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# Voting for Democracy

Watershed Elections in Contemporary Anglophone  
Africa

*Edited by*

**John Daniel**

**Roger Southall**

**Morris Szeftel**



# VOTING FOR DEMOCRACY



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Watershed Elections in Contemporary Anglophone Africa

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# Contents

<i>List of Tables</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>List of Contributors</i>	<i>ix</i>
1 Political Crisis and Democratic Renewal in Africa <i>Morris Szeftel</i>	1
2 Electoral Systems and Democratization in Africa <i>Roger Southall</i>	19
3 Electoral Corruption and Manipulation in Africa: the case for international monitoring <i>John Daniel and Roger Southall</i>	37
4 The 1989 Elections and the Decolonization of Namibia <i>Lionel Cliffe and Donna Pankhurst</i>	57
5 Democratization and the 1991 Elections in Zambia <i>Carolyn Baylies and Morris Szeftel</i>	83
6 Kenya: The Survival of the Old Order <i>Rok Ajulu</i>	110
7 Settling Old Scores: from authoritarianism to dependent democracy in Lesotho <i>Roger Southall</i>	136
8 Blocked Transition in Nigeria: democracy and the power of oligarchy <i>Chudi Okoye</i>	158
9 The Democratic Transition in Malawi: from single-party rule to a multi-party state <i>Diana Cammack</i>	183

10	Choosing 'The Freedom to be Free': the South African general elections of 1994 <i>Roger Southall and Morris Szeftel</i>	206
11	Conclusion: false dawn or democratic opening? <i>John Daniel and Roger Southall</i>	238
	<i>Bibliography</i>	248
	<i>Index</i>	260

# List of Tables

4.1	Namibian Constituent Assembly results 1989 - total votes and seats for each party	70
4.2	Namibian elections 1989 - patterns of differing SWAPO voting strength	72
5.1	1991 Zambian presidential election results - by province	93
5.2	1991 Zambian parliamentary election results - by province	94
5.3	Winning percentages in Zambian parliamentary contests (highest and lowest by province)	95
5.4	1991 Zambian parliamentary elections - gross percentage polls: constituencies with highest and lowest polls in each province	96
6.1	1992 Kenya general elections - breakdown of registered voters and constituencies, by provinces	111
6.2	1992 Kenya general elections - registered voters and constituencies in three Rift Valley districts	112
6.3	1992 Kenya general elections - distribution of seats by province	113
6.4	1992 Kenya general elections - presidential vote by province	114
6.5	1992 Kenya general elections - combined opposition presidential percentage vote compared to KANU	133
7.1	Lesotho's election results - 1993 compared with 1970	152
8.1	Unofficial results of the 12 June 1993 presidential election	172



9.1	Malawi election results 1994 - percentage distribution of votes	198
9.2	1994 Malawi election results - National Assembly seats won by region	199
10.1	National and regional representation under the South African interim constitution	218
10.2	1994 South African election results - National Assembly	220
10.3	1994 South African election results - regional assemblies	222
10.4	Racial composition of ANC and NP vote 1994	223

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# 1 Political Crisis and Democratic Renewal in Africa

MORRIS SZEFTTEL

The papers in this book examine the context and conduct of a series of watershed elections held in Anglophone Africa between 1989 and 1994. These elections crystallized a wider process of democratization, underway during the last decade, in which attempts were made to shift from various forms of authoritarian rule (colonial or racial oligarchies, military regimes, one-party states, or presidential rule) to pluralist parliamentary politics. Such attempts at democratic renewal were not confined to Africa's former British colonies. Similar efforts were also made during this period in Francophone Africa and in the war-ravaged states of Ethiopia, Eritrea, Uganda, Angola and Mozambique. Indeed, as Bayart has observed, 'from 1989 most sub-Saharan African countries experienced an unprecedented wave of demands for democracy, which succeeded in bringing about the downfall of several authoritarian regimes and forced others to accept multi-party politics' (1993: x). The essays which follow bring together (for the first time) studies of these events in Anglophone countries of the continent, which share a comparable legacy of British colonialism, an acquaintance with the Westminster constitutional tradition, and even some related historical experiences of decolonization and democratic struggle.

The first in the cycle of elections, for a constituent assembly in Namibia in 1989, brought South Africa's seventy year occupation of that country to an end and so created an independent state out of Africa's 'last colony'. The last, South Africa's 'liberation election' of 1994, allowed South Africans of all races to vote in a democratic election for the first time and formally ended three centuries of racial domination and African exclusion. In the years between these two events, a number of other Anglophone countries held elections, not to end colonial rule or settler domination, but to restore competitive, multi-party politics - in some instances twenty or more years after such systems had been abandoned. In the vast majority of these countries the pluralist constitutions established at the end of British colonial rule were progressively undermined by factional conflict and political instability and

## 2 Voting for Democracy

ultimately abrogated in favour of military rule or one-party regimes. Now, with the restoration of competitive elections and the re-establishment of the right to organize political parties, there was a return to this earlier legacy.

Precisely because they were linked to this wider process of democratization, and gave formal political expression to it, these elections constitute one of the most important political developments in the last quarter-century in Africa (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997: 3). Not all of them produced a successful transition to a democratic order, as the essays that follow demonstrate. Democratic elections and democratic reform proved neither inevitable nor unproblematic. Yet, if anything, in a continent devastated by international debt, war and violence, famine and disease, corruption and political instability, the attempt at reform was all the more significant where it occurred and its achievements, however modest, the more noteworthy. Not surprisingly, therefore, it was initially universally welcomed by all but those whose control of office it threatened. Observers from most parts of the ideological spectrum hoped it might open up constitutional space for democratic forces and pressures for equitable development. Radical Africanists emphasised the opportunities that democratic struggles created for greater equality and social justice in Africa (*The Review of African Political Economy*, numbers 45/46, 1989 and 54, 1992; Gibbon, Bangura and Ofstad, 1992). Mainstream liberals explored the prospects for the development of multi-party systems and liberal institutions, the influence of external actors and the role of civil society (Healey and Robinson, 1992). And African scholars (encouraged by research organizations such as Codesria and OSSREA) focused particularly on questions of development, class, human rights and security (Anyang 'Nyong'o, 1992; Imam, 1992). Democratization produced a new, if temporary, optimism and a justified pride in achievement among those on the continent who fought so hard for it.

The process was far from even and - by the end of the 1990s - generally incomplete. As the century moved to its end, many difficult struggles still lay ahead and many of the gains made proved temporary or modest in their impact. Not all these elections successfully established democratic parliamentary systems. In Nigeria, the process was aborted while the votes were still being counted. In Lesotho, the settling of old scores, between the parties and between the military and the parties, undermined the transition. In Kenya, the elections were won by the old order and new democratic forces finished in disarray - as was to happen in subsequent elections five years later. Even where elections did change the government and where political systems based on ideas of freedom of association and electoral competition were successfully introduced, reform often became mired in the problems of

economic underdevelopment. Moreover, the circumstances in which democratization occurred, of economic and social crisis, and of state instability, remain capable of undermining every gain. Perhaps most worryingly, there was little evidence that the nature of African politics, rooted in clientelism and the manipulation of communal identities, had changed enough to sustain the momentum of democratization. Thus the prospects for democratization raised wider issues than could be resolved by any single election, however important. As Nelson Mandela put it, after the 1994 elections in South Africa: 'We have not taken the final step of our journey, but the first step on a longer and even more difficult road.' (1994:751).

### **Democratization and its Alternatives**

Democratic elections in Anglophone countries were largely confined to the southern and eastern sub-continent, in states occupying a crescent stretching from the south-western Atlantic coast (Namibia and South Africa) to the eastern equatorial coast (Kenya). Anglophone states in West Africa fared far less well: in Nigeria, elections were aborted; in Ghana, economic liberalization measures were carried out by a decidedly illiberal regime; and in Sierra Leone, the state collapsed into chaos and civil war. Yet, despite these geographic limits, democratization and democratizing elections affected most regimes, even those who most strenuously resisted it: first, by exciting mass hopes for change; and, then, by imposing pressures on regimes to promise (and appear to) change even where they worked to undermine it. Thus, the Nigerian military, after setting aside the presidential election of 1993 and imprisoning its victor, still felt impelled to promise that it would restore democracy. Thus, too, where 'in 1989, 29 African countries were governed under some kind of single-party constitution, and one-party rule seemed entrenched as the modal form of governance', by 1994 'not a single *de jure* one-party state remained in Africa' (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997: 8).

Whether there was a genuine process of democratization, or whether it was merely a smokescreen behind which the old order continued, depended on the specific nature of the process, the political forces involved in it and the role played by the government and ruling party. In Benin, for instance, students and public sector workers forced the single-party regime to cede power at a national conference of representative groups (Allen, 1992). While, the President remained in office, most of his old powers were transferred to a Prime Minister (chosen by the conference) and an interim government. Subsequently Benin developed a multi-party system, the ruling party was

#### *4 Voting for Democracy*

dissolved, and none of its surviving fragments participated in the 1991 elections. The use of a national conference to effect constitutional change was a feature of some Francophone states. A rather different sequence can be seen in the Anglophone countries which are the subject of this volume. In Zambia and Kenya, the conference stage was by-passed by the emergence of a loose coalition (the MMD in Zambia, FORD in Kenya) which quickly came to act as the dominant opposition party. In Zambia, the MMD easily defeated the former ruling party in an election; in Kenya, by contrast, the ruling party retained power after an electoral contest against a fragmented opposition (Ajulu, 1993; Baylies and Szeftel, 1992; chapters 5 and 6, below).

Across the continent, in fact, a full transfer of power to the opposition was rare. Opposition boycotts and divisions often ensured victory for the ruling party by default and, where these were absent, electoral manipulation often did so instead. In the Ivory Coast and Gabon, for example, after demonstrations had forced concessions, elections were called before opposition groups could become fully organized and the state's legal and financial resources were used to ensure a victory by the ruling party. And finally, where all else failed, there were cases of the military acting to protect its own interests and those of the ruling establishment. In Togo, as in Lesotho and Nigeria, the army sought to force a reversal of elections, restore some or all of the governing party's powers and legal status, and exclude certain groups from power (Allen, Baylies and Szeftel, 1992: 6-7).

The uneven nature of this process of political transformation makes it possible to group African states in one of four main categories according to their experience of political change in the last quarter century. The first would include those states which underwent some form of liberal democratization process, involving a shift towards a more pluralistic, less authoritarian political order and some overt commitment to increasing human rights and strengthening the rule of law (Allen, Baylies and Szeftel, 1992: 3-10). A second, residual, group would include the dwindling number of states largely untouched by the process, either because long standing multi-party states had previously been established (as in Botswana) or because demands for democratic change were not yet powerful enough to force reform (as in Zimbabwe and Swaziland) or because the process had yet to begin (as in Libya and Morocco).

The third group comprised states where armed rebellions engineered the violent overthrow of corrupt and repressive regimes with the promise to begin building representative institutions and effective government. The group includes Uganda, the most successful so far, and Ethiopia and Eritrea (where significant democratic gains were challenged in the late nineties by territorial

conflict between the two states). In Rwanda, Burundi and the former Zaire (renamed the Democratic Republic of Congo) efforts to undertake similar post-bellum reform was blocked by continuing communal violence and the ambitions of predatory elites. These three countries demonstrate some of the characteristics of the fourth group, those states where central institutions disintegrated, or were disintegrating, under the weight of rampant corruption and open looting of public resources, communal violence and civil war. In such cases, the central state either became merely one faction in a murderous struggle for power (as in Sudan, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Congo-Brazzaville) or gave way entirely to the sway of competing warlords (as in Chad and Somalia). The four categories were not entirely exclusive of each other: Rwanda, Burundi and Zaire demonstrated the fine line between renewal through insurrection and collapse into warlordism and communal violence, just as Nigeria teetered between the democratic transition its citizens demanded (and voted for) and violent military repression.

The narrowness of the divide between democratic reform and state 'collapse' further underlines the importance of these watershed elections. However limited the democratic reforms to which they gave expression proved to be in some instances, the elections represented a progressive and positive step away from the political crises which affected so much of the continent. That they were undertaken at all, against the tide of crisis and disintegration, made their achievements all the more noteworthy.

### **The International Dimensions of Crisis and Democratization**

Because the democratic reforms which affected Africa in the early nineties coincided with (and were influenced by) wider international events, there was a tendency to perceive them as local manifestations of a 'global democratic resurgence' which signalled the historic triumph of liberal democracy. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, after all, preceded by only a few weeks the speech by President De Klerk in February 1990 which signalled the end of apartheid and the beginning of a democratic transition in South Africa. Indeed, De Klerk's initiative was quite clearly timed to take advantage of the universal optimism about the prospects for reform which flowed from the events in Berlin. Zambia's 1991 elections, which produced the first change of ruling party and president since independence in 1964, and one of the first occasions in which power changed hands without violence in post-colonial Africa, came less than two months after the collapse of the Soviet Union. For Huntington, these events were part of 'democracy's third wave', a democratic



tide starting around 1974, comparable to two earlier 'waves' (the first running from the 1820s to 1926, the second from 1945 to 1962). The 'third wave', argued Huntington (1996: 4), was the result of a number of related factors, including: unprecedented global economic growth in the 1960s which increased wealth, education and the size of the urban middle classes; the 'anti-authoritarian' stance of the Catholic Church in the sixties; decreasing support for authoritarianism among the major powers; the loss of legitimacy of authoritarian regimes as a result of performance failures and the increasing universality of democratic values; and the contagion of early democratic transitions which encouraged others to follow. Above all, the changes of the nineties could be seen to represent

the utter 'self-discrediting' of communist systems and of such other dictatorial regimes as 'African socialism' and 'bureaucratic authoritarianism'. As a result, antidemocratic forces ... have been weakened throughout the world, democracy has been left 'with no serious geopolitical or ideological rivals', and democrats have regained their self confidence. In fact, as Plattner argues, liberal democracies today are widely regarded as 'the only truly and fully modern societies' (Diamond and Plattner, 1996: ix).

Yet, if a few celebrated liberalism's triumph as 'the end of history' (Fukuyama, 1989), most were less sanguine about its prospects. In 1992, Jowitt, for example, warned of the need to 'think of a "long march" rather than a simple transition to democracy' (1996: 35). Similarly, Huntington noted that both the first and second 'waves' had each been followed by a 'reverse wave' which had reduced the number of functioning democracies. Similarly, he considered that a new reverse wave had begun to check the momentum of democratic reform from 1990 (1996: 8-11). Bratton and van de Walle, too, considered that

the entire wave of regime transition in Africa passed its zenith during 1993, as the emergence of fragile democracies in a few countries began to be offset by a rehardening of political regimes elsewhere (1997: 6).

Political reform, and the problems which confronted it, in turn promoted concern with the needs of the reform process itself, particularly with the kind of institutional changes which might best advance democratization. Some focused on problems of promoting economic development capable of supporting democratic reform (Diamond, 1992). Some were concerned with the impact on democratization of economic liberalization (O'Donnell, 1996).

Others debated the relative merits of parliamentary and presidential political systems (see the essays by Linz and Horowitz, in Diamond and Plattner, 1996). Many were concerned with the need to develop the network of associational activity generally regarded as constituting the 'civil society' necessary to promote active citizenship and limit state authoritarianism (Diamond, 1996a: 230-4). If there was little unanimity about the specific nature of the measures that needed to be taken, there was, nevertheless, a general underlying sense that it was necessary to support political reform if it was to be consolidated and sustained.

In this respect, academic observers anticipated and then reflected the mood among policy-makers in Western capitals and multilateral financial institutions, particularly the World Bank. Initially, these officials were not always consistent in their support for democratic change in Africa. In some countries, they supported ruling groups (as in Benin, Algeria or Zaire) or pressed them to undertake more or less cosmetic reforms (as in South Africa). In others, they actively promoted or assisted democratic pressures. In Kenya, the US ambassador actually held press conferences condemning the government's poor democratic record and demanding multi-party elections. In Zambia, donors pressed the incumbent regime to hold elections, and even forced it to implement unpopular economic measures during the election campaign. They then welcomed the new government's willingness to implement economic restructuring and debt servicing 'conditionalities'. It is perhaps this identification of economic with political reform that explains greater Western enthusiasm for certain regime changes. Alongside 'economic conditionalities', requiring African states to restructure their economies by implementing 'structural adjustment', introducing market reforms, and reducing the proportion of national wealth controlled by the state (Szeftel, 1987), there developed, from the mid-eighties, a set of parallel 'political conditionalities', requiring democratic reforms to promote 'good governance' (Baylies, 1995). These 'conditionalities' had, by the mid-nineties, become a major feature of relations between indebted African governments and their creditors, or 'donor community' as they had come to be called.

At the same time, academic prescriptions and international interventions to promote liberal democratization attracted criticism from scholars who considered that the undertaking was less concerned to promote African democracy than to further Western interests. The bulk of this radical criticism was concerned with the strategy and socio-economic effects of structural adjustment and economic liberalization (see, for instance, Loxley and Seddon, 1994; Leys, 1994; Bush and Szeftel, 1994; Campbell and Parfitt, 1995; Bromley, 1995). Increasingly it was augmented by a critique of liberal

democratic reforms as being inappropriate or inadequate instruments for democratization in developing countries. Some questioned the usefulness of imposing liberal conceptual labels, such as 'civil society', on African circumstances (Mamdani, 1996; Allen, 1997). Others questioned the purpose and objectives of the entire project. Contrasting earlier attempts to forge a theory of political development with recent work on democratization, Cammack, for instance, argued that liberal scholars too often abandoned academic detachment in favour of missionary zeal in the 1990s:

where the theorists of the 1960s found themselves in an impasse in which they could formulate a model of stable liberal democracy but felt unable to recommend its implementation, those of today are avid exponents of the dissemination of democracy. The result has been the proliferation of frankly programmatic procedural guides to the installation of pro-Western liberal democracies in the Third World ... (Cammack, 1997: 224).

For Cammack, this doctrine was less a means of supporting local efforts to build democracy than 'a transitional programme for the installation and consolidation of capitalist regimes in the Third World' (ibid: 1). In order to promote this liberal model, he wrote, the concept of democracy was reduced to procedural issues, notably periodic competitive elections held under universal adult suffrage; thus, Huntington, for one, rejected 'the automatic association of democracy with other values such as social justice, equality, liberty, fulfilment and progress' (ibid: 224).

These objections were echoed by the late Claude Ake's dismissal of recent democratization efforts in Africa as 'largely a matter of form rather than content' (1995: 70). Accusing the IMF and World Bank of 'effectively redefining democratization as economic liberalization' (ibid: 82), Ake asserted that, despite his belief that it was 'the lack of democratic politics ... which is at the root of the African crisis',

the ascendancy of form over content results in a significant blockage to democratization. For the people of Africa, instead of emancipating them, democratization is becoming a legitimization of their disempowerment. They are effectively worse off than they were before democratization, for their alienation from power and their oppression are no longer visible as problems inviting solutions (ibid: 70).

Ake's sense that democratization actually 'disempowered' the vast majority of Africans, spoke specifically to the fears of many that international

sponsorship of democracy was concerned with achieving the form of state most conducive to debt repayment and closer integration of Africa into global markets than with mass empowerment and expansion of citizenship. It also directed attention to the less benign ways in which international influences had shaped Africa's history over three centuries. It reflected not only the uncertain nature of democratization in Africa but also, and more importantly, the differences and conflicts between, on the one hand, international efforts to promote democracy on the continent as part of wider global reforms and, on the other, African efforts to produce democratic reform consonant with indigenous aspirations.

Despite the undoubted importance of processes of globalization and of related international developments which encouraged and supported demands for reform, recent struggles to democratize - and African politics in general - cannot be reduced to a reflection of what unfolded in Eastern Europe or an imitation of the recent success of market liberalism in the West. The case studies in this volume demonstrate clearly how any understanding of the watershed elections of the nineties must be based on an examination of the struggles between key local interests: students, trade unionists, professionals, intellectuals, certain business interests, the media, women, the urban poor, small farmers and the churches among those challenging the government; and, resisting them, the ruling group, their business associates and their external allies. As the case studies demonstrate, 'the specifically African dynamics were perhaps more decisive' and the 'influence of the events of Eastern Europe [and elsewhere] more limited' than is often believed (Bayart, 1993: x-xi). We need to look beyond events in Eastern Europe when we ask why pluralism was so easily and quickly discarded a generation earlier and why demands for multi-party democracy became so difficult to resist in the nineties.

### **The Roots of Political Crisis and Authoritarianism**

Starting with Ghana's independence in 1957, British colonialism rapidly withdrew from Africa. Its legacy was universal adult suffrage, competitive elections for a unicameral legislature, a multi-party political system and - the one departure from the Westminster model - a powerful executive presidency.<sup>1</sup> By the late sixties, the colonial state survived only in its settler form, in Rhodesia until 1980, in South Africa and, indirectly, in South West Africa, where white settlers controlled government and resisted democratic demands by force. For all its ubiquity, however, post-colonial democracy was a fragile

construct. In almost all former British colonies, the multi-party state was in reality a dominant-party state. One party, enjoying overwhelming support at independence (further consolidated with the resources provided by office) confronted a small, often divided, often regionalised opposition lacking resources and any real prospect of power. Botswana apart, this seldom endured for long. In Tanzania, the predominance of TANU created a *de facto* one-party state from the start. In Malawi, Kenya, Zambia, Ghana and Sierra Leone, the dominant party, under a powerful executive president, ensured some degree of political stability for a time before giving way to one-party or military authoritarianism. In Ghana, it was replaced by a one-party state and then a military junta in less than a decade. In Sierra Leone the dominant party was replaced by the opposition after elections before the latter was consumed by corruption, military intervention and, finally, state collapse. In Malawi, Kenya and Zambia, it was replaced by one-party states, characterised by increasing authoritarianism, economic stagnation and corruption. Where this dominant party was absent from the outset, as in Lesotho, or where the excluded political interests constituted a large and strategic proportion of the population, as in Nigeria and Uganda, conflict and instability characterised the state from its inception and military rule (rather than one-party civilian regimes) quickly overwhelmed the civil political order. Save for Botswana, multi-partyism had essentially disappeared in Anglophone Africa by the early seventies. Moreover, few one-party or military regimes ruled without the use of emergency powers, preventive detention, draconian labour regulations and the suspension of civil liberties or the rule of law.

There are many reasons for the failure of liberal democratic politics but the complex inter-relationship of three factors were of particular importance: economic underdevelopment, the nature of the inherited state, and the pattern of political mobilization in post-colonial Africa. The first of these has been explored in numerous places so that it is enough here merely to recall the legacy of slavery, colonialism, export cash cropping, plantation production, mineral extraction and migrant labour regimes, all of which entrenched the economies of individual African countries in a wider, international division of labour within which each acted as a specialized supplier of primary export commodities. These economies were characteristically highly skewed and vulnerable to international economic changes and fluctuations. This extreme *dependence* on the expansion and contraction of the global economy (Dos Santos, 1970) was complemented by the level of *unevenness* in their economic and social development. Uneven development took many forms, among them: the combination of declining peasant subsistence economies with multinational export production; extreme inequalities of income; the *differential*

*incorporation* of different regions and ethnic groups into different roles in the economy and the state; and the exclusion of vast numbers of the indigenous population from ownership of property, capital, skills and market opportunities through institutionalized racism (Szeftel, 1987).

The problems confronting the African post-colonial state were rooted in these economic circumstances. Historical experience suggested that it was unlikely that the market forces which had produced these conditions would, once independence was attained, mysteriously reverse themselves without the state actively forcing a change of direction. Moreover, the association of the market and private property with racial discrimination meant that the state was central to African aspirations; political power was regarded as the mechanism by which development and individual opportunities for jobs and upward mobility would be achieved. The state was seen by many as the means to redress past discrimination and promote private wealth.

Nationalist movements awakened and played on popular dreams of transformation and justice. They mobilized people in the name of democracy and parliamentarism ... and committed their future programmes to economic growth and development (Szeftel, 1987: 118).

This placed a huge burden on the African state:

It is the state to which nationalist aspirations were directed, the state which thus became the locus of struggles to redefine the relationship of particular societies with international capitalism, and the state to which various groups and interests looked for redress ... (ibid.).

The peculiar conjuncture of colonial exclusion, nationalist promises and political independence thus produced almost limitless expectations of government, both to intervene in the economy to redistribute entitlements and to provide jobs, loans, contracts and favours through political patronage.

Unfortunately, the state was not equipped to bear this burden. Economic underdevelopment and heavy dependence on primary exports gave it an uncertain revenue base which constantly undermined development strategies. More importantly, the nature of the post-colonial state, and specifically the institutions inherited from its colonial predecessor, were entirely inappropriate for the project of social renewal. Lacking established democratic institutions, and run by an alien bureaucracy, the colonial state was designed to ensure order and facilitate the production of export commodities, not to respond to the democratic demands grafted onto it or to expand the content of citizenship.

## 12 *Voting for Democracy*

The order that it represented was based on patterns of differentiation and exclusion which did not transfer positively to pluralist democratic politics. Mamdani identifies the colonial state as a 'bifurcated' system of power, dividing Africans between those who experienced urban racial discrimination and those subjected to rural 'Native Authorities':

The African colonial experience came to be crystallized in the nature of the state ... Organized differently in rural areas from urban ones, that state was Janus-faced, bifurcated. It contained a duality: two forms of power under a single hegemonic authority. Urban power spoke the language of civil society and civil rights, rural power of community and culture. Civil power claimed to protect rights, customary power pledged to enforce tradition (Mamdani, 1996: 18).

One form, *direct rule*, involved the 'comprehensive sway of market institutions' alongside the exclusion of Africans from civil rights. The other, *indirect rule*, in which 'land remained a communal possession' and the 'market was restricted to the products of labour' exercised power through 'Native Authorities':

direct and indirect rule actually evolved into complementary ways of native control. Direct rule was the form of urban civil power. It was about the exclusion of natives from civil freedoms guaranteed to citizens in civil society. Indirect rule, however, signified a rural tribal authority. It was about incorporating natives into a state-enforced customary order. Reformulated, direct and indirect rule are better understood as variants of despotism: the former centralized, the latter decentralized (ibid.: 18).

Political independence reinforced both the authoritarian character of the state and the duality of African incorporation into civil and political life. By creating powerful central executives, the independence constitutions ensured that presidential authority would dominate post-colonial legislatures (despite them being chosen by universal suffrage in competitive elections), restrain popular demands for welfare spending and control radical pressures for fundamental changes in economic direction. Despite the tendency by some to see the post-colonial state as reflecting traditional African deference to 'The Big Man' or as an expression of 'neo-patrimonialism' (Bayart, 1993: 70-83; Bratton and van de Walle, 1997: 63-5), presidentialism was, in fact, primarily rooted in the nature of the post-colonial transition.

The tendency towards authoritarianism was underpinned also by the way in which independence incorporated the urban-rural dichotomy into the politics

of electoral competition. Drawing on the contrasting experiences of Uganda and South Africa, Mamdani argued that nationalist politicians addressed themselves to the problem of 'deracializing' urban civil society without tackling the question of 'detrribalizing' the rural areas. By failing to free rural 'subjects' from the yoke of 'tribal' Native Authorities, nationalist politicians ensured the continued domination of the rural population by traditional communal authorities and denied it the opportunity to take their place in the post-colonial order as individual 'citizens'. This omission, he suggests, not only disadvantaged the peasantry but also, fundamentally, 'contaminated' the process of democratization itself (Mamdani, 1996: 289 and *passim*). By incorporating the peasantry into party politics without first freeing them from the 'decentralized despotism' of tribal authorities, Mamdani suggests that African politics was 'tribalized' rather than 'democratized'.

This formulation helps to explain why 'civil society' has so singularly lacked autonomy in post-colonial Africa and why ethnic forms of political organization have been so ubiquitous and powerful. LeVine (1993: 276) identifies 'civil society' as an intermediate layer of associational structures occupying the space between the state, on the one hand, and ethnic and kinship networks, on the other. In this conception, 'civil society' refers to the organizations and interests which act to influence public policy and moderate the authoritarian tendencies of community and state. The development of a network of such associations serves to underpin a fundamental feature of liberal democracies, namely the distinction between the public and private domains. Mamdani's argument, in contrast, highlights the failure to incorporate rural voters into the political realm through anything resembling the active, organized citizenship of 'civil society'. Instead, the franchise meant that ethnic identity was catapulted directly into the electoral arena and into the considerations driving state policy. The test of public performance became how well it served particularistic interests.

In a landmark contribution, and working from a different perspective, Allen has examined this process in the transition to independence and beyond, arguing that Britain and France organized a rapid process of decolonization so as to ensure that radical elements lacked the time and resources to develop a strong grassroots base. This permitted the transfer of power to conservative nationalist leaders prepared to guarantee key economic interests. Moreover, 'independence elections' were called at short notice,

requiring nationalist organizations to mobilize huge new electorates in a very short time. Those that succeeded had combined two strategies for party building and creation of electoral support: a reliance on individuals who



already had considerable local followings, and the use of clientelist ('patronage') politics to bind local notables to the party and local voters to the candidates. In essence, voters were offered collective material benefits (roads, schools, clinics, water, etc) for their votes, while candidates and notables were offered individual benefits (cash, access to licences, credit or land, etc) ... . This combination produced a set of locally-based MPs ... responsive to local demands, and loosely organized into parties whose leaders had access to private or public resources (Allen, 1995: 304).

Political mobilization thus rested on clientelist politics in which local power brokers were incorporated into national political movements and electoral support was exchanged for access to state resources. Moreover, communal land tenure ensured that African clientelism did not rest on the traditional patron-client relationship between landlord and tenant, in the way it had in South Asia, southern Europe or Latin America. Instead it was mobilized through the politicization of identity, using traditional authorities and local notables. Political factions, speaking for ethnic or regional interests, articulated demands and measured entitlements in what came to be called the politics of 'tribalism'. Even in the cities, where rapid inward migration ensured the rise of 'political machines' and local 'bosses', patterns of migrant labour recruitment established in the colonial economy tended to integrate these urban networks into ethnic and regional factions.

Clientelism in this form was extremely unstable. Underdevelopment of the economy meant that governments could not deliver the 'development goods' necessary to satisfy mass expectations. Popular disappointment put pressure on faction leaders to intensify their demands on the centre for an increased share of resources for their region or group, or face being replaced by those who would. Nor was it possible for the central leadership to satisfy all factions when distributing offices and resources. Thus post-colonial politics was characterized by intense factional competition for patronage and by conflicts between factions which frequently became public and acrimonious, producing governmental crises and intensifying communal rivalries. Disappointed leaders could represent their personal frustrations as a snub for an entire region or ethnic group. In these circumstances, multi-party politics allowed dissatisfied factions to threaten the centre with withdrawal to join the opposition, taking with them their regional or ethnic support. Thus, even the largest government majorities were fragile, vulnerable to wholesale defections. It is instructive that, amongst the earliest legislation enacted in Kenya and Zambia, were statutes that tied parliamentary seats to the party that had won them in an election. MPs crossing the floor were required to vacate their seat

and fight a by-election if they wished to continue to represent the constituency. While such measures may have moderated the competition for 'spoils' between warring factions, they were unable to control it or to check the corruption that inevitably arose as a result.

Over time, African governments became preoccupied with the need to manage patronage, a need which made them intolerant of debate within their own ranks and increasingly inclined to use presidential power to impose a centrally-determined distribution of patronage on all factions. Attempts to manage patronage had varying degrees of success, depending on the nature of the state and central authority (Allen, Baylies and Szeftel, 1992) but all involved the growth of authoritarianism and the abandonment of the pluralist constitutions inherited at independence. Two particular outcomes are worth noting here. The first, and commonest, we can call *bureaucratic centralism* (Allen, 1995: 305-7). In typical cases (such as Zambia, Tanzania and Kenya) this had four main elements: the continuation of clientelism under central control; the centralization of power in an executive presidency standing above factional competition; the subordination of party politics to a bureaucracy answerable to the presidency, particularly with regard to the distribution of patronage; and the downgrading of representative institutions relative to presidential appointments, including the absorption of much of civil society by the state. The one-party state was the ultimate expression of a process of 'government' replacing 'politics'. The strategy worked well for a time but became increasingly ineffective in the 1980s and finally collapsed almost everywhere. The economic crisis which affected Africa from the mid-seventies, and the rising burden of international debt and increasing austerity which followed in its wake, produced mounting opposition to one-party rule and centralized authoritarianism among a growing middle class of intellectual, professional, trade union, business and other urban groups, all demanding political rights.

The second category, in sharp contrast, involved a smaller number of states in which there was no resolution (however temporary) of clientelist crisis, a process of political restructuring did not occur and competition for resources created a *spoils system*. In some cases, Nigeria and Zaire being examples, political competition was controlled by force and spoils politics briefly institutionalized to allow ruling 'kleptocracies' to plunder state resources for their personal benefit and that of the dominant regional or ethnic interests in the country. More often such states lacked the requisite repressive capacity to achieve even this temporary degree of control, or were unable to consolidate one-party rule, with the result that a 'winner takes all' struggle for spoils ensued, producing intensified corruption, political repression and violence, and

tribalism and factionalism in extreme forms in many or all institutions (Allen, 1995: 307-10). In the majority of such cases, the integrity of the state itself came to be threatened, state institutions became consumed by looting of their resources and the state itself began to disintegrate (as in Uganda or Sierra Leone). In such cases, populist revolt (as in Ghana and Uganda) was occasionally an alternative to uncontrolled political violence, civil war and state collapse (Sierra Leone, Sudan, Somalia and Liberia).

Once African economies began to contract from the mid 1970s, clientelist politics could not be sustained. Populations suffering the hardships imposed by debt and structural adjustment became increasingly critical of the shrinking patronage dispensed by an authoritarian state and of the ageing leaders who managed its dispersal while enriching themselves. Moreover, such arrangements could no longer be defended in meetings with international creditors insistent on fundamental economic and political reform as a precondition for further assistance. By the end of the 1980s, with the Cold War over, the collapse of these regimes was inevitable. Such pressures tended either to hasten the disintegration of those states consumed by spoils politics (Sierra Leone and Liberia, for example) or to attempt rigidly controlled and unsuccessful experiments in democratization (as in Nigeria). In contrast, the bureaucratic centralist systems were generally better able to undertake reform and begin a process of democratization. The majority of the case studies that follow in this volume began their democratic transitions and organized their watershed elections from this bureaucratic centralist base.

## **The Prospects for Democratization**

The preceding analysis indicates the fundamental nature of the problems which confronted African states at independence and thus permits an understanding of the difficulties that confronted reformers before and after the democratic elections of the 1990s. In the enthusiasm for 'good governance' and multi-party elections, it is important to recall that many African states became independent with pluralist political systems and constitutions in place. Yet few of these survived the first decade of independence. The African leaders who imposed one-party regimes were not all charlatans or despots by inclination. Some considered one-party systems as necessary for development and stability; some even saw in them the possibilities for *increasing* grass-roots democracy and safeguarding the mass of citizens from the corruption of elites. While such structures became instruments for consolidating power and prohibiting opposition, they also undoubtedly reflected an attempt to wrestle with political

and economic crisis, as we have seen. In this sense they were products of historical circumstance. It is appropriate to ask if these circumstances have now changed and if new conditions exist which will better support democracy in the new millennium than in the 1960s.

On the positive side, the indications are that there was greater support for liberal democratic values at the end of the century than there had been a generation earlier. The growth of 'civil society' over thirty years fostered the middle class groups which placed a high value on democratic institutions. As the authoritarian state ceased to be able to ensure growth or patronage, these groups increasingly asserted their autonomy from the state and demanded democratization. The institutional level of development of churches, trade unions, business interests, students and the urban intelligentsia became a fundamental factor in the late 1980s and early 1990s in driving the process of democratic renewal.

Nor had this momentum run its course once the democratizing elections were over. Even where successful multi-party elections were held, popular pressures to extend and strengthen democratic institutions and procedures continued and ruling groups (including those brought to power by democratic demands) resisted any further extension. Demands for electoral reform, for a reduction of presidential power and expansion of parliamentary sovereignty, for effective anti-corruption measures, for stronger human rights safeguards, for a more equal resourcing of political parties, have all continued to dominate debate in Africa as they did at the time of the elections. Such debates further underline the important role of these elections in legitimating the democratic agenda.

Yet the problems which undermined both the first generation of multi-party states and the one-party regimes that followed them remain and endanger the gains of the 1990s. Firstly, the elections left the structures of the old politics largely untouched. Politics continued to be concerned with access to state office and resources rather than with ideology and programme. Clientelism and the scramble for spoils even intensified after the elections. In turn, this reduced the early enthusiasm of new governments for constitutional reform, particularly for the dilution of presidential power. It also provoked instances of government repression of civic organizations pressing for further change. Secondly, the democratic reforms of the 1990s were undertaken in the context of continuing debt and economic restructuring which imposed severe hardship on the mass of the population. This had potentially damaging consequences both for the prospects of extending democratic rights beyond a small middle class, and for legitimating democracy in the eyes of workers and peasants (Mamdani, 1996; Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens, 1992).

Thus, if democracy is to be consolidated in Africa, it will have to be done under hostile conditions. The weakness of civil society makes democratization vulnerable to the destructive effects of what Bayart called 'the politics of the belly' which, in turn, confines democratic politics to a narrow, elite circle and so weakens its relevance to the wider African society. Fundamental to prospects for consolidating the legacy of the multi-party elections will be the development of institutional forms capable of extending meaningful participation to the rural population and the urban poor. There thus remains a long and difficult road towards democracy which has yet to be travelled. As Allen puts it (1995: 319):

If African states are to regain some of their autonomy, then there will have to be a second and more radical wave of innovation, this time directed ... towards stable, decentralized and democratic systems, at regional, national and subnational levels. Western agencies and African leaders, who have been so thoroughly implicated in past failures, can provide neither guidance nor initiative in this process. Those are far more likely to come from within civil society, which already has experience of coping with the breakdown of centralized-bureaucratic systems, and of the far more difficult task of the reconstruction of civil and political life in the aftermath of terminal spoils politics.

The elections examined in this volume were thus but a first step on the path of democratic reform. Nevertheless, they were an important, even essential, first step, away from 'terminal spoils politics' and state collapse. Even where the elections produced limited democratic progress, even where they were aborted, as in Nigeria, they nevertheless put democracy and pluralist competition on the political agenda and provided African voters with a rare opportunity to express their opinions on the matter. Their verdict was unequivocal: in every case, they voted for democracy.

## Note

1. The blending of an executive presidency into the post-colonial settlement served to strengthen the power of the central state against possible challenge by centrifugal regional forces and radical elements within the nationalist movements. It thus suited the outgoing colonial administration, the nationalist leadership and foreign and settler economic interests.