

African democratization: contextual factors and institutional choices

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The year 1989 marked the beginning of a new wave of political reform in Africa. Most one-party or military regimes had lost legitimacy domestically and internationally and calls for a return to multi-party politics became widespread. The causes for this wave of political reform were multiple, both domestic and international. They include disillusionment with economic performance, corruption and abuse of power by the ruling parties as well as diffusion effects of the democratic upheaval in Eastern Europe, the collapse of the Soviet Union and consequent end to the bipolar world system.

At the same time, the end of the bipolar world system also took away the political motive for donor governments to support 'friendly' though authoritarian governments. Democratization obtained an important place on the international development agenda. Currently, it is considered to be an essential element of 'good governance'.¹ Donor governments have pledged to consider democratization either in the form of conditionality, or in a more 'positive approach' attempting to support programs or projects which contribute to democratization.² The increased use of conditionality led some to comment that Africa is being re-colonized.³ The extent of donor influence in African political reform remains subject of debate. It is beyond doubt that the pressures exerted by domestic forces have been formidable, and the outcome depends primarily on the balance of power between opposition groups and ruling elites in a specific country. However, where this balance is very delicate and governments are particularly dependent upon donor funds, donor policies may influence state responses to popular demands for reform significantly.

The media paid much attention to the introduction of multi-party elections. In observing these reforms, early optimists had spoken of Africa's 'second liberation'.⁴ By 1993, however, a sobering record of setbacks led to a new pessimism. In some cases, reform constituted little more than a cosmetic change with the ruling party remaining firmly in power. Elections stirred up ethnic conflict in some cases. Both optimists and pessimists, however, tend to oversimplify the problem of democratization by expecting linear trends (either progress or regression) toward a presumably clear goal. In reality neither the goal is sufficiently clear, nor the institutions or the process by which it may be attained. As Larry Diamond put it: 'If progress is made toward developing democratic government, it is likely to be gradual, messy, fitful and slow, with many imperfections along the way.'⁵

While multi-party elections may constitute an important step towards democratization, the emphasis on multi-party elections leaves several very fundamental issues unaddressed. If the new concern with democracy is to lead to the adoption of sustainable patterns of democratic politics, the highly normative and multiple meanings of the concept of democracy need to be

translated into specific institutional choices: which democratic model will Africans adopt in their quest for reform? And how do the societal conditions surrounding reform influence the outcome? What are the implications for our time perspective?

Before addressing these issues we need to make explicit what is meant here by democracy and why at all we should be concerned with democratization in Africa. Our interest in democratization is linked to a conceptualization of development revolving around expanding the choices and capabilities of individuals. This view implies that democracy is not only a means to a given end (development) but also an end in itself. It is hard indeed to conceive of any kind of development which is centered around human values without expanding the control of citizens over the state. Furthermore, Africans themselves have shown their own aspirations to achieve democracy. In the past, many Africans have attempted to show that one-party systems could be democratic - although these views have now been proven to be mistaken. Presently, African opposition groups all firmly object to authoritarianism in its varied forms and attempt to replace it with democracy.

How, then, can increased control over the state be achieved? A first condition for democracy is that citizens can elect their government by being presented a choice among competing parties. But ensuring competition between parties is not enough. We need to go beyond a purely procedural definition of democracy. More substantive criteria for democracy may be deduced from the requirement that the choice offered to citizens must be meaningful. Thus, a second condition has to do with the kind of parties which present themselves to citizens: is there a viable opposition? Finally, in a democracy the policies pursued must in some way reflect the preferences of citizens. This implies that, as a third condition, mechanisms are needed for the articulation and aggregation of interests which are to be fed into the policy making process.

In this paper two arguments will be advanced in an effort to broaden the scope of the current discourse on African democratization. *Firstly*, the formal requirement of multi-party elections is not sufficient to mark progress towards democratization. More substantive criteria need to be addressed such as whether multi-party competition makes any difference in the choices presented to citizens. What kind of opposition emerges? Is there any capacity to alternate in office or participate in government? This question can only be answered if we broaden the scope of inquiry into the nature of civil societies in African countries, where a capacity to articulate and aggregate political demands must be present. We will examine whether such prerequisites in the realm of civil society obtained in African countries allow the creation of mechanisms whereby societal interests can be fed into the policy process. *Secondly*, important institutional choices are to be made on the road to democracy with respect to electoral systems and constitutional rules. We argue that the reform agenda should be broadened to include reform of the electoral system and constitutional rules.

In the following sections these issues will be further developed with particular reference to two anglophone countries of East Africa. First, a brief background on the countries upon which the argument is based is necessary.

Kenya and Tanzania: background to reform

Kenya and Tanzania share many similarities both culturally and politically. Both former British colonies inherited a Westminster system at independence: parliaments were elected on the basis of single member districts, which could be won with a plurality of votes. In both cases, the experiment with parliamentary government was extremely short-lived. Republicanism was adopted soon after independence with a strong executive in the form of a president. The powers of parliament were reduced drastically. At the same time oppositions were eradicated and a 'unitary party' acquired dominance: the Kenya African Nationalist Union (KANU) in Kenya and the Tanganyika African Nationalist Union (TANU, in 1977 reconstituted into the Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM)) in Tanzania.

Proponents of the African one-party state had often mirrored the ideas of Rousseau revolving around 'the will of the people'.⁶ This vision implied a unitary conception of 'the people.' African one-party leaders suggested they were executing the will of the people in advancing universally desired outcomes such as nation-building and economic development. In practice this meant that in the one-party state mechanisms to channel preferences of citizens to the political center were very limited: they were monopolized by the single party which claimed to know the will of the people. In the process, associations outside of the party-state configuration were either suppressed or tightly controlled. Although pluralism in society was severely circumscribed, this did not mean the system was completely closed. Indeed, in several African one-party states, there had been a degree of competition between leaders of the same party. In this competition, policy issues did not play a significant role, since all candidates had to adhere to the ideology and policies of the single party.

In the course of time, single party rule degenerated into authoritarian politics. Constitutions were amended to allow concentration of power without significant checks on the executive. Policies were formulated in increasingly closed forum and possibilities for an open public debate were severely circumscribed. While the Kenyan variety of single party rule was more personalistic and autocratic, the Tanzanian variety was more ideological and bureaucratic.⁷ In both countries, politics remained highly personal revolving around clientelistic exchanges.⁸ 'Neo-patrimonialism' implied a linkage role for politicians who could exchange political support for access to resources of the center. The stability of the system depended much on the creation of strong local power bases by patrons, which was facilitated by the electoral system based on single member districts and by their access to resources at the center. The nature of these exchanges has been characterized as 'hegemonial exchan-

ge': while they do involve reciprocities, they are not equal and not directed at substantive policy issues. Politicians extract resources from the center, but do not seek a change of policies pursued by the political center. The process is not without costs: it is fragile, it limits the scope of political participation and it may at some point lead to loss of legitimacy.⁹ This point seems to have been reached in the 1980s with the deepening of the economic crisis. While resources for distribution dwindled, the system was highly prone to abuse. Nepotism and corruption by the political class became important issues around which opposition emerged.

The call for democratization was received with varying degrees of enthusiasm in both countries. In Tanzania the immense authority of ex-president Nyerere stood behind calls for a multi-party system. It became popular to say that 'even God permitted opposition by allowing Satan to live among his people'. The current President Ali Hassan Mwinyi installed a committee to investigate needed constitutional changes. The committee's recommendations resulted in constitutional amendments to lift the monopoly of the party in power, and the elections scheduled for 1995 will be multi-party. Like many other African autocrats, however, President Daniel Arap Moi of Kenya countered that multi-party politics would spell ethnic strife. President Moi said that multi-party politics was a foreign ideology 'peddled by some unpatriotic people with borrowed brains'.¹⁰ However, increasing pressures from domestic groups coupled with international pressure exerted in the context of the Donors' Consultative Group Meeting of December 1991 led to the announcement that elections were to be held in December 1992. These elections, however, which were won by the ruling party, met with serious criticism on account of their degree of fairness.

Both countries have embarked on a journey towards democracy. Unlike the experience of some former French colonies, no 'National Conference' has been formed claiming sovereignty in setting the terms of the transition. The ruling parties remained fully in charge during the transition. Both CCM and KANU attempt to control the reform agenda and limit the losses to the incumbent leadership. We may therefore classify the process of reform in both countries as a 'managed transition'.¹¹

Multi-party politics and the choices offered to citizens

In both Kenya and Tanzania the first area of political reform concerned the lifting of the monopoly of the single party by allowing the formation of other parties. Thus, the potential scope for political competition was broadened. But to assess whether such measures of political liberalization contribute to democratization, we need to examine the actual scope of political competition. What type of political parties emerged in African countries since the lifting of the ban on political parties? With what kind of issues do parties appeal to citizens? Do the new political parties constitute a viable opposition? Three features characterize the emerging landscape of political parties in Kenya and

Tanzania: fragmentation, an urban and elite basis, and the lack of a coherent or credible policy programme.¹² These features should be understood in relation to the broader societal conditions defining the context of political reform.

In the case of Kenya, we have seen the emergence first of a broad forum for the reinstatement of democracy (FORD), which was bound together predominantly by a broadly shared critique of the incumbent party: corruption, abuse of power, and economic mismanagement. A younger generation of lawyers and professionals played important roles in this coalition. There was little time for this coalition to develop a coherent policy programme. Government harassment stood in the way of its effective organization while internal leadership clashes led to divisions. The opposition disintegrated into rivaling factions based on ethnicity or clan politics. It appears that the opposition movement was taken over by older generation politicians which had been ousted from power and sought to re-enter political life. Thus, FORD split into two camps, and other parties emerged representing separate ethnic groups. FORD did not manage to transform itself from an opposition movement into a viable political party.

The Kenyan scenario did not show any significant programmatic issues which divided these groups, but rather the struggle for access to the center by creating a strong local power base.¹³ The continuation of factional politics points to the persistence of neo-patrimonial politics in another guise. In this system leaders seek to link their constituencies to the resources of the center, and they might just as well change parties as soon as this enhances their ability to distribute resources. In fact we have seen the crossing of party boundaries in the Kenyan experience. In this way, parties do not present citizens with meaningful choices. The electoral system reinforced this style of politics. Intense competition between groups reflects the zero sum nature of the electoral system based on the 'winner takes all' principle: in single-member districts, the candidate with a mere plurality of votes obtains the entire seat (in other words, a relative majority is sufficient). The opposition has not been able to organize the kind of coherence which would enable them to actually occupy the government.

In the case of Tanzania, new parties have been formed since registration officially opened in June of 1992. Important leaders who had formerly operated within the one-party framework have formed opposition parties (e.g. Chief Fundikira, Speaker of the House of Assembly). More than 40 parties have been formed since then, while two efforts were made to arrive at a broader forum or coalition. Both efforts failed due to divisions between these emerging groups. Distrust and rivalry between the leadership seem to be the main cause of failure.¹⁴ As in the case of Kenya, the intense power struggle is linked to the electoral system: since the single member district system was maintained, the expectation is that 'the winner takes all', which renders politics a zero-sum political game.

Policy issues remain rather elusive on the opposition side. In an overview of the policy issues presented by six opposition parties, Mmuya and

Chaligha point to major inconsistencies and lack of credibility. Thus free education and health services appear on the programme of most of them, while there is no indication of the sources of finance for these services. Aspiring leaders thus try to capitalize on the discontent with current austerity measures without seeking to formulate an alternative. The parties are rather unclear about the role of the state in the economy, paying lip-service to the new creed of privatization and free markets, while at the same time continuing to advocate state shares in enterprises and a large role for the government in the economy.¹⁵ The fragmentation of the opposition and the lack of policy alternatives does not help to establish credibility with the electorate and the opposition can hardly be called viable.

The unviability of current opposition groups may be traced in part to the legacy of one party rule. Manipulation by the party in power has contributed to the fragmentation and weakness of opposition parties. In both Kenya and Tanzania, opposition groups have been hindered by the government in organizing rallies and meetings in the districts. In the case of Kenya, ethnic conflict was stirred up by the ruling party's following. Moreover, the media continue to be under government control. Although a broader range of views enters the daily newspapers, critical journalists have also been harassed. Thus, until the ruling party has loosened its grip on the state apparatus and its control over the media, the contest between ruling and opposition parties will not be an equal one. In Tanzania, the highly sensitive issue of the union with Zanzibar and the emergence of religion as a divisive issue complicate the opening up of the political system. Basically, the current leadership has declared the issues around the type of union with the islands as an issue beyond the scope of reform.

The unviability of the opposition is also linked to certain constraints at the level of leadership and to the nature of African civil societies. The long term exclusion from political power has prevented the accumulation of knowledge and experience on the part of political leaders in serving as a link between citizens and the state. African leaders exhibit a culture associated with the neo-patrimonial style of politics. They often lack a capacity to present viable policy alternatives. The neo-patrimonial linkages are fragmentary and on a dyadic basis. The problem with clientelistic exchanges is that they remain highly personal and do not contribute to the creation of forms of trust and reciprocity beyond those narrow relations, as aptly put by Hyden.¹⁶ Peter Lewis argued that African democratization fundamentally depends on the emergence of a 'political society': a stratum of people professionally engaged in politics, who serve as a linkage between citizens and the state by articulating and aggregating interests.¹⁷ Both the culture and the structures which allow for the articulation and aggregation of interests in society are rudimentary. Thus, an important challenge for African democratization concerns the strengthening of civil society, a process requiring a broader approach and a longer time perspective than is prevalent.

The concept of 'civil society' requires some clarification here, since civil society encompasses more than the existence of voluntary associations in

society. Rather, 'civil society' is defined by its paradoxical relation to the state: it is simultaneously arrayed against the state and engaged with the state.¹⁸ While it is characterized by its assertion of autonomy *vis a vis* the state, it is simultaneously shaped by the state. In particular, the opportunities and constraints provided by state policies influence the formation and public role of civil associations: civil society is engaged with the state. Inherently, civil society entails pluralism: it entails an array of separate and discretionary interests, because individuals associate on the basis of perceived interests. At the same time, civil society is unified by a minimum of cohesion. This cohesion is provided not by uniformity or similarity, but by consensus on the fundamental rules of the political regime. 'Civil society' presupposes citizenship, which is here conceptualized as an identity of individuals *vis a vis* the state. A sense of citizenship is closely connected to the legitimacy of states.

The weakness of civil society is intimately connected with the material conditions in African countries. Low levels of economic development imply that essential prerequisites for associational life such as transport and communications form a great obstacle. The formidable logistical problems in transport and communication mean that face to face contacts remain the dominant form of communication.

However, the kind of political development pursued since independence had important implications for African civil society as well. Briefly captured, African regimes tended to be hegemonic: they exhibited a great concentration of power and they tended to be highly interventionist. While the state thus gained a near omnipresence, this did not imply state strength. Indeed, African states were weak, 'soft', swollen but ineffective.¹⁹ Patterns of governance undermined the legitimacy of the state. Superficially, the state seemed to have virtually submerged civil society. In reality, a rich associational life characterized African society.²⁰ Within informal self-help groups or community organizations, people have pursued their own objectives parallel to the structures of the state or even obstructing state structures. These patterns of associational life reflected the illegitimacy of the state. But the richness of such forms of associational life does not imply the presence of a strong civil society as conceived here. The kind of associations prevalent in the context of African authoritarian or hegemonic regimes tend to reflect the weak and illegitimate character of the state. While the official state-sanctioned organizations - characterized by their unitarian philosophy - became 'hollow'²¹, informal associations were characterized precisely by fragmentation and disengagement from the state. The weakness of the African state meant that few incentives existed to form autonomous organizations to engage with the state: rather, the 'exit' option prevailed as individuals preferred to remain outside the reach of the state. Therefore, civil society in many African countries is weak.

The recent recognition of the importance of civil society in Africa meant that the so-called NGOs (non-governmental organizations) received more and more attention in the formulation and implementation of development policies. Following the disillusionment with the development

performance of African states, they had already obtained an increasing role as a channel for aid during the 1980s. Now, they were also to be agents of democratization. The recent Human Development Report considered NGOs an important means to achieve participation.²²

Several observations, however, serve to modify such high expectations about the role of NGOs. These hopes may be in vain in light of the prevailing development strategies and structures of accountability within the NGO sector.²³ Dependence on donor funds tends to diverge accountability away from local constituencies to donor organizations. In addition, African governments have increasingly used legal instruments to limit the potential of NGOs to play a significant political role. The potential for NGOs to fulfil a role in policy advocacy remains limited up till now due to constraints in their political environment and the lack of a domestic funding base, while their membership constituencies often lack a basis in common interests.²⁴ Moreover, NGOs constitute only a part of what is meant here by civil society. Generally, NGOs are organizations *of* or *for* so-called 'target groups' of the poor or marginalized. They are often rather narrowly based and have not developed many links to other sectors of society. Civil society encompasses a much broader range of associations including professional and interest associations of middle groups. These groups are essential to the formation of civil society. If democratization is to take roots in Africa, it is extremely important that such civil associations obtain a certain room to organize and articulate interests *vis a vis* state policy makers.

The weakness of civil society in Africa constitutes an important constraint in the democratization process. We have traced this weakness to both the prevailing material conditions and the role of the state up till now. The first condition cannot be overcome overnight and will therefore continue to present constraints. The latter implies that there is something governments can do in the short run. In the pursuit of political reform, there is a role for government now to increase the political space for civil society: legal and social pre-conditions should be created for self-organization and the pursuit of diverse interests. Governments should remove the many legal obstacles currently existing. If democratization is to take roots in Africa, a broad range of civil and interest associations should obtain room to organize and articulate interests *vis a vis* state policy makers. Mechanisms should be created to increase civil associations' involvement in the policy making process. This entails possibilities for lobbying, but also the creation and actual use of advisory or consultative bodies. Clearly, political reform should go beyond the holding of multi-party elections and address the opening up of policy making processes simultaneously. Thus, for political reform to be successful, both a broader approach and a longer time perspective are required.

Institutional choices: models of democracy

The agenda for African political reform also remains rather limited with respect to the institutional choices to be made. A much heard comment about recent concern for African democratization is that this constitutes the imposition of a 'Western model' upon Africans. Political reforms, however, imply choice among a variety of democratic models - all entailing multi-party politics - which Africans might opt for. Precise institutional arrangements vary widely even in existing Western democracies. Instead of rhetorical emphasis on a presumed 'Western' model, we need to examine several models of democracy which evolved in differing social and cultural conditions and which are rooted in different theoretical approaches. Some of these, in particular those evolved in the context of plural and divided societies, may prove of great value to Africans today.²⁵ Thus, the debate should change its focus from the broad normative goals, to which all will at least nominally agree, to the institutional choices to be made.

A vast body of literature on democracy led to an equally vast conceptual and theoretical classification of democratic systems. In outlining some of the institutional choices to be made, we will follow Arend Lijphart in his distinction of two broad types of democracies: majoritarian democracy and consensus democracy. We will also discuss a mixed type, in particular a muted majoritarian model. This classification revolves centrally, though not exclusively, around the type of electoral system adopted.

Majoritarian democracy is well known in both its parliamentary form (the Westminster model) and its presidential form (United States). The electoral system is based on single member districts. It tends to produce a clear winner and reduces the loser to the oppositional role. We know this system by the adage 'the winner takes all'. The possibility of alteration of parties in power secures that oppositions remain 'loyal'. Such systems tend towards a two-party system, but regional parties or larger third parties may emerge. The presidential variety in the USA is characterized furthermore by federalism, which disperses power among territorially defined units. In this way, some possible excesses of majoritarian rule are avoided. The majoritarian type of democracy fares well in relatively homogeneous societies. It has been argued that it is less suitable for segmented societies. Depending on the precise distribution of the population over electoral districts it may lead to a large degree of distortion in representation: ethnic, religious or political minorities may become underrepresented while majorities may dominate the national executive.

Consensus democracy challenges the basic concept of majoritarian rule. One of the earlier writers elaborating its basic features - without labelling it as such - was Sir Arthur W. Lewis, in an explanation of the failure of majoritarian democracy in post independence West African countries.²⁶ Arend Lijphart elaborated the model based on an analysis of the Dutch political system - which he called 'consociational democracy' -, extending it later to include other countries with religiously or ethnically divided populations.²⁷

Three characteristics define what Lijphart later preferred to call the consensus model: proportional representation, autonomy for separate groups and power sharing.

The electoral system is based on proportional representation, allowing all political groups an amount of seats in the legislature proportional to their percentage of total votes. The country may constitute one large district, or be divided in a number of districts each with multiple seats. The executive is a coalition of the major political parties. The model seeks to include representation of all significant political groups to manage the country's affairs. The political groups maintain a degree of autonomy at the same time with regard to the management of their own affairs. While societies may exhibit potentially divisive segmentation, Lijphart argues that the consensus model promotes stability. Political elites are prone to accommodation and reconciliation. The success of this system depends critically on the behavior of political elites, who realize they must accommodate in order to maintain governability. Within this system, political parties may proliferate and are frequently based on religious, ethnic or cultural factors - a situation which is not considered inappropriate or disadvantageous. Lijphart's model has been influential in one African country only: it has been proposed as a solution for South Africa²⁸, but it has received criticism both on theoretical and on practical grounds.²⁹ An important criticism voiced against the model concerns the reliance on the benign behavior of political elites to achieve accommodation.

In a critique of Lijphart's model, Horowitz developed another model suitable for ethnically or religiously divided societies.³⁰ I will call this model, which may be seen as falling between the two types of democracy described above, a '*muted majoritarian model*'. Horowitz's model, too, has been presented as a possible solution for South Africa. As in the consensus model, it is designed to produce accommodation and compromise, but rather through the electoral system. Instead of reliance on the conciliatory behavior of political elites, Horowitz seeks electoral mechanisms which produce incentives to compromise and accommodate between different groups. The essence of the mechanism is 'vote pooling': by requiring citizens to give alternative votes (second or third preferences), leaders of different groups are bound to attract votes beyond their 'own' constituencies. Thus parties will pool the votes they receive as first preferences with those received from other groups in the form of second or third preferences. No one can win on the basis of a clear majority based on first preferences, but must gather support as second or third preference (an assumption made in the model is that all districts have a heterogeneous population and that ethnic groups are not geographically concentrated). Thus, incentives are built in the electoral system to produce parties which do not exclusively mirror religious or ethnic divisions, but reach out to other constituencies. The required compromise or accommodation is reached at an earlier stage than in the consensus model: at the stage of gathering support in the electoral process and even party formation. While Horowitz's model is an example of a muted majoritarian model, other systems have been developed

which aim to mix elements of proportionalism with majoritarianism, such as in the German electoral system.

African political systems nearly all entail basically the majoritarian model in a unitary state. National assemblies were chosen directly by the people in single member districts. (e.g. Tanzania, Kenya). A plurality of votes was sufficient to gain a seat in Parliament. Minorities could only be presented in Parliament if they were concentrated in an electoral district. The President picks the members of his cabinet from among the elected or nominated MPs. With the introduction of the Executive Presidency, in both countries a number of seats in Parliament were nominated by him - allowing the executive to become even less representative.

With the issue of multi-party politics emerging on the political agenda, the arguments used in the early 1960s to discredit multi-partyism were reiterated by opponents of reform. Ethnic differences would spell divisive politics. While recalcitrant incumbents were correct in emphasizing the plural nature of their societies, they did not appear to acknowledge the importance of the type of electoral systems within which they were to introduce multi-party competition. In fact, ethnic politics could thrive even within the single party framework, expressed through personalistic clientelism. Now the fear was that ethnic identities would be institutionally expressed in the party system. Opponents of reform did not acknowledge that depending on the constitutional design of the system, ethnic parties do not necessarily threaten the stability of the system. The debate of political reform does not address these issues and assumes the electoral system adopted at independence to be a constant. In both Kenya and Tanzania, when the monopoly of the single party was lifted by constitutional amendment, the electoral system with single member constituencies was maintained, with a plurality of votes sufficient to win a district. The majoritarian system with the winner taking all was not challenged.

Some electoral provisions were used, however, in an attempt to prevent ethnic party formation or the domination of a regional or ethnic group.³¹ In Tanzania, it was decided that all parties should be national; they should not be based on race, ethnicity religion or gender. A requirement for the registration of a party was that it should be sponsored by at least 200 members from each of at least 10 regions in the country, among which should be the islands.³² In Kenya the government ruled that any party should obtain a certain percentage of votes in a certain number of regions.³³ In the cases of Kenya and Tanzania, these requirements tend to bolster the position of the party in power, which can build on its decades-long prominence in the entire country. It is difficult for any new grouping to practically gather votes beyond its area of origin. In the context of the legacy of one-party dominance, these requirements and indeed, the maintenance of the 'winner take all' electoral system are beneficial to the incumbent parties.

As convincingly argued by Lijphart, the 'winner take all' electoral system is not particularly suitable in countries marked by ethnic or religious pluriformity. Proportional representation and other elements of the consensus

model could mitigate the potentially divisive tendencies within African societies. Besides such institutional reforms, a change in political culture would also contribute to the construction of a viable political system. By recognizing pluralism as existent and legitimate, the self-fulfilling prophesy inherent in the unitary approach would disappear. The formation of parties on an ethnic basis does not in itself constitute a threat to the stability of the political system, as is commonly argued. Ethnicity is not a fixed identity with fixed political implications. Much depends on the way political leaders mobilize their constituencies. The self-fulfilling prophesy inherent in the unitary approach may be transformed into a self-denying prophesy, as leaders recognize they must accommodate in order to prevent political instability. In the view of Lijphart, proportionality in the electoral system and elite attitudes favoring power sharing would render politics a positive sum game instead of the zero-sum situation inherent in the majoritarian system. In the view of Horowitz, the electoral mechanism of vote pooling would build in incentives to compromise. The argument here does not imply that either solution is without problems in actual practice. Indeed, the assumption about the enlightened and rational behavior in the Lijphart model can in practice prove to be problematic, while the system proposed by Horowitz presents practical problems due to its complexity and the condition that electoral districts are heterogeneous. The purpose of the argument is to broaden the scope of debate about the actual institutional choices available in African political reform.

While it is not surprising that ruling parties have kept such more fundamental reforms of the electoral system off the reform agenda, it is surprising that this issue received little attention from general observers within the donor community. Neither have emerging opposition groups in Kenya and Tanzania put this issue on the reform agenda -with the exception of one opposition group in Tanzania (the NCCR). This may partly be explained by the persistent influence of the colonial heritage. At the same time, opposition groups may hold the rather unrealistic hope that they might 'win and take all'. In the worst case, opposition groups simply wish to seize power and continue a style of governance marked by concentration of power, lack of accountability and checks and balances.

Broader constitutional reforms to address these issues have been granted a lower priority on the reform agenda compared to the multi-party issue. The models of democracy we discussed above share some fundamental constitutional features such as guarantees for civil rights, the rule of law and a degree of delimitation of governmental powers either by checks and balances or by strict separation of powers. The relatively low priority of these issues is in part due to the efforts of ruling parties to keep them off the agenda while acceding to the most vocal demands of donors and opposition groups. A case in point is that of the powers of Parliament. Thus, while Kenyans were to elect a new parliament under multi-party competition, Parliament in Kenya continues to possess few powers to hold the executive accountable. The President can continue to nominate a number of MPs. In Tanzania, opposition groups have called for the restoration of the supremacy of Parliament, but the

incumbent President managed to keep important powers to amend laws. Other mechanisms to act as a check on the executive, such as an independent judiciary, remain severely constrained. Concentration of power continues to characterize the system and is reinforced by majoritarianism. Such broader constitutional reforms deserve a central place on the reform agenda.

Conclusion

A change in prevailing attitudes concerning African democratization is essential. A narrow focus on multi-party elections obscures many more fundamental issues, and implies unrealistic expectations regarding the success of reform. The potential danger is that disappointments may contribute to reversals in attempts to democratize African political systems.

Democratization depends fundamentally, firstly, upon the conditions defining the context of political reform and secondly upon the institutional choices made in the pursuit of political reform. If the contextual issues linked to African political reform are recognized, the expectations about the results will be more realistic and more sensitive to conditions in African countries. Moreover, the time perspective of political change will be longer. If a broader scope of institutional choices in political reform is considered, painful or even dangerous mistakes may be avoided.

An important implication of this argument is that research into both the societal conditions surrounding political reform and the varieties of constitutionalism appropriate to African contexts needs to be increased. Such research could help to broaden the scope of the debate about African political reforms and change the perceptions about the options in reform. As the perceptions and expectations of actors in this process may influence actual reform measures, a broadened and more realistic perspective can itself become a positive factor in the process of African democratization.

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Notes:

1. The World Bank discussed this issue in its report *Sub Saharan Africa: from crisis to sustainable growth* (Washington 1989). For a brief overview see 'The emergence of the "good government" agenda: some milestones', *IDS Bulletin* 24,1 (1993) 7-8 and other articles of the same issue.
2. An example is the policy advocated in the Dutch policy paper 'A world of difference', Ministry of Foreign Affairs (The Hague 1990).
3. See S. Decalo, 'The process, prospects and constraints of democratization in Africa', *African Affairs* 91 (1992) 29; S. Riley, 'Political adjustment or domestic pressure: democratic politics and political choice in Africa', *Third World Quarterly* 13,3 (1992).
4. See S. Riley, 'Africa's "New Wind of Change"', *The World Today* (1992) 116-120; and *idem*, 'Political adjustment'.
5. Larry Diamond cited in Decalo, 'The process, prospects and constraints of democratization', 35.
6. See for example O. van Cranenburgh, *The widening gyre: the Tanzanian one party state and policy towards rural cooperatives* (Delft 1990) 44.
7. See also the typology of Jackson and Rosberg, which characterized Nyerere as a 'prophet' and Moi as an 'autocrat'. See R. Jackson and C. Rosberg, *Personal rule in Black Africa: prince, autocrat, prophet, tyrant* (Berkeley 1982).
8. See also R. Sandbrook, *The politics of Africa's economic stagnation* (Cambridge 1985); and G. Hyden, *No shortcuts to progress: African development management in perspective* (London 1983).
9. See D. Rothchild, 'State-ethnic relations in Middle Africa' in: G. Carter, *African independence: the first 25 years* (Bloomington 1985).
10. See S. Riley, 'Political adjustment' 545.
11. For a typology of political transitions see N. Chazan, R. Mortimer, J. Ravenhill and D. Rothchild, *Politics and society in contemporary Africa* (Boulder 1992, 2nd ed.).
12. These issues have been highlighted as well by Decalo, 'The process, prospects and constraints of democratization in Africa', and Riley, 'Political adjustment'.
13. See Makau wa Mutua, 'The troubled transition', *Africa Report* 37,5 (1992).
14. See M. Mmuya and A. Chaligha, *Towards multi-party politics in Tanzania* (Dar es Salaam 1992).
15. See Mmuya and Chaligha, *Towards multi-party politics*.
16. See G. Hyden, 'Governance and the study of politics' in: M. Bratton and G. Hyden, ed., *Governance and politics in Africa* (Boulder 1992) 24.
17. See P. Lewis, 'Political transitions and the dilemma of civil society in Africa', *Journal of International Affairs* 46,1 (1992).
18. See also Lewis, 'Political transitions', 36.
19. See G. Hyden, *No shortcuts to progress: African development management in perspective* (London 1983); Van Cranenburgh, *The widening gyre*; R. Jackson and C. Rosberg, 'The marginality of African states' in: G. Carter, ed., *African Independence: the first 25 years* (Bloomington 1985).

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20. See N. Chazan and C. Rothchild, *The precarious balance state and society in Africa* (Boulder 1988) and N. Chazan, R. Mortimer, J. Ravenhill and D. Rothchild, *Politics and society in contemporary Africa* (Boulder 1992, 2nd ed.).
21. For the case of cooperatives, see Van Cranenburgh, *The widening gyre*.
22. See UNDP, *Human Development Report* 1992.
23. Within this sector, it is common to distinguish NGO's and NGDO's - the non-governmental development organizations. The former are community based organizations, while the latter are service organizations to assist the NGO's. The latter tend to function as intermediaries between donors (either government or private) and NGO's.
24. See M. Bratton, 'Non-governmental organizations in Africa: can they influence public policy?', *Development and Change* 21 (1990) 87-118; A. Fowler, 'The role of NGO's in changing state-society relations: perspectives from eastern and southern Africa', *Development Policy Review* 9,1 (1991) 53-83; and 'Non-governmental organizations as agents of democratization: an African perspective', *Journal of International Development* 5,3 (1993) 325-339.
25. Presumed differences between developing countries and the developed countries are often overstated. Some western models, especially those evolved in plural societies may prove to be of value to Africans. See also A. Lijphart, *Democracy in plural societies* (New Haven 1977) 21-22.
26. See Arthur W. Lewis, *Politics in West Africa* (London 1965).
27. See A. Lijphart, *Verzuiling, pacificatie en kentering in de Nederlandse politiek* (Amsterdam 1979), and his *Democracy in plural societies: a comparative exploration* (New Haven 1977); and *Democracies: patterns of majoritarian and consensus government in twenty-one countries* (New Haven 1984).
28. See A. Lijphart, *Machtsdeling: de oplossing voor Zuid-Afrika?* (1985).
29. Some of the criticism is undeserved and should rather be directed to the parties within South Africa which have used a distorted version of it to develop a system favorable to the group concerned.
30. D.L. Horowitz, *A democratic South Africa?* (Berkeley 1991).
31. Similar mechanisms are used in Nigeria, where the incumbant military leaders have designed a two-party system 'from above' in order to prevent the re-emergence of ethnic parties.
32. See Mmuya and Chaligha, *Towards multi-party politics*, 104.
33. See *Africa Confidential* (6 November 1992).