PARTY SYSTEMS in NEW DEMOCRACIES:
Variations in Institutionalization in Africa

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Presentation for “Bridging Disciplines, Spanning the World” Conference
Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies
Princeton University
April 8-9, 2005
ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the puzzle of the development of very different types of party systems in new African democracies. What are the causes of strongly institutionalized party systems, which exhibit stable roots in society, regular patterns of party competition and highly developed party structure, versus weakly institutionalized party systems with high electoral volatility, low legitimacy of parties and weak party organization? Furthermore, what are the implications of these differing developments for the stability of democracy and political order? How does party system institutionalization (PSI) influence the quality of policy creation and implementation, or governance more generally? The paper uses the region of sub-Saharan Africa to analyze the formation of new party systems and their causes of institutionalization through statistical analysis, and finds that (1) socio-economic structure and (2) institutional legacies of the former dominant party are the two main factors contributing to variations in this outcome. A surprising aspect of the statistical analysis of the African cases is the negligible role of ethnicity and social cleavages in relation to the institutionalization of the party system. The discussion of these statistical findings is followed by a case study comparison of Benin and Senegal, two countries that are similar in many respects yet diverge widely on the outcome of PSI. Finally, I will discuss implications of these variations for the quality and stability of enduring democracy in the region and what generalizations can be made for new democracies elsewhere.

INTRODUCTION

Political parties have long been considered a necessary condition of democratic politics, as a mechanism to aggregate interests and channel societal demands into electoral competition. Parties have historically had two broad functions in the political system, representative (linking and mediating social needs and demands relative to policy formation) and institutional (recruitment of political leaders and governing as organization of parliament and the executive). ¹ These functions are relative, and shift over time and context, yet they remind us of the important and unique role of parties in democratic politics. Parties can further serve as agents of mobilization, integrating local communities into the nation ² and providing ‘symbol integration’

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¹ Bartolini, Stefano and Peter Mair “Challenges to Contemporary Parties” in Larry Diamond, ed Political Parties and Democracy 2001.
of citizens into the democratic process.\(^3\) As such, parties have the possibility of legitimating the nation, providing ideologies, leadership or opportunities for political participation and thus sustain government and democracy, “providing political stability in societies able to absorb increasing levels of political participation”.\(^4\) The potential contribution of this institution is beneficial to the social order and quality of governance, particularly in new democracies as they struggle to provide participatory channels for diverse groups of mobilized constituencies.

However, even from their early days, there was considerable concern regarding parties’ pernicious possibilities – as polarizing forces which provide citizens a mechanism through which they can pursue their interests directly, destroying the cohesion and order of the political system through factional competition.\(^5\) While any party system has the capacity to be either centripetal or centrifugal, the question of why it develops as it does is one which continues to have great consequences for the stability and well-being of public life. A well-developed party system can serve as the means of moderating the destabilizing influences of social change and maintaining order within the political system, providing “order in changing societies”\(^6\). The pursuit of interests through institutionalized channels keep disputes mediated and within bounds of legal and political mechanisms of compromise and resolution. It follows that the more developed and established parties are in society, the better for stability, democracy, representation and accountability.

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3 Schmitter, Philippe “Parties Are Not What They Once Were” in Larry Diamond, ed Political Parties and Democracy 2001.
5 Madison, Lipset and Rokkan discuss these possibilities.
6 Huntington extols parties as the institution that is capable of channeling diverse social needs and tensions during modernization and rapid social change into an orderly political system. Political Order in Changing Societies. 1968.
In interaction, parties form a system, such that when the majority or all effective parties are enduring, coherent and strongly rooted in society, they are linked to increased democratic quality in many countries. Theoretical and empirical studies of advanced democracies have argued that well established and highly institutionalized party systems facilitate societal access to government and representation, increase accountability, more effectively channel social concerns into policy outcomes, and support the legitimacy of the democratic regime. As parties become increasingly institutionalized, constituents can focus on which lasting parties most closely match their interests, and can hold those parties electorally accountable if they do not live up to their promises. Thus, party system institutionalization is assumed to be strongly related to democratic survival, quality and functioning.

Because parties hold the promise of great virtue for public life, it is critical to understand how and why they form as they do, as the empirical world belies much variation in their actual roles and functions. This question is three-fold. It first relates to party system formation, why certain cleavages are mobilized in political competition, and why they remain salient over time. The new democracies of the ‘third wave’ provide an exciting opportunity to study this question, as multi-party systems are emerging anew in Latin America, Eastern Europe and Africa. While some of these countries are building on earlier legacies of democratic competition, others have experienced rapid transitions following long and harsh periods of authoritarian or communist

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7 Mainwaring, Scott *Rethinking Party Systems in the Third Wave of Democratization: The Case of Brazil*. 1999. 8 While Mainwaring admits that extremely high levels of party system institutionalization are also problematic, resulting in a stultified party system, the functions of parties and their role in democracy have been extolled nonetheless. He finds that the problems of weakly institutionalized parties in Brazil lead to instability and uncertainty about the desirability of democracy, greater personalism, clientelism and corruption, lower legitimacy of parties making it easier for anti-party politicians to win office, and the importance of individual leaders leading to ad-hoc practices and policy inconsistency. *Rethinking Party Systems in the Third Wave of Democratization: the Case of Brazil* 1999.
rule, and thus have built nascent party systems in a very short amount of time, which creates
interesting variations for the study of party system development. Earlier work on the advanced
industrial democracies focused on the types of parties that form\(^9\), the number of parties that make
up the system, and whether the cleavages of competition are centrifugal or centripetal.\(^{10}\)
Research of this set of new democracies gives us insight not only into the consequences of these
types of party systems, but the deeper question of why they form as they do.

The second part of the question of party system development is its institutionalization, a category
Mainwaring added to Sartori’s classification, to emphasize that a third key dimension requires an
understanding of the relative fluidity versus stability of the existing parties and their interaction,
and how deeply rooted they are in the social fabric of public life, giving us greater insight into
the abilities of parties to withstand social change and channel tensions, and to maintain a certain
type of democratic order. The question to investigate in this aspect, and the main focus of the
paper, is what determines different degrees of institutionalization? Why are some party systems
so much more fluid than others?

The third question of the effects of PSI builds upon the previous two questions of substantive
differences among new democracies; we then must ask what these differences mean for
democratic deepening or stability, quality of public life and ordering the social world. Stability
is directly affected by the fluidity of party system competition, but also its direction. If party
competition is incredibly stable but also extremely polarized, the party system will be stultified
and may ultimately collapse in deadlock or lead to extra-institutional means of conflict resolution

\(^9\) Lipset and Rokkan, Kitschelt, etc.
and violence. Additionally, the formation and institutionalization of the party system determines what types of parties form, what issues make it to the political agenda such that they are mediated in a public framework? What kinds of links to society are being developed? Are the majority of citizens incorporated into political competition via these various party systems, or do they sustain systems of intra-elite accommodation that maintain stability because it involves only an elite few in the realm of real decision making and distribution? Does the party system allow for increased accountability, transparency and representation, or does it obscure these links through high electoral volatility and extra-legal mechanisms of competition such as strikes and boycotts? Does the party system provide, as a minimum condition, peace and stability? For many citizens, that may be sufficient, as the ‘degree’ of government is more important to their daily lives than ‘type’.  

Theories of political parties and party systems thus have a distinguished pedigree, and have developed over time in relation to accumulating empirical evidence. Yet the large number of countries in the world now emerging as electoral democracies, as part of the ‘third wave’ presents new questions in light of this contextual difference. If the causes of party formation and partisan identification may be different at this later stage of global development and identity politics, and the sequence of democratization is different in this third wave, emerging as mass participation in competitive politics following periods of colonization, authoritarian regimes and other variations, new democracies should not be assumed to have the same meanings or experiences with similar types of institutions. To investigate the nature of party systems in new

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11 Huntington 1968: “The most important political distinction among countries concerns not their form of government but their degree of government”, p. 1
democracies, this paper looks at both the causes and implications of party system institutionalization in Africa’s newly competitive systems.

PARTY SYSTEMS IN AFRICA

To begin, a party system refers to the set of parties that interact in patterned ways within a country. Institutionalization is a process by which organizations and procedures acquire value and stability, meaning that political actors have clear and stable expectations about the behavior of other actors. Thus an institutionalized party system is one in which “actors develop expectations and behavior based on the premise that the fundamental contours and rules of party competition and behavior will prevail into the foreseeable future. There is stability in who the main parties are and how they behave”.

Regarding the electoral democracies of Africa, this analysis takes into account only those regimes in which political rights and competition is judged to be minimally free and fair, such that we can speak of meaningful party competition, where the opposition is allowed to exist and endure over time. The cut-off for this level of political competitiveness is any country which has received a four or lower on the political rights score of the Freedom House indicators. (See Appendix 1 for list of countries and their relative Freedom House scores).

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12 Huntington 1968:12
13 Mainwaring 1999 chp 2.
Based on this defined set of cases, one is struck by empirical variation in the formation and institutionalization of party systems across these countries. According to Mainwaring and Scully, the relevant dimensions for the measurement of party system institutionalization include:

- **Stability** – patterns of party competition show regularity, resulting in low electoral volatility
- **Roots in Society** – linkages between parties and citizens are stable such that parties are structuring political preferences and providing avenues for representation
- **Legitimacy** – political actors see parties as a necessary part of democratic politics and respect electoral outcomes as the route to state power.
- **Party Organization** – parties acquire an independent status, beyond an individual leader and have autonomy from those who originally created it as well as territorial reach and administrative capacity to carry out its campaign and policy formation.

Building on these dimensions, scholars have established a means of measuring the outcome of party system institutionalization as a composite index of the first three factors: regularity of party competition, stable roots in society and legitimacy of parties and elections (breadth and depth of party organization is a fourth factor to be included based on further field research). With each of these three factors receiving a score on the range of 1-3, the outcome of PSI is then a composite scale of 3-9. As displayed in the table below, the African democracies range from extremely weakly institutionalized to fairly strongly institutionalized. This means that party systems that have formed under fairly similar conditions of rapid democratic transitions, low levels of development, heterogeneous societies and similar historical trajectories have developed extremely different types of parties and forms of party competition.

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The range we see here cannot be explained by length of democratic experience alone, although we would certainly predict that those democracies that have existed longer will have time to become more institutionalized. Yet, Mauritius, a successful democracy since independence with multiple alternations in power, shows only a medium range of party system institutionalization, whereas Sierra Leone, whose democracy has been interrupted since independence by military governments and, recently, civil war, shows much higher institutionalization of its parties. Similarly, Namibia has only become an independent country very recently, and South Africa’s main parties have only been allowed to exist since the early 1990s, although there were certainly precursors to these parties within society. And the least institutionalized system, the Gambia, was long-heralded as a multiparty democracy from independence until 1994 when a military
coup took control, but which has since re-instated its electoral democracy. Thus, we cannot rely on the assumption that over time systems naturally become more institutionalized.

Applying statistical analysis to this set of countries (albeit with caution, given the total number of 22) will help us to separate some of the main hypotheses for variations in party system institutionalization. In this section, I present my initial findings from analysis of the twenty two cases of African democracies, using data I compiled to evaluate my initial hypotheses regarding variations in party system institutionalization.

*Testing Ethnicity*

One of the first issues that we might consider when trying to explain the formation and institutionalization of party systems in Africa is the role of ethnicity. My initial hypothesis was that ethnically mobilized societies would translate into particularly stable party affiliations and thus, strongly institutionalized party systems, due to the creation of deep and enduring links within society, strong partisan identities and relatively stable voting constituencies affiliated with ascriptive identities. When we take into account the pervasive and important role of clientelism in African politics, and the political mobilization of many African societies according to ethnic group during the colonial period, we would further assume that ethnic group affiliation with a particular party would lead to a stable, institutionalized and yet centrifugal party system. That is, there would be little electoral volatility, citizens would strongly identify with their parties as representing them in the political community, and thus parties would endure. Furthermore, patterns of competition would be relatively fixed and parties would continually reach out to the
same constituency despite possibly polarizing that entire society into a number of distinct and competitive groups.

Some recent scholarly work has related ethnic political mobilization to party systems developing along ‘additive’ cleavage lines, rather than cross-cutting pluralisms. This tendency is based on the fact that while multiple identities may relate to political party choices, in Africa these identities tend to reinforce each other. A member of a certain ethnic group will likely have similar socio-economic opportunities, language, religion, regional affinities, etc. to the other members of his group, rather than expanding one’s identity base and ‘bridging’ interests and affiliations through more heterogeneous memberships.

This logic leads us to assume that the relation between politically relevant ethnic groups and party system institutionalization would be strong and significant, such that where such groups exist, they would equate directly with particular parties and maintain those partisan identities over time. In testing these predictions in statistical analysis, however, this group of twenty-two African electoral democracies shows no relation between politically relevant ethnic groups and party system institutionalization. Even when controlling for other factors such as economic and political institutions, ethnicity remains insignificant in multi-variate regression analysis. As the following graphs show, even when considered as the sole causal factor, ethnic heterogeneity predicted less than 2% of the outcome of PSI.

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15 Manning, Carrie “Party Systems in Africa”
16 The measure of ethnicity used here is an Index constructed by Dan Posner, the Politically Relevant Ethnic Group Index, PREG, to measure African identity groups that were actually politically mobilized, a major improvement over the previous Ethno-Linguistic Fractionalization Index.
Table 1  Bivariate Regression Estimate of African Party System Institutionalization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Estimate (B)</th>
<th>Significance (p-value)</th>
<th>Explained Variance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Heterogeneity (PREG90)</td>
<td>0.745</td>
<td>0.624</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No. of Observations = 22

R-squared      0.0122
Adj. R Square  -0.0372
Root MSE       1.7079
Stand. Error   1.499
F (1, 20)      0.25
Prob > F        0.62

Table 2  Multiple Regression Estimates of African Party System Institutionalization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Estimate (B)</th>
<th>Significance (p-value)</th>
<th>Explained Variance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Heterogeneity (PREG90)</td>
<td>0.745</td>
<td>0.624</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP/Head</td>
<td>0.0004</td>
<td>0.199</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of former party dominance (as % of authoritarian or single-party rule period)</td>
<td>1.105</td>
<td>0.329</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant Party Maintained in MPS1</td>
<td>.56121</td>
<td>0.097</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R-squared      0.5219
Adj. R Square  0.4094
Root MSE       1.2888
F (4, 17)      4.64
Prob > F        0.0103

Figure 1  Scatterplot of African Party System Institutionalization (y) and Ethnic Heterogeneity (x)
While this finding of the relative unimportance of ethnic group structure in relation to party system institutionalization may be surprising, it is reinforced by the findings of public opinion survey data, conducted by the Afro-barometer. In considering how voters choose and evaluate their candidates, Afrobarometer data showed that social structure plays only a minor role in shaping vote choice and that relevant social considerations of performance evaluation “does not include ethnicity, at least when this concept is measured as membership in each country’s largest language group”.17 Certainly, in particular countries, ethnic ties are the predominant social cleavage and structure vote choice as well as the party system more generally (especially where the largest ethno-linguistic group makes up half or more of the national population, such as in Namibia or Zimbabwe). However, across all countries, Afro-barometer showed the vote choice is first and foremost a product of popular performance evaluations, particularly privileging the protection of individual political rights over economic management. This micro level data reconfirms that primacy of the political realm in Africa, and the large role that political organization plays in shaping future rounds of competition.

Testing Economic Explanations

While the evidence points us away from ethnic structure of society as an explanation for party system development, the literature points us towards another type of cleavage, that of economic class. Lipset and Rokkan’s structural theory emphasized early patterns of class identification in Western European party system development, which has since been tested against evidence in the United States, Latin America and beyond. As related to the outcome of party system

institutionalization, we could hypothesize that those countries with more industrialized and urban populations are able to form more class-based identities upon which parties are able to build, creating stronger policy platforms as well as better networks of communication and information dissemination. We could also predict that where resources of economic power are sufficiently distributed to the society at large, (as measured by an index of resource distribution which accounts for economic distribution as well as factors such as literacy, percentage of the population as students, etc\(^\text{18}\)) most citizens would be able to engage in politics, use political resources, and evaluate parties, such that parties are more firmly linked to citizen participation and therefore are more enduring and stable.\(^\text{19}\)

Testing these hypotheses presents some interesting conclusions, particularly in multi-variate analysis which allows us to control for the importance of other factors. In all cases, the Index of Economic Power Resources as well as its aggregate parts of adult literacy, percentage of the population as students, urbanization, occupational diversification, non-agricultural population and other related aspects, were repeatedly not statistically significant, nor did they predict a significant amount of the variation in party system institutionalization.

The aspect of economic structure that exhibited consistently significant impact on party system institutionalization is an indicator of economic inequality, measured by the “area of family farms as a percentage of the total area of holdings, assumed to measure the relative distribution of economic power resources based on the ownership or control of agricultural land. The higher the percentage of family farms, the more widely economic power resources based on the ownership

\(^{18}\) Vanhanen, Tatu  
Routledge Press 1997

\(^{19}\) This assumption builds on Dahl’s Polyarchy and the discussion of distribution of resources as being necessary to the establishment and maintenance of polyarchy.
or control of agricultural land are usually distributed”. ²⁰ It is particularly important in Africa, where the majority of countries remain agricultural societies and continue to be dependent on agricultural exports for a large portion of their GDP, as well as domestic subsistence. “The concentration of landownership makes a large part of the agricultural population dependent on those controlling the use of land. It is difficult for an economically and socially dependent agricultural population to take part in politics independently, to form its own economic and political interest organizations, and to participate in national politics.”²¹ Given this logic, we would expect Dahl’s theory of a minimum threshold of resource distribution as a necessary condition for democracy to transfer as well to institutionalized party systems. However, we find just the opposite relation, giving renewed weight to Barrington Moore’s still salient theory of the role of the bourgeoisie as critical. It seems that in the African cases, those societies with more dispersion of ownership, or greater equality of political resources, actually have less institutionalized party systems, whereas those in which the precious resource of land is concentrated in the hands of a few have built more durable institutions of political competition. This critical finding leads to further investigations of the nature of party system institutionalization, whether it has similar meanings in all contexts, and whether that meaning tends to equate with an empirical reality of elitist rotation of the same players in the durable parties, using clientelism as an intra-elite bargaining mechanism, and using electoral competition as a means of maintaining order while leaving the fundamental balance of power undisturbed.

²⁰ Measurement and database created by Vanhanen 1997.
²¹ Vanhanen p. 48
Table 3 Multiple Regression Estimates of Economic Factors Relative to African Party System Institutionalization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Estimate (B)</th>
<th>Significance (p-value)</th>
<th>Explained Variance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban Population</td>
<td>-.0056</td>
<td>0.912</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy</td>
<td>-.0045</td>
<td>0.813</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index: Dist. of Econ Resources</td>
<td>.01289</td>
<td>0.833</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Farm Ownership</td>
<td>-.1123</td>
<td>0.097</td>
<td>0.2362</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R-squared 0.2362
Adj. R Square 0.0325
Root MSE 1.6496
F (4, 15) 1.16
Prob > F 0.3674

*note similar results when other economic indicators are used, such as % of population as non-agricultural, Industry as a % of GDP, GDP/head, etc. The overall finding is that family farm ownership remains a significant variable, although not a strong relation, where other economic factors are not.

Table 4 Bivariate Regression Estimate of African Party System Institutionalization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Estimate (B)</th>
<th>Significance (p-value)</th>
<th>Explained Variance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Farm Ownership</td>
<td>-.101</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No. of Observations = 21
R-squared 0.2923
Adj. R Square 0.2551
Root MSE 1.48
Stand. Error .036
F (1, 19) 7.85
Prob > F 0.0114

Figure 2: Regression Estimation of African PSI as a function of Ownership of Family Farms
Testing the Effects of Political Institutions

Consistently across analyses of these multiple hypotheses, the effects of prior political institutions remained the most important factor in determining party system institutionalization in the new multiparty regimes. To unpack this hypotheses and move to more observable implications of exactly how the legacies of the past transfer into current political systems, a number of possibilities were tested. These included:

- colonial power, to test whether a certain occupying country developed different modes of political organization which had lasting impact on political formation;
- whether or not a protracted war was fought for independence, to determine if the experience of ‘war making the state’ might also make for stronger political institutions;
- the experience of political formation in the early independence years, whether there was prolonged instability, a fairly rapid and definitive move to establish one party control, or multi-party competitive systems, be they settler colonies that restricted the franchise such as in South Africa or fully participatory such as in Mauritius, Botswana, Namibia and the Gambia;
- the defining character of the continent-wide authoritarian period of the 70’s and 80’s, as military rule or single party control or the few that maintained multiparty systems;
- whether authoritarian governments experimented with internal political liberalization such as competition within the single party at local levels, or attempted democratic transitions as moderated from above (which were not long lasting but perhaps signaled more experience in party formation and competition over time);
- whether the country had a strong Marxist orientation, to test whether different types of party organization had lasting implications beyond their original formation.
• the length of time the dominant party maintained its rule during the authoritarian period, as a ratio of time over independence through transition to multipartism, to test whether parties that were more dominant, and perhaps more organized with greater reach and control in society, related to stronger parties in the multiparty period, building on this experience or because the society is easier to penetrate to some degree

• whether that dominant party was maintained until the multiparty transition, or whether its rule was interrupted prior to the transition itself, such that those parties that were interrupted may have had less control over the transition process and may have been able to influence the development of the subsequent party system to a lesser degree.

• Whether the former dominant party was maintained in the multiparty system, to test whether the mere presence of the former dominant party (regardless of whether it won or lost the transition elections) lent credence to the newly formed multiparty regime, such that prior elites were not on the ‘outside’ of the system waiting for it to fail.

• Whether the former dominant party won the first election or lost the first election, or whether there was no former dominant party competing in the first election, looks at the electoral results as a possible moment of critical juncture, to determine whether this moment fundamentally set in place a new dynamic depending on the victor, and whether its outcomes were shaped by whether or not a former dominant party was present at all.

• The speed of the transition, to test whether rapid transitions led to a more destabilized party systems as new parties have to form in an instant and voters have a relative lack of information with which to make calculated choices whereas gradual transitions lead to a precise development of the major players with clear channels of communication and knowledge of policy platforms and representation of the parties competing.
While all of these hypotheses present a myriad of moments and actors and institutions to claim as important, it serves merely as a tool to sharpen the focus of the effect of political institutions and to make more precise the moments at which legacies of the past might affect future political organization, and how specifically those legacies would be carried forward over time. Many of these hypotheses showed significant and strong results in relation to party system institutionalization when considered as the sole factor. The length of time that the prior dominant party was in power during the 1970’s and 80’s, and whether the character of the authoritarian period was military rule versus single party rule, where the former dominant party won the first election, and whether the transition was rapid or gradual all appeared to be important in bivariate analysis. However, when controlling these factors against each other, it is very clear that the main factor that retains its significant result, while draining this result from the other factors under consideration, is whether the former dominant party was maintained in the multiparty system. Whether it won or lost that election and how long it was in power before the transition become much less important, although we can hypothesize that of course these questions are related theoretically as well.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Estimate (B)</th>
<th>Significance (p-value)</th>
<th>Explained Variance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dominant Party Maintained in MPS</td>
<td>2.056</td>
<td>0.040</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Former Party Dominance</td>
<td>1.014</td>
<td>0.433</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instability following Independence</td>
<td>.8578</td>
<td>0.466</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Dom Party Won 1st Elec</td>
<td>.5937</td>
<td>0.401</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R-squared: 0.5100  
Adj. R Square: 0.3947  
Root MSE: 1.3048  
F (4, 17): 4.42  
Prob > F: 0.124
This result is extremely interesting, given prior theorizing about the role of a dominant party and concerns that it would create a ‘hegemonic’ party system, by dominating the political arena, the resources of the state for its own competition and suppression of opposition parties. In this respect, the assumption goes that because the playing field would never be equal, opposition parties would remain weak and fractionalized, and the dominant party would use its resources to maintain its hegemony. The focus of this research agenda on the party system provides an important critique to this analysis, as the cases of sub-Saharan Africa clearly show that where a former dominant party transitioned into the multi-party system, opposition parties were also stronger, more coherent, more organized and more linked with society. In addition, the former dominant party’s control of the transition process and several electoral victories following the liberalization to multipartism did not preclude a meaningful and ultimately victorious opposition from developing, even where the playing field was fully tilted in favor of the ruling party, as in Senegal and Kenya.

This sub-set of cases applies only to those countries in which political rights are judged to be at least minimally protected and guaranteed, such that political opposition can function in a competitive environment and elections, while displaying some irregularities and challenges, does reflect the will of the voters and power is transferred accordingly. In many senses, this minimal requirement on the type of political competition makes the result of the former dominant party’s involvement in the newly shaped party system all the more surprising. Where the regime transition is merely a façade of allowing nominal opposition parties to exist, but the dominant party has retained complete control of the party system and no real opportunity for

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22 Sartori conceived of the classification of ‘hegemonic’ party system to describe this state.
23 As measured by Freedom House, political rights score of 4 or below.
political competition exist, we would expect to find a very stable record of electoral results, little
volatility, entrenched parties, and control over the society such that the electoral outcome is
resigned to if not accepted. Because these cases are not included in this analysis, instead
focusing on countries where the former dominant party must compete in a completely different
political environment, it is even more surprising that its presence goes the furthest in explaining
institutionalization across the entire party system.

This finding builds on earlier analyses of democratic transitions in Africa and other regions of
the ‘third wave’. According to some analyses, the paths of democratic transition were “shaped
by the institutional legacy of preceding political regimes”.24 The next question for this research
agenda is to trace the process of exactly how and why earlier institutional attributes shape the
development of party systems in a new political regime. This will entail case study comparisons,
to discern the effects of electoral rules (and who were these put in place by - in such a short time
frame the actors making the rules and later playing the game are likely to be one and the same),
pre-existing social organizations and associational activity that may have served as precursors for
opposition party development (and whether these had different types of space to organize in
depending on the character and nature of control of the former dominant party during its reign),
and the structure and organization of the dominant party in the authoritarian period (and whether
deeper roots in society, administrative capacity and territorial reach meant for a different type of
transition and interaction with new parties). A brief comparison of two broadly similar countries
in terms of economic and social organization with very different experiences of party system
formation following democratic transitions is presented with the cases of Benin and Senegal.

24 Bratton, Michael and Nicolas van de Walle, Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in
INSTITUTIONALIZATION: Variations in Benin and Senegal

Benin and Senegal are two countries located in West Africa, with broadly similar levels of social heterogeneity (.30 and .33 respectively on the PREG index), economic industrialization (wage earners involved in industry approximately 10% and 11%), gross domestic product per person (407 and 494 US$), colonial history (French inheritance of electoral rules and administrative structure) and yet the party systems that have developed in these two countries are extremely different. Their very different types of party systems is especially puzzling, as both of these countries have been leaders (in different ways) in democratic transitions on the continent and in their enduring commitment to democracy, both at the elite level and the society at large.

Benin is among the least institutionalized on the continent, with many independent candidates running for office without party affiliation, a very fluid scene of party formation and alignments around particular candidates, and opposition boycotts to contest the elections rather than participating in them. Even the country’s long-time military dictator and now-reformed democrat (“the chameleon” is his affectionate nickname) successfully ran for presidential election in the last two competitions without a political party of his own. A loose coalition of forces and new political parties certainly grouped around his candidacy, and this support base has recently transformed itself into a formal political party in preparation for the next election in which term limits will prevent the current president from running again. Yet, even this maneuver points to the fluidity and transformative landscape of the party system, as each election brings a new alignment of forces.
While independent and anti-party candidates are prolific, the commitment to democracy in Benin is both wide and, seemingly, deep. Benin heralded the National Conference mode of democratic transition in which civil society forces claimed sovereignty over the government and created a new constitution. The public debate centers on maintaining and building their democratic system and to avoid the detrimental divisions of ethno-regionalism that plagued the country at independence and caused continued instability. The political agenda has increasingly included debate on economic issues, provision of public services, and quality of governance. Economic issues have been decisive in some political campaigns, as the first elected president of the country was defeated in his 1996 run for re-election as he was widely held responsible for currency devaluations which had high social costs. So despite the fluidity of parties in Benin, and the overall weak institutionalization of the party system, parties remain important actors in the political system, as Benin remains focused on democratic competition and dissemination of information for judgments on party performance and leadership. This relationship supports Mainwaring’s distinction between the demise of parties as important political actors versus parties remaining important in political competition despite their weak institutionalization; in the second scenario, parties continue to have important effects on the political system, but they function differently and have different consequences for the political system at large.

In Senegal, the party landscape is very well defined and has been fairly stable since the re-introduction of multipartism in the 1980s. The former dominant party strongly controlled the transition process, allowing only two other parties to exist with ideological positions imposed by the ruling party. Over time, the political liberalization increased to allow more parties to register,

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25 *Le Matinal*, Benin
26 Mainwaring 1999
and parties to determine their own ideological placement and campaign agenda. Yet throughout the changes and liberalizations controlled by the government, there has been one major opposition force that was a contender. There have been other opposition parties, to be sure, and their critical decision to unite behind an opposition alliance was key to their victory in 2000, but the main parties and players have continued to dominate and structure the choices available to the electorate from a very early stage.

In both cases, the opposition parties have been successful – in Benin, the transition process stripped the government of power and ushered in an opposition candidate who was then defeated in the following election making Benin a ‘two-alternance’ democracy - and in Senegal the opposition built up over time to counter the ruling party’s dominance and offer a valid alternative to the citizens. Yet the party systems remain completely different in their functions and modes of operation, and while both countries espouse a democratic commitment and look poised to maintain this regime type for the foreseeable future, party system dynamics in either case could ultimately determine whether this goal is met and how well it serves the needs of the society.

The key difference between these two countries is the experience of dominant party formation both at independence and in the modes of transition to multipartism. Benin experienced a destabilizing tripartite competition based on ethno-regionalism following independence until military rule established order in 1975 and gradually created a party organization to support the authoritarian regime. In contrast, Senegal presents the quintessential case of dominant party rule from independence through the transition, maintaining secure links to important social groups and a strong party organization at the center.
The cases also differ at the moment of transition, Benin’s government stripped of power through the national conference that made a dramatic break with the old elite and declared itself sovereign, versus Senegal’s gradually initiated transition which left the dominant party in power in the multiparty system for almost two decades before opposition victory. Benin’s former dominant party was created only as a secondary support base to the military government even during its reign, and it did not make the transition into the multiparty system. Even though the former authoritarian leader ultimately re-emerged in the new democratic environment, it is interesting that he did so without a strong party organization. With his political resources and leadership capabilities, he could have easily reconstructed a party based from the remnants of its earlier organization. Yet he chose to remain an independent candidate, and his campaign was more of a personalist attempt to appeal directly to the voters. In contrast, in Senegal, the party organization was important to both the former dominant party and the opposition, as the former dominant party survived a transfer of leadership within its ranks and the party’s depth was critical to this change-over. Similarly, the opposition party only grew in strength and popularity and its organization allowed it to penetrate the national territory more fully, reaching out to voters on a more local level to counter the resources that the government could provide.

The economic structure of the countries in terms of land ownership is also related strongly related to political phenomenon and aspects of social control. Land ownership is about 5% more concentrated in Senegal than Benin, but in addition to this fairly important difference is the role of the Mourides in the Senegalese economy. While individual families do own some of the means of production, the Mouride Islamic brotherhood in Senegal has long controlled the
production, transport and storage facilities and export relations for the country’s largest export crop, groundnuts. The deep level of social penetration and extensive territorial networks have allowed the Mouride elite to control this lucrative trade and is the reason behind their powerful political influence in the country. Their religious linkages with the population as well as serving as the main social service provider in many areas the government does not reach solidifies their dominant impact on the society. Thus, while land ownership in Senegal is fairly concentrated, and the reality is that production is much further controlled than that indicator presents. The Mourides early affiliation with the ruling party following independence allowed the party to extend its distributional links to the countryside and thus was a key factor in the party-constituency relationship. The economic control of this important political group ties directly into the maintenance of the former dominant party as a competitive force to be reckoned with.

In contrast, in Benin ownership of land is more dispersed and the production of cotton as the main export has been organized by a parastatal, Société Nationale pour la Promotion Agricole (SONAPRA), which does not directly affect ownership or production, but which has been in control at the level of marketing and trade. The recent privatization of this sector is indicative of its more affiliate status to the government, rather than a core aspect of its social and political control. This comparison indicates a much more highly concentrated holding over economic power resources in Senegal than in Benin, a finding which supports the earlier statistical analysis of the concentration of resources leading to more institutionalized party systems.

CONCLUSION

The question of party system institutionalization provides many avenues for further research. In general, the idea of institutionalization should be problematized to determine its exact meaning
across contexts. That is, does a measurement of party system institutionalization such as I have
provided above actually describe similarities across contexts, or does institutionalization have
different meanings according to specific criteria? For example, in new democracies, party system
institutionalization from the perspective of party elites may not relate to the endurance of their
party over time and increasing enduring links to society or developing partisan attachments in
various constituencies, but rather the stability of the modes of competition and social
organization and endurance of elite bargaining patterns and intra-elite accommodation practices.
Furthermore, to what extent is party system institutionalization related to the particular cleavages
that are mobilized? That is, is party system institutionalization actually only a reflection of the
formation of specific political cleavages, or does the cohesion and continuity of parties imply a
separate process that is not related to the passion or depth with which political cleavages are felt
in society? And finally, what are the effects of party system institutionalization for stability and
a peaceful social order in both centrifugal and centripetal party systems?

While these questions perhaps present more confusion than clarification, I present them to
highlight the importance of this research agenda, and the unique opportunity that the study of
new democracies presents for advancing our knowledge of democratic processes and institutions.
To observe the creation of party systems at this early stage will add to our understanding of the
role of institutions and how they can structure or reflect changing societies.
APPENDIX ONE:
Party System Institutionalization as related to Freedom House Political Rights Score

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>PSI</th>
<th>FHPolR</th>
<th>FHCivLib</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madagascar</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zambia</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesotho</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mauritius</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namibia</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botswana</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regression Estimate of Country Political Rights (Freedom House) as a function of Party System Institutionalization
Finding of significance within 90% confidence interval, but not a strong relationship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Estimate (B)</th>
<th>Significance (p-value)</th>
<th>Explained Variance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party System Institutionalization</td>
<td>-.2484</td>
<td>0.078</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No. of Observations = 22

| R-squared   | 0.1471       |
| Adj. R Square | 0.1045     |
| Root MSE     | 1.0278      |
| Stand. Error | .1337       |
| F (1, 20)    | 3.45        |
| Prob > F     | 0.0781      |