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12.12.2019

Literature Review of Dominant Party Systems in Southern Africa

Prolonged party dominance is a relatively rare phenomenon in true democratic systems. However, in the case of Sub-Saharan Africa a much larger proportion of democratic polities can be considered dominant party systems. The intention of this paper is to understand how one-party dominance effects southern African polities, specifically, the quality of democracy experienced under them. Additionally, this paper will address the prospects of further progress towards liberal democracy in these cases.

What is dominance?

Dominance has three main aspects, the electoral, the duration, and the governmental. Pempel defines the electoral aspect of dominance as when a party receives a plurality which renders it necessary to the formation of a governing coalition and the party plays a key role in said coalition¹. Others suggest a stronger margin of victory or the presence of a majority², but these definitions are somewhat subjective and would exclude several clearly dominant party systems. A plurality within a multiparty system is much easier to achieve and maintain for long periods of time than a majority. Surprisingly, Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa have all retained majorities in multiparty systems during their dominance (the exception being the BDP – Botswana Democratic Party – in 2014 with 46% of the vote). In institutionalized democracies such constant electoral dominance is never experienced³. However, while the margin of electoral dominance may affect opposition party behavior, it has little effect on how dominant parties govern. Dominance could occur despite low margins

¹ Pempel, T. J., "Introduction" in Pempel, T. J. (Ed.), *Uncommon Democracies The One-Party Dominant Regimes*, Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press, 1990. pp. 1-32.

² Sartori, G. *Parties and Party Systems, A Framework for Analysis*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976.

³ Pempel, T. J., "Introduction" in Pempel, T. J. (Ed.), *Uncommon Democracies The One-Party Dominant Regimes*, 1990.

of victory and coalition partners. What is unique about party systems in industrializing and democratizing societies is they appear to be more conducive to single-party dominance.

Dominance has a time factor to it. I find the three consecutive elections⁴ or the “x” number of year approaches somewhat subjective. The Republican Party controlled the presidency and House of Representatives in the US from 1921-1933 but was never considered dominant. Repeated electoral success plays a factor, but there is more to dominance than winning several consecutive elections. A polity should not be concerned with the repeated electoral success of party, if competition is relatively robust and the dominant party fails to impose its “historic agenda⁵”. However, a dominant party can only begin to dominate governmentally when it has had the opportunity to influence the state and policy for multiple election cycles. A party can not dominate governmentally in one election cycle. It is simply too short a time to build clientelist networks, subvert institutions, and create enough policy to dominate governmentally⁶.

Arguably the most enduring and significant aspect of single party dominance is the ability to dominate governmentally. Pempel argues to dominate governmentally is to shape policy, institutions, and potentially even the ideological climate of the electorate, which can only occur after periods of long governance. Party becomes regime⁷. However, de Jager and du Toit view dominance as more of a progression. A party initially dominates electorally, then begins to dominate constitutionally, which, in turn, reinforces its dominance. Eventually the party dominates the state⁸, which is roughly equivalent to Pempel’s description of

⁴ Erdmann, G. & Basedau, M. “Party systems in Africa: Problems of Categorising and Explaining Party Systems”, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 26:3, (2008), pp. 241-258.

⁵ Pempel, T. J., “Introduction” in Pempel, T. J. (Ed.), *Uncommon Democracies The One-Party Dominant Regimes*, 1990, pp 1-32.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ de Jager, N. and du Toit, P. (Eds.), *Friend or Foe? Dominant Party Systems in Southern Africa*. New York, United Nations University Press, 2013.

dominating governmentally. In a way these distinctions reflect the idea of preeminent dominant party, a party that dominates electorally, but has yet to really monopolize the state and of dominant party, a party which is indistinguishable from the state. An important indicator of dominance is the implication of a “historical agenda”, where the dominant party has addressed a major social or economic issue through their relative free reign in the policy making process, for example, the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP) in South Africa. In a way the ‘historical agenda’ fundamentally alters a polity reflecting the powerful influence of single party dominance, such as the SAP’s creation of the welfare state in Sweden, leading to the political culture of Nordic socialism there⁹. Although Schlemmer argues for the RDP being the ANC’s (African National Congress) historical agenda/project¹⁰, many scholars argue that single party dominance in southern Africa is too nascent to have fulfilled a “historical agenda”. There is much debate regarding whether these regimes in southern Africa are preeminent or dominant parties and what that subsequently means for democracy in them.

A true dominant party wins free and fair elections. De Toit notes the distinction between electoral, liberal, and pseudo-democracies, arguing that dominant parties, in the case of southern Africa, fall into the electoral and pseudo-democracy categories¹¹. Other scholars like Bogaards attempt to reconcile pseudo-democracy and electoral democracy; for good reason, as the distinction is often blurry. Bogaards views the lack of an institutionalized, competitive opposition, regardless of the actions of the dominant party, as the main

⁹ Pempel, T. J., “Conclusion” in Pempel, T. J. (Ed.), *Uncommon Democracies The One-Party Dominant Regimes*, 1990, pp. 333-360.

¹⁰ Schlemmer, L. “Democracy or Democratic Hegemony? The Future of Political Pluralism in South Africa” in Giliomee, H. and Simkins, C. (Eds.), *The Awkward Embrace One Party Domination and Democracy*, 1999, pp. 281-300.

¹¹ du Toit, P. “Bridge or Bridgehead? Comparing Party Systems of Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Malawi”. in Giliomee, H. and Simkins, C. (Eds.), *The Awkward Embrace One Party Domination and Democracy* 1999, pp. 193-217.

characteristic of dominant party systems¹². Therefore, pseudo-democracy and electoral democracy are relatively unimportant distinctions when discussing dominant party systems regarding democracy. Erdmann, using Sartori's categories of authoritarian dominant party and non-authoritarian dominant party systems, offers a typology for inchoate democracies: dominant authoritarian, dominant non-authoritarian, non-dominant, pulverized, and one-party¹³. While these distinctions are useful for categorizing African polities, they do not emphasize the presence or quality of democracy. Simply having elections does not allow for a dominant party system. Pempel notes that the developing world has many one-party states, but very few true dominant party systems¹⁴. Consequentially, I feel cases like Zimbabwe, Angola, and Mozambique where election fraud and violence are common are not truly dominant party systems. Instead, they are more akin to du Toit's definition of pseudo-democracy. Polities in southern Africa that I believe approach the definition of a dominant party systems are Botswana with the BDP, Namibia with SWAPO (Southwest Africa People's Organization), and South Africa with the ANC.

Why dominant party systems are prolific in Southern Africa

Erdmann and Basedau notice the proliferation of dominant party systems in non-authoritarian, democratizing polities following the Third Wave¹⁵, which begs the question why dominant parties are so prolific during the early stages of democratization? Mainwaring argues that the main difference between Western democracies and Third-Wave democracies is that these developing democracies lack institutionalized parties¹⁶. However, I disagree that

¹² Bogaards, M. "Crafting competitive party systems: Electoral laws and the opposition in Africa", *Democratization*, 7:4 (2000) 163-190.

¹³ Erdmann, G. & Basedau, M. "Party systems in Africa: Problems of Categorising and Explaining Party Systems", *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 26:3, (2008), pp. 241-258.

¹⁴ Pempel, T. J., "Introduction" in Pempel, T. J. (Ed.), *Uncommon Democracies The One-Party Dominant Regimes*, 1990.

¹⁵ Erdmann, G. & Basedau, M. "Party systems in Africa: Problems of Categorising and Explaining Party Systems", *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 26:3, (2008), pp. 241-258.

¹⁶ Mainwaring, Scott. "Party Systems in the Third Wave." *Journal of Democracy*, 9:3, (1998), pp. 67-81.

all parties are uninstitutionalized in dominant party systems in Third-Wave democracies. As established before, these dominant parties are so institutionalized they effectively are the state¹⁷. Erdmann and Basedau's criterion of institutionalized parties: low electoral volatility, rootedness in society, and successful transfers of leadership¹⁸ are all present in my cases. The ANC, SWAPO, and the BDP's electoral performances have remained very constant, whereas opposition parties within these polities often disband or fail to generate constant levels of support across elections¹⁹. The dominant party is heavily rooted in society, as dominance creates the perception that party ties/relationships are needed to get things done²⁰. Extensive patronage networks and large public sectors make the dominant party influential somewhat regardless of its political platform and performance. The opposition has no access to the state's resources and can not hope to influence society like the dominant party²¹. The ANC did not collapse after the charismatic Mandela retired in 1999, nor did SWAPO post Njoma, nor did the BDP post Khama. Opposition parties readily collapse due to leadership concerns and are often tied to a local elites²² - a reflection of the prevalence of "Big Men" in African politics - instead of an ideological platform. Consequentially, the opposition is not only doomed through asymmetry of resources, but also by their lack of institutionalization in comparison to the dominant party. In industrialized democracies the opposition was already institutionalized and the resources asymmetry between incumbent and opposition is less vast.

¹⁷ Pempel, T. J., "Introduction" in Pempel, T. J. (Ed.), *Uncommon Democracies The One-Party Dominant Regimes*, 1990.

¹⁸ Erdmann, G. & Basedau, M. "Party systems in Africa: Problems of Categorising and Explaining Party Systems", *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 26:3, (2008), pp. 241-258.

¹⁹ Levitsky, S. and Way, L. "Why Democracy Needs a Level Playing Field" *Journal of Democracy*, 21:1, 2010.: 57-68.

²⁰ Pempel, T. J. (Ed.), *Uncommon Democracies The One-Party Dominant Regimes*, 1990.

²¹ Levitsky, S. and Way, L. "Why Democracy Needs a Level Playing Field" *Journal of Democracy*, 21:1, 2010.: 57-68.

²² Cooper, I. "It's My Party: Opposition Politics, Party Motivation and Electoral Strategy in Namibia", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 40:1, (2014), pp. 111-127.

I believe these two characteristics of the opposition in southern African dominant party systems makes it near impossible for the electoral defeat of a dominant party.

There has been significant scholarly work about electoral system design and its relation to party dominance: however, electoral design is not a casual mechanism for dominant party systems. First past the post (FPTP) voting, and low district magnitude are often cited as the culprits of continued party dominance²³. FPTP voting would disproportionately reward the most competitive party (likely the dominant party), and low district magnitude limits the number of seats the opposition can realistically contest. However, FPTP only benefits the dominant party if the opposition is dispersed²⁴. In polities where ethnicity is politicized, often constituencies would be primarily constituted of a specific ethnicity, because ethnic groups tend to be geographically distributed. One could then argue that proportional representation (PR) would aid the dominant party in these cases as it could potentially win a few seats in a constituency it has no chance of taking. Additionally, FPTP reduces party fragmentation, so FPTP voting could limit the number of potential coalition members for a dominant party²⁵. Pempel argues that open-list PR systems limit the need for interparty competition and fratricide as ideological opposed candidates can run without hurting the dominant party's performance²⁶. So, the PR versus FPTP debate seems inconclusive, or, at the least, is specific to individual polities. Erdmann notes there have been very few cases of an artificial majority in Africa, when a popular vote of less than a majority is turned into one via electoral system²⁷. Low district magnitude does seem conducive to party dominance as it gives less opportunity for minority parties to obtain seats,

²³ Bogaards, M. "Crafting competitive party systems: Electoral laws and the opposition in Africa", *Democratization*, 7:4 (2000). 163-190.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Pempel, T. J., "Conclusion" in Pempel, T. J. (Ed.), *Uncommon Democracies The One-Party Dominant Regimes*, 1990. pp. 333-360.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Erdmann, G. & Basedau, M. "Party systems in Africa: Problems of Categorising and Explaining Party Systems", *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 26:3, (2008), pp. 241-258.

but it does not necessarily mean that low district magnitude is correlated with DPS. Botswana has 61 seats in its parliament (unicameral), and South Africa has 400 seats in its national assembly. This line of reasoning goes with Bogaards claim that electoral system design may aid dominance but does very little to do with the presence of a dominant party system. There are cases of FPTP dominant party systems, Botswana, and PR dominant party systems, South Africa. I am also critical of further distinctions between open and closed-list PR, despite claims that closed-list PR aids ANC dominance in some cases²⁸. Certainly, electoral system design can aid dominance, but it seems this on a case by case basis. In some polities FPTP could aid dominance, in others PR could. In some cases, it would likely not make a difference.

Some scholars suggest the political cultural of a polity leads to party dominance. I find these explanations problematic and controversial. I believe there may be an implication behind them that democracy, or at least democracy without authoritarian tendencies, may be exclusive towards Africa. O'Brien brings in the example of "Demokaraasai" in Senegal, where consensus is valued, instead of the debate and competition one associates with liberal democracy²⁹. Sebudubudu and Botlhomilwe bring in this argument specifically to the Tswana people, the majority ethnic group in Botswana, arguing there is a political culture of consensus and conformity/respect for authority among the Tswana³⁰. I am critical of what O'Brien feels is democratic and the idea that culture can determine the nature and extent of democracy within a polity. Is simply voting with the majority for the sake of consensus

²⁸ Giliomee, H. and Simkins, C. (Eds.), *The Awkward Embrace One Party Domination and Democracy*, Cape Town, Tafelberg Publishers Ltd., 1999.

²⁹ Cruise O'Brien, D. "Does Democracy Require an Opposition Party" Implications of Some Recent African Experience" in Giliomee, H. and Simkins, C. (Eds.), *The Awkward Embrace One Party Domination and Democracy*, 1999, pp. 319-336.

³⁰ Sebudubudu, D and Botlhomilwe, M. "Interrogating the Dominant Party System In Botswana" in de Jager, N. and du Toit, P. (Eds.), *Friend or Foe? Dominant Party Systems in Southern Africa*. New York, United Nations University Press, 2013, pp. 115-131.

democratic? For Sebudubudu and Botlhomilwe, making broad general claims about an electorate is problematic. Regardless, I feel that this debate over political culture goes beyond the scope of my paper. Sebudubudu and Botlhomilwe's argument that Tswana people are more likely to listen to their partisan clan leaders and councils, Kgolta, is much more credible. The Tswana, under the impression their chiefs and Kgolta are independent from national politics, do not question their motives as they would the BDP's. In reality, Tswana chiefs have been integrated into the civil service by BDP³¹. The dominant party has ingeniously appropriated traditional authorities to support their regime. If political culture plays a factor in dominant party systems, it is when dominant parties exploit traditional, cultural frameworks, not because a people or society are more culturally conducive to party dominance.

Quality of Democracy

If dominant parties are simply parties with long periods of electoral dominance, then what separates a dominant party system from a liberal democracy? Isn't single party dominance just representative of the will of the majority? There are a few concerns with dominant party systems and their quality of democracy. The three I find most prominent are competitiveness, representing minority interests, and accountability. Schmitter and Karl argue that democracy is simply when the government is accountable to its citizens³². One can view government accountability as being upheld by the threat of being voted out, but this implies a competitive party system, which is often not the case in dominant party systems. For example, in South Africa it was found that people frustrated with the ANC would not seek to

³¹ Sebudubudu, D and Botlhomilwe, M. "Interrogating the Dominant Party System In Botswana" in de Jager, N. and du Toit, P. (Eds.), *Friend or Foe? Dominant Party Systems in Southern Africa*. New York, United Nations University Press, 2013, pp. 115-131.

³² Schmitter, P. and Karl, T.L. "What Democracy Is. . . and Is Not". *Journal of Democracy*, 2:3, (1991), pp. 75-88.

support another party, instead simply abstaining from voting³³. The opposition was too marginal and illegitimate, (the NP and DP being associated with Apartheid) for dissidents to ever consider supporting them. However, Schmitter and Karl's definition is vague because it never discusses legitimate electoral competition. This could mean that a dominant party can be held accountable through internal pluralism. Burchard notes how interparty primaries in the case of the BDP led to abnormally high turnover rates for incumbents³⁴. Burchard also brings up intraparty factionalism as a form of competition. Granted, intraparty factionalism can be viewed as largely separate from the interest of the electorate, instead as simply inter-elite competition within the regime³⁵. Wegner also supports the idea of competition within a single party framework. The ANC in competitive districts will only re-nominate local administrators who provide high quality of governance, using opinion polls and economic data to determine if the incumbent is worthy of re-nomination³⁶. However, Wegner notices this trend only in competitive districts, which make up a small minority of constituencies in South Africa (37/192)³⁷. For the non-competitive districts there is no need for the ANC to hold officials accountable. So, in that case, internal pluralism is merely a reflection of external pluralism. This appears to be the main critique of internal pluralism, while there are mechanisms in which officials of the dominant party are held accountable, they are neither universal, nor entirely a reflection of public opinion. Oftentimes, internal pluralism seems to be an effort to instill internal party discipline, as in neither of these examples are party higherups in danger of losing their positions.

³³ Friedman, S. "No Easy Stroll to Dominance: Party Dominance, Opposition, and Civil Society in South Africa" in Giliomee, H. and Simkins, C. (Eds.), *The Awkward Embrace One Party Domination and Democracy*, 1999, pp. 97-126.

³⁴ Burchard, S. "You Have to Know Where to Look in Order to Find It: Competitiveness in Botswana's Dominant Party System." *Government and Opposition*, 48:1, (2013): 101-26.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Wegner, E. "Local-Level Accountability in a Dominant Party System", *Government and Opposition*, 53:1, (2018), pp. 51-75.

³⁷ Ibid.

Competition allows for accountability. Burchard and Wegner both note how there are internal mechanisms in the dominant party that lead to accountability. I do not think one can discount electoral competition, despite the electoral dominance that dominant parties experience. To Pempel, dominance is an art and maintaining electoral victories for decades, despite a changing electorate, reflects virtue and ability on the dominant party's part. Dominance is not inevitable and dominant parties still view elections as nonguaranteed affairs³⁸. On the other hand, Arian and Barnes feel that one of the characteristics of dominance is the dominant party being able to make mistakes without the opposition being able to exploit them³⁹. I think these two perspectives are reconcilable, because Arian and Barnes also emphasize the dominant party needing to adapt its platform constantly in order to continue dominance. A dominant party is not constantly in danger and has much more leeway in governing, but it is still subject to political repercussions for its actions, making dominant parties somewhat accountable.

The behavior and position of opposition parties in dominant party systems, especially within the context of Sub-Saharan Africa, is not often conducive to competition. Cooper, using the case of Namibia, argues that opposition parties will mobilize minute ethnic cleavages to receive the bare minimum vote in order to receive government support. There is no effort to form inclusive, electoral coalitions to challenge SWAPO⁴⁰. This means the opposition is inherently defeatist, and, therefore, there is no competition. In Namibia and South Africa opposition parties do receive state funding, but its tied to the proportion of seats a party has, giving the dominant parties a huge advantage in terms of public funding. In

³⁸ Pempel, T. J., "Introduction" in Pempel, T. J. (Ed.), *Uncommon Democracies The One-Party Dominant Regimes*, 1990. pp. 1-32.

³⁹ Arian, A. and Barnes, S. "The Dominant Party System: A Neglected Model of Democratic Stability." *The Journal of Politics*, 36:3, (1974), pp. 592-614.

⁴⁰ Cooper, I. "It's My Party: Opposition Politics, Party Motivation and Electoral Strategy in Namibia", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 40:1 (2014), 111-127

Botswana the opposition receives no funding⁴¹. Levitsky and Way argue that there is no true competition in dominant one-party systems because the dominant party will appropriate state resources for their campaign to create a vast asymmetry in campaign resources. State media will positively focus on the incumbent, giving the opposition little to no airtime. Dominant parties will readily appropriate state institutions and assets. For example, state-owned all-terrain vehicles are used by the CCM in Tanzania to reach isolate constituencies, unlike the opposition, and secure their support⁴². In fact, the opposition often has so little resources that members often defect to the dominant party to gain access to the state patronage network. Or even worse, the opposition will directly collaborate with the dominant party, for example, in the Russian Federation where the “official” opposition parties will not challenge United Russia in the duma and often work with them⁴³. While I agree with Pempel’s claim that dominance is an art and electoral dominance is very tenuous in true dominant party systems, I think the idea of electoral competition in weakly institutionalized democracies is at best nominal.

While the question of what competition is regarding democracy is key to understanding to what extent dominant party systems are democratic, there are other characteristics associated with liberal democracy that dominant party systems can provide. I think Storm’s approach of a continuum⁴⁴ for understanding democracy is a more comprehensive, albeit still vague, approach to defining democracy. Storm lists four general characteristics of democracy: reasonably competitive elections that are devoid of fraud with

⁴¹ Sebudubudu, D and Botlhomilwe, M. “Interrogating the Dominant Party System In Botswana” in de Jager, N. and du Toit, P. (Eds.), *Friend or Foe? Dominant Party Systems in Southern Africa*. New York, United Nations University Press, 2013, pp. 115-131.

⁴² Levitsky, S. and Way, L. "Why Democracy Needs a Level Playing Field" *Journal of Democracy*, 21:1, 2010.: 57-68.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Storm, L. “An Elemental Definition of Democracy and its Advantages for Comparing Political Regime Types”, *Democratisation*, 15:2, (2008), 215-229.

broad suffrage, basic civil liberties, elected governments being able to govern effectively, and additional features associated with liberal democracy. These are then put on a point system with a 3+ being ideal democracy and a 0 being fully authoritarian⁴⁵. In the cases of South Africa, Botswana, and Namibia it is likely that these countries would score a 3, not receiving a point for reasonably competitive elections. In comparison to Bogaards' argument that competitive multiparty elections are a necessity to democracy and that elections in dominant party systems are "competition without competitiveness"⁴⁶, Storm's continuum is much more optimistic towards dominant party systems in terms of quality of democracy. However, even if Storm's approach categorizes these cases as democratic, one should consider if one party dominance is a manifestation of the feared tyranny of the majority?

Dominant parties attempt to exclude as little of the electorate as possible, but in the absence of electoral means to express their will, minority groups are often excluded. Adam gives an example of South African corporatism as a way interest groups can influence policy without using electoral politics⁴⁷. The ANC seems much more willing to listen to organized labor and business than delegitimized, marginalized opposition parties. Corporatism, in South Africa's case NEDLAC, is an institutionalized forum for minority interests to influence policy⁴⁸. However, one needs to consider other minority interests outside of the business organized labor state bargaining network. This is the fear of dominant party systems, some minority interests are regularly consulted by the dominant party, but not all. Minority interests oftentimes find themselves excluded to these electorally insignificant, narrow-base, opposition parties. In South Africa the collapse of the Government of National Unity has

⁴⁵ Storm, L. "An Elemental Definition of Democracy and its Advantages for Comparing Political Regime Types", *Democratisation*, 15:2, (2008), 215-229.

⁴⁶ Bogaards, M. "Crafting competitive party systems: Electoral laws and the opposition in Africa", *Democratization*, 7:4 (2000). 163-190

⁴⁷ Adam, H. "Corporatism as Minority Veto under ANC Hegemony in South Africa" in Giliomee, H. and Simkins, C. (Eds.), *The Awkward Embrace One Party Domination and Democracy*, 1999, pp. 261-280.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

somewhat confirmed these fears. Schlemmer argues that the South African opposition has no hope of contestation, so they should actively seek to influence the ANC. The implication of this is that ANC dominance is guaranteed⁴⁹. Minority interests within dominant party systems have no chance at political power but can somewhat advance their interests if the dominant party is willing to listen. For example, the IFP - Inkatha Freedom Party -, despite a history of conflict with the ANC, is now included in the government of South Africa because of its salience in Zulu regions⁵⁰. Of course, there are counter examples too, especially when the minority interest is irreconcilable with the dominant party platform, such as Afrikaner nationalists and the far-left (EEF)⁵¹. Dominant parties are inherently inclusive in order to maintain dominance, but there are few avenues for excluded minorities to participate relevantly in politics. Is this good enough for democracy?

Means of dominance

Dominant parties delegitimize their opposition to maintain dominance.

Delegitimization of the opposition is one of the strategies to successfully maintain dominance according to Pempel⁵². Friedman's case study of the ANC's delegitimization of the institutionalized opposition, is a perfect example of how race and ethnicity can serve as, not only a means of political mobilization, but political exclusion⁵³. Delegitimization in the context of race and ethnicity is key to dominance in South Africa and Namibia because of

⁴⁹ Schlemmer, L. "Democracy or Democratic Hegemony? The Future of Political Pluralism in South Africa" in Giliomee, H. and Simkins, C. (Eds.), *The Awkward Embrace One Party Domination and Democracy*, 1999, pp. 281-300.

⁵⁰ Friedman, S. "No Easy Stroll to Dominance: Party Dominance, Opposition, and Civil Society in South Africa" in Giliomee, H. and Simkins, C. (Eds.), *The Awkward Embrace One Party Domination and Democracy*, 1999, pp. 97-126.

⁵¹ Schlemmer, L. "Democracy or Democratic Hegemony? The Future of Political Pluralism in South Africa" in Giliomee, H. and Simkins, C. (Eds.), *The Awkward Embrace One Party Domination and Democracy*, 1999, pp. 281-300.

⁵² Pempel, T. J. (Ed.), *Uncommon Democracies The One-Party Dominant Regimes*, 1990.

⁵³ Friedman, S. "No Easy Stroll to Dominance: Party Dominance, Opposition, and Civil Society in South Africa" in Giliomee, H. and Simkins, C. (Eds.), *The Awkward Embrace One Party Domination and Democracy*, 1999, pp. 97-126.

their experience under Apartheid. The NP and PDM, Popular Democratic Movement (formerly DTA - Democratic Turnhalle Alliance), are viewed as white parties that wish to return to white dominance. The DA (Democratic Alliance) in South Africa is viewed without the association with Apartheid, but is still condescendingly labeled a “white party”⁵⁴. These parties are institutionalized, as they in some form existed before the end of Apartheid. They could potentially serve as competitive center-right oppositions to the ANC and SWAPO, but almost no black Africans will support these parties. Not only do these opposition parties face a near insurmountable asymmetry in resources, but also the electorate does not view them as legitimate opposition to the dominant party, which dooms said parties’ electoral ambitions.

The legitimacy of dominant party origins is a commonality shared by dominant party systems, but the extreme legitimacy southern African dominant parties receive is unique to the region and could explain their success and entrenchment. De Jager, as well as numerous other scholars, acknowledges the fundamental role liberation struggles played in giving dominant parties legitimacy⁵⁵. Pempel calls this a “mobilization crisis, where some “big bang” in the political history of a polity fundamentally alters politics, giving an opportunity for a dominant party to emerge⁵⁶. For SWAPO and the ANC this effect is twofold. Not only did these parties use the end of colonial rule to mobilize new social cleavages as the foundation of their support base, but, additionally, they played a central role in creating the political development that created the “mobilization crisis”. There is no end of Apartheid without the ANC, there is no Namibia without SWAPO. The monopoly these parties have

⁵⁴ Friedman, S. “No Easy Stroll to Dominance: Party Dominance, Opposition, and Civil Society in South Africa” in Giliomee, H. and Simkins, C. (Eds.), *The Awkward Embrace One Party Domination and Democracy*, 1999, pp. 97-126.

⁵⁵ de Jager, N. “South Africa: A Democracy in the Balance” in de Jager, N. and du Toit, P. (Eds.), *Friend or Foe? Dominant Party Systems in Southern Africa*, 2013, pp. 149-170.

⁵⁶ Pempel, T. J. “Introduction” in Pempel, T. J. (Ed.), *Uncommon Democracies The One-Party Dominant Regimes*, 1990. pp. 333-360.

over the liberation struggle cements them into the national myth, already making the distinction between state and party blurred before dominance begins⁵⁷. These parties had the legitimacy that normally only occurs after decades of dominance before the first election. The role of dominant party in the liberation/decolonization struggle may be an explanation of why dominance has been so absolute and enduring in southern Africa.

I feel the focus on ethnicity instead of socioeconomic cleavages in regard to mobilization gives these parties an advantage in retaining their support base and being less vulnerable to demographic change. Union membership can decline, youth can become dissatisfied with the status quo, but when ethnic identity is politicized, and wealth accumulation through patronage is directly linked to ethnic chauvinism, ethnicity-based party identification does not change. So, as opposed to the demographic change that effects historical support bases⁵⁸ in Pempel's case studies of industrialized democracies, dominant parties in Southern Africa may be less susceptible to loss of dominance because of their reliance on fixed ethnicity. From a rational choice theory perspective, voting for the dominant party is the correct choice because the opposition's chances are near nonexistent and support for the dominant party can lead to material benefits⁵⁹. Levitsky and Way as well as Bogaards give examples of opposition cooperating for this very purpose, for example, power sharing agreements, instead of the opposition contesting elections in Senegal⁶⁰. Politics is often the avenue for personal enrichment, so leveraging one's role as potential opposition to gain access to state patronage is more appealing than attempting to contest the incumbent.

⁵⁷ de Jager, N. "South Africa: A Democracy in the Balance" in de Jager, N. and du Toit, P. (Eds.), *Friend or Foe? Dominant Party Systems in Southern Africa*, 2013, pp. 149-170.

⁵⁸ Pempel, T. J. (Ed.), *Uncommon Democracies The One-Party Dominant Regimes*, 1990.

⁵⁹ Cooper, Ian. "It's My Party: Opposition Politics, Party Motivation and Electoral Strategy in Namibia", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 40:1 (2014)

⁶⁰ Bogaards, M. "Crafting competitive party systems: Electoral laws and the opposition in Africa", *Democratization*, 7:4 (2000). 163-190.

Simply saying dominant parties stay dominant because they are the best at governance is unnuanced. Pempel's argues that dominance can reinforce itself in "virtuous cycle of dominance", consequently, party becomes synonymous with government⁶¹. Fulfillment of the dominant party's policy reinvigorates electoral support, and eventually the party's policy becomes viewed as logical and uncontroversial. A dominant party has the chance to influence the political opinion of the electorate, for example, the perceived normalcy of the extensive Swedish welfare state after decades of SAP rule⁶². There is a potential for the electorate to become used to and content with party dominance. Frustration with government policy will not result in electoral gain for opposition party, but disgruntled resignation which has consequences for the future of competitive democracy, yet it is immaterial to dominance.

Erdmann argues party systems that have moderate fragmentation, low polarization, and high institutionalization are ideal for liberal democracy⁶³. Bogaards notes that the institutional design for African polities seems based on this fear of high fragmentation due to high levels of ethnic diversity in these polities⁶⁴. This is certainly a legitimate fear. Elites in weakly-institutionalized democracies are more than willing to resort to violence to contest elections⁶⁵. This is part of the reason dominant party systems have been looked upon favorably by scholars. They provide a stabilizing role as democratic institutions develop. Granted, much of the debate is if dominant party systems eventually bridge towards liberal democracy or degenerate into one-party pseudo-democracy⁶⁶. Simply saying dominant party

⁶¹ Pempel, T. J. "Introduction" in Pempel, T. J. (Ed.), *Uncommon Democracies The One-Party Dominant Regimes*, 1990. pp 1-32.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Erdmann, G. & Basedau, M. "Party systems in Africa: Problems of Categorising and Explaining Party Systems", *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 26:3, (2008), pp. 241-258.

⁶⁴ Bogaards, M. "Crafting competitive party systems: Electoral laws and the opposition in Africa", *Democratization*, 7:4 (2000). 163-190

⁶⁵ Snyder, J. and Ballentine, K. "Nationalism and the Marketplace of Ideas." *International Security*, 21:2, (1996), pp. 5-40

⁶⁶ du Toit, P. "Bridge or Bridgehead? Comparing Party Systems of Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Malawi. in Giliomee, H. and Simkins, C. (Eds.), *The Awkward Embrace One Party Domination and Democracy*, 1999, 193-217

systems are beneficial does not inquire to how dominant party systems factor into democratization. However, Bogaards argues that the fear of ethnic conflict from democratization is largely without basis as we see low numbers of effective parties⁶⁷ in most African polities. High ethnic heterogeneity makes ethnically exclusive parties electorally unviable, instead large, multi-ethnic coalitions are much more common⁶⁸. Bogaards' analysis of African political parties fits with Pempel's characteristics of a dominant parties being inclusive, ideologically pragmatic, catchall parties, instead of exclusive parties with rigid ideological platforms⁶⁹. For example, the ANC and BDP have governed in a centrist manner with neoliberal macroeconomic policy. In the case of the ANC, there are outright ideological contradictions in policy such as pro-business incentive and strong labor laws, affirmative action and meritocracy, etc.⁷⁰. SWAPO is an example of a party that for a time was Marxist-Leninist but abandoned their hardliner ideological position for a milder center-left platform. This pragmatic approach to policy makes dominant parties able to expand their electoral support to new cleavages. Pempel notes that the right balance between rigidity and flexibility is necessary for a dominant party to maintain dominance. Without evolution a dominant party will stagnate and lose dominance, too much change and the dominant party risks fragmentation and collapse⁷¹.

One of the main critiques of one-party dominance in the case of Africa is that elections are an ethnic census. Unlike Pempel's industrialized examples, the cleavages mobilized by dominant parties are along ethnic lines. For example, there is a robust scholarly debate about whether the ANC is simply African majority rule or is truly a reflection of the

⁶⁷ See Laakso, M., & Taagepera, R. "The "effective" number of parties: "A measure with application to west europe". *Comparative Political Studies*, 12:3, (1979).

⁶⁸ Bogaards, M. "Crafting competitive party systems: Electoral laws and the opposition in Africa", *Democratization*, 7:4 (2000). 163-190

⁶⁹ Pempel, T. J. "Conclusion" in Pempel, T. J. (Ed.), *Uncommon Democracies The One-Party Dominant Regimes*, 1990. pp. 333-360.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

“rainbow nation”, a racially and ethnically inclusive democracy. White and Asian support is low for the ANC⁷². While there have been efforts to include “white” parties in the governing coalition⁷³, ethnicity still seems to be the main determinate for party identification. This is also the case in Namibia and Botswana with the Ovambo and Tswana groups respectively⁷⁴. Erdmann argues it is the presence of ethnic coalitions which creates these large catch all parties⁷⁵. There’s been a significant amount of quantitative evidence pointing to this that ethnic heterogeneity has an inverse effect on effective number of parties⁷⁶. Politicized ethnicity in diverse societies could be conducive to dominant parties. However, it is certainly not a main determinant as there are polities with high ethnic heterogeneity that maintain competitive multiparty systems, for example, Nigeria and Ghana.

Change?

The loss of dominance is inevitable according to Pempel. This has been an optimistic hope that scholars cling on to when discussing democratization and dominant party systems in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Third Wave for most African polities began only in the 1990s, so for these countries, democracy is still quite young. One could predict in the cases of ANC and SWAPO that dominance will fade and say that this period as a dominant party system consolidated democratic institutions. Dominant party systems, therefore, become retroactively necessary for these hypothetical, future, liberal democracies. Botswana is the

⁷² Schlemmer, L. “Democracy or Democratic Hegemony? The Future of Political Pluralism in South Africa” in Giliomee, H. and Simkins, C. (Eds.), *The Awkward Embrace One Party Domination and Democracy*, 1999, pp 281-300.

⁷³ Schlemmer, L. “Democracy or Democratic Hegemony? The Future of Political Pluralism in South Africa” in Giliomee, H. and Simkins, C. (Eds.), *The Awkward Embrace One Party Domination and Democracy*, 1999, pp 281-300.

⁷⁴ du Toit, P. “Bridge or Bridgehead? Comparing Party Systems of Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Malawi” in Giliomee, H. and Simkins, C. (Eds.), *The Awkward Embrace One Party Domination and Democracy* 1999, pp. 193-217.

⁷⁵ Erdmann, G. & Basedau, M. “Party systems in Africa: Problems of Categorising and Explaining Party Systems”, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 26:3, (2008), pp. 241-258.

⁷⁶ Bogaards, M. “Crafting competitive party systems: Electoral laws and the opposition in Africa”, *Democratization*, 7:4 (2000). 163-190

case that challenges this somewhat, because they have been in power since 1965. As Burchard notes, there are questions to whether the BDP is on its way out⁷⁷, but 55 years rivals any other cases where competitive democracy resumed, apart from the PRI in Mexico (71 years). Being an inchoate democracy and a democracy being temporally young are two different things. Simply viewing time as the dependent variable for democratization is problematic.

Pempel feels a party loses dominance when it fails to be flexible enough to expand its support base, or fails to be rigid enough to not alienate its historical support base.

Demographic change can reduce the influence of a dominant party's traditional support bases⁷⁸. In Botswana the BDP has largely failed to appeal to the youth vote⁷⁹. This may become problematic as voters alive during the initial years of BDP rule die off. The ANC has also failed to entice non-Africans despite running a disproportional number of non-African candidates for office at times⁸⁰. However, these parties have managed to maintain unity. One of the main hopes for electoral competition in dominant party systems is fractionalization of the dominant party. While there have been small defections and examples of party infighting, all three case studies have avoided fragmentation, despite changes in leadership and wide ranges of political opinion within party ranks.

Monopoly on state resources and strong patronage networks are lynchpins of party dominance. Many cases of party dominance collapse, especially within the developing world involved economic difficulties which deplete the amount revenue going to clients of the

⁷⁷ Burchard, S. "You Have to Know Where to Look in Order to Find It: Competitiveness in Botswana's Dominant Party System." *Government and Opposition*, 48.1, (2013), pp. 101-26.

⁷⁸ Pempel, T. J. (Ed.), *Uncommon Democracies The One-Party Dominant Regimes*, 1990.

⁷⁹ Burchard, S. "You Have to Know Where to Look in Order to Find It: Competitiveness in Botswana's Dominant Party System." *Government and Opposition*, 48.1, (2013), pp. 101-26

⁸⁰ Schlemmer, L. "Democracy or Democratic Hegemony? The Future of Political Pluralism in South Africa" in Giliomee, H. and Simkins, C. (Eds.), *The Awkward Embrace One Party Domination and Democracy*, 1999, pp 281-300.

dominant party. Greene argues that dominant party systems collapse when the dominant party loses the resources to maintain its patronage network⁸¹. The PRI's fall from dominance in Mexico is associated with the economic downturn which effected its ability to continue to pay its clients. Greene also found a quantitative correlation between the price of diamonds and the BDP's electoral support⁸². Levitsky and Way explain how integral the control of state resources is to a dominant party's electoral success, so potentially economic downturns could limit the flow of resources to clients, leading to their desire for political consciousness/independence to outweigh the material benefits of supporting the dominant party⁸³. The argument that the development of a middle class normally leads to the formation of political opposition is problematic in Africa because the middle class is not created through private sector growth, but through state patronage⁸⁴. This new black middle class in the case of South Africa may seek to form an opposition party if state patronage dwindles but disassociating the middle class from dominant party is difficult because they likely recognize their socioeconomic status as inorganic and linked to the state.

Gilomee and Simkins predict that further dominance and an increasingly liberal platform is in the works for the ANC⁸⁵. As they were writing this in 1999, they are certainly correct in these respects. Will dominance continue for the foreseeable future for these southern African polities? The 2014 Botswanan elections brought some hope, but the BDP has still maintained its electoral domination. Du Pisani argues that SWAPO experiences

⁸¹ Greene, K. "The Political Costs of Privatization: Why democratic and Authoritarian Dominant Parties Meet Their Doom", in de Jager, N. and du Toit, P. (Eds.), *Friend or Foe? Dominant Party Systems in Southern Africa*, 2013.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Levitsky, S. and Way, L. "Why Democracy Needs a Level Playing Field" *Journal of Democracy*, 21:1, 2010.: 57-68

⁸⁴ Gilomee, H. and Simkins, C. (Eds.), *The Awkward Embrace One Party Domination and Democracy*, 1999.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

effectively no prospect of electoral challenge⁸⁶ and de Jager and du Toit consider SWAPOs dominance to be a rare case of state dominance, where public good and party interest are indistinguishable to the state bureaucracy and much of the electorate⁸⁷. I find this problematic in regard to the idea that SWAPO rule goes on unchallenged. It goes against Pempel's view that dominant parties always work towards dominance, as opposed to simply having it. However, maybe SWAPO has just mastered the virtuous cycle of dominance. Regardless of the debate of SWAPO's level of entrenchment, I do agree that Namibia is the least probable case for transition to competitive liberal democracy in the near future. Du Toit and De Jager seem somewhat optimistic in their analysis of southern African polities, excluding Zimbabwe. However, by arguing these dominant parties in these cases respect democratic institutions, Du Toit and De Jager do not determine when or if these dominant parties will lose their dominance. Certainly, these polities have the frameworks up to be competitive, multiparty democracies, but they are not. What is the causal mechanism or process that will lead to the end of dominance in these cases? Several scholars have pointed out the high levels on inequality in Botswana, South Africa, and Namibia. Despite steady economic growth, there is still high levels of poverty. In South Africa and Namibia this could be potentially even more delegitimizing as the economic status of Africans still remains behind that of whites. Part of the historical project of the ANC is to decrease socio-economic equality, and while there has been some policy reminiscent of a welfare state⁸⁸, the ANC's commitment to neo-liberal macroeconomic policy does not fulfill this. This technocratic, globalist approach

⁸⁶ du Pisani, A. "The Policy and Resource Endowment of Party Dominance in Namibia: The Past as the Present and the Future?" in de Jager, N. and du Toit, P. (Eds.), *Friend or Foe? Dominant Party Systems in Southern Africa*, 2013, pp. 132-148.

⁸⁷ de Jager, N. and du Toit, P. (Eds.), *Friend or Foe? Dominant Party Systems in Southern Africa*. New York, United Nations University Press, 2013

⁸⁸ Friedman, S. "No Easy Stroll to Dominance: Party Dominance, Opposition, and Civil Society in South Africa" in Giliomee, H. and Simkins, C. (Eds.), *The Awkward Embrace One Party Domination and Democracy*, 1999, pp. 97-126.

to macroeconomic policy is shared by the BDP and SWAPO and while it has fared well in some respects, there is certainly frustration about the “jobless growth” and the high levels of unemployment (and crime in the case of South Africa) that go along with it⁸⁹. I believe the failure of these regimes to universally raise the socioeconomic standing of their support base may prove to be the undoing of their dominance. Friedman notes the tensions present between the Left (COSWATU and SACP) and the ANC within the Tripartite Alliance in South Africa as a potential avenue of party fragmentation⁹⁰. If the Left in South Africa could defect and unify with the more radical EFF, there may be an electoral opportunity to mobilize the unemployed and below-poverty-line voters to challenge the ANC. However, politics are generally not conducted along class lines in South Africa. Ethnicity is much more prominent in party affiliation. Continued support and legitimacy for the ANC among the lower class may eventually wane, but class consciousness in South Africa is nascent. This continues into the argument how ethnic support bases are so much more durable than socio-economic ones. As long as race and ethnicity remain the main determinant of party identification, it will be problematic for the Left in South Africa to challenge party dominance.

Not just the dominant party’s strategy and means of dominance, but also dominant party systems’ success in governance could explain why the prospects for change seems slim. Arian and Barnes argue that dominant party systems should be viewed as a unique system as opposed to a degeneration from competitive multiparty or two-party systems. They claim dominant party systems are a model of “how democracy and stability may be combined under

⁸⁹ du Toit, P. “Bridge or Bridgehead? Comparing Party Systems of Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Malawi”. in Giliomee, H. and Simkins, C. (Eds.), *The Awkward Embrace One Party Domination and Democracy* 1999, pp. 193-217.

⁹⁰ Friedman, S. “No Easy Stroll to Dominance: Party Dominance, Opposition, and Civil Society in South Africa” in Giliomee, H. and Simkins, C. (Eds.), *The Awkward Embrace One Party Domination and Democracy*, 1999, pp. 97-126.

difficult conditions”⁹¹. In the past, dominant party systems have been viewed positively or at least relatively innocuous to democracy in the long term. In industrialized democracies we see no degeneration to one party state, and in several cases within the developing world. For example, in Mexico and Taiwan dominant parties led the transition to competitive institutionalized democracies⁹². Dominant party systems provide stability. They avoid the high levels of fragmentation and the constant turnover of governments that characterize democratic instability. Despite the critiques of the quality of democracy, if one looks at it dichotomously as dominant party system or anarchy, dominant party rule is certainly preferable. Additionally, the virtue of the dominant party needs to be credited. The BDP has made Botswana into one of the wealthiest countries in Africa from one of the least developed places in the world upon independence⁹³. While economic growth has not been exceptional of late in South Africa and Namibia, there has been steady growth throughout the dominant party rule. Corruption, ethnic chauvinism, patronage, and vast social inequality are all legitimate reasons to critique these regimes, but in comparison to other African polities, Botswana, South Africa, and Namibia have arguably experienced the best governance, standard of living, and freedoms on the continent.

Conclusion:

Dominant party systems are democratic, but they are what every polity seeking liberal democracy should fear. There are goods provided by single party dominance in terms of stability, but to allow one party, however inclusive, to rule indefinitely is unjust. This regime

⁹¹ Arian, A. and Barnes, S. "The Dominant Party System: A Neglected Model of Democratic Stability." *The Journal of Politics*, 36:3, (1974), pp. 592-614.

⁹² de Jager, N. and du Toit, P. (Eds.), *Friend or Foe? Dominant Party Systems in Southern Africa*. New York, United Nations University Press, 2013

⁹³ Sebudubudu, D and Botlhomilwe, M. "Interrogating the Dominant Party System In Botswana" in de Jager, N. and du Toit, P. (Eds.), *Friend or Foe? Dominant Party Systems in Southern Africa*. New York, United Nations University Press, 2013, pp. 115-131.

does not work towards the common advantage of all, just the majority at best. At worst, a dominant party is an insurmountable regime that views accountability as a vague formality. The evidence of dominant parties being bridges to liberal democracy are suspect, in that this has only occurred in industrialized democracies in which the opposition and certain democratic norms were already in place. I think the systemic problems of politicized ethnicity, weakly-institutionalized and funded opposition, and prominence of clientelism make dominance potentially much more enduring in the case of Africa. Additionally, in these cases the dominant party's good governance, respect for democratic institutions, and role in the historical liberation give them massive amount of legitimacy. Therefore, simply putting blind faith in further elections and or dominant party fragmentation is problematic. I am critical of the theory that dominant party systems will degenerate to authoritarianism in these cases. If we regard competitive, liberal democracy as the end of democratization, then continued stagnation is a is much more probable fear.

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