ELECTORAL REFORM IN SOUTHERN AFRICA
Voter Turnout, Electoral Rules and Infrastructure

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ABSTRACT

Elections are the most important elements of democracies and, with referenda, the only way to organise mass participation and to promote government accountability. Low voter turnout can be seen as an indicator of low legitimacy and limited political stability. The African Union, the Southern African Development Community and the New Partnership for Africa's Development champion the idea of transparency and the integrity of the electoral process as well as greater participation and electoral turnout. An analysis of the voting-age population of Southern African reveals that voter turnout is declining alarmingly. Do electoral rules and electoral infrastructure matter? The paper analyses election instruments using qualitative criteria from democratic theory. Are electoral systems, quotas for women and the conjunction of elections influencing voter turnout? Is a reform of voting infrastructure necessary? Southern African countries diverge widely in their electoral rules and infrastructure, which allows for cross-national learning. A number of remedies, including the necessity for automatic voter registration, are recommended.

INTRODUCTION

Competitive elections are the main characteristic of democracies. Elections are often discredited as instruments of a purely formal 'electoral democracy' or 'liberalised competitive autocracy' (Bratton, Mattes & Gyimah-Boadi 2005) and direct participation and deliberative political discourse championed. Nevertheless, apart from referenda, elections are the only political instrument that allows for

broad representation. Authoritarian systems, however, use semi-competitive elections for pseudo-legitimacy while totalitarian non-competitive elections are often pure acclamation (Abbink & Hesseling 2000; Cowen & Laakso 2002).

Political systems worldwide seem to be under stress. New, often 'non-democratic' institutions are gaining influence and, because of privatisation, the public sector is losing control. Elected parliaments appear to be becoming obsolete and are no longer a forum or 'plaza' for open discussion or decision-making. Instead, 'deformed' and skewed media often seem to shape public discourse and technocratic administrations to dominate decision-making. 'Post-parliamentaria-nism', characterised by a diminished or weak role of parliaments and parliamentary elections prevails. This may lead to a crisis in the legitimacy of parliaments and to political apathy, cynicism and absence of political interest. It may, furthermore, lead to a crisis in participation. Not only may participation in elections decrease, participation in non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society may also fall apart. In Africa's developing countries this is already happening for specific reasons.

Worldwide, societal change is leading to higher urbanisation. Although there are still more agrarian populations in Africa than on other continents and rural lifestyles still predominate in certain countries, urban centres and metropolitan areas are growing rapidly. Demographic change is becoming obvious.

In Europe, a tendency towards a 'grey society' resulting from low birth rates and high life expectancy is becoming a problem for, among others, pension funds. In Southern Africa, the reverse applies: life expectancy has been low because of weak health systems and birth rates have been high. In some countries, however, birth rates are decreasing because HIV/Aids is endemic in the age group 20 to 40. Youth dominance is therefore prevailing – but in a reduced population. Older generations are also profiting from better health systems and higher life expectancy. These factors are leading to societies dominated numerically by children and older people.

Furthermore, worldwide socio-economic change is resulting in growing structural unemployment, a decreasing agrarian and industrial sector and a growing service-sector dominance. Although, as stated above, agriculture is still important in Africa, the problem of structural unemployment is becoming a characteristic of developing African countries.

Finally, in industrial countries, socio-cultural change as individualisation and a lack of social capital is growing. African countries often perform better in this regard but, in some countries, such as South Africa, empirical data show a low level of social capital in urban areas.

Elections are seen as the most important element of representative parlia-mentary democracy. They allow for the selection of parties, programmes and

representatives and strengthen accountability and political control. They give legitimacy to political power, they lead to peaceful change in power, and they enhance political stability.

African regional organisations and initiatives, such as the African Union (AU), Southern African Development Community (SADC) and New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad), endeavour to ensure the transparency and integrity of the electoral process as a whole. SADC, for example, calls not only for equal opportunities in exercising the right to vote, for non-discrimination in the registration of voters, for freedom of association and for equal opportunities for organisations but also for higher participation and electoral turnout.

The lack of participation of certain groups, such as youth and women, however, is becoming apparent to these regional bodies. SADC, in its Article 5 and *Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections*, therefore encourages the empowerment of the younger generation to vote. This is a major principle emanating from the AU in its *Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa* (AHG/DECL1 [XXXVIII]) and its *Guidelines for African Union Electoral Observation and Monitoring Missions* (EX/CL/35 [III] Annex II). It is also embedded in the charter of the AU.

Discussion of the electoral system must go beyond whether a majoritarian/ pluralist, proportional or mixed electoral system is best practice. Jackson & Jackson (1997, p 371) state that 'each system offers certain benefits and disadvantages in terms of the representation of different groups in society'. Although the electoral system plays an important role, especially in inner-party democracy and the role of parliament, the legitimacy of elections rests upon other factors. Electoral infrastructure and electoral rules become important and are often neglected when it comes to the analysis of voter turnout.

QUALITY OF ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

In evaluating and defining the quality of electoral systems various writers have endeavoured to seek universal normative concepts. Rae (1971, p 14) has defined electoral systems as 'those which govern the processes by which electoral preferences are articulated as votes and by which those votes are translated into distributions of governmental authority (typically parliamentary seats) among the competing political parties'.

Five criteria may be defined for the quality of electoral systems. These are: representation, concentration, participation, transparency and simplicity. The constitutional criteria for a free, fair, secret vote (Kersting 2005; Reynolds, Reilly & Ellis 1999; 2002) may also be included. In addition to these criteria the consolidation of democracies – incentives for conciliation, the encouragement of cross-

cutting political parties, the promotion of parliamentary opposition as well as costs and administrative capacity – also becomes important in developing countries, new democracies and highly segregated countries, such as South Africa.

Representation

Electoral systems should allow all groups in society to be represented in the elected institution. This has frequently led to the misleading argument that all groups must be represented according to their statistical representation. However, congruent representation does not respect that an advocatory representation by elected incumbents is possible and factor representation implies a relation between citizen and elected bodies. Electoral systems should hold both government and representatives accountable and enhance responsiveness.

Concentration

The systems should guarantee the decision-making capacity of the electoral institution. High levels of fragmentation and a large number of party factions may be counter-productive and inefficient in this regard, since majority systems tend to develop and foster two-party systems, which do not include smaller groups within a constituency. Although this may differ in a national setting, in the case of first-past-the-post (FPTP) constituencies, as much as 49 per cent of minorities might be neglected. Because of the limited number of seats in parliament, a natural quorum and threshold pertain to avoid very small particular-interest groups.

Participation

Electoral systems are significant democratic instruments for enabling participation. This is important in relation both to input legitimacy and to political incumbents and parties. In addition to the election of parties at the local level, the election of candidates (in other words, the personal vote) is seen as important. In some countries citizens have no or few rights to nominate candidates within parties; there are no primaries or pre-elections or polls. The personal vote, therefore, offers the voter the possibility of something that is seen as a special motivation to cast a ballot. Clientelistic networks should be used to build a bridge between the voter and the candidate. Preferential voting and the personal vote are seen as a factor in boosting voter turnout. According to Marsh (1985), however, such preferential voting does not lead to higher voter turnout but, instead, to the enhancement of clientele parochialism.

Transparency

Transparency is the key aspect of the legitimacy of electoral systems. The electoral result should show the will of the voters. If this is doubted, the legitimacy of the candidate, the institution, or the political system may be endangered. The institutional procedures of both ballot casting and counting should therefore be controllable. For example, inside the polling station and in electoral administration, the sealed ballot box and the four-eyes principle enhance trust and the legitimacy of elections.

Simplicity and the Reduction of Complexity

Ease and simplicity affect the cost of information and the limited resources of voters' time. A complicated electoral system may be interesting and motivating for those politically involved and for citizens with, for example, a higher level of education and more time, but it may also confuse voters (Farrell 2002). Elections are, firstly, a choice between different ideas and programmes and, secondly, a choice between parties and persons. This acts as an information clue.

Secrecy and Privacy

The reduction of supervision and the concomitant threat to the secrecy of the ballot may, however, be the most crucial issue. The secrecy of the ballot is considered essential in most modern states. It is adopted in a wide range of conventions and declarations, to which many Western democracies are signatories. These conventions and declarations include the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (Article 21[3]), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 25) and the European Convention on Human Rights (Protocol 1, Article 3) (Kersting & Baldersheim 2004). Paradoxically, the secrecy of the ballot in traditional voting is brought about by supervision.

Development of Democracy

In new democracies parliament and party systems are often not consolidated. Electoral systems can, however, provide incentives for conciliation. They can encourage crosscutting cleavages and the development of crosscutting to catch all political parties. They can, furthermore, promote parliamentary opposition. Cost and administrative capacity should also be recognised and electoral systems should not ask too much of the public administration or the institutions implementing the elections.

VOTER TURNOUT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

The analysis of official electoral data is largely based on the number of registered voters. This leads to distortions because large population groups are not represented. In the following analysis, voter turnout is recorded as a percentage of the estimate of the total eligible voting-age population.[1] Averages are therefore mostly considerably lower than turnout data using the percentage of registered voters. Low registration levels often have enormous effects. In some cases only particularly interested citizens may register and a wide range of population groups may not participate.

In Botswana, Madagascar, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia, and South Africa, registration severely affects turnout data. In Angola, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, Zimbabwe and the Seychelles, these effects are moderate, or even low. There is also a problem with using voting-age populations because of a lack of proper statistical census data. Furthermore, demography changes dramatically because of HIV / Aids. Nevertheless, turnout related to voting-age population rather than registered voters seems to be a more reliable indicator.

In Botswana, with its long tradition of elections, only half (50%) of the voting-age population can be mobilised to vote, a decline that started in 1989. Official figurers, however, are distorted by voter registration, with official data showing a higher voter turnout of 77 per cent in 1999 (Matlosa 2003).

In Lesotho, voter turnout declined between the 1998 and 2002 elections; voter turnout fell from 72 per cent in 1993 to 61 per cent in 2002.

The picture in Malawi is mixed. Voter turnout was low in the first election, with only 68 per cent of the possible electorate going to the polls. This went up to more than 90 per cent in the 1999 election, however. A high turnout of 78 per cent of registered voters was recorded in 1999 but that figure dropped in the 2004 national election, although 75 per cent of the voting-age population participated.

Mauritius traditionally has very high voter turnout. In 1982 it was more than 90 per cent, with about 80 per cent of the voting-age population participating. A total of 80,9 per cent of registered voters cast their votes in 2000; the figure was even higher in 2004.

Mozambique had a relatively high voter turnout in the 1994 election. In 1999, it was still moderate – about 58 per cent (about 70 per cent of the registered population). This declined dramatically in 2004, however. Only 40 per cent of the voting-age population participated in the 1999 presidential and parliamentary elections.

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1   Because new census data are not always available, the analysis also uses older census data. This is indicated in the table by the use of italics. Angola, as a praetorian state with one election not accepted in 1992, and autocratic Swaziland are not included in the analysis. The Seychelles, as a former SADC member state, is included.

Namibia's first election, in 1989, was a novelty and 97 per cent of the voting-age population cast its vote. Then there was a decline between 1994 and 1999, when the figures dropped by one-third. An analysis of registered voters revealed the turnout to have declined from an already low 76 per cent in 1994 to 62 per cent in 1999. In 2004, however, turnout increased to 85 per cent of the voting-age population.

Since its first election in 1993, the Seychelles has had very high voter turnout, although this dropped to below 90 per cent in the 2002 and 2004 elections.

In South Africa's first democratic election, in 1994, the turnout was 85 per cent. After this democratic honeymoon, however, voter turnout declined but stabilised, with only 63 per cent (in 1999) and 61 per cent (in 2004) of the voting-age population turning out. Data on registered voters, however, give a different picture: in 1999, 89,3 per cent of registered voters were still casting their votes.

In Swaziland, voter turnout is regarded as generally low. In 1998, 60,4 per cent of registered voters went to the polls.

In Tanzania there has generally been a low turnout in relation to the voting-age population but there registration has had a strong influence. In 1995, 75 per cent and in 2000 approximately 80 per cent of registered voters participated. In 2005, participation declined to 71 per cent.

Zambia has very low turnout rates. In 1991, 1996 and 2001 less than 40 per cent of the voting-age population cast its vote. This is not properly reflected in official data. But, even according to official data, because of an opposition boycott in 1996 Zambia has been facing a dramatic decline in voter turnout, which has dropped to less than 50 per cent. In the 2006 election, however, 63 per cent of registered voters participated.

In Zimbabwe, the influence of registration is small. But voter turnout declined from 95 per cent in 1980 to 54 per cent in 1990 and to less than 50 per cent in 2000. In the 1996 elections, only 32 per cent of registered voters cast their vote.

There are very few data on local elections, with most of the statistics reflecting the position only in the larger cities. Malawi had a very low voter turnout (15 per cent) in its 2000 municipal elections. Because of an opposition boycott the figure in Mozambique's 1998 municipal elections was only 15 per cent. In Zambia, only 26 per cent voted in municipal elections in 1998. In Namibia, turnout in local government elections in 1994 was between 50 per cent and 60 per cent; bigger cities, such as Windhoek, recorded only 35 per cent and Walvis Bay only 30,3 per cent (Africa Election Database 2006). In Mauritius, no turnout data are available for the 2001 local elections; in the 2005 elections, turnout was much lower than in the national election, with between 37 per cent and 43 per cent of registered voters casting their ballot. In Botswana, voter turnout in 2006 was high – 72 per cent of registered voters. In South Africa, only 50 per cent voted in the municipal elections

Table 1
Electoral Turnout in Southern Africa
Voting Age Population (%)

Year	Botswana	Congo/ DRC	Lesotho	Madagascar	Malawi	Mauritius	Mozambique	Namibia	Tanzania	South Africa	Zambia	Zimbabwe
1980												84,1
1981												
1982						91,5						
1983				79,9		77,0						
1984	54,2											
1985												75,5
1986												
1987						84,6						
1988												
1989	47,9			72,9				97,0				
1990												48,7
1991		75,3				82,4					34,2	
1992		2,8		66,7								
1993			72,3	54,1								
1994	44,6				67,9		66,4	63,8		85,6		
1995						77,1			47,9			26,0
1996				29,7							39,8	27,4
1997												
1998			71,8	40,6								
1999	42,0				92,3		58,2	61,7		63,9		
2000						79,6			45,7			45,0
2001				n,a,							40,0	
2002			61,1	51,2								53,6
2003												
2004	49,9				74,6			84,9		61,4		
2005						83,8			70,9			47,7
2006		70,5									62,4	

Source: IDEA 2002; Africa Elections Database 2006

of 1995/96 and 2000; turnout dropped again in local government elections in 2006 (Africa Elections Database 2006).

In Namibia, Malawi and Tanzania there have been ups and downs, but the turnout is relatively high. Zambia and South Africa experienced a real decline in participation and turnout is low. In Botswana, Zimbabwe and Mozambique electoral turnout is very low.

What remedies can be employed in relation to electoral laws and infra-structure and what would their influence be on turnout in Southern African elections?

REFORMING VOTING RULES AND VOTING FACILITIES

Voting behaviour seems to be a result of societal development, the influence of mobilising media (such as political parties and churches), individual resources (such as time and skills) and motivation (such as political interest and trust) (Norris 2002). Declining turnout is explained by different theories of electoral motivation. The normalisation theory argues that an adjustment process occurs and that, after years of democratic stability, political apathy and absence of interest grow. This apathy is not always the result of political dissatisfaction but may be the consequence of satisfied indifference. The dissolution of social milieux also enhances the de-alignment of political parties. Furthermore, because of individualisation and a change of values, voting is no longer seen as a citizen's duty. The competing theory sees a strong legitimacy crisis. According to this crisis theory, political alienation develops and non-voting is based on political cynicism. This means that even well informed citizens do not cast their vote. Political apathy is seen more as a lack of interest; cynicism is seen as the dissatisfaction of intellectual elites, which can be destabilising in the long term. Other explanations are based on rational-choice theories. According to Downs's (1957) electoral paradox, individual voting does not count. Additional factors are party alignment, problem and candidate orientation and underdog and bandwagon effects. Only close and unpredictable results seem to have a high impact on people's motivation to cast their ballot (Katz 1997).

What are the effects of electoral rules and constitutional structures? Do institutions matter? Is there a harmonisation of electoral rules and infrastructure in Southern Africa?

ELECTORAL RULES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

To enhance the influence of the electorate some new electoral rules are being discussed and implemented but, in some cases, because of other collateral damage,

some rules are also being abolished (see, for example, the Southern African Elections Forum 2000). Some rules are not being questioned because of long traditions in political systems.

Majority systems can be differentiated as FPTP systems, which are used mostly in African Commonwealth states, and two-round systems, used mainly in former French African colonies (Lindberg 2004). The two systems are simple to understand, offer strong geographical representation and accountability, and lead to clear majorities. They may, however, exclude minorities. They also seem to result in the election of fewer women. Furthermore, gerrymandering can become a problem.

Proportional representation (PR) systems, as implemented with the wave of democracy in Spain and Greece and with the second wave in Eastern Europe, Latin America and, later, in South Africa, strengthen inclusiveness and allow minority representation (Jackman & Miller 1995; Milner 2001). They are seen as responsible for slightly higher voter turnouts. They may, however, result in weak geographic representation, which can reduce the accountability of members of Parliament. Because of strong party influence during nomination, they have to be accompanied by strong inner-party democracy.

Internationally, there is a trend towards mixed electoral systems. Parallel systems have been introduced in Japan, Thailand and Senegal. Mixed-member proportional (MMP) systems have been implemented in Mexico (in 2000), New Zealand (in 1996) and Lesotho (in 2002). Mixed systems are seen as including the best of all worlds. They lead to less party fragmentation, higher inclusiveness and higher accountability. They are, however, more complicated, and sensitive to strategic voting. Proportional systems are believed to produce a higher voter turnout (Jackman & Miller 1995).

Do electoral systems matter in Africa? Namibia, with its PR system, has a very high electoral turnout; South Africa has a relatively low one. Turnout is high in Tanzania and Malawi, with their FPTP, but low in Zimbabwe. Mauritius, with its complicated mixture of majoritarian multi-member constituencies and block votes, has a high turnout, Lesotho, which switched from the FPTP to MMP, a relatively low one.

Most of the instruments and reforms mooted in other parts of the world have been discussed and implemented in the SADC region. Some are not recommended, for example, electoral systems that make voting compulsory or impose sanctions for non-participation, although these may result in voter turnout increasing by about 10 per cent (Jackman & Miller 1995).

Some political instruments focus on the inclusion of new voters, with the legal voting age almost universally set at 18. Internationally, in some countries the voting age was reduced to 16 at local level but because of the lack of effect on voter turnout this system was abolished.

Table 2
Electoral Rules and Infrastructure

Electoral rules	Electoral infrastructure
Electoral systems (Proportional/Majority)	Automatic registration
Size of the electoral districts	Obligatory registration
Electoral counting system (Hare- Niemeyer/d'Hondt)	Voting on a rest day
Quora (5%), thresholds for non-party groups, etc.	Days of voting, early voting
Enfranchisement of foreigners	Proxy voting
Quota for regions	Postal voting for people abroad
Age of voting	Postal voting
Length of legislative period (frequency of elections)	Electronic voting machines
Conjunction of elections	Cross linking of the polling stations
Personal vote: direct election of the mayors	Alternative polling booth
Gender quota	Electronic voting by telephone, text messages, digital TV, etc
Compulsory voting	Remote Internet voting

Kersting 2005

The conjunction of elections at local, state and federal levels could enhance turnout because saliency in national elections is regarded as high. Such conjunction, however, contradicts the idea of federalism and could confuse voters.

With the abolition of a quorum (5 per cent in Germany, for example) and the introduction of new formulas in representative electoral counting systems (the d'Hondt to Hare-Niemeyer counting systems) in proportional systems, the influence of the supporters of smaller parties is increasing. Although these measures have had almost no influence on the enhancement of participation rates (see, for example, German local municipalities), they are leading to a greater fragmentation of party systems and probably to greater political instability.

In most countries with a proportional electoral system (IDEA 2002) parties present a list of candidates and receive seats in proportion to their share of the overall vote. The personal vote, that is, a vote for individuals not for party lists, was introduced at the local level in some countries in the 1990s (see preferential

voting, Kersting 2006). It is argued that the personal vote reflects the tendency towards a greater personalisation of politics, which, in turn, leads to greater media coverage and higher electoral turnout. At the local level the direct election of mayors, which is also a personal vote, has been introduced in Zimbabwe (Kersting 2005).

The enfranchisement of women in Switzerland in the 1970s was an important step towards political inclusion, although turnout decreased in the early days. With changes in traditional social roles and with new forms of political socialisation, the voting behaviour of women is becoming similar to that of men, especially in the younger age groups. The implementation of voting rights for foreigners has been carried out at local level and has been a step towards further integration of this group. However, because of a lack of interest, electoral turnout has been low.

Southern Africa seems to be in the lead when it comes to women's electoral rights. In some Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, France and Belgium, for example, new quotas are strengthening the role of women and representatives of regional minorities in local parliaments. In 1997 the SADC summit committed itself to equal representation of women (SADC 2000). The SADC declaration on gender postulated at least 30 per cent representation in all decision-making bodies by 2005 although by 2006 only Mozambique and South Africa had met this target, with Namibia and the Seychelles coming close.

Gender quotas are being discussed in different ways in Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania and South Africa (Molokomme 2000; Nkiwane 2007). Some countries are focusing on either voluntary or compulsory democratisation within parties, forcing them to implement 'zebra' party lists. Others are focusing directly on quotas within parliament. These quotas seem to have no or little influence on voter turnout.

In Southern Africa voting rights are not extended to citizens of other SADC member countries or to other foreigners. The extension of voting rights to citizens living abroad is discussed intensively in, among other countries, Zimbabwe and South Africa. Expatriates tend to be more highly motivated to vote but are often perceived to be critical of the ruling government. Decisions about expatriate voting are often related to the presence or absence of postal voting facilities.

Southern Africa has experienced a number of referenda, which appear to enhance political interest. This was the case in Malawi and Namibia and in Zimbabwe the referendum in 2000 led to mobilisation of the opposition's supporters for the parliamentary and presidential elections. In the long run, the fact that the Mugabe government ignored the results of the referendum may have led to a higher level of cynicism and abstention from voting in 2005. So it is

not merely the fact of a referendum that leads to increased political interest, the country's leadership must also be politically committed to implementing the will of the electorate.

Electoral systems which include compulsory voting or sanctions for non-participation could increase voter turnout by about 10 per cent (Jackman & Miller 1995). Arguments against compulsory voting, however, often refer to civil liberties. It is also feared that obligatory voting, might increase the number of citizens who vote for extremist parties.

In respect of electoral infrastructure there are problems with voter registration. Registration procedures are cumbersome and require personnel in large numbers (SADC Parliamentary Forum 2001). Registration, therefore, should be a continuous exercise. A high level of transparency and free access to stakeholders to control the process are seen as crucial. A national identity card could help to reduce manipulation, such as removal from the voters' roll. A continuous process of registration or even mandatory registration could stop intimidation through political violence. The only countries in which there is automatic or compulsory registration are Angola, Lesotho and Madagascar. Links to national registration records or data matching with other agencies exists only in the Seychelles. However, voter registration has a major influence on electoral participation in Botswana, Madagascar, Mozambique, Tanzania and South Africa but has less impact in Angola, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, the Seychelles, and Zimbabwe.

Infrastructural instruments are used in various countries to facilitate the electoral process. Surprisingly, Zimbabwe seems to use a number of these, among them postal voting and advance voting. South Africa has not introduced postal voting: after extensive analysis it was argued that postal voting might reinforce intra-family coercion and electoral manipulation. The SADC Parliamentary Forum (2001) requested the introduction of proxy voting and voting facilities for illiterate persons, the elderly, and people with disabilities. Although it is used in many countries of the world, postal voting has not enhanced turnout in the SADC region – Zimbabwe being one example of this failure.

In Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania, Zambia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo parliamentary and presidential elections are held at the same time. In Zimbabwe the postponement of the 2008 presidential election to 2010 to coincide with the parliamentary elections was under discussion. Although the survival of the Mugabe regime is an important factor in this discussion, it is also argued that the conjunction of elections reduces electoral costs. Nevertheless, harmonisation of the legislative period and the length of presidential office are not under discussion, nor is the return to a Westminster style parliamentary system, which was aborted in 1987 with the installation of a presidential system.

Other reforms are being recommended and discussed in the SADC region. The SADC parliamentary forum is championing a harmonisation of electoral systems and also refers to the Windhoek Declaration on Freedom of the Press, the Blantyre Declaration of 1997 on Gender Equality, and the Harare Declaration of 1991 to highlight the rights of citizens in the electoral process (SADC Parliamentary Forum 2001).

In its support for harmonising electoral systems the forum calls for government and the ruling party to play a neutral role, which would include not manipulating election dates. The British example of the prime minister setting the election dates is therefore not considered good practice. Public funds should, furthermore, not be misused to support the ruling party in elections. State-owned media should also be neutral and should not manipulate voters.

The implementation of independent regulatory watchdogs and whistle-blowers is also being championed. These include boundary delimitation commissions, electoral tribunals and an impartial, all-inclusive, competent and accountable electoral commission with independent and impartial staff – in other words staff that are not related to government ministries and therefore do not have loyalty issues. National electoral bodies should be selected by a chief justice and judges and should be approved by Parliament.

The electoral infrastructure should allow for a high level of transparency and control, polling stations should not be in private houses but in neutral public places, and ballot boxes should not be opaque and wooden but transparent. The forum also recommends open counting at polling stations and the immediate release of results and/or the sealing of ballot boxes. Polling agents should also attest to whether an election has been free and fair. A perceived lack of fairness has a major influence on efficacy, political cynicism and on voter turnout itself.

CONCLUSION

Any analysis of electoral turnout in Southern Africa reveals a mixed picture. This is often distorted because of the use of official data.

Namibia initially experienced a democratic honeymoon and had a very high turnout in 2004. In Malawi, the turnout is relatively high but the picture is very mixed, with ups and downs. In Tanzania, turnout increased in the last elections.

In Zambia, turnout is low, although it has increased. In South Africa, turnout is also low and a real decline in participation has been experienced. In Botswana, Zimbabwe and Mozambique electoral turnout is very low. Zimbabwe has experienced a decrease since the 1980s, but there was short-term reinvigoration during the highly contested elections in 2000.

Low turnout could become a long-term trend because political apathy is

very high in the younger age groups. Turnout is even lower for local elections. Low turnout has consequences for, among others, the legitimacy of parliaments and electoral campaigns.

It is impossible to find a made-to-measure electoral system that fits all countries, all national levels and all sizes of political communities. 'The fact is that one country's circumstances can vary dramatically from another's, and a judgement on which electoral system is best for a given country should be made in the light of that country's history, social composition and political structure' (Farrell 2002, p 207). The size of a country, its social structure and democratic maturity seem to play an important role in this regard (Dahl & Tufte 1974). According to Katz (1997, p 308), the best electoral system is based on path-dependency and goal-dependency: it is important 'who you are, where you are, and where you want to go'.

The hypothesis that countries with very low electoral turnouts are hesitantly introducing new electoral instruments cannot be confirmed. Electoral reforms seem to depend on democratic tradition. In new democracies, risky instruments that do not strengthen democratic instruments and that open the door to possible manipulation should be rejected.

In addition to all other arguments, as a result of the HIV/Aids pandemic, which has taken the lives of many elected incumbents, the FPTP system results in numerous very costly by-elections. It often seems useful to mix systems and to amalgamate strategies to find compromises: the MMP system as a kind of personalised proportional voting system seems to combine 'the best of both worlds'. Matlosa (2003) suggests that South Africa and Mozambique should not, however, reform the PR system; that Lesotho should analyse its 2002 and 2006 electoral experiences; and that Tanzania should shift from FPTP to MMP and Zimbabwe should change from FPTP either to PR (as it existed in 1980) or to the MMP system. List PR can control the influence of the party hierarchy over the candidates' list only if there is strong inner-party democracy, so instruments that prevent iron-law oligarchy within parties therefore have to be found. Alternatively, the personal vote (cumulative voting) or MMP system can be implemented.

Although individual efforts are reduced and voting is facilitated by electoral infrastructure (postal voting, advanced voting, etc), Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Lesotho, Botswana and South Africa have low electoral turnouts. The main reason for this is either the electoral disjunction of presidential and parliamentary elections or the fact that the president is not elected directly. In Mozambique and Zambia the lack of instruments facilitating elections and low parliamentary strength seem to be important reasons for the low turnout.

Tanzania has a presidential system but a relatively strong Parliament, with presidential and parliamentary elections being held together and producing high

voter turnouts. In Namibia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, electoral conjunction and facilitating instruments lead to high turnout. The Seychelles and Mauritius, as smaller countries, do not have to rely on instruments, such as postal voting.

Clientelism and networks are important factors in voter behaviour in all Southern African countries. Strong social networks and group identity motivate the casting of ballots and define voting decision. These networks are weaker in countries with higher urbanisation, but why is voter turnout so different in Southern Africa?

The most important factor is voter registration. It is also a field of manipulation, often invisible to electoral observers. To combat such manipulation automatic registration or mandatory registration (see elections Nigeria 2007) could be a solution. With proper registration, all citizens are included.

Although voter registration appears to be the most critical problem, other electoral infrastructure must be improved. One instrument might be more sophisticated voting facilities – electronic voting machines, which can be combined with electronic registration, are used successfully in many countries, India and Brazil, for example.

Internet voting would be problematic because of the digital divide and low proliferation but, given the high level of cellphone usage, text-message voting might be a more realistic option although there are the same problems as with postal voting with regard to secrecy of the vote and possible manipulation (Kersting/Baldersheim 2004)

Family voting (proxy voting for children), smart voting (more information and control of incumbents), voucher systems (distribution of resources to NGOs or parties) and lotteries for voters (the fun factor) as well as local referenda (thematic decisions initiated by citizen) are being discussed and the last mentioned has been implemented quite successfully at local level (IDEA 2006; Kersting, Schmitter & Trechsel 2007). Local referenda, with their pre-legislative effects, could be a useful tool for strengthening democracy in Africa.

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