



AFRICAN POLITICAL PARTY SYSTEMS AND CONFLICT

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Author Background: Susan M. Bartlett has concentrated her studies in International Relations and Comparative Government as well as African Studies. She has researched and written numerous papers on African development, conflict, mobilization and protest. She also attended Louisiana State University Law Center where she obtained her Juris Doctorate degree as well as a Diploma of Civil Law. Ms. Bartlett was a FMSO-KU Global Security Studies Fellow in the fall of 2012, when she researched and wrote *African Political Party Systems and Conflict*.

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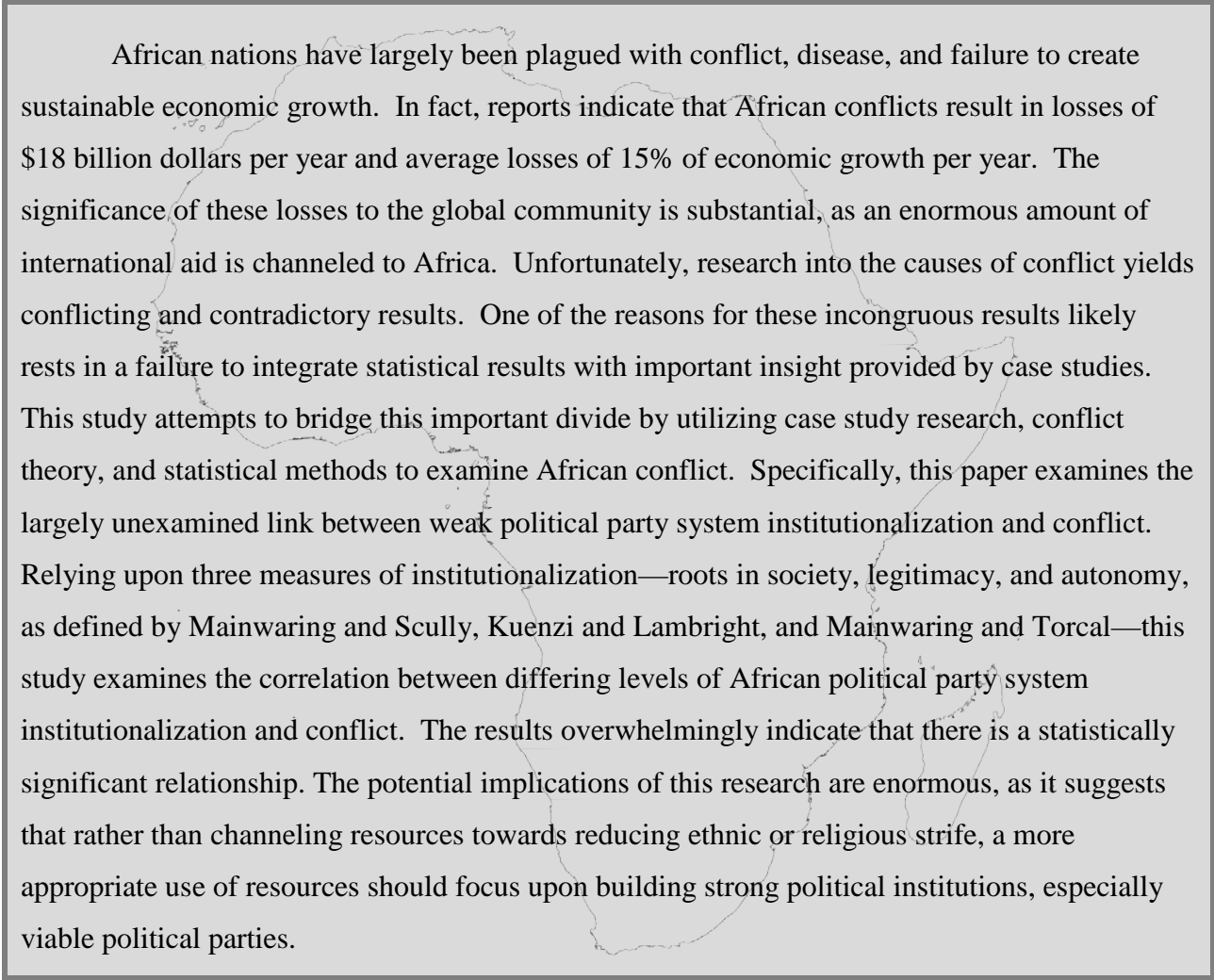
Introduction by FMSO Analyst, Jason Warner

What is the relationship between African conflict and political party institutionalization? By using survey results from Afrobarometer polling, Kansas University graduate student Susan M. Bartlett argues that greater political party institutionalization is positively correlated with reduced instances of African conflict. Bartlett's work is an important step in giving greater attention to how political parties in postcolonial state settings differ in genesis, composition, and actions from their analogues in Western societies. Moreover, by investigating political party institutionalization – and not GDP or ethnic, religious, or sociolinguistic fractionalization – as a potential underwriter of conflict, the paper is a creative new conceptualization of a long studied, yet little understood, phenomenon. Particularly, as the U.S. government seeks to promote peace, democracy, and good governance on the continent in the context of an increasingly limited means, such forward thinking should be wholeheartedly welcomed.

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African nations have largely been plagued with conflict, disease, and failure to create sustainable economic growth. In fact, reports indicate that African conflicts result in losses of \$18 billion dollars per year and average losses of 15% of economic growth per year. The significance of these losses to the global community is substantial, as an enormous amount of international aid is channeled to Africa. Unfortunately, research into the causes of conflict yields conflicting and contradictory results. One of the reasons for these incongruous results likely rests in a failure to integrate statistical results with important insight provided by case studies. This study attempts to bridge this important divide by utilizing case study research, conflict theory, and statistical methods to examine African conflict. Specifically, this paper examines the largely unexamined link between weak political party system institutionalization and conflict. Relying upon three measures of institutionalization—roots in society, legitimacy, and autonomy, as defined by Mainwaring and Scully, Kuenzi and Lambright, and Mainwaring and Torcal—this study examines the correlation between differing levels of African political party system institutionalization and conflict. The results overwhelmingly indicate that there is a statistically significant relationship. The potential implications of this research are enormous, as it suggests that rather than channeling resources towards reducing ethnic or religious strife, a more appropriate use of resources should focus upon building strong political institutions, especially viable political parties.

Introduction

The African landscape is permeated by conflict, rebellion, and, more recently, an increase in international terrorist activities. To be sure, African nations have largely been characterized as failing or failed states such that they are branded dysfunctional and wholly ineffective at providing basic governmental services and security. In fact, governmental institutions, such as political parties, have often been characterized as mere vehicles for individual corruption. As such, the study of African political parties has often received little attention.

Notwithstanding the corruption and fraud that often surrounds elections and politics in Africa, many nations do have basic political party structures. While these parties and party systems do not mirror Western European or American political parties, the impact of African parties should not be deemed inconsequential. In fact, research suggests that one of the costs of weak governmental institutions is violent conflict. Importantly, some states do have functioning democracies and not all African states are besieged by violence. Why is this? Is there a relationship between weak or strong political party systems that is correlated with conflict? Whether there is any relationship between the political party institutions of Africa and conflict is an important question to consider, as it concerns two of Africa's most vexing problems: failure of full representative democracy and widespread conflict.

Given the growth of political parties, as well as the persistence of conflict, this paper will examine the relationship between political parties and conflict in Africa. Specifically, it examines whether weak African political party systems are positively correlated with conflict. Answering this question has important implications not only for Africa but also for the global community. An enormous amount of foreign aid is directed at quelling violent conflict in Africa;

however, systematic conflict persists, which not only inflicts human costs but also is an economic drain on international aid, as well as hinders African development.

In order to examine this question it is essential to first understand African political parties, conflict theories, and party system institutionalization before exploring the linkages among these complex areas.



Map Source: <http://www.nps.gov/ethnography/aah/A heritage/histContextsA.htm>

Part I: Review of the Literature

African Political Parties

The importance of political parties cannot be overstated. In fact, the importance and influence of parties has been found to be inextricably linked to successful democracy (E.Schattschneider 1942, 1; G. Sartori 1976, 24). To be sure, theorists and researchers alike have deemed parties as “one of the primary channels for building accountable and responsive government” (Reilly 2008, 3). They serve as a link between citizens and government by “organizing voters, aggregating and articulating interests, crafting policy alternatives, and providing the basis for coordinated electoral and legislative activity” (Reilly). These characterizations of parties are often used when describing the European and American democratic experience. When examining newly democratizing nations, the ability of political parties to fulfill these vital roles is more attenuated. Despite the importation of the Western party system model into newly democratizing nations, outside of Europe and America this system has not been able to wholly behave in accordance with the traditional Western roles of political parties. Nowhere is this more visible than in Africa.

Many African nations attempted to create viable democratic systems during “the third wave of democracy,” in the 1980s and 1990s. One mechanism utilized to achieve representative government during this time was the creation of political parties, a decidedly Western institution. Unfortunately, in contrast to political parties in Western Europe, which emerged and evolved over

“... the wholesale disregard of political parties and party systems neglects the opportunity to gain true insight into the consequences of these systems.”

long periods of time and in the process were able to develop strong linkages to civil society, African political parties were quickly created after colonial rule ended, often importing a copy and paste formula used in Western systems. The result is a system of parties that are largely characterized as clientelistic.

Clientelistic-based politics or patrimonialism is a practice whereby political leaders utilize individual and personal favors in return for political support (Roessler, 304). Bratton and van de Walle extensively describe the use of neopatrimonialism, the modern form of patrimonialism, used in Africa. These authors note that African political systems are characterized as follows:

Relationships of loyalty and dependence pervade a formal political and administrative system, and officials occupy bureaucratic positions less to perform public service, their ostensible purpose, than to acquire personal wealth and status. The chief executive and his inner circle undermine the effectiveness of the nominally modern state administration by using it for systematic patronage and clientelistic practices in order to maintain political order. Moreover, parallel and unofficial structures may well hold more power and authority than the formal administration. (Bratton and van de Walle, 62)

This systemic form of governance stems largely from the weak political institutions that plague many African nations; often state institutions are too weak and corrupted by patronage to effectively prohibit the systemic governance by bribe. The consequences of these patrimonial systems are often a retardation of economic growth and national development that result from usurping important public resources to pay off supporters (Bratton and van de Walle, 67). Furthermore, patrimonialism prevents political parties and elites from representing the electorate. Often specific subsections of the electorate, such as particular ethnic groups and women, are often actively excluded by political elites (Randall 2007). In short, African political party systems are largely ineffective; however, not all African nations serve as examples of these types of party systems.

The literature on political party systems is not optimistic, but a woeful lament of the dysfunction does not offer any insight into the implications of such systems. In fact, the wholesale disregard of political parties and party systems neglects the opportunity to gain true insight into the consequences of these systems. One such consequence theorized in this study is their correlation to violent conflict.

Conflict

There are numerous theories that attempt to explain the causes of conflict. Interestingly, these theories often produce contradictory and heatedly contested results. U.S. foreign policy and aid to African states are often based on an understanding of the cause of conflict as being one of these traditional causal views. It is essential to review the main theoretical approaches to conflict in order to identify the weaknesses of these traditional approaches.

Ethnicity

Many authors emphatically assert the influence of ethnic and religious diversity as the primary cause of conflict. In contrast, others find ethnic and religious diversity to be superficial causes of conflict, while others find ethnicity to be wholly unrelated to conflict and violence.

Samuel P. Huntington asserts that more than economic or ideological variances between groups of people, differences between civilizations are the fundamental causes of conflict (Huntington 1993). Differences in civilization include language, religion, region, ethnicity, and nationality. It is these differences that Huntington argues “generate the most prolonged and violent conflicts” (Huntington, 25). Huntington states the following: “[A]s people define their identity in ethnic and religious terms, they are more likely to see an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ relation existing between themselves and people of different ethnicity and religion” (Huntington, 29).

Thus, Huntington seemingly finds ethnicity to be the principal cause of conflict. Similarly to Huntington, Donald Horowitz asserts that nations with large ethnic diversity will experience more numerous and severe conflicts than more homogenous nations (Horowitz 1985).

In contrast, James Fearon and David Laitin conducted quantitative

research into the causes of civil war in the aftermath of the Cold War (Fearon and Laitin 2003).

These authors find that religious and ethnic diversity are not significantly and positively correlated with civil war. Fearon and Laitin's findings are interesting, as Africa's enormous diversity is often blamed for its many conflicts. Importantly, the often arbitrary and random geographical boundaries established by colonial rulers are frequently used to explain the intense ethnic conflict that many African nations experience. According to them, however, the correlation between religious and ethnic diversity and conflict is nothing more than a spurious relationship with violence. These disparate and arguably contradictory results concerning ethnic and religious diversity illustrate the danger in excising a single phenomenon without taking into account the broader political context in African nations.

In short, research on ethnic fractionalization, as well as religious fractionalization, has produced contradictory results. I assert that these opposing conclusions result from a failure to produce integrated research that examines how ethnic and religious differences proceed into



Photo: A Guinea-Bissau demining technician employed by U.S. State Department partner organization HUMAID searches for landmines left over from that country's war for independence.

Source: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/pix/pm/161924.htm>

violence. African research overwhelmingly illustrates that ethnic conflicts are often used as political tools by weak parties in weak party systems; thus, by isolating research to the examination of the number of ethnic groups, one fails to consider the confluence of factors that influence ethnic conflict

Exclusion

Despite the contradictory theories and findings of causes of conflict, Africanists do find that elites have used ethnic diversity as a means to politicize ethnicity; the result has often been violence. For example, Philip Roessler theorizes that the patronage system facilitated a paranoia-like effect that plagued leaders, such that they began to fear for their continued power (Roessler 2011). As a result leaders would exclude groups of people who they feared were threats or could potentially become threats. In short, leaders engaged in “ethnic stacking,” whereby they filled government positions with people belonging to ethnic groups that leaders have deemed nonthreatening, while eliminating those groups deemed treacherous. These types of practices thereby resulted in large-scale exclusions of ethnic groups from government representation, which thereafter allowed discontent to brew before eventually exploding into violence.

Stefan Lindemann notes that conflict theories often produce contradictory analysis and results, and thus suggests that the crux of the African conflicts rests upon exclusionary political practices (Lindemann 2008). Lindemann states that exclusionary governments “fail to accommodate existing social cleavages and provide excluded leaders with an incentive to mobilize protest and violent rebellion” (Lindemann, 2). Lindemann attempts to distinguish his theory from the ethnicity theories previously discussed, but his assertions are essentially a restatement and a reincorporation of religious, regional, and ethnic diversity theories.

Lindemann's most important contribution may be his recognition that African political institutions, including political parties, are instrumental in stemming conflict and violence.

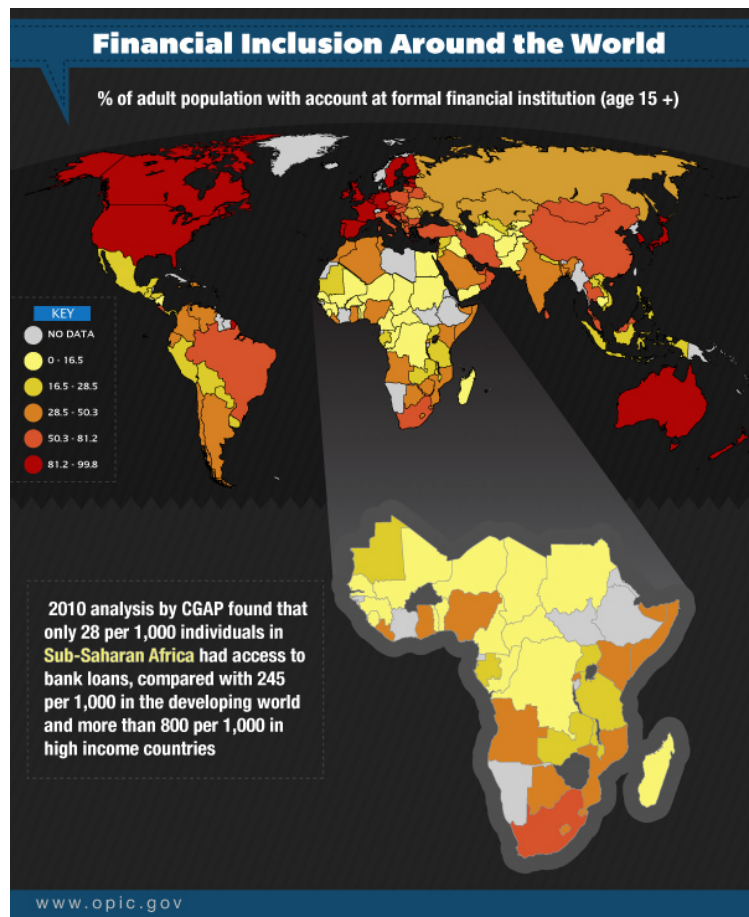
Poverty/Inequality

A significant portion of African conflict literature examines economic growth and poverty levels as a causal mechanism through which political violence is developed. Fearon and Laitin find that per capita income is statistically significant. In fact, they find that a \$1,000 reduction in per capita income is associated with a 41% increase in the chances of civil war occurring (Fearon and Laitin, 83).

Interestingly, the authors largely discount income levels as a causal

mechanism of violence; instead, they find that income levels are merely proxies for weak governments that are inept at solving poverty problems (Fearon and Laitin, 88).

Nicholas Sambanis also examines income levels and economic growth (Sambanis 2004). He found that there is a statistically significant inverse relationship between violence and income. With respect to economic growth he finds no relationship. Sambanis pointedly notes



Graphic: OPIC world map showing percentage of adult population with an account at a formal financial institution.
Source: <http://www.opic.gov/blog/opic-in-action/expanding-access-to-banking-and-credit-in-sub-saharan-africa>

that these results cannot be used to give practical policy guidance because it is not clear how income levels interact with ethnicity.

Stefan Lindemann wholly rejects the conflict literature that links income level to economic growth. He finds that the conclusions are contradictory and fail to account for important variables that influence the occurrence of violence in Africa. This is significant because it illustrates the recognition that competing but unexamined phenomena directly influence the prevalence of conflict.

Weak Institutions

In contrast to those theories that examine particular variables, such as poverty, ethnic diversity, and religious diversity, theories of weak institutions essentially find that weak state systems are the latent yet determinative factor in explaining conflict. Fearon and Laitin empirically find that weak institutions facilitate the necessary preconditions to conflict (Fearon and Laitin 2003). They note that weak states are characterized by poverty and instability, and thereby lay the road for the emergence of guerilla rebel groups.

Similarly, Jo-Ansie van Wyk also finds that weak and/or failed states are the cause of conflict. She notes that weak states leave a power vacuum so that non-state actors are encouraged to organize and step into this unfilled gap. (van Wyk 2007). Unlike Fearon and Laitin, however, she does not discount ethnic and religious differences, but rather holds them to be aggravating forces rather than principal causes.

“Ethnicity, exclusion, poverty, terrorism, and weak institutions provide theoretical explanations for conflict; unfortunately, much of this literature provides conflicting results.”

While providing important insight into causes of conflict, the aforementioned studies often produce conflicting results. This suggests that an unexamined aspect of conflict remains. Of particular interest is the link between conflict and political party systems, which African case studies consistently note.

William Reno provides in-depth historical analysis of warfare, conflict, and violence in Africa (Reno 2011). He continually recounts the relationship that seemingly ethnic, religious, and regional conflicts have with political parties. In fact, Reno provides evidence that political parties operating within the weak institutional structure of African politics directly engage rebels and deliberately provoke conflicts.

Andrea Mehler examines six African nations in an attempt to explore the connection between political parties and violence in Africa (Mehler 2007). His findings suggest that political actors pervasively use violence for political means. Mehler's work is largely descriptive, but he does offer important contextual insight into the link between African conflict and political institutional factors. In fact, his most important contribution may be his systematic examination of the link between political parties/actors and violence; unfortunately, similarly to most African conflict studies his work is decidedly qualitative, which necessarily prevents the identification of specific factors.

Ethnicity, exclusion, poverty, terrorism, and weak institutions provide theoretical explanations for conflict; unfortunately, much of this literature provides conflicting results. Furthermore, much of this research fails to account for African case study results, which provide rich descriptive insight into the linkages between political parties and conflict. A systematic examination of the effect of weak political party systems and conflict provides essential

information that may be useful for the construction and implementation of policy reforms that more effectively address the underlying causes of conflict.



Photo: U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum photo of refugee camp in Buhimba, Uganda (November 2007)
Source: <http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/investigate/terrorism/genocide-and-war-crimes-program/overview>

Part II: Methods

Political Party System Institutional Index

The institutionalization of political party systems as a predictor of conflict is an important concept that has been largely unexplored. There are many reasons for this cavity, but one reason may be that scholars have promulgated multiple theoretical constructs that attempt to delineate the components of party system institutionalization (Kuenzi and Lambright 2001; Mainwaring and Torcal 2005; Basedau and Stroh 2008; Randall and Svåsand 2002). In fact, despite the multiplicity of constituent aspects of institutionalization, many theorists agree upon many of the key conceptual components: roots in society, autonomy, legitimacy, volatility, and organization/coherence.

Many scholars have attempted to determine the institutionalization of political parties or political party systems as an end unto itself. This is no easy feat, given the lack of systematic data available in even fully developed political systems; nevertheless, the contribution of operationalizing even three of these components is helpful to gain increased knowledge about the role of party systems. In African party systems the challenges of data availability are even more pronounced than in many other regions. This is because functional governments and parties are fairly recent innovations and data collection and recording are severely lacking.

Despite the difficulties in measuring the institutionalization of African parties and party systems, Kuenzi and Lambright, as well as Basedau and Stroh, have extensively examined this phenomenon. Specifically, Kuenzi and Lambright sought to recreate the seminal institutionalization study by Mainwaring and Scully.¹ In short, they sought merely to determine

¹ Scott Mainwaring's and Timothy Scully's *Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems in Latin America* (1995) is the seminal piece on party system institutionalization. Mainwaring has since expanded this original study.

what African nations had institutionalized party systems. Similarly, Basedau and Stroh also sought to identify the level of institutionalization of individual political parties. Neither study attempted to determine whether the level of institutionalization was related to any other defining characteristic of Africa.

Kuenzi and Lambright conducted their research prior to the dissemination of comprehensive and reliable survey data and thus relied upon information obtained from multiple sources that exclusively examined data such as the age of a political party or how many votes a party received in an election. Their research wholly excluded current survey data, which necessarily restricted their results. In contrast, Basedau and Stroh conducted extensive fieldwork that they included in their work, but did not include much of the most reliable and respected resources on Africa: the Afrobarometer.

I intend to build upon these previous studies by not merely identifying the level of institutionalization, but also by relying upon survey data, as well as examining important causal linkages between the level of institutionalization and conflict.

Case Selection

In order to measure institutionalization I will utilize the Afrobarometer and the World Bank's corruption index from 2009, as each provides information that can operationalize essential indicators that measure institutionalization. The Afrobarometer is a comprehensive public opinion survey of citizens of African nations. It is the only known database that provides exclusive, continuous, and reliable data on African citizens' perceptions and opinions. At the time of this research the survey is in its fourth round, which necessarily limits the number of

In this paper, I refer to one of his more recent collaborations with Mariano Torcal (2005) rather than his 1995 piece as the more recent version includes additional clarification and research.

countries to twenty.² I have chosen to rely upon round four of the Afrobarometer because it surveys the most number of countries; I have limited my study to nineteen nations due to the unavailability of conflict data for Cape Verde³.

These sources provide the necessary information to derive three indicators appropriate for the study of African party system institutionalization as theorized by Mainwaring and Torcal and Kuenzi and Lambright: roots in society, legitimacy, and autonomy.⁴

In short, the index comprises three subindices and three indicators (See Table 1). Each indicator was coded by country and the results summed up across all three subindices to give a total institutionalization score by country. The aggregated institutional scores may range from very low levels of institutionalization (3.0) to very high levels of institutionalization (12.0).

Subindex 1: Roots in Society

There is general agreement that institutionalized political parties have strong roots in society. This concept is essentially the recognition that political parties and voters are intertwined such that the voters identify with specific parties and parties reach out and connect with voters (Mainwaring and Torcal 2005). Earlier studies were conducted without the use of reliable survey results and thus generally operationalized this variable by determining the length

² The Afrobarometer began in 1999 with its inaugural survey of people within twelve African states. Researchers have continued to increase the number of countries that are surveyed with each subsequent round of the Afrobarometer. This paper was written when the fourth round of the survey was available. The fourth round included surveys from twenty states. With each additional round of the Afrobarometer researchers continue to increase the number of countries included within the research program.

³ The Armed Conflict and Location Event Dataset (ACLED) does not include conflict events for Cape Verde for 2009.

⁴ Both Mainwaring and Torcal and Kuenzi and Lambright also examined volatility. Volatility is the amount of turnover in votes a party experienced from one election to the next. Unfortunately, as Mainwaring and Torcal have previously noted, the study of volatility in authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes is inappropriate because parties within these systems may employ techniques that favor the governing party and thereby deliberately limit volatility (Mainwaring and Torcal 2005). I examined the Freedom House scores for each nation included within the study. Only five out of the twenty nations in the study are deemed to be “free.” Thus, I have excluded this one component from study. This exclusion does not undermine the ultimate results of the study as neither Mainwaring and Torcal’s nor Kuenzi and Lambright’s studies have utilized all four components; furthermore, this elimination of an inapplicable variable is appropriate in model specification.

of time that a party exists (Kuenzi and Lambright 2001). In contrast, the Afrobarometer directly surveys people about whether they identify with a political party or not. Responses are separated by percentages into “yes I identify with a particular party” or “no I do not identify with a particular party.” I examined the percentages of those that positively identified with political parties, as determined by the percentage of “yes, I identify with a particular political party,” and coded these aggregated “yes” responses by giving a score of 1.00-3.00 based upon the percentage of respondents who identify with a particular political party:

1.00=0-33%
2.00=34-66%
3.00=67-100%

Subindex 2: Legitimacy

The legitimacy component is the recognition that in order for political party systems to be institutionalized the electorate must believe that parties and elections are crucial to the political system (Mainwaring and Torcal, 2005; Kuenzi and Lambright, 2001). The Afrobarometer survey questions citizens about their degree of faith in the fairness of the electoral process. The possible responses included the following: “not free and fair,” “free and fair with major problems,” free and fair, but with minor problems,” and “completely free and fair.”

I combined the percentage of responses for categories “not free and fair” and “free and free and fair but with major problems” into subcategory 1. I combined these two answers because each essentially attempts to determine the amount of distrust in the electoral system. Similarly, I combined “free and fair” with “completely free and fair” into subcategory 2 because both responses are an attempt to determine if citizens trust and believe in the legitimacy of the electoral process.

Subcategory 1 (survey responses that included “not free and fair” and “free and free and fair but with major problems”): each nation was examined and a score of 1.00 or 2.00 was given for following:

1.00=0-50%

2.00=50-100%

Subcategory 2 (survey responses that included “free and fair” and “completely free and fair”): each nation was examined and a score of 3.00 or 4.00 assigned for the following:

3.00=0-50%

4.00=50-100%

Subindex 3: Autonomy

The third subindex used in this study is autonomy. Autonomous political parties eschew ties to leaders as necessary components of their continued survival. In short, parties can create policies, platforms, and ideologies independently from the control of powerful leaders. This may be the most significant element in African politics, as parties are often dismissed as corrupt facades of representative democracy. In fact, African politics are largely characterized as clientelistic that serve the governing leader, otherwise known as “Big Men,” rather than citizens. In this case, I chose to use the World Bank’s corruption index for several reasons. First, World Bank index uses Afrobarometer results, as well as other sources, to derive its index score. This allows for a comprehensive assessment of autonomy. Second, the World Bank index not only includes citizens’ perceptions but also other sources that help to determine whether parties are autonomous or not. Each nation was examined and was given a score of 1.00 through 5.00 based upon the World Bank index number:

1.00=0-20

2.00=21-40

3.00=41-60

4.00=61-80

5.00=81.00-100

Table 1 illustrates the subindices and the indicators used in the index while Table 2 provides the index score for each nation in the study.

| SUB-INDICES | INDICATORS |
|-------------------------|--|
| Roots in Society | Voter identification with a political party |
| Legitimacy | Public perception of legitimacy of elections |
| Autonomy | Level of country corruption |

Table 1: Sub-indices and Indicators of Party System Institutionalization

| COUNTRY | INSTITUTIONALIZATION | SUBINDEX-ROOTS IN SOCIETY | SUBINDEX-LEGITIMACY | SUBINDEX-AUTONOMY |
|----------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Benin | 8 | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| Botswana | 9 | 1 | 4 | 4 |
| Burkina Faso | 9 | 2 | 4 | 3 |
| Ghana | 9 | 2 | 4 | 3 |
| Kenya | 6 | 1 | 4 | 1 |
| Lesotho | 7 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| Liberia | 7 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| Madagascar | 8 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| Malawi | 8 | 1 | 4 | 3 |
| Mali | 6 | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| Mozambique | 7 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| Namibia | 9 | 1 | 4 | 4 |
| Nigeria | 7 | 2 | 4 | 1 |
| Senegal | 6 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| South Africa | 8 | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| Tanzania | 7 | 1 | 4 | 2 |
| Uganda | 6 | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| Zambia | 6 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Zimbabwe | 5 | 2 | 2 | 1 |

Table 2: Country Institutionalization Index

While institutionalization scores range from 3.0 (very low institutionalization) to 12.0 (very high institutionalization), Table 2 indicates no nation received a score of either 12.0 or 3.0. These are not surprising results, as it would be unlikely for any African nation to have very high levels of institutionalization, given the historical context of their political development. Specifically,

recent colonial independence and creation of political institutions and political parties would necessarily moderate the ability to rapidly achieve institutionalization.

Model Specification

The singular objective in creating the party system institutionalization index is to determine whether institutionalized party systems are correlated with conflict in African nations. The full model that explores this relationship includes the institutionalization index number for each country, as well as control variables: ethnic fractionalization and inequality/poverty. In order to derive the ethnic fractionalization variable I relied upon Fearon and Laitin's well known ethnic fractionalization research, as well as the Inequality Adjusted Human Development Index⁵ for the poverty and inequality variable.

The model relies upon the Armed Conflict Location and Event Dataset (ACLED) for the dependent variable: the number of conflicts by country.⁶ This dataset is useful because it does not limit conflict events by imposing an arbitrary death count upon the event before declaring it a conflict. Indeed, conflicts that cause unrest, political instability, and any deaths should be examined, not merely those that have the highest death tolls.

Figure 1: Model

$$\text{Conflict} = \text{Institutionalization} + \text{Ethnic Fractionalization} + \text{Poverty}$$

⁵ The IHDI provides an inequality-adjusted assessment of human development by nation. The index relies upon social and economic indicators as a means to assess the national development. Using this index not only takes into account gross national income per capita, but also examines other important social factors such as educational opportunities and life expectancy. This comprehensive score provides a better assessment of inequality and poverty than a control variable of gross domestic product.

⁶ The ACLED measures the number of conflict events that occur in a certain country during a specified time period. As such, the ACLED is a count dataset and because it is used as the dependent variable a Poisson distribution is required; however, the model includes overdispersion, thereby necessitating the use of a negative binomial distribution.

Part III: Empirical Results

Table 3 illustrates that political party system institutionalization is the only significant predictor of conflict in the model. In fact, higher levels of party system institutionalization result in a dramatic decrease in conflict.

The coefficient indicates that for every one unit increase in institutionalization there is a 66% decrease in the rate of conflict. In other words, as political party institutionalization increases (as measured by increased rates of party identification, belief in elections, and reduced rates of corruption) there will be fewer conflicts.

Table 3

| VARIABLE | COEFFICIENT | STANDARD ERROR | P VALUE |
|-----------------------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| Institutionalization | -1.1067 | 0.2318 | 1.e79-06*** |
| Ethnicity | 2.2174 | 1.2830 | 0.0839 |
| IHDI | 3.9007 | 2.9897 | 0.1920 |

*significant at the .05 level

**“... as political party institutionalization increases ...
there will be fewer conflicts...”**

Figure 2

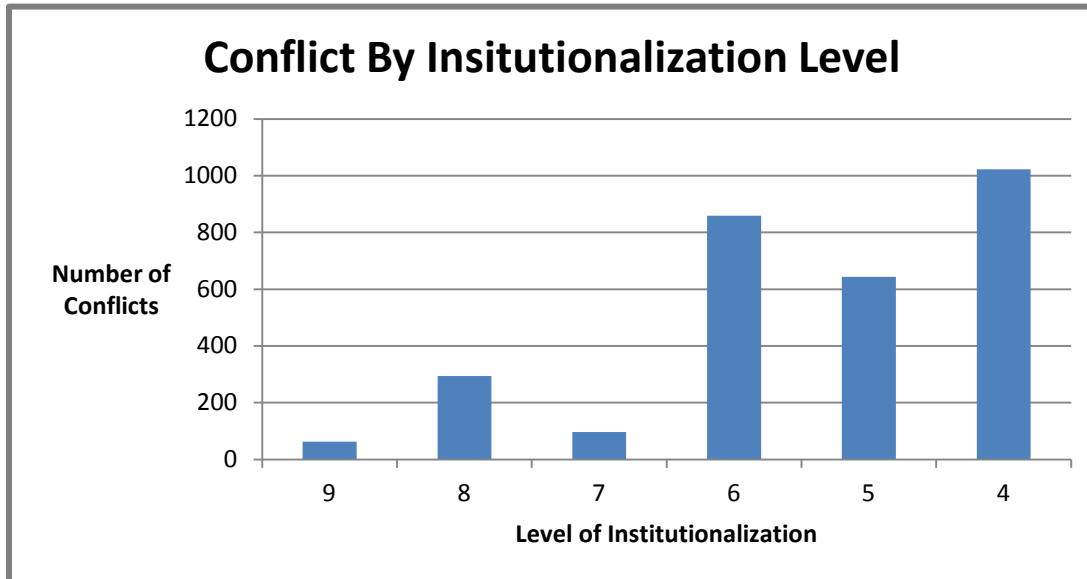


Figure 2 illustrates the range of conflicts that occur at different levels of institutionalization. For example, those nations that have low institutionalization (index score of 4) have much higher rates of conflict. The plot also illustrates that a nation with a high political party institutionalization score (index score of 9) experiences significantly fewer conflicts than those nations with weak party system institutionalization. This suggests not only that party system institutionalization is an important factor in reducing conflict, but also that in order to reduce conflict significant institutionalization must occur.

These findings suggest that, contrary to popular perception, African political parties and party systems should not be wholly disregarded. In fact, this research indicates that their impact upon African society, politics, and developmental failure are not merely anecdotal, but rather quantitatively proven.

Part IV: Implications

The tremendous amount of violent conflict in Africa not only results in enormous economic losses and costs to humanity, but also increases the attractiveness of these countries as terrorist bases. In short, African conflict should not be viewed as merely an African issue, but rather one that holds important concerns for the global community. For these reasons this paper has examined the linkages between two of the most troublesome issues in Africa nations: conflict and weak political party systems.

The findings hold important implications for scholars, policymakers, and development organizations. Importantly, this research illustrates that inequality and fractionalization may not be the most significant predictors of conflict. This suggests that important resources may be better used if aimed at improving the functional capabilities of political parties to fulfill the essential roles that parties have traditionally played in the West. In order to reform these party systems, and thus to reduce conflict, it is necessary to engage in large scale modifications of the political system. This suggestion should not be construed as radical, since political parties have been deemed protectors of democracies and have been touted as holding governments accountable to the electorate.

Despite the important results derived from this study, it is important to note that additional research into the relationship between conflict and differing levels of political party system institutionalization should be conducted. Specifically, the number of African states that are examined should be expanded, as well as extending the time period time examined in order to increase the study's robustness. Importantly, future research should examine the specific impact that these findings may have upon foreign aid donations.

Background Image (next page): Ethiopian Soldier standing guard during multinational exercise in Djibouti
Source: <http://www.africom.mil/Newsroom/Article/7039/eastern-african-forces-work-together-in-historical>

Part V: Conclusion

Africanists allude to the relationship between party system institutionalization and conflict; unfortunately, many researchers marginalize, and in many cases wholly disregard African political parties because they do not follow the pattern established in Western Europe. Similarly, conflict theories provide contradictory findings and fail to account for important political events that are inextricably linked with conflicts. African political parties often operate in nations that are weakly organized and that are relatively young. They are properly characterized as dysfunctional and corrupt. In fact, many scholars and policymakers lament the conflicts in Africa and bemoan the corrupt parties. Often there are descriptive accounts about how parties contribute to conflict by excluding and marginalizing ethnic minorities (who are often excluded from the benefits of clientelism). Yet, despite these faults, parties do operate and do have a substantial impact upon the African landscape.

Empirical research into the relationship between African political parties and conflict is woefully deficient. In fact, numerous qualitative case studies descriptively highlight the interaction between weak political party institutions and conflict. I have attempted to bridge this gap by quantitatively examining the link between party system institutionalization and conflict. The results of this study, although preliminary, indicate that there is strong evidence that party system institutionalization is a significant predictor of conflict.

The potential implications from this study are tremendous because they suggest that if the goal is to reduce conflict and thereby increase development and economic growth, then foreign aid may better aimed at making the party system more robust and accountable. To disregard this political institution as an essential component in reducing conflict will likely ensure that conflict will continue unabated and corruption will continue to flourish.

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