggle for independence against colonial rule, especially after the Second World War.

Ideally, political parties should be the institutional transmission belt that conveys the will of the voter to government and back. They are the vehicle through which popular sovereignty is expressed and then transformed into public policy and action. In addition, multiple parties provide a mechanism for competition, so that voters



have a choice in conveying their mandate to the rulers. In and of itself, competition has an intrinsic value: it forces parties to provide a better ‘product’ to the voter. In a sense, therefore, it is difficult to conceive of a practical democracy without parties except in small communities where direct democracy may be still practicable.

Yet no aspect of building democracy has been as problematic as constructing a functional and competitive multiparty system. It is probably easier to put together a constitution specifying the responsibilities of the three branches of government than a multiparty system that genuinely serves the interests of the voters. This is particularly true of the new democracies in the developing world, including those of Africa. This lesson comes out clearly when we examine the functioning of political parties in the countries that have experimented with democratic governance since April 1974 when a military coup d’état in Portugal toppled the Salazar dictatorship, eventually leading to an elected government in that country.

This study examines the structure of the party systems, and parties’ internal organization and functions, and evaluates the effectiveness of political parties in strengthening democratic governance in five East African states—Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. It provides striking evidence of similarities between the party systems found in these countries—internal weaknesses, poor organizational skills, lack of ideological clarity, intolerance, an inclination to resort to violence, narrow membership bases, and dependence on individual leaders or cliques of leaders. But it also provides evidence of striking differences in party structures and the capabilities of political parties in the five countries.

In Sudan, at the one extreme, political parties have been officially banned since 1989, yet even so their power bases and their leadership are still distinguishable beneath the surface, and the state often uses them for its own purposes. In Ethiopia and Uganda, political parties opposed to the dominant ruling party function under severe political constraints imposed by authoritarian governments. In Tanzania, by contrast, the dominance of the incumbent party (since 1961) has proved to be unassailable by the country’s many new opposition parties. On the other hand in Zanzibar, a semi-autonomous part of Tanzania, the two-dominant-party system has been fiercely adversarial, violent, and incapable of tolerating democratic choice that goes against the incumbent rulers of the island. Here Zanzibar has much in common with Ethiopia and Uganda. Of the five countries, only in Kenya has there been a peaceful change of government from one ruling party to another—in 2002. Yet even there party structures and alliances have been fluid, and the allegiances of leaders and membership are constantly shifting. Kenya has made the most profound progress toward political liberalization in the region, but it lacks a strong foundation for a durable competitive party system.

This report aims to provide details and an explanation of this diverse experience in party systems in East Africa. It is based on a study of party documents, published research, interviews and press reports. In addition to these open sources, it relies on individual country studies and interviews with party officials, conducted in the countries concerned under the auspices of International IDEA's Political Parties Programme for Africa. Not all the political parties actively involved were covered by the survey, but the data collected have proved an invaluable supplement to the information already available to the writer.

The author would like to thank all those who have helped in putting the study together. Abdalla S. Bujra and Lydia Wambugu, of the Development Policy Management Forum (DPMF), Ethiopia, as International IDEA's regional partner for East Africa; the consultants responsible for the country surveys; the International IDEA staff in Pretoria and in Stockholm who were extremely helpful in guiding the study and providing background material, and in particular Abdalla Hamdok, Grace Ndungu, Per Nordlund and Joram Rukambe.

This study is a part of a series of studies undertaken by International IDEA focusing on the political parties in specific regions. In Africa the studies cover West Africa, Southern Africa and East Africa. A Sub-Saharan report on *Political Parties in Africa: Challenges for Sustained Multiparty Democracy* is available in printed form (Nordlund and Mohamed Salih 2007) and can be downloaded from the International IDEA website at <<http://www.idea.int>>. The three sub-regional reports can also be downloaded from <<http://www.idea.int>>.

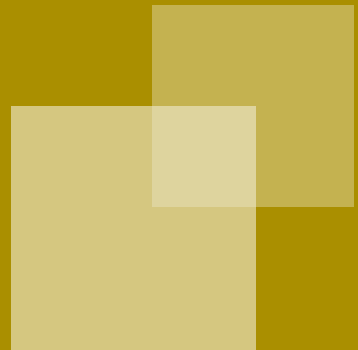
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Chapter 1

The Project and Methodology





Chapter 1

The Project and Methodology

To the best understanding of the author, and after a review of the literature published on the subject, this is the first comparative study of political party systems in East Africa. There are now more democracies in Africa than at any other time since independence in the 1960s. Since 1972, Freedom House has rated governments in the world as 'free', 'partly free' or 'not free', based on a combined average of indicators assessing 'political rights' (essentially, the freedom to elect governments and hold them accountable) and 'civil liberties' (primarily, respect for individual and group rights). In its 2006 *Freedom in the World* report, Freedom House classified 11 African countries as 'free', compared to only three in 1976. The most remarkable phenomenon was the transition of most African states from the 'not free' category to 'partly free'. Of the 48 African countries surveyed in 1976, 57 per cent were classified as 'not free'. By 2006, in contrast, 71 per cent of African countries were either 'free' (23 per cent) or 'partly free' (48 per cent) (calculated from Freedom House 2006). When one attaches a population weight to these figures, the progress made is even more striking: the number of African people enjoying democratic rights under 'free' status jumped from 3.3 million in 1989 to 100.8 million in 2003 (Chege 2005: 271). To put it another way, a larger number of African people were enjoying individual and civil liberties in 2006 than at any time since independence in the 1960s.

This story has so far been told through the prism of general elections and electoral outcomes. This is understandable. Elections excite political passions and produce a sense of drama in the contest between presidential and parliamentary candidates, and the parties they represent. They are also easy to track, and their results are easy to quantify. In Africa, elections have not only been of interest to local voters and candidates; foreign donors, scholars, the press, international observer missions and independent local monitors have all shown sustained interest in recording and

interpreting the remarkable developments of the years 1976–2006 mentioned above. So have leading international research centres on democratic governance, such as the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the Afrobarometer project, International IDEA and IFES (formerly the International Foundation for Election Systems); donor organizations such as the World Bank and the Department for International Development (DFID) in the United Kingdom; and human rights associations such as Human Rights Watch Africa and Amnesty International.

As a result of these developments, we now have a veritable pool of data and information on the progress made in democratic governance in Africa. Certainly, this information is of varying quality and making sense of it is a huge challenge. Constructing realistic paradigms that explain the huge amounts of observations we encounter every day is always a more daunting challenge than the mere assembling of information, as Thomas Kuhn informed us over 30 years ago (Kuhn 1971). But the information is there in plenty, awaiting further analyses yet. Some analytical efforts have been devoted to understanding African elections, legislatures and internal governance reforms, and we have some useful publications in these fields.

But there is one aspect that has not received as much attention in Africa's political transition since 1989 as it deserves. This is the structure of political parties and the closely related aspect of electoral systems. Party systems and innovation in electoral structures are the Cinderella of studies of democracy in Africa. This project is expected to fill that gap for five contiguous but highly diverse countries in East Africa—Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda.

This study begins with a survey of global findings on the subject of party systems, before narrowing the focus to the African experience. It then proceeds to the general findings emanating from empirical research in the five countries—concentrating on party systems, regulatory procedures, internal party structures and gender representation—before proceeding to draw some general conclusions and make recommendations.

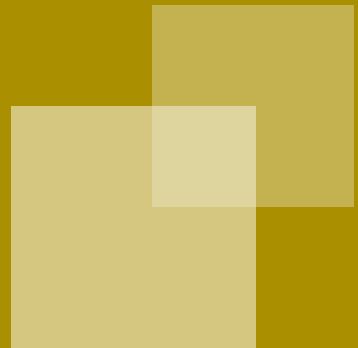
The methodology used was a systematic examination of the documents available from the political parties themselves and selected interviews, supplemented by press reports, analysis of elections and election results, analysis of national laws on parties, and information from academic journals and books. In addition, this report has made extensive use of the international data banks that carry information related to political parties and their role in elections and democratic governance generally. These include the data of the World Bank with its worldwide governance indicators, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s annual *Human Development Report*, and the publications of Transparency International, Freedom House, and

Human Rights Watch. Although many of these publications do not directly address the character and functions of political parties, this study has nonetheless found some of the data useful in assessing the *impact* of political parties. This report is intended to be a baseline study that could provide the basis for systematic field observation and data collection—a process that should be undertaken in the future.



Chapter 2

The Global Context





Chapter 2

The Global Context

Although, as explained above, political parties (and the interest groups and organizational life linked to them) are among the instruments that are most fundamental to sustaining democratic life, their overall contribution to democracy is often ambiguous. Political parties played a key role in mobilizing voters in the transitions from Soviet communism to democracy after 1989, and from apartheid to majority rule in South Africa in the 1990s. In Western Europe, social democrats and socialist parties played an instrumental role in building the welfare state. But political parties were also responsible for the rise of Nazism, the institutionalization of apartheid in South Africa and racism in the US South following Reconstruction, as well as the most egregious violations of human rights in the USSR, in China under Mao Zedong, and in Cambodia under the Khmers Rouges. This is an old dilemma. Among the US founding fathers, James Madison (in Federalist Paper no. 10) was concerned about the perverse consequences of ‘faction’ (parties) in republican government, even as he acknowledged that it was impossible to eliminate factional competition under a system that guarantees individual liberty.

Following the historic spread of global democracy after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the esteem political parties enjoyed in the public eye initially rose. That, however, did not last. According to the 2004 Global Barometer Surveys Network, the trust extended to political parties was as low as 11 per cent in Latin America, and 10 per cent in the former Soviet bloc countries (International IDEA 2006: 62–71). Trust in political parties in Africa was higher (46 per cent) but the authors were quick to clarify that the approval rating applied only to ruling parties. There is considerable disillusionment with political parties in the older industrial democracies as well, but, with a 35 per cent approval rating, parties in East Asia appear to be doing slightly better than elsewhere, except for Africa as a whole. In our attempt to understand

this generalized disillusionment with political parties worldwide, it would be helpful to look at the operating variables using the categories that we propose to apply in examining the political party systems in East Africa. These are:

- party systems;
- external regulations; and
- the internal functioning of political parties.

As far as *party systems* as generic institutions are concerned, we know more about their structures in Western Europe (where they have operated longest) than in any other part of the world. In one of the earliest studies on the subject, Robert Michels, on the basis of his analysis of the German Social Democratic Party, concluded that, despite its proletarian mass base, the party's policy was eventually hijacked to serve the goals of the elite in the leadership (Michels 1915, republished 1998). A believer in the inevitability of parties (and other social organizations) being dominated by self-serving elites, Michels considered the phenomenon he observed to be common to other parties.

That was before the Second World War. In the post-war era, the most influential classifications of political parties are those associated with Duverger and Sartori. Duverger's work was an ingenious association of *electoral systems* with specific patterns of party structures. Thus (in his analysis) the First Past The Post (FPTP) electoral system based on a simple majority for the winning candidate in single-member electoral districts (as in the United Kingdom) tended to produce a strong two-party political regime. In contrast, electoral systems based on proportional representations (PR) were most likely to produce a plurality of roughly equal political parties (Duverger 1954). Sartori qualified this typology, yielding a classification that could be roughly summarized as follows: one-dominant-party systems were not associated with any particular electoral system; a pattern of two alternating parties was most commonly associated with the FPTP electoral system; and moderately and highly fragmented party systems were associated with PR (Sartori 1976). While dominant-one-party systems could be the product of free and fair elections (as in South Africa after 1994, and in Japan until 1994), the states falling into this category tended to be authoritarian. Two alternating parties tended to produce stable democracies, while 'moderate' and 'highly fractured' multiparty systems typically relied on coalition governments that were prone to break up and be reconstituted in between elections.

With regard to *external regulation* and an enabling political environment, Pippa Norris has demonstrated, in an International IDEA paper entitled 'Building Political Parties', that legal procedures regulating political parties vary enormously even

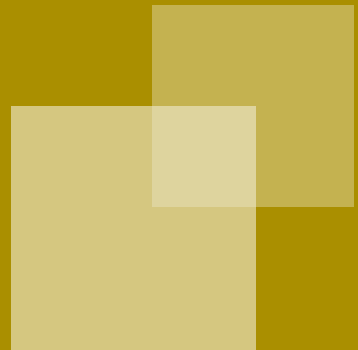
among the industrial democracies (Norris 2004). The best of them are those that are deemed 'equitable, free and fair' and that provide competing parties with an equal opportunity to be elected to office. Party regulatory regimes, according to her analysis, fall into three categories: (a) 'monopolistic' regimes intended to exclude competition and prop up incumbent authoritarian regimes; (b) 'cartel' formats that restrict meaningful participation to select 'insider' parties; and (c) 'egalitarian' systems that meet the conditions of fairness and openness. The association between egalitarian regulatory frameworks and genuinely competitive party systems (two-party alternate or moderate plurality) is evident. Indeed, Norris' data demonstrate a close statistical association between 'egalitarian' party regulation frameworks, political freedom and effective governance. As we shall see, this generalization is borne out by evidence in East Africa.

This brings us to the issue of the *internal functioning* of parties. Norris considers the basic functions of political parties as (a) the integration of voter interests; (b) the mobilization of members to realize common goals; and (c) the realization of membership objectives, whether the party is in government or the opposition. This is done through a series of 'mechanical' steps: (a) the nomination of leaders, candidates and officials through clear, open procedures; (b) campaigning for party objectives (which requires funding and access to the mass media); (c) free and fair elections; and (d) access to legislative and, where so specified under law, administrative office (Norris 2004). Again, the smoother this process tends to be the greater the chances of individual liberty, stable government and economic development. Statistically speaking, these factors tend to move in the same direction.



Chapter 3

Regional Analysis: General and Country-Specific Characteristics





Chapter 3

Regional Analysis: General and Country-Specific Characteristics

3.1 The political background of the region

The region covered by this study is extremely diverse in historical experience, geography, and social and political characteristics. And it is not just the individual country experiences that are diverse. Political experience within states is also varied. Some countries (such as Kenya and Tanzania) have enjoyed prolonged and uninterrupted periods of domestic political stability. Sudan on the other hand has been in the throes of one civil war or another since it gained independence in 1956, with the exception of the period between 1972 and 1983 (under Gaffar al Nimeiry) when the Addis Ababa Accords between the Khartoum government and an autonomous southern administration in Juba were in force. Four countries—Kenya, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda—gained independence after decades of British colonial rule. Apart from a brief occupation by Italy (1939–44), Ethiopia has a long history as an independent state that has withstood efforts at foreign occupation for centuries. On top of all this, the countries are characterized by sharp internal cleavages in many dimensions. These take the form of region, ethnic identity, religious faith, culture, race and class.

Political parties reflect the social and economic milieu in which they are grounded. It is impossible to understand the basis of party structures and inter-party competition without some appreciation of these differences. But it is also important to appreciate the extent of the similarities between the five countries examined here. Table 1 summarizes the most salient features in these countries. Their relevance will become clearer as we proceed to analyse their respective party systems.

Table 1: Basic country profiles

Country	Size (sq km, '000)	Population (m.) 2004	Income per capita (USD)	Freedom House rating	No. of ethnic groups	No. of registered parties, 2006
Ethiopia	1,222	75.6	114	5 (PF)	80	60
Kenya	583	33.5	481	3 (PF)	42	66
Sudan	2,506	35.5	594	7 (NF)	150	7
Tanzania	945	37.6	288	3.5 (PF)	120	25
Uganda	236	27.8	245	4.5 (PF)	22	10

Sources: World Bank, *African Development Indicators* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2006) (columns 2–4); Freedom House, *Freedom in the World* (New York: Freedom House, 2006) (column 5); national censuses (column 6).

Notes: Freedom House scores range from 1 (most free) to 7 (least free). PF = partly free; NF = not free. Per capita income figures are for 2003. USD = US dollar.

As is evident from the table, Sudan is the geographically most extensive country, followed by Ethiopia, then Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, in that order. Sudan, the largest country in Africa, occupies 2.5 million square kilometres (km), compared to Uganda's 236,000 square km. Ethiopia, geographically half the size of Sudan, has a population twice as large. Internally, the regions of all the countries are poorly integrated due to the relative sparsity of roads, railways and telecommunications, but Sudan and Ethiopia are particularly disadvantaged. Internal communications are better in Kenya and Uganda, but even there some areas (northern Kenya and northern Uganda) are poorly integrated into the rest of the country. Although the five states are all low-income countries (765 US dollars (USD) per capita or less at 2003 prices), there are considerable variations. Sudan (since oil production resumed in 1999) now has the highest per capita income of the five, and Ethiopia the lowest—less than 20 per cent that of Sudan. Kenya has the most diversified economy among the five countries and is the commercial and communications hub of East Africa.

The extent of ethnic diversity in the five countries can be seen in column 6 of Table 1. However, as everywhere else in Africa, the data presented here (from the latest census figures) must be treated with caution. Ethnic identities in Africa mutate quickly over time and place depending on how people are asked to identify themselves. In and of themselves, ethnic identities are a neutral factor in political life. A great deal depends on how they are used and manipulated by political entrepreneurs. The extent of cultural diversity in and of itself therefore need not be a cause of political alarm: East African countries with low diversity (Somalia and Rwanda) have suffered from vicious

inter-ethnic violence, while states that exhibit unusually broad ethnic pluralism (such as Tanzania) have enjoyed long periods of inter-community peace and been spared that fate. The extent to which party leaders, ideologues and mobilizers appeal to negative ethnic, cultural and religious stereotyping is the determining factor in whether diversity is turned into a liability (as in Somalia and Rwanda) rather than asset—which it could very well be in a democratic setting. It is clear from Table 1, though, that all the five countries are so ethnically diverse that party leaders and organizers intent on mischief can always take advantage of the situation to make the transition to democracy impossible, if not to induce anarchy and state failure.

Although all these factors affect the structure and rhythm of party politics in the region, none of them is as immediately relevant to that process as the condition of democratic freedoms, reflected in the Freedom House ratings shown in Table 1. In 2006 Kenya had the best Freedom House rating in the region (3), just short of ‘free’ status (2.5). Kenya is on a par with the Seychelles, the Philippines and Thailand. Only eight African countries got a better rating than Kenya—Ghana, South Africa, Benin, Botswana, Mali, Namibia, Lesotho and Senegal. At the other extreme, Sudan’s rating (7) was on a par with the ratings of some of the most repressive regimes in the world today—those of Burma (Myanmar), Libya, Syria and North Korea. Tanzania’s democratic rating (3.5) is closer to that of Kenya, while those of Ethiopia (5) and Uganda (4.5) fall between Tanzania and Sudan. In summary, if Kenya seemed in 2006 to be the freest country in the region, followed by Tanzania, Sudan was the least free, followed by Ethiopia and Uganda, in that order. All this has a direct bearing on party organizations and the liberties they can be expected to enjoy.

3.2 Party systems in their national context

It is clear from Table 1 that, apart from the special case of Sudan, the East African countries have allowed considerable numbers of political parties to register. Again, Kenya leads the field with 66 registered political parties. At the opposite extreme, the seven main Sudanese political parties have been operating under such difficult conditions since 1989, when all secular political organizations were banned, that it would be difficult to describe the country as one that upholds a party system. Sudan is a one-party civil–military autocracy that justifies its rule on religious grounds. Since 2005, the ruling party has extended power sharing to some regional parties without compromising that basic position. Again, the other three countries fall in between. Next to Kenya, Tanzania has a relatively liberal party structure, with 25 registered parties. Uganda and Ethiopia have both allowed the registration of a plurality of parties but freedom for opposition parties remains severely constrained.

To put the situation differently, the number of parties registered and their freedom to operate in the five countries are quite consistent with the Freedom House ratings. They are also consistent with expert opinion polls conducted for the UNECA in 2003 under its African governance programme. When asked to rate—on a scale of 1 to 100, 100 being the highest—the amount of freedom granted political parties to operate and their security, the survey of experts produced the following results.

Table 2: The scale of political freedom and security of political parties in East Africa, 2002

Ethiopia	50
Kenya	55
Tanzania	63
Uganda	55

Lowest = 0; highest = 100.

Source: United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, *African Governance Report, 2005* (Addis Ababa: UNECA, 2005).

Sudan was not part of the survey since the government, as stated above, does not allow open party politics. It is also worth noting that the survey was taken before Kenya's December 2002 elections, which opened up the political space considerably. On the whole, the information on the status of party systems observed here is confirmed by the country data provided by the context analysis of International IDEA's research programme on political parties in Africa; and it is also in line with Pippa Norris' conclusion—that vibrant party systems are coextensive with individual liberty and democratic 'space'.

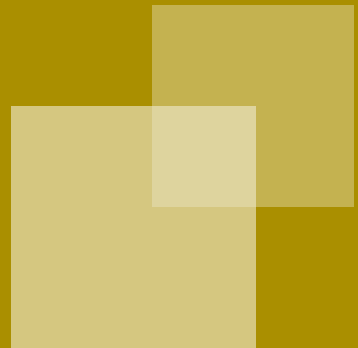
Having surveyed the rough aggregates of political parties in the five countries and the political environment in which they operate, it is now time to comment on how voters view political parties as institutions. Most of the evidence we have, however, is indirect. To start with, African voters are among the most politically active in the world today—particularly at election time. Some 88 per cent of the voters polled under the UNECA African governance project had voted in elections. And they had voted for a candidate identified with a political party. Voter turnout in Uganda in the 2001 and 2006 elections was 70 per cent; that in Tanzania in 1995 was 76 per cent. In Kenya voter turnout since the reintroduction of multiparty politics in 1992 has varied between 66 and 69 per cent.

However, these high voter turnout figures should not be strictly interpreted as an indicator of voter confidence in political parties per se. Rather, they indicate that voters trust the electoral process as a means of reconfiguring the way they are governed, for the better. Political parties seem to be merely a necessary tool for getting there that can be safely discarded once their use expires. Except for the small organizational core, political parties in the East African region tend to become moribund after election time. Although the UNECA surveys indicate that about one-half of African voters will have attended a political rally at some point, the fact is that these rallies tend to be concentrated in the immediate period leading up to elections. From the UNECA *African Governance Report* (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa 2005: 37) it is clear that Africans participate more seriously and consistently in religious associations than they do in political parties. Indeed, as we shall see shortly, with few exceptions, voter confidence in political parties is not directed to the institution as such. It is based on the personality of the leadership of the party and can be transferred to any party this leadership may choose. All this makes for a rapidly changing structure of party systems and alliances over time. While core membership support tends to be stable, therefore, the structure of parties and their allegiance is constantly shifting, at the whims of the leadership.



Chapter 4

Party Systems at Country Level





Chapter 4

Party Systems at Country Level

4.1 National party structures and alliances

As we have already seen, the five countries have registered dozens of political parties. (This was also, incidentally, the case in Sudan before the government of President Omar Beshir came to power in 1989.) However, many of these political parties are either too small in terms of total membership to have any electoral effect, or are registered in the books but moribund. The number of registered political parties discussed earlier, therefore, is better considered as an indicator of how permissive the political environment is in allowing the registration of parties than as an indicator of the effectiveness of the party regime.

Taking the region as a whole, national party systems seem confusing and unpredictable, but closer inspection reveals emerging patterns that will be familiar to students of generic political party configurations, particularly in ethnically heterogeneous societies. There are also some strong elements of continuity in the membership composition of parties and support for them that cannot be ignored by any student of the long-term development of electoral democracy in the five countries covered by this study.

4.2 Country studies

Kenya: political freedom and the emergence of competitive coalitions

Multiparty politics was restored in Kenya in 1991 after prolonged demands for change, often violently suppressed. In August 1992, however, Kenya's incumbent ruling party

(the Kenya African National Union, KANU) amended the constitution to outlaw the formation of coalition governments, sensing that the divided opposition parties would go into the December 1992 elections separately. KANU did not wish them to unite after the elections and thereby form the government. It had read the omens right. It won that election on a plurality (36 per cent of the vote) but retained a working majority in the legislature courtesy of the lopsided nature of the country's constituency boundaries, which favoured the party's bedrock support regions. However, it was clear thereafter that, as long as party competition was the basis of elections, no government would command an absolute majority in the legislature. Indeed, after gaining 40 per cent of the vote in the next (1997) election and a reduced mandate in the legislature, KANU itself proceeded to form an informal alliance with the National Development Party (NDP). The lesson here is that in ethnically pluralistic societies like Kenya parties tend to fragment so much along cultural lines that broadly-based coalitions become the most sensible foundation for any elected government that expects to serve its term in office with some semblance of stability. For all its antipathy to coalition building, the government of President Daniel Arap Moi in the end found it necessary to go into an alliance of convenience with the NDP for the sake of its own survival.

In 2002, KANU was ousted from power by the National Alliance Rainbow Coalition (NARC), an unlikely confederation of four parties, one of them (the Liberal Democratic Party, LDP), a reconstituted breakaway faction of the KANU–NDP coalition. To avoid breaking the 1992 law against coalition governments, the NARC constituted itself into a single party of convenience, and used the opportunity to sponsor candidates from constituent parties for election to the Parliament. Since then, the ruling NARC coalition has undergone internal schisms which have led to the LDP leaving it following bitter disagreements over power sharing and constitutional reforms. During the November 2005 constitutional referendum, in fact, the LDP rejoined KANU, forming the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM), to campaign against the government's approval of the constitution. Thus, yet another coalition (the ODM) was formed to counter the moves of the incumbent alliance of three parties in government, which strengthened itself further by bringing in coalition partners from smaller parties hitherto in opposition. The 2007 general elections will thus very likely be fought on the basis of two rival coalitions of parties—the ODM versus what remains of the NARC coalition. This format now defines the party system in Kenya as the country continues to widen its democratic space—a pattern of competitive broad party alliances. This was to be expected, and indeed it is nothing new to Kenya's politics. The same phenomenon can be observed in any phase of the country's post-independence political history when genuinely competitive party politics was permitted.

Kenya is a multi-ethnic state, as is evident from Table 1. Political parties have historically found their core support in the major ethnic homelands of the seven or eight numerically

dominant cultural groupings—the Kikuyu, Luhya, Luo, Kamba, Kalenjin, Kisii, Taita and Mijikenda—which make up about 70 per cent of the population. The remaining smaller groups—mostly pastoralists and minorities within minorities—are likely to ally themselves with or against the main parties (constituted by groupings among the eight) on the basis of some form of deal making to accommodate demands from the ‘satellite’ communities. That was the essence of the country’s party system in 2006. Kenya has never had experience of a single party with a genuinely national following: even in the days of a one-party state (1969–91) it was always clear beneath the surface who constituted the bedrock of ethnic support, who was on the periphery and who was perceived to be in opposition. But that could not be expressed too openly.

This is not for want of trying. The political party that brought Kenya to independence (KANU) found its core support within the Kikuyu (22 per cent of the population), who had spearheaded the anti-colonial struggle going back to the 1920s, and the Luo, whose main leaders (Jaramogi Oginga Odinga and Tom J. Mboya) had played a leading role in the nationalist movement when Kikuyu leaders (including Jomo Kenyatta) were jailed by the British over the Mau Mau rebellion (1952–60). The Kamba, the Taita, the Kisii and a part of the Luhya allied themselves to KANU, formed in 1960. Then, however, leaders from the Kalenjin, the Mijikenda, another part of the Luhya, and the main pastoral communities—the Maasai, Samburu, Rendille and Pokot—fearing marginalization by the Kikuyu–Luo leadership, reconstituted themselves into the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU), also formed in 1960. Kenya’s two pre-independence elections were fought between these two loose ethnic voting blocs.

When KADU (as the opposition) voluntarily crossed the floor to join KANU in 1964, the government’s stability was assured by a delicate balancing of Cabinet positions between ex-KADU and KANU members—a ‘consociational’ solution to the problem of governance under conditions of ethnic pluralism rather than unified one-party rule. (On the concept of ‘consociational’ government and its relevance for ethnically pluralistic societies, see Lijphart 1977). Indeed, in 1967 the former KADU chairman, Daniel Arap Moi, was named vice-president of Kenya, with KANU’s Jomo Kenyatta remaining as president. The subsequent attempt (1966–9) by the left-wing Kenya People’s Union (KPU) to set itself up as a viable opposition to KANU met with stiff resistance and repression by the government, which ultimately confined its support to one single ethnic base of Luo–Nyanza—something the KPU leaders had resisted since 1966. With the proscription of the KPU in 1969, Kenya entered the era of a one-party state which became steadily more repressive until 1991.

The country’s experience since 1991 is therefore one of constantly shifting party alliances, in which all parties command an ethnic and regionally defined following.

Kenya's elections are run on a single-member constituency, FPTP basis. As students of electoral systems will appreciate, this choice of voting mechanism may be good for strengthening a two-dominant-party regime, but it is not particularly suitable for a culturally pluralistic society like Kenya, where ethnic groups vote in blocs, thereby making some of them vulnerable to prolonged exclusion from participating in the formation of government. Proportional representation, 'grand coalition' governments, minority veto and concurrent majorities are the most appropriate tools for national governance in countries like Kenya. Still fascinated by the mirage of homogeneous rival national parties, Kenyan party leaders have not considered these options as much as they should. Political inertia prevents them from doing so. As we shall see, this is a problem in the rest of the region as well. Kenya has been lucky in that the vigorous political jostling of ethnically-based parties has from time to time produced loose party alliances that have sought hard to bring on board as many ethnic groups as possible—even if only symbolically. Kenya has moved towards party consociational democracy by default.

In 2007 the Kenyan Parliament was about to debate a new bill on political parties that specifies the conditions parties must meet in order to qualify for registration, recruitment of membership, their internal regulations, and their accountability to their members and the wider society. For the first time in Kenya's history, the bill has opened up the prospects of state funding for political parties. Even more importantly, the bill calls for stronger gender representation within parties and in the Parliament. The gender requirement is particularly timely: of all the countries covered by this study, Kenya has the lowest female representation in the national legislature (7 per cent), despite receiving the best democratic governance ratings compared to its peers.

Tanzania: a one-dominant-party system

In one-dominant-party systems, political parties in opposition, although given free rein by the government, tend to be small, fragmented and ultimately ineffectual in providing a credible alternative to the main party in ideological and policy terms. This was largely the case in mainland Tanzania (Tanganyika as it was then) in the two pre-independence elections (in 1958 and 1960) and also after multiparty politics was reintroduced in 1995 following prolonged agitation for political pluralism in the early 1990s.

The autonomous island of Zanzibar, however, represents a very different situation: essentially it has a two-party system that reflects a sharp ethnic cleavage between Africans in Zanzibar (represented by the former Afro-Shirazi Party, now the Revolutionary State Party (Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM))-Zanzibar, on the one

hand, and on the other Zanzibaris of Omani origin in alliance with Africans from Pemba Island (represented by the Civic United Front, CUF). Here yet again the FPTP majoritarian system has aggravated the political situation rather than help it. Zanzibar's party politics are as turbulent as those of the mainland are calm.

The Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) was the party that won independence from the United Kingdom in 1961, under the leadership of the late President Julius K. Nyerere. It is remarkable testimony to the wide national following the party commanded even at the time that, in the election preceding independence, in 1960, it won 70 of the 71 seats being contested. The winner of the single seat won by a non-TANU candidate immediately joined TANU, leaving the country without a viable parliamentary opposition; he had stood as an independent candidate only because he was opposed to the official TANU candidate. President Nyerere won 99.2 per cent of the votes cast in the 1962 presidential election, compared to 0.8 per cent cast for the only opponent, Zuberi Mtevu of the African National Congress. By the time Nyerere moved to declare Tanzania a one-party state in 1965, Tanzania had made it so by popular choice.

This was to remain the case until political pluralism was allowed back in 1992. TANU in the meantime (in 1977) had transformed itself into a mass party, modelled on the parties of the then socialist bloc, and taking on the name Revolutionary State Party (Chama Cha Mapinduzi, CCM) after merging with the Afro-Shirazi Party of Zanzibar. However, the CCM at the top was broadly representative of the country's diverse communities and interest groups, rather than a vanguard party. Although it presided over one of the most regressive economic programmes in the country (especially between 1978 and 1990), TANU kept faith with its members and won credit for keeping the country united and free of the internal violence that characterized nearly all its neighbours. This made the CCM unassailable when multiparty competition was reintroduced in 1992.

Conditions for the registration of parties are not particularly stringent: parties must have a national outlook and cannot be sectarian or ethnically based. Although, as we have seen, over 20 political parties have been registered in Tanzania, only three relatively small ones made any impact in the 1995 parliamentary elections, the first competitive elections since independence. Thus, while the CCM took 59 per cent of the votes cast in that election (and won 186 out of 232 seats), the next-highest number of valid votes cast went to the National Convention for Construction and Reform-Mageuzi (NCCR-Mageuzi), which took 22 per cent of the total vote and only 16 seats. Its support, unfortunately, was confined to the capital city, Dar es Salaam, and the relatively prosperous Mount Kilimanjaro region. The third-largest party, the CUF, found most of its support in Zanzibar and Pemba, winning no more than 6 per

cent of the total votes cast nationally, and 24 seats. The even smaller (much smaller) United Democratic Party managed a mere 3 per cent of the vote and took three seats. In sum, the CCM's hegemony remained unchallenged. Three small parties had emerged in opposition when party politics returned in 1995. Whether united or divided, however, they were no match for the dominant party—the CCM.

As it turned out, Tanzania's opposition parties were even more divided and ineffectual in the two next rounds of elections, in 2000 and 2005. The NCCR-Mageuzi, the largest of the opposition parties in 1995, split into two factions in 1998. In the elections of 2000, the CCM presidential candidate, Benjamin Mkapa, won 70 per cent of the vote, and his party won an overwhelming victory in the parliamentary elections. As the CCM strengthened its parliamentary hold, the opposition became weaker and weaker. An attempt to forge an alliance between the opposition parties in 2003 aborted when the CUF refused to participate. The opposition ended up fielding several presidential candidates. Again, the CCM consolidated its hold on the mainland. Its presidential candidate, Jakaya M. Kikwete, was elected with an overwhelming 80 per cent of the votes cast in 2005.

Although there have been frequent complaints about fraud and other electoral irregularities in mainland Tanzania—particularly in the 1995 elections and in the November 2004 local elections—there has been nothing compared to the problems associated with party politics in Zanzibar. As we have seen, the Afro-Shirazi Party there merged with the CCM in 1977, but as the CCM-Zanzibar it has retained considerable local autonomy and control in the regional legislature and government. The CCM on the mainland is an active supporter of the CCM-Zanzibar. Given the ethno-regional cleavage that separates the CCM in Zanzibar from the CUF, any attempt to wrest power from the CCM in the island through the ballot has been resisted by a combination of electoral fraud and the use of force and intimidation in all the multiparty elections held since 1995. Tensions mounted after the severely contested 2000 election results on the island, leaving 40 people dead and many thousands exiled. Reconciliation talks between the CCM and the CUF were subsequently initiated and calm restored, but tensions arose again in the run-up to the 2005 elections and independent observers subsequently reported ballot-rigging and fraud during those elections to keep the CCM-Zanzibar in power.

Tanzania can therefore be said to be an emerging one-dominant-party democracy in the mainland and an autocratic government in Zanzibar that cannot countenance a free two-party contest that could jeopardize the CCM's iron control on the island. As in many other two-way ethnically polarized societies, an FPTP majoritarian electoral system has sharpened political cleavage rather than reduce it. The incumbent party has responded to the electoral challenge with repression. This is a mistake. As argued

elsewhere in this report, ethnically polarized societies like Zanzibar are best governed under proportional representation, and constitutionally mandated power sharing has so far been resisted by CCM. PR, fiscal autonomy, a grand coalition or minority veto are not even on the horizon. And yet the future of multiparty democracy in Zanzibar could conceivably be strengthened by these constitutional devices.

One feature of the Tanzanian political party system that deserves attention is the representation of women in the Parliament, which is higher than in other countries in the East African region. Nearly one-third (30 per cent) of the national legislature are women, which is unusually high for a country whose electoral system is FPTP rather than PR. Credit for this must go the dominant CCM party, which has adopted a formula for enhanced gender parity in candidate nominations and direct representation in Parliament of gender interest groups such as Umoja wa Wanawake Tanzania.

Uganda: an authoritarian one-dominant-party system

Uganda represents the global pattern of a dominant authoritarian party that is ill disposed to open and fair electoral competition from other parties. The Ugandan Government resisted the introduction of multiparty competition more strongly than any of the governments in the region, except Sudan's. President Yoweri K. Museveni came to power in 1986 following a six-year guerrilla campaign against the central government. His position was that party competition was responsible for the country's violent post-independence history. He was determined from the start that his ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM)—an offshoot of the guerrilla army that brought him to power—would be transformed into an all-inclusive national political 'movement', not a party. Parties in Uganda, Museveni said quite rightly, had tended to be sectarian and ethnically focused in the past. Nevertheless, pressure for political pluralism mounted, and a referendum inviting Ugandans to decide for or against a multiparty system was organized in 2000. Scared that multiparty politics would reintroduce violence, and partly because of electoral irregularities, Ugandans voted 90 per cent in favour of the 'movement system'. But agitation for multiparty politics did not cease. Opposition parties began to operate more or less openly. In another referendum on the subject held on 28 July 2005, 92 per cent of the voters opted for a multiparty system. This followed a 2004 court order declaring restrictions on opposition political parties unconstitutional.

In the circumstances, the NRM dominated the 1996 and 2001 parliamentary elections, following boycotts by the (active though unregistered) opposition parties. Although they were aware of Museveni's personal popularity, as the man who stopped the wars, most independent observers doubted the fairness and transparency

of these elections. They pointed specifically to the NRM's domination of the media, and restrictions on opposition meetings and campaigns, some of which were broken up forcibly. However, the Parliament was not monolithic. The NRM habitually nominated a large number of special-interest members of Parliament with allegiance outside the party—women leaders, trade unionists, the military and so on. Still, after the 2001 elections, Museveni's main challenger in the presidential race, Dr Kizza Besigye, had to flee the country, reportedly in fear of his life.

Only after the July 2005 referendum did the semblance of a genuinely competitive party system return to Uganda for the first time since 1962—the election that brought Uganda independence from the United Kingdom. Whereas in 1962 there were three dominant parties—the Democratic Party (DP) (mostly Catholic); Kabaka Yekka (a monarchist party confined to the Baganda); and the pan-Africanist Uganda People's Congress (UPC)—in 2006 a different party configuration had emerged. The intervening 40 years of mayhem and dictatorship had sapped the energy of the parties of the 1960s even though their distinct ethnic and cultural bases could still be detected below the surface. Instead Uganda had one dominant party and a range of small fledgling ones in opposition. One of them, however, was drawing strength from adversity.

In the February 2006 parliamentary elections, Uganda's one overwhelmingly dominant party—the NRM—won 191 of the 273 seats contested. Its bedrock of support was in western Uganda, where Museveni comes from, but it had succeeded in part by making life difficult for the opposition. In the presidential election the same month, Museveni, standing on the NRM party ticket—after the constitution had been amended to enable him to stand for a third constitutional term—secured 59 per cent of the popular vote. The second party in size was the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) led by Dr Kizza Besigye (formerly of the NRM), who had returned from exile in the run-up to the election, and announced his intention to stand for the presidency. He was subsequently arrested and charged with treason, terrorism and rape. The diplomatic community and Uganda's external donors protested, but to no effect. The FDC still managed to get 37 per cent of the vote in the presidential election—mainly in northern and eastern Uganda, Kampala and Buganda—and 37 seats out of 273 in Parliament. There were also three even smaller parties: the old UPC (under the leadership of Obote's widow, Miria Obote), which won nine seats; the old DP (with eight seats); and the Conservative Party (standing in for Kabaka Yekka) which took one seat. (The remaining seats out of the 273 are the non-elected seats reserved for specific groups, such as women.)

To sum up, the victorious guerrilla movement of 1986 had given birth to a new, authoritarian dominant party, the NRM. Museveni remained its symbol and its

unchallenged leader. It faced only one principal opponent—the FDC under Besigye. Beneath the shadow of these two lurked the remains of the dominant parties of the turbulent 1960s—the Democratic Party, the UPC, and Kabaka Yekka, now renamed the Conservative Party.

To its credit, the NRM has crafted an electoral formula that has increased women’s representation in Parliament to 29 per cent, the second-highest in the region.

The political climate in Uganda remained essentially hostile to the evolution of a genuinely competitive multiparty system. The government feared a return to the volatile 1960s. The opposition parties, as in the 1960s, also seemed to be provincial in nature, small and fragmented. Some of them were prone to violence. The electoral and constitutional structure needed to respond to this reality rather than aim at producing nationwide parties in an ethnically pluralistic system that seemed incapable of generating these even after 44 years of independence.

Ethiopia: an autocratic one-dominant-party system

Party politics was unknown for most of Ethiopia’s history since it was an absolute monarchy until the 1974 revolution, when the Dergue overthrew the government of Emperor Haile Selassie II. The Dergue instituted single-party rule in 1984 after its first decade in power when it pursued a revolutionary socialist policy. Thus the Ethiopian Workers’ Party came into being after a decade when there were effectively no political parties of any description. It was modelled on the monolithic Soviet bloc ruling parties. A more relaxed but never truly free party system had to await the violent overthrow of the Mengistu Haile Mariam government in 1991 by the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) coalition under the leadership of Meles Zenawi. The EPRDF had fought a protracted guerrilla war for 18 years against the Dergue, principally in Tigray. Like the NRM in Uganda, the EPRDF was a guerrilla army with a socialist revolutionary agenda that transformed itself into a ruling party.

In 1991, multiparty politics was nowhere near the top of the EPRDF’s agenda. That was to come later as a result of two principal factors: (a) the EPRDF’s introduction in 1993 of a new constitution which allowed considerable regional autonomy, forcing ethnic communities to mobilize themselves into parties for regional rule; and (b) external pressure from Ethiopia’s international donors, which reinforced the pressure coming from a vocal domestic interest group for a more open political space. Yet, to the extent that the formation of political parties in Ethiopia has been permitted, their freedom to operate has been so circumscribed that none of them has had even a remote a chance of competing with the EPRDF.

Ethiopia is most accurately described as a one dominant-coalition party state. As constituted in 1991, the EPRDF is actually a coalition of five parties united by their mutual antipathy to the Mengistu dictatorship. The dominant partner was and still is the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) led by Meles Zenawi. The other four parties in the EPRDF are the Amhara National Democratic Movement, the South Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement, the Oromo People's Democratic Organization, and the Ethiopian United Peoples' Democratic Force. Apart from the TPLF, none of these parties commands support in its ethnic homelands or in the capital. The EPRDF is therefore essentially the TPLF in power, a minority regional party.

Over time, as the political climate eased somewhat, attempts to form counter-coalitions against the EPRDF appear to have been the strategy of choice for the deeply fragmented opposition. This has not met with much success so far. The Ethiopian opposition parties are even more ethnically provincial and worse organized than those of Uganda, Tanzania or Kenya. Moreover, some of them are inclined to the use of violence as a means of removing the EPRDF from power. The government's repressive stance has in turn made it difficult for opposition parties and alliances to mobilize their membership effectively through public meetings and the press. It was not until the May 2005 election that the opposition parties managed to make a political impression in the legislature worth the name. Comparatively speaking, the 2005 elections were the most politically relaxed Ethiopia had ever seen: open campaigning was tolerated, and parties were allowed to mobilize voters. Even so, the results were accompanied by violent protests and the fatal shooting of 40 demonstrators. Few local or international observers considered the process to have been free of fraud, and protests followed. This time the EPRDF government put 129 opposition politicians and journalists on trial for, among other charges, treason and plotting genocide. Repeatedly since the EPRDF came to power in 1991, opposition parties have threatened boycotts or actually boycotted elections because the playing field was not level, or because of harassment of candidates and the intimidation faced by the EPRDF's opponents. But the situation had never been as tense as it was after the 2005 elections.

The main organizational base of opposition parties in Ethiopia remains ethnic and regional. Of the 11 parties currently represented in the House of People's Representatives, eight bear the following titles: (a) the Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement; (b) the Benishangul-Gumuz People's Democratic Unity Front; (c) the Afar National Democratic Party; (d) the Gambela People's Democratic Movement; (e) the Sheko and Mezenger People's Democratic Unity Organization; (f) the Harari National League; (g) the Somali People's Democratic Party; and (h) the Argoba National Democratic Organization. All these represent Ethiopian nationalities outside

the central heartland of the country close to the capital, Addis Ababa. Between them, they currently hold 77 out of the 547 seats in the legislature. These regional parties face two major problems. First, their agendas are region-specific and it has proved impossible to galvanize them into a working coalition of any kind. Second, they all face local opposition from parties that are either sympathetic to the EPRDF or opposed to them taking seats in the legislature. The Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement, for example, is opposed by the Oromo National Congress and the Oromo People's Democratic Organization, and the South Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement competes with the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Coalition.

To the extent that one can speak of a credible democratic alternative to the EPRDF, it has to be found in the uneasy and unstable counter-coalitions that emerged in Addis Ababa, and are largely Amhara-based. Some of their leaders were put on trial after the riots of mid-2005. In 2006, these coalitions were the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), which has 106 members in the House of People's Representatives, and the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF), which has 52 members. Between them, they have about half as many parliamentarians as the EPRDF. This is the most formidable opposition the EPRDF has faced in Parliament. Combined with the smaller regional parties discussed above, the opposition has 238 members in the House of People's Representatives, compared to the EPRDF's 327. In addition, the CUD and the UEDF have full control of the Addis Ababa city government.

The problem, however, is not in the numbers. Rather it lies in the structural weaknesses of all the parties, and the absence of an effective coalition-building strategy which has to be the political option of choice in a political terrain that is characterized by intense ethnic cleavages and small parties as a result. By far the most effective of the opposition parties is the CUD, a coalition of four parties all drawing support from the Amhara (including their vast diaspora in North America and Europe). The CUD is, however, prone to leadership wrangles and disagreements over whether to join or boycott parliamentary proceedings. Most of its constituent parties are offshoots of the now defunct All Amhara People's Organization, which was set up in 1991 to oppose the EPRDF 'Tigrean hegemony' and in particular article 39 of the new constitution, which allows for regional self-determination, and even secession, for Ethiopian nationalities. The CUD sees this as a formula for the eventual dismemberment of the country. Since most Ethiopian nationalities outside the central highlands value local autonomy very deeply, it would be extremely difficult for the CUD to form a broadly-based coalition that would include the eight regional parties with representation in the legislature. The other coalition in opposition (the UEDF), though Amhara-based, has tried harder to reach out to other parties. Of its five constituent parties, two are southern-based. However, by reaching out to the periphery, the UEDF has had to moderate its opposition to article 39, thereby losing some of its appeal to Amharic

voters, to the advantage of the CUD. As a result, it has 52 seats, and has been more willing than the CUD to oppose the EPRDF in the legislature.

All in all, the May 2005 elections and the run-up to those elections were a historic watershed in the evolution of party politics in Ethiopia. For the first time the government now faces the largest opposition in the legislature the country has ever had, even though that opposition is weak and divided.

The representation of women in Parliament has risen to 22 per cent, largely through proactive government rules rather than policies within the parties.

If Ethiopia is to cultivate a competitive party system to strengthen its ‘emerging democracy’ credentials, at least three critical challenges need to be addressed. First, the state has to commit itself to level the playing field and respect freedom of speech, the freedom of the press and the freedom of assembly of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (a persistent complaint) and political parties. Most important of all, if a levelling of the playing field is to mean anything, the National Electoral Board (NEB) needs to be reconstituted on the basis of an inter-party agreement. The NEB has been the cause of constant rancour between the EPRDF and opposition groupings. Second, the ruling political parties (in the EPRDF) must by now appreciate that in Ethiopia’s culturally pluralistic conditions no single party is ever likely to have nationwide appeal. Coalition making on a broad base is more likely to strengthen the evolution of democratic governance in Ethiopia than the elusive single-party parliamentary majorities that have so far been achieved only by means of underhand political manoeuvres and repression. The FPTP electoral system which Ethiopia, like all its neighbours, has adopted is a disincentive to coalition building. List-based proportional representation (List PR) and the Single Transferable Vote (STV) would provide greater stability than the present system. Finally, Ethiopia’s unfinished constitutional agenda keeps intruding into the political party system, with very negative results. Until the question of autonomy and the right to secession is settled, which is to say until the constitution of the Ethiopian state is agreed on the basis of a broad consensus, it will be difficult to organize broadly-based parties. This is because article 39 has become a permanent lightning conductor separating the EPRDF and its supporters from the parties that support the unambiguous territorial integrity of the Ethiopian state at it now stands.

Sudan: a dictatorship with established parties in the shadows

Sudan has strong tradition of active political parties—secular, religious and sectarian in origin—that have dominated the political landscape of the country since limited

competitive politics was introduced by the British colonial authorities after the Second World War. Sections of these parties have tended to break away and fuse into others. The military dictatorships—of Gaffar al Nimeiry (1969–84) and now Omar Beshir (from 1989 to the present)—banned these parties. Yet despite the constant jostling and deal making between the parties, and their periodic banishment by the military authorities, the basic structures of Sudanese political parties and their popular bases of support have endured. Even after they have banished them, the military dictatorships have continued to cajole, threaten and entice them into partnership, as and when it suited them. This has been the case since General Beshir took over after the June 1989 *coup d'état* against the elected government, then led by the Umma Party of Sayed Saddiq el Mahdi, and promptly banned all political parties. Sudanese political parties have shown considerable endurance and resilience over the last 50 years.

The most influential political parties in the dominant north of the country are sectarian-based, and their origins go back to the Mahdist uprising in the 1880s. They are (a) the Umma Party, founded in 1945 on the foundations of the Al Ansar sect, pledged to upholding the strict Islamic teachings of the Great Mahdi who led the popular religious revolt in 1883 against the Anglo-Egyptian condominium then ruling Sudan; and (b) the Democratic Unionist Party (a fusion of the People's Democratic and National Unionist parties of the 1950), fronted by the Khatmiyya sect. The latter were traditional rivals of the Mahdists, based on the Mirghrani family, who had favoured closer integration with Nasserite Egypt. Both parties draw their core support from the north. Successive military governments in the country have tried to play them off against each other.

In addition to the two 'traditional' parties, two other influential parties compete directly or indirectly with the sectarian-based parties. Both have an urban, educated base and a clearer ideological foundation than the traditionalist parties. They may never have commanded a large popular following at any time since Sudan's independence in 1956, but their ideological clarity and organizational superiority have been responsible for some of the most decisive political turns in Sudanese political history. The first is the National Islamic Front (NIF), which is the Sudanese scion of the Muslim Brotherhood formed in Egypt at the turn of the 19th century with the intention of institutionalizing Islamic-based governance free of the corrupting ways of Western civilization. The brotherhood was incorporated in 1949. Its impact was originally restricted to the university-educated intelligentsia and student organizations. After 1964, however, it acquired a new lease of life under the umbrella of the NIF and the leadership of Hassan Al Turabi, former dean of the University of Khartoum Law School, an articulate exponent of global Islamic revivalism, starting with an Islamic state in Sudan. The NIF reached its political high point between 1989 and December 1999, when Turabi became the ideological mentor and principal defender of Beshir's

National Congress government. The second influential non-‘traditional’ party is the Sudanese Communist Party, which was founded in 1944. Although small in size, it has had a loyal following in the workers’ movement. It initially supported the Nimeiry government, until 1971, when he turned against its leadership, accused it of complicity in an attempted coup d’état, and executed its top leadership. The party has been a fierce opponent of the Beshir government (from exile) and is one of the few northern parties that have consistently worked for unity and equality with the south.

Although opposed to political parties, the Beshir government has been forced to deal with the sectarians and, after many years of military confrontation, with the Sudanese People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM). Khartoum came to terms with the latter under the September 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in Nairobi, which ended the 23-year old civil war in the south. The result is a formula for power sharing between the south and the north. Under the agreement, the vice-president of Sudan will be from the SPLM. Oil revenues will be shared between north and south on a 50 : 50 basis. The SPLM was allocated eight national ministries, including foreign affairs. A referendum was to be held in six years to determine whether southerners want self-determination or not. This agreement smacks of consociational politics, and in some fundamental ways it derives from the Addis Ababa Agreement of 1972, which Nimeiry abrogated in September 1983, leading to the resumption of civil war in the south.

The Nairobi agreement, however, also set up a chain reaction in other regions on the periphery of northern Sudan which have voiced grievances over their economic marginalization and exclusion from power by the north. This has forced Beshir to reckon with parties from the periphery. The low-level uprising in Darfur in 2003 reached an unprecedented scale in 2004 as Darfuris—the Fur, Massalit and Zhagawa—recognized that Khartoum could be forced to acquiesce in resource redistribution and power sharing. That at any rate seems to be the position taken by the parties representing them—the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). However, the uprising was also connected with localized conflict over farming and grazing rights with ‘northerners’ (Arabized Africans) living in the region. Reprisals by the Khartoum army and the Janjaweed militia provoked international horror and charges of genocide by the US Administration and the global human rights movement. Negotiations began in July 2005 between the SLA and the JEM on the one hand, and the Khartoum government on the other, under Nigeria’s leadership. These have proved inconclusive and, despite international outrage and intervention by the United Nations, the European Union and the African Union, the conflict is now estimated to have cost up to 400,000 lives and left 2 million people displaced.

The Nairobi agreement also raised the stakes in eastern Sudan, where the Beija Congress increased the ferocity of its attacks against the central government in January 2005.

The Beija too have long voiced grievances against their political marginalization and economic neglect. More anti-government attacks followed in September 2005. As in the south, the Beshir government opened negotiations with the Beija Congress. In October 2006 a peace agreement, brokered by Eritrea, was signed between the Beija Congress and the Khartoum government. It too contained elements of power sharing and provided for special funds dedicated to the development of the Beija people, who inhabit one of the least developed parts of the country.

Thus, in spite of the formal ban on political parties in Sudan, the Beshir government has been forced, as and when necessary, to engage with established political parties for its own survival, and to weaken its opponents as it plays them off one against the other. Indeed, one of the explanatory factors behind the regime's longevity could be its capacity to play musical chairs with most of the established political parties—in the north as well as in the south, and now the east and the west. And the character of Sudanese political parties is such that most offers the government has made have been taken, as party leaders (including southerners) move in and out of government, sometimes out of state power to prison or exile, and then back in to government.

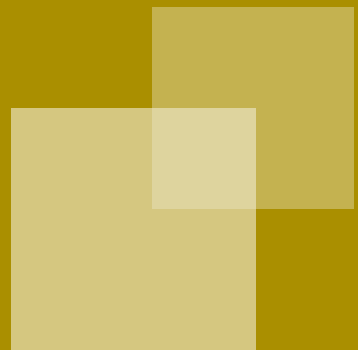
In the north, the NIF served the government loyally between 1989 and 1999. After a disagreement with the government, its leader then proceeded in 2001 to sign an agreement on cooperation with the SPLM to fight the Beshir government. In power, the NIF's Turabi had been an implacable foe of the SPLM. In January 2001, the government opened negotiations with the Umma Party, but in the end Umma declared itself unable to support a totalitarian government. Turabi in the meantime had been put in detention for a second time in 2005. In the south, the Beshir government was essentially ruling in coalition with the SPLM. Some SPLM leaders served in his government in the mid-1990s before returning to the battlefield. In the east, the National Congress will now share power with the Beija Congress, which it had fought since the 1990s. This, then, is the picture of the party system in Sudan at the end of 2005—a military dictatorship in pursuit of an Islamic state, flush with oil money, bringing parties into partnership with the government or discarding them as and when it suits it.

This is clearly not the way to advance democracy in Sudan. It breeds popular cynicism and mistrust of political parties in all parts of the country. Unlike Ethiopia, Sudan had a long tradition of genuinely competitive multiparty elections after 1953, when internal self-rule was granted—in 1958, 1965, 1968 and 1986. The established parties have experience in political horse-trading and bargaining over coalition building. As incorporation on the basis of equality of parties from the south and east—and hopefully Darfur too—becomes part of the political landscape in Khartoum, those skills will be severely tested if and when democratic elections come back to Sudan.



Chapter 5

Political Parties: Internal Structures, Functions and Regulation





Chapter 5

Political Parties: Internal Structures, Functions and Regulation

5.1 Internal structures and functions

Before proceeding to outline the internal functioning of the political parties discussed above, it will be useful to begin with some generalizations that apply to the parties across the region and to point out peculiarities that are common to parties in the five countries under discussion. Students of political parties in the advanced democracies are wont to concentrate on such issues as their organizational structure or type—elite, traditional, mass, or totalitarian. An examination of parties in East Africa, however, evokes memories of Max Weber's description of pre-modern organizations: charismatic leadership, patron–client networks, patrimonial leadership, and traditional legitimacy (Weber 1947: 324–423, esp. 407–12). That distinction is important in understanding why political parties in East Africa are structured in the way they are, why they are either durable or transitory, their membership composition, and why their mobilization capabilities (for resources or members) are generally weak. It may also help to explain why the strongest political parties in the region have been those associated with political incumbency, in government.

Leadership

Party leadership in East Africa is strongly associated with founding personalities or those to whom leadership is bequeathed by the original leaders. In Sudan we have already seen the role played by the el Mahdi family in the Umma Party and the Mirghrani family in the Democratic Unionist Party. In Tanzania, as long as Julius Nyerere was alive (even after he gave up the presidency in 1985) he wielded overwhelming influence over the operations and philosophy of the CCM; indeed,

it was at his suggestion in 1991 that the party decided to open up Tanzania to multiparty competition. The Uganda People's Congress consulted Milton Obote, its founder, throughout all his years of exile in Zambia. When he died, the party nominated his widow as its presidential candidate. In Kenya, the Kenyatta family supported KANU both before and after the rule of President Daniel Arap Moi. Even when parties do not have a long history, they tend to be identified with strong personalities behind them—Yoweri Museveni with the NRM; Meles Zenawi with the EPRDF; and John Garang with the SPLM. Very often, the philosophy and the day-to-day management of the party depend on the leader. In his heyday in Kenya, Daniel Arap Moi ordered party branch elections on the basis of petitions addressed to him personally. It was his personal decision, in December 1991, to yield to his critics' demands for multiparty politics, an announcement that took many of his most vocal supporters by surprise.

This style of leadership selection and management may have the advantage of relying on tried and tested hands and of predictability. But on the whole we were not able to find any political party in East Africa that has held regular elections for the membership to choose its leaders. Even in the CCM, the most open and participatory of all of them, the leadership is chosen by consensus resulting from broad consultation, rather than open competition and voting.

This style does have severe drawbacks. The passing of a leader or his exit from power could put the party in jeopardy, if not practically destroy it. KANU in Kenya functioned for a while after Arap Moi left the presidency in 2003. It even held bitterly contested and divisive national elections the following year. But after an internal schism that saw the exit and registration of a 'New Kanu' faction, and defeat in several by-elections, in 2006 KANU was considering either merger with the resurgent opposition coalition, the ODM, or allowing its members to take out personal membership in the ODM and, in effect, belong to two parties at once. This split the party even more. In Uganda, Kabaka Yekka has proved impossible to revive without the personal participation of the kabaka (king) of Buganda. The fortunes of the FDC are closely tied to those of Kizza Besigye. The SPLM has been under internal stress after the death of John Garang. All these developments betray the lack of strong institutional foundations in East Africa's political parties that can guarantee leadership from one personality to the next, and one generation to another.

Candidate selection

Of the eight parties covered in the survey commissioned for this study, only one—the CCM in Tanzania—appears to have a systematic programme for the selection

of party candidates. Many of the rest admit to using ‘informal’ but fair procedures. This would appear to open a great deal of room for discretion in the selection of candidates. Informality and the absence of firm rules for candidate selection within parties is definitely one major reason for the poor representation of women in national legislatures that we have observed. The popularity of candidates in specific electoral districts counts, but not all the time. All that is required is that at the very least all candidates are expected to be adult party members. The fragility in leadership discussed above and the absence of strong institutional foundations also affect candidate selection. Where party regulations do exist in the parties studied, the selection of candidates has not worked as well as the regulations require. Much of this has to do with the prevalence of the strong-personality leadership that was identified above. Disagreements about the selection of candidates, of which there are always plenty at election time, are referred to the dominant party leader, his close associates, or a committee in which the top leadership has the final say.

The slim resource base on which the parties in the region operate has a lot to do with this situation. It takes considerable human resource skills to devise and operationalize an efficient and transparent system of candidate choice that is deemed legitimate by the rank-and-file membership. Primary elections, party caucuses, a system of constituency delegates, open interviews by party tribunals, and the selection of candidates by independent boards have all been used by established and respected political parties around the world. Coordinating all these activities requires effective management, but it also requires financial resources. Many of the parties in East Africa lack both these. The exception is parties in government, which can call on the public service to mobilize members and conduct the selection of party candidates—a process that has survived the days of one-party rule. The prevalence of this practice varies from country to country.

In these circumstances, there are a motley of methods by parties select their candidates to stand for political office. These range from nomination by the leader or the party elite, canvassing at branch level by potential candidates, the outright buying of a party nomination, quasi primaries organized by lining up behind potential candidates, and seeking blessings from local elders and religious and community leaders. These largely informal mechanisms may sometimes bring the advantage of local legitimacy of the candidate’s nomination. But in a situation where, as we shall see, parties seldom bother to prepare and update their membership lists, these procedures are susceptible to abuse. And they may not ultimately serve to strengthen the functional capability of the political parties.

Policy and programme development

In a companion publication to this study, Per Nordlund and M. A. Mohamed Salih highlight the diversity in African party systems, ranging from extreme fragmentation to consolidation of dominant parties, and the consistent weaknesses in party organization, recruitment, funding and policy formulation (Nordlund and Mohamed Salih 2007). On the whole, the present report concurs with their conclusion that the consolidation of the democratic gains made in Africa so far calls for greater attention to be paid to creating viable party systems that are capable of responding to local political conditions of the kind this report identifies, and of translating voter interests into public policy to the extent that competing demands and resources allow. In any democracy, compromise and bargaining are at the heart of the process, and they work best for a country when it takes impartial and objective analysis into consideration.

In reforming African political party systems, more systematic formulation of party platforms and programmes should rank next to open candidate selection in order of priority. The parties most severely affected are those that have grown out of a strong authoritarian tradition—in Uganda, Ethiopia and Sudan—but even those in Kenya and Tanzania are more likely to draft manifestos, electoral policies and programmes the closer they get to elections. Political parties begin with constitutions that specify their structures, offices and responsibilities, their policies and long-term goals, and the qualifications for and responsibilities of membership. With every approaching election, parties generate manifestos that explain to voters why they deserve a chance to form the government, what the problems of the country truly are, and how the party intends to solve them. These policies and programmes should not be taken for granted. In the United Kingdom, leading parties hold annual conferences each summer to explain their prospective policies to members and key stakeholders and to communicate progress made in the past year. US party conventions are as much a forum for nomination as an opportunity to chart new policy directions for the parties concerned through carefully drafted keynote addresses delivered by the most promising and articulate members of the organization.

None of the political parties surveyed in the region comes anywhere close to this, even though some have a better record than others. The CCM under Nyerere had a precise calendar of party conferences and well-formulated political programmes of action, often delivered by the party leader himself. This CCM tradition has not died but it is clearly not what it used to be. Parties in Kenya write elaborate manifestos and distribute them to their members and to the press. For the leading parties these have sometimes been translated into public policy. The best example is that of the NARC manifesto during the 2002 election. It contained a detailed analysis of the problems

the country faced under 38 years of rule by KANU and what to do about them. Once it came into government in 2003, the NARC administration used the manifesto to craft its development blueprint for the next four years, *The Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation: 2003–2007*. The NRM in Uganda has always published the agenda it has for the country at each election season.

In general, the smaller a party and the less established it is, the greater the chance that it will not have an elaborate policy and programme to offer the electorate. Outside Kenya, where we have noted several parties of roughly equal size, the other countries have a plurality of many small parties, functioning in the shadow of one big national party that commands considerable human and financial resources. In such circumstances, as is evident in Tanzania, Uganda and Ethiopia, the smaller parties lack the capacity to generate party programmes and policies and market them to the public. In the cases of Uganda and Ethiopia, and particularly in Sudan, political intolerance and authoritarian politics make it even harder for these parties to produce and publicize their plans. Some parties in these countries in fact find it easier to market their policies from locations abroad. Increasingly the Internet has become a cheaper and reliable medium of publicizing party programmes. A number of parties in East Africa are now using it, whether they are under threat or not.

The role of the party membership

Perhaps the greatest internal weakness reported within political parties in East Africa is the failure to mobilize their members, to keep updated registers of the membership, and to communicate to members. The most elaborate internal party structure in the region is that of the CCM in Tanzania, but even it has not updated its register since 1995. A few small parties claim to know the size of their membership. However, these are not the ones that determine the fate of democracy in the five countries covered by this study. It would appear that the lack of vigorous leadership leads to weak organizational structures and poor recruitment, and the result is a lack of a firm financial base. The parties studied that were not in government were in a uniformly precarious financial condition.

A vibrant membership is the energy that drives any party, be it elite, mass or oligarchic. This is why members ought to be recruited on a continuous basis, so that the party can replenish its ranks with a new and more dynamic membership. Yet if there is one area in which political parties in East Africa are especially weak it is in membership recruitment, maintaining and updating membership registers, and—above all—ensuring that members are constantly involved in party decision making and governance.

When parties are built on loyalty to an individual leader or family, a region, a religious sect, an ethnic group or a quasi-military movement in search of political power, there is very little incentive to mobilize on a different basis for party membership. Membership in these primary associations—‘tribe’, religion, community or region—automatically becomes one’s ‘entry card’ into the party. The mass parties of the 20th century found their base in the new classes produced by the Industrial Revolution, a point made at the beginning of this report. In a way, therefore, political parties in Africa are host to the affective primary loyalties in the predominantly rural societies in which they are anchored. But there is more to it than that. Many of the political leaders who head the parties do not seem inclined to change a situation that suits them so well. It is a cheap alternative. With the wave of a hand, a leader can get masses of voters to cast their ballots a certain way.

If party democracy is to take root in Africa, this has to change. In Tanzania, until the 1990s the CCM made huge efforts to reach party members in the countryside through the branches, and then the cell system. This was unusual, but then it did not face any opposition at the time. In Kenya, the leading parties have made periodic efforts to register their members, issue cards and update the party registers. But this has never been done on a sustained basis by any of the parties.

Fission and fusion of parties

One remarkable characteristic of parties in East Africa is their longevity. In Sudan, as we have seen, the Umma Party dates back to 1945 and the National Unionist Party to 1954. In Tanzania, TANU and the CCM date their formation to the Tanganyika African Association in 1956, and KANU in Kenya was inaugurated in 1960. The UPC in Uganda dates back to 1957 when Milton Obote returned to Uganda from Kenya.

At the same time, however, the region shows remarkable evidence of ephemeral parties—political associations that appear with pomp and circumstance and then disappear, parties that break up and join others under new names, and factions that regroup under new coalitions and then disintegrate. Many political parties in East Africa, and in all the five countries of the region, display an unbelievable capacity to fissure and to fuse. It is practically impossible to track the parties as they mutate from one anagram to the next, from one abbreviation to another.

It may help to give a few examples, starting with Kenya, which (as we have seen) has more registered political parties than any of the other countries. The opposition grouping which spearheaded the campaign to bring multiparty politics back to Kenya in 1991 was the Forum for the Restoration for Democracy (FORD), then an

immensely popular party with a genuinely national following. It faced stiff resistance and violent assault by KANU and the government. In the middle of the following year, and in advance of the general election, it broke up into two factions—Ford-Asili (original) and Ford-Kenya—over the issue of leadership selection. Over time, Ford-Asili itself broke into Ford-People and Saba-Saba Asili. In the meantime a faction of Ford-Kenya left the party in 1995 to form the NDP, which two years later went into an informal alliance with KANU, and ultimately rejoined KANU, the party it had fought so hard in the 1990s. In the run-up to the 2002 elections, what was once the NDP and a breakaway KANU faction composed the Rainbow Coalition, and merged with opposition parties to produce the NARC, which won the 2002 general election.

In Sudan, to cite another example, the NIF ruled (as we have seen) in alliance with the military government, under the auspices of the National Congress between 1989 and 1999. When its leader, Hassan Al Turabi, and the military government quarrelled, Turabi then (in 2000) formed the Popular National Congress Party (PNC), which was promptly refused permission to operate. Disenchanted, the PNC then called for a national uprising against the National Congress in 2001, at which point the PNC signed a memorandum of understanding with its old nemesis, the SPLM, in Geneva. The truth is that the NIF, the Muslim Brotherhood and the PNC are the same movement in different political guises. Meanwhile in 2005 the SPLM joined the National Congress government. In Ethiopia, by the time of the 2005 election the All Amhara People's Organization, formed in 1991, had broken up into seven or eight factions, several of which (as we saw earlier) had reconstituted themselves as the CUD coalition.

In general, the longer a party in the region stays out of power, the greater the chance that it will be afflicted by factionalism and schisms. This is a phenomenon that cuts across the five countries.

5.2 The regulation of political parties: external and internal

In all the countries dealt with in this study, the registration and regulation of political parties is vested with the government rather than an independent body. This gives incumbent governments considerable leverage in the registration, regulation and deregistration of parties. The powers of national electoral commissions are confined to the management of elections rather than the regulation of parties. At one time or another, parties in East Africa have appealed to the courts for redress against government action. The amount of regulation and control exercised over political parties, and the freedom to operate accorded to them, therefore again vary from country to country. In general the regulatory framework and the freedom granted

political parties show tremendous improvement in Kenya since the election of December 2002; yet even so there are occasional problems that deserve note, mostly related to the right to assemble. Sudan's parties face the most restrictive system, followed by Ethiopia's. Again, Uganda and Tanzania fall in between, with Uganda being the more restrictive of the two.

As mentioned above, Kenya has a bill pending in Parliament that will provide new legislation for the formation, registration, operation and public funding of political parties. It has clear provisions on equality in gender representation within party structures and in the legislature. But even before the bill is approved, political parties face fewer hurdles in the registration process than they did in the period before 2002. Party meetings can be held at any place provided parties give the police sufficient advance notice. Although the police are entitled to refuse permission if they fear a breach of security, it is now rarely refused. (There were several incidents in advance of the November 2005 referendum when the opposition parties were refused permission to assemble³) Until the new bill is passed, parties generally finance themselves (in case of the Liberal Democratic Party, for example) through a system by which legislators donate part of their salary to the party, or by soliciting donations from business and the public. According to Freedom House's 2006 *Freedom in the World*, the Kenyan constitution's provisions for freedom of speech and a free press 'are generally respected in practice, and Kenya enjoys one of the liveliest press environments on the continent'. While critical in many respects, a 2005 audit of Kenya by the independent Chamber of Justice gave the administration of President Mwai Kibaki generally high marks for accommodating criticism and respecting civil liberties, human rights and the freedom of the press (Freedom House 2006: 384). The Freedom House report praises Kenya's 'energetic and robust civil society' for achieving greater transparency in government. That applies to opposition parties too.

In Sudan, at the opposite extreme, parties are in theory governed by the 1998 Political Parties Registration Act. However, the government wields considerable discretion in allowing parties to operate. The press and NGOs are severely constrained, and this deprives political organizations of vital means of communication to recruit and inform members. The same applies to independent trade unions, which no longer exist, and which in the past were key allies of some political parties.

In Ethiopia, which has been less restrictive than Sudan, especially since the run-up to the 2005 election, the government allows registration of political parties under Proclamation no. 46 of 1993 (the Party Registration Law). As we have seen, there were about 60 parties on the registration books in 2005. The party registration process, however, is said to be cumbersome. On the other hand, party mobilization for voter registration is non-controversial and transparent. Ethiopian political

parties face their worst problems in exercising the right to assemble (due to constant harassment), the absence of press freedom (the print and electronic media are still overwhelmingly dominated by the state), and the restrictions placed on voluntary civic groups (other than the Christian churches) and NGOs. In 2005 for instance, Reporters Without Borders and the Committee to Protect Journalists produced a report critical of the Ethiopian Government's attacks on the opposition press, including harassment, intimidation, the revocation of press credentials, and its denial of press licences to journalists who were critical of the government. Academic freedom is also severely restricted. The arrest and arraignment in court of opposition party leaders following the May 2005 elections will narrow the political space of the Ethiopian political parties even further.

In Uganda, in the meantime, 'significant concern exists regarding the ability of opposition parties to compete on a relatively level playing field with Museveni's ruling NRM' (Freedom House 2006: 744). This is because in Uganda the party registration requirements are onerous and time-consuming. The state has in the past allocated public resources to the NRM campaign and NRM candidates, and there have been allegations of paramilitary units being deployed to intimidate opposition voters and candidates. The state provides no funding for the opposition. Although the press now enjoys a considerable measure of freedom, there have been cases of selective harassment and intimidation. In sum, opposition parties in Uganda, while free to operate, still face an uphill struggle in providing the voter with a truly meaningful alternative to the NRM.

Tanzania's legislation on the registration of parties errs on the side of caution. To ensure the consolidation of national unity, parties based on a regional, ethnic or religious constituency are not eligible to register. New parties must demonstrate that they have a nationwide membership in order to register, and they cannot pursue a partisan agenda, although this is difficult to enforce. Parties like the NCCR-Mageuzi and the CUP have ultimately been confined to a narrow regional following, in spite of their best intentions. But what distinguishes Tanzania even further from its East African neighbours is that it is only country that funds bone fide opposition parties. Recipient parties insist that the funds are not adequate. All the same, Tanzania has blazed the trail, and many opposition parties in the region would wish their governments to follow suit.



Chapter 6

**Conclusion: General
Comments on the Features
of East African Region
and the Way Forward**





Chapter 6

Conclusion: General Comments on the Features of the East African Region and the Way Forward

This report began with a review of the generic justification for political parties in a democracy: they represent the next best alternative to direct representation of the voter in government decision making. The most distinguished theorists of democracy from the past to the present have had to tackle the question of the most appropriate institutional format for aggregating like-minded interests in situations where direct democracy is not possible. Hence concern with the role of political parties and associations. By aggregating the views of like-minded voters, party politics serves to reduce the costs of translating the will of parties' members into concrete action in a legitimately democratic fashion. Parties come in many shapes and sizes, however, and not all of them have proved capable of discharging their obligations to the voter, even in the established industrial democracies. Some have perverted democracy and instituted tyranny. As in the rest of the world, African political parties have often played constructive roles in realizing the most humane democratic values, but in other circumstances they have been accessories to or the instigators of massive repression and abuse of human rights.

Although the study of democratic governance in Africa (and other newly-democratizing regions) has received considerable attention since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, that attention has been manifestly uneven. Elections and election monitoring, and 'national governance' issues regarding the executive branch and the judiciary, have received a good deal of attention. This is understandable because elections present the first phase in the installation of a legitimate democratic order. The events in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in late 2006—the run-off in the presidential election—are living evidence of this; political stability through legitimate elections precedes all else. Some attention has subsequently been accorded to 'good governance' as a precondition for economic development and the reduction

of poverty, and to legislative and judicial reforms. Strengthening NGOs and civil society has also been a long-standing topic of interest. This has generally been the order of priority where attention to the problems of the transition to democracy in Africa is concerned.

In contrast, very little attention has been given to the character and viability of political parties, central though they are to connecting the voter to public policy making and implementation. As stated above, political parties are the Cinderella of democratization studies and funding in Africa. In a modest effort to close that gap, a considerable part of this report has focused on the political parties and party systems in five East African countries—Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. These countries have some similarities, but upon closer inspection there are also some gaping differences, especially on this subject. In this concluding section of the report, we attempt to flesh out some generalizations that apply to the region, and to account for the differences between countries, before proceeding to some suggestions as to what could be done to advance our understanding of party systems in Africa.

The capacity and effectiveness of party systems are strongly conditioned by the degree of political liberty and tolerance in a country. After 2002, Kenya seems to have made considerable progress in widening the scope of multiparty competition and individual freedom. This was the result of two decades of pro-democracy activism. Kenya's lead is followed by Tanzania and to a lesser extent Uganda. The same cannot, however, be said of Ethiopia and Sudan. Opposition parties in Uganda and Ethiopia, in particular, operate under severe political constraints, and in Sudan they can only resume activity at the pleasure of the government. The scope of liberal political activism (and of political parties) is narrowest in Sudan.

Still, the party systems in the five countries bear some similarities.

- *Fragility and structural weaknesses*, particularly in parties that are not associated with the government in power. Parties in general lack strong organizational capability; recruitment of new members is intermittent; fund-raising is weak; and management is lax and often informal.
- *Lack of adherence to formal rules, regulations, procedures and programmes*. Practically all the parties have constitutions, but the operative procedures for internal elections, discipline and publicity are lax and often unwritten.
- *Leadership centred on a dominant personality, family or clique*, often commanding a substantial popular following. Major decisions are therefore made at this level. Most parties are dominated by strong personalities (or families) for historical

and social reasons. Followers identify parties with personalities and accord them support on that basis, not on account of the party's platform or ideology.

- *A strong tendency for parties to break up and fuse with others* over and over again. Parties out of government are especially vulnerable to this endless fusion and fission. For this reason parties (in the formal legal sense) tend to have short lives, as they mutate into new coalitions, merge, or reinvent themselves. Almost the only thing that remains constant is the cultural and ethnic base.
- *A weak and unreliable financial and human resource base.* We encountered no party out of government that had a sound financial base as a result of membership support. As a result, it has proved difficult to recruit and retain qualified staff to manage the business of the party.
- *The FPTP majoritarian electoral system.* This seems to have a negative effect on the representation of political parties in government. FPTP systems have an inherent tendency to exclude even major parties from power, particularly in systems like those in East Africa (outside Tanzania) where membership is confined to regions or ethnic groups.
- *Lack of a mass membership* recruited from primary associations, notably ethnic groups, particular regions, traditional and religious groups, and social movements. Again, with the exception of the CCM in Tanzania, parties in East Africa tend to have a narrowly-based membership built on pre-existing social organizations.
- *Lack of activity except at election time.* Parties tend to be moribund in between elections. This applies to parties both in and out of government.

It is important to remember these vital characteristics in considering the way forward towards rescuing the study of parties and party systems in Africa, so that they could be refashioned into the useful tools for democratic government that they deserve to be. Without doubt, we have to begin by understanding the complex situation. The series of studies commissioned by International IDEA make an excellent start towards meeting that need. But there are some important considerations that are worth taking on board as we contemplate the way forward.

1. It is difficult to understand political party systems without a clear and objective understanding of the societies in which they are grounded. This is not a plea for a richly-textured cultural and historical analysis of the societies in which the parties are located. Rather, it is a plea to trace the intimate connection between a party and its clientele, the society it purports to serve, and the demands made of the party by its base.

2. The study of political parties in Africa should never be separated from that of electoral systems. All the countries studied here are highly pluralistic. A considerable number of the problems parties run into are traceable to exclusion, which is always inevitable whenever majoritarian systems are applied in ethnically fragmented societies where parties reflect inherent social cleavages.
3. Detailed field research on the internal functioning of political parties in this part of the world would be advisable. The records kept by the parties themselves are sparse and discontinuous. It is clear, however, that poor managerial capacity is a major problem. It is impossible to provide assistance to remedy the problem until we are certain about its magnitude.
4. The autocratic pressure that continues to be exerted on opposition political parties in East Africa is unacceptable. Some strategy to remedy the situation ought to be found. Some opposition parties in Africa are relatively free. Twinning parties in Africa would be a good start. This could then be extended to partnerships between parties in Africa, and those outside Africa that share similar objectives and ideologies.
5. If there is one overarching lesson that emerges from the empirical part of this report, it is the aversion which party leaders (and parties in power especially) have shown to the principle of coalitions and power sharing. Yet, for the fractured and segmented party systems that we have in East Africa, coalitions and power sharing are the battle-tested tools of the trade for producing political stability and democracy at one and the same time. These have their downside but, on balance, coalitions fare better than the elusive single-party majorities many parties in Africa continue to seek. There is a crying need for parties, leaders and governments to appreciate this.

Finally, it is time to bring political parties to centre stage in the transition to democracy in Africa. We now have a considerable body of literature on electoral politics in Africa. Problems associated with ‘national governance’ have received attention, focusing on reforms in the executive branch of government, and to a lesser extent the legislature and the judiciary. Civil society has long been the favourite of external donors, pro-democracy activists and scholars. From the foregoing analysis, it is clear that, for good or ill, political parties—their policies, members and leaders—have a profound effect in all these areas of government. It is time they received the attention they deserve.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

CCM	Chama Cha Mapinduzi (Revolutionary State Party) (Tanzania)
CUD	Coalition for Unity and Democracy (Ethiopia)
CUF	Civic United Front (Tanzania)
DP	Democratic Party (Uganda)
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
FDC	Forum for Democratic Change (Uganda)
FPTP	First Past The Post (electoral system)
IDEA	(International) Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
KADU	Kenya African Democratic Union
KANU	Kenya African National Union
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party (Kenya)
NARC	National Alliance Rainbow Coalition (Kenya)
NCCR	National Convention for Construction and Reform (Tanzania)
NDP	National Development Party (Kenya)
NIF	National Islamic Front (Sudan)
NGO	non-governmental organization
NRM	National Resistance Movement (Uganda)
ODM	Orange Democratic Movement (Kenya)
PR	proportional representation
SPLM	Sudanese People's Liberation Movement
TANU	Tanganyika African National Union
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
UEDF	United Ethiopian Democratic Forces
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UPC	Uganda People's Congress



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About International IDEA

What is International IDEA?

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization that supports sustainable democracy worldwide. Its objective is to strengthen democratic institutions and processes. International IDEA acts as a catalyst for democracy building by providing knowledge resources, expertise and a platform for debate on democracy issues. It works together with policy makers, donor governments, UN organizations and agencies, regional organizations and others engaged on the field of democracy building.

What does International IDEA do?


Democracy building is complex and touches on many areas including constitutions, electoral systems, political parties, legislative arrangements, the judiciary, central and local government, formal and traditional government structures. International IDEA is engaged with all of these issues and offers to those in the process of democratization:

- knowledge resources, in the form of handbooks, databases, websites and expert networks;
- policy proposals to provoke debate and action on democracy issues; and
- assistance to democratic reforms in response to specific national requests.

Areas of work

International IDEA's notable areas of expertise are:

- *Constitution-building processes.* A constitutional process can lay the foundations for peace and development, or plant seeds of conflict. International IDEA is able to provide knowledge and make policy proposals for constitution building that is genuinely nationally owned, is sensitive to gender and conflict-prevention dimensions, and responds effectively to national priorities.
- *Electoral processes.* The design and management of elections has a strong impact on the wider political system. International IDEA seeks to ensure the professional management and independence of elections, adapt electoral systems, and build public confidence in the electoral process.
- *Political parties.* Political parties form the essential link between voters and the government, yet polls taken across the world show that political parties enjoy a low level of confidence. International IDEA analyses the functioning of political parties, the public funding of political parties, their management and relations with the public.

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Where does International IDEA work?

International IDEA works worldwide. It is based in Stockholm, Sweden, and has offices in Latin America, Africa and Asia.

Strong and sustainable democracy is dependent on the existence of well-functioning political parties, which are crucial actors in bringing together diverse interests, recruiting and presenting candidates, and developing competing policy proposals that provide people with a choice. In a democracy there is no substitute for open competition between political parties in elections. Throughout the world, however, political parties find themselves in crisis, unpopular and increasingly distrusted. In Africa, they face challenges similar to those faced elsewhere, further exacerbated by diverse and complex political and developmental challenges.

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