

Part I

Institutional Foundations

2 Institutional Legacies

Understanding Multiparty Politics in Historical Perspective

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The institutions of multiparty politics in Africa today have important causal implications for a variety of critical outcomes, such as the ability to build cross-ethnic coalitions; the stability or volatility, accountability and representativeness of elections; the extent and distribution of public services; the likelihood of authoritarian successor parties' return to power; the durability of democracy itself; and even the very existence and salience of particular social cleavages. These contemporary formal institutions have, in some cases, been crafted *de nouveau* from upheaval and transition moments, but in other cases have evolved gradually out of pre-existing authoritarian-era institutions. However, even where new institutions have been crafted in the recent past from scratch, this has not occurred in a vacuum. The legacies of past struggles – modes of organisation and distribution of power and resources – have a significant influence on the possibilities for the future.

This chapter demonstrates the significance of *past* institutional configurations – harking back to the era of supposed 'institutionless' politics in Africa, or the reign of the informal – in shaping contemporary multiparty politics. In doing so, it makes two corrections to existing interpretations of the political landscape. First, it is common to assert that African political parties are weak, with the assumption that parties do not structure the electoral playing field.¹ This is an error that has serious consequences for understanding contemporary politics. Political parties across the continent vary dramatically not only in their strength, but also in the forms of territorial organisation, resources and strategies of mobilisation, internal rotation mechanisms and abilities to thrive beyond a single candidate or term in power. This variation is a global phenomenon, and understanding how parties structure the political playing field (and to what extent) is an

¹ Scholars have previously characterised political parties in Africa in undifferentiated terms, as extremely weak, non-ideological or reflective of ethnic cleavages (Mozaffar, Scarritt and Galaich 2003). They are presumed to remain weakly institutionalised and volatile given obstacles to party building (Randall and Svåsand 2002).

empirical question relevant in Africa just as it is in Europe, Latin America, Asia and beyond.

First, it is important to highlight the many robust political parties in Africa – including the Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) in Tanzania, the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and New Patriotic Party (NPP) in Ghana, and the Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo) in Mozambique. They have historically distinct roots – from nationalist parties fighting for independence to revolutionary, military or multiparty opposition parties. These divergent origins offer particular opportunities for citizen-linkage strategies and power contestation, and also constrain other opportunities for adaptation and regeneration in a changing environment.

Second, a historical approach to institutions corrects the perceived dichotomy between an era of weak formal institutions – ruled by the informal throughout the 1970s and 1980s – and an era of multiparty politics that has seen a ‘resurgence’ of formal politics. As Cheeseman (Chapter 15, this volume) usefully reviews, the *interaction* between formal and informal institutions is critical across historical periods. For example, while authoritarian leaders may not have been constrained by constitutions, they felt compelled to use their control over legislatures to make formal constitutional amendments; often they could neither ignore it nor completely control the reform process. This institutional process was built upon the primacy of neo-patrimonialism, but the channels of formal institutional change nonetheless created new opportunities for contestation and the further adaptation of both the formal and informal spheres. For example, by changing the constitution in Uganda to dissolve term limits, President Museveni was forced to make concessions and initiate multiparty competition in the process. As a consequence, opposition parties now engage in new electoral tactics that were previously not possible, and reformists and disgruntled politicians within the ruling party can break off and create new challenges for the status quo. In the run-up to the 2016 presidential elections, a key National Resistance Movement (NRM) ruling party insider opted to challenge Museveni’s domination first within the party and then as an independent candidate.

This type of challenge is perhaps the most common route to dominant party defeat in sub-Saharan Africa because it simultaneously weakens the ruling party’s support base, sparks renewed interest in the possibility for alternation among civil society and other political groups, motivates additional defections and highlights failures in the ruling party’s reign (Cheeseman et al. 2015). Moreover, the Ugandan example demonstrates that even efforts to subvert institutional constraints – such as term limits – engage with the formal institutional landscape to create

new focal points, opportunities and limits to political agency in the next phase. Authoritarian leaders' manipulation of the formal institutional realm to maintain power can have unintended consequences for their political futures, precisely because elites and masses alike respond to the altered institutional incentives with new possibilities for challenging the status quo.

This chapter examines the points of informal and formal institutional congruence and divergence. Whereas congruence generates lock-in and self-reinforcing dynamics for institutional stability, informal and formal institutional divergence generates opportunity for institutional transformation such as displacement, layering, drift and conversion (Mahoney and Thelen 2010). Only by considering both realms is it possible to understand how past institutional configurations are linked to contemporary outcomes. I draw upon a range of empirical examples from across the continent – including Ghana, Senegal and Uganda – to demonstrate how informal institutions of reciprocal exchange, traditional authority and local brokers, as well as indigenous notions of citizenship and political participation shape the construction and practice of formal institutions. Additionally, I discuss evidence of how formal institutions – such as the colonial state or the multiparty electoral system – transform informal institutions (Laitin 1986; MacClean 2010), which suggests the continually evolving nature of nominally stable institutions.

The Roots of Institutional Strength in Africa

Contrary to the many simplistic claims of weak parties in Africa, much recent work has demonstrated variation in party strength, institutionalisation and types of parties that exist across the continent (LeBas 2011; Arriola 2012; Pitcher 2012; Resnick 2012; Elischer 2013; Koter 2013; Riedl 2014; Weghorst and Bernhard 2014; Wahman 2015). Deploying Mainwaring and Scully's (1995) measure of party system institutionalisation across semi-established and full democracies in Africa demonstrates one dimension of this variation (Figure 2.1).

These differences in contemporary party systems are fundamentally shaped by the origins of nationalist and authoritarian-era parties themselves. Prior consolidation through revolutionary struggles (Huntington 1968), past modes of incorporating support through local brokers (Riedl 2014) and leveraging the existing social structure to use local brokers and build multi-ethnic, nationalist parties (Koter 2013) have long-enduring consequences for the nature of the present multiparty institutional landscape. That nationalist and authoritarian-era parties were often built by mobilising traditional authority structures is readily apparent, but without a focus on *both* realms of formal and informal institutions during this

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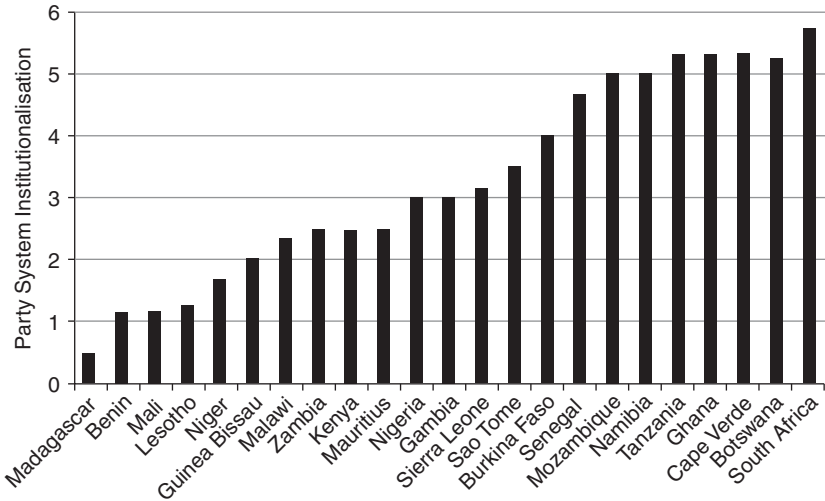


Figure 2.1 Variation in party system institutionalisation by country in Africa

Source: Riedl 2014.

*Party System Institutionalisation (PSI) has a possible range of 0–6, with 0 indicating the lowest level of institutionalisation and 6 being the highest. The mean PSI of all African democracies is 3.3. These data form a composite measure of the period from the founding elections through 2011 in each country.

period, their interaction and their long-term consequences for the contemporary multiparty system are obstructed.

One demonstration of the enduring effects of historic struggles and past institutional organisation for contemporary multiparty politics is evident in the specific legacy of revolutionary parties across sub-Saharan Africa. Levitsky and Way (2012) argue that the organisational structures, as well as the identities and norms forged during revolutionary struggles for liberation, created critical and durable sources of cohesion for the resulting nationalist parties. The violent and ideologically driven conflicts over national liberation created a uniquely durable reservoir of unity and discipline that maintains over time to forge stronger, more resilient – and indeed, more institutionalised – parties. These parties are not only less prone to defection due to their solidarity and ideological core, but they are also less reliant on material sources of loyalty production for elites and followers alike. FRELIMO in Mozambique, the ANC in South Africa and the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front

(ZANU-PF) in Zimbabwe are all examples that highlight the importance of formative processes, and the cohesion and durability of the ideationally driven parties formed through conflict.

In particular, Levitsky and Way (2012) highlight how the party's origins enhance later intra-institutional cohesion and durability in several ways: (1) by creating enduring partisan identities; (2) by hardening partisan boundaries between competing groups; (3) by forcing parties to create militarised structures and establish high levels of internal discipline; and (4) by producing a generation of leaders with high legitimacy and authority, which can be used to unify the party and impose discipline. While these characteristics may well contribute to enduring competitive authoritarianism, they are not inherently anti-democratic elements. Instead, they contribute overall to the party's institutionalisation and durability, which can exist in a range of regime types over time.²

The cohesion and durability these parties sustain is likely to degrade over time in some dimensions and less so in others, as founding legacies are reproduced and adjusted to new contexts (Levitsky and Way 2015; Mahoney and Thelen 2015). Some founding legacies are bounded and will certainly diminish with time, such as the generation of leaders forged by conflict who enjoy high legitimacy and authority. The leaders, cadres and soldiers who participated in the revolutionary struggle and the seizure of power will eventually pass from the scene, and as they do, the cohesion that characterises these revolutionary regimes will tend to dissipate (Mahoney and Thelen 2015; see also Slater 2010). To take but one clear example, a future ZANU-PF without Robert Mugabe must adapt, and these points of transition are key tests for other dimensions of the party's institutionalisation. Presidents now elected in Senegal and Ghana, and elsewhere across the continent, were born *after* independence and are fundamentally driven by concerns well beyond the nationalist-era rallying cries. Other types of legacies are considered to be more static, such as the party organisation itself. Once constructed, politicians and party officials are recruited and have an interest in sustaining the institution. Therefore, investments in the party organisation become self-perpetuating (see also Brownlee 2007).

In addition to origins of ideological and violent conflict, historical patterns of power consolidation can also have enduring effects on multiparty

² Levitsky and Way (2015) also suggest other causal mechanisms that contribute to enduring authoritarianism, such as the ruling party's capacity to repress and to control the state's coercive apparatus with loyalists. Furthermore, *how* this conflict defines the opposition and hardens the boundaries between competitors for power could mean that the ruling party sees the opposition as a threat to the nation itself, and therefore could never accept their electoral victory, as in Ethiopia (Mengisteab 2001; Abbink 2010).

politics in the contemporary period. Elsewhere, I have demonstrated how strategies of authoritarian rule throughout the 1970s and 1980s to build support and maintain power provided these authoritarian ruling parties with very different capabilities to manage the transition to multiparty competition that swept the continent in the early 1990s (Riedl 2014).

In most African authoritarian regimes, incumbents consolidated their power in one of two ways: either through broad-based incorporation of social and economic authorities at the local level, or through state substitution – attempting to neutralise local power brokers and replace them with state-sponsored organisations. Both strategies were useful for authoritarian control and its maintenance, but they provided unequal transferrable assets when unforeseen transitions to multiparty competition required that these incumbent parties win majorities in founding elections in order to stay in power. Incumbents shared a common goal – they wanted to win these founding elections, and in order to do so they attempted to control the terms of the transition, to determine which opposition parties would be allowed to compete and under which electoral rules.

But only those authoritarian incumbents who had previously practised broad-based incorporation had the capacity to carry out their agenda. Incumbents who had incorporated local elites were able to maintain their support, set the rules of democratic competition in their favour and retain power despite new multiparty competition. By contrast, those who had previously substituted state or party agents in an attempt to replace local power brokers found themselves lacking cooperation across the rural areas and unable to mobilise mass support for their new rules and transition agenda. Local brokers were suddenly presented with new options for affiliation in the multiparty era and defected rapidly to the opposition. In these cases, new opposition forces then pushed for more permissive electoral rules and weakened incumbent control.

These strategies of power accumulation – either through incorporation or state substitution – had long-lasting implications, shaping the nature of the transition to multiparty competition, the rules for party competition and organisational imperatives for interparty competition. Successful incorporation strategies required a significant investment in the rural hinterlands. As Waldner argues, rural incorporation facilitates the construction of robust cross-class (or in Africa, multi-ethnic) coalitions, which in turn facilitates the construction of mass integrative parties (Waldner 2004). In Africa, what we might call the ‘rural incorporation strategy’ creates multi-ethnic parties; once constructed, they shape the very structure of the politically relevant social cleavages (Riedl 2014, 2016). Parties not only capsule social cleavages at a given point in time and project them into the

future, but also potentially reshape relevant cleavages through the process of formation and contestation. For example, authoritarian parties that successfully navigate the transition to multipartyism and compete strongly in founding elections establish a regime/outsider cleavage. The prior authoritarian single party – such as the NDC in Ghana, the *Parti Socialiste* in Senegal, FRELIMO in Mozambique, the CCM in Tanzania, among others – shape one pole of the electoral competition, which is often centered on voting for the party of stability (the incumbent).

The other side of the new electoral pole is a vote for democracy and change (the opposition). This new cleavage achieves saliency *because of* the formal institutional change to multiparty elections; in this new regime cleavage, existing social divides, such as class, religion or ethnicity, may be subsumed within elite coalitions and represented on both sides. Such regime cleavages are often based upon the ways in which informal institutions of traditional authority were, or were not, incorporated into the support base of the prior single party over the previous decades. Relatedly, when authoritarian parties relied on strategies of alliance with corporate actors, and organised urban labour in particular, they created an unstable base of support that unintentionally created the organisational, institutional foundations for a strong opposition party (LeBas 2011). LeBas demonstrates how these authoritarian-established and -supported labour unions provided structures and resources that could be transformed into oppositional challenges to the ruling party, and have long-term consequences for partisan alignment and multiparty organisation.

Furthermore, once specific patterns of competition and electoral mobilisation are established, these patterns often persist over time. Early elections drive strategic adaptations; and effective approaches in an initial contest become dominant. For example, Koter (2013) demonstrates how independence-era politicians seeking to mobilise the electorate had to work within the parameters of the existing social structure. Where local brokers existed, such as the *marabout* leaders in Senegal, politicians could harness them as intermediaries and build cross-ethnic parties, and ultimately downplay the salience of ethnicity as a political cleavage in the entire political landscape. These forms of party organisation and electoral mobilisation persisted over time due to the congruence between informal institutions of authority – the local brokers – and the formal institutions of political party organisation and systemic competition. Thus, historical strategies can create a dominant narrative and an understanding of how politics works, how voters and politicians alike engage in the system, generating self-reinforcing mechanisms of further party investments in these strategies.

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Congruence and Divergence: Institutional Continuity and Change

Given the overlapping importance of informal and formal institutions in the contemporary multiparty landscape (Chapter 15, this volume), analysing the interaction between these forces can contribute to our understanding of institutional stability and change. Where formal and informal institutions are symbiotic, or act in congruence, this contributes to stability through self-reinforcing mechanisms or lock-in.

Institutional stability occurs in many new multiparty systems across sub-Saharan Africa because the conditions of the transition to such systems established congruence between the informal institutions of power management (such as local broker interlocutors) and the formal rules established by the ruling party overseeing the transition itself. This congruence contributes to preserving the characteristics of previous systems through institutional isomorphism – a similarity of the processes and structures of one organisation to those of another through imitation or independent development under similar constraints (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). A simple example is how new political parties form in the shadow of well-established parties, and in their effort to be competitive in the same playing field, try to copy and imitate the strongest parties in the system. Formed by their own prior experiences within the dominant parties, and because the rules in place often reinforce the utility of the dominant parties' organisation and practices, new party elites try to reassure potential followers that they can go toe-to-toe with the existing parties. In new African democracies, party competition replicates the distribution of power in place at the system's founding, embedding institutional logics that continue to drive the degree of party system institutionalisation over repeated contests (Riedl 2014).

Whereas previous work has suggested that volatile competition and incoherent party relations would increasingly institutionalise with the passage of time following the democratic transition (Converse 1969), party systems in Africa demonstrate that initial divergences across national party systems from the critical moment of democratic transition have exhibited 'lock-in'. Numerous rounds of competition certainly provide opportunities for increased coordination and learning, yet the party systems at both ends of the institutionalisation spectrum continue to operate in the same fashion as in the founding elections.³ This stasis suggests that the legacies of the distribution of power in the critical juncture of democratisation have far-reaching impact on democratic party systems. Certainly, future change can

³ Studies of electoral volatility in African democracies have shown no decrease in volatility over time (Lindberg and Morrison 2005; Bogaards 2008).

occur, and in sub-Saharan Africa it is often the potential for extra-institutional change (through conflict) that leads to new institutional outcomes. Witness Côte d'Ivoire, wherein the authoritarian single party successfully manoeuvred through the transition to multiparty competition, and the opposition formed according to a regime cleavage model. Yet, the death of founding President Houphouët-Boigny led to a series of institutional ruptures that were meant to reshape relevant social cleavages (and their anchoring in traditional authority structures) and rewrite the requirements of citizenship. This raw struggle for power was first implemented through changing formal institutions (namely through ethno-national laws to bar candidates and voters from electoral participation), which ultimately escalated into civil war. In the process, the conflict destroyed the institutional stability and organisational model the *Parti Démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire* had provided as the former single party.

Yet, institutional continuities from the authoritarian period into the new multiparty system are frequently enduring. This relationship occurs through three mechanisms whereby continued dominance of authoritarian incumbents (or the lack thereof) shapes the emergent competitive party system: (1) eligibility rules; (2) organisational modelling; and (3) regime cleavages. Eligibility rules refer to laws and legislation surrounding candidate and party registration. Organisational modelling refers to the forms of imitation that new parties pursue to attempt to compete with the dominant, established players. And regime cleavages refers to the division of party competition and the electorate into pro-(prior authoritarian) incumbent versus pro-(nominally democratic) opposition. As explained below, these mechanisms of production and reproduction explain the persistence of varied party systems in the face of many forces that might have been expected to disrupt the patterns established in the transition period. Which rules are debated and contested versus maintained from previous periods, how identities are politicised and aggregated into party blocs and how resources from the state and private interests are distributed are all conditioned by the degree of power the incumbent retains over the transition.

These mechanisms of production enable authoritarian incumbents to sustain their authority into the new party system and to reproduce it over time through three mutually-reinforcing dynamics. First, rules of party registration established in the transition transmit existing power structures into the founding party system. Eligibility rules act as barriers to entry: difficult requirements limit party formation, and easy requirements facilitate party formation and proliferation. Authoritarian control over the transition provides the incumbent party with the opportunity to set the