

SOME PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS ON THE CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF POLITICAL PARTY ALLIANCES AND COALITIONS IN AFRICA

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INTRODUCTION

The papers brought together in this issue of the *Journal of African Elections* were presented at EISA's Eighth Symposium, held in Johannesburg in September 2013. At this event academic specialists joined politicians and electoral officials from a wide range of settings within and outside Africa to reflect on the experiences of forming political party alliances and coalitions and governing through them. Their contributions to the symposium addressed five key questions: How do we define electoral alliances or coalitions? Which circumstances favour their formation? Why do parties form coalitions? What have been their effects? And, finally, which are the key issues that future researchers should address? This concluding essay brings together the main insights that were generated by the presentations and the discussions they prompted.

HOW DO WE DEFINE ELECTORAL ALLIANCES AND COALITIONS?

In the papers in this issue you will find differences in the ways in which authors employ the terms alliances and coalitions. Certain articles use the terms interchangeably. Denis Kadima, however, suggests that alliances are different from coalitions. Pre-election coalitions differ from post-election coalitions and, of course, not all of the latter are the product of agreements before elections. And willing post-electoral coalitions are different from imposed or coerced governments of national unity, though their internal dynamics can be just as fretful.

And then there are mergers, which are sometimes considered as alliances, though Danielle Resnick believes that for a merger to embody an alliance or a coalition it must maintain the separate entities it brings together. So, for example,

the formations that have contested the last two elections in Kenya are mergers by Resnick's definition, for within them they still retain separate organisational hierarchies for each of their components.

A Nigerian presentation to the symposium, not included in this issue, supplied an illuminating study of a party merger of quite a different kind (Ibrahim & Idayet 2013). Here, although the Nigerian All Progressive Congress (APC) continues to describe itself in its publicity as an alliance its initial constituents dissolved their own separate organisations to become, at least notionally, a single new party. So the APC replaced the four parties that joined to form it with a single party; accordingly its constituents had their operating licences withdrawn by the Nigerian Independent Electoral Commission and the new formation now recruits its own members. New defections from the ruling party have expanded the APC's parliamentary caucus to nearly half the seats in the House of Representatives. Whether it will maintain its growth remains uncertain, though; the four parties that make it up themselves emerged from defections from other groups and Nigerian parties are often internally unstable and lack tight localised organisation.

Earlier Nigerian mergers of this kind have often broken apart, as Jibrin Ibrahim and Hassan Idayet detailed in their paper. By Danielle Resnick's definition, the APC would not represent an alliance but, in reality, the formative organisations, though dissolved, may still constitute distinct networks within the new organisational structure and if this is the case the APC may remain vulnerable to fission and defection, as was the case with the incomplete integration of the Democratic and National Parties in South Africa after the formation of the Democratic Alliance.

A looser usage of alliances might also include 'loyal oppositions' that agree to support the government in Parliament, but hold back from joining it. An example is provided in Samson Lembani's Malawian analysis, in which opposition parties between 2005 and 2008 supported the national budget in return for the dismissal of floor-crossing MPs by the minority governing party, a decision that would prove very unpopular with voters in 2008. In a comparable vein alliances might also include the informal arrangements that result after floor crossing, as noted in Susan Booysen's article. For example, in 2009 Themba Godi, a breakaway or crossover MP from the Pan Africanist Congress, agreed to support the ANC government as the sole representative of the African People's Convention and was accordingly rewarded with a Select Committee chair.

If we follow the spirit of Mexican usage, alliances are less regulated formations than coalitions. There, pre-election coalitions are very tightly arranged agreements in which parties or fronts commit themselves to fielding common candidates. Alliances are less formal kinds of cooperation, over supporting legislation or policy in legislatures in presidential systems, for example (Navarro 2013).

More generally, at the symposium presenters tended to distinguish between alliances, which are informal kinds of cooperation, and coalitions, which are more formal, governed by memorandums of understanding and so forth. Perhaps we should adopt the distinction that Denis Kadima borrows from Andrew Wyatt's work (Wyatt 1999). In this usage, alliances are simply about maximising votes, whereas post-electoral coalitions must involve agreement to work together in government and/or Parliament after the election. Samson Lembani's paper in this issue has a variation of this understanding: in the Malawian setting alliances are understood to embody agreements about pre-election cooperation whereas coalitions are about what happens after the election.

These differences matter analytically. For instance, they affect how we count coalitions and hence they will influence the kind of quantitative study undertaken here by Matthijs Bogaards. Analytical precision is important if you are going to make rules about how coalitions should behave.

WHEN DO ALLIANCES AND COALITIONS FORM?

From the experiences reviewed at the symposium we learned that the formation of alliances and coalitions can be facilitated by different conditions and circumstances. Durable pre-election coalitions are easiest to start if you have large opposition parties with plenty of electoral experience, Bogaards suggests, though he is not sure why. With respect to experience, perhaps political actors need time to learn that coalitions and the compromises that they require are prerequisites for victory. After all, as Raila Odinga recalled in his keynote address at the start of the symposium, Kenyan opponents of the ruling party only joined forces after two defeats in which the winners obtained office with a minority of the votes.

The dynamics of coalition formation vary with differences in party systems. In other words, as Bogaards shows, different party systems create different incentives for coalition formation. For example, in a dominant-party setting in which small parties have no hope of winning elections, they may still join forces simply because this may enable them to reach the thresholds required in certain countries before they can obtain seats and the livelihoods that these provide. In Mozambique a 5% threshold that operated up to 2009 prompted ten smaller parties that failed to win seats in 1994 to line up in a pre-election alliance with the main opposition group, RENAMO.

Then, as Denis Kadima has noted, differences in electoral systems affect the likelihood of coalition formation. There are better prospects for pre-election coalition formation in first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral systems in which parties agree with each other not to contest particular constituencies, an option unavailable in national list style proportional representation (PR). The second

round in presidential run-offs is an obvious inducement for coalitions. As Sheila Bunwaree and Tanya Diolle told the symposium, the Mauritian variant of FPTP, with its three-member constituencies and triple ballots favours coalitions and fosters collaboration between the main parties (Bunwaree & Diolle 2013).

Kadima has found that coalitions – before and after elections – are more sustainable in parliamentary than in presidential systems. In parliamentary systems there are sanctions if parties dishonour undertakings made before elections. If elected executive presidents fail to honour undertakings to second-round allies these have little recourse, as became all too evident in early post-democratisation Kenya.

The threat of national disintegration may prompt the establishment of the sorts of consociational arrangements that call for post-electoral coalitions. In this issue Phillipe Makutu and Rossy Tshimanga offer us an illuminating study of the way this happened in Congo after 2003 as a consequence of the South Africa-brokered negotiations at Sun City. Similarly, certain democratisations have imposed limitations on the number of parties that can be formed, in effect making coalitions an institutionalised requirement. This happened when Senegal became a multiparty system, Abdoul Aidara noted at the symposium (Aidara 2013). Carlos Navarro's discussion of the Mexican case supplied an example of institutional arrangements, legally regulated, that prompt and facilitate alliance and coalition formation. These include a rare instance of the kind of representative ceiling proposed by Matthijs Bogaards that compels even large parties to form coalitions if they seek, for example, to achieve amendments.

We also learned from the Mexican experience, in which coalitions have now functioned routinely over several decades, that ideology and ideological similarity have become progressively less important as a consideration that facilitates coalition formation. Indeed, as Alistair McMillan's Indian analysis in this issue suggests, parties may have good reasons not to try coalition formation with ideological soulmates – preserving their separate identity may be easier in a coalition with an ideologically distant partner. In practice, in India the most common alliances or coalitions are between nationally prominent parties and regionally focused parties: these matches often bring together ideologically disparate partners. They work because strong regional partners can help national parties gain the edge over their main national rivals in the national legislature, while, at the same time, the regionalists can obtain protection from their national ally for their more parochial concerns.

In both India and Mexico, as well as in Nigeria occasionally, the federal structure functions as a coalition driver because it offers opportunities for partnerships between actors whose primary concerns and interests are located at different levels of government. In South Africa coalitions of opposition groups in

the national legislature have succeeded in winning executive power in provinces and municipalities.

Voter preference may also drive coalition formation. The Indian evidence suggests that a sophisticated electorate favours coalitions – and understands and tolerates the ideological and policy trade-offs that coalitions require when they bring ideologically distinct parties together. Ibrahim & Idayet's research indicates that Nigerian public opinion may also be shifting in favour of coalition formation. For voters in certain countries a key concern might be stability, not ideology. In India, voters punish coalition-exiters. Susan Booysen's paper refers to voter-led dynamics of coalitions, particularly in the formation of the Democratic Alliance in 2000, after voters abandoned the New National Party in 1999 in favour of the Democrats. The Independent Democrats' phased merger' with the Democratic Alliance also followed the direction of 'voter migration' in 2009.

The Nigerian case also tends to support Bogaard's observation that durable pre-election opposition coalitions are easier to establish if you have in place large opposition parties with plenty of electoral experience. There is a process of lesson learning or, as one contributor from the floor put it, eye opening, that parties need to undergo which may take them through several electoral defeats before they recognise the coalition imperative. This may explain why Nigerian parties find it so difficult to form and sustain coalitions: too many of the opposition parties are new and small. And even the larger parties are organisationally inchoate and constituted around personalities or 'godfathers', as Ibrahim and Idayet put it. They lack the internal discipline that is necessary to maintain coalition arrangements. Each of the three pre-coalitions that were formed before previous Nigerian elections collapsed shortly before or after the poll. Three years before the next election the Nigerian APC seems to be forming too early.

On the other hand, when *all* the parties are small and built mainly around regional concentrations, as is the case in the pulverised Benin system, then the coalition imperative becomes immediately obvious. In Benin, as Atayi-Guedegbe (2013) reminds us, the necessity for parties to join forces was acknowledged at the inception of multiparty politics, in 1991. In Benin, coalitions – or alliances – are geared to the operations of a presidential system; they primarily serve a vote-maximising function.

WHY DO PARTIES FORM ALLIANCES AND COALITIONS? WHAT ARE THE COMMON MOTIVES?

In international experience office-seeking explanations of coalitions are very frequent. From this perspective, political party leaders join forces in the hope that in so doing they can win control over patronage and the material rewards

that accompany office. Office-seeking is not always such a compelling prompt, though, as the papers presented at the symposium showed. In India, regional parties that combine with national entities are not seeking to maximise office opportunities, rather, as Alistair Macmillan observes, they are trying to protect their own regional agendas through trade-offs between their parochial concerns and national interest imperatives.

Co-option by large parties of smaller potential rivals once prompted ruling party initiated coalitions in Mexico, though they do not do so as often now. In South Africa, during the Mandela administration, the mandatory coalition of the African National Congress (ANC) and the New National Party (NNP) had the effect of alienating the NNP from its own support base, and subsequent coalitions between the ANC and the NNP in the Western Cape's provincial government, in Booyesen's words, 'advanced the ANC's project to gain dominance' while weakening the NNP still further in its former stronghold.

In South Africa, then, coalition formation by the ruling party may be prompted by the recognition that coalitions can eviscerate junior partners. So, for powerfully dominant parties which face no prospect of losing elections, forming coalitions with small parties might be an appealing venture simply because in doing so they effectively co-opt and demoralise such groups, removing or immobilising any entities that might otherwise in the long term constitute threats.

A slightly different consideration for the ANC in offering coalition opportunities might have been to appear to be all-embracing so as to cultivate a loyal opposition. The ANC has offered deputy ministerships to right-wing Afrikaner groups, for example. More generally, Samson Lembani has referred to the need to invest in social relationships as a spur to coalition-building. Coalition formers may genuinely be motivated by a concern for national unity. Not all politicians are greedy and self-serving and in any case it is possible under certain circumstances to satisfy both self-interest and patriotic imperatives, as may have been the case with the rump NNP leadership when they joined the ANC government in 2003.

In very fragmented party systems a survivalist strategy may prompt alliance coalitions, as when very small groups partner to maintain parliamentary representation. As Booyesen notes, the 'survivalist initiatives' that have brought together micro-party alliances have 'only secondarily [been] about building some form of power to challenge the ANC'. However, alliances may also form when opposition parties combine in Parliament to challenge and obstruct minority government business, as in Malawi. In this case coalitions may form on the basis of shared ideological perspectives and this may make them easier to sustain. Coalitions may be prompted by recognition that they are the only way in which opposition groups can win power, as happened in Kenya in 2002. Denis Kadima

maintains that small parties tend to have short-term motives for going into coalitions and alliances whereas large parties that form coalitions have longer-term more strategic aims.

WHAT HAVE BEEN THE EFFECTS OF ALLIANCES AND COALITIONS?

It is still quite unusual in Africa for opposition coalitions to win elections, though, over time, coalition formation may be making alternation of parties in government more frequent. This may help to explain why assessment of the effect of coalitions on the functioning of the party system and of government more generally was quite sharply divided at the symposium.

More negatively, in Abdoul Latif Aidara's evocative phraseology, coalitions facilitate the 'pollution' of the political arena by 'telephone booth' groups that are not really political parties at all. Post-election coalitions are likely to govern badly because it is difficult to make good consistent policy decisions, Danielle Resnick concludes from the comparative literature. As Aidara puts it, 'coalitions are a hindrance to government'. They weaken party institutionalisation. During coalitions parties may become more internally volatile and unstable. With respect to Lesotho's recent history of party splits, Motlamelle Kapa and Victor Shale (2013) have shown that coalitions seriously undermined party cohesion in that country. They may weaken opposition generally as well. In fact, they may remove opposition altogether, as happened in Mauritius in 1982 and 1995 when the main parties formed coalitions that won all the seats.

In Mauritius they have tended to under-represent women, though this shortcoming can be and is addressed in Africa through quota requirements. Coalitions in power might arguably result in the inclusion of mediocrities in government; they certainly help to constrain meritocratic considerations in the making of Cabinet appointments that might otherwise operate when a single party constitutes a government. They may function in other ways that block democratic advance. For example, McMillan shows how Indian state parties have managed, through alliances, to prevent fresh delimitations of constituencies, resulting in sharp inequalities in representation.

In a more positive vein, pre-election coalitions tend to soften conflict. At the symposium we heard plenty of testimony from the politicians on the Zimbabwean panel to this effect, though they disagreed about other things. The Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF)'s Paul Mangwana and the Movement for Democratic Change-Tsvangirai (MDC-T)'s Lovemore Moyo concurred that decisions about constitutional reform were shared amicably enough, though implementation of other commitments in the Global Political

Agreement were blocked, in the view of the MDC's Nhlanhla Dube, by the 'incumbent party's reluctance to concede' (Mangwana, Dube & Moyo 2013). Indeed, at least one academic commentary on the recent Zimbabwean experience of power-sharing government noted that the former opposition parties had 'little capacity to restrain the authoritarian excesses of their ruling party partners' (LeBas 2011). And though power-sharing coalition arrangements may be indispensable in bringing about peace settlements, once in place they are not always effective in ending conflict. At least one critic of the DRC accord has suggested that the power sharing arrangements might have provided incentives that helped to motivate future violent rebellions (Tuli & Mehler 2005).

In other, less ideologically polarised, post-conflict settings, coalitions might offer better prospects for 'consensual' democracy, though perhaps at the cost of efficiency: in Kenya the post-2008 coalition 'has led to greater state spending and larger cabinets' as well as public perceptions of increased corruption (LeBas 2011). Such costs are, of course, outweighed by the damage arising from armed conflict, but in more stable contexts maintaining consensus can restrict desirable policy options – as in Mauritius. Sheila Bunwaree and Tania Diolle's Mauritian study presented us with a very telling case of coalitions as key instruments in the political management of ethnic cleavages, in moderating their effects, though they seemed to think that managing ethnicity has become too overriding a preoccupation for Mauritian politicians. But if a post-election coalition breaks down in a climate of latent political tension this can accentuate the risk of severe conflict, Denis Kadima warns.

In certain settings, coalitions are fundamental to the working of the political system, indispensable to governability, as Booyesen terms it. In Benin coalitions are prevalent and presidents could not be elected without them. So, in highly fragmented political settings coalitions may have an integrating function, contrary to common theoretical suppositions. In South Africa, over time, coalition formation has tended to concentrate opposition in the Democratic Alliance. Booyesen's view is that coalitions have helped to foster in South Africa an evolving two-party system and, in effect, this may also be happening in Kenya. As Yunusa Tanko, one of the Nigerian panelists, observed, when coalitions repeatedly contest elections, offering voters the same party combinations, they are probably engaged in a lengthy process of merger.

The longer-term evidence we have from India and Mexico suggests that coalition administrations are not noticeably less efficient than single-party administrations. This may be a reflection of the fact that the coalitions in these countries are primarily formed around pragmatic concerns rather than ideological affinities. More generally, coalitions seem to have the effect of reducing ideological polarities. Indian evidence also confirms that, to an extent, coalitions have softened

or blunted the sharper and more aggressive communalist agendas of certain parties that represent religious or ethnic groups as an effect of the expedient constraints that arise from coalition membership.

WHAT DON'T WE KNOW?

We need to know more before we can be certain whether coalitions advance or retard democratic consolidation. In Africa our experience with them is still too short. We could learn from elsewhere, though.

We don't know enough yet about when and why it becomes likely that a pre-election coalition can win an election. Danielle Resnick calls for more systematic comparative research on this topic.

Do we need more legal regulation with respect to the formation and management of coalitions? Kadima, Odinga, Makutu and Aidara think we do. Resnick does not – she does not want coalitions to become institutionalised. Bogaard's proposal for ceilings and premiums would, in effect, facilitate coalition formation. Kapa and Shale, with their comments on the way coalitions have distorted the intentions that underlay Lesotho's adoption of mixed member PR, alert us to the risks of trying to engineer outcomes through institutional design.

We need to know more about the best ways coalition participants can look after their party concerns while still helping government to perform its functions smoothly. How best should they keep supporters on board? As we know from European experience, governing coalition engagement usually harms junior parties, and this seems to be confirmed by the Zimbabwean experience.

Finally, if participation has the effect of weakening small parties, might not this be a good thing, because then coalitions would be helping to bring about a more coherent and less fragmented party system. This would be a development that might enhance democratic consolidation.

AND, WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

In brief, at the symposium and in the papers published in this issue of the *JAE*, the most common usages imply that alliances are less formalised arrangements than coalitions and that the latter normally embrace agreements by different parties to join forces in government.

Coalitions are most likely in settings inhabited by experienced and well organised parties that compete through first-past-the-post elections in a parliamentary system.

Ideological proximity is not a common feature of coalition partners, despite evidence of growing voter predisposition favouring coalitions.

In Africa and the other settings reviewed in this issue, the motives that prompt alliance- and coalition-formation are more complicated than mere office-seeking. Regional parties may seek national allies to protect their local concerns, dominant parties might seek to co-opt and compromise possible future rivals, and small parties might band together simply to survive.

In this issue of the *JAE* there is sharpest disagreement about the consequences of coalition and alliance formation, in and out of government. Critical views of coalitions focus on those instances in which they have fragmented the party system, weakened opposition and produced indecisive government. In the articles brought together in this issue these perspectives are countered by case studies of coalitions that have alleviated conflict, promoted a more cohesive party politics and supplied relatively efficient government. In short, we need to know more.

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