



**Realising effective and sustainable  
democratic governance in Southern  
Africa and beyond.**

**Party Systems in the SADC Region:  
In Defence of the Dominant Party  
System**

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## **Introduction**

Since its transition to democracy in the early 1990s, the SADC region's democratic credentials have undergone a series of assessments to examine the state of their strength/entrenchment. Many observers, in their attempt to carry out such assessments, have utilised a range of indicators, "as evidence of a successful transition to democracy"<sup>1</sup> as well as a series of differing tests to determine the likelihood of its consolidation. Most recent studies as a result, have focused on determining the degree to which these democratic transitions have been consolidated and many have arrived at the principle conclusion that in the last decades there have been numerous and persistent challenges to democratic consolidation. The most pertinent of these, apart from the difficulty of creating a viable opposition and building autonomous civil society organisations, is the rapid movement toward a one-party dominant political system. They argue that what remains as a formidable challenge are the indications that "within the institutions of political society, where partisan contestation for political power takes place",<sup>2</sup> there has been a continuing agenda by dominant parties to entrench and maintain their dominance.

Other studies have produced similar conclusions (see Barkan 1999) - that an important by-product of the dynamics existing in democratic transitions in the region, is the preponderance of incumbent authoritarians and a domination of regions across these countries by one party<sup>3</sup>. In his paper "Protracted

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<sup>1</sup> Gretchen Bauer, "Challenges to Democratic Consolidation in Namibia", published in *State, Conflict and Democracy in Africa*, edited by Richard Joseph 1999

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> Joel D. Barkan, "Protracted Transitions Among Africa's New Democracies", *Democratization*,

Transitions among Africa's New Democracies", Barkan suggests that discussions of democratic transition and consolidation need to devote much attention to the structural conditions that prevailed in neo-patrimonial regimes. He argues that from the seven<sup>4</sup> structural conditions he identified that shape African Transitions - the most important being the effects of Africa's "very short and imposed previous experience with democratic rule - two features or by-products emerge from this predetermined situation. The first is the emergence of "incumbent authoritarian rulers that represent one geographic region or a coalition of regions, and the second, a domination of a series of regions in most countries by one party"<sup>5</sup> as already noted above. In the context of this paper, the issue that is relevant, however, is not the viewpoint/approach that he takes but the conclusions he discerns from this approach, which are similar to those of many other approaches; in that the distinct feature of democratic transitions in the region has been the gradual slide toward one-party dominance.

Even those scholars who have administered the parochial electoral

criteria to determine whether democratic regimes in the region have become consolidated have ascertained that democracy in the region has not been consolidated because many of the founding and second elections in the region did not result in leadership alternation. This is despite its simplistic approach and the condemnation by other analysts that such an approach risks the "fallacy of electoralism"<sup>6</sup>. Although the main purpose of these studies was to merely look at elections "to see what they portend for the consolidation of democracy"<sup>7</sup>, they concluded that consolidation only occurs when there has been a regime change. Samuel Huntington referred to this as the "two-turnover test", according to which consolidation occurs whenever the winners of founding elections are defeated in a subsequent election, and the new winners themselves later accept an electoral turnover.<sup>8</sup> As already observed, it is worth noting that such an approach has been criticised for its one-dimensional understanding of democracy. It presupposes that "formal procedures for elections do create if not a liberal democracy, at least an electoral democracy and that elections if conducted regularly and fairly can in and of themselves create a broader consolidated democracy"<sup>9</sup>.

To illustrate more clearly what has been said so far; regional elections whether founding or second elections have not always resulted in leadership

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<sup>4</sup> The paper observes the following conditions: "that the experience with democratic rule was short and imposed; that the economic conditions required to sustain democracy, if not launch a transition are poor; that almost all African countries remain agrarian societies, with the exception of a few countries. In this context Africans usually define their political interest in terms of where they live and their effective ties to their neighbors rather than on the basis of what they do or their socio-economic status; that all African countries with the exception of Botswana and Somalia are plural societies – societies populated by members of two or more ethnic or linguistic groups each of which inhabits a distinct territorial homeland; that the African state provides a much larger proportion of wage employment; and finally that African politics have long been marked by neo-patrimonial norms of political authority and forms of governance.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

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<sup>6</sup> Karl in "Imposing Consent" quoted in Michael Bratton and Daniel N. Posner, "A first look at the second Elections in Africa with illustrations from Zambia" published in *State, Conflict and Democracy in Africa*, edited by Richard Joseph 1999

<sup>7</sup> Michael Bratton and Daniel N. Posner, "A first look at the second Elections in Africa with illustrations from Zambia" published in *State, Conflict and Democracy in Africa*, edited by Richard Joseph 1999

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*

alternation. The region in the early 1990's saw a wave of multiparty elections, which marked a transition from a period of authoritarian rule to a new era of democratic government. This trend has continued and has firmly been entrenched in the politics of the region. Given that elections have continued to be conducted, and we are now arriving at the third round. These were initially initiated by Zambia followed soon thereafter by South Africa, Tanzania, Namibia, and Malawi, to mention but a few. However surveys of both founding and second elections reveal not only a trend of declining quality of electoral management that has affected the competition qualifications and quality of elections but also a trend of elections that did not result in leadership alternation. The table below displays a list of countries in the region illustrating this latter trend.

**Table 1: Parliamentary Elections 1995-2001**

Country	Date	Ruling Party	Party Alternation	Vote %	Party Seats %
Tanzania	1995	CCM	No	76.5	80.2
	2000	CCM	No	72.8	89.1
Namibia	1994	SWAPO	No	76.0	76.1
	1999	SWAPO	No	62.1	
Zambia	1996	MMD	No	78.5	60.8
	2001	MMD	No		
Zimbabwe		ZI-PF	No	31.8.	53
		ZI-PF	No	48.3	
South Africa	1994	ANC	No	86.9	66.4
	1999	ANC	No	89.3	
Malawi	1994	UDF	No	80.0	47.3
	1999	UDF	No	92.3	
Botswana	1994	BDP	No	76.7	5.2
	1999	BDP	No	77.1	

Sources<sup>10</sup>

Acknowledging that the introduction of multiparty politics in Africa has resulted, among others, in an unexpected slide toward one-party dominance is just the starting premise of this paper. As the debate above has

revealed, many democratic transitions in the region develop slowly and a typical feature of this development as democracy is drawn out over lengthy time spans, has been the existence of dominant party regimes. However, without getting stuck on the debate around the constraints, primary features, challenges and obstacles to the consolidation of democracy - one of which as already noted is party dominance - the fact remains that one-party dominance is not a democratically preferred principle. Hence some consideration in the introduction, albeit briefly, needs to be devoted to the detrimental implications of dominant party systems and the strategies applied by incumbent parties to retain such dominance.

One way of looking at this is to myopically focus on elections because for the most part, this is the one area in which leaders have chosen to focus their efforts to retain political dominance. And, as some cases in the region strikingly illustrate; "dominant parties have not hesitated to structure the rules of electoral competition to their own advantage"<sup>11</sup>. In this regard, the trend has reflected a decline in the quality of elections caused largely by the electoral imperfections induced by incumbent parties. Some of the electoral rules that receive the most abuse and manipulation by ruling authorities include the issue of candidacy eligibility. This usually involves disqualifying the principal rivals for the presidency, which has assured many a political regime the necessary political control. Other principal sources of electoral malpractice manipulated by incumbent parties stem from campaign periods. Rules of campaign conduct are unfairly shaped and reconfigured as a party deems fit. Vote buying and political intimidation stand out as the most

<sup>10</sup> Michael Bratton and Daniel N. Posner, "A first look at the second Elections in Africa with illustrations from Zambia" published in *State, Conflict and Democracy in Africa*, edited by Richard Joseph 1999

widespread electoral malpractices in this regard. Thus because of such rigorous manipulation practices of the electoral rules, dominant parties have usually gone on to win one election after the other.

Other factors underpin the process of entrenching dominance besides the absence of electoral competition. According to Giliomee and Simkins, these include the “elimination of the dividing line between the ruling party and the state with the result that the ruling party comes to be seen as the state rather than a temporary government; arbitrary decision making that undermines the integrity of democratic institutions such as the legislature and the judiciary; and the abuse of advantages enjoyed by incumbency as well as abuse of public institutions and resources.”<sup>12</sup> The advantages alluded to by the authors refer specifically to the decided benefits dominant parties have over the opposition, over and above their ability to terrorise and intimidate the opposition. These are firstly the authority a dominant party has to determine the date of elections. Secondly the ability to monopolise state media and thirdly, the benefits it has in having a stronger and more developed party organisation, although this is seen more as a genuine advantage than one that can be manipulated.<sup>13</sup>

Zambia and Zimbabwe stand as the most suggestive cases of the above. In the 1990 general elections, ZANU-PF, the ruling party in Zimbabwe won 117 out of the 120 seats open for contestation in the 150-member

Parliament.<sup>14</sup> The distribution of parliamentary seats in the 1995 general elections was the same. Although this number fell dramatically to only 63<sup>15</sup> seats after the 2002 general elections, as a result of MDC’s momentous advancement in the country’s political processes, the hegemony of ZANU-PF hardly diminished. If anything, it was strengthened through other channels. As Matlosa and Mbaya noted “ruling parties dominate not only in the legislature but more importantly the executive organ too, which in turn give impetus to their undue influence and control over the judiciary as well. The recent conflicts in Zimbabwe”, they continue to observe, “between the executive arm and the judiciary organ are clear testimony to the tensions among key organs of the state as a result of the overwhelming hegemony of the one-party executive”<sup>16</sup>. The situation in Zimbabwe however, is much more stark than they suggest. In this country there has been no government change since independence despite the introduction of multiparty politics in the early 1990s. The country has functioned as a de facto one party state since the merger between ZANU and ZAPU in 1998<sup>17</sup>, a move that was cemented by other dimensions to help the new party

<sup>14</sup> Per Nordlund, “Organizing the Political Agora: Domination and Democratization in Zambia and Zimbabwe”, Uppsala University, 1996

<sup>15</sup> In 2002 Zimbabwe’s legislature had 53% of ruling party seats in a 150-member parliament, with 57 opposition seats and 30 appointed seats. *Source*: Matlosa and Mbaya, “An analysis of Utilization of State/Public resources during elections: A comparative survey of experiences in the SADC region, 2003.

<sup>16</sup> Matlosa and Mbaya, “An analysis of Utilization of State/Public resources during elections: A comparative survey of experiences in the SADC region, 2003

<sup>17</sup> In fact Zimbabwe in 1984 had toyed with the idea of becoming a de jure one-party state. In a 1984 ZANU party congress, the party’s formal ideological objective was to pursue a socialist state based on Marxist-Leninist principles, which had entailed the establishment of a one-party state, an objective that was nonetheless eventually abandoned.

<sup>12</sup> Herman Giliomee and Charles Simkins, “*The Awkward Embrace; One Party Domination and Democracy*”, Tafelberg Publishers 1999

<sup>13</sup> Joel D. Barkan, “Protracted Transitions Among Africa’s New Democracies”, *Democratization*, Volume 7, Number 3 2000, edited by Todd Eisenstadt

formalise its dominance<sup>18</sup>. These strategies resemble those pursued by today's government, although less brutal and blatant. Since the March 2002 elections, in an attempt to strengthen his volatile hegemony, Mugabe has increasingly relied on violence to control the opposition, win the elections and deter mass action. He has put in place a legal infrastructure designed to extinguish dissent, to consolidate his hold on the economy, state institutions, and the media<sup>19</sup>. In summary, with ZANU-PF's hegemony secured, Zimbabwe is better characterised as a neo-authoritarian one-party political system.

In the case of Zambia, the country's political record to date has confirmed the suspicions of many pundits, namely that the introduction of multiparty political competition in Africa has essentially not negated the post independence authoritarian framework of politics. Notwithstanding the restoration of multiparty politics in 1991, which was widely lauded as a model for the rest of the region, Zambia remains a *de facto* one-party state. The three elections since that date have returned the MMD (Movement for Multiparty Democracy) to power each time. In the 1991 highly contested elections against Kaunda's party UNIP (United National Independence Party), MMD with 71.9% as opposed to UNIP's 23.6% of the votes, took 125 parliamentary seats.<sup>20</sup> The 1996 elections saw

MMD's parliamentary seats increase by 6 seats. Although this figure fell dramatically to 69 seats in the 2001 elections due effectively to continual splintering and fragmentation within the party, the MMD's legislative dominance under Mwanawasa's leadership has now been maintained with an average of 127 parliamentary seats. Opposition party defections have been the single factor behind this comeback.

Under Chiluba, Zambia's performance regressed politically. Despite high expectations his governance style mirrored that of Kaunda's hence the conclusions by analysts that Zambia's re-democratisation, disappointingly, did not amount to much. If anything it only transformed Zambia from a *de jure* to a *de facto* one-party state (see Burnell, 2001; (Pierre Du Toit, 1999; Bratton and Posner 1999). In short, the continuing exploitation of government resources and the manipulation of democratic institutions to undermine the opposition, among other factors, preserved the political culture of a one party state.

Despite all of the above, the aim of this paper is to argue that dominance is not only caused by forms of coercion or electoral manipulation or through any of the strategies thus far discussed but that some parameters of politics do indeed aid dominance in democratically acceptable ways. Dominance, the paper will show, may be based on consent or even indifference on the part of the citizenry, it may be entrenched by real electorate support, it may be necessary for the promotion of national reconciliation and it may be a reflection of the non-manipulative capacity of the dominant party, among other factors on which this paper will

<sup>18</sup> Pierre Du toit, "Bridge or Bridgehead? Comparing the party systems of Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi, published in *The Awkward Embrace; One Party Domination and Democracy*, edited by Herman Giliomee and Charles Simkins, Tafelberg Publishers 1999

<sup>19</sup> "Zimbabwe: The politics of national liberation and international division", International Crisis Group (ICG) *Africa Report* No.52, 17 October 2002

<sup>20</sup> Pierre Du toit, "Bridge or Bridgehead? Comparing the party systems of Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi, published in *The Awkward Embrace; One Party Domination and Democracy*, edited by Herman

later elucidate. In sum, the assertion is that party dominance should not only be viewed as a state of politics that can only be achieved by wholly undemocratic means. In other words, dominance should not only be looked at as being a symptom of unhealthy dynamics in a particular society. The objective here is not to justify the undemocratic conditions of such a system but rather provide a viable defence of the usually ignored positive implications of dominance that do not, in essence, invalidate democracy.

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

### **Unraveling the Fallacy of Party Dominance**

Before highlighting some of the democratic features that may entrench a party's dominance, it is important to draw attention to the different evolution stages, or forms of dominant party rule, mentioned above. Giliomee and Simkins have referred to three such evolution forms of dominant party rule in their discussions<sup>21</sup>. Firstly, dominant party rule they suggest, can be summarised as a "regime innovation in the direction of a liberal democracy".<sup>22</sup> The dominant parties

that demonstrate characteristics associated to such a pattern are those in advanced industrialised democracies. Here a party's dominance is recognised by society as an outcome rightly deserved as a result of its progress and achievements. These go beyond mere accomplishments in the electoral arena. The strength depends much more on the party's ability to reformulate complex economic and social matters in such a way that the party's view on them becomes a national political consensus.<sup>23</sup> Other factors such as leadership skills in managing the divergent issues facing its country and the party's ability to remain open and non-exclusionary also decidedly fortify that dominance. The assumption is that any dominant regime type that is indeed evolving in the direction of a liberal democracy, is naturally at the same time operating compliantly/willingly within the boundaries of democracy and is committed to competitive politics.

A second pattern of dominance highlighted in their discussions is what they call a "semi-democracy stuck half way between authoritarianism and liberal democracy." In this dominant regime, a party's authority is obtained by "openly utilizing authoritarian practices alongside democratic procedures"<sup>24</sup> The authoritarian practices of which they speak, refer to activities designed specifically to protect the regime from political changes. These have ranged from manipulating rules of electoral competition, to designing laws that legally allow such exploitation. The small degree of democracy in fact tolerated by the regime, Giliomee and Simkins observed, is done so "because

<sup>21</sup> H. Giliomee and C. Simkins, "The Dominant party regimes of South Africa, Mexico, Taiwan and Malaysia: A comparative assessment, published in *The Awkward Embrace; One Party Domination and Democracy*, edited by Herman Giliomee and Charles Simkins, Tafelberg Publishers 1999

<sup>22</sup> *ibid*

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*

<sup>24</sup> H. Giliomee and C. Simkins, "The Dominant party regimes of South Africa, Mexico, Taiwan and Malaysia: A comparative assessment, published in *The Awkward Embrace; One Party Domination and Democracy*, edited by Herman Giliomee and Charles Simkins, Tafelberg Publishers 1999

it presents it with so few difficulties”.<sup>25</sup> What it does however, it deceitfully borrows some features of democracy such as electoralism but it ensures that it only partially and fraudulently concedes to what it borrows. And the third pattern persuasively examined by both analysts is that of “presiding over an eroding liberal democracy in the direction of mere majoritarianism and electoralism”. This is a regime that has adopted/acquired many features of liberal democracy and, in addition functions in an almost competitive party system which according to the authors, however “acts as a cloak for domination of one group over the other”.

The above analysis of the three distinctive forms of dominant party rule, forces one to draw the following conclusions. Firstly it is important to mention that the four country case studies examined in this paper share similar characteristics, to those prescribed in all the different evolution stages. Put somewhat differently, all four cases do not display a single likely pattern such as the second pattern (*a semi democracy stuck halfway between authoritarianism and liberal democracy*), the most probable pattern most observers assume for dominant regimes such as the CCM, SWAPO and to a lesser extent BDP and ANC. Even Giliomee and Simkins acknowledge in their study that their four cases (Malaysia, Taiwan, South Africa and Mexico) taken together do not display a distinct pattern. These countries have displayed certain characteristics that are synonymous with all features of the three different patterns of dominance. It is all too easy to mark the preponderance of dominant party systems in transitional multiparty politics as an obstacle/challenge to the consolidation of democracy and to judge its

existence as a symptom of unhealthy politics. However, if it is possible to have a dominant system functioning within the parameters of liberal democratic polities, then it is correct to assume and acknowledge that democratic features of a dominant party system do exist. What is not highly acceptable or credible however, as noted in a number of studies, is the idea that such democratic features exist in polities other than those that function in the direction of a liberal democracy as alluded to by Giliomee and Simkins. The essential point being made here is that party dominant systems, even if operating in the other two least desirable forms, can be achieved in part by democratic means.

### **In the Name of National Reconciliation and Nation Building**

Most of the dominant cases under review in this paper originated either in a crisis, South Africa stands perhaps as the only case in this category, or originated as post independence forces endowed with the task of nation building whilst facing volatile post liberation politics. In South Africa and Namibia, the destabilisation of apartheid has provided, in part, some justification for a dominant party rule. Whilst this is true in most countries facing such types of aggression, it must be noted that a party’s dominance itself was made possible by the forefront role these parties had in the struggle and thus the support such a role was accorded. In Namibia, SWAPO’s contributions in the struggle against apartheid South Africa cemented its dominance. As a premier nationalist organisation during the struggle – SWAPO was among the first black political organisation in Namibia and the only organisation to engage in armed struggle – it managed to command and still does to this day, the loyalty and allegiance of the majority

<sup>25</sup> *ibid*

of the Namibian people.<sup>26</sup>

Likewise, the ANC's widely shared conception as a liberation movement helps it command similar loyalty among the South African people. The ANC is in fact, the world's oldest liberation movement with its formations dating as far back as 1912.<sup>27</sup> As the oldest serving liberation party there is every possibility that such status will continue to help consolidate its dominance. As Steven Friedman puts it "the ANC has, over more than eight decades, established itself as the almost unchallenged symbolic vehicle of majority aspirations for liberation. Its hegemony as a result seems to rest on irrefutable logic"<sup>28</sup> The Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) also serves as an illustrative example of how it assumed its dominant status as a result of its role in the struggle against colonial rule. To put it differently, almost all of the four dominant parties (ANC, CCM, SWAPO, and BDP) under review have relied heavily on what Friedman refers as the powerful "founding myth"; their role in spearheading the demise of either apartheid or colonial rule.<sup>29</sup> This identification "with an epoch" by the majority of the electorate in these countries seems to have legitimised the dominance enjoyed by these parties.

It is not just the destabilisation process that requires or demands the existence

of a dominant party or, that in effect, the role played by parties in this process entrenches dominance. Party dominance, it has been argued, serves well when there is need to promote national reconciliation and forge the unity required after oppressive systems such as apartheid have been eliminated. With this in mind there are those that have greeted the ANC's overwhelming power positively. A degree of political stability needed to be established in the new South Africa, to not only promote national reconciliation but also create the preconditions for democracy and build the nation, especially in the context of the immense political and development challenges it faced.<sup>30</sup> According to this model of democratic stability which supports dominant party systems "the dominant party is a much better stabilizing mechanism than fragmented parties".<sup>31</sup> Indeed, there is no denying that the ANC played a stabilising role in the inauguration of South Africa's democracy which might otherwise have been derailed if the ANC, like the other parties, had been fragmented and weak to the point where there was no dominant political formation.

By suggesting that a party's dominance is valuable and legitimate for as long as the electorate continues to identify it as a founding party or, more particularly, if its rule is necessary for both social and democratic progress, this section makes one principal assertion; that dominant parties can in fact act as "benign bridge builders". This is a concept borrowed from Pierre Du Toit who argues that dominant

<sup>26</sup> Gretchen Bauer, "Challenges to Democratic Consolidation in Namibia", published in *State, Conflict and Democracy in Africa*, edited by Richard Joseph 1999

<sup>27</sup> Steven Friedman, "No easy stroll to dominance: party dominance, opposition and civil society in South Africa", published in *The Awkward Embrace; On eParty Domination and Democracy*, edited by Herman Giliomee and Charles Simkins, Tafelberg Publishers 1999

<sup>28</sup> Steven Friedman, "No easy stroll to dominance: party dominance, opposition and civil society in South Africa", published in *The Awkward Embrace; One Party Domination and Democracy*, edited by Herman Giliomee and Charles Simkins, Tafelberg Publishers 1999

<sup>29</sup> *ibid*

<sup>30</sup> Anthony Butler, "South Africa's political futures: the positive and negative implications of one party dominance, paper presented at EISA 7 August 2002

<sup>31</sup> H. Giliomee and C. Simkins, "The Dominant party regimes of South Africa, Mexico, Taiwan and Malaysia: A comparative assessment, published in *The Awkward Embrace; One Party Domination and Democracy*, edited by Herman Giliomee and Charles Simkins, Tafelberg Publishers 1999

<sup>31</sup> *ibid*



parties can facilitate the development of a democratic regime and thus serve as benign bridge builders. However, he hastens to add that a dominant party can only have such bridging mechanisms if it is accompanied with the necessary party organisational functions; these being party strength and party system strength. Strong parties he says “outlive charismatic leaders, exhibit organizational linkages, produce effective competition and yield a strong party system” among others. He nonetheless emphatically adds that in the emerging democracies of African states, it is very unlikely that these benign bridging functions actually exist. For this reason, he argues that dominant parties “are more likely to act as bridgeheads to single party hegemony, either through a sustained period of electoralism or in the form of elections which amount to pseudo democracy?”<sup>32</sup>

Part of this paper will argue differently. Whilst it is true that the state building process is still new in Southern Africa and thus relatively weak, the organisational strengths which Du Toit claims can give a dominant party the ability to perform this bridging function do in fact exist, although not in the same level found in western democracies. For instance, although the ANC will invariably capitalise on Nelson Mandela’s founding figure, it has to a large degree managed to politically function without him; a reflection of the only symbolic influence he now exerts. In other words, in line with Du Toit’s thought, this paper will argue that by looking in particular at the electorate’s behaviour, the strength of a dominant

party, the strength of the party system and lastly but not least the economic and social performance of a dominant party, one could argue that dominant systems such as the ANC, BDP, CCM and SWAPO can be viewed or accepted to some degree as legitimate dominant democracies.

### Stable Roots in Society

The salient point here is that dominant systems in some cases are a truthful expression of the will of the electorate, which is made up mostly of societies that have formed allegiances with incumbent parties. Transition parties or more accurate liberation parties gain considerably from their political allegiances with stable rural societies and their existence goes a long way in explaining how dominant parties are able to cement their hold on the reins of power. According to Kuenzi and Lambright, “a party’s ability to survive reflects its ability to maintain support in the population”.<sup>33</sup> In their study they used two indicators to show the extent to which parties have fairly stable roots in society; one of which was the percentage of lower chamber seats obtained by parties and the other was the average of parties with ten percent of the lower-chamber seats. Kuenzi and Lambright’s results for the first indicator reveal that all the parties used in this paper as case studies, with the exception of Tanzania, have held over 70 percent of the lower chamber seats in the 1994 election. BDP in Botswana, for example had the highest percentage (100%) of lower-chamber seats obtained in the 1994 elections. These figures reflect BDP’s electoral dominance, made possible by the stable roots it has in society.<sup>34</sup> The question that begs attention in this case

<sup>32</sup> Pierre Du Toit, “Bridge or Bridgehead? Comparing the party systems of Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi, published in *The Awkward Embrace; One Party Domination and Democracy*, edited by Herman Giliomee and Charles Simkins, Tafelberg Publishers 1999

<sup>33</sup> Michelle Kuenzi and Gina Lambright, “Party system institutionalization in 30 African countries” *Journal of Party Politics*, Volume 7, No.4, pp437-468, 2001 SAGE Publications

<sup>34</sup> *ibid*

is that if a party wins the majority of the votes and consistently does so in a modestly credible and legitimate electoral process, is this in and of itself bad?

There are those however, see du Toit for example, who argue that given that these support bases are ethnically dependent, it undermines the legitimacy of this electorate support and that dominance becomes more threatening if these support bases “reflects and exacerbates race based political identity”<sup>35</sup>. In Namibia, for example, SWAPO has been the only party to secure a popular base among the Ovambo who make up 51% of the Namibian population. It seems therefore, that SWAPO’s dominance continues to be entrenched through ethnic appeals<sup>36</sup>. We need to face reality however. In the particular case of South Africa, given that the black support base, which is at the same time a racial/ethnic base, keeps returning the ANC again and again to position of dominance; should this mean that their consensus is any less legitimate because it is ethnically or racially based? The results from the SABC/Markinor survey, the Afro barometer and the HSRC surveys have all suggested that there has been a considerable stability in voter support patterns for the ANC since the 1994 elections. As one might have expected, their voter support maximised with 69% in the first “liberation” election, a level which has not easily been sustained but nonetheless has remained stable since then<sup>37</sup>. According to the

latest SABC/Makinor opinion poll, 64% of the eligible voters are likely to vote for the ANC in the upcoming elections scheduled for 14 April 2004. These patterns suggest that a bonding has occurred between the ANC and the mass of its electorate, which contrary to popular or scholarly belief is, in fact, not racially dependent. According to Lanegran “a variety of reports and multi party democracy surveys published over the years suggest that the race-based interpretation of South African political parties is incorrect”. She bases this view partly on a public opinion survey published by Robert Mattes of the Institute of Democracy of South Africa (IDASA). This revealed that in the Western Cape, the ANC support in the 1994 elections was divided approximately 50% to 40% between African and Coloured voters.<sup>38</sup> This, if anything, suggests that to some extent the ANC’s dominance is indeed not overwhelmingly dependent on one racial group and thus can be regarded as a true expression of the electorate’s will.

Of course incumbency allows dominant parties to sustain these “stable roots in society” and maintain its rural support base by “indulging in politically calculated disbursements of government funds to rural areas”<sup>39</sup>. Evidence suggests that government spending targeted to rural areas tends to increase during elections which may to a degree, assist dominant parties in maintaining their rural support base. Overall however, the use of such incumbency to allocate resources in a more party-interested manner or even for party political gain has been

<sup>35</sup> Kimberly Lanegran, South Africa’s 1999 election: Consolidating a dominant party system, *Africa Today*; June 22, 2001;

<sup>36</sup> Gretchen Bauer, “Challenges to Democratic Consolidation in Namibia”, published in *State, Conflict and Democracy in Africa*, edited by Richard Joseph 1999

<sup>37</sup> Lawrence Schlemmer, “Democracy or Democratic Hegemony: The future of Political Pluralism in South Africa, published in *“The Awkward Embrace; One Party Domination and*

*Democracy*, edited by Herman Giliomee and Charles Simkins, Tafelberg Publishers 1999

<sup>38</sup> Kimberly Lanegran, South Africa’s 1999 election: Consolidating a dominant party system, *Africa Today*; June 22, 2001;

<sup>39</sup> Wiseman John A, The Slow evolution of the party system in Botswana, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, January 1998.

relatively modest in some of these countries. Besides, despite the transparency of the rules, the balance of scales will always seem to favour the ruling party as a result of the advantages afforded by its incumbency. For the most part, these advantages are legitimate, unavoidable and even inevitable.

It must be noted however, like all the other factors which ensure dominance, these “stable roots in society” will not endure indefinitely. There are already signs of these societies’ support declining in many African nations. Urban Africans for example are showing disinterest and dissatisfaction with the performance of their governments and have begun to call for better government. According to the *Economist’s* Sub Saharan survey, their numbers have risen from 23% of Africa’s population in 1980 to 35% in 2001.<sup>40</sup> The BDP in particular has been unable to extend its voting support into the newly emerging urban voters. It has to date, depended largely on its original voters who have included the rural traditionalists, state bureaucrats and its ethnic groups. Meanwhile its most ardent opposition, the Botswana National Front (BNF) keeps drawing support from the urban groups at their expense<sup>41</sup> Friedman called this “the generational change” threat; in which the new generation of voters mostly urban and better informed voters do not view the dominant party’s heroic deeds with the same enthusiasm; a factor which managed over the decades to ensure the dominant party its supremacy<sup>42</sup>. This is indeed an

indication that such dominance enjoyed by the ANC, CCM, and SWAPO is not inevitable and necessarily everlasting or interminable.

If this could happen in Botswana, it most certainly can to the ANC and CCM. The party system in Botswana is seen as changing from a dominant party system to a semi-dominant party system. Until recently “no election in Botswana was seriously about which party will win power but only about where the opposition might or might not make gains”<sup>43</sup>. Giliomee and Simkins in their observations point to the various cycles that domination dominant parties inevitably live through historically, especially in relation to advanced countries. Such a cycle began with “the inauguration of dominant party rule, which then passes through a consolidation phase and ends with its first time defeat”.<sup>44</sup> While the same cannot be said about BDP’s dominance, it nevertheless appears to be slowly coming to the end of its prolonged dominance. Indicating that, like the advanced countries featured in the Giliomee and Simkins study, non authoritarian dominant systems in SADC too have a restricted life span to their apparent longevity.

### Commitment to Competitive Politics

So far the arguments above have focused on the “natural advantages” or long-term benefits usually enjoyed by dominant parties which have allowed them to retain their dominant status. Consequently it is widely assumed that given these advantages, dominant parties in the region have little incentive to govern effectively in a reasonably competitive environment

<sup>40</sup> *The Economist’s* Sub-Saharan Survey, January 15<sup>th</sup> 2004

<sup>41</sup> Pierre Du Toit, “Bridge or Bridgehead? Comparing the party systems of Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi, published in *The Awkward Embrace; One Party Domination and Democracy*, edited by Herman Giliomee and Charles Simkins, Tafelberg Publishers 1999

<sup>42</sup> Steven Friedman, “No easy stroll to dominance: party dominance, opposition and civil society in South Africa”, published in *The Awkward Embrace; One Party Domination and Democracy*, edited by Herman Giliomee and Charles Simkins, Tafelberg Publishers 1999

<sup>43</sup> Wiseman John A, The Slow evolution of the party system in Botswana, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, January 1998

<sup>44</sup> Hermann Giliomee and Charles Simkins, “The Dominant party regimes of South Africa, Mexico, Taiwan and Malaysia: A comparative assessment in *The Awkward Embrace: One Party Domination and Democracy* edited by Giliomee and Simkins, 1999

and to allow the conditions for democratic competition to thrive. The point to be made here, however, is that some of the region's party dominant systems do for the most part operate in conditions of political competition; in that there is "regular and open electoral contest, opposition parties are free to organize and civil liberties are at least respected"<sup>45</sup> In other words, dominant parties can succeed in securing their dominance while remaining within the parameters of constitutional democracy, and if they succeed in doing so their dominance is even more deserved. In fact, provided civil liberties and competition exists, dominant party systems can serve well as necessary platforms for a democratic system; a point which echoes du Toit's argument "that dominant parties can only be benign bridge builders if political competition and a large measure of civil liberties exist".<sup>46</sup>

The problem arises however, when it is assumed that for the most part civil liberties and political competition are not safeguarded in dominant party systems of the SADC region. In fact, without hesitation it is invariably assumed that dominant parties are a sign of suppression of political competition. The BDP of Botswana and the ANC in South Africa however, stand as the closest examples of parties which function in fairly competitive political systems, where as the other countries, their scope for competitive politics admittedly remains limited. It should be recalled that South Africa has some impressive democratic

features. It has an independent judiciary, a progressive bill of rights, a vigorous civil society, institutions such as the police that are independent from the state and an independent Electoral Commission, free press, relatively free electoral competition and the right of political association, among others. Botswana also appears to be another case where a dominant party system functions within the parameters of constitutional democracy. The country actually presents a unique case in the region; it has had competitive party politics and regular free and fair elections since independence. True, democracy has yet to be consolidated towards a viable liberal democratic system in both these countries.

Of course, the relatively high level socio-economic conditions for democratic competition are much better realised in Botswana and South Africa than in countries such as Tanzania and Namibia. But the dominant-party systems of both these latter countries, the paper cautiously argues, have remained moderately democratic. Despite the numerous challenges and constraints facing the political societies in these countries, there have been some gains. Elections in Namibia since its independence in 1990 for instance have been considered free and fair and the country's national legislative bodies have functioned largely unhampered, among other factors.<sup>47</sup> As for Tanzania, a number of elements of fair competition have been introduced through several constitutional amendments, the enactment of other laws and the implementation of policies.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Steven Friedman, "No easy stroll to dominance: party dominance, opposition and civil society in South Africa", published in *The Awkward Embrace: One Party Domination and Democracy*, edited by Herman Giliomee and Charles Simkins, Tafelberg Publishers 1999

<sup>46</sup> Hermann Giliomee and Charles Simkins, "The Dominant party regimes of South Africa, Mexico, Taiwan and Malaysia: A comparative assessment in *The Awkward Embrace: One Party Domination and Democracy* edited by Giliomee and Simkins, 1999

<sup>47</sup> Gretchen Bauer, "Challenges to Democratic Consolidation in Namibia", published in *State, Conflict and Democracy in Africa*, edited by Richard Joseph 1999

<sup>48</sup> Daudi R. Mukangara, "The Parameters of party competition in Tanzania", paper presented at the 6<sup>th</sup> East African Workshop on Transition to democracy, 22-23 September 2003, organized by Research and Education for Democracy in Tanzania (REDET)

**Party Performance:  
Organisationally, Economically and  
Socially**

Another essential point to consider when assessing the democratic credentials of dominant party systems is that domination at the end of the day is “an art far more than it is an inevitability”.<sup>49</sup> Dominant parties in the region managed to receive the loyalty of the majority of the electorate largely due to their ability to position themselves in the party system, both tactically and prudently. This has been possible because the strengths of these parties usually far outweigh those of their opponents. By party strengths, du Toit refers to “the ability of parties to outlive their founding leader, to capture and mobilize support, and to harness the energy of ambitious individuals to the goals of the party among other variables”<sup>50</sup> Of the four countries under review in this paper, Botswana however, according to analysts (see du Toit 1999, Wiseman 1998) is the only dominant party that has thus far succeeded in generating almost all these strengths. The BDP for instance has outlived its founding leader; a factor whose difficulty cannot be underestimated considering the importance Seretse Khama played on the development of the party. His direction and leadership, according to many, originally established the BDP’s dominance.<sup>51</sup> From its election victory

in 1965 until his death, Wiseman suggests that “Seretse’s personal prestige virtually guaranteed all the election victories which the party enjoyed”.<sup>52</sup> Another notable strength of the BDP has been its ability to draw in the support of diverse interest groups such as chiefs, bureaucrats, commercial farmers, and tribal communities.<sup>53</sup> It should also be noted that other dominant parties too, have succeeded in generating, if not all, then at least some of these strengths. The CCM in Tanzania for example is the only party with the capacity to mobilise voters in all corners of the country.<sup>54</sup> With branches in every district and most villages, the CCM remains the most powerful political organisation; a capacity that continues to serve the party well in every election.

Another way of explaining how a party’s strengths can present opportunities for dominance expansion is by illustrating that a lack of these same strengths can affect a dominant party’s progress. Wiseman accurately points out that “factors relating to party strengths such as leadership and party unity certainly help explain the creation and maintenance of the dominant position of incumbent parties, but also help explain the erosion of that position”.<sup>55</sup> In recent years, the BDP’s dominance has been diminishing partly because its party unity has been weakening. The factional cleavages within the BDP, the increasingly obvious personal

<sup>49</sup> Pempel quoted in Steven Friedman, “No easy stroll to dominance: party dominance, opposition and civil society in South Africa”, published in *“The Awkward Embrace ;One Party Domination and Democracy*, edited by Herman Giliomee and Charles Simkins, Tafelberg Publishers 1999

<sup>50</sup> Pierre Du Toit, “Bridge or Bridgehead? Comparing the party systems of Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi, published in *“The Awkward Embrace; One party Domination and Democracy*, edited by Herman Giliomee and Charles Simkins, Tafelberg Publishers 1999

<sup>51</sup> Wiseman John A, The Slow evolution of the party system in Botswana, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, January 1998

<sup>52</sup> *ibid*

<sup>53</sup> *ibid*

<sup>54</sup> Joel D. Barkan, “Protracted Transitions Among Africa’s New Democracies”, *Democratization* , Volume 7, Number 3 2000, edited by Todd Eisenstadt

<sup>55</sup> Pierre Du Toit, “Bridge or Bridgehead? Comparing the party systems of Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi, published in *“The Awkward Embrace; One Party Domination and Democracy*, edited by Herman Giliomee and Charles Simkins, Tafelberg Publishers 1999

disagreements among its elites in public and the uncertainties around Masire's succession all contribute to the deterioration of the party's unity. These could if they remain unresolved, Wiseman suggests, undermine BDP's dominant position within the party system.<sup>56</sup> In the case of the ANC, the tendency of concentrating power at the centre as well as imposing its decisions at the provincial level has weakened both its links with its provincial support bases and its organisational wing. This neglect has tended to reduce the provinces membership bases, as well as its branches. This goes without saying will have wider implications for its dominance (see Friedman 1999).

Another related point to be made here is that, like the organisational strengths that help retain a party's dominance, a well managed economy can also have the same effect. Party dominance in this particular situation goes beyond electoral strength; it rests very much on the party's ability to manage the economy, such that if a party succeeds in promoting economic development year after year, it can yield itself favourable support from the electorate in every election. The BDP party stands as the most suggestive example of this. In fact some would even say (see du Toit 1999 and Wiseman 1999) that the major reason for the party's electoral victory in every election has been found in its economic performance. The BDP, itself, enthusiastically recognises this; and uses it as a main campaign strategy in all its electoral contests by ensuring that its election manifesto features its record on the economy.<sup>57</sup> It is easy to see why the BDP has derived considerable electoral benefit from the country's dramatic growth and

development. After all, Botswana at independence was one of the poorest in the world, with a GNP per capita of US\$14<sup>58</sup>. The country is now designated as an upper middle income country by the World Bank with a GNP per capita of \$3, 950; all made possible by the wide-ranging development policies implemented by BDP on education, health care, urban infrastructure, the economy, and administrative state and which, it must be noted, were all done on an equitable basis across the various regions of the country.<sup>59</sup> Clearly in BDP's case, good economic management remains a major reason for its sustained political success.

The same however, cannot be said of the ANC. Although its support base was largely inspired by their desire for delivery; the ANC's lack of control of the white-controlled economy and its liberalised policies has hindered it from delivering. This suggests that the ANC dominance, if it will continue to be evaluated against its ability to deliver and its economic performance, is fragile and not long-term. Nevertheless for the present, the ANC's dominance seems assured partly because its support base insists that the state has delivered adequately and that it makes it possible for them to "catch up materially with the dominant white socio-economic group"<sup>60</sup>.

### A Fragmented and Weak Opposition

<sup>58</sup> Pierre du Toit, "Bridge or Bridgehead? Comparing the party systems of Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi, published in *The Awkward Embrace; One Party Domination and Democracy*, edited by Herman Giliomee and Charles Simkins, Tafelberg Publishers 1999

<sup>59</sup> *ibid*

<sup>60</sup> Hermann Giliomee and Charles Simkins, "The Dominant party regimes of South Africa, Mexico, Taiwan and Malaysia: A comparative assessment in *The Awkward Embrace; One Party Domination and Democracy* edited by Giliomee and Simkins, 1999

<sup>56</sup> Wiseman John A, The Slow evolution of the party system in Botswana, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, January 1998

<sup>57</sup> *ibid*

By way of concluding the debate, the paper now turns to the role and capacity of opposition parties in dominant party systems. Despite being overshadowed by dominant parties, opposition parties, it has been observed, can play a significant role as either establishers/entrenchers or impeters of dominant party directions. In situations where the opposition takes on the former role, political parties are usually known to be weak and fragmented. The assertion being made here is that highly fragmented opposition parties can and do become unwilling and indirect entrenchers of dominant party systems. As Olukoshi so aptly put it “The dominant party system in Southern Africa is also symptomatic of the weaknesses, fragmentation and disorganization of opposition parties”<sup>61</sup>.

Opposition parties in the region’s transitional democracies are generally conceived as overwhelmingly weak and fragmented. They struggle around major questions of tactics and strategy; they espouse no alternative policy stances that are different from those adopted by current ruling parties and they are divided along grounds of history, ethnicity, and race; some of course more than others<sup>62</sup>. As a result there are very few parties in the region that can truly aspire to serving as an alternative government in their country. To understand why this situation is so pervasive in the region’s new democracies, some attention must be given to the influences of one-party systems on the party organisation of the majority of the countries in the region. Matlosa says “given the all

pervasive political culture of centralization within the one-party system, political parties are highly centralized. This centralization has in turn inculcated and fuelled personality cult politics wherein a party is often equated with the leader. These tendencies have very often led to some form of authoritarian administration. And although most parties argue that they are able to allow internal debate and free flow of divergent ideas, in practice there is very little tolerance of this within parties”<sup>63</sup>. While, it must be said, today’s political parties are much more democratically minded and function within the party framework that is predominantly democratic, the party features of the one party rule have not entirely been abandoned.

Giving some attention to opposition party situations in individual countries will provide a clearer illustration of this perspective. In Tanzania for example almost all opposition parties have been experiencing internal crises, which in turn have left the parties weak and fragmented. The NCCR- Mageuzi (the National Convention for Construction and Reform), the main challenger to CCM in the 1995 elections, stands as the most well-known example of this problem. Soon after the 1995 general elections, NCCR split into two camps, one associated with Augustine Mrema; the party’s presidential candidate (who by the way was formerly a CCM deputy prime minister) and one with its secretary general.<sup>64</sup> Not long afterwards, Mrema abandoned the newly reconstituted NCCR faction and joined the Tanzania Labour Party (TLP) as its chairman.

<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Khabele Matlosa, “Interrogating challenges for Intra-party democracy in Southern Africa”, Paper prepared for the Third Congress of the World Movement for Democracy, Durban, South Africa, 1-4 February 2004

<sup>62</sup> Roger Southall, “Opposition in South Africa: Issues and Problems”, Seminar Report; Opposition in South Africa’s New Democracy, Konrad Adenauer Foundation, 2001

<sup>63</sup> Khabele Matlosa, “Interrogating challenges for Intra-party democracy in Southern Africa”, Paper prepared for the Third Congress of the World Movement for Democracy, Durban, South Africa, 1-4 February 2004

<sup>64</sup> Tim Kelsall, “Governance, democracy and recent political struggles in Mainland Tanzania”, *Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 7/1/2003

The extent of the damage the splits had on the party's political influence can be seen by the dramatic reduction in the party's parliamentary seats. In the 1995 general election, NCCR-Maguezi won 16 seats in the mainland Parliament with 27.8% of the presidential votes going to Mrema. By the 2000 general elections however, not only did the party fail to field a presidential candidate, their failure to overcome the destructive internal tensions reversed their previous fortunes radically to only one seat in Parliament. In addition to experiencing damaging splits, parties in Tanzania have become platforms of the founding leaders who have overwhelming powers in establishing structures that do not necessarily champion the rules governing internal party democracy.<sup>65</sup> Some parties have also, to their detriment, organised themselves around obvious religious and ethnic cleavages. Specific parties that make up this category are CUF (Civic United Front), and UDP (United Democratic Party). Party formations based on and driven by religious positions have found it difficult to survive in Tanzania, in particular mainland Tanzania. Largely because religious differences, although they exist in Tanzania, only play a peripheral role in politics and voters' in addition, prefer to ignore religious appeals from political parties. As a result, a party that identifies itself exclusively as a religious one is bound to lose in Tanzania. Similarly parties that have strong ethnic bases have no chance of winning in Tanzania largely due to the fact that the country has no dominant ethnic group. All the 127 ethnic cleavages are small and not necessarily antagonistic towards one another. The only party that espouses a non ethnic agenda and has the support of almost

<sup>65</sup> Mohabe Nyirabu, "The Multiparty reform process in Tanzania: the dominance of the ruling party", *Journal of African Association of Political Science*, Vol7 no2, 2002

all these groups is the ruling party, the CCM<sup>66</sup>. Because of all the hardships facing the opposition in Tanzania, CCM's dominance of the political system seems guaranteed for many years to come.

The opposition parties in South Africa, though better organised with seemingly democratic features, portray, to a limited extent, similar characteristics. The problems plaguing many opposition parties in South Africa however, have more to do with their inability to appeal to the voters as viable, alternative parties than their inability to democratically institutionalise themselves. Many opposition parties have employed tactics and articulated policy agendas that are deliberately aimed at appealing and targeting minority racial groups; by highlighting issues, for example, that are not necessarily the concern of most voters (the African majority), and employing campaign styles that are only attractive to small groups of voters<sup>67</sup>. This, it must be noted, happens despite the apparent willingness by the electorate to have politics in South Africa go beyond ethnic identities. Consequently, only small groups of voters support the opposition. Other factors that continue to undermine the opposition's chances and contribute to the opposition weaknesses, other than their failure to make themselves attractive to the African majority of the electorate, include their small presence in Parliament; their vague and indecisive party principles and policies and the fact that many smaller parties are under a not so aggressive and charismatic leadership<sup>68</sup>. This has

<sup>66</sup> Tim Kelsall, "Governance, democracy and recent political struggles in Mainland Tanzania", *Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 7/1/2003

<sup>67</sup> Kimberly Lanegran, South Africa's 1999 election: Consolidating a dominant party system, *Africa Today*; June 22, 2001;

<sup>68</sup> *ibid*



given many a theorists the impression that the ANC looks set to dominate for a significant period.

Generally parties in the region have a further obstacle to tackle; this concerns the issue of legitimacy. While some incumbent parties have taken every opportunity to delegitimise opposition parties by depicting them as “fascist and inimical to the democratic order and national stability”<sup>69</sup>, it must be said that in many cases opposition parties behave in ways that allows them to be delegitimised by dominant parties. Friedman argues “that deligitimation of opposition parties is not automatically within the gift of dominant parties”<sup>70</sup>: “An excluded party’s deligitimation is a function not only of its enemies’ actions but of the cultural understandings of the mass public”.<sup>71</sup> Friedman in fact, in recognising that most literature has failed to define legitimacy, posited his definition of legitimacy as “a status in which the party is regarded as a legitimate participant in the polity, whose views need to be taken into account and which is, at least in principle, a potential partner in a governing coalition.”<sup>72</sup> Based on this definition, the paper cautiously asserts that many opposition parties in the region do in fact suffer from real legitimacy problems. In South Africa,

the history of apartheid has naturally delegitimated many parties that speak for the white Afrikaner minority. In the case of the NP, given its role in introducing and implementing apartheid and in the case of the Freedom Front with its aspirations for speaking for the white Afrikaner minority, both parties have been facing legitimacy barriers<sup>73</sup>. In Tanzania CUF (Civic United Front) the largest opposition party, also suffers from severe and real legitimacy problems largely caused by its associations with pre-independence political regimes. It has strongly affiliated itself with the pre-revolutionary Zanzibar Nationalist Party (ZNP) with unclear ideologies influenced by such affiliations. The party’s close co-operation with the Arab Gulf states and its ties with the Islamic states have prompted voters to question its loyalty and legitimacy especially in Zanzibar where the history of politics is defined by the revolution, colonialism, and racial splits between Arabs and Africans.<sup>74</sup>

An illustration of how a politically stable and well structured opposition party can undermine a party’s dominance, will also serve to support the assertion posited above; that weak and fragmented opposition parties which fail to act as alternatives to incumbent parties can and do entrench dominance. The BNF, the largest opposition party in Botswana for example, has recently begun to show itself as a capable contestant or match to the BDP. This is largely based on its success in expanding its support base by organising and politicising non

<sup>69</sup> H. Giliomee and C. Simkins, “The Dominant party regimes of South Africa, Mexico, Taiwan and Malaysia: A comparative assessment, published in *The Awkward Embrace; One Party Domination and Democracy*, edited by Herman Giliomee and Charles Simkins, Tafelberg Publishers 1999

<sup>70</sup> Steven Friedman, “No easy stroll to dominance: party dominance, opposition and civil society in South Africa”, published in *The Awkward Embrace; One Party Domination and Democracy*, edited by Herman Giliomee and Charles Simkins, Tafelberg Publishers 1999

<sup>71</sup> Levite and Tarrow quoted in Steven Friedman, “No easy stroll to dominance: party dominance, opposition and civil society in South Africa”, published in *The Awkward Embrace; One party Domination and Democracy*, edited by Herman Giliomee and Charles Simkins, Tafelberg Publishers 1999

<sup>72</sup> *ibid*

<sup>73</sup> Steven Friedman, “No easy stroll to dominance: party dominance, opposition and civil society in South Africa”, published in *The Awkward Embrace; One Party Domination and Democracy*, edited by Herman Giliomee and Charles Simkins, Tafelberg Publishers 1999

<sup>74</sup> Pal Ahluwalia and Abebe Zegeye, “Multiparty Democracy in Tanzania: Crisis in the Union”, *Journal of African Security Review* Vol 10 No3, 2001

ethnic groups, and *inter alia*, by establishing grassroots organisational structures in the remote rural areas. The BNF now has a more significant support in rural areas than before as it previously used to rely heavily on the urban support group. In the 1994 general elections, the party took almost all the urban seats with a total of 13 seats in Parliament compared to the BDP's 27 seats<sup>75</sup>. These results slowly began to advance the notion that BNF was indeed a force to reckon with and that an end to BDP's dominance was a sure possibility. The BNF's electoral strength, however, has taken a nose dive since then, as shown by the 1999 election results where it won only 6 seats compared to BDP's 33 seats.<sup>76</sup>

### Conclusion

The initial point to be made in this summation is that party dominant systems discussed in this paper function within and respect to some degree, the essential parameters of constitutional democracy; an assumption that in fact forms the basis of the paper's observations and assertions. It just so happens that in these systems "one party monopolizes power"<sup>77</sup>. While it is true that some of these dominant systems lack the features of a liberal democracy in significant ways, it must be noted that dominance is not and should not be outright dismissed as a symptom of unhealthy political dynamics. In other words, because these parties do not operate in fully fledged democracies, it should not always be presumed that party domination is predominantly

achieved by undemocratic means. The paper therefore insists that guided and constrained by democratic procedures/rules, dominance can become an outcome achieved by factors (economic growth, party strengths, and stable political institutions) and advantages (weak and fragmented opposition, stable electorate support) either aided by or outside a dominant party's control.

Instead of the outright dismissal of dominant parties as undemocratic, simply because an electoral takeover by other parties is unlikely for an extended period, observers should in fact be more interested on the implications of such dominance for the future prospects for democracy in these countries<sup>78</sup>. There is no denying that dominance raises serious concerns about the quality of these newly achieved democracies, the particular point of interest should therefore be on assessing whether or not appropriate mechanisms exist that will minimise these implications or effects. These mechanisms, whether they be a strong and organised opposition or non-electoral mechanisms including legislative and independent oversight institutions (auditor general, public protector, human rights and gender commissions, an independent reserve bank, broadcasting authority and Electoral Commission) will hold the dominant party to account and check the abuse of its power.<sup>79</sup> To put it differently, the dominant party should be made to exercise its dominance within the parameters of constitutional democracy.

<sup>75</sup> Wiseman John A, The Slow evolution of the party system in Botswana, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, January 1998

<sup>76</sup> *The Human Rights Observer*, Volume 2 2000, Afronet Zambia

<sup>77</sup> Steven Friedman, "No easy stroll to dominance: party dominance, opposition and civil society in South Africa", published in *The Awkward Embrace; One Party Domination and Democracy*, edited by Herman Giliomee and Charles Simkins, Tafelberg Publishers 1999

<sup>78</sup> Roger Southall, "Party Dominance and development: South Africa's prospects in the light of Malaysia's experience, *The Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*; 1 July, 1997.

<sup>79</sup> Anthony Butler, "South Africa's political futures: the positive and negative implications of one party dominance, paper presented at EISA 7 August 2002

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