

PARTY SYSTEMS IN THE SADC REGION

In Defence of the Dominant Party System

By
Shumbana Karume

Shumbana Karume is a Research Fellow in the Research Department
of the Electoral Institute of Southern Africa (EISA)
P O Box 740 Auckland Park 2006 Johannesburg.
Tel: +27(0)11 482.5495; Fax: +27(0)11 482.6163
e-mail: shumbana@eisa.org.za

ABSTRACT

In the past ten years or so the process of democratisation in emerging democracies has continued to face numerous and persistent challenges. The most pertinent of these is the rapid movement towards one-party dominant political systems. This phenomenon has been observed by scholars who have administered a series of tests to determine the possibility of democratic consolidation. This paper makes a detailed study of the detrimental implications of dominant party systems. It also explains the distinguishing features between a de jure and a de facto dominant party system using examples from the SADC region. The paper, however, argues that although dominance is, in many instances, created by forms of coercion and electoral manipulation, there are some parameters of politics that do indeed aid dominance in democratically acceptable ways. The paper addresses five basic types of parameters, examines the ways in which they function and discusses their relevance in terms of aiding dominance democratically. The central argument maintains that certain dominant party systems can function within and respect the essential parameters of constitutional democracy. That said, a number of important political questions must be addressed about what such dominance means to the future prospects for democracy in these countries.

INTRODUCTION

Since SADC's transition to democracy in the early 1990s its democratic credentials have undergone a series of assessments to examine the state of their strength/entrenchment. Many observers, in their attempt to carry out such assessments, have utilised a range of indicators 'as evidence of a successful transition to democracy' (Bauer 1999, p 429) as well as a series of differing tests to determine the likelihood of democratic consolidation. As a result most recent studies have focused

on determining the degree to which these democratic transitions have been consolidated and many have arrived at the principal conclusion that in the past decades there have been numerous and persistent challenges to democratic consolidation. The most pertinent of these, apart from the difficulty of creating a viable opposition and building autonomous civil society organisations, is the rapid movement toward one-party dominant political systems.

They argue that 'within the institutions of political society, where partisan contestation for political power takes place' (Bauer 1999, p 432), there remains a formidable challenge – the continuing determination by dominant parties to entrench and maintain their dominance.

Other studies have produced similar conclusions (see Barkan 2000) that an important by-product of the dynamics existing in democratic transitions in the region is the preponderance of incumbent authoritarians and a domination of regions across these countries by one party. In his paper 'Protracted Transitions among Africa's New Democracies', Barkan (2000) suggests that discussions of democratic transition and consolidation need to devote much attention to the structural conditions that prevail in neo-patrimonial regimes.¹ He argues that of the seven structural conditions he identifies that shape African transitions – the most important being the effects of Africa's 'very short and imposed previous experience with democratic rule' – two features or by-products emerge. The first is the 'incumbent authoritarian rulers representing one geographic region or a coalition of regions, the second, the domination of a series of regions in most countries by one party' (p 232) as noted above. In the context of this paper, the relevant issue, however, is not the approach he takes but the conclusions he draws from this approach, which are similar to those emanating from many other approaches – that the distinguishing feature of democratic transition in the region is the gradual slide toward one-party dominance.

Even those scholars who have administered the parochial electoral criteria that determine whether democratic regimes in the region have become consolidated have ascertained that they have not because many of the founding and second elections did not result in leadership change – a simplistic approach decried by other analysts as the 'fallacy of electoralism' (Karl, quoted by Bratton and Posner 1999). The main purpose of these studies was to look at elections 'to see what they portend for the consolidation of democracy' (Bratton and Posner 1999, p 377) and

1 The paper observes the following conditions: 'that the experience with democratic rule was short and imposed; that the economic conditions required to sustain democracy, if not launch a transition, are poor; that almost all African countries remain agrarian societies. In this context Africans usually define their political interests in terms of where they live and their effective ties with their neighbors rather than on the basis of what they do or of their socio-economic status; that all African countries with the exception of Botswana and Somalia are plural societies – societies populated by members of two or more ethnic or linguistic groups, each of which inhabits a distinct territorial homeland; that the African state provides a much larger proportion of wage employment for the middle class than do states outside Africa; and finally that African politics have long been marked by neo-patrimonial norms of political authority and forms of governance'.

their conclusion was that consolidation only occurs when there has been a regime change. Samuel Huntington referred to this as the 'two-turnover test', according to which consolidation occurs whenever the winners of founding elections are defeated in a subsequent election, and the new winners themselves later accept an electoral turnover (Bratton and Posner 1999). This one-dimensional position presupposes that 'formal procedures for elections do create if not a liberal democracy, at least an electoral democracy and that elections if conducted regularly and fairly can in and of themselves create a broader consolidated democracy' (Bratton and Posner 1999, p 379).

The fact is that regional elections, whether founding or second elections, have not always resulted in leadership changes. In the early 1990s the region saw a wave of multiparty elections, which marked the transition from a period of authoritarian rule to a new era of democratic government. This trend has continued and has been firmly entrenched in the politics of the region with many countries, among them Zambia, South Africa, Tanzania, Namibia and Malawi, now conducting a third round of elections. Surveys of both founding and second elections reveal both declining standards of electoral management affecting the quality of the elections and the absence of changes in leadership. The table below illustrates this trend.

Table 1
Parliamentary Elections 1995-2001

Country	Date	Ruling Party	Party Alternation	Voter turnout %	Party Seats %
Tanzania	1995	CCM	No	76.5	80.2
	2000	CCM	No	72.8	89.1
Namibia	1994	Swapo	No	76.	–
	1999	Swapo	No	62.1	76.1
Zambia	1996	MMD	No	78.5	60.8
	2001	MMD	No	68.5	–
Zimbabwe	1995	Z/-PF	No	31.8	–
	2000	Z/-PF	No	48.3	53
South Africa	1994	ANC	No	86.9	–
	1999	ANC	No	89.3	66.4
Malawi	1994	UDF	No	80.0	–
	1999	UDF	No	92.3	47.3
Botswana	1994	BDP	No	76.7	–
	1999	BDP	No	77.1	5.2

Acknowledging that the introduction of multiparty politics in Africa has resulted in, among other things, an unexpected slide toward one-party dominance is just the starting premise of this paper. As the debate above reveals, many democratic transitions in the region have developed slowly and a typical feature of this development in the long term has been the existence of dominant-party regimes. The detrimental implications of dominant-party systems and the strategies applied by incumbent parties to retain such dominance deserve consideration here. One way of examining this phenomenon is to focus myopically on elections because, for the most part, these are the mechanisms used by most leaders to retain political dominance.

As some cases in the region illustrate strikingly 'dominant parties have not hesitated to structure the rules of electoral competition to their own advantage' by manipulating electoral rules, notably those concerning the eligibility of candidates. This usually involves disqualifying the principal rivals for the presidency, a manoeuvre that has secured many a political regime the necessary political control. Other cases of electoral malpractice emerge during campaign periods with rules of campaign conduct unfairly shaped and reconfigured as a party deems fit. Vote buying and political intimidation stand out as the most widespread electoral malpractices in this regard.

Other factors besides the absence of electoral competition underpin the process of entrenching dominance. According to Giliomee and Simkins (1999, p 340) these include the 'elimination of the dividing line between the ruling party and the state with the result that the ruling party comes to be seen as the state rather than as a temporary government; arbitrary decision making that undermines the integrity of democratic institutions such as the legislature and the judiciary; and the abuse of advantages enjoyed by incumbency as well as abuse of public institutions and resources.' The advantages alluded to by the authors are the fact that dominant parties have decided benefits over the opposition over and above their ability to terrorise and intimidate it. Among these benefits are: the authority to determine election dates; the ability to monopolise state media; and, usually, a stronger and more developed party organisation, although this is seen more as a genuine advantage than as one that can be manipulated (Barkan 2000).

The examples of Zambia and Zimbabwe illustrate the above points most graphically. In the 1990 Zimbabwe general elections, the Zimbabwe African National Union-Permanent Front (ZANU-PF), the ruling party, won 117 of the 120 seats open for contestation in the 150-member Parliament (Nordlund 1996). The 1995 general elections resulted in the same distribution of parliamentary seats. Although the number of seats occupied by the ruling party fell dramatically to only 63 (Matlosa and Mbaya 2003) after the 2002 general elections as a result of the momentous advancement of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in the country's political processes, the hegemony of ZANU-PF hardly diminished. If anything, it was strengthened through other channels. As Matlosa and Mbaya noted 'ruling parties dominate not only in the legislature but more importantly the

executive organ too, which in turn gives impetus to their undue influence and control over the judiciary as well. The recent conflicts in Zimbabwe,' they observe, 'between the executive arm and the judiciary organ are clear testimony to the tensions among key organs of the state as a result of the overwhelming hegemony of the one-party executive' (p 19). The situation in Zimbabwe, however, is far starker than the authors suggest. There has been no change of government in the country since independence, despite the introduction of multiparty politics in the early 1990s.

The country has functioned as a *de facto* one-party state since the merger between ZANU and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) in 1998², a move accompanied by other strategies that helped the new party to formalise its dominance (Du Toit 1999). These strategies resemble those pursued by today's government, although they are less brutal and blatant. Since the March 2002 elections, in an attempt to strengthen his volatile hegemony, Robert Mugabe has increasingly relied on violence to control the opposition, win elections and deter mass action. He has put in place a legal infrastructure designed to extinguish dissent and to consolidate his hold on the economy, state institutions, and the media (ICG 2002). In summary, with ZANU-PF's hegemony secured, Zimbabwe is better characterised as a neo-authoritarian one-party political system.

In the case of Zambia, the country's political record to date has confirmed the suspicions of many pundits, namely that the introduction of multiparty political competition in Africa has essentially not negated the post-independence authoritarian framework of politics. Notwithstanding the restoration of multiparty politics in 1991, which was widely lauded as a model for the rest of the region, Zambia remains a *de facto* one-party state. The Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) was returned to power in each of the three elections held since 1991. The 1991 elections were fiercely contested, with former president Kenneth Kaunda's party, the United National Independence Party (UNIP), receiving only 23.6 per cent of the vote as against the 71.9 per cent gained by the MMD, giving it 125 parliamentary seats (Du Toit 1999). The 1996 elections saw the MMD's parliamentary seats increase by six to 131. Although this figure fell dramatically to 69 seats in the 2001 elections owing, effectively, to continual splintering and fragmentation within the party, the MMD's legislative dominance under Levy Mwanawasa's leadership has now been maintained with an average of 127 parliamentary seats. Opposition party defections have been the single factor behind this comeback.

Under Frederick Chiluba, Zambia's political performance regressed. Despite high expectations of change his governance style mirrored that of Kaunda, leading analysts to come to the disappointing conclusion that Zambia's re-democratisation

2 In fact, Zimbabwe had toyed with the idea of becoming a *de jure* one-party state. At a ZANU party congress in 1984, the party's formal ideological objective was stated as being to pursue a socialist state based on Marxist-Leninist principles, which entailed the establishment of a one-party state, an objective that was eventually abandoned.

did not amount to much. If anything it merely transformed the country from a *de jure* to a *de facto* one-party state (see Burnell 2001; Du Toit 1999; Bratton and Posner 1999). In short, the continuing exploitation of government resources and the manipulation of democratic institutions to undermine the opposition, among other factors, preserved the political culture of a one-party state.

Despite all of the above, the aim of this paper is to argue that dominance is not only created by forms of coercion or electoral manipulation or through any of the strategies thus far discussed but that some parameters of politics do indeed aid dominance in democratically acceptable ways. Dominance, the paper will show, may be based on consent or even indifference on the part of the citizenry; it may be entrenched by real electoral support; it may be necessary for the promotion of national reconciliation and it may be a reflection of the non-manipulative capacity of the dominant party, among other factors this paper will later elucidate. In sum, the assertion is that party dominance should not only be viewed as a state of politics that can only be achieved by wholly undemocratic means. In other words, dominance should not only be looked at as being a symptom of unhealthy dynamics in a particular society. The objective here is not to justify the undemocratic conditions of such a system but rather to provide a viable defence of some positive implications of dominance that are usually ignored and that do not, in essence, invalidate democracy.

In short, the paper will demonstrate that the evolution of a dominant party has both non-democratic and democratic features, although discussion will be limited mostly to the latter. In its deliberations the paper will turn to a few cases of one-party dominant systems in the region, namely the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, the South West African People's Organization (Swapo) in Namibia, Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) in Tanzania and the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) in Botswana.

UNRAVELLING THE FALLACY OF PARTY DOMINANCE

Before highlighting some of the democratic features that may entrench a party's dominance, it is important to draw attention to the different evolutionary stages, or forms of dominant-party rule, mentioned above. Giliomee and Simkins (1999) have referred in their discussions to three such forms. Firstly, dominant-party rule, they suggest, can be summarised as a 'regime innovation in the direction of a liberal democracy' (p 36). The dominant parties that demonstrate characteristics associated with such a pattern are those in advanced industrialised democracies. Here a party's dominance is recognised by society as an outcome rightly deserved as a result of its progress and achievements that extend beyond mere accomplishments in the electoral arena. The party's strength depends much more on its ability to reformulate complex economic and social policies in such a way that its views on them become a national political consensus (p 37). Other factors such as leadership skills in

managing the divergent issues facing the country and the party's ability to remain open and non-exclusionary also fortify that dominance. The assumption is that any dominant regime type that is indeed evolving in the direction of a liberal democracy is naturally at the same time operating compliantly/willingly within the boundaries of democracy and is committed to competitive politics.

A second pattern of dominance highlighted by Giliomee and Simkins is what they call a 'semi-democracy stuck half way between authoritarianism and liberal democracy' (p 37). In this dominant regime a party's authority is obtained by 'openly utilizing authoritarian practices alongside democratic procedures' (p 38). The authoritarian practices of which they write relate to activities designed specifically to protect the regime from political changes. These have ranged from manipulating the rules of electoral competition to designing laws that allow such exploitation. The small degree of democracy in fact tolerated by the regime, Giliomee and Simkins observe, is the result of the fact that 'it presents it with so few difficulties' (p 38). What it does do, however, is deceitfully borrow some features of democracy such as electoralism while ensuring that it only partially and fraudulently concedes to these elements. The third pattern persuasively examined by both analysts is that of 'presiding over an eroding liberal democracy in the direction of mere majoritarianism and electoralism' (p 38). This is the method used by a regime that has adopted/acquired many features of liberal democracy and, in addition, functions in an almost competitive party system, which, according to the authors, 'acts as a cloak for domination of one group over the other'.

The above analysis of the three distinctive forms of dominant-party rule forces one to draw the following conclusions. Firstly, it is important to mention that the four country case studies examined in this paper share similar characteristics with those prescribed in all the different evolutionary stages. Put somewhat differently, the four cases do not display a single likely pattern such as the second (a semi-democracy stuck halfway between authoritarianism and liberal democracy), the pattern most observers assume is the case with dominant parties such as the CCM, Swapo and, to a lesser extent, the BDP and the ANC. Even Giliomee and Simkins acknowledge that the four cases they study (Malaysia, Taiwan, South Africa and Mexico) taken together do not display a distinct pattern. These countries have shown certain characteristics that are synonymous with all features of the three different patterns of dominance.

It is all too easy to mark the preponderance of dominant-party systems in transitional multiparty politics as an obstacle/challenge to the consolidation of democracy and to judge its existence as a symptom of unhealthy politics. However, if it is possible for a dominant system to function within the parameters of liberal democratic polities, then it is correct to assume and acknowledge that democratic features of a dominant-party system do exist. What is not highly acceptable or credible, however, as noted in a number of studies, is the idea that such democratic features exist in polities other than those that function in the direction of a liberal democracy as alluded to by Giliomee and Simkins. The essential point is that party

dominant systems, even if they operate in the two least desirable forms, can be achieved in part by democratic means.

IN THE NAME OF NATIONAL RECONCILIATION AND NATION BUILDING

Most of the parties considered in this paper emerged either from a crisis situation (the ANC) or as post-independence forces endowed with the task of nation building while facing volatile post-liberation politics. In South Africa and Namibia the destabilisation of apartheid has provided, in part, some justification for dominant-party rule. While this is true of most countries facing such types of aggression, it must be noted that the very fact of the party's dominance was made possible by its leading role in the struggle and the support it was accorded because of this role. Swapo, as a premier nationalist organisation during the struggle, was among the first black political organisation in Namibia and the only one to engage in armed struggle – hence it managed to command, and still does to this day, the loyalty and allegiance of the majority of the Namibian people (Bauer 1999).

Likewise, the ANC's role as a liberation movement helps it to command loyalty among the South African people. The ANC is, in fact, the world's oldest liberation movement, having been formed in 1912 (Friedman 1999). As such there is every possibility that its status will continue to help consolidate its dominance. As Steven Friedman puts it, 'the ANC has, over more than eight decades, established itself as the almost unchallenged symbolic vehicle of majority aspirations for liberation. Its hegemony as a result seems to rest on irrefutable logic' (p 98). The Botswana Democratic Party is another example of a party that assumed its dominant status as a result of its role in the struggle against colonial rule. To put it differently, of the four dominant parties (ANC, CCM, Swapo, and BDP) under review all but one have relied heavily on what Friedman (1999) refers to as the powerful 'founding myth'; their role in spearheading the demise either of apartheid or of colonial rule. This identification 'with an epoch' by the majority of the electorate in these countries seems to have legitimised the dominance enjoyed by these parties.

It is not just the destabilisation process that requires or demands the existence of a dominant party or the role played by parties in that process that entrenches dominance. Party dominance, it has been argued, serves well when there is a need to promote national reconciliation and forge the unity required after oppressive systems such as apartheid have been eliminated. With this in mind there are those who have greeted the ANC's overwhelming power positively. A degree of political stability needed to be established in the new South Africa, not only to promote national reconciliation but also to create the preconditions for democracy and build the nation, especially in the context of the immense political and development challenges it faced (Butler 2002). According to the model of democratic stability supporting dominant-party systems 'the dominant party is a much better stabilizing mechanism than fragmented parties' (Giliomee and Simkins 1999, p 345). Indeed, there is no denying that the ANC played a stabilising role in the inauguration of

South Africa's democracy, which might have been derailed if the ANC, like the other parties, had been fragmented and weak to the point where there was no dominant political formation.

By suggesting that a party's dominance is valuable and legitimate for as long as the electorate continues to identify it as a founding party, or, more particularly, if its rule is necessary for both social and democratic progress, this section makes one principal assertion; that dominant parties can in fact act as 'benign bridge builders', a concept borrowed from Pierre du Toit. However, Du Toit hastens to add that a dominant party can only create such bridging mechanisms if it has the necessary organisational functions; these being party strength and party system strength. Strong parties, he says, 'outlive charismatic leaders, exhibit organizational linkages, produce effective competition and yield a strong party system' among other characteristics. He nonetheless emphatically adds that in the emerging democracies of African states it is very unlikely that these benign bridging functions actually exist. For this reason, he argues, dominant parties 'are more likely to act as bridgeheads to single party hegemony, either through a sustained period of electoralism or in the form of elections which amount to pseudo democracy' (Du Toit 1999, p 195).

This paper will argue differently. While it is true that the nation-building process in Southern Africa is still new and thus relatively weak, the organisational strengths that Du Toit claims can give a dominant party the ability to perform this bridging function do, in fact, exist, although not to the same level as in Western democracies. For instance, although the ANC will inevitably capitalise on the founding figure of Nelson Mandela, it has, to a large degree, managed to function politically without him; a reflection of the fact that the influence he now exerts is merely symbolic. In other words, in line with Du Toit's thought, this paper will argue that by looking in particular at the electorate's behaviour, the strength of a dominant party, the strength of the party system and at the economic and social performance of a dominant party one may argue that dominant systems such as the ANC, BDP, CCM and Swapo can be viewed or accepted to some degree as legitimate democracies.

STABLE ROOTS IN SOCIETY

The salient point here is that in some cases dominant systems are a truthful expression of the will of the electorate, which is made up mostly of societies that have formed allegiances with incumbent parties. Transition parties or, to put it more accurately, liberation parties, gain considerably from their political allegiances with stable rural societies and their existence goes a long way to explaining how dominant parties are able to tighten their hold on the reins of power. According to Kuenzi and Lambright (2001), 'a party's ability to survive reflects its ability to maintain support in the population' (p 446). In their study they used two indicators to show the extent to which parties have fairly stable roots in society. One of these

is the percentage of lower chamber seats obtained by a party, the other the average age of parties with ten percent of the lower-chamber seats. Kuenzi and Lambright's results for the first indicator reveal that all the parties used in this paper as case studies, with the exception of the CCM in Tanzania, held over 70 percent of the lower-chamber seats in the 1994 election. The BDP in Botswana, with 100 per cent of the seats, had the highest percentage. These figures reflect the BDP's electoral dominance, made possible by the stable roots it has in society (Kuenzi and Lambright 2001). The question that has to be asked is whether, if a party consistently wins the majority of the votes in a modestly credible and legitimate electoral process, is this in and of itself bad?

Some analysts, of whom Du Toit is one, argue that the fact that the parties are dependent on an ethnic support base undermines the legitimacy of the electoral support they receive and that dominance becomes more threatening if the support base 'reflects and exacerbates race based political identity' (Lanegran 2001). In Namibia, for example, Swapo has been the only party to secure a popular base among the Ovambo, who make up 51 per cent of the Namibian population. It seems, therefore, that Swapo's dominance continues to be entrenched through ethnic appeals (Bauer 1999). We need to face reality, however. In the case of South Africa the black support base, which is both a racial and an ethnic base, returns the ANC again and again to a position of dominance; should this mean that the consensus of the electorate is any less legitimate because it is ethnically or racially based? The results of the SABC/Markinor survey, the Afro barometer and surveys conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council have all suggested that there has been considerable stability in voter support patterns for the ANC since the 1994 elections. As one might have expected, voter support, as expressed by respondents to these surveys though it was not reflected in the subsequent election results, peaked at 69 per cent before the first 'liberation' election, a level which has not easily been sustained but has nonetheless remained stable since then (Schlemmer 1999). According to the pre-April 2004 general election SABC/Markinor opinion poll, 64 per cent of eligible voters were likely to vote for the ANC. In fact, 69.7 per cent of them did so. These patterns suggest that a bonding has occurred between the ANC and the mass of its electorate, which, contrary to popular or scholarly belief, is, in fact, not racially dependent. According to Lanegran (2001, p 4) 'a variety of reports and multiparty democracy surveys published over the years suggest that the race-based interpretation of South African political parties is incorrect'. She bases this view partly on a public opinion survey published by Robert Mattes of the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) that revealed that support for the ANC in the Western Cape in the 1994 elections was divided approximately 50 per cent to 40 per cent between African and coloured voters. This, if nothing else, suggests that the ANC's dominance is not overwhelmingly dependent on one racial group and can thus be regarded as a true expression of the electorate's will.

Of course incumbency allows dominant parties to sustain 'stable roots in society' and maintain their rural support base by 'indulging in politically calculated

disbursements of government funds to rural areas' (Wiseman 1998). Evidence suggests that government spending targeted at rural areas tends to increase during elections, which may, to a degree, assist dominant parties to maintain their rural support bases. Overall however, the use of such incumbency to allocate resources in a more party-interested manner or even for party political gain has been relatively modest in some of these countries. Besides, however transparent the rules, the balance of scales will always seem to favour the ruling party because of the advantages afforded by its incumbency. For the most part, these advantages are legitimate, unavoidable and even inevitable.

It must be noted, however, that, like all the other factors which ensure dominance, these 'stable roots in society' will not endure indefinitely. There are already signs of declining support for incumbents in many African nations. Urban Africans, for example, are showing dissatisfaction with the performance of their governments and have begun to call for better government. According to the *Economist's* 'Sub-Saharan Survey' (2004), urban Africans increased from 23 per cent of Africa's population in 1980 to 35 per cent in 2001. The BDP in particular has been unable to extend its voting support among newly emerging urban voters. It has, to date, depended largely on its original voters, who include the rural traditionalists, state bureaucrats and ethnic groups. Meanwhile, its most ardent opposition, the Botswana National Front (BNF) keeps drawing support from the urban groups at the BDP's expense (Du Toit 1999). Friedman (1999) refers to this phenomenon as 'the generational change' threat in which the new generation of voters, mostly urban and better informed, does not view the dominant party's heroic deeds with the same enthusiasm as did their predecessors. This is indeed an indication that the dominance enjoyed by the ANC, CCM, and Swapo will not necessarily last forever. If this could happen in Botswana it most certainly can in South Africa and in Tanzania. The party system in Botswana is seen to be changing from a dominant to a semi-dominant system. Until recently 'no election in Botswana was seriously about which party will win power but only about where the opposition might or might not make gains' (Wiseman 1998). Giliomee and Simkins (1999, p 1) point to the cycles that dominant parties inevitably live through, especially in relation to advanced countries. The cycle begins with 'the inauguration of dominant-party rule, which then passes through a consolidation phase and ends with its first time defeat' (Giliomee and Simkins 1999, p 1). While the same cannot be said about the BDP it nevertheless appears to be coming slowly to the end of its prolonged dominance, indicating that, like the advanced countries featured in the Giliomee and Simkins study, non-authoritarian dominant systems in SADC too have a restricted life span.

COMMITMENT TO COMPETITIVE POLITICS

So far the argument has focused on the 'natural advantages' or long-term benefits usually enjoyed by dominant parties which have allowed them to retain their

dominant status. Consequently it is widely assumed that, given these advantages, dominant parties in the region have little incentive to govern effectively in a reasonably competitive environment and to allow the conditions for democratic competition to thrive. The point to be made here, however, is that some of the region's party-dominant systems do, for the most part, operate in conditions of political competition in that there is 'regular and open electoral contest, opposition parties are free to organize and civil liberties are at least respected' (Friedman 1999, p 99). In other words, dominant parties can secure their dominance while remaining within the parameters of constitutional democracy and, if they succeed in doing so, their dominance is even more deserved. In fact, provided civil liberties and competition exist, dominant-party systems can serve well as necessary platforms for a democratic system; a point which echoes du Toit's argument that 'dominant parties can only be benign bridge builders if political competition and a large measure of civil liberties exist' (Giliomee and Simkins 1999).

The problem arises, however, when it is assumed, as it invariably is, that civil liberties and political competition are not safeguarded in dominant-party systems in the SADC region and that dominant parties signify the suppression of political competition. In fact the BDP in Botswana and the ANC in South Africa are examples of dominant parties functioning in fairly competitive political systems. South Africa has some impressive democratic features. It has an independent judiciary, a progressive bill of rights, a vigorous civil society, institutions such as the police that are independent from the state, an independent electoral commission, a free press, relatively free electoral competition and the right of political association, among other features. Botswana, too, provides an example of a dominant-party system functioning within the parameters of a constitutional democracy. In fact, it is unique in the region, with competitive party politics and regular free and fair elections a feature since independence. However, democracy has yet to be consolidated to create a viable liberal democratic system in both these countries.

Of course, unlike Tanzania and Namibia, Botswana and South Africa have the relatively high socio-economic conditions necessary for democratic competition. Still, the dominant party systems in both the former countries, this paper cautiously argues, have remained moderately democratic and despite the numerous challenges and constraints facing political society in these countries there have been some gains. Elections in Namibia since its independence in 1990, for instance, have been considered free and fair and the country's national legislative bodies have functioned largely unhampered (Bauer 1999). As for Tanzania, a number of elements of fair competition have been introduced by means of several constitutional amendments, the enactment of other laws and the implementation of policies (Mukangara 2003).

PARTY PERFORMANCE: ORGANISATIONALLY, ECONOMICALLY AND SOCIALLY

Another essential point to consider in assessing the democratic credentials of dominant-party systems is that domination is 'an art far more than it is an

inevitability' (Pempel, quoted in Friedman 1999). Dominant parties in the region managed to win the loyalty of the majority of the electorate largely because of their ability to position themselves both tactically and prudently in the party system. This has been possible because the strengths of these parties usually far outweigh those of their opponents. Du Toit (1999) defines party strengths as 'the ability of parties to outlive their founding leader, to capture and mobilize support, and to harness the energy of ambitious individuals to the goals of the party among other variables' (p 194). Of the four parties under review in this paper the BDP is, according to analysts (see du Toit 1999, Wiseman 1998), the only dominant party that has thus far succeeded in marshalling almost all these strengths. The party has outlived its founding leader; a factor whose difficulty cannot be underestimated given the importance of Seretse Khama's role in the development of the party. His direction and leadership, according to many, originally established the BDP's dominance (Wiseman 1998). From its election victory in 1965 until his death, Wiseman suggests, 'Seretse's personal prestige virtually guaranteed all the election victories which the party enjoyed.' Another notable strength of the BDP has been its ability to draw in the support of diverse interest groups such as chiefs, bureaucrats, commercial farmers and tribal communities (Wiseman 1998). It should also be noted that other dominant parties, too, have succeeded in marshalling some, if not all these strengths. The CCM in Tanzania, for example, is the only party with the capacity to mobilise voters in all corners of the country (Barkan 2000). With branches in every district and in most villages, the CCM remains the most powerful political organisation; a strength that continues to serve the party well in every election.

Another way of explaining how a party's strengths can present opportunities for the expansion of its dominance is to show that the absence of these strengths can affect a dominant party's progress. Wiseman accurately points out that 'factors relating to party strengths such as leadership and party unity certainly help explain the creation and maintenance of the dominant position of incumbent parties, but also help explain the erosion of that position' (Wiseman 1998). In recent years the BDP's dominance has diminished, partly because its party unity has weakened. The factional cleavages within the party, the increasingly obvious public disagreements among its elites and uncertainty about Masire's successor have all contributed to the deterioration of the party's unity. If these problems remain unresolved, Wiseman suggests, they could undermine the BDP's dominant position within the party system. In the case of the ANC, the tendency to concentrate power at the centre as well as to impose leadership decisions at provincial level has weakened the party's links both with its provincial support bases and with its organisational wing. This neglect has tended to reduce the provinces' membership bases as well as the party's branches. This will inevitably have wider implications for its dominance (see Friedman 1999).

Another related point to be made here is that a well-managed economy, like organisational strengths, can help retain a party's dominance and attract the support of the electorate. The BDP is the best illustration of this. In fact, some would even

say (see Du Toit 1999 and Wiseman 1999) that the major reason for the party's electoral victory in every election is its economic performance. The BDP itself enthusiastically recognises this and uses it as the central campaign strategy in all its electoral contests by ensuring that its election manifesto features its record on the economy (Wiseman 1999). It is easy to see why the BDP has derived considerable electoral benefit from the country's dramatic growth and development. After all, Botswana at independence was one of the poorest countries in the world (Du Toit 1999). The World Bank now designates Botswana an upper middle-income country, all made possible by the BDP's wide-ranging development policies in relation to education, health care, urban infrastructure, the economy, and the administrative state. These policies, it must be noted, were implemented equitably across the entire country (Du Toit 1999). Clearly good economic management remains a major reason for the BDP's sustained political success.

The same, however, cannot be said of the ANC. Although its support base was largely inspired by a desire for delivery the ANC's lack of control over the white-controlled economy and its liberalised policies has hindered it from delivering. This suggests that the party's dominance, if it continues to be evaluated against its ability to deliver and its economic performance, is fragile and short-term. Nevertheless, for the present this dominance seems assured, partly because its supporters insist that the state has delivered adequately and has made it possible for them to 'catch up materially with the dominant white socio-economic group' (Giliomee and Simkins 1999).

A FRAGMENTED AND WEAK OPPOSITION

By way of concluding the debate, the paper now turns to the role and capacity of opposition parties in dominant-party systems. Despite being overshadowed by dominant parties, opposition parties, it has been observed, can play a significant role as either establishers/entrenchers or impeters of dominant-party directions. In situations where the opposition takes on the former role, political parties are usually weak and fragmented. The assertion here is that highly fragmented opposition parties can and do become unwilling and indirect entrenchers of dominant-party systems. As Olukoshi so aptly put it, 'The dominant-party system in Southern Africa is also symptomatic of the weaknesses, fragmentation and disorganization of opposition parties' (quoted in Matlosa 2004, p 7).

Opposition parties in the region's transitional democracies are generally conceived as overwhelmingly weak and fragmented. They struggle with major questions of tactics and strategy; they espouse no policy stances that are different from those adopted by current ruling parties and they are divided on grounds of history, ethnicity, and race; some, of course, more than others (Southall 2001). As a result very few opposition parties in the region can truly aspire to serve as an alternative government. To understand why this situation is so pervasive in the region's new democracies, some attention must be given to the influences of one-

party systems on the party organisation of the majority of the countries in the region. Matlosa (2004, p 4) writes:

... given the all pervasive political culture of centralization within the one-party system, political parties are highly centralized. This centralization has in turn inculcated and fuelled personality cult politics wherein a party is often equated with the leader. These tendencies have very often led to some form of authoritarian administration. And although most parties argue that they are able to allow internal debate and free flow of divergent ideas, in practice there is very little tolerance of this within parties.

While, it must be said, today's political parties are much more democratically minded and function within a predominantly democratic framework, the features of one-party rule have not been entirely abandoned.

Some information about opposition party situations in individual countries will provide a clearer illustration of this. In Tanzania, for example, almost all opposition parties have experienced internal crises which have left the parties weak and fragmented. The National Convention for Construction and Reform (NCCR-Mageuzi), the main challenger to the CCM in the 1995 elections, is the best-known example of this problem. Soon after the 1995 general elections the NCCR split into two camps, one associated with Augustine Mrema, the party's presidential candidate (and a former CCM deputy prime minister), the other with its secretary general (Kelsall 2003). Not long afterwards, Mrema abandoned the newly reconstituted NCCR faction and joined the Tanzania Labour Party (TLP) as its chairman.

The extent of the damage of the splits on the party's political influence can be seen in the dramatic reduction in its parliamentary seats. In the 1995 general election NCCR-Mageuzi won 16 seats in the mainland Parliament, with 27.8 per cent of the presidential votes going to Mrema. By the 2000 general elections, however, not only did the party fail to field a presidential candidate, its failure to overcome the destructive internal tensions reversed its previous fortunes and it won only one seat.

In addition to experiencing these damaging splits, parties in Tanzania have become platforms for the founding leaders, who have overwhelming powers to establish structures that do not necessarily champion the rules governing internal party democracy (Nyirabu 2002). Some parties have also, to their detriment, organised themselves around obvious religious and ethnic cleavages. Parties in this category are the Civic United Front (CUF) and the United Democratic Party (UDP). Party formations based on and driven by religious positions have found it difficult to survive in Tanzania, in particular mainland Tanzania, largely because religious differences, although they exist in Tanzania, only play a peripheral role in politics and because voters prefer to ignore religious appeals from political parties.

As a result, a party that identifies itself exclusively as religious is bound to lose in Tanzania.

Similarly, parties with strong ethnic bases have no chance of winning in Tanzania largely because the country has no dominant ethnic group. The 127 ethnic divisions are small and not necessarily antagonistic towards one another. The only party that espouses a non-ethnic agenda and has the support of almost all these groups is the ruling party, the CCM (Kelsall 2003). Because of the problems that face the opposition in Tanzania, the CCM's dominance of the political system seems guaranteed for many years to come.

The opposition in South Africa, though better organised and with apparently democratic features, portrays, to a limited extent, similar characteristics. The problems plaguing many opposition parties have more to do with their inability to appeal to the voters as viable, alternative parties than with an inability to democratically institutionalise themselves. Many opposition parties have employed tactics and articulated policy agendas that are deliberately aimed at minority racial groups; highlighting issues, for example, that are not necessarily the concern of most voters (the African majority), and employing campaign styles that are only attractive to small groups of voters (Lanegran 2001). This, it must be noted, happens despite the apparent willingness of the electorate to have politics in South Africa move beyond ethnic identities. Consequently, only small groups of voters support the opposition.

Other factors that continue to undermine the opposition's chances and contribute to its weakness include a small presence in Parliament; vague and indecisive party principles and policies and the fact that the leadership of many smaller parties is neither aggressive nor charismatic (Lanegran 2001). This has given many theorists the impression that the ANC is set to dominate for a significant period.

Generally parties in the region have a further obstacle to tackle – the issue of legitimacy. While some incumbent parties have taken every opportunity to delegitimize opposition parties by depicting them as 'fascist and inimical to the democratic order and national stability' (Giliomee and Simkins 1999), it must be said that in many cases opposition parties behave in ways that allow them to be delegitimized by dominant parties. Friedman argues that 'delegitimation of opposition parties is not automatically within the gift of dominant parties: An excluded party's delegitimation is a function not only of its enemies' actions but of the cultural understandings of the mass public' (Levite and Tarrow, quoted in Friedman 1999, p 101). In recognising that most literature has failed to define legitimacy Friedman posits his definition of legitimacy as 'a status in which the party is regarded as a legitimate participant in the polity, whose views need to be taken into account and which is, at least in principle, a potential partner in a governing coalition'. Based on this definition, this paper cautiously asserts that many opposition parties in the region do, in fact, suffer from real legitimacy problems.

In South Africa, the history of apartheid has naturally delegitimated parties that speak for the white Afrikaner minority. Both the National Party (NP), given its role in introducing and implementing apartheid, and the Freedom Front, with its aspirations to speak for the white Afrikaner minority, face legitimacy barriers (Friedman 1999). In Tanzania the Civic United Front, the largest opposition party, also suffers from severe and real legitimacy problems caused largely by its association with pre-independence political regimes. It has strongly affiliated itself with the pre-revolutionary Zanzibar Nationalist Party (ZNP), an affiliation that has resulted in ideologies that are not clear. The party's close co-operation with the Arab Gulf states and its ties with the Islamic states have prompted voters to question its loyalty and legitimacy, especially in Zanzibar where the history of politics is defined by revolution, colonialism, and racial splits between Arabs and Africans (Ahluwalia and Zegeye 2001).

An illustration of how a politically stable and well structured opposition party can undermine a ruling party's dominance will also serve to support the assertion posited above that weak and fragmented opposition parties which fail to act as alternatives to incumbent parties can and do entrench dominance. The BNF, the largest opposition party in Botswana, has recently begun to emerge as a capable contestant or match for the BDP. This assessment is largely based on its success in expanding its support base by organising and politicising non-ethnic groups, and, *inter alia*, establishing grassroots organisational structures in the remote rural areas. The BNF now has more significant support in rural areas whereas it has traditionally relied heavily on urban support. In the 1994 general elections the party took almost all the urban seats, winning a total of 13 seats in Parliament compared to the BDP's 27 (Wiseman 1998). These results slowly began to advance the notion that the BNF was a force to be reckoned with and to raise the possibility of an end to the BDP's dominance. The BNF's electoral strength, however, has taken a nose dive since then, as shown by the results of the 1999 election, in which it won only six seats compared to the BDP's 33 (*Human Rights Observer* 2000).

CONCLUSION

The party dominant systems discussed in this paper function within and respect, to some degree, the essential parameters of constitutional democracy. However, in all the systems considered here 'one party monopolizes power' (Friedman 1999). While it is true that some of these dominant systems lack a significant number of the features of liberal democracies it must be noted that dominance is not and should not be dismissed as a symptom of unhealthy political dynamics. In other words, because the parties do not operate in fully-fledged democracies it should not always be presumed that their domination is predominantly achieved by undemocratic means. The paper therefore insists that, guided and constrained by democratic procedures and rules, dominance can be achieved by factors (economic growth, party strengths, and stable political institutions) and advantages (weak and

fragmented opposition, stable electorate support) either aided by or outside of a dominant party's control.

Instead of dismissing dominant parties as undemocratic simply because an electoral takeover by other parties is unlikely for an extended period, observers should be more interested in the implications of such dominance for the future prospects for democracy in these countries (Southall 1997).

There is no denying that dominance raises serious concerns about the quality of these newly achieved democracies so the emphasis should be on assessing whether or not appropriate mechanisms exist that might minimise these implications or effects. These mechanisms, whether they be a strong and organised opposition or non-electoral mechanisms including legislative and independent oversight institutions (auditor general, public protector, human rights and gender commissions, an independent reserve bank, broadcasting authority and electoral commission) will hold the dominant party to account and check any abuse of its power (Butler 2002). To put it differently, the dominant party should be made to exercise its dominance within the parameters of constitutional democracy.

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