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# DOMINANT PARTY SYSTEMS AND ELECTORAL VOLATILITY IN AFRICA

A Comment on Mozaffar and Scarritt

*Matthijs Bogaards*

## ABSTRACT

In a recent publication in this journal, Mozaffar and Scarritt claim to have found a puzzling combination of low fragmentation and high volatility in African party systems. However, if we look at national party systems rather than Africa-wide averages, include regime type as a variable and specify dominance, we find three different constellations: dominant party systems with relatively low volatility, non-dominant and pulverized party systems with high volatility and dominant *authoritarian* party systems with high volatility. The real surprise is that dominant parties in authoritarian regimes have higher electoral instability than dominant parties in democracies. The analysis is based on data from 78 elections in 20 African countries with at least three consecutive multiparty elections.

KEY WORDS ■ Africa ■ democracy ■ dominant parties ■ electoral volatility  
■ fragmentation

## Introduction

In a recent publication in this journal, Mozaffar and Scarritt (2005) identify and seek to explain two puzzling features of African party systems: low fragmentation and high volatility. In fact, the main puzzle lies in the unusual combination of the two. However, there are reasons for doubting these findings. First, the analysis is based on a database of electoral system features and election results that is only summarily described, but appears to include almost all sub-Saharan African countries with multiparty elections, irrespective of the nature of the regime, the quality of the elections and the number of consecutive elections. Whereas studies of electoral volatility in Eastern Europe and Latin America have either selected on regime type

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(Tavits, 2005) or controlled for regime type (Remmer, 1991), Mozaffar and Scarritt do neither. This leaves open the possibility that the concentration in African party systems at least in part is due to undemocratic elections and that aggregate electoral stability is different in democratic versus non-democratic countries.

Second, the analysis is conducted almost exclusively with averages at the continental level. To describe 'party system structure' in Africa, Mozaffar and Scarritt provide continent-wide averages of the mean, median and standard deviation of vote-share and seat-share of the largest party as well as the effective number of electoral and parliamentary parties. For electoral and legislative volatility too, only Africa-wide averages are given. By consequence, it is very difficult if not impossible to make statements about *national* party systems. There is the risk of an ecological fallacy in concluding from Africa-wide averages of party system concentration and volatility that the same relationship exists at the national level. On the contrary, it is likely that important differences exist among African countries and that the continent displays a diversity of constellations.

Third, to determine the presence of dominant parties in Africa, two more elements are necessary: a concept of dominance and an element of time, as dominance is established over successive elections. Both elements are missing in the analysis of Mozaffar and Scarritt. We are informed that the average effective number of legislative parties across all elections in Africa is 2.02 (p. 404), but this does not tell us much about the kind of party systems we can expect in the region. Even for individual countries, it is not easy to identify type of party system on the basis of the effective number of parties. In Africa, any effective number of parties between 1 and 3.3 has been associated with a dominant party system (Bogaards, 2004). Second, the element of time separates occasional majorities from sustained one-party dominance. That is why most definitions of dominant party systems include a minimum duration. It is very well possible to have indicators showing a concentrated party system plus high volatility in a situation of alternating majorities, but this should not be mistaken for a dominant party system.

### An Alternative Analysis

'Electoral instability is a phenomenon originating at the level of individual behaviour, but which acquires political relevance only by reference to the changes which it produces in the structure of party systems' (Bartolini and Mair, 1990: 4). In order to assess the relationship between type of party system and volatility, we need information from consecutive multiparty elections. Twenty-six countries in sub-Saharan Africa had organized at least three consecutive multiparty elections for parliament up to the end of 2004. Data on vote-shares for three consecutive elections are available for

20 countries: Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, The Gambia, Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, the Seychelles, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.<sup>1</sup> The total number of legislative elections in this dataset is 78.<sup>2</sup>

Two different methods for counting parties are followed. First, the effective number of parliamentary parties (Ns) invented by Laakso and Taagepera (1979) and used by Mozaffar and Scarritt: this concentration index measures the relative size of parties. It takes each party's share of the vote or seats as a decimal fraction, squares it, then sums these squared fractions and divides one by this sum to yield the effective number of parties. Second, Sartori's counting rules: these look at the number of relevant actors in party competition and government formation. Relevant are those parties with coalition or blackmail potential, that is, all parties with the potential of either forming a coalition or preventing a coalition from being formed (Sartori, 1976: 122–3). In presidential systems, relevance includes all parties 'that make a difference in helping (or obstructing) the president's election, and that determine his having (or not having) a majority support in the legislative assemblies' (Sartori, 1994: 34). Divided government signals the presence of more than one relevant party.

Sartori's counting rules are grounded in a typology. Sartori distinguishes four types of multiparty system for Africa's 'fluid' polities: dominant authoritarian, dominant, non-dominant and pulverized (1976: 260, Table 30). The non-dominant party system is described as a situation of 'relatively few parties that actually counterweight one another' (p. 258); the pulverized party system speaks for itself. A dominant party system exists when one party wins an absolute majority in parliament over at least three consecutive elections and captures the presidency (see Bogaards, 2004).<sup>3</sup> Of special interest is the dominant *authoritarian* party system, in which one-party dominance is maintained by extra-democratic means. The authoritarian dominant party does not allow for competition on an equal basis. Dominant authoritarian parties are operationalized as dominant parties in authoritarian regimes.<sup>4</sup>

To identify regime type, Doorenspleet's (2005) classification of minimally democratic regimes based on selected disaggregated Polity IV authority scores is used, supplemented with Freedom House data for the countries (Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe and the Seychelles) and the time period (the year 2004) not covered by Polity.<sup>5</sup> Democratic are all those countries considered minimally democratic by Doorenspleet and classified as either free or an 'electoral democracy' by Freedom House. Freedom House's classification of electoral democracy and Doorenspleet's classification of minimal democracy are similar conceptually, as both explicitly seek to operationalize Dahl's (1971) concept of polyarchy and have an almost perfect empirical correspondence for Africa (Bogaards, 2007).<sup>6</sup> An electoral democracy is a competitive, multiparty political system with universal adult suffrage, regularly contested elections without massive fraud and significant public

access of major parties to the electorate through the media and through generally open political campaigning.<sup>7</sup>

To calculate electoral volatility, the Pedersen index is used. The differences between the vote-shares for all parties in the last elections are added up and then divided by 2. The Pedersen index is the most widely used method for calculating volatility and its properties and behaviour compare favourably to the alternatives (Taagepera and Grofman, 2003). This is the method used for Africa by Mozaffar and Scarritt and by Kuenzi and Lambright (2001, 2005), although the latter calculate *legislative* volatility based on changes in seat-share instead of *electoral* volatility based on changes in vote-share. The advantage of using legislative volatility is that seat-shares are more widely available and more reliable than vote-shares in Africa. The disadvantage is that legislative volatility is caused not only by changes in vote-share but in addition by the working of the electoral system.<sup>8</sup> Another disadvantage is that it makes the results less easily comparable to those of other studies, usually based on electoral volatility.

There are at least four problems plaguing African voting data. First, for many countries and elections they are not readily available, especially not after 1999, the year in which Nohlen et al. (1999) published their invaluable data handbook entitled *Elections in Africa*. It is probably no coincidence that vote results are most likely to be missing for elections in authoritarian regimes or controversial elections in electoral democracies. Second, when and where they are available, their accuracy may be contested. Election results in authoritarian regimes especially should not be taken at face value. Third, not seldom, data are incomplete, as reported vote-shares do not add up to 100 percent. Fourth, votes for small parties and independents are often lumped together in a category 'others'. Normally, this category is small, but for the 1999 legislative elections in Benin, 'other parties' count for 41 percent of the votes! Remmer (1991) and Roberts and Wibbels (1999) deal with the problem of small parties by calculating the aggregate shift in the vote for all parties receiving less than 5 percent of the vote. However, this solution will underestimate volatility, as can be shown with a simple example. Imagine there are two small parties, one with 2 percent and the other with 4 percent of the vote. In the next election their fortunes are reversed. On aggregate, these parties win 6 percent of seats in both elections and volatility would be zero for Remmer and Roberts and Wibbels. However, if we look at the individual results, volatility for these two parties was 2 plus 2 divided by 2 is 2 percent. Therefore, when results were available for small parties, these were used.<sup>9</sup>

For party mergers, splits and name changes, the guidelines of Bartolini and Mair (1990: 311–12) are followed. For party splits, they stipulate that 'when a party splits into two or more parties, the relevant electoral volatility is computed by subtracting the combined vote of the new parties from that of the original party in the election immediately preceding the split' (p. 311). Likewise, when parties merge, the vote for the new combination

is compared to the combined vote of the merged parties in the previous elections. Name changes are ignored.<sup>10</sup>

The implications of choice of type of volatility and of different coding decisions are illustrated by Lesotho, where the ruling BCP split and the prime minister with the support of most of the parliamentary caucus formed a new party, the LCD (see Neocosmos, 2002). The LCD won the subsequent elections in 1998 with 61 percent of the vote against 10 percent for the rump BCP. The first-past-the-post electoral system inflated this victory and gave the LCD 78 of the country's 80 seats, leaving the BCP with only one seat. Using legislative volatility and treating the governing LCD as a new party, Kuenzi and Lambright (2001: 449) arrive at an almost perfect volatility score of 99. Using electoral volatility and following Bartolini and Mair's rules for party splits, volatility is only 4. The difference could hardly be greater.

In general, the practice of summing the parts for the first election following the merger or split depresses volatility levels. This rule is based on a particular understanding of party formation and what it means to change one's vote. One could argue that in Africa's emerging party systems with highly personalized politics a new combination or a breakaway party indicates rupture rather than continuity and a vote for this formation constitutes a vote shift rather than loyalty. Because the rules for calculating volatility have an impact on the level of volatility one will find, they should be stated and justified. This article adopts Bartolini and Mair's coding rules because these are the standard in the field and facilitate a comparison of results.

Sikk (2005: 408) complains that 'the index of volatility is blind to the parties involved in contributing to it'. To estimate the extent to which electoral volatility is caused by voters switching between existing parties or by new parties entering the electoral race, this article calculates the vote-share for new parties. Whether a party is really new is often difficult to establish. Given the fluid nature of African parties – parties come and go and party labels change frequently, especially among opposition parties – and a dearth of reliable sources it can be tricky to determine with any certainty whether competitors in election  $t$  are the same as those in election  $t - 1$ .<sup>11</sup>

To gain further knowledge about the make-up of electoral volatility, the percentage change in incumbent vote is listed separately (Roberts and Wibbels, 1999). In the event of splits or mergers, incumbent vote change looks only at the ruling party. For example, after the merger of the ruling ZANU(PF) with its main rival ZAPU in Zimbabwe, its vote-share improved by 3 percent in 1990. The incumbent vote change in this case is the difference between the result of the merger party and the result of the ruling party in the previous election. However, for the calculation of volatility, the result of the merger party is compared to that of both constituent parties, showing that the combination in fact lost 16 percent compared to the combined result of 1985. To facilitate an assessment of competitiveness based on volatility, incumbent vote change (IVC) is also expressed as a percentage of

overall volatility. The minimum is zero, when volatility is caused entirely by changes among opposition parties, and the maximum is 100, when the gains of the government equal the losses of the opposition or vice versa.<sup>12</sup>

## Results

Table 1 gives the results. The average volatility across all 78 elections (58 volatility scores) is 19 with a minimum of 2 for Botswana 1979 and a maximum of 49 for Benin in 1995. The standard deviation is 11. These figures are much lower than the average electoral volatility of 30 (standard deviation of 20) reported by Mozaffar and Scarritt (2005: 404). As the authors do not provide volatility scores for individual countries and do not specify how they deal with party mergers and splits, it is difficult to determine the causes for this discrepancy, apart from differences in the set of cases and the elections taken into account. According to the appendix (p. 418), Mozaffar and Scarritt used data from 101 elections, 7 of which were single elections, and calculated 65 volatility scores, 12 of which for the 12 countries that had only organized two consecutive multiparty elections. This leaves 53 volatility scores for the 17 countries with three or more elections until 2001 for which Mozaffar and Scarritt have voting data available. The database used in this article and presented in Table 1 covers the same countries and has election data up to 2004. The average largest party takes 59 percent of the vote (Mozaffar and Scarritt: 58) and 72 percent of the seats (70).<sup>13</sup>

In contrast to what Tavits (2005) found for Eastern Europe, but in line with Mainwaring and Zoco's (2007) findings for third-wave democracies worldwide, no general trend towards stabilization over time is discernible. Volatility for the last elections is 20, while volatility for penultimate elections is slightly lower at 18. For the 11 countries that organized three consecutive elections up to 2004, an increase in volatility from 17 to 20 percent is evident between the second and third elections. In the three countries that had organized a fourth election by 2004 (Ghana, Namibia and São Tomé and Príncipe), volatility declined sharply between the second and third elections from 33 to 13 percent, to increase very slightly to 14 percent in the fourth election. The four countries with a longer tradition of multiparty elections show stark contrast. The only two long-standing African democracies, Botswana and Mauritius, display a stable level of electoral instability between the last elections, whereas the two countries with a tradition of unfree multiparty elections, Senegal and Zimbabwe, exhibit a strong rise in volatility.

The figures on incumbent vote change are mainly negative, indicating vote loss for the ruling party. Only in Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa has the dominant party steadily increased its vote-share. Namibia is a perfect example of a consolidating dominant party system. Volatility has declined

Table 1. Elections, parties and volatility in 20 African countries

Country	Election year	Vote share winner	Seat share winner	Ns	Relevant parties	Regime type	Turn-over	Party system	Electoral volatility	Incumbent vote change (IVC)	IVC as percentage	New parties' vote share
Benin	1991	19	19	8.8	6+	D	Yes	Pulver	-	-	-	-
	1995	15	25	6.7	6+	D	Yes	Pulver	49	-17	36	41
	1999	23	32	6.3	6+	D		Pulver	19	+8	43	9+
Botswana	1969	68	77	1.6	1	D		Dom	-	-	-	-
	1974	77	84	1.4	1	D		Dom	9	+8	92	1
	1979	75	91	1.2	1	D		Dom	2	-1	61	0
	1984	68	82	1.4	1	D		Dom	9	-7	80	2
	1989	65	91	1.2	1	D		Dom	7	-3	45	1
	1994	55	67	1.8	1	D		Dom	13	-10	77	3
	1999	57	82	1.4	1	D		Dom	5	+2	50	12
	2004	52	77	1.6	1	D		Dom	7	-5	71	1
Burkina Faso	1992	48	73	1.8	1	A		Dom auth	-	-	-	-
	1997	69	91	1.2	1	A		Dom auth	32	+20	64	11
	2002	49	51	3.3	1	A		Dom auth	22	-19	87	16
Cape Verde	1991	66	71	1.7	2	D	Yes	Non-dom	-	-	-	-
	1995	61	70	1.8	2	D		Non-dom	9	-5	57	9
	2001	50	55	2.1	2	D	Yes	Non-dom	23	-21	90	3
Djibouti	1992	75	100	1	1	A		Dom auth	-	-	-	-
	1998	79	100	1	1	A		Dom auth	8	+4	52	2
	2003	63	100	1	1	A		Dom auth	20	-18	93	0
Equatorial Guinea	1993	70	85	1.4	1	A		Dom auth	-	-	-	-
	1999	85	94	1.3	1	A		Dom auth	22	+16	71	6
	2004	88	98	1.8	1	A		Dom auth	6	+2	38	0
The Gambia	1966	65	75	1.6	1	D		Dom	-	-	-	-
	1972	63	69	1.3	1	D		Dom	19	+2	12	0

Continued over



Table 1. Continued

Country	Election year	Vote-share winner	Seat-share winner	Ns	Relevant parties	Regime type	Turn-over	Party system	Electoral volatility	Incumbent vote change (IVC)	IVC as percentage	New parties' vote share
The Gambia	1977	69	79	1.3	1	D		Dom	29	+6	21	23
	1982	62	77	1.6	1	D		Dom	16	-8	48	0
	1987	56	86	1.5	1	D		Dom	24	-6	23	17
	1992	77	95	1.1	1	A		Dom auth	-	-	-	-
Ghana	1996	53	66	1.9	1	A		Dom auth	43	-24	56	43
	2000	45	50	2.2	2	D	Yes	Non-dom	17	-12	68	3
	2004	49	56	2.1	2	D		Non-dom	6	+4	73	0
	1993	75	100	1	1	D	Yes	Dom	-	-	-	-
Lesotho	1998	61	97	1	1	PF		Dom	4	-14	96	62
	2002	55	65	2.2	1	D		Dom	16	-6	36	9
	1994	46	48	2.7	2-3	D	Yes	Non-dom	-	-	-	-
	1999	47	48	2.7	2-3	D		Non-dom	9	+1	10	0
Mauritania	2004	25	25	4.3	2-4	D		Non-dom	22	-22	30	19
	1992	67	85	1.4	1	A		Dom auth	-	-	-	-
	1996	68	89	1.3	1	A		Dom auth	18	0	0	12
	2001	51	79	1.6	1	A		Dom auth	17	-17	100	6
Mauritius	1976	41	49	2.4	2-4	D		Non-dom	-	-	-	-
	1982	63	91	1.2	2-4	D	Yes	Non-dom	25	+22	88	1
	1983	46	66	1.9	2-4	D		Non-dom	19	-17	90	1
	1987	47	63	1.9	2-4	D		Non-dom	3	+2	49	1
Mozambique	1991	55	86	2.6	2-4	D		Non-dom	16	n.a.	-	1
	1995	65	91	1.2	2-4	D	Yes	Non-dom	25	n.a.	-	11
	2000	52	81	1.4	2-4	D		Non-dom	27	n.a.	-	7
	1994	44	52	2.1	1	D		Dom	-	-	-	-
Mozambique	1999	49	53	2	1	D		Dom	11	+4	37	4
	2004	62	64	1.8	1	D		Dom	13	+13	100	4

Continued opposite

Table 1. Continued

Country	Election year	Vote share winner	Seat share winner	Ns	Relevant parties	Regime type	Turn-over	Party system	Electoral volatility	Incumbent vote change (IVC)	IVC as percentage	New parties' vote share
Namibia	1989	57	57	2.4	1	D		Dom	-	-	-	-
	1994	74	74	1.7	1	D		Dom	18	+17	93	2
	1999	76	76	1.7	1	D		Dom	12	+2	19	10
	2004	75	76	2	1	D		Dom	7	0	7	4
São Tomé and Príncipe	1991	54	60	2	3	D	Yes	Non-dom	-	-	-	-
	1994	42	49	2.7	3	D	Yes	Non-dom	37	-34	94	26
	1998	51	56	2.4	3	D		Non-dom	12	+8	66	2
	2002	40	44	2.6	3	D		Non-dom	27	-11	41	5
Senegal	1983	76	92	1.7	1	A		Dom auth	-	-	-	-
	1988	71	86	1.3	1	A		Dom auth	14	-5	36	2
	1993	57	70	1.8	1	A		Dom auth	16	-14	88	1
	1998	50	66	2.1	1	A		Dom auth	20	-6	32	25
Seychelles	2001	50	74	1.8	2-3	D	Yes	Non-dom	45	-33	73	19
	1993	57	82	1.4	1	PF		Dom	-	-	-	-
	1998	62	88	1.3	1	D		Dom	21	+5	24	0
	2002	54	68	1.8	1	D		Dom	16	-7	45	0
South Africa	1994	63	63	2.2	1	D	Yes	Dom	-	-	-	-
	1999	66	66	2.1	1	D		Dom	17	+4	21	4
	2004	70	70	2	1	D		Dom	8	+3	42	0
	1991	74	83	1.4	1	D	Yes	Dom	-	-	-	-
Zambia	1996	61	87	1.3	1	A		Dom auth	38	-13	35	27
	2001	28	46	3	1	A		Dom auth	39	-33	26	65
	1980	63	57	1.7	1	D	Yes	Dom	-	-	-	-
	1985	77	64	2.2	1	A		Dom auth	14	+14	100	0
Zimbabwe	1990	80	97	1	1	A		Dom auth	18	+3	17	18
	1995	81	98	1	1	A		Dom auth	18	+1	5	6
	2000	49	52	2	1	A		Dom auth	47	-33	70	47

with every election. The dominant party has stabilized its support at a very high level and in the last elections aggregate vote change was largely confined to a weak opposition. The same is true of the dominant authoritarian party in Equatorial Guinea. Senegal exemplifies the electoral haemorrhaging of a dominant authoritarian party, losing more than half of the total electorate in a succession of elections. Zimbabwe, however, shows how electoral fortunes can change quite suddenly, with the ruling party losing one-third of all voters in a single election. Any prediction about the future of dominant (authoritarian) party systems in Africa would have to take such information into account.

Looking at incumbent vote change in relation to volatility, a rough distinction can be made between countries where gains and losses of the ruling party contribute significantly to overall volatility (Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Lesotho, Mauritius, Mozambique, São Tomé and Príncipe and Senegal) and those where volatility is largely caused by a game of changing chairs among opposition parties (Benin, The Gambia, Malawi, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa and Zambia).<sup>14</sup> Mauritania and Zimbabwe are more difficult to place because of drastic fluctuation of the contribution of incumbent vote change to overall volatility.

The vote for new parties would seem a useful indicator for party system institutionalization, and it is surprising it has not been used to this effect so far (cf. Kuenzi and Lambright, 2001).<sup>15</sup> In light of frequently voiced exasperation about the fluidity of African party politics, the vote-share for new parties is remarkably low, although there are important exceptions. Apart from Benin, Burkina Faso, Senegal and Zambia, there are no countries where new parties managed to attract more than 10 percent of the vote in two consecutive elections, indicating that structurally unstable party systems are rare.<sup>16</sup>

### The African Puzzle

The main claim of Mozaffar and Scarritt (2005: 406) is that 'high electoral volatility coincides with low party system fragmentation in Africa's emerging democracies'. Electoral volatility in Africa (20) is high in comparison to Western Europe, where the average between 1945 and 1985 was only 8 (Bartolini and Mair, 1990: 100), but not with respect to new democracies in Eastern Europe, with an average volatility of 25.6 percent (Tavits, 2005: 291) or 26.1 percent (Sikk, 2005: 401) or Latin America, where average volatility in the 1980s and 1990s reached 24 percent (Roberts and Wibbels, 1999: 577). The effective number of parties is low, with the sole exception of Benin, and averages 1.9 (Mozaffar and Scarritt: 2). In the other countries, it varies between 1 (Djibouti, Lesotho until 2002 and Zimbabwe between 1990 and 2000) and 4.3 (Malawi since 2004). Mozaffar and Scarritt never

specify what they mean with ‘dominant party systems’, seemingly equating this with a low average effective number of parties. However, we know that countries with a similar effective number of parties may have different party systems. Cape Verde has on average 1.9 parties, but has witnessed two alternations already and is non-dominant, whereas Namibia with the same average effective number of parties has a dominant party system.

To test whether there is a relationship between type of party system and volatility, Table 2 groups together African countries on the basis of party system, using Sartori’s counting rules and typology, and provides average volatility scores per country and per party system type. If there were a coincidence of one-party dominance and high electoral volatility in Africa, as posited by Mozaffar and Scarritt, we would expect dominant and dominant authoritarian parties to have a higher average volatility than non-dominant and pulverized party systems: the African puzzle. However, this is not the case. Dominant parties in Africa experience less electoral volatility than non-dominant and pulverized party systems. In contrast, volatility for dominant authoritarian party systems is at the same level as for non-dominant and pulverized party systems.<sup>17</sup> This finding should stimulate research into the different electoral dynamics of dominant parties in democratic versus authoritarian settings. Dominant authoritarian party systems seem of two kinds. The first sees an electorally safe ruling party with relatively low volatility (Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea and, to a lesser extent, Mauritania). The second sees a governing party under electoral pressure, expressed in high volatility and severe incumbency losses (Senegal, Zambia, Zimbabwe). Only Burkina Faso does not fit either of these patterns.

The results do not change when one uses the effective number of parties instead of Sartori’s counting rules. Table 3 groups together cases by effective number of parties and level of volatility. The distinction between high

**Table 2.** Party system type and average volatility in 20 African countries

<i>Party system type</i>	<i>Non-dominant and pulverized</i>	<i>Dominant</i>	<i>Dominant Authoritarian</i>
Countries	Benin (34)	Botswana (7)	Burkina Faso (27)
(average	Cape Verde (16)	The Gambia (22)	Djibouti (14)
electoral	Ghana (22)	Lesotho (10)	Equatorial Guinea (14)
volatility)	Malawi (15)	Mozambique (12)	Mauritania (17)
	Mauritius (19)	Namibia (12)	Senegal (24)
	São Tomé and	Seychelles (18)	Zambia (38)
	Príncipe (25)	South Africa (12)	Zimbabwe (24)
<i>Average volatility</i>	22 (20 without Benin)	13	23
<i>Average Ns</i>	2.7 (2.2 without Benin)	1.6	1.7

**Table 3.** Effective number of parties and level of volatility in 20 African countries

<i>Volatility</i>	<i>Effective number of parliamentary parties</i>		
	<i>1–2</i>	<i>2.1–3</i>	<i>3.1–</i>
High	20 (10)	7 (2)	4 (1)
Low	21 (4)	6 (1)	0

*Note:* Total number of volatility scores is 58. The number of authoritarian cases is in parentheses.

and low volatility is made by doubling the European average, following Mair (1997: 68).<sup>18</sup> High is any volatility above 16. Party numbers are grouped into three categories. It is important to note that these cutoff points do not correspond to types of party system and are simply meant to distinguish between different degrees of fragmentation (see Bogaards, 2004). To identify regime type, the number of authoritarian cases is given in parentheses. For example, there are 20 elections with an effective number of legislative parties between 1 and 2 and high volatility, and, of these, 10 elections were in authoritarian countries. From Table 3 it is clear that, different from what Mozaffar and Scarritt portend, most African party systems with low fragmentation have a low level of volatility. Of the party systems with low fragmentation and high volatility, half are authoritarian, again highlighting the importance of the regime variable ignored by Mozaffar and Scarritt.

The final test for the existence of Mozaffar and Scarritt's puzzle is correlation analysis. If there were a combination of low fragmentation and high volatility in Africa, we would expect a negative relationship. Instead, correlation analysis yields a positive relation between the effective number of parties and the level of volatility. The correlation is only modest, at 0.289, but significant at the 0.05 level.<sup>19</sup> In sum, all three tests disprove Mozaffar and Scarritt's central claim about a relationship between low fragmentation and high volatility in Africa.

## Explanations

In explaining the alleged puzzle of dominant party systems with low volatility in Africa, Mozaffar and Scarritt focus on 'the joint effects of strategic choice and institutional legacies on party formation and stability' (p. 407). Much space is devoted to electoral system choice, even though the authors admit that the actual difference in outcomes between different types of electoral system 'is not substantial' (p. 412). That electoral systems are not responsible for dominant parties in Africa should not have been a surprise as this was the main argument in Bogaards (2000) and has also been noted by Van Cranenburgh (2003) and others (Basedau, 2005). Moreover, as Mozaffar and Scarritt show, the level of electoral volatility in Africa is

almost the same for majoritarian systems (32.2) as for proportional representation (30.6) (p. 413). Since the electoral system, by the authors' own admission, is related to neither fragmentation nor volatility, it is not clear how the elaborate discussion of this variable will contribute to solving the alleged puzzle of their relationship.

The discussion of presidentialism and ethnicity, the other two selected explanatory variables, only examines their impact on party system fragmentation (see also Van de Walle, 2003). No mention is made of volatility, let alone that the impact of presidentialism and ethnicity on the *relationship* between volatility and fragmentation is examined. In sum, Mozaffar and Scarritt's analysis does not speak directly to the alleged 'puzzling combination of low party system fragmentation and high volatility' (p. 416). As a consequence, and contrary to the authors' claim, no 'systematic explanation' is provided, irrespective of whether one accepts such a puzzle exists (p. 416).

The analysis in this article has revealed that there is a relationship between relatively high volatility and low fragmentation, but only for authoritarian regimes in Africa. Mozaffar and Scarritt did not discover this fact because they failed to include regime type as a variable and in their analysis treat all elections alike. To understand why dominant authoritarian parties have higher volatility than dominant parties, one would have to look at the nature of one-party dominance and at the regime context in which party politics is played out.

### Predictions

The prediction of a decline in electoral volatility over time (p. 418) is not corroborated by the findings here and finds scant support from Mozaffar and Scarritt's own evidence from the few long-standing democracies in Africa (Botswana, The Gambia until 1994 and Mauritius). They treat these 'established democracies' separately in the analysis, based on the expectation that developments there can be used as a 'benchmark' (p. 402) and 'suggest the likely trajectory of party system development' on the continent (ibid.). This expectation sits uneasily with the special status of these countries and their small number makes them susceptible to the influence of outliers. Volatility for The Gambia is artificially high owing to the inclusion of the post-coup elections of 1997, organized by a military-dictator-turned-presidential-candidate who banned all pre-coup parties.<sup>20</sup> Before that, The Gambia was particular in that varying vote levels for independents boosted volatility. There is, thus, little reason to use developments in these deviant cases as pointers for the future of other African countries.

## Conclusions

This analysis has demonstrated that, contrary to Mozaffar and Scarritt, there is no 'puzzle of African party systems' if by that one means a combination of high volatility and low fragmentation in the party systems of Africa's electoral regimes.

The coincidence of low average fragmentation with relatively high average volatility (although much lower than what Mozaffar and Scarritt calculate) at the continental level is not found in the national party systems. Instead, we find three different constellations: dominant party systems with relatively low volatility, non-dominant and pulverized party systems with high volatility and dominant *authoritarian* party systems with high volatility. The real puzzle is why dominant parties in democratic and authoritarian regimes have different levels of volatility and why dominant authoritarian parties experience more electoral change than their democratic counterparts. The analysis of elections and voting data, and the identification of the type of party system, needs to take account of the nature of elections and the regimes in which they are conducted.

Different from Mozaffar and Scarritt's prediction, and different from what has been observed in Eastern Europe, on average electoral volatility has slightly increased over time in Africa. Africa is exceptional because of the dominance of dominant party systems on the continent, but the average level of electoral volatility is not much different from that found in the new democracies of Latin America and Eastern Europe. This is a surprising result in light of 'the commonplace view that African parties and voters are fluid', but one supported by other recent research (Lindberg and Morrison, 2005: 10).<sup>21</sup>

Lindberg and Morrison (2005) break new ground in the study of electoral volatility in Africa as they look at volatility at the individual rather than the aggregate level and seek to explain electoral behaviour through demographic features. Kuenzi and Lambright have studied volatility in Africa in relation to party institutionalization (2001) and democratic consolidation (2005). This article has suggested that these relationships can be examined more precisely by breaking down the components of electoral volatility, that is, by looking at the changing fortune of ruling parties and the vote-share for new parties. There are different ways of measuring volatility and different ways of dealing with party splits, mergers and name changes. The choices made will depend on the specific purposes, but the rules for calculating volatility need to be clearly stated.

In light of the emerging research on volatility in Africa, it is difficult to understand Manning's (2005: 724) claim that 'volatility and fragmentation, among the most common measures of party system development and stability, are clearly not adequate measures of anything in the African context'. This conclusion seems to be based on the notion that volatility and fragmentation are meaningful concepts only in the context of strong, socially rooted parties, with coherent organizations and programmatic identities.

The same critique could be levelled against the analysis of parties and party systems in Africa in general, which would thereby invalidate most of our cumulated knowledge about and the analytical tools for the study of African politics. However, such a verdict cuts against the grain of recent work by Africanists who have concluded that ‘much of what we know about how electoral and democratic politics works in the established democracies may also apply to new democracies in Africa’ (Lindberg and Morrison, 2005: 20) and that, ‘although there is a strong western European bias in established party research, it can be applied in a modified way to political parties in Africa as well’ (Erdmann, 2004: 80–1).

## Notes

I thank the four reviewers, Giovanni Carbone and participants at the Research Colloquium in Integrated Social Sciences at the Jacobs University Bremen for their helpful comments.

- 1 Vote-shares are missing for Gabon and Togo, the first two elections in Madagascar, the 1997 elections in Kenya, the last elections in Cameroon and Mali as well as the fourth elections in Benin. For The Gambia, only the period from independence until the coup in 1994 is taken into account. For 1992, no vote-shares of the opposition are available.
- 2 Data on elections, government composition and political parties come from Nohlen et al. (1999), supplemented with information from the *African Research Bulletin: Political, Social and Cultural Series*, various editions of *Africa South of the Sahara* (London: Europa Publishers), election results reported by the Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU) at: <http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/parlinesearch.asp>, the Election Guide of the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) at: <http://www.electionguide.org/>, the African Elections Database at: <http://africanelections.tripod.com/>; the Malawi Electoral Commission at: <http://www.sdn.org.mw/~solomon/mec/index.htm>; and the Ghana Electoral Commission at: [http://www.ghana.gov.gh/election\\_2004/results.php](http://www.ghana.gov.gh/election_2004/results.php).
- 3 Turnover is operationalized as a change of the majority party in parliament, the main party in government or the presidency.
- 4 The minimum of three consecutive electoral victories does not apply when the ruling party did not change after the introduction of multiparty politics, as in Ghana. In this case, elected dominance is regarded as the continuation of non-elected dominance.
- 5 At: <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/polity/>.
- 6 Lesotho (1998–2001) and the Seychelles (1993–95) are classified as partially free, in-between democracy and authoritarianism, following Freedom House. The Seychelles are not covered by Polity, and before 1996 Freedom House did not provide information on electoral democracies. Lesotho between 1998 and 2001 is a special case, as the elected government had to be supported by the military intervention of neighbouring countries to subdue violent opposition. To avoid the misleading impression that the country turned authoritarian, the original Freedom House classification of partially free is used.



- 7 See: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=35&year=2005>.
- 8 One would expect disproportionality to inflate the consequences of vote change and thereby increase volatility, but instead Mozaffar and Scarritt (2005: 413) report that legislative volatility is lower than electoral volatility and that legislative volatility in plurality and majoritarian electoral systems is the same as for proportional representation. Part of the explanation may lie in the phenomenon of wasted votes, as these increase electoral volatility without affecting legislative volatility.
- 9 Missing vote-shares were added to the category 'others'. The larger this category, the more likely that the calculation underestimates volatility. This explains, for example, the relatively low volatility in Benin in 1999.
- 10 In Mauritius, parties contest elections in changing coalitions. As vote-shares are only reported for the coalitions, not the member parties, volatility from 1991 on was difficult to calculate and some parties were counted twice. To correct for this, total volatility was divided by the total vote-share used in the calculation.
- 11 Sikk (2005: 399) is interested in what he calls 'genuinely new' parties that are not linked to any parliamentary parties, have a novel name and structure, and do not have any important figures from past democratic politics among their major members. This would be another interesting category, but one even more difficult to verify.
- 12 When expressed as a percentage of total volatility, the incumbent vote change (IVC) is recalculated as the actual contribution of the ruling party to overall volatility. Simply dividing overall volatility by the IVC would overstate its share in the event of mergers and splits affecting the ruling party. In fact, with Bartolini and Mair's guidelines it can happen that, as in Lesotho's 1998 elections, the vote loss of the ruling party is higher than overall volatility.
- 13 The figures by Mozaffar and Scarritt are from Table 2 (p. 404), based on 91 elections, and can be slightly different from those in their Table 1 (p. 403), based on 101 elections. It is not clear which 10 elections are different between the two tables.
- 14 Significant here means that the incumbent vote change on average made up more than 50 percent of electoral volatility. For Zambia in 2001, one should know that the heavy loss of the ruling party contributed only little to overall volatility, as splits were counted against it. Most volatility comes from changing parties and fortunes in the opposition, a fact that is adequately reflected in the figure.
- 15 To facilitate interpretation, Table 1 gives the vote-share only for new parties, not for new combinations of existing parties. The difference can be profound. For example, if coalitions are recognized as new parties, the vote-share for new parties in Djibouti in 2003 would be 100 percent.
- 16 Of course, the second time, a new party is not new anymore. For Benin, the exact vote-share for new parties in 1999 could not be calculated, as many small parties are thrown together in the 'other' category, but it was at least 9 percent.
- 17 Two countries (Ghana and Senegal) underwent a transition to democracy, and changed from a dominant authoritarian to a non-dominant party system. If these countries are excluded from the analysis in Table 2, the results do not significantly change.
- 18 What is high and low is relative. Mozaffar and Scarritt never specify what they perceive as 'high' volatility and 'low' fragmentation. Because data from established West European party systems are commonly used as a point of reference,

here the European average is taken as a starting point. Only four elections in this dataset had a volatility of more than 40 or double the African average. The African median is 17.

- 19 Visual inspection of the scatterplot did not reveal a curvilinear relationship.
- 20 In such a situation, it is advisable to calculate volatility separately for the pre- and post-coup period, following Bartolini and Mair's (1990: 312) rule for dealing with interruptions by war.
- 21 Birnir (2007) provides a possible explanation, arguing that in new democracies ethnic voting stabilizes electoral behaviour.

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