Political Opposition in African Countries
The Cases of Kenya, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe

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Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala 2007
Indexing terms:
Political opposition
Politics
Democratization
Ethnicity
Local government
Political parties
SWAPO
Case studies
Kenya
Namibia
Zambia
Zimbabwe
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This Discussion Paper publishes three revised papers originally presented in Session 1 of the Research Committee on Comparative Sociology at the XVI World Congress of Sociology, which was organised by the International Sociological Association (ISA) at the end of July 2006 in Durban, South Africa. The original initiative for this panel on “The Role and Meaning of Political Opposition in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Sociological Perspective” was taken by Emil Uddhammar from the Department of Government at Uppsala University in collaboration with Jean-Pascal Daloz. I wish to thank them both for thereby paving the way for what ultimately matured into this printed result.

This is among the last publications of the project “Liberation and Democracy in Southern Africa” (LiDeSA), which was operational at the Institute between 2001 and 2006. The research network has during the period of its existence, produced several Discussion Papers, Current African Issues and a book published by NAI. Further books, many more articles and a variety of other scholarly as well as popular writings were also published elsewhere.

While the LiDeSA project is drawing to a close, the relevance of the subjects touched upon within its framework continues to demand attention. The commitment to further emancipation of the people – not only but also in the context of (Southern) Africa – remains a priority on the agenda of all concerned about true liberation who aim through their own work in whichever way to contribute towards further decolonisation all over this world.

Henning Melber
October 2006
Ethnic politics is in the minds of most people no doubt associated with different kinds of democratic constraints.¹ Political scientists have devoted considerable effort to explaining why ethnic mobilisation is likely to spill over into violent conflict (Varshney, 2002; Glickman, 1998; Fearon and Laitin, 1996; Forbes, 1997; Hardin, 1995; Horowitz, 1985); how institutions in plural societies ought to be structured in order to mitigate such perverse effects of ethnic mobilisation (Hadenius, 2002; Rule, 2000; Sisk, 1996; Glickman 1995; Horowitz, 1993; Lijphart, 1977; Rustow, 1970); and increasingly also in critically analysing whether ethnic mobilisation is in fact inherently more conflict prone than other forms of mobilisation (Chandra, 2001; Widmalm, 1997). Apart from these three research themes concerned with the consequences of mobilisation, a fourth body of literature consists of attempts to explain why ethnic identities are mobilised in the first place (Bates, 2000; Mozaffar, 1995; Esman, 1994; Newman, 1991; Horowitz, 1985): under what circumstances do individuals mobilise along ethnic cleavages? Within it, this literature contains a number of studies that focus specifically on the causes of one, often well-elaborated aspect of ethnic politics. For example, Chandra (2003) and Posner (2002) bring to light different determinants of varying levels of ethnic voting. Mozaffar et al. (2003) show that both institutions and structure (in the form of ethnic cleavages) shape the party system in plural societies.

Two aspects of ethnicity and politics however appear to be insufficiently explored in the political science literature. Firstly there is little study focused on systematic accounts of non-violent ethnic politics.² A considerable number of ethnic relations are clearly not violent, and several societies bear witness to the fact that competitive politics based on ethnic affiliation may be durable, peaceful and open to democratisation. The existing investigation of such polities have tended to explore the par-

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1. Here ethnicity refers to a consciousness of a group identity built around an ascriptive category dissimilar to others in terms of objective criteria including language, customs, religion or any other category normally acquired at birth or through early socialisation. This definition is elaborated from Chandra, 2002:3 & Brass, 1991:19.

2. Several studies that attempt to explain a specific element of what we might call ethnic mobilisation (Chandra, 2001; Mozaffar et al., 2003; Posner, 2003; Posner, 2002), offer rich conceptualisations of specific aspects of politicised ethnicity – ethnic voting, ethnic parties or party systems – but there are few studies that offer a comprehensive conceptual framework, capturing all the expected manifestations, of peaceful politicised ethnicity. For an exception, See Hulterström, 2004.
ticipatory side of politics (i.e. mobilisation) rather than offer a complete framework for expected manifestations of politicised ethnicity. Secondly, while we empirically study the behavioural manifestations of ethnic politics (how people vote, parties mobilise, elites align etc), we tend to neglect (or simply theorise about) the attitudinal patterns that sustain (or undermine) the behaviours labelled ethnic mobilisation or ethnic politics. The purpose of this chapter is to contribute to both these neglected aspects. The chapter explores perceptions and attitudes regarding the influence of ethnicity on politics in two predominantly peaceful polities characterised by varying degrees of manifested ethnic politics.

Apart from the relative lack of previous examination, there are a couple of reasons for studying attitudinal patterns associated with varying degrees of ethnic politics. Firstly, identifying a potentially cohesive set of beliefs about ethnicity is important for the later endeavour of explaining behaviour associated with ethnic politics. Perceptions among political actors are essential in order to illustrate how, and explain why, ethnic politics is sustained or dismantled. Secondly, and linked to the first point, understanding beliefs and perceptions is necessary for institutional theory in that it constitutes the basis for the incentive structures on which institutional engineering builds. If, for example, the ambition is to create electoral incentives that diminish party fragmentation in plural societies, then one needs to understand how political actors themselves perceive the driving forces behind such ‘centrifugal’ developments. Exposing how political actors themselves perceive of ethnicity as enabling or constraining their political action is thus a principal ambition of this study.

A second ambition is to detect attitudes on the role of ethnicity with regard to a more comprehensive notion of politics than that normally associated with (ethnic) mobilisation. Rather than limiting the examination of attitudes to a particular manifestation of an ethnic cleavage, such as ethnic voting, or even to different aspects of mobilisation, the analysis includes both the ‘input’ and ‘output’ side of politics. In order to disclose a comprehensive belief pattern on the role of ethnicity in politics, the study seeks to capture perceptions about several of the core actors in democratic politics: voters, parties and the government. Ethnic politics is thus understood as the manifestation of an ethnic cleavage with regard to both political participation and policy making.

To clarify the purpose of the study further, it can be said to examine how elite actors believe that ethnicity affects the government, political parties and their elite, as well as voters in an attempt to identify a cohesive notion of the role of ethnicity in politics in Kenya and Zambia.

3. Larger surveys that have included some questions on ethnic identity and political behaviour may offer clues about such a belief pattern. See e.g. the Afrobarometer. Studies with interviews on topics related to ethnic politics have been carried out by among others Inkinen (2003); Chandra (2001) and Mattes and Gouws (1998).
The most comprehensive attitudinal pattern with regard to ethnicity is presumably gained through surveys capturing the attitudes of (a representative sample of) citizens. What role do citizens ascribe to ethnicity in relation to government policy, voting behaviour and the support and leadership divisions in the party system? Such a large-scale survey is nevertheless often not an option. An alternative is offered through the study of the beliefs of individuals that for some reason are particularly well placed to offer insights on the central cleavages in politics. As was once pointed out by a well-known American political scientist, ‘some people are much more interested, much more involved, and much more influential in public affairs than their fellows’ (Putnam, 1973:2). The political elite, the ‘makers of politics’, are obviously such people. The argument for studying elite beliefs is twofold. Firstly, political elite actors are placed right in the middle of the political process. Politics is ‘their game’ and they consequently have a comprehension of how that game works that widely exceeds that of most people. They are furthermore in this case found at the national level, which means that they have the chance of a much broader, nation-wide view than most. Secondly, politicians are not only well placed observers of politics, they are the ‘makers of politics’. They influence – to varying degrees depending on their position but no doubt more than the rest of us – how the political game functions. In short, the political elite is better informed and more influential than the average citizen is with regard to the role of ethnicity in politics. Elite actors are the theme of this study.

The empirical investigation of elite attitudes

Attitudes on ethnic politics were investigated through a series of interviews with Kenyan and Zambian elite actors: Cabinet Ministers, Assistant Ministers, Members of Parliament or party executives at the national level.\(^4\) The interviews with political elite actors were supplemented by interviews with a ‘reference group’ in both countries. The reference group consisted of political analysts from the University of Nairobi and the University of Zambia, different research institutes, political reporters from dailies, and senior officials from non-governmental organisations working with policy issues.\(^5\) The purpose of the reference group interviews was to partly ‘test’ the interpretations of the elite interviews. Politicians are normally very experienced interviewees and actors accustomed to pushing their own (not always obvious to the outsider) agenda. The discussions with individuals with vast experience of analysing the specific political settings were, thus both an attempt to

\(^4\) See the references for a complete list of those interviewed.

\(^5\) See the references for a complete list of the individuals constituting the ‘reference group’ in each country. It should be pointed out that the reference group is ‘imagined’ in the sense that the interviews with its participants were conducted individually. No group interviews were conducted.
improve the interpretation of elite responses and an additional perspective on the role of ethnicity in politics in the two countries.

The sample of respondents was strategic in the sense that it was intended to ensure a spread across political parties, between incumbents and the opposition, and to some extent different ethnic groups. A total of 69 Members of Parliament and party executives were interviewed, 35 in Kenya and 34 in Zambia. The reference group consisted of ten people in Kenya and eleven in Zambia. The interviews with politicians were carried out in November and December 1999 and in the period between October 2001 and January 2002. The interviews with the reference group were conducted during the period of December 2002 and January 2003.

Behavioural manifestations of ethnic politics in Kenya and Zambia

We know from previous studies that the two countries vary significantly with regard to the extent to which ethnicity affects the actual behaviour of voters, political parties, party leadership and policy makers (i.e. the government).

In Kenya a very strong relationship between ethnic belonging and voter support exists. In other words, Kenyan voters tend to bloc vote with their ethnic group for the same party or presidential candidate. Furthermore, a vast majority of Kenyans belong to bloc voting ethnic groups. In Zambia the number of bloc voting ethnic groups is fewer and the proportion of the population belonging to these groups is much smaller than in Kenya. Hence, ethnicity does affect voters in both countries, but it does so to a significantly a greater extent in Kenya than in Zambia (Hulterström, 2004:75–94).

6. It should be pointed out that there is a heavy bias in the Kenya sample towards members of the opposition parties. Members of Parliament and party executives of the opposition proved substantially more willing to partake in the interviews and despite a deliberate effort to correct this bias it still persists. Of the 35 interviews carried out with politicians in Kenya, six were held with KANU Ministers or Members of Parliament. An additional four interviews were held with Ministers or Members of Parliament from KANU’s allies, the NDP. The NDP supported the KANU Government on many issues in Parliament after the 1997 elections, and officially crossed the floor in March 2002. As there were quite probably attitudinal differences between the opposition and the KANU Government with regard to ethnic politics, or at least to the willingness to confer on such attitudes, this bias is something that should be kept in mind throughout the analysis.

7. The interviews were semi-structured and took between 40 minutes and one and a half hours. There are some differences in the interviews as the respondents were to a certain extent permitted to influence the direction of the discussions.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ETHNIC GROUP</th>
<th>Parties Bloc Voted for in the Kenyan Elections</th>
<th>ETHNIC GROUP</th>
<th>Parties Bloc Voted for in the Zambian Elections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kikuyu</td>
<td>DP; Ford-A; -KANU</td>
<td>Bemba</td>
<td>MMD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kalenjin</td>
<td>KANU; - DP</td>
<td>Inamwanga</td>
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<td>Kisii</td>
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<td>Kaonde</td>
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<tr>
<td>Luhya</td>
<td>Ford-K; NDP; -KANU</td>
<td>Lozi</td>
<td>NP; -MMD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Luo</td>
<td>Ford-K; -KANU</td>
<td>Lunda-Luvale</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Masaai</td>
<td>KANU; Mambwe</td>
<td>Nyanga</td>
<td>UNIP; -MMD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mijikenda</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Turkana</td>
<td>KANU</td>
<td>Tonga</td>
<td>UNIP; -MMD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Hulterström, 2004:85 & 89.
All groups in the table followed by a political party are groups that bloc voted for that particular party. Bloc voting is here understood as at least 25 per cent of the group voting for the same party. (Statistically this means that groups and parties were included when a one per cent increase of a particular group increased or decreased the support for a particular party by at least 0.25 on a district level.)

Manifestations of an ethnic cleavage in the party systems reveal an even clearer distinction between the two countries. All, but one, of the major parties in Kenya have a highly ethnically cohesive voter support. KANU is the only party that is better described as a multiethnic rather than an ethnic party. The opposite is true about Zambian parties. Only one party, in one of the two Zambian elections (the small Agenda for Zambia) gains ethnically cohesive support (Hulterström, 2004:95–109).

The ethnic cleavage is similarly more pronounced in Kenyan policy making than in Zambian. Kenyan governments have consequently taken part in ethnic politics, most likely through ethnically biased resource distribution and certainly through

9. The definition of an ethnic party used here is that of a party that receives at least 67 per cent of its support from a single ethnic group. This concept of ethnic parties has been elaborated from a concept introduced by Rose & Urwin (Rose & Urwin, 1969). The analyses on which this conclusion is based were however made on ecological data. Hence the exact conclusion to be drawn is that at least two thirds of support of parties came from a geographical area in which a particular ethnic group constituted at least 75 per cent of the population. The correct conclusion would thus be that a majority of Kenyan parties were ‘ethno-regionally’ cohesive (Hulterström, 2004:95–109).

10. Other studies focused on policy making in Kenya and Zambia, with varying interest in the role of ethnicity are: Ajulu, 2002; Atieno-Odhiambo, 2002; Chikulo, 2000; Berman, 1998; Grindle, 1996; Ihonvbere, 1996; Maipose, 1996; Ngunyi, 1996; Kees van Donge, 1995; Barkan, 1994; Momba, 1993; Widner, 1992.
an ethnically inclined appointment policy. The latter conclusion is clearly illustrated in the table below.

Table 2. Ethnic composition of Kenyan cabinets 1964–1998

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<td>Kisii</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Hulterström, 2004: 118.

‘Min’ here refers to per cent of Cabinet Ministers while ‘Tot’ refers to per cent of both Cabinet Ministers and Permanent Secretaries in the respective Governments.

In Zambia the conclusions about policy-making are less straightforward. There are signs of a rather dramatic overrepresentation in appointments of certain ethnic groups. This can however not, as in Kenya, be explained as an effect of those controlling appointment power (i.e. State House) favouring their own ethnic community.

Table 3. Ethnic composition of Zambian cabinets 1964–1996

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</table>


‘Min’ here refers to Cabinet Ministers while ‘Tot’ refers to both Cabinet Ministers and Permanent Secretaries in the respective Governments.

* Bemba here includes Lambas.

** Lenje here also includes Ila and Tokaleya.
Accusations about biased resource distribution are not supported by data during the Kaunda or Chiluba presidencies (Hulterström, 2004:111–152).11

Ethnic politics – An ethnic cleavage manifested in participation and policy

As indicated earlier the concept of ethnic politics applied in this study goes beyond the commonly used concept of ethnic mobilisation and aims at capturing manifestation of an ethnic cleavage with regard to both the participatory side of politics and policy making (that is, the output side of politics). Six themes, briefly introduced below, were used to structure both the interviews and the analysis. They aim at capturing both the cognitive and normative perceptions concerning how ethnicity affects the behaviour of the three actors of interest: voters, parties (and their leadership) and policy makers (or government).

1. **Beliefs about ethnicity generally in politics.**
   Respondents were asked to discuss whether ethnicity influences politics generally in Kenya and Zambia, and if so how.

2. **Beliefs about the behaviour of voters.**
   The questions under this theme dealt with to what extent ethnic groups are understood to bloc vote; to what extent voters are perceived to shun candidates or political parties led by candidates from other ethnic groups than their own; to what extent it, as a consequence, is possible for parties and presidential candidates to win nation-wide support.

3. **Beliefs about political parties and party elites.**
   Focus here was on how ethnic (in the sense of how strongly associated with an ethnic community) parties are thought to be; what are the main distinguishing features between political parties; what are the main reasons for politicians to align with a particular party; and how does ethnicity affect the collaboration between political parties as well as between political leaders?

4. **Beliefs about government policy.**
   This theme aimed at capturing whether past and present governments in Kenya and Zambia are seen as partakers or actors in ethnic politics. This was discussed in relation to both appointment policy and policies on the distribution of resources. Two different aspects of distribution were pondered: a) whether the respondent felt that the distribution of (particular) governments was or had been biased towards certain ethnic groups (or other societal groups) and b) whether the respondent felt that ethnic balancing (leading to either proportional or disproportional distribution) was or had been practised by past and present governments.

11. It should be stressed however that analysing and drawing conclusions about the distribution of public resources is rather difficult considering the lack of reliable public statistics. More analyses, using better data, are needed for reliable conclusions to be drawn.
5. **Evaluative attitudes regarding the desirability and legitimacy of ethnic politics.**

Normative perceptions are important in order to understand why perceptions about reality do not always correspond with observed manifestations of reality. A familiarity with the normative beliefs about ethnic politics makes it easier to interpret the cognitive views on the subject.\(^{12}\) As an illustration, it seems a plausible assumption that what one perceives as normatively ‘desirable’, or conversely ‘undesirable’, will influence how one perceives reality (Hardin, 1995:41–42). If we want to use perceptions in order to better understand behaviour, it serves us well to take evaluative attitudes into account. Furthermore the experience from this investigation is that it can be rather difficult to empirically distinguish cognitive and evaluative attitudes. Both kinds of norms make up the underlying beliefs people possess with regard to ethnicity and politics, and even if the two are untangled they appear to deeply influence one another. Consequently, including both in our analysis allows us to draw a more comprehensive picture of the beliefs surrounding ethnicity and politics. The questions under this theme were expected to capture the extent to which different manifestations of ethnic politics (e.g. the perception of ethnic interests, ethnic bloc voting, ethnically inclined distribution) are viewed as desirable or not on the one hand, and legitimate or not on the other.

6. **Normative attitudes towards ethnic balancing.**

Finally attitudes towards the practice of ethnic balancing were probed. Respondents were asked whether they viewed it as a legitimate and desirable practice, or not.

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**Elite perceptions about ethnic politics in Kenya and Zambia**

The perceptions about ethnicity and politics discussed in the interviews together clearly make up distinct sets of beliefs in the two countries. These beliefs will be summarised in two different accounts of the different logic guiding politics in the two countries under study. By discussing the two countries one after another some comparability may indeed be lost, but on the other hand it allows us to accentuate the possible mechanisms linking the perceptions of different aspects of ethnic politics. It turns out that the different manifestations are not isolated elements, at least not in the minds of the countries’ elite actors, but rather parts of a larger logic that guides politics. The account of how these aspects interact is valuable in attempting to illustrate and explain why ethnic politics is sustained or dismantled.

\(^{12}\) The distinction between cognitive and normative/evaluative beliefs is intended to capture the ‘is’–‘ought’ duality.
The Kenyan ethnic pragmatist

Ethnicity is clearly the main conflict dimension in Kenyan politics. In the understanding of the Kenyan elite, ethnicity is the essence around which politics revolved. This is manifested through a number of beliefs and attitudes, and taken together they give rise to a very explicit logic of politics. The following is an account of that logic as it came forth in the interviews.

Even though ethnic politics originates from a selfish political elite and in fact has no or little meaning to ordinary people, ‘*wananchi*’, electoral politics in Kenya consists of highly cohesive bloc voting ethnic groups. Kenyans generally vote for the same party as their ethnic kin, and particularly so if a contending party has a representative from their own community as a presidential candidate. The ‘local-man syndrome’ is hence strong and a credible presidential candidate can more or less count on the support of his or her entire community. In the unlikely event that an aspiring Member of Parliament chooses to break this compartmentalisation of party politics by running for a party with a presidential candidate from another community, the price to pay is hefty.

> [M]y environment was absolutely hostile because it was part of what is known as KANU zones. KANU zones are mainly the Rift Valley which is the homeland of the President [i.e Moi]. Among the Kalenjin there is only KANU and they looked upon me as a traitor, since I am a Kalenjin who has gone to the opposition. This is where politics become tribal; you do not have the independent mind to choose what you want. It is bloc voting. This tribe is voting for so and so because they belong to their tribe. So a Kalenjin from Rift Valley who takes up a party associated with the Kikuyu from Central Province will not find it easy. “How are you going to explain why you have decided to betray your people by going opposite?” they ask (Seii, 22-11-2001)

Only if more than one presidential candidate from the community stands does the ethnic groups’ vote risk being divided. From this practice it follows that ethnic groups not only bloc vote but do so for a party exclusive to them. Where such a voting behaviour is not possible – because no candidate from the community stands – people instead vote ‘selectively’ in the sense that the community systematically shuns parties led and supported by ethnic groups perceived as antagonists of the community.

As hinted above, the cause of this ‘ethnicised’ voting behaviour is the elite itself. The mobilisation strategy and leadership style of the past decades have taught the Kenyan electorate that only by having ‘one of your own’ in State House can the community access power and patronage. Thus every ethnic community needs

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13. It might be pointed out here that most of the respondents in the reference group endow local political leaders with enormous influence over the voting behaviour of their fellow kinsmen. As one interviewee put it ‘people vote the way their élite tell them. The level of legitimacy and control of most leaders is almost “hypnotical” and close to worship (Owiti, 13-12-2002)
its own presidential candidate and party to sustain the hopes of controlling State House. The idea of ‘one community, one party’ is now so entrenched that it has to a large extent cornered the very elite that once ensured that it evolved. Even where the will to co-operate with leaders from other communities exists, the establishment of multiethnic parties is prevented by fear among the elite that their ‘ethnicised’ voters would then abandon them. There is a strong belief that stepping down from presidential ambitions, or other grand ambitions, in order to work with leaders from other communities is very risky, not to say ‘suicidal’. The compartmentalised competition in Kenyan elections implies that leaders only compete for support within their own ethnic group. Hence, there is little to win from being moderate and collaborating with outsiders. On the contrary, stepping down entails an immediate danger of being made redundant, as it would very likely mean that a fellow kinsman picks up the presidential banner and carries instead the aspirations of the community. The ethnic group would then no doubt switch their support to the latter. As an illustration the suggestion that a Luo Member of Parliament should try to convince his electorate to vote for a Kikuyu presidential candidate was met with the candid comment: It would be suicidal at this stage to even try to do that. (Ochoudho, 14-12-2001)

It should be stressed that this voting behaviour – which saw a unified minority beat a fractionalised majority in two consecutive elections during the 1990s – is not seen first and foremost as an act of a deceived and foolish electorate. Rather, given the circumstances, both leaders and followers act according to what is viewed as a fairly rational strategy. The compartmentalised character of electoral competition makes it rational for most politicians not to co-operate, as a strategy of co-operation would almost certainly guarantee a loss. Bearing the community’s presidential ambitions may not take you to State House, but it will most likely get you into parliament.

These people bear the presidential aspirations of their entire community. Stepping down would definitely weaken their grip on their community. Someone else from the community would steal their role if he instead declared presidential ambitions. (Hassan, 12-12-2001)

Voters want to access state patronage and the only way of being sure of that is to have your own ethnic kin in State House. So even if your local man may have little chance of winning there is no point in voting for someone else. The best that can be done is to vote for your local man and hope for a miraculous victory.

Because of the way things have been handled in Kenya in terms of distribution of resources, people have been pushed to think that unless you have a person in there [i.e. in State House], you will not be able to get resources back to your people. ... So people will want to have their own [ethnic kin] there, to be able to get jobs, allocation of resources etc. (Katuku, 21-11-2001)

Furthermore, this strategy is advanced by the lack of reliable information about the
popularity of candidates. The popularity of the candidate supported by everyone in the voters’ surroundings will no doubt be exaggerated, while the support of other candidates from other parts of the country will be similarly undervalued.

If you [as an MP] are in a party that people think can never win [the presidency] then they will not support you. And since most people live a very local life with little understanding of what is going on in other areas, they think that the presidential candidate supported in their own region is the only one that stands a chance of winning. In Meru they have no idea that Kibaki isn’t popular in Luo-Nyanza. So [similarly] you can’t convince [the Meru] to support you on a NDP ticket because Raila isn’t popular among their neighbours – so they think he has no support. Leaders are caught up in this logic and it therefore works as a self-reinforcing prophecy. (Murungi, 20-11-2001)

Consistent with the voting behaviour described, ideological differences are of little consequence in Kenyan party politics. Neither party affiliation of individual politicians nor inter-party co-operation in parliament is to any large extent decided by ideological concerns. A politician’s party affiliation is instead primarily determined by his or her ethnic belonging (and at times by more personal relations and antipathies). Party politics is all about representing the interest of your community. Moreover, electoral success is by and large determined by affiliation to the ‘right’ party in the politician’s own region. The ‘right’ party is naturally the party led by one of the community’s own members. Even the most popular parliamentary candidate will have trouble being elected if he or she stands on the ticket of a party associated and led by another ethnic community.

There are no ideological differences between Kenyan parties. … So we don’t join different parties because we believe more in the one party than the other – or even because we believe more in the leadership of our party. Look at XX, he doesn’t respect his party president at all, but he can’t join any other party if he wants to come to parliament. (Nyagah, 11-121-2001)

The behaviour of both leaders and voters ensures that there are very few, if any, national parties, parties with support in all ethnic communities, in Kenya. Some parties might be labelled multiethnic as they bring together the support of several ethnic groups. But, they still have ‘selective’ support in the sense that they have no support at all among many of the country’s communities. Most parties, however, have even more exclusive support, which may not cross any ethnic boundaries at all. Such exclusive parties only have the support of the party president’s ethnic group. The personalised character of Kenyan parties renders the party president an effective ‘marker’, indicating the ethnic affiliation of the party. Consequently a party can have a very clear ethnic affiliation despite never having contested an election. The notion of exclusive bloc voting and the role of the party leader as flag bearer predetermines

the ethnic connotation of parties – even if they are new – in Kenya.

There seem to be very few limitations to inter-party co-operation in parliament – apart from personal animosities and a widespread distrust between KANU and the opposition. A diverging ethnic voter basis certainly does not constitute a hindrance to collaboration. Hence, while inter-party divides make inter-party co-operation impossible before elections, they seem to be of little importance once the parties have won their seats in parliament. If it increases the community’s chances of accessing patronage to work with others then it would seem almost an obligation for party leaders to engage in such an alliance – regardless of the antagonism that may have existed between the groups before the elections. A Minister from the NDP in coalition with KANU explains this point very succinctly:

There are no ideological differences between Kenyan parties so why be in opposition if it means more possibilities to develop your area if you co-operate [with the KANU Government]. (Awiti, 30-11-2001)

That it does matter for the access to public resources whether your community is in government or not, as we shall see further below, is next to a truism in Kenya. An assistant Minister from KANU elucidates:

Of course Charity Ngilu [leader of the opposition party, NPK] should join KANU. She will never be President, but if she joins KANU she will be able to develop her area. Now she asks for roads, and the ministry says “sure as soon as there are resources available you will get your road” [the respondents’ face clearly shows that that will never happen]. But if she were in KANU she would get funding from the presidential funds for such projects. But she just wants to be rebellious. (Kimkung, 12-12-2001)

The notion of compartmentalised electoral competition is not only reflected in the fact that few, if any, parties have nation-wide support, but also in that few parties have any ambition to gain nation-wide support. The logic is simple; why waste resources campaigning in areas where the party will never gain substantial support? No doubt most parties are believed to have some ambition outside the party stronghold but the notion of ‘fruitless areas’ is strong. The amount of resources considered necessary to overcome such structural constraints is simply not available to most Kenyan parties – with the possible partial exception of KANU.

Relations among elite actors of different ethnicity are, similarly to inter-party relations, on one level very good and unconstrained, but on another rather conflicting and tense. On the one hand politicians at the national level form a fairly cohesive group. They have often attended the same schools, they have been involved in student politics together, they share large business interests, they dine in the same restaurants, and they are members of the same clubs. In short, they are friends and business partners.
Yes, we could very easily co-operate. … I am very free with my friends – like have you spoken to Dr Mukhisa Kituyi? Kituyi and I were expelled from the University of Nairobi together. We are friends. But if I want to come to parliament I must do what my community wants me to do. Although I know very clearly that if we go the way we are going [i.e. down the road of ethnic politics], we are all going to lose. And I say to him “Mukhisa, we are going to lose?” And he says “yes, we are losing. Why don’t we vote together?” – “Because my community cannot vote for you and your community cannot vote for me.” So in the end we can talk but when it comes to voting each one goes to his community to survive as a politician first and foremost. (Kajwang, 16-11-1999)

On the other hand, in politics they represent their communities and it is only through this representation that they can access state power and patronage. Politics is largely seen as a game of sharing whatever the state has on offer and during such distributive sessions these friends turn into adversaries. Being leaders of different communities engaged in a zero-sum game means that your friend’s loss is your gain and vice versa. Hence, personal and social harmony co-exists with political competition and antagonism. It should also be mentioned, however, that among elite actors, ethnicity does ensure some feelings of closeness among kin or among ethnic affiliates of groups perceived as being particularly close.15

Turning to the Kenyan Government, it is beyond doubt seen as a ‘part’ in ethnic politics. The distribution of both public resources and government positions has always been biased. The ethnic groups controlling State House have systematically favoured their own ethnic communities. Most agree that the uneven distribution under Kenyatta has been further distorted during the Moi era. An opposition Member of Parliament wryly remarked that:

When Moi became President even his arid areas developed. They have even got an international airport. So because of that it became known that if a son of a tribe is in a position [of power] then the rest of the tribe will benefit. (Kombo, 14-12-2001)

Public resource investment in the Rift Valley has been extensive, as has the proportion of Kalenjin appointed to government, while deliberate attempts to weaken the Kikuyu community economically are believed to have been undertaken. Public distribution is thus viewed as a system of ethnic punishment and reward, and politics itself has, due to this government ‘bias’, been diminished into a game of ethnic patronage. Whoever dominates State House is expected – and no one has been dis-

15. This somewhat ‘schizophrenic personality’ of élite actors, as it was put by one person in the reference group (Ngunyi, 18-12-2002), was described in almost every reference group interview. Another member of that group illustratively explained that ‘they are all friends, but claims begin at home’ (Ongoing, 09-01-2003). The notion of an élite culture that transcends ethnic boundaries is thus understood as fully corroborated by the Kenyan reference group, as is likewise the importance of the ethnic following for politicians to access state resources. Gaitho, 12-12-2002; Owiti, 13-12-2002; Kibara, 16-12-2002; Kanyinga, 18-12-2002; Ngunyi, 18-12-2002; Musebe, 07-01-2003; Ongoing, 09-01-2003; Karlsson, 18-12-2002.
appointed in this respect – to favour his own community and neglect others.

It is interesting that the belief of a bias is so strongly held that a Nandi Member of Parliament complained that the Nandi subgroup has not been afforded the biased treatment it, as part of the Kalenjin group, should have been able to count upon. President Moi himself comes from another Kalenjin subgroup, the Tugen.

[W]e expected that once he [Moi] gets the cake he would be fair. Even if he is not fair when it comes to the rest of the country, he will at least be fair when it comes to our front. Because when we are in trouble we are all lumped together [the Kalenjin group], so we thought during the good time we would also receive – get something here and there. The observation we have made is that he has not only been unfair to us, but deliberately gone out of his way to make sure that we don’t get what is rightfully ours. (Anonymous Member of Parliament)

This highly exclusive view of political power has encouraged the notion of ethnic groups as having different or even opposing interests in Kenya. Furthermore, it means that a kind of ‘distributive justice’ can only be upheld if the control of State House is alternated. Hence, a very cohesive set of beliefs, which has been aptly, even if somewhat crudely, summarised as ‘our-time-to-eat’ underscores Kenyan politics.16

The understanding of voters, elite actors and the government described here adds up to a notion of politics that is deeply entangled with ethnic concerns. There is primarily a very strong association between the notion of political patronage and ethnic politics. Ethnic politics is made possible by the functioning of politics through patronage, or “dishing out” as it is often referred to in Kenya. Ethnic politics is in that sense an institutional artefact, as it could hardly exist without the institutions that enable ethnic patronage.17

Politics is a competition over the control of state patronage, and ethnic groups thus become competitors over limited state resources. Hence, there is a view of ethnic groups as having diametrically opposing interests in a zero-sum game. Structural differences are in this sense of limited importance for the notion of diverging ethnic interests. Winning the game entails control over patronage – it is ‘our time to eat’. Losing the game means that the community is denied such public patronage. This winner-takes-all character of politics breeds the understanding that the community

16. The reference group supports the notion of systematic distribution uneveness. Interestingly enough, however, many in the reference group argue that ethnic balancing has indeed been an important principle in Moi’s appointment policy – especially before the introduction of multi-party politics. Even though much more important within the KANU party, balancing has at least to some degree also been practised in Government. The reference group contends that the balancing has been largely superficial and has not contributed sufficiently to a sense of inclusiveness – but nevertheless balancing has been practised. Hence their argument is basically that balancing and bias have co-existed and that presence in the Government does not automatically mean access to any substantial power. (Githongo, 06-01-2003; Musebe, 07-01-2003; Okello, 08-01-2003; Opanga, 09-01-2003)

17. This point is discussed by Kanyinga (18-12-2002).
must have one of its own in, or at least close to, State House – or perish until the next elections.

This belief or perception of politics as being very exclusive is in addition supported by a normative view that politics should be competitive. Ethnic balancing, while not rejected, does not have a fundamental place in the notion of politics in Kenya. There is fairly extensive support for a government of national unity, but out of purely pragmatic rather than normative motives. A government of national unity might assist in improving the perceived low levels of trust in institutions. It is seen, however, as a temporary measure, suggesting that inclusion as such is not the guiding norm. In the era of multiparty politics it is no inclusive principle of distributive justice that gets – or should get – leaders into politics, but numbers. So in short, politics is a game in which ethnic groups give their support to ethnic leaders, and if they have the numbers this support will be traded for patronage, or whatever crumbs might fall off the ‘dining table’ as ethnic leaders share the spoils.  

Finally, and as already mentioned above, ethnic politics despite its firm grip is not an entirely legitimate nor desirable phenomenon in the eyes of the Kenyan elite. On the contrary, most consider it highly problematic. ‘Tribalism’ contradicts meritorial concerns and undermines all attempts for more issue-based politics. Consequently, ‘tribalism’ hampers national development, it is said. However, despite this view of ethnic politics as highly undesirable, few reject it completely in practice. Most manifestations of its existence – perhaps with the exception of distribution bias – are somehow considered legitimate exercises of politics.

Well, I would put it this way; every community is strategizing. Moi’s community [the Kalenjin] is thinking about how to survive without Moi and there is absolutely nothing wrong about talking. … The Kikuyu community has been in government before and they know what benefits that can be derived from it, and what losses that can be suffered from being out of it. So you don’t blame them for wanting to go back there. (Kajwang, 16-11-1999)

As things stand, the ethnic community is the undisputed – and supposedly legitimate – building blocs of politics. Working for the good of the group is hence an understandable – and presumably legitimate – motive behind political behaviour. In fact there seem to be few other ways to gain legitimacy as a leader than to be the (undisputed) representative of an ethnic community. Evoking ethnic loyalties is necessary in order to become the leader of the community. Few politicians in Kenya

18. It is interesting, albeit somewhat confusing, that the members of the reference group have very diverse opinions about the impact of distribution uneveness. While all agree that distribution of public goods has been ‘biased’, a few (e.g. Kibara, 16-12-2002) argue that this has really only affected elite actors as very little trickles down to the local level anyway. Others (Owiti, 13-12-2002; Githongo, 06-01-2003; Musebe, 07-01-2003; Okello, 08-01-2003; Opanga, 09-01-2003) instead contend that there have indeed been large differences in the provisions of services at the local level. It is quite difficult to study distribution empirically, as the investigation into this matter in Hulterström, 2004 revealed, which might explain part of the attitudinal discrepancy.
deny that they use ethnic loyalties to mobilise support and freely acknowledge that they would never succeed in politics if they did not.19 Kenyan elite actors clearly dislike ethnic politics, but on the other hand they cannot do without it – they are true pragmatists.

I don’t start a war I can’t win. I just become pragmatic. (Kajwang, 16-11-1999)

The Zambian national moralist

The attitudinal pattern with regard to politicised ethnicity is less distinct and cohesive in Zambia. This may of course be a reflection of the fact that the political elite does not perceive ethnicity as the main conflict dimension in politics. However, the sturdiest support for such a conclusion would rather be a cohesive set of beliefs that unambiguously point to an alternative conflict dimension. Alternatively, the somewhat inconsistent attitudinal pattern may be a reflection of the fact that the Zambian polity is undergoing substantial change. It is plausible that the dramatic electoral politics witnessed in Zambia at the beginning of the 1990s and the increase of ethnic consciousness, have led to a situation in which no cohesive set of political beliefs has yet been completely consolidated. Or it may be the natural result of a generally more disparate political elite with fewer shared nodes around which to develop common attitudes. Whatever the reason, it should also be stressed that there are unmistakably some shared norms and beliefs with regard to ethnicity and politics in Zambia. It is to a portrayal of this attitudinal pattern the discussion now turns.

Generally, ethnicity is of limited importance for Zambian politics. Few deny that ethnic affiliation has some impact on political behaviour but argue that structural factors, such as demography and social circumstances, make reference to ethnic belonging highly problematic. Like the party executive cited below, many politicians described their own family relations in detail to illustrate this point.

Zambia is a unique place, I think. Kenya is very ethnic, Zambia is not. And the reason Zambia is not ethnically inclined is the intermarriages that have taken place. For instance, I come from a family where my father comes from northern Zambia. My mother comes from the eastern part of Zambia. My sisters are married to virtually every other province. My wife comes from Eastern province. Her family has links to Southern province. So when we have family gatherings we have the whole country in one house. So I have no ethnic basis of treating anybody because I accept the chaps who have married my sisters, for instance, simply as Zambians. So we don’t have a serious ethnic problem. (Chunga, 30-10-2001)

19. There is great agreement in the reference group that ethnic mobilisation is completely accepted and ethnic claims are regarded as completely legitimate among Kenyan politicians. Owiti, 13-12-2002; Kibara, 16-12-2002; Ngunyi, 18-12-2002; Musebe, 07-01-2003; Opanga, 09-01-2003; Karlsson, 18-12-2002.
This rather functional attitude stresses, apart from the frequency of intermarriages, that many Zambian regions are multiethnic. This renders reference to ethnic belonging a poor strategy for mobilising support in many constituencies. Rather than talking in terms of ethnic groups, regions or provinces are often spoken of as the relevant actors in Zambian politics.\footnote{This is also stressed, for example, in the interview with Kaela (21-01-2003). Mutesa (21-01-2003) also pointed out that endeavours with ethnic mobilisation might be camouflaged in regional terms, as this is a more accepted terminology.} Besides reflecting a perception of many parts of Zambia as fairly ethnically integrated, this description of politics also seems easier to reconcile with the strong nationalist norm that inspires all political thinking in Zambia. Zambian elite actors take great pride in the nation-building success they ascribe to their country, and perceiving politics as a matter of ethnic competition would clearly be a profound break with that understanding.\footnote{Mulenga (20-01-2003) explains that, in his view, it is simply unthinkable to claim to be the leader of an ethnic community in Zambia. Such ethnic language is just not conceivable.}

We are all one and tribes do not separate our mutual understanding. (Anonymous MMD Member of Parliament)

Politics in Zambia is, however, slowly becoming more ethnic. Attempts to draw on ethnic loyalties in order to mobilise political support are increasing, as is distribution unevenness on ethnic lines – at least in the form of appointment bias.\footnote{This is supported by several in the reference group, while no one had a diverging understanding (Chanda, 20-01-2003; Kaela, 21-01-2003; Mutesa, 21-01-2003; Simuchoba, 22-01-2003).} The Zambian elite argues that this development is caused by political leaders who use ethnic kinship for want of other sources of support. However, ordinary people, just as in Kenya, are said to not care about ethnic politics nor perceive politics in terms of ethnic competition.

Recognising some discrepancy, the overarching notion is thus that voters in Zambia do not bloc vote with their ethnic community.\footnote{While voting behaviour was not widely discussed in the reference group, it was clearly understood by most of them that that the Southern provinces or the Tongas were willing to bloc vote for Anderson Mazoka and the UPND (Mumba, 15-01-2003). This was seen, however, as something rather abnormal – albeit not unknown – as the Eastern province is at times ‘accused’ of having moved as a bloc in the first two elections of the 1990s. (Lungu, 17-01-2003; Mulenga, 20-01-2003; Kaela, 21-01-2003; Mutesa, 21-01-2003)} Ethnic loyalties are not completely disregarded but are thought to compete with a number of other characteristics, such as professional identities or the qualities of the individual candidates. As the party executive argues below, the individual candidate is often perceived as more important than the party for which he or she stands, which suggests that political considerations are quite local. His concluding remark, moreover, very illustratively captures the ambiguity that surrounds thinking about ethnicity in Zambia.

That feeling of sending someone of your own to represent you in Lusaka, I think it is a very natural feeling. But I don’t think it is a tribal feeling. … [P]eople look at...
somebody being one of them in terms of whether that person lives with them, not in terms of where they hail from. … However one would be burying one’s head in the sand if one said there was no tribal factor in politics. (Sikota, 10-12-1999)

Voters want to be represented by people with a strong local connection and knowledge, in other words, by ‘local men’. That such local men in turn are connected to other local men, in other constituencies with the same ethnic affiliation, in order to protect the interests of the larger ethnic community is not the political norm in Zambia. Voters in Zambia are instead perfectly willing to support (candidates of) political parties (or presidential candidates) that are supported by other ethnic communities. Rather than voting exclusively ethnically, voters shun parties with exclusive ethnic support. It is argued that since no single ethnic group can form its own majority, any voter who wishes to see his or her preferred party or president in government must support a party with ethnically non-exclusive support.

Immediately that Zambians find out that a party is tribal that is the end. It is a natural death. Because like I told you there is no single tribe with an outright majority. (Mukupa, 13-12-1999)

The motives ascribed to the behaviour of voters are hence extremely rationalistic. This rationale is moreover sustained by the fact that representation in Zambia has a broader connotation than the presidency. The perception is that one does not require ethnic or regional representation in State House in order to feel included and protect one’s interests. This less exclusive notion of politics can only be interpreted as resulting from a greater trust in either formal or informal institutions in Zambia.

Neither ideology nor ethnicity is understood as a major divisive factor in party politics. Some ideological differences between parties exist but they are small, and ideological concerns are not the main reason for individual party affiliation or inter–party collaboration.24 The FDD National Secretary’s response to a question about the distinguishing factors between the major political parties in Zambia, gives a fairly representative view.

[I]t is not ideology – it is just personality. There are no major differences if you look to manifestos. I think the difference is in the personality of the leaders of these political parties. (Sejani, 23-11-2001)

Parties are not seen as ethnic in the sense of bringing people together with a shared ethnic affiliation. Parties may not be equally strong across the entire country but they do gather voters and leaders of different ethnic belonging.

As indicated above, some parties, but it should be stressed not all, are highly personalised, which entails an increased risk of being identified as more of an ethnic

24. In the reference group interviews in which this is discussed, the view that there are few ideological differences between parties is supported (Lungu, 17-01-2003; Mulenga, 20-01-2003; Kaela, 21-01-2003).
party. The more homogeneous the party leadership, the greater the chance of homogeneous party support. A description of the UPND and its leadership reflects this point.

What makes the UPND a tribal party is that the party is built around one person. Then that person appoints his right-hand men from his tribe. It is not a party that is formed by various people who then elect their leaders. But here there is one man that forms a party. Then he gets his tribesmen to go and register the party. (Mwufambi, 10-12-1999)

This indicates that there is in fact a perceived relationship between the ethnicity of a leader and his or her voter support – even though political leaders in Zambia cannot count on the support of their entire community.

Nevertheless, generally the understanding is that of an ‘integrated party system’ where parties and presidential candidates strive for nation-wide support and in actuality also compete for the same votes. The perception of political parties as having a nation-wide ambition is not, however, only descriptive but evidently also normative. The idea of an integrated Zambian polity is clearly strong and politicians often hold a stronger belief that parties should have a national ambition than an opinion as to whether they actually do. Pressed on the issue of whether parties actually attempt to garner support in all areas of the country, a UNIP executive instead gives his view on why a strategy of selective vote seeking is at least nothing that one could say out loud.

Because of the way that our nations were built. Our nations were arbitrarily set up. So if you take the Chewas; a small group in the Eastern province of Zambia; a big group in Malawi; and even bigger group in Mozambique. … So if there was supposed to be a Chewa nation it would cut across four countries. What this means is that our countries, many of them have not succeeded in nation building. And in some cases that has caused serious problems of ethnic violence. So this is an area which is delicate. So to say that “I am just representing the Tongas” – [now laughing a great deal] I think you would be laughed out of the luncheon. … Every political party in Zambia attempts to get support from everywhere. Because I think we have been more successful in the process of nation building. (Choongo, 17-12-1999)

The elite in Zambia is not only fairly disparate when it comes to attitudes on politicised ethnicity but also regarded as a generally rather heterogeneous group. There is no apparent notion of the political elite forming an elite class with similar habits and interests in Zambia. The diversity is not understood, however, as being primarily related to ethnic divisions. Few Zambian politicians feel that they are affected by ethnicity in their relations with fellow politicians. Interestingly though, while politicians are generally not themselves affected by ethnic belonging it is not unusual that their colleagues are. The debate over whether a Bemba speaker was actually a feasible successor to President Chiluba after his two terms in office – in which
many politicians explicitly stated their opposition to ‘yet another Bemba’ – furthermore, suggests that ethnicity is not an entirely unfamiliar concern among Zambian elite actors. Very few were however as explicit and informative about the role of ethnicity as this Member of Parliament.

Like now when we are talking, if somebody from my tribe comes in, I will immediately switch to my mother language, and sort of ignore you. I will finish with him and then come back to you – without an apology. It always comes out in political circles. (Kamanga, 12-10-2001)

Attitudes on the functioning of distributional practices are in part very cohesive among the Zambian elite. The distribution of public resources is, and always has been, largely unrelated to ethnic belonging. Ethnic inclination is not perceived as the norm in Zambia distribution policy. This is a view shared by both incumbents and the opposition as demonstrated by this FDD Member of Parliament.

The regional unbalances that may exist depend on different endowments of natural resources rather than politics. The Copperbelt was full of minerals so infrastructure had to be put in place in order to develop that. South, Eastern and Central provinces are agricultural land and roads must be built for transportation etc. North-western Western and Luapula have less resources – at least that have been developed – so less investment is made there. But once the development of resources gets started there they will also enjoy more investment. (Ngulube, 26-01-2001)

Ethnic communities are not, it seems, even a relevant entity when distributive justice is discussed in Zambia. The discussion instead tends to focus on a perceived ‘bias’ between urban and rural areas, and at times on the neglect of socially weak groups, such as women and disabled people. When it comes to appointment policy there is less attitudinal cohesiveness. The attitudinal divide seems to largely follow party lines. Politicians affiliated to the ruling MMD have the belief that appointment policy has, during the 1990s, followed the same logic of ethnic balancing, which had already during Kaunda’s early days, ensured representation to all Zambia’s major ethnic communities. The opposition on the other hand claims that Chiluba has abandoned the practice of ethnic balancing and instead favoured his own Bemba-

25. Respondents in the reference group normally believed that ethnicity had a rather limited impact on elite relations. (Lungu, 17-01-2003; Mulenga, 20-01-2003; Siyanga, 22-01-2003) Politicians are not seen as ethnic leaders in Zambia in the way that they are in Kenya. This notwithstanding, a couple of respondents stressed that top politicians, like all people, will normally want to be surrounded by people they feel close to. This is only to be expected, it is argued. Such closeness is, in Zambia, not only constituted by ethnicity – but a common ethnic belonging is definitely a possible ground. (Chanda, 20-01-2003; Simuchoba, 22-01-2003; Milapo, 22-01-2003)

26. Even though the largest part of the reference group shared the general view of distribution having been largely free of ethnic inclination (Momba, 14-01-2003; Mumba, 15-01-2003; Chanda, 20-01-2003; Kaela, 21-01-2003; Mutesa, 21-01-2003; Simuchoba, 22-01-2003), there are several interviewees in the group that believed that the Northern province and Luapula province benefited during Chiluba’s years as president (Lungu, 17-01-2003; Siyanga, 22-01-2003; Milapo, 22-01-2003; Kanyanga, 24-01-2003).
speaking community. The opposition is convinced that the government in general, and the important positions in Cabinet in particular, have been heavily dominated by Bembas.27

In the last eight years [the MMD] has been in government, the whole government has become Lupaula and Northern province. All government [branches] and departments are full of Northern province. … In the whole Ministry of Finance, if you go right from the top to the bottom, including the Cabinet Office, you will find 90 per cent of the staff – even the ordinary staff – are Bembas. If you go across to other ministries, to the Bank of Zambia and so on, everybody is Bemba! (Kahenya, 07-12-1999)

Furthermore, this ethnic inclination is the most common reason cited for the increased ‘ethnification’ of politics in Zambia. A former MMD Minister of Agriculture, now active in the opposition, who is himself neither Bemba nor from any of the communities around Lusaka, disclosed his perception of this trend.

You are even supposed to speak Bemba in Lusaka these days. You stand up and address a rally here [in Lusaka] and you address it in Bamba and everybody goes “yeah, yeah” [without reacting]. (Scott, 1999-12-10)

The logic of politics in Zambia is, most would no doubt agree, not entirely comprehensible. It clearly bears certain attitudinal traits related to politicised ethnicity but in addition it also shows signs of factors other than ethnicity that structure beliefs about politics. In the Zambian context it seems important to distinguish between cognitive and evaluative attitudes. The descriptive attitudes on politics, firstly, reveal that ethnicity is not entirely absent in the minds of elite actors, but normative beliefs, secondly, make the disclosure of such traits awkward. Turning first to descriptive attitudes on ethnicity and politics, it is apparent that the ethnic group is not the expected, or normal, building block in politics. It is noticeable, however, that no alternative cohesive dimensions along which people are believed to structure their political opinions or behaviour are visibly expressed. This applies to voters and political parties as well as the political elite in general. Indeed, local affiliation and perhaps to a small extent region or province are said to affect voting behaviour. But a local connection can hardly be viewed as a dimension that structures politics in a predictable way at the national level (especially not with an electoral system that almost dictates a local connection). Even though regions or provinces are not unfamiliar political entities – not least due to their importance as administrative and distributive units, no doubt – they can definitely not be said to form a consistently perceived building block in politics. Political parties seem to be structured, if by

27. If the political establishment is divided on this issue the reference group is all the more in accord. There is almost total agreement that Bemba speakers have dominated Government in a disproportional manner (all except Mulenga 20-01-2003). A number of interviewees, however, believed that Chiluba’s appointment policy became more ‘balanced’ towards the end of his rule – presumably due to the sharp reactions to his early bias.
anything, by personality and personal animosity among elite actors. Elite actors themselves seem to be, to some extent, guided by ethnic concerns but evidently not very consistently.

It is obvious that no ‘Kenyan’ understanding of politics as a game in which ethnic groups compete for state patronage exists in Zambia. What the ‘prize’ is in Zambian politics, and which actors stand the chance of winning it, is yet unclear. Hence, the limited conclusion that can be drawn here is that there is a fairly limited perception of ethnic politics in Zambia but no satisfactory alternative or, perhaps more appropriately, complementary logic has been distinguished.

Turning instead to the evaluative aspect of the Zambia attitudinal pattern, there is an exceedingly strong nationalist norm in Zambia. Great pride is felt over the successful nation-building process and the ‘one Zambia, one nation’ axiom. ‘Tribalism’ is not only illegitimate and undesired. The intensity with which attitudes on ethnic politics are held is very striking. Suggestions that politicians might want to protect the interest of their ethnic group are met with shock and disapproval.

[We] know what tribalism can do. We have seen examples in other countries. We know what is happening in Angola. What happened earlier in Zimbabwe. We don’t want that. It will bring violence. … This evil should not be allowed to reign within our country. (Chitala, 30-10-2001)

You simply cannot be ‘tribal’ in Zambia. The evils of tribalism, which consist of violence or even genocide, are unquestionably a political ghost in Zambia.

More nuanced descriptions of attitudes suggest that there might be a somewhat greater tolerance towards ethnic voters than ethnic leaders. The most despicable political offence is committed by ambitious leaders who call on ethnic loyalty to further their own cause. Similarly, there is very little tolerance for the practice of favouring the elite in one’s own ethnic group through appointments. The support for ethnic balancing in Zambia is enormous while the rejection of ‘tribalism’ (especially in the form of appointment bias) is equally heated. A ZAP spokesman elaborates the virtues of ethnic balancing:

The perception is that when they are sharing a cake in Lusaka I am sure that my MP is also present, so they cannot leave us out. It also removes the perception of tribal hegemony, so that no one ethnic grouping should feel that they are predominating. And when you look at it in practice, it works out so well. Even when you go about it in a mathematical way, the seats and positions are shared equally; one there, another there, you get one there and so on. (Kabimba, 08-12-1999)

While ‘tribalism’ seems to be the illegitimate practice of accommodating one’s own ethnic group at the national level, ethnic balancing is instead the legitimate practice.

28. It is surprising the Zambian reference group shows quite a large tolerance for the practice of surrounding oneself with one’s own kinsmen, while that practice is completely rejected by Zambian politicians.
of accommodating all ethnic groups at the national level. These two, strongly held attitudes form two interesting contradictions. Firstly, ‘tribalism’ is rejected due to its violent consequences but also because it is said to contradict concerns of merit and democratic principles. It is hence also often argued in Zambia that ‘tribalism’ hampers economic development. Ethnic balancing on the other hand is instead credited as ensuring meritorial concerns and reflecting democratic principles, despite the fact that the main feature which ‘tribalism’ and ethnic balancing share is that both practices put ethnic concerns before other considerations.

This contradiction seems utterly unreasonable if it is not placed in the context of Zambian political tradition. Ethnic balancing is (and has been since the beginning of the 1970s) not only seen as normatively good but as the remedy for ‘tribalism’. Hence, it is perhaps not surprising that ethnic balancing is ascribed all the good qualities that ‘tribalism’ lacks.

Secondly, it is somewhat surprising that ethnic balancing is regarded as such a vital principle in a polity where the ethnic group is not regarded as a relevant building block of politics. This gives rise to an image of ethnicity as always lying in wait to strike as soon as efforts to balance out its potential powers are relaxed. A scenario of unchecked ethnic politics is normatively awful and descriptively disastrous, as it would threaten the entire Zambian nation – the nation that has been the only relevant building block in Zambian politics since 1964.

To sum up, ethnicity cannot be said to be absent in the logic of politics in Zambia. The notion of ethnic politics is, however, a stronger normative than descriptive attitude. Ethnic politics is not understood as widespread but is all the more dreaded and despised. It is simply not accepted to prefer or favour your own ethnic group – not when voting, not when politicians interact, definitely not when government positions are to be filled, and not in politics generally. The game of politics in Zambia is thus to a large extent occupied with struggling against underlying forces that may, if left uncontrolled, contaminate the polity with ethnic politics. It is hence rather the ideal of the nationalist vision that constitutes the motive behind politics in Zambia, than a competition between opposing interests – be they ethnic or ideological. In short, Zambian politicians are ‘national moralists’.

Concluding remarks

Briefly summarising the findings, Kenyans have a very cohesive set of beliefs. They hold an explicit notion that ethnicity does, and how it does, affect politics among voters, elite actors, political parties, government, and hence politics in general. The findings suggest that ethnicity is perceived as the primary factor around which

politics is structured. This perception is definitely held about voters, politicians (in their strictly political function) and the government, and in some respects about political parties. The revealed evaluative attitudes on ethnic politics are more ambiguous. They contain a collective rejection of ethnic politics as inferior to other ways of organising politics, but deeply entangled with cognitive attitudes as they are, the result is a fairly large and cohesive acceptance of ethnic politics. Realism surmounts norm, it would seem.

The Zambian norm system concerning ethnicity is less cohesive and elaborated than the Kenyan. It would be erroneous, however, to conclude that Zambian elite actors are not accustomed to certain beliefs about ethnic politics. No aspects of politics seem to be ‘untouched’ by ethnicity, and even more evidently none are understood as ‘immune’ to ethnicity. The Zambian attitudes are characterised by a view of politicised ethnicity as a partly dormant, underlying factor, combined with a strong norm rejecting that factor. If the opposite is true in Kenya, in Zambia it seems as if evaluative attitudes on the ills of ethnicity often dominate cognitive notions of how ethnicity influences politics. There is far greater normative, than cognitive, cohesion in Zambia and it appears as if the cognitive attitudes are influenced more by the evaluative norms on ethnicity, than vice versa. In conclusion, there is nevertheless a fairly uniform understanding that it is not the only or even primary determinant of politics on any of the three aspects: government, parties and voters.

Attitudinal patterns and behavioural manifestations of ethnic politics

Relating the findings about the attitudinal patterns with previously observed behavioural manifestations of ethnic politics (i.e. voting, party and leadership cohesiveness, and distribution), there is clearly a large coherence in both countries. A few interesting inconsistencies between beliefs and behaviour however exist and with regard to these it seems two rather distinct conclusions about the two countries can be drawn.

Starting with Kenya, perceptions about the working of politics appear to slightly exaggerate the role of ethnicity – and especially so with regard to the behaviour of voters and policy makers. Bloc voting has been shown to be extensive in Kenya but the coherence was not as perfect as suggested by the beliefs of elite actors. Similarly, the entrenched notion of a severe distribution bias favouring the president’s own community is not entirely supported by data. Politics in Kenya is viewed as a game in which it is expected that one favours one’s “own” and neglects others. While previous analyses confirm that such an inclination exists, it is not nearly as extreme as perceived by the country’s elite.

In Zambia it instead seems that the role of ethnicity may be somewhat greater in practice than perceived by elite actors. Limited bloc voting does occur in Zambia
in contrast to the view of political leaders of the “ordinary citizen” as disinterested in ethnicity

Even though it should be repeated that beliefs and behaviour about ethnic politics in the two countries seem fairly consistent, the discrepancies discussed above may suggest a few insights into how attitudes and actions relate. These inconsistencies may simply be a sign of changing political cleavages. That is to say that the importance of ethnicity is either growing or diminishing so rapidly that no cohesive understanding on the subject exists among the country’s elite.\(^{30}\) There are some indications, however, that the discrepancies may be the result of the influence of diverging normative attitudes in the two countries. It is at least a plausible hypothesis that normative attitudes influence the consistency between behavioural manifestations and beliefs. The functioning of norms is perhaps appropriately likened to a filter through which ‘reality’ is interpreted before a perception of that same reality takes shape.

Looking at the evaluative or normative beliefs held about ethnic politics, there is apparently a consensus among the leadership of Kenya and Zambia that ethnic politics is something utterly undesirable. In Kenya, ethnic politics is perceived as undesirable and it is believed to hamper development. In Zambia, there is rather an intensely held fear that ethnic politics would not only slow progress but that it would destroy the Zambian ‘nation’ with its perceived violent consequences. An even more interesting difference in the normative attitudes found, is that the shared rejection of ethnic politics as undesirable is not paralleled with a shared notion of ethnic politics as illegitimate.\(^{31}\) It seems that while Zambian politicians view ethnic politics as both undesirable and illegitimate, many Kenyan elite actors make a fairly explicit distinction between the phenomenon’s desirability and legitimacy. (This at least seems to be the case with regard to participatory aspects of ethnic politics.) Many Kenyans apparently view ethnic politics as undesirable, but they also reason, given current conditions, that it is legitimate for ethnic groups to organise politically as such, and protect their collective interests. It moreover seems fully plausible that strongly held fears about the consequences of ethnic politics in Zambia, influence the individual’s propensity to perceive and describe reality in terms of ethnic politics. Similarly, it

\(^{30}\) This is a possible explanation as to why there was a strong belief in a Bemba appointment bias in Zambia, despite there being no “objectivist” evidence supporting such an inclination. An alternative, and perhaps more plausible, explanation of this discrepancy is that the Chiluba administration abandoned the rhetoric of ethnic balancing to a far greater extent than the actual practice – and that this was enough to alter the general (élite) perception about the appointment policy.

\(^{31}\) The distinction between ‘legitimacy’ and ‘desirability’ is aimed at capturing an apparent attitudinal distinction made by many respondents in the two countries. ‘Desirability’ refers to the view of ethnic politics as either something positive or negative. Is ethnic politics regarded as a societal problem or not? The concept of ‘legitimacy’, on the other hand, is intended to capture the right, which is ascribed to ethnic politics – or in most cases, specifically ethnic participation or ethnic policy. It addresses the issue of whether people (voters or leaders) have a ‘moral’ or ‘recognised’ right to partake in different forms of ethnic politics.
does not appear too farfetched that a Kenyan with the contrary view, that ethnic
groups constitute legitimate actors of politics, will be more prone to interpret the
polity in ethnic terms. This is simply to suggest that what ‘ought to be’ influences
what ‘is’, just as what ‘is’ no doubt affects what ‘ought to be’.

More importantly perhaps, this study of beliefs and attitudes about ethnic
politics, combining cognitive and normative attitudes, points to an interesting
empirical finding only implied above. Namely, that ethnic politics is upheld despite
being deemed as an undesirable, and in other words ineffective, way of organising
politics by the central actors of politics. In Kenya (as well as in Zambia) elite actors
perceive ethnic politics as highly undesirable, but yet it persists (not least due to the
actions of those same actors) as the main conflict line in Kenyan politics. The kind
of dilemma that such ineffective institutions constitute for the (rational) individual
is of course not unique to ethnic politics, but the revealed attitudes suggest – to draw
a careful conclusion – that the view of the political game, rather than the role of
ethnicity per se in society, is a great influence on the role ethnicity plays in politics.
If politics is viewed as an exclusive winner-takes-all situation, than there is little
to gain from breaking ethnic compartmentalisation.32 Whereas if there is a belief,
as there seems to have been in Zambia, in the distributive mechanisms of power,
then one has a great deal to win from bridging ethnic divides in electoral politics.
In Zambia it offers some degree of assurance that the community ‘has a man in
Lusaka’, while control of State House is the only way of ensuring a piece of the cake
in Kenya.

32. This dilemma has been discussed in relation to almost endless cases of collective action. To men-
tion but a few, e.g. in Putnam (1973) it is discussed in relation to administrative reform in Italy;
in North (1990) with regard to circumstances of profitable economic transaction; in Ostrom
(1990) concerning common pool resource projects; in Olson (1965) in relation to labour unions
and class action.
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Bibliography


Of Jinxes and Blessings

The Opposition in Zimbabwe’s Urban Local Governance

Amin Y. Kamete

The appearance of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) on Zimbabwe’s political scene injected unprecedented vitality into the form, content and trajectory of the country’s politics. The sleepy and predictable urban politics, hitherto characterised by apathy, continuity and monotony, experienced a dramatic revival with the formation of the MDC and the raging, divisive constitutional debate in 1999. This created a political powder keg that was to explode in 2000. The results of this have been more than dramatic. One of the most notable consequences is the disjunction between the centre and the local in the control of governance institutions; while ZANU-PF, the ruling party, retained control of central government and national institutions, the opposition took over municipal councils in the majority of urban centres.

This paper analyses how this disjunction resulted in intense struggles between the centre and the local for the control of urban councils. It describes how the centre set out to repossess the urban centres it had lost. Following the introduction is an overview of what constitutes the framework for analysis: disagreement and conflict in local governance. This is followed by a synopsis of the genesis of the disjunction between local and national governance in Zimbabwe. After a note on the study methodology, the paper presents and analyses the views of two groups of people, namely, the youth and the elderly. It captures their interpretations of the lively and all-too-often acrimonious politics in urban local governance. Of particular interest to the discussion is how these socio-demographic groups interpret these fractured and antagonistic political landscapes and the impact of the bruising centre-local conflicts. The conclusion revisits some of the important issues before closing the discussion.

Analytical framework

There is no doubt that governance is essentially a relational concept, which involves a “whole range of relationships…” (Devas, 2001:393). However, a survey of available literature betrays an overwhelming preoccupation with state-society relations. For example, in making the case for the importance of governance in sustainable development, the UNDP correctly insists that while necessarily encompassing the
state governance also “transcends it [the state] by taking in the private sector and civil society” (UNDP, 1997). Prescriptions such as these, though opening up the terrain of governance, suggest that the state at its various levels is the locus of governance, if not the most senior partner. So it is that the state and society – with the latter invariably perceived as calling the shots – have become the norm in discussions of governance, not withstanding the fact that there are “multiple sites of … governance” on different societal and institutional scales (Lourenço-Lindell, 2005), each of which has distinctive scalar characteristics (Brenner, 2004).

Perhaps not surprisingly, state-society relations dominate one of the best anthologies on urban governance in the developing countries (McCarney and Stren, 2003). This fixation is perhaps a natural outcome of a “change in perspective with respect to state-society relationships and dependencies” (Pierre and Peters, 2000:4). At a time when the state’s unrivalled position in society as the “obvious locus of power and authority” is being questioned (even in authoritarian states of the global South) as “states become increasingly dependent on other societal actors” (Pierre and Peters, 2000:4–5), it is fashionable – and even prudent – to be preoccupied with how the state is doing in the much-needed transformation from government to governance (Peters and Pierre, 1998). This fixation has had unfortunate consequences one of which is akin to the one generated by the globalisation debate, namely, the obfuscation, marginalisation and silencing of “an intense and ongoing socio-spatial struggle in which the reconfiguration of spatial scales of governance takes a central position” (Swyngedouw, 2005:64).

Thus, though it is beneficial to focus on relations between the public sector and other non-state stakeholders and actors (cf. Clark 2000:3), governance is as much about relations between actors in these two broad categories as it is within these categories especially the public sector at different levels of government. Thus, while it is true that governance involves “…cooperation between the public sector, the private sector, and civil society” who, among other things, “…work together as partners in building a stronger economy and a better society”, it is equally important to zero in on intra-governmental relations – such as those between the centre and the local – as critical factors in the building of that sought-after ‘stronger economy’ and ‘better society’.

Be that as it may, centre-local relations in matters of local governance have remained largely out of sight in many analyses of governance. A fundamental fallacy has led to the submergence of these interscalar relations; it is based on the misconception that where state-society relations are concerned ‘the public sector’, even though made up of “governmental systems”, is a monolith, some kind of “a unified, monistic centralised organisation opposed to society” (Dunleavy and O’Leary, 1987:42). As such the ‘state’ has one mind, has a unified leadership, holds a cohesive and common set of values, and is consistently engaged in a single pursuit. In this monistic perception, the local is no more than a miniaturised reflection of the centre.
Consequently, according to most conventional perspectives, though local governance is, in part, a process that has to do with encounters and interactions between and within the interacting parties (Goodwin and Painter, 1996:646), it seems there are two distinctive categories in this interactive enterprise, namely, those who govern and those who are governed (Olowu and Akinola, 1995; cf. Kamete, 2006). Every stakeholder or actor – individual or institutional – belongs to one, and only one, of these categories, each of which is internally coherent because its parts are unified by some essence. Consequently, despite occasional references to the principle of subsidiarity, as far as democratic local governance is concerned, the state is one; and it relates to those whom it governs as a unified entity. Perhaps this kind of reductionist analysis draws from the common conception of the state, even in pluralist systems, as “a set of organisations, which have a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence” (Dunleavy and O’Leary, 1987:43).

However, even if it were to be accepted that the state, at the various territorial and institutional levels, is a unified entity and does indeed think, behave and act as one, in pluralist democracies the situation does arise where disjunctions exist between central and local government. One common scenario is where the governing political party at the national level does not control local government in the form of, say, municipal councils. This creates a situation where the national and local political elites are not the same (cf. Keating, 1995). Although this is more likely to happen in advanced democracies in situations of political pluralism, the centre-local disjunction has been witnessed in highly centralised states in Africa, examples being Kenya and Zimbabwe. In these countries, the ruling political parties – KANU in Kenya and ZANU-PF in Zimbabwe – found themselves losing control of urban councils in their respective capital cities (Kamete, 2006), in much the same way as the ruling conservatives were totally absent in local government in Scotland in the 1970s (Keating, 1975). In each of these cases, a strong opposition took over the control of local urban councils. In South Africa, the ruling African National Congress has almost become used to having opposition controlled local councils, Cape Town being an excellent example.

Clearly, in these cases the state ceases to be a unified monolith. Governmental systems are no longer in harmony, at least in territorial and institutional terms. Local governance, which is already “a messy reality” (UN-Habitat, 2000:9), because of the many competing forms the governed take at any one time, becomes even messier since the governors are themselves fragmented. Having seen the creation of a rival (Keating, 1995:130) a strong central government, especially one with authoritarian tendencies is bound to make life difficult for the opposition stronghold. This is a result of “competition among centers of power” (Breton and Salmon, 2002:3).

The ensuing competition is a complex one. Being a creation of the central state, local government’s autonomy is relative. So, even if it is not a ‘possession’ of the national political elites who run central government, an opposition-dominated urban
Amin Y. Kamete

council still finds itself accountable to central government, while still answerable to the local electorate who would have voted out the governing party. Sandwiched between the central state and the local community, an elected urban council finds itself in a situation where it is subject to competing accountabilities and contradictory impulses. This raises important questions on “the status of local government as an expression of the local community… [or] an agency of the [central] state” (Keating, 1995:129). When, as is often the case, there is no love lost between the centre and the local – and both the centre and the local are playing to the gallery, trying to impress or woo the local electorate – then centre-local conflicts are inevitable. Stripped of all the diplomatic pretensions of a cold war, these conflicts all too often flare up and degenerate into open wrangles, with the one trying to out-maneuouvre the other.

These intra-governmental conflicts and disagreements do not leave local communities untouched. The local populace either benefits or loses out from the centre-local skirmishes. Granted, in theory, as the two tiers of government turn on each other, local populations can be the ultimate beneficiaries as the pugilists try to outdo each other in the war for hearts and minds. But all too often, as witnessed in Zimbabwe and Kenya, local communities emerge as the biggest losers as the warring parties trash their mandate and become fixated with scoring victories, however petty and costly, against each other. In such situations it becomes necessary to ask if the coming of a strong opposition is a blessing or a curse. More directly, one could ask whether oppositional politics in authoritarian and/or highly centralised states is inevitably jinxed right from the start.

Disjunctions and conflict in local governance in Zimbabwe

With the opposition embroiled in internecine struggles, the real inter-party conflict in Zimbabwe is now being played out in the few remnants of opposition potency in the country. These are the opposition-controlled councils in the major cities. Beginning in 2000, the opposition MDC ousted ZANU-PF from urban councils in successive general and local elections and by-elections. Before the end of 2003 the city councils of Harare, Bulawayo, Gweru, Mutare and Masvingo had become opposition-controlled councils. In municipalities, which in Zimbabwe’s urban hierarchy are a tier below city councils, the ruling party lost Chitungwiza, Gwanda, Kariba and Victoria Falls. Even Chegutu, deep in a traditional ZANU-PF stronghold, elected an opposition executive mayor.

Being used to always being in charge, ZANU-PF was bound not to take its rejection lightly. It was sure to wage a war to retrieve the “lost cities” (Kamete, 2002a). And wage the war the ruling party did. Being the party in government, the party essentially used the centre to settle political scores with the opposition-controlled local governance institutions. Brandishing his legally enshrined powers the local
government minister elbowed his way onto the urban local governance arena in the opposition strongholds, and embroiled himself in the management and governance of these towns and cities. Beginning with Harare, the minister started harrying opposition executive mayors and destabilising opposition councils. The majority of mayors and councils for their part refused to be cowed. Egged on by what government describes as ‘oppositional forces’ – a blanket term that describes, among others the independent press, civil society and individuals and organisations critical of the state – each time the minister descended on them, the opposition councils characteristically snapped their fingers at him. The urban local governance scene was perpetually riven by intragovernmental tensions and conflicts.

As predicted, citing insubordination, incompetence, inefficiency and corruption, the minister began a crusade to elbow out the defiant mayors and councils. Citing a lack of cooperation or the absence of satisfactory results following the expiry of his brief ultimatums, the local government minister began a wave of suspensions and dismissals. By December 2005, Harare and Mutare had had their executive mayors and entire councils dismissed and replaced by government-appointed ‘commissions’; the executive mayors of Chegutu and Chitungwiza had been suspended and ‘acting mayors’ appointed to replace them.

Perspectives on the opposition

The study was carried out between January and March 2006 in four urban centres that were or had been the sites of centre-local tensions and conflicts (Tables 1a and 1b). As noted above, at the time, Harare and Mutare had had their opposition executive mayors and opposition-controlled councils dismissed and replaced by government-appointed commissions. The opposition mayors of Chegutu and Chitungwiza had been suspended and replaced by government appointed acting mayors.

Table 1a: Generational and spatial distribution of study participants (N = 281)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CENTRE</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>% of all centres</th>
<th>YOUTH</th>
<th>% of all centres</th>
<th>ELDERLY</th>
<th>% of all centres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harare</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>31.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chitungwiza</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutare</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chegutu</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Research data, January 2006
In each of these centres, two socio-demographic groups, youth aged between 15 and 25 years (cf. MYDEC, 2000) and elderly, whose ages ranged upwards from 60 years (cf. Madzingira, 1997), were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule. The demographic distribution of the 281 study subjects is shown in Tables 1a and 1b. The interviews sought to solicit the respondents’ views on on-going controversies relating to the meaning, role and impact of a strong opposition with respect to urban local governance. The interviews focused on whether and why, by enlivening the local governance scene, and by being instrumental in creating the centre–local disjunction, the opposition was a blessing or a curse.

Table 1b: The generational, sex and spatial distribution of study participants (N = 281)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CENTRE</th>
<th>YOUTH</th>
<th></th>
<th>ELDERLY</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number % of all</td>
<td>Number % of all</td>
<td>Number % of all</td>
<td>Number % of all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>youth</td>
<td>youth</td>
<td>elderly</td>
<td>elderly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harare</td>
<td>20 11.9</td>
<td>18 10.7</td>
<td>16 14.2</td>
<td>19 16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chitungwiza</td>
<td>17 10.1</td>
<td>16 9.5</td>
<td>15 13.3</td>
<td>17 15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutare</td>
<td>25 14.9</td>
<td>23 13.7</td>
<td>12 10.6</td>
<td>14 12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chegutu</td>
<td>24 14.3</td>
<td>25 14.9</td>
<td>8 7.1</td>
<td>12 10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>86 51.2</td>
<td>82 48.8</td>
<td>51 45.1</td>
<td>62 54.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Research data, January 2006

In all the centres save Chegutu, some follow-up low-level focus group discussions were carried out with some of the participants. Being cognisant of security legislation – the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) – that restricts public gatherings of a ‘political’ nature, I agreed with the police on the inadvisability of having ‘political meetings’ in ‘public places’1 – ‘political meetings’ and ‘public places’ being highly adaptive terms in the enforcement of POSA. Instead, I arranged three focus groups in private homes in Harare, with mixed groups of between five and seven participants. Colleagues who assisted me did the same for Chitungwiza and Mutare. A total of six such focus group discussions were conducted between January and March. The discussions revolved around the same issues covered by the interview schedules, except that this time participants were in one place irrespective of age and gender.

---

1. POSA aims to “make provision for the maintenance of public order and security...”. It requires four days advance notice to the police for any public gathering, which is a public meeting “held for the purpose of the discussion of matters of public interest or for the purpose of the expression of views on such matters”. It gives the police power to prohibit any public gathering they reasonably believe will result in public violence, to disperse such a gathering, and to cordon off and search any area at any time.
Welcome or not? – The role of the opposition in local governance

The first set of discussion points centred on the perceived role of the opposition in local governance. Table 2 captures the sentiments. All the youth and a few of the elders were in agreement that the opposition had a role to play in local governance. The youth were forthright in their views. About 85 per cent of the youth in all centres insisted that the opposition’s business was to replace the ruling party in institutions of local and national governance. There were no striking gender differences in the opinion. The greatest divergence between the genders was an 18-point difference in Mutare where 88 per cent of the males held this view compared to about 70 per cent of the females. In contrast only 17 per cent of the aged held this view. Harare had the greatest concentration of these (32 per cent) with Chegutu having the least (11 per cent). More females (19.3 per cent) believed in the role of the opposition as primarily to displace the governing party than males (15.7 per cent). More of the ‘young-old’ (below 65 years) held this view than the ‘old-old’ (cf. Neugarten, 1974, 1975; Tornstam, 2003; Chipungu, 2005).

There was more gender and generational agreement on two points, namely the opposition’s role in increasing the accountability of the ruling party and ‘keeping the government on its toes’. Increasing accountability meant holding government accountable, where it had to account for its every move, by way of justification or explanation. Keeping government on its toes meant “making sure the ruling party does not take us for granted” (Interview, 13–01–2006). According to these views, directly or indirectly, the MDC made sure that “people kept government busy”; they capitalised on its well-known dread of losing support to the opposition. Many respondents (70 per cent of the grand total) contrasted the post-2000 situation with the pre-2000 period, during which one dominant political party “did whatever it wanted with … people”.

Table 2: The perceived role of the opposition in urban local governance (N= 281)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERCEIVED ROLE</th>
<th>YOUTH</th>
<th></th>
<th>ELDERLY</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pushing out the ruling party</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>84.5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping rulers on their toes</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>77.4</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>76.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing accountability</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>67.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redistributing resources</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>39.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting as people’s pawns</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>39.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolutely no role</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>32.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Research data, January 2006
Two out of three of the youth held quite a novel view of the opposition. They maintained that the opposition MDC was there to facilitate the redistribution of resources. It later emerged that this view was a spin-off of the clientelism rampant in Zimbabwean politics. Davies (aged 21), a Harare youth explained it this way:

ZANU-PF bigwigs have their own people whom they favour. They give jobs, money, contracts and many favours to these ones. So, when a new party takes over, we get new bigwigs and new beneficiaries. Resources are then shared among many people. More people get the chance to enjoy the fruits of politics when there is a strong opposition. …That is what happened when the MDC came. … I think it’s very good and fair.

Almost two out of five of the elderly endorsed this view. In all centres more females thought this was and should be the raison d’être of opposition politics. The study noted that, in both political parties patron-client relationships were strong between the party elite and women. This was based on the belief that women were more stable and dependable political allies than men. Female beneficiaries of clientelism included the young and elderly who benefited directly such as those in the informal sector, and those who benefited directly by securing employment in the city councils. The study found women who had benefited from a ruling party council (18) as well as those who had benefited from an MDC council (23).

A surprising role of the opposition is captured as ‘people’s pawns’ in Table 1. This means that people can manipulate the ruling party more if there is a strong opposition. This is not to be mistaken for keeping the party on its toes, which might or might not involve manipulation. When used as pawns, political parties have the tables turned against them as residents play one party against the other. Thus, the people of Mutare were able to get a road repaired because they turned against the MDC council and ‘cried’ and complained directly to the ruling party. Sensing that there was an opportunity to win a few converts, government reacted quickly. In this case, the opposition was used as a pawn, “sacrificed for bigger gains”, according to a key informant.

Some of the elderly respondents felt that the opposition had ‘absolutely no role’ to play in urban local governance. Remarkably, not one of the youth felt this way. On the contrary, more than two thirds of the elderly felt strongly about this point. Most of these were males in Chitungwiza and Chegutu, with the latter accounting for two out of five (40 per cent) of the total cases. Of all those who felt the opposition had no role to play, three out of five (22) were males above 65 years of age. The majority (70 per cent) of those in this group reasoned that the opposition was a front of some enemy forces bent on recolonising Zimbabwe, a view that by admission was borrowed from the public media. Their reasoning is reflected in the words of ‘Mudhara Kumbi’, a 63-year-old Chitungwiza businessman. Claiming to have “seen through it all”, he mused:
We needed an opposition when we fought evil colonialists. The purpose of being in opposition was to fight the racists. Now, tell me, if you are in the opposition today, whom do you want to fight – whose war and why? You see… I have a broader view. … We do not need them at the national level… so why should we need them in our cities? … The question is not whether somebody sent them, but who sent them. … You see … President Mugabe has a point.

The reasoning that after the delivery of independence there was no need for an opposition political party was widely shared, having been voiced by over 86 per cent of those who felt that the opposition had absolutely no role to play in local governance – or anywhere in Zimbabwe for that matter.

Of these, slightly more than half (51 per cent) were convinced that there was enough accountability as well as checks and balances in the form of the institutionalised supervision by government through the Urban Councils Act and the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and Urban Development (MLGPWUD). Two out of five pointed out that there was enough protection from the ruling party to make sure that the urban residents were not short-changed by the council. A few informed ones reminded this researcher of the sacking of the ZANU-PF council in 1999 by the then local government minister (Kamete, 2002b) for gross incompetence and inefficiency. The fact that there were senior ruling party people in the sacked council was to these people, proof enough that there was enough protection as well as ample checks and balances “without some shady and dubious opposition messing up things, as your opposition has done” (Interview, 12–01–2005).

A blessing or a jinx? – The impact of the opposition

The study also sought to capture what in the view of the participants were significant outcomes of the opposition’s involvement in local governance in their respective centres. The purpose of this section of the study was to determine not only what the respondents thought were the major impacts, but also what they made of those impacts, and consequently, the opposition. With the exception of a few extreme cases, there was no clear dividing line between those who viewed the opposition as a blessing and those who were adamant it was a curse.

The blessings

The greatest positive impact for oppositional politics appears to be the episodic benefits it brings to residents (Table 3). With 93 per cent of the youth agreeing with 85 per cent of the elderly, this is undoubtedly the greatest point of convergence between the age groups. The fact that this perspective applied to all urban centres, and was singled out by both males and females, enhances its position as the foremost blessing emanating from the entry of the opposition into the local governance arena.
Episodic benefits in this case meant occasional, mainly material ‘goodies’, at critical moments such as immediately before and after elections, or when parties where jostling to outdo each other in “playing Santa Claus” (Interview, 12–01–2006). The benefits did not have to come from the opposition. In fact, most of the documented cases of episodic benefits were from government, the ruling party or ruling party candidates vying for parliamentary or council seats. It was observed that the presence of a competitive opposition was the major contributor to this tactical and self-centred ‘generosity’.

Some of the most popular outbursts of ‘generosity’ took place in Harare’s Kuwadzana, Highfield and Glen Norah low-income residential areas ahead of three by-elections in 2003 and 2004 and the general elections of 2005. Here, residents benefited from ZANU-PF, which, in an effort to shore up its candidates, showered residents with heavily subsidised commodities that were in short supply in the country. Maize meal, sugar, bread and cooking oil were suddenly available in large quantities, albeit it briefly, in the run-up to the polls. In Highfield, the ruling party candidate even brought in a fleet of buses from the government-owned Zimbabwe Passenger Company (ZUPCO). For a few weeks, residents of the suburb forgot about the city’s perennial transport blues. They enjoyed not only the availability of transport, but also its affordability. The same was witnessed more intensely on a citywide scale in Harare and Chitungwiza during the triple polls (presidential, mayoral and council) of 2002. Mutare and Chegutu had their periods of enjoyment in 2003 during the mayoral and council elections. The episodic benefits were enjoyed by a broader spectrum of the respondents than the regular benefits from established patron-client relationships (see below). As some of the youth boasted, “Tinosimbodya navo madhara” (“We sometimes ‘eat’ with [enjoy benefits from] the big shots”).

Table 3: The blessings from opposition participation in local governance  (N = 281)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMPACT</th>
<th>YOUTH</th>
<th></th>
<th>ELDERLY</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livening the political scene</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiting ZANU-PF</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>39.9%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bringing material and other benefits</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>52.4%</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>47.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased accountability and transparency</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>77.4%</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>79.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognising the marginalised</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>79.8%</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>61.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Episodic benefits</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>92.9%</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>85.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolutely no good</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Research data, January 2006

Still on benefits, more than half the youth and nearly half the elderly agreed that the participation of a strong opposition in local governance had brought them material
benefits in the form of regular handouts, and sources of income including direct employment. They also indicated that they enjoyed other benefits, principal among them being training and prestige. Again, most of these benefits were not necessarily directly showered on them by the opposition but were a result its participation. The fact that the opposition presented a threat to the establishment was cited again and again as the main contributing factor in the increase of material and non-material benefits. Interestingly, 13 of the youth (4 female, 9 male) were products of government’s controversial National Youth Training Programme (NYTP) that many agree was a direct result of the threat presented by the opposition (cf. MYDEC, 2000). Graduates of the programme get preferential treatment in entrance to government tertiary educational and vocational training institutions, in the civil service, parastatal and local authority employment. All but three of the thirteen graduates who participated in the study were adamant that they were not ZANU-PF supporters but had participated because it was the only route to a decent job, to power and prestige. In the same vein, the elderly, in particular, women (60 per cent of the elderly subscribing to this point) claimed to have benefited from the competition between the parties.

Another point of gender/age agreement was that the opposition had delivered increased accountability and transparency. Sixty-eight-year-old Manu, who was not particularly enchanted by the opposition grudgingly admitted:

We now know what’s going on all the time, and …they [people controlling institutions of governance] now think twice before they mess up. I think that is good… [It’s] not like in the past when we did not know what was going on and nobody answered for their actions.

Transparency was brought about by increased supervision, as the parties were keen to expose each other. So it was that when the MDC council took over in Harare, they went on the offensive telling all and sundry how much ZANU-PF and its top brass owed the city in unpaid bills (see Kamete, 2002a). The same happened in Chegutu where the opposition executive mayor was ever so keen to expose his deputy (a ZANU-PF stalwart) for embezzling funds, a crime for which he was later suspended by the local government minister. That this happened was regarded by 24-year-old Pretty as a result of “our mayor who is our eyes”. ‘Jimalo’, barely out of his teens cried out, “Do you think this could have happened with only ZANU-PF as the only cockerel in council? Never!” In Mutare, the ruling party was constantly on the opposition executive mayor’s back, picking out areas of incompetence and alleged malfeasance (see Sithole, 2004), which culminated in the sacking of the mayor and the entire council. According to a Mutare-based ‘analyst’, “This happened because the fat cats are watching each other’s every move, trying to catch the other in the act (sic).” As Chenai, a 62-year-old Harare woman noted, echoing ‘Jimalo’, this would
not have happened “in the days of ZANU-PF … when it was the lone bull in the game”.²

With an 80 per cent score, the recognition of hitherto marginalised groups was cited by the youth as an important positive outcome of the opposition’s participation in local governance. The youth in all four centres viewed the MDC as “kapati kemayuti” (colloquially, “the party of the youth”), compared to ZANU-PF, “chipati chemadhara” (derogatively, “a useless old people’s party”). This was a popular conception among the youth, shared by over 90 per cent of the males and 95 per cent of the females. Many of these youth felt that to break into ZANU-PF structures “you need to have fought the (liberation) war and that means you should to be very, very old” (Interview, 10–01–2006). They complained that they were always marginalised even in the youth league – which should have been their exclusive turf – that an outspoken 21-year-old Chitungwiza man, described as having been captured by “machembiza” (slang for old people). According to many youth and commentators, it was only after the arrival of the ‘youthful’ MDC that ZANU-PF started seriously courting youth and taking them seriously. Not surprisingly, many youth felt that it was only through the emergence of a strong opposition that members of their generation had a realistic chance of making it in politics.

Fascinatingly, about two fifths of the youth and more than a third of the elderly were of the view that one of the significant positive impacts of the opposition was spiting the ruling party. Slapping the ruling party in the face in this case included embarrassing it at the polls, exposing the misdemeanours of its trusted cadres, openly defying government orders, and calling its bluff. In Harare, a third of the youth and 40 per cent of the elderly believed that the sacking of ZANU-PF supporters by the opposition council was a welcome way of spiting the party. In Chitungwiza, the electoral trumping of the ZANU-PF mayoral candidate was savoured with glee among the respondents, as was the exposure of the deputy mayor’s alleged larceny in Chegutu. Among the elderly in all centres, save Harare, it was women who seemed to enjoy the humiliation of ZANU-PF, a development they traced back to the MDC’s “vindictive politics”.

A minority of the participants, all of them elderly, referred to by one key informant as “the hard core” refused to acknowledge any good from the emergence of a strong opposition in local governance. Of the 10 holding this view, three (all male) were from Harare, four (two male, two female) from Chegutu; two (both female) were from Chitungwiza and one (male) from Mutare. No amount of cajoling could get them to provide a single instance where they felt the opposition had brought anything good. Further enquiry revealed that they were among the biggest material and emotional losers from the defeat of the ruling party in local polls, having among

² In fact, in February 1999, the ZANU-PF government did dismiss a ZANU-PF executive mayor and his entire ZANU-PF council in Harare for failing to deliver (see Kamete, 2002b).
other woes, lost favours, livelihoods or handouts from their defeated benefactors, who were now in the political wilderness and had no more use for them.

**The jinxes**

The jinxes in this study refer to negative impacts or conditions of bad luck that appear to have been caused or exacerbated by the opposition’s involvement in matters of local governance. Table 4 summarises the most popular sentiments. This was by far the area where the generations disagreed the most. However, there were no marked gender differences within the generations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JINX</th>
<th>YOUTH</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increasing tensions</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>76.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wasting time quarrelling</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>90.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bringing collective punishment</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>77.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divisive</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>65.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harbinger of bad</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>56.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolutely no bad</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: The jinxes from opposition participation in urban local governance

N = 281

Source: Research data, January 2006

According to some youth, the leading curse of oppositional politics was an increase in tensions. Identified in this regard were tensions between and within families, between political parties, and most prominently, between residents and government and by extension the ruling party. Twenty-year-old Mike, a Chegutu resident, appropriately summed it up when he quipped rather exaggeratedly, “Kwese kwese vanhu havachawirirarna …” (“Everywhere, people no longer get along”). The occasional eruption of political violence, always – but sometimes erroneously – blamed on the ruling party was the climaxing of these tensions. About a third of the youth and more than three out of four of the elderly subscribed to this view.

Linked to the issue of mounting tensions was the perceived divisive nature of oppositional politics, a fact that many holding this view blamed squarely on the MDC for daring to challenge ZANU-PF. Two thirds of the elderly felt strongly about this point, with one out of three of them complaining that the coming of the opposition resulted in the polarisation of society. “We are no longer just residents of Harare”, lamented 60-year-old Jackson. “You are either MDC or ZANU-PF.” According to a local sociologist, this polarisation was having a negative impact “on the functions and operations of society”. In a way, she was right (cf. Chung, 2006:328).
The political cleavages had spilled over into many areas of everyday life. There were instances where people clashed on issues simply on the basis of political affiliation. For instance, some parishioners in Chitungwiza refused to report the local cleric to the police for alleged child abuse because they felt that it was political victimisation by ZANU-PF-aligned parishioners. In Mutare, a petition against a primary school headmaster accused of embezzling funds did not see the light of day because it was construed as a ploy by the opposition to have him fired. It was only after press reports, which the opposition was accused of having a hand in, that the man was arrested and convicted.

Among the elderly, the most damaging result of oppositional politics in local governance was the wasting of time on petty squabbles. There was a feeling that subsequent to the coming of the opposition, the parties were devoting an inordinate amount of time “trying to score cheap points” (Interview, 10–01–2006). Institutions of governance had been transformed into what one analyst described as “bickering zones”. In these “pointless quarrels” “victory” was scored by “composing the biggest insult … [and] conjuring up the most bizarre allegations.” A quarter of the youth endorsed this observation. It was among the youth that the damaging nature of the quarrels was well articulated. Blessing, a 23-year-old Mutare young woman bewailed:

It’s as if once you vote them in they forget why you put them there. They soon focus on each other, always trading insults and accusations while we look on. In their sick minds they expect us to cheer them…they imagine they get our admiration by shouting the loudest and arguing the longest. It’s a circus, what with this Chombo [the local government minister] always budging in at the most inappropriate time.

One key informant was probably right when he posited that once voters had elected the councils, they became “spectators in a show of endless absurdities”.

The second point where the divergence was not that wide was on the view that the entry of the opposition into local governance brought collective punishment on residents. Less than half of the youth and nine out of ten of the elderly cited this as a particularly bad impact. On just what this collective punishment is, we will listen to Marwei, a 70-year-old Chegutu woman, a retired teacher, who complained:

When ZANU-PF was defeated, they got angry, very angry. They do not know who stabbed them in the back, so they think all of us are traitors. …Now they hate us all. So, when somebody becomes naughty, they beat up the whole town. When we are in distress they ignore us because they think all of us betrayed them [the ruling party]. The police and army beat us; green bombers [graduates of the NYTP] harass us. …We suffer because of the decision of a few renegades to turn their backs on the party.

Significantly, in many instances collective labelling was usually bundled together with collective punishment. This ‘wickedness’ which first cropped up in Harare was
mentioned in various shades in all centres. There were complaints that all urbanites were collectively labelled as MDC supporters, a stereotype that was held even by the top brass in the ruling party. It was this collective labelling that resulted in collective punishment.

Also closely linked to collective labelling and collective punishment was an interesting point summed up by 54-year-old James Chirume, the only participant willing to be identified by name. He complained that the opposition “gets us noticed for the wrong reasons”. According to him, the opposition was so eager to show that it had the urbanites on its side that it took every opportunity to flaunt its popularity by “creating a fracas”. Chirume reasoned, “When this happens, everybody notices us; …and then there is no more peace.” He complained that as a result of this unwanted attention, it was dangerous to go to his rural home – a ruling party stronghold – because local ruling party militia thought he was an opposition supporter who “like all urbanites is in the habit of protesting against the party [ZANU-PF]”.

This “unwanted attention” applied to more than three out of five of the elderly respondents who subscribed to the view that the opposition brought collective punishment to the cities. It appears these were not pointless remarks. When I raised the matter with a senior ruling party operative in Chitungwiza, he told me that the urbanites were “all dissidents and sell-outs”, adding, “When you are not sure what beast killed your livestock, burn the whole forest.”

An intriguing issue raised by about two out of five of the elderly was the conviction that the opposition was a harbinger of bad luck. What looked like a strange sentiment when it was first mentioned in Harare became a full-blown superstition in the course of the study. Basically, the argument raised was that it was with the coming of the opposition that the crises in the country started. The list of MDC-induced bad luck included drought, loss of jobs, political violence, and poverty. The youth cited inflation, shortage of foreign currency and the rising cost of living. The post-2000 dramatic plummeting of services in the towns and cities as well as the teetering of many local authorities on the brink of bankruptcy also invariably cropped up among the litany of jinxes that coincided with the emergence of the MDC. When I pointed out that these problems were perhaps the reason for rather than the consequences of, the opposition’s strong showing, as admitted even by the ruling elites, I was told that there were too many coincidences to be dismissed lightly. Peshi, a retired Chegutu policewoman who professed political neutrality asked, “Why is it that when we had only ZANU-PF being the cockerel things were not that bad?” The fact that the MDC is always blamed by the state for campaigning for sanctions against Zimbabwe was cited several times as evidence of the opposition as the harbinger and bringer of misfortunes.

By far the majority of the youth (69 per cent, of which 45 per cent were female), and decidedly the minority of the elderly were convinced that the involvement of the opposition in local governance had brought absolutely no bad consequences. The
Amin Y. Kamete

majority of the elderly holding this view were males from Harare (4) and Chitungwiza (3). On this point, it was impossible to separate national from local governance; respondents were quick to latch onto events in the national arena to explain their convictions. In most focus group discussions, the youth were at pains to convince the elderly that, far from being created by the opposition, most of the crises were actually what contributed to the rise of the opposition. The youth maintained that it was because of these crises that the opposition was popular. Baba Francis, a 67-year-old pastor agreed with the youth. He provided the typical textbook list of the “serious mistakes” he thought had precipitated the economic problems in the land. He mentioned the 1991 economic structural adjustment programme (ESAP), the embroilment of Zimbabwe in the costly Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) war in 1998, the awarding of unbudgeted hefty payouts to war veterans in 1997, and the controversial land reform programme that started in 2000 (cf. Bond and Manyanya, 2002; Hammar and Raftopoulos, 2003:2–3; Chikuhwa, 2004; MFED, 2003:1).

Conclusion

The centre-local disjuncture in urban local governance in Zimbabwe is by no means unique. Kenya and South Africa have experienced these disjunctures, with the former having had Nairobi, the capital wrestled from a powerful ruling party by a fledgling opposition. As late as 2006, South Africa’s ruling ANC – easily the country’s most dominant political party – surrendered control of the city of Cape Town to the small opposition Democratic Alliance. These disjunctures are part of what some commentators have termed “transformations”, which according to Stren (2003:6), stem from two impulses, namely decentralisation and democratisation. Both of these impulses imply major concessions by the ruling elite. Whatever the rationale, level and efficacy of decentralisation and democratisation, these processes are an expression of the acceptance, grudging or otherwise, by ruling elites sharing hitherto monopolised ‘space’, be it political, social or economic. This ‘sharing’ of space obviously involves, in part, bringing other social, institutional or spatial entities into the processes of governance.

Some scholars believe that one of the essential conditions for democracy in the global South is the existence and operation of political institutions, political parties being some of them (Pinkney, 2003:31; Herper, 1991). Political parties are both the cause and consequence of democratisation; some agitate for reform and win concessions that include democratisation; others come into existence by taking advantage of the newly opened political spaces. Though most opposition parties are fixated with replacing the existing ruling party by gaining control of key institutions of national governance, part of the overall strategy includes taking on the ruling elites at the local and grassroots levels.
Democratisation and decentralisation imply increasing the degree of political competition and participation with political institutions being both the key battle-grounds and the prized trophies (cf. Bratton and van de Walle, 1997; Dahl, 1971). This inevitably gives rise to, activates, or reinvigorates, political players eager to gain pole position in the governance arena. Obviously, unless the processes are stage-managed, individuals and institutions benefiting from these processes cannot be expected to always share the values and concerns of ruling elites. What results from democratisation and decentralisation is a newly enlivened local governance space, a space of multiple contestations, disagreements, conflicts and dissensions. Whether the new configurations are welcome depends on what the relevant constituencies think about them; it also depends on what the reconstituted spaces bring and give rise to, directly or indirectly. In the case of Zimbabwe, the radically transformed governance space resulted in unprecedented centre-local disjunctures, and ushered in conflict and acrimony as the centre attempted to mend the critical disconnect.

It is at this stage that normal discussions of governance need some reworking. The state does not always behave as one, always ranged against competing political actors as a unified monolith. If governance is in part about relations, if urban politics is in part about competition, conflict and strife, and if democracy is in part about participation, then in the reconstituted spaces of local governance the instinctive assumption that the ‘state’ is one needs to be revisited. Before such an assumption is accepted as fact, and fed into analysis, the state – even in its most authoritarian form – needs to be disassembled; it needs to be looked at as no more than an assemblage of institutional and spatial units that do not necessarily think, behave and act in unison. It is only after this reworking that we can begin to appreciate the contrasting and contradictory perspectives that some constituencies, such as the youth and the elderly in this case, have on sub-units of the state. In the case of Zimbabwe, these perspectives are not only a result of contending constituent parts of the state, but they are also a response to the behaviour and actions of those parts.

There is little doubt that the opposition has transformed the local governance arena in Zimbabwe. There is also little doubt that Zimbabwe’s polarised political landscape actively lends its polarity to what people make of this change. Just how much spatial, demographic, gender and temporal divergence exists is not straightforward. For one, there is no clear age-centre relationship in the perspectives on the role, meaning and impact of the entry of a strong and vibrant opposition into local governance. But there is enough evidence to suggest that there are significant intergenerational differences, and some vague gender variations. In this regard, it can be said with a measure of certainty that youth are more favourable to the coming and existence of a strong opposition than the elderly. Young men and women regard the opposition as a blessing. A significant proportion of them believe the opposition has a role to play in local governance; many credit it with bringing – or having helped bring – something good to the governing of urban centres. The pat-
tern seems to repeat itself in each of the centres, be it Harare the capital and clearly an opposition stronghold; or Chegutu, a medium sized town that is nestled deep in the heart of a ruling party stronghold. Notable also is the finding that for the majority of the youth, there is the conviction and expectation that the opposition is there to get rid of the ruling party – a thought that is abhorrent and unthinkable to many of the elderly.

Not surprisingly, many youth feel that the opposition exists to punish the ruling party for making things hard for them. In a way, they do have a point. With soaring unemployment and dwindling employment opportunities, urban youth believe that the ruling party has failed them; they are also convinced that it has made things worse for them. Although there are no recent figures on how many prospective job-seekers the country’s school system currently churns out per year, it is known that by the time the plague hit in 2000, the system was releasing some 300,000 students annually, whereas at its healthiest, the formal job market could only absorb a maximum of 20,000. With the economy on the precipice of a meltdown (Gono, 2006), and industry having shrunk by more than a third, the formal job market is almost non-existent. Some 25-year-olds, who graduated from secondary school more than a decade ago, have never had a paid job. This explains why the youth, both male and female, evince anger and resentment, and blame the national state – and by extension the ruling party – for failing, and indeed, victimising and marginalising them.

That is not to say the elderly are unscathed. Most admitted to being victims of ESAP and the controversial and manifestly chaotic land redistribution programme. But they seem not to have the kind of venom and palpable anger that youth exude. In fact, some of the elderly are decidedly uneasy about the opposition’s existence; they are hostile to it and are sceptical about any ‘good’ that it has brought; they openly blame it for a host of misfortunes which have hit not only the cities, but also the nation as a whole. So it is that about one out of ten of the elderly claim to have seen absolutely no good coming from the arrival of the opposition. But even here, it is difficult to detect a clear gender-centre pattern, although it could be said with a measure of certainty that Chegutu seems to have the greatest concentration of ‘opposition-sceptics’, with females leading the pack, although Harare and Chitungwiza were home to some of the most articulate of the lot.

So, what could be the explanation of the polarisation of viewpoints between the young and the old? The most obvious relates to the sources of credible (as judged by the respondents) information. The study revealed that with very little difference, the elderly relied on and trusted the readily available state-controlled media. As noted by many informed commentators (see Melber, 2004), the public media is a mouthpiece of the ruling party. Some even claim that it is ZANU-PF’s propaganda machinery. Having firm control of the electronic media, the ruling party can thus deliver its payloads with little or no direct rebuttal. Its dismissal of the opposition as
an agent of the imperial West, the bringer of ostracism to Zimbabwe, the advocate of sanctions, and the factory of evil machinations, appears to sell well among a significant proportion of the elderly.

In contrast, it is fashionable – mandatory even – among youth to despise everything in the official media. To be popular among the youth, you need to carry an adverse report on the ruling party. To be ‘cool’, intelligent, and modern one needs to echo the sophisticated, anti-establishment rhetoric and venom from opposition spin-doctors. One also needs to have grasped the message of what according to government are ‘oppositional forces’ that, oftentimes, have no kind words for government’s performance and record. These include civic organisations, NGOs, independent newspapers, the international media, some websites, controversy-courting firebrand academics, and independent political commentators. The youth’s umbrage against the ruling party is thus instigated and nurtured by institutions, organisations and individuals known for their disagreement and dogfights with the establishment.

Another source of divergence in intergenerational perspective has to do with what one of the key informants described as “where one is looking”. The elderly look back to the past, whereas the youth are concerned about the future. It is from these perspectives that the groups draw the material they use to shape their view of the present. To the elderly, their marriage to ZANU-PF goes back into history. It is the party that liberated them; it is the party whose leaders dared poke the murderous colonial regime in the eye, and having failed to help it see reason, took up arms in a long bloody war of liberation that called for massive sacrifices and brought untold suffering. Many of the elderly suffered. Many of them witnessed how the liberation movement took their interests to heart and delivered independence to them. It is the elderly also who enjoyed the first glorious decade of independence and democracy, when it “was all sunshine” as one of them fondly remembered.

Further, these are the people who witnessed and endured the horrors of political conflict between and within the liberation movements. So, anyone who ratchets up political tensions is not welcome. To them, opposition breeds dissension; and dissension is a harbinger of conflict and war. As Dzeka, a 72-year-old man, confided in me, he may not have unbending loyalties to the party, but he certainly is cautious and discreet enough not to plunge headlong into another long-drawn-conflict. To him tension and polarisation inevitably lead to war. His view is that the opposition spawns these maladies and projects them onto the local governance scene. This explains why a good number of the elderly are certain that the opposition has – and in fact should have – no role in local, let alone national, governance. Some of them believe that given time and support the party that brought majority rule has enough will, personnel and competency to carry the country through the present crises. The common conviction seems to be that having been tried and tested in their participation in the liberation struggle, these liberators have the credentials to govern; and they have earned the right to govern in perpetuity.
But for the youth all this is history. History that is instructive, yes, but which should not be allowed to imprison the future. As one of them passionately reasoned with one of the elderly on the sidelines of our discussion, the youth were not willing to be shackled to the past. They are for the future; they are the future; they want to move with the times. The reason why they want “some other driver to steer the nation into the future” is that what is happening now demonstrates that the ruling elite cannot be entrusted with the country’s destiny. The current crop of rulers has tried every idea they have and have failed; they have no formula to bring a decent future; they are “creatively bankrupt”. To many of the youth, the present state of the nation is enough to convince them that different rulers are needed; the opposition is home to such rulers.

Not too keen to be imprisoned by the past, and utterly dissatisfied with the present, the youth view the opposition as a partner to carry them into the future they desire. The youth’s loyalties, as they themselves insisted, are not to what was but to what ought to be. These loyalties are shaped by what is. Which explains why they are decidedly unimpressed by an excessive digging into and (ab)use of the archives; which is also why they cheer every time the opposition talks of an unrealistically glossy future, where the culprits who have messed up the present have no chance to ruin that future. That is perhaps why the youth consider the opposition to be their weapon of choice for striking at the ruling party, spitting it, and in the process, foiling its attempts to steal their future. Ndakaiti, a 25-year-old unemployed Harare woman captured the sentiments very well when she cried out, “We desire a future that is not like the present!” Thus, not wanting to be entombed in the past, not knowing – and not caring to know – what some foggy, supposedly glorious past was like, and extremely fed up and disenchanted with the present, the youth are ready to believe and ride alongside anyone who promises them a different future; that to them is the meaning and role of the opposition.
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This analysis highlights trends in the post-colonial political culture emerging under the previous liberation movement SWAPO of Namibia and its impact upon political opposition parties. Like other anti-colonial movements in Southern Africa, who had resorted to armed resistance as the ultimate form of the struggle for liberation from colonialism, it seized legitimate political power and has occupied the state apparatus since the end of white minority rule. Re-organised as parties, these movements gained control over the political sphere, and managed to consolidate dominant positions within the modified – though anything but fundamentally transformed – state structures. They obtained the power of definition in the political arena and shape public discourse within their societies to a considerable extent. In pursuance of their nation building ambitions, they tend to operate with and according to rather strict concepts of inclusion/exclusion. The legitimacy of these governments is based on being the – more or less democratically elected – representative of the majority of the people. At the same time, however, the democratic notion is also a contested territory.

Decolonisation and democracy at Independence

SWAPO’s armed liberation struggle, launched in the mid-1960s, had a major impact on the further course of decolonisation. But Namibian independence was as much the result of a negotiated settlement, which finally after the end of the Cold War period was also guided by the strategic interests of the two power blocs. It paved the way for a legitimate government led by the previous liberation movement after far too many delays and sacrifices. The goal of the struggle was national liberation. This was defined as political independence in a sovereign state under a government representing the majority of the people, who were so far excluded from full participation in society through the imposed Apartheid system. The power of definition concerning the post-colonial system of political governance was exercised
during this process mainly by the national liberation movement in interaction with the international system represented by a variety of competing actors under the polarised conditions of superpower rivalry during the 1970s and 1980s. The agenda was first and foremost shaped by the goal to establish a formally legitimate and internationally recognized sovereign Namibian state. By implication the expectation might have been among many of the forces involved that this required democracy as a lasting political system. Explicit evidence for this, however, remains scarce and scattered. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the liberation struggle was understood and perceived foremost as the right to self-determination. Once achieved, the task to formulate and adopt further specifications was left to those policy makers who emerged as representatives of the Namibian electorate as a result of free and fair general elections. It was therefore not democratisation, which was the priority on the agenda for Namibia, but decolonisation.2

From a logical point of view this is an understandable approach, since there is no democracy under colonialism. Hence only a decolonisation process provides the necessary framework for democratisation. Both can be and have been achieved to some extent. But it is important to note that the goals are neither identical nor necessarily congruent. The recognition of one particular liberation movement (notwithstanding the existence of several other African organisations mobilising against the South African occupation) as the only legitimate agency of the Namibian people through the United Nations General Assembly is a case in point. The liberation movement – in a process of formation during the 1950s and established after 1960 as the “South West African People’s Organisation” (later SWAPO of Namibia) – subsequently achieved a unique status. As a result of the decision to resort to armed struggle (which offered the movement more legitimacy than other anti-colonial organisations operating at that time) and subsequent intensive diplomacy it was – with the overwhelming support of the non-aligned countries and the Eastern bloc – acknowledged by the General Assembly as the only legitimate agency of the Namibian

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2. One might argue that the Constitutional Principles, which were drafted in the early 1980s by the Western Contact Group and adopted by (if not to say imposed upon) the conflict parties (SWAPO and South Africa) as common denominator and prerequisite for the implementation of Resolution 435(1978) to serve as an agreed framework and point of departure for the foundation of the independent Namibian state to come were characterized by a democratic notion. After all, the UN Security Council’s adoption of Document S/15287 of 12 July 1982 (“Principles concerning the Constituent Assembly and the Constitution for an independent Namibia”), introducing virtually procedural rules for the planned election under UN supervision contained several “Constitutional Principles” to that extent, which were then accepted as a point of departure for the Constituent Assembly elected in November 1989. Others might counter-argue, however, that the democratic notion was mainly crafted to maintain a status quo within a process of controlled change in terms of securing the existing property relations and former privileges by those who benefited from the minority rule. Along these lines, Dobell (1998:104) suggests that “the nature of the transition process itself should be treated as an independent variable, which served to institutionalize democratic political structures in Namibia, while simultaneously helping to construct perhaps insurmountable obstacles to the extension of political democracy to social and economic institutions.”
people and obtained formal observer status to the United Nations bodies. While celebrated as a major success over the Western policy of continued actual support (or at best passivity) concerning South Africa’s ongoing illegal presence, it was at the same time the most undemocratic decision vis-à-vis those Namibian people, who did not feel represented by the organisation. They were hitherto excluded from the negotiations and doomed to operate at the margins of the decolonisation process or degraded to a junior status as local allies within the South African ranks.

The mandate implemented during 1989/1990 by the United Nations Transition- al Assistance Group (UNTAG) under UN Security Council Resolution 435(1978) provided the supervision of free and fair general elections for a Constitutive Assembly among all parties competing for votes in the country registered under the transitional authority composed jointly by the South African Administrator General and the United Nations Special Representative. Those in competition, on the other side, were not operating from a basis of equal opportunities. While the one side (South African allies) could rely on massive support from the colonial power, the other side (SWAPO) had the privilege of being the only recognized representative of the Namibian people internationally. The possibility of any similar support to other forces not aligned to the two sides was basically eliminated by the factual constraints imposed upon these after the increased polarisation emerging from the 1970s onwards.

The constitutional democracy that was formally institutionalised as a last preliminary step towards formal sovereignty of the Republic of Namibia, confirmed in both its content as well as the drafting procedures, a negotiated compromise. Since the constitutional document had to be adopted by a two thirds majority, none of the parties involved in the process of negotiations had the power to impose a unilateral decision upon the other interest groups represented in the Constituent Assembly. SWAPO, with 41 seats (57 per cent of the votes) had missed the two thirds majority. The DTA (Democratic Turnhalle Alliance) with its 21 seats (28 per cent of the votes) failed to emerge as a really powerful opposition. In this constellation, both parties preferred a negotiated settlement to continued conflict.

The emerging process has been qualified as “an impressive example of successful bargaining by opposing political elites in a transitional democratic context” (Forrest 1998:43). For the time being available first hand statements of actors involved can serve as evidence to confirm that the negotiated settlement in Namibia resembled aspects of an “elite pact” (Dobell 1998:38). The constitutional negotiations were the final chapter of a decolonisation process “closely supervised by international forces,

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3. United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3111 of 12 December 1973 recognized SWAPO as “the authentic representative of the Namibian people”. This was amended in United Nations General Assembly Resolution 31/146 of 20 December 1976 to “sole and authentic”, endorsing an exclusive status and political monopoly of SWAPO in the negotiations on behalf of the Namibian population.
and facilitated by a ‘transitional pact’, which “alongside at least an instrumental commitment to democracy on the part of opposing forces, has surely also made a difference” (Bauer 2001:36). The pragmatic give and take approach by all parties involved, who were “eager to seize the reins of power” (Cliffe et al. 1994:213), is documented by Namibia’s first Head of State, who plainly states in his autobiography that “we agreed without argument that Namibia would be a multi-party democracy with an independent judiciary and a strong bill of rights” (Nujoma 2001:424). Similar views, stressing the general consensus among the main parties, were presented by both the then leader of the DTA and Namibia’s first Foreign Minister during a conference among relevant actors and stakeholders directly involved in the transition, recalling the Namibian decolonisation process (cf. Weiland/Braham 1994). And a local politician involved in the drafting process explained to Dobell (1998:101): “everybody wanted to be seen as a democrat during these negotiations”.

As a result of this negotiated transition, the constitutional rooting of formal political liberties and human rights secured a “yardstick for good governance” (Erasmus 2000:98). To that extent it offers a meaningful impact as a tool contributing towards a process of democratisation. The Grundnorm introduced, however, had not been anchored in wider societal acceptance, nor did it reflect virtues and norms internalized by the lawmakers themselves. Testing the essence against some features of social reality, a law professor at the University of Namibia observed a “discrepancy between the acclamation of the Constitution as the symbol of liberation and independence, and the translation of the Constitution into daily life” (Hinz 2001:91). Even more importantly, as the new Under-Secretary for Legal Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs pointed out: “To instil democratic and human rights values is not enough, however; we also need to insist that institutions themselves become more democratic”. It is an irony, he continued, “that although we have a widely admired Constitution, the organisations which are supposed to provide the officials who will protect this constitution, namely our political parties, are the most undemocratic institutions in the country” (Pickering 1995:107).

Political hegemony under Swapo

The most striking phenomenon in terms of political development during Namibia’s first decade of Independence has been the constant gain and consolidation of political power and control by the former liberation movement. From election to election during the first ten years, it managed to add further strength to its dominant role. Swapo had originally failed to obtain the aspired two thirds majority votes in the elections for the Constituent Assembly in November 1989. With a marked decline of overall votes and an almost constant numerical support base, it managed to seize exclusive control over the parliamentary decision-making process with the national
elecrions in December 1994, which it has maintained and consolidated since that time.

During the first decade of Namibian Independence a political system emerged, which displayed tendencies towards a dominant one party state under increasingly autocratic rule. But the election figures over the first decade also disclose only a small absolute increase of votes for Swapo. In fact, while the party expanded its representation in the National Assembly by 17 per cent in 1994, obtaining with 73.89 per cent a two thirds majority, the number of votes received had actually dropped by 22,767. Due to a total decrease of all votes (almost 28 per cent less), the loss (5.9 per cent) was more than compensated. With a total of 408,174 votes in the 1999 national elections, Swapo received 23,607 votes (or 6.1 per cent) more than in 1989. Due to the lower number of total votes cast (151,751 or 22.1 per cent less than in 1989) the party increased its representation by another almost 2.3 per cent to 76.15 per cent. Even more notably, it maintained this overwhelming dominance with 75.83 per cent in 2004 and an increase in the absolute number of votes by some 280,000 to almost 820,000. While doubts were cast over the voters roll and related issues (see more details on the disputed election results of 2004 below), the outcome in terms of mandates was at the end endorsed in court and illustrated the mass support in numerical terms.

Parliamentary election results 1989–1999 for the bigger parties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election</th>
<th>Votes</th>
<th>SWAPO</th>
<th>DTA</th>
<th>UDF</th>
<th>CoD</th>
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<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>687,787</td>
<td>384,567</td>
<td>191,532</td>
<td>37,874</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(constituent)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(56.90%)</td>
<td>(28.34%)</td>
<td>(5.60%)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>497,499</td>
<td>361,800</td>
<td>101,748</td>
<td>13,309</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(73.89%)</td>
<td>(20.78%)</td>
<td>(2.72%)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>536,036</td>
<td>408,174</td>
<td>50,824</td>
<td>15,685</td>
<td>53,289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(76.15%)</td>
<td>(9.48%)</td>
<td>(2.93%)</td>
<td>(9.94%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>818,439</td>
<td>620,609</td>
<td>42,070</td>
<td>30,355</td>
<td>59,464</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(75.83%)</td>
<td>(5.14%)</td>
<td>(3.71%)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


For du Toit (1996:59), the erstwhile liberation movement had with the election results of 1994 already secured the position of an “electorally dominant party”, which was “well positioned to establish a cycle of dominance”. Not surprisingly, during the 1990s as another characteristic feature no numerically meaningful opposition party could firmly establish itself as a relevant political counter-weight to be considered as a serious challenge to the political hegemony of the former liberation movement.
In stark contrast to this sober fact, is the strong reaction provoked by the founding of the Congress of Democrats (CoD) as a new political party in early 1999. As if to illustrate the point, Swapo conducted its election campaign during 1999 with a brochure in which it states, “saving democracy, or more appropriately saving the opposition, is the latest version of Europe’s burden to civilize the natives” (SWAPO Party Department of Information and Publicity 1999:24). Many observers originally expected the CoD to attract a meaningful number of frustrated Swapo followers, thereby challenging the two thirds majority of the previous liberation movement, from whose ranks some of the CoD activists defected. Instead, the CoD mainly split the number of votes among the opposition parties and established itself as the second strongest political factor only by a marginally higher number of votes than (and at the expense of) the ‘traditional’ opposition party, DTA. As the figures show, opposition parties have so far never managed to obtain enough weight to seriously challenge the actual dominance of Swapo. Where, due to the local constellation on the ground, the Swapo dominance was challenged by the existing preferences among the regional identities, which had an impact on the regional and local elections, the practice of “gerrymandering” (through re-defining demarcation boundaries of constituencies and regions) assisted in establishing and consolidating Swapo’s country-wide dominance wherever possible also in the local contexts (Kaapama 2005:100).

Based on official figures, Hopwood (2005:131) presents the following overview for the oppositional votes cast in parliamentary elections since Independence:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total votes</th>
<th>Opposition votes</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Seats (of 72)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>680,787</td>
<td>286,263</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>497,508</td>
<td>127,836</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>541,114</td>
<td>27,862</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>829,269</td>
<td>197,830</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on its reputation as the liberating force and in the absence of serious political alternatives, Swapo managed to firmly entrench political dominance also by means of obtaining a continuously higher proportion of votes in a

---

4. The 2,465 votes (0.46 per cent) that the CoD obtained over the DTA proved beyond a doubt that – despite the same number of seats in the National Assembly – the CoD qualified as the official opposition. Notwithstanding this fact, attempts were initiated to construct bypassing arrangements. The DTA and the UDF were prepared to assist Swapo in this effort by entering a parliamentary coalition, which was used to award them the status as official opposition. Common sense finds it difficult to see any justification or rationale for such acrobatics, which ultimately took place at the expense of the legitimacy and credibility of the representatives of the political system. Furthermore, such an arrangement made two opposition parties active collaborators in anti-democratic tricks exercised by the majority party in government.
largely legitimate way.\textsuperscript{5} In contrast to this rather positive conclusion, however, an increasingly repressive atmosphere during the election campaign in late 1999 might be perceived as a “lack of consolidation of Namibian democracy” (Glover 2000:147).\textsuperscript{6} The far-reaching mandate encouraged the misperception that the government is supposed to serve the party and that the state is the property of the government.\textsuperscript{7}

With the two thirds majority obtained for the second legislative period, SWAPO lawmakers were also securing the quasi-monopoly over the parliamentary decision-making process. Furthermore, the appointment of more than half of the party’s parliamentarians as ministers or deputy ministers degraded the parliament to a rubber-stamping institution, which hardly ever tried to control the executive (Melber 2006a). Consequently, the Constitution was changed for the first time in 1998. Despite strong objections from most other political parties and within the public sphere, SWAPO’s politically elected representatives in both houses (the National Assembly and the National Council) executed the constitutional modification allowing its President a third term as Head of State (Melber 2006b). From a formal point of view, such policy interventions are legitimate and based on the mandate received through general elections by secret vote of all citizens registered. The same year (1998), the country joined a war in the DR Congo as a result of a personally ordered intervention by the Head of State. He is constitutionally entitled by the power vested in his office to such a far-reaching single-handed initiative in the protection of the national security interest. But its execution in the particular case posed the question if indeed it was necessitated by the stipulated urgent state of emergency. After all, it happened by totally ignoring the need for any consultation among the elected political office bearers (and hence representatives of the people). Neither the Cabinet nor the Parliament was consulted on the matter. During 1999 the failure of nation building with regard to the so-called Caprivi region escalated into a failed attempt for secession by an armed rebel movement, which provoked a repressive response


\textsuperscript{6} On this basis, the strong reaction by SWAPO to the newly established CoD is even more disturbing. While this could have been interpreted during the time of the 1999 elections as a sign of uncertainty and lack of self-confidence on behalf of the party’s leadership and activists, the ongoing almost paranoid dimension of a witch-hunt even after the election results displayed features of an irrationality that might be explained only in psycho-analytical terms. This applies also to the election post-mortems conducted by SWAPO’s party organ “Namibia Today” and the continued smear campaigns and character assassinations it has pursued since then unabated and with ever increasing vigour against anyone perceived to be in visible disagreement with the official party line.

by the state authorities and led to a new stage of national chauvinism (Hopwood 2000). From the end of 1999 onward, Namibian army forces were involved in military conflict with UNITA until its collapse after the death of Savimbi. It turned parts of Namibia’s own border areas into a low-key war-zone with high sacrifices for the local civilian population.

Critical voices on these and other issues were and continue to be labelled as unpatriotic elements. Loyalty to Namibia is equated with loyalty to Swapo’s policy and in particular the party’s President. As a legacy of both colonialism and the struggle against foreign rule a “psychosis of fear is permeating the entire Namibian society” (Diescho 1996:16) and remains a constitutive part of Namibia’s political realities, in which “good patriots” don’t criticise. Dissenting views are marginalised. Nation building efforts take place at the expense of minorities. Gay-bashing and xenophobic sentiments are among the repertoire of the highest political office bearers, often combined with an “anti-white” slant. The independence of the judiciary is openly questioned when it takes unpopular decisions not in favour of the government’s political will. The weekly Swapo newspaper “Namibia Today” attacks those not in line with what is considered (in a narrow sense of the meaning) the defined party policy in the most vulgar way and uses name-calling as a comfortable strategy to avoid arguments over subject matters. Party officials (including members of Cabinet) have articulated on numerous occasions their undemocratic views to the extent of voicing unconstitutional demands without being corrected by the party leadership or government. Self-enrichment by higher-ranking officials and politicians utilising their access to the state apparatus has so far been tolerated at the expense of public morale (Kössler/Melber 2001) and illustrates the emergence of a new post-colonial class interest among the political elite (Tapscott 1995 and 2001, Melber 2005). The practices applied in pursuance of such a strategy guided by material self-interests of the new elite are doing anything but consolidating a culture of

8. The revitalization of the Caprivi-based United Democratic Party (UDP), formerly a member party of the DTA, provoked another repressive response by the state authorities. Since the UDP has the independence of the Caprivi as part of its political programme, the government announced in a statement issued on 1 September 2006 by the Deputy Minister of Information and Broadcasting that this is an unconstitutional aim violating the territorial integrity of the Republic of Namibia. Hence the party’s “secessionist activities … render it an illegal organisation” (quoted from Menges 2006).


10. An interesting new dimension to this was introduced with the presidential transition, during which Swapo President Sam Nujoma after three terms as Head of State ensured in a hitherto unprecedented internal party competition over the candidacy during 2004 that his selected crown prince Hifikepunye Pohamba became his successor in March 2005. Nujoma will remain party president at least until 2007 and hence in control over Swapo. This has created a party internal division between those camps in support of the Swapo president, those in support of his successor as Head of State and those who favour another candidate (see Melber 2006b).

transparency and accountability and hence also undermining the democratic process and its consolidation.

**Government and opposition today**

The parliamentary and presidential elections on 15 and 16 November 2004 provided the thus far latest results to illustrate the overwhelming dominance of the party in power. The way in which as public servants party political office bearers abused their access to state owned facilities during the campaign confirmed once again the existing misperception equating the party with government and government with the state.\(^\text{12}\) The same is partly true for the way Swapo has mobilized voters ever since being in government, as it “often fails to differentiate between its existence as a party and as the government when listing its achievements” (Boer 2005:53). It even goes a step further by simply refusing to be measured against other parties.\(^\text{13}\) When in 2004 party representatives were approached to offer their views on the economic policies they pursued, “the ruling Swapo party decided not to participate arguing that this research project was designed to help opposition parties” (Sherbourne 2004:2). Swapo’s view is simply that any information on any other party than itself is considered an undue interference in state affairs.

Out of a record number of well above 800,000 ballots (some 85 per cent of close to one million registered voters) Swapo again secured above 75 per cent of the valid votes and 55 out of the 72 seats in the National Assembly from March 2005 onward. During the fourth legislative period, parliamentarians represent seven different parties (previously five) with six of them sharing 17 seats.\(^\text{14}\) Opposition parties were both internally and as regards to each other more divided than ever before, while the different party programmes showed few to no substantive alternatives. The CoD maintained the second

\(^\text{12}\) State facilities and public property, e.g. means of transport and communication, were used for party propaganda purposes during the election campaign. The state owned radio and television NBC devoted disproportional time in its news programmes to reporting in favour of Swapo.

\(^\text{13}\) When a first comparative overview of the different party programmes was compiled ahead of the 1999 elections (see appendix) by the local think tank NEPRU (Namibian Economic Policy Research Unit), it also invited representatives of all major parties to a pre-election panel debate to represent core issues of their programmes to the public. Swapo refused to participate, since it felt that as the government it deserved more prominence than the others. Even when the party was offered double the amount of time to speak on the topical issues than the other parties, it preferred to remain absent. Hifikepunye Pohamba as the party’s Secretary General (since 2005 Namibia’s Head of State) was willing to receive the then director of NEPRU but remained non-committal. Instead, the party demanded that the panel debate was cancelled. In the end, NEPRU went ahead with the public event but Swapo simply did not show up and left the panel to several other parties and their representatives, who all made use of the opportunity.

\(^\text{14}\) The most detailed, solid and authoritative information on the panorama of both the political structures and system of Namibia as well as the policy makers and other figures of so-called public interest is offered by the encyclopedic volume compiled by Hopwood (2006).
rank within the party landscape despite a decline from seven to five seats. The DTA continued its steady decline and has four seats left from previously seven. The Herero based National Unity Democratic Organisation (NUDO) separated from the ranks of the DTA and obtained three seats of its own. The United Democratic Front (UDF) – another ethnically oriented interest group rooted in the Damara communities – consolidated its position by increasing its seats from two to three. The Republican Party (RP), supported mainly by members of the white minority, campaigned like NUDO for the first time outside of the DTA and gained one seat. The Monitor Action Group (MAG), representing the most conservative white element in post-colonial Namibia, surprisingly managed to keep its one seat. The diversity of smaller parties sharing from election to election more or less the same proportion of votes dissenting from the dominant party illustrates the absence of any powerful opposition force. Instead, ethnic-regional patterns re-surface, which du Pisani (1996:42) once described in this context as “the rise of older identities”. This ultimately benefits once again the hegemonic status of Swapo, which has as a power base the unconditional support from the most densely populated areas in the North, representing far more than half of the total electorate. In the end, smaller opposition parties may mushroom, but remain without influence beyond the local support base:

While the fragmentation of parties into smaller groups, often with an ethnic pitch to the voters, may have prevented the opposition vote deteriorating from its 1999 position, it also produces a bits and pieces opposition. [...] Namibia’s political system tends to encourage small-time politicians, several of them ethnic entrepreneurs, who wish simply to win a wedge of support in their home areas that will justify a presence in the Parliament. (Hopwood 2005:142 and 144; original emphasis)

Under the given circumstances, there was hardly any doubt that Swapo had clearly retained the dominance it had established and consolidated since Independence. Numerous minor irregularities and inconsistencies in the electoral procedures, discrepancies in the voters’ list and the casting and counting of votes, as well as an undue delay in announcing the election results, however, provoked a subsequent legal intervention by the CoD and RP, questioning the results of the parliamentary vote. They filed a court application to enforce insight into documents the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN) originally refused to grant. The High Court ruled on 16 December 2004 in favour of the application. On the basis of the evidence collected, CoD and RP contested the election results on 21 December. They claimed that they had discovered an array of failures to comply with the Electoral Act and discrepancies between voting figures and results as well as a series of other irregularities.15

15. For a detailed overview on recorded biases and flaws see the documentation presented by the National Society for Human Rights (2005). The UDF as one of the winners in this election
The CoD and the RP as the original complainants were joined in the legal battle in court during mid-January 2005 by another three parties. They challenged the ECN over a series of observed irregularities and questioned the final election results published in the government gazette of 3 January 2005. On 10 March 2005, the High Court ordered a vote recount. This took place under reportedly hectic and chaotic circumstances in order to meet the deadline for swearing in the new Parliament before Independence Day (21 March). On 16 March, the ECN announced the outcome of the recount, which resulted in only minor differences from the original results, thus leaving the distribution of parliamentary seats unchanged. The two main complainants questioned the recount procedures and registered their objections to the influence of Swapo officials in the process. However, they did not appeal in court. The 72 newly elected members of the (4th) National Assembly (55 of them Swapo) were subsequently sworn in on 20 March 2005.

The above dispute over the parliamentary election procedure and results showed “that there is scope for significant improvement in the way elections are regulated, managed, observed and monitored” (Kapaama 2005:113) – to say the least. Notwithstanding a series of highly dubious administrative flaws by the electoral body displayed in the course of preparing, implementing and supervising the elections, the composition of the members of the ECN was confirmed during 2005 by the re-appointment of the relevant office bearers (including the chairman of the commission) for another term. A critical article in a local monthly magazine\(^\text{16}\) received a harsh response from the Director of Elections and CEO of the ECN. In a letter reacting to the article he stated in (not so) good old centralist struggle fashion: “we are not surprised by the unpatriotic spirit, with which certain articles are published” (Kanime 2006). This says a lot about the professional ethics and political loyalties, which guide the – supposedly neutral or at least impartial – highest office bearer in charge of organising the country’s elections.

While a slogan in the days of the liberation struggle claimed that SWAPO is the people, the adjusted slogan for today might be that Swapo is the government and the government is the state. This tendency towards abuse of state power fails to acknowledge and hence disrespects the relevant difference between a formal democratic legitimacy (through the number of votes obtained in a free and fair general election) and the moral and ethical dimensions and responsibilities of such legitimacy. As a result, also in Namibia, “the state often uses democracy to perpetuate hegemony rather than to advance rights, liberty and democracy” (Salih 2000:24). Several examples from recent years offer empirical evidence to substantiate the case in point. They confirm the suspicion that “the adoption of non-democratic measures is often justified against the backdrop of achieving ‘national’ objectives through

a democratic mandate” (ibid.). The contested results of the last parliamentary and presidential elections of November 2004 are a recent case in point. The degree of dominance by Swapo seems to be more of interest to the party than the legitimacy of its mandate beyond any doubt also within the ranks of politically dissenting citizens.

This is somehow a peculiarity which contrasts with the lack of substantive political-ideological differences among the major parties in the country. As an overview on the party manifestos for the parliamentary elections in 1999 documented (see appendix), the issues raised by the parties did not allow a clear positioning according to topical policies. This was reconfirmed by a more detailed and systematic comparison of political party platforms in a variety of contributions in a volume compiled on the occasion of the 2004 election. Its introductory overview states:

Ideology itself does not seem to play a large role in Namibian politics. […] When comparing the manifestos of the CoD and the DTA with SWAPO’s, they differ very little across the major issues. (Boer 2005:54 and 55)

The analysis of the economic programme of the various parties reiterates:

Opinion parties clearly do not represent a source of original thinking on economic policies. [They] are not particularly ideological [but] appear rather pragmatic and middle-of-the-road. […] Nor do opposition parties appear to have singled out specific areas of disagreement with the economic policies of the ruling SWAPO party and the status quo. […] there is fundamentally little to distinguish between the ruling party’s economic policies and those that would be pursued by the opposition parties. (Boer/Sherbourne 2005:121 and 122)

In confirmation of this phenomenon, Hunter (2005:97) concludes:

Namibia’s main parties remain broadly centrist, and could be seen as more pragmatic and less ideological in nature. […] It would appear that a number of Namibian politicians joined political parties not, as one would expect, primarily on the grounds of agreement with its platform, but for other reasons, such as Namibia’s recent liberation history and ethnicity, as well as personal ambition.17

In contrast, Kapaama (2004) identifies four strands of political-ideological differences in the same manifestos of all but one party competing in the 2004 parliamentary elections for votes among the electorate. He labels them as “moderate developmentalism, neo-liberal economic outlook, religious based (mainly Christian) political outlook, radical socialist-based outlook”. In his further analysis, however, he reaches the same conclusion: “Looking at the party manifestos, one may conclude

17. The relatively large number of figures who during their political career have changed parties (in some cases several times) to secure offices on different lists at different times could serve as evidence of the motives for securing access to personal gains as a driving force in Namibian politics.
that perhaps Namibians are even more extravagant than the Americans, in the sense that they are presented with nine parties to choose from, but their policies are not significantly different.” Joseph Diescho had already observed almost a decade earlier a phenomenon, which seems to still be relevant in this context:

One of the strengths of SWAPO is its ability to appear to transform itself from a non-democratic, authoritarian, top-down organization to a democratic, participatory organization while essentially remaining the same. It is this style of political chicanery that makes it very difficult for opposition against SWAPO. In this context SWAPO owes its resilience more to a lack of challenge than to its own strength. (Diescho 1996:15)

While there seems to widely exist the perception that the preferential funding of Swapo through public finances (on the basis of proportional allocations related to the number of votes obtained in elections) is a major factor in offering undue support by political office bearers to their own party, this seems to be on a closer look, if at all, only one – and not the most important – factor among several. A comprehensive overview on party funding in Namibia shows in fact that the current practices do acknowledge opposition parties with proportional funding and that parts of the problem also lie with the lack of transparency and accountability among most if not all parties in terms of the use of the revenues received. As it concludes it would be somehow unfair and too one-sided, “to lay the burden of democracy on only the Government itself” (Boer 2004:8). It therefore seems somehow a weak excuse, if “Namibian opposition parties believe that lack of adequate financial resources is the biggest culprit for their poor performance during national elections” (Kangueehi 2006).

Following the political discourses within the Namibian public sphere, it is a striking phenomenon to see that it is only to a comparatively small degree the opposition parties, which pursue pro-active and interventionist initiatives. More visibility (with often not more favourable funding) has been obtained at different stages during the past 16 years since independence by civil non-party agencies like the National Society for Human Rights (NSHR), research institutions such as the Namibian Economic Policy Research Unit (NEPRU), the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) and the Labour Resource and Research Institute (LaRRI) as well as a number of other non-governmental advocacy groups such as the Namibia Institute for Democracy (NID), the Legal Assistance Centre (LAC) and the Sister Namibia Collective (to mention only some of the more prominent ones), which all were engaged in the protection and promotion of a human rights oriented culture

18. This was reportedly the tendency expressed at a public seminar, during which on 10 October 2006 the political analysts André du Pisani and Bill Lindeke of the University of Namibia presented some results of a (not yet published) study.
often in opposition to Swapo policy. They have shouldered so far more than most parties the main tasks of contributing towards a democratic society, while political parties, in the same way as churches and the private sector have all too often not met the expectations.19

Given the relatively high degree of press freedom and the impressive number of independent and politically alert media (at least in the print sector), the dominance of the ruling party is not good enough as an excuse.20 Lack of adequate public media coverage is at least as much the failure of the opposition parties to provide meaningful news stories of political substance and worth being reported. Even the state-owned daily newspaper “New Era” offers noticeable space for coverage of government-critical views.21 The possible consequences of a combination of largely ethnical-regional based opposition parties and the relative passivity and lack of engagement in the political sphere by strong factions within so-called civil society might ultimately produce even “the very familiar African scenario of politicised ethnic identities, monocratic and highly-personalised rule with no or very little opposition from the private sphere and a large-scale disengagement of a disillusioned citizenry from the political arena”, as Keulder (1996:88) has warned.

Decolonisation with limited democracy

John Saul (1999) proposes as a result of the sobering socio-political realities in former settler colonies of Southern Africa to perceive decolonisation as “Liberation without Democracy”. The track records of the liberation movements with regard to their internal practices during the wars of liberation as well as their lack of democratic virtues and respect towards the protection of human rights once in power are reason for disappointment among many of those, who had supported the social emancipation of the colonised. Fighting against unjust systems of oppression, rooted in the totalitarian colonial rule of a minority, did not protect the cadres of the movement from violation of human rights and other abusive forms of executing power within

19. One of the most prominent businessmen of Namibia observed (self-)critically that neither churches nor the private sector “are, in fact, sufficiently aware of their duty and still less it seems willing to do their duty of speaking up on matters appertaining to maintenance and preservation of moral, ethical and social values and standards” (Pupkewitz 1996:81).
20. According to the latest annual ranking list of the independent organization “Reporters without Borders” for 2006, Namibia holds position 26 among 168 classified countries in terms of its press freedom – well ahead of the UK, France and the USA (rank 53) – as second best African country after Benin (Grüllenbeck 2006).
21. For empirical information on the use and role of media in disseminating political knowledge among Namibian students see the result of a research experiment published by Keulder (2006). The information that students are more likely to visit the web sites of the Namibian government and Parliament than those of political parties and NGOs might on the one hand confirm the dominance of the state authorities in the public sphere, while on the other hand also testify again to the relative weakness of other institutions as a contributing factor to this dominance (and not purely a result of this).
their own ranks as well as forms of authoritarian and autocratic rule after Independence. With the notion of national reconciliation at hand, the liberators blocked any meaningful dialogue on the violation of human rights within their own ranks in the exile situation. The victims of the Swapo-internal waves of repression have remained marginalised until the present (Gertze 2006).

As this particularly sensitive issue illustrates, Namibia’s dominant political culture reveals some disturbing features. In a survey undertaken by the Helen Suzman Foundation in six Southern African states Namibia was the only country in which a large majority would not accept defeat of its party. It diagnosed that “not much more than one third of respondents felt confident of democracy’s future” (Johnson 1998). A survey conducted at the turn of the century among six African countries (Mattes et al. 2000) ranked Namibia last in terms of public awareness of democracy. A summary of the report concluded with reference to Namibia and Nigeria, “the consolidation of democracy is a distant prospect in both these countries” (Bratton/Mattes 2001:120). In terms of measured support for democracy during 2001, Namibia ranked second from the bottom with 58 per cent (Afrobarometer 2002).

A survey among Namibians aged 18 to 32 concludes more than a decade after Independence that “Namibia does not have sufficient young Democrats to make the consolidation of democracy a foregone conclusion” (Keulder/Spilker 2002:28) and the same statement is completed in a follow up study with the not so flattering diagnosis that “Namibians are high in partisanship and low in cognitive skills” (Keulder 2003:24). This touches on aspects of what could be termed the authoritarian character, resulting from the oppressive systems of both the settler colonial structures as well as the hierarchy of the anti-colonial movement particularly in exile. It is therefore not too surprising that the Afrobarometer Network in a compendium of public opinion findings based on a total of three surveys in Namibia between 1999 and 2006 concludes that among the 18 countries surveyed “Namibians appear to be the most deferential to their elected leaders” (Logan et al. 2006:16). In another comparative survey among 12 African countries Namibians in 2006 displayed after Ghana (70 per cent) the second highest degree of satisfaction with democracy (69 per cent) – against an average of 45 per cent in all countries. At the same time, the support for multiple political parties among Namibians had dropped by 5 per cent between 2002 and 2005 and ranked with 57 per cent as the third lowest – below

22. Evidence on the more recent repressive stages in Swapo’s history is offered by Leys et al. (1995) and Saul et al. (2003). An interesting indication of Swapo-internal cohesion is also found in the autobiography of the founding president Sam Nujoma (2001) and the critical review by Saunders (2003).

23. A Media Statement by Swapo “on the so-called detainee issue” had been issued on 12 March 1996 in reaction to a book on the ex-detainee-issue (Groth 1995), which a prominent SWAPO politician in a public speech suggested should be burnt. As the Statement argued, Swapo “cannot allow this country to be made ungovernable and be turned into a chaotic and lawless society by irresponsible, unpatriotic elements and foreign remainents (sic!) of fascism and apartheid.”
the average of 63 per cent (Bratton/Cho 2006:19 and 21). In terms of the attitudes among citizens the latest Afrobarometer national survey classified Namibia as “a democracy without democrats” (Keulder/Wiese 2005:26).

The open unanswered question is to what extent this mixed result is mainly the responsibility of the dominant party in political power, exercising its hegemonic rule as described above, or more a sign of the failure of political opposition parties unable to get their act together despite all odds. Or maybe, the question is in itself already misleading. It could well be that these are just two sides of a coin minted in the decades of oppression and resistance, which ended not too long ago. After all, the hierarchical environments both at home and in exile were for too long a time anything but fertile breeding ground for democrats, who as social products do not fall from heaven or miraculously appear at Independence Day when a national flag is hoisted to the tune of a national anthem.
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### APPENDIX

Topical issues in the party programmes for the parliamentary elections 1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
<th>CoD</th>
<th>DTA</th>
<th>SWAPO</th>
</tr>
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<td>Identified as an issue</td>
<td>No reference</td>
<td>No reference</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employment/Industry</td>
<td>Own section relating employ-</td>
<td>&quot;Job creation&quot; a key-issue. 14</td>
<td>Job creation and growth are priorities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ment, wealth creation and</td>
<td>recommendations to achieve</td>
<td>Manufacturing is identified as one of the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>redistribution to economic</td>
<td>employment include budgeting, SME</td>
<td>seven biggest contributors with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>empowerment. Focus on</td>
<td>promotion, privatising parastatals and</td>
<td>optimistic employment forecasts (6000 jobs).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>diversification of industry</td>
<td>protection of local know-how and man-</td>
<td>Little information on investment promotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>through investment and SME</td>
<td>power from foreign contractors in such</td>
<td>and employment policy, but trade and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>promotion, human resources</td>
<td>areas of industry where Namibian</td>
<td>industrial development are priorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>development and overcoming</td>
<td>competence exists. No further elaboration</td>
<td>under the section &quot;prudent fiscal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dual economy. No particular</td>
<td>on industry.</td>
<td>management&quot;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>reference to manufacturing.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture/Land Reform</td>
<td>Productivity increase as guid-</td>
<td>No reference to agriculture in detail.</td>
<td>Development schemes should provide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ing principle. Investment and</td>
<td>Proposals aim at commercialisation of</td>
<td>several thousand jobs. Land reform is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>regional development plans</td>
<td>agri-cultural production in communal</td>
<td>integrated in a section on social justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>are suggested. Modernisation</td>
<td>areas. Ownership of land is regarded</td>
<td>and conceptualised as an equity issue. No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in communal areas with train-</td>
<td>as most important aspect. A step-by-step</td>
<td>direct beneficiaries such as historically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ing aspects. Goals include</td>
<td>&quot;Master Plan&quot; on resettlement suggests a</td>
<td>dispos-essed communities are identi-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>un-impeded access to veterinary</td>
<td>revolving fund of inter-national and</td>
<td>fied. Resettlement process should be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and financial support services.</td>
<td>own capital with limited interest rate</td>
<td>accelerated. Communal areas are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Creation of a Drought Relief</td>
<td>(4 per cent) over a minimum of 25 years,</td>
<td>considered as much as commercial farms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fund (without indicating any</td>
<td>which should allow financing such</td>
<td>Utilisation of virgin lands an objective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>differences to existing prov-</td>
<td>initiatives.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>isions). Committed to speed up</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>redistribution of land within</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>the constitutional framework.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Own section in support of</td>
<td>Commitment in principle to manage</td>
<td>No reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>environmental protection, in-</td>
<td>development and environment, but no fur-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cluding support to civil society actors (NGOs and CBOs) with such aims.</td>
<td>ther reference.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Promotion of an integrated</td>
<td>Own section on women, promoting equality</td>
<td>Gender equality a sub-section. Further un-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>approach towards equality and</td>
<td>without mentioning concrete new</td>
<td>specified efforts announced to attain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>justice in a sub-section un-</td>
<td>proposals.</td>
<td>equality. Women a separate issue in health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>der &quot;compassionate society&quot;.</td>
<td></td>
<td>section.</td>
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<tr>
<td>HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>Own section with multiple ap-</td>
<td>Considered mainly as a health problem (like malaria) addressed by means of an active campaign to reduce its spread.</td>
<td>Addressed in the health section and not as a separate issue. Advocating an educational campaign and planning to make it a noticeable disease.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Finance/Debt</td>
<td>No reference</td>
<td>Improved national debt management announ-</td>
<td>A section on &quot;Prudent Fiscal Management&quot; refers to foreign debt. The local debt (about 85 per cent) is ignored.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**HENNING MELBER**

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
<th>CoD</th>
<th>DATA</th>
<th>SWAPO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tax Policy</td>
<td>Improve and broaden tax base, cut down tax evasion, progressive taxation to protect the poor.</td>
<td>No reference</td>
<td>No reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Governance Issues</td>
<td>Own section. Reduction of Cabinet to 15 posts, less perks and Code of Conduct for political office bearers. Administrative reform and streamlining of Government, budget reorientation, Standing Committee on Corruption, creating further watchdog institutions. Devolution of power through decentralisation, including traditional leaders, NGOs and CBOs on local and regional levels.</td>
<td>Reduction to 12 portfolios with less deputy ministers (but no reference to Justice, Tourism and Environment in new ministries). Introducing “the right to work” and an Unemployment Compensation Fund. Provisions for a law reform and decentralisation.</td>
<td>Own section dealing with peace, democracy, good governance, decentralisation and local development as topical, separate issues. Caprivi seen as example for effective restoration of peace. Military involvement in DRC a contribution to a peaceful and democratic transformation in that country. Accountability, honesty and commitment to service seen as requirements. Law against corruption announced. No public sector reform.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Summary of a more detailed overview compiled by a team from the Namibian Economic Policy Research Unit (NEPRU) and published as a leaflet by the Forum for the Future as What do they say? An overview on the political party programmes for the National Elections ’99 (Windhoek:Forum for the Future 1999).


