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### **“What accounts for opposition party strength?”**

Exploring party-society linkages in Zambia and  
Ghana”

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## **Abstract**

This paper attempts to shed light on the differences in party system development within Sub-Saharan Africa. In particular, it asks why some opposition parties have stable linkages with society while others fail to take root. This question is approached by making use of mainstream political science concepts – which, it is argued, has not been done enough. It is found that the initial conditions at independence enabled the organisational manifestation of class cleavages in Ghana while in Zambia the attempt to forge inclusive coalitions prevented the translation of rural-urban inequalities into political mobilisation. This laid the foundations for subsequent parties' possibilities to utilise organisational structures.

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## What accounts for opposition party strength? Exploring party-society linkages in Zambia and Ghana

“The value of choice is that I can cause my views to enter the public realm.”

(Przeworski, 2003: 275)

### **I. Introduction**

There is no way around political parties. In representative democracies they constitute the vital link between citizens and the state (e.g. Schattschneider 1942; Lipset 2000). The degree to which they fulfil their task of aggregating and representing a population's interests is therefore closely connected to the overall success of the democratic process (Randall/Svåsand 2002).

Since the so-called 'third wave' of democratisation (Huntington 1991) swept through Sub-Saharan Africa in the beginning of the 1990s, triggered by popular protests against economic austerity measures and often reinforced by external pressures, scholars have started to pay attention to the political parties of the continent. A common wisdom arises from the literature that these parties are characterised by various weaknesses: no roots in society; low ideological variation; inconsistency and volatility; and the persistence of personalistic and clientelistic relationships as well as 'ethnic' constituencies (e.g. Ottaway 1999; van de Walle 2003; Erdmann 2004; Mozaffar/Scarritt 2005). From a more structuralist perspective, others have pointed to the specific “choicelessness” that African policy makers face due to the externally imposed neo-liberal reform programmes that coincided with democratic transitions (Mkadawire 1999; also Olukoshi 1998; Berman 2010). The weakness of opposition parties can moreover be regarded as one of the reasons for the persistence of what are sometimes called 'hybrid regimes' (Diamond 2002; Levitsky/Way 2002), where multi-party elections take place on a regular basis but one dominant party, sometimes that of the pre-democratic era, maintains vast majorities of the votes (e.g. Bogaards 2000).

In a recent article, Bleck and van de Walle (2011) have studied the degree to which opposition parties in francophone West Africa pick up on issues that are of concern to the population. They find that parties concentrate on non-contentious issues such as 'democracy' or 'development', on which they do not take a particular stance, and that they fail to claim issues about which discontent

prevails in the society. Given that parties in a democracy rely on people's votes in order to be elected into parliament, this clearly presents us with a puzzle. Why do opposition parties not try to mobilise support by connecting with societal interests? Widner (1997) also diagnosed the weak links between political parties and civil society in Sub-Saharan Africa – in particular with existing organisations and interest groups. She called it a paradox that parties failed to systematically link up to those interest associations that had often preceded them in the struggle for democratic reforms (*ibid.*: 67; also van de Walle/Butler 1999; Randall 2007). Her main argument is that civil society groups are too fragmented and weak to present parties with promising avenues for garnering support.

These observations hit at the above remark that political parties are meant to transport the interests of social groups into the political sphere. Yet, they leave many questions unanswered. This paper will attempt to close in on them by starting to offer some conceptual clarifications. What these authors describe can be approached through the concept of 'linkages' between political parties and society. Linkages refer to institutionalised channels for communication between parties and individuals or parties and organised interests (e.g. Duverger 1954; Allern 2010). They include programmatic, organisational and/or personal links (e.g. Poguntke 2002; Kitschelt 2000), and provide a party with information about opinions. Further more, they increase the stability of party profiles (Webb/White 2007: 5) and serve as mechanisms for accountability and responsiveness (Poguntke 2002).

The aim of this paper is to shed light on what accounts for opposition party strength in Sub-Saharan Africa. It will attempt to do so by making use of the literature on political parties' linkages. While the 'outcome variable' of party strength requires a brief discussion, it will be argued that it boils down to providing the electorate with a choice about political alternatives (see Przeworski 2003). This is crucial for enabling the actualisation of democratic rights. Especially for democratic consolidation, an institutionalised party system<sup>1</sup> where a “pattern of competition and cooperation [emerges] that defines the roles of governmental and opposition parties” is key (Rakner 2011: 1109).

The literature on political parties in Sub-Saharan Africa is proliferating since the late 1990s and yet marked by a considerable absence of the use of 'mainstream' political party theories (see also Erdmann 2004). This constitutes the meta-theoretical motivation of this paper. It can be argued that

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'party system' describes “the set of parties that interact in patterned ways” (Mainwaring/Torcal 2006).

the various particularities which characterise African parties according to the literature are to some extent an outcome of the failure to simply look at them through a conventional, 'non-African' lens. More importantly, though, it will be argued that what conventional theories can tell us about parties' linkages with society helps to understand different trajectories of party system developments.

For a comparative case analysis, Zambia and Ghana were chosen in order to substantiate the theoretical argument of this paper. As will be discussed later on, the representativeness of both cases might be limited. Zambia is often considered exceptional for its broad-based democracy movement, and Ghana might be the “shining democratic star on the African continent” (Whitfield 2009: 621). Yet, a closer comparative investigation will not only challenge these common perceptions but also allow for wider conclusions about what accounts for the different paths that the initially similar party constellations have taken.

The rest of this paper will proceed as follows: after a brief introduction to the history of political parties in Sub-Saharan Africa, the main foci of the scholarly debate and its major shortcomings will be mapped out. Following this, a methodological reflection will explain this paper's theoretical and empirical approach as well as the choice of cases more precisely.

While this paper takes as a point of departure the literature on African political parties, a further body of thought will be introduced in order to substantiate the debate. In the main chapter, the literature on linkages between parties and society will be discussed. This leads to the argument that linkages can arise out of societal cleavages, based on shared political aims. However, in order for this to happen, they require politicisation, manifestation and activation by political actors.

Subsequently, the histories of the Ghanaian and Zambian party systems will be explored. It will be found that they confirm the theoretical argument. Ghana saw the early politicisation of class cleavages which translated into broad organisational linkages that all parties have since made use of. In Zambia, the post-independence regime's attempt at maximum inclusivity prevented the formation of factions and organisational structures, which impeded subsequent parties from taking root.

After assessing the findings, the conclusion will point out further avenues for research.

## 2. Political parties in Sub-Saharan Africa

A short introduction to the historical role of political parties in Sub-Saharan Africa shall serve to contextualise the following elaborations, followed by an overview of the scholarly debates. The literature on African parties which has only started to grow since the 1990s can be said to be primarily characterised by 'large-N' measurements of party system institutionalisation, an absence of detailed historical accounts, as well as little application of existing 'mainstream' theories. These findings lead to a set of 'gaps' which this paper attempts to address.

### 2.1. History and early neglect

In Sub-Saharan Africa the first political parties became known when colonial rulers devolved power to indigenous governments (Coleman/Rosberg 1964: 3) as a response to the demands of the nationalist movements (*ibid.*: 10)<sup>2</sup>. The colonial governments had by definition not had an interest in an active civil society (Young 1994). Yet, before their departure, they aimed to 'teach' Africans democracy and introduced elections (Lindberg 2004: 11). These origins in inherently undemocratic environments (Mohamed Salih 2003: 2) were to shape subsequent developments in various respects. While this will be elaborated in more depth below, it can overall be argued that colonialism 'disconnected' people from their ruling institutions. States lacked fundamental legitimacy (Englebert 2000) and had not assumed a role of providers and protectors (Ekeh 1990, 2004). This led indigenous citizens to organise in a parallel sphere (*id.* 1975), as associational life was at the same time intensified and formally constricted (Chazan 1999: 77). Mamdani (1996) has argued that the major legacy of colonial rule was social fragmentation, including fragmented independence movements – and thus “inherited impediments to democratization” (*ibid.*: 25). To what extent nationalist struggles were carried out “under one or more banners” (Hyden 2006: 25) of course varied. However, the first political parties in Sub-Saharan Africa, arising out of the struggle for independence, subsequently carried the legacy of prioritising national unity (Young 1994) – which is crucial for understanding the prevalence of one-party states that would come to characterise the continent (*ibid.*).

With the exceptions of Botswana and Mauritius, African states reversed towards autocracy shortly after independence which constrained party development in various ways. Not surprisingly, little

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<sup>2</sup> This is not to deny the existence of some earlier parties such as the Whig Party in Liberia, established 1860 (Mozaffar 2005).

attention was thus paid to Africa by the earlier works on political parties that “blossomed” in the 1950s to 1970s (Gunther/Montero/Linz 2002: 2). With a few exceptions (Hodgkin 1961; Coleman/Rosberg 1964; Wallerstein 1966) they were primarily informed by the (Western) European experience (e.g. Duverger 1954, 1972; Lipset/Rokkan 1967; Sartori 1976). At the same time 'Africanists' attributed higher significance to 'informal' institutions (see Erdmann 2004; Erdmann et al. 2011; LeBas 2011: 29).

Coleman and Rosberg (1964: 5f.) undertook one of the few early attempts to categorise African single-party states. They differentiated between pragmatic-pluralist and revolutionary-centralising states and observed that the latter tended towards a complete “fusion” with all social groups (ibid.: 6). LeBas (2011) makes a similar distinction of importance to this paper, by arguing that authoritarian regimes either repressed civil society organisations or monopolised the linkages with them (see also Mozaffar/Scarritt 2005). The parties which grew out of independence movements were often characterised by particularly large support from the people they had fought with (Mohamed Salih 2003: 13). Moreover, Huntington (1968: 424f.) notes that the deeper the ideological commitment and the longer the revolutionary struggle had been, the more stable was the dominant-party system that followed. This becomes especially significant when studying parties such as UNIP in Zambia or CCM in Tanzania, and the prevalence of dominant-party systems today (Dorenspleet 2003). In sum, despite undertaking some “experimentation [...] with the electoral system” (Lindberg 2004: 12), political parties in Africa were therefore in this period of little concern. This changed only when multi-party elections were (re-) introduced.

## **2.2. Recent scholarly debates**

Domestic protests in the 1980s, often triggered by the increasing economic strains that came with privatisation and liberalisation reforms, and external political conditionality started to put pressure on the incumbent regimes. This led to democratic reforms and the holding of multi-party elections in 35 Sub-Saharan African states between 1991 and 1994 (Bratton/van de Walle 1997: 4). In some countries, such as Zambia, the democracy movement was elected as the new democratic government (see van de Walle/Butler 1999: 17). In others, such as Ghana, the former autocratic government remained in place but tolerated a certain degree of political competition. Thus the work of political parties suddenly acquired enormous significance and attracted scholarly attention. Yet, the literature which subsequently emerged can be criticised for producing many particularly 'African' typologies and concepts (e.g. van de Walle/Butler 1999; van de Walle 2003) rather than



integrating the work on new African democracies with existing comparative frameworks.

Due to the concern for the overall democratisation process which provides the background to most studies of African political parties, the usual focus is on the institutionalisation of either the party system or political parties. Institutionalised party systems, contrary to “fluid” systems, are characterised by providing a stable structure to the political process (Mainwaring/Torcal 2006) and are agreed to be crucial for democratic consolidation (Kuenzi/Lambright 2005; Randall/Svåsand 2002). In a much-read paper, Kuenzi and Lambright (2001) extend and apply Mainwaring and Scully's famous work on Latin America (1995) to 30 African party systems and find that they are in general characterised by instability, and by parties that possess few roots in society. They attribute this to the young age of most African democracies. Others have subsequently come up with their own combination of shortcomings which confirm the overall picture: the dominance of one party, plus several small, shortlived and ideologically undifferentiated opposition parties – or “low fragmentation and high volatility” (Mozaffar/Scarritt 2005; also van de Walle 2003; Manning 2005; Doorenspleet 2003). When explaining these party systems, the electoral systems also receive much attention. Presidentialism is said to contribute to more personalised rather than programmatic appeals (Evans et al. 2010) and discourages the opposition from coalition-building (Manning 2005). Similarly, whether votes are distributed according to a majoritarian or proportionality principle shapes the nature of political competition (e.g. Bogaards 2007; Mozaffar/Scarritt 2005). Yet, while the electoral system can be said to influence party interaction (see also Duverger 1954: 296ff.), these structural conditions cannot by themselves account for differences in opposition party strength between countries (LeBas 2011: 35f.).

Despite a renewed optimism regarding the apparently self-reinforcing mechanism of holding democratic elections, and a new refreshing emphasis on the 'naturalness' of some of the shortcomings of transitional elections (Lindberg 2004, 2006), the implication is that these 'weak' opposition parties constrain democratic consolidation. In fact, the dominance of the ruling party – whether old or new – cannot be separated from the marginality of the opposition. The latter's weakness can also be read as a cause, not just as an outcome of the former's persistence. While the incumbents' advantages are indeed various, the lack of viable alternatives also contributes to their constant re-election (Bogaards 2000; LeBas 2011; Rakner 2011: 1116).

When trying to explain voting patterns, party affiliations based on ethnicity receive a lot of attention (e.g. Ottaway 1999; Mozaffar et al. 2003). Some have argued that voters primarily “place ethnic representatives in the arenas where, they believe, the national pie is divided” (van de Walle 2003: 314). Even though others have demonstrated that ethnicity is not necessarily the most important

criterion in African party politics (Norris/Mattes 2003; Cheeseman/Ford 2007; Basedau/Stroh 2011), the extent to which election results mirror regional and/or ethnic composition still remains a field for investigation (e.g. Eifert/Miguel/Posner 2010; Lindberg/Morrison 2008).

Another familiar variable of African politics follows suit. The persistent dominance of incumbent parties is often attributed to their material advantage (e.g. Weghorst/Lindberg 2011). Besides larger resources for election campaigns, this material advantage can also be played out in 'vote-buying' strategies – material favours might outweigh more formalised (and possibly policy-based) affiliations. One of the academic legacies of autocratic rule in Africa is the ubiquitous reference to 'neo-patrimonialism' (e.g. Bratton/van de Walle 1997; Hyden 2006) – or clientelism, or 'politics of the belly' (Bayart 1993) (see Lindberg 2004: 12) – even though it can be argued that “in seeking to explain everything, the concept explains nothing” (Mkandawire 2001: 299). Prioritising individual or selective material rewards over public goods when holding political actors accountable can have counter-productive effects on the democratisation process and is thus worthy of closer and more differentiated analysis (Lindberg 2003). However, “formal rules of the game are beginning to matter” (Posner/Young 2007: 126) and therefore it is time to analyse more closely the relationships between parties and the electorate that go beyond neo-patrimonial linkages (see also Erdmann 2009: 12). This constitutes the starting point for this paper, as it is hoped that – by dropping the familiar set of 'African' variables – new perspectives might open up.

### **2.3. Interim conclusions**

The literature on political parties in Africa is vast and insufficient at the same time. Although studies have proliferated in the last decade, they leave many questions unanswered. More specifically, four shortcomings in the available literature inform the aspirations of this paper.

As became apparent from the cited studies above, many of them do not concentrate on one particular issue or country but aim to explain a range of characteristics applicable to large groups of cases in predominantly quantitative studies (but of course exceptions prove the rule: see e.g. LeBas 2011; Rakner 2011). This approach is, firstly, neither well-suited for a detailed understanding of the contextual factors that account for the observed characteristics in a given country, nor, secondly and relatedly, does it help to shed light on variations *within* Sub-Saharan Africa. Thirdly, an aspect that is often mentioned and has acquired a 'common sense' quality but is seldomly elaborated upon is the supposedly weak rootedness of parties, i.e. their linkages with society. Although not necessarily using the concept of *linkages*, a number of authors have pointed to the fragile connection between

parties and the electorate and its effects on the weakness of parties more generally. Whether they speak of parties' shallow roots in society (Kuenzi/Lambright 2001; Manning 2005), their limited success at representing different groups (Randall 2007) and at linking up to organised interests (Widner 1997; van de Walle/Butler 1999), or the failure to offer programmatic choice (Bleck/van de Walle 2011; Elischer 2012) – it appears that parties do not fulfil their task of connecting people to politics. Lastly, as argued before, there has been a lack of cross-fertilisation between political party research more generally and the research on *African* political parties. The intersection of these gaps constitutes the starting point for the following theoretical and empirical elaborations.

### 3. Approach and methodology

The main chapter of this paper will broadly consist of two parts, one theoretical and one empirical. It will undertake a 'stock-taking' of the theoretical literature on political parties' linkages with society, with the aim to illustrate their importance for a party's strength; and to draw out the most fruitful explanatory concepts. With the aim of understanding the different outcomes in Zambia and Ghana, the theoretical findings will then guide a “focussed, structured comparison” (see George/Bennett 2005: 67) that constitutes the exploratory comparative case analysis.

The analysis employs deductive and inductive methods. On the one hand, existing theories about political parties and linkages are reviewed and 'tested' in a Zambian and Ghanaian context. On the other hand, explanations as to what accounts for these developments and the different degrees of opposition party strength today follows an inductive logic – informed by combining the theoretical insights with the empirical findings.

Ghana and Zambia were selected in order to shed light on what accounts for differences in opposition party strength between different African countries. Zambia was chosen as a case of 'weak' opposition parties that do not offer substantial representation of differing interests (see e.g. Rakner 2011), while Ghana was chosen to represent the positive case of having a party system with clear alternatives (see e.g. Morrison 2004). This initial judgement is largely based on secondary sources and will be briefly discussed prior to the analysis.

Ghana and Zambia clearly do not provide an obvious “most similar systems” design (see e.g. Przeworski/Teune 1970: 32; Gerring 2012: 52), given for example their economic and geographical differences as well as very different political histories. However, for the purpose of this analysis, the important variables that shall be 'controlled' are regarded as similar enough for both countries. They include the electoral system (in both parliaments MPs are elected in single-member constituencies with a first-past-the-post system, and presidents are directly elected; see African Elections Database 2012) – a variable that this paper does not aim to investigate<sup>3</sup>. Both have a similar number of years' experience with multi-party elections (Zambia since 1991; Ghana since 1992), which will 'control' for the 'Lindberg-argument' that democracy simply needs time (Lindberg 2004). They can moreover both be considered 'free' enough to enable true party competition<sup>4</sup>. Further more, neither of the countries is an obvious case of purely 'ethnic voting' (for Zambia see Erdmann 2007; for Ghana see Lindberg/Morrison 2008) and neither has a history of violent conflict (which can influence the

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<sup>3</sup> This is not to deny its importance but due to the assumption that the electoral system alone is not able to account for differences.

<sup>4</sup> Although in the analysis it will be shown that for some periods, Zambian opposition parties were restricted in their work (Momba 2003).

nature of party competition, see Söderström 2012). Lastly, both are marked by an interesting pattern of party competition, including the persistence (though differential success) of the former independence movement's party. This is hoped to contribute especially to our understanding of the legacies of the late colonial and immediate post-independence constellations.

On a more practical note, it has to be acknowledged that the availability of literature also speaks for these two countries. Even though this should in theory not influence the case selection (George/Bennett 2005), for a study that relies on secondary sources this criterion of feasibility has to be fulfilled.

The shortcomings of this analysis are evident and yet accepted. First of all, and as mentioned before, both selected cases can be regarded as 'outliers' in themselves and the findings will need to be questioned for their representativeness. Secondly, given the space available for this study, the comparison will inevitably remain exploratory and cannot be exhaustive. However, given the important aim of this paper to account for *differences* in party development within Africa, some depth is wittingly sacrificed for the sake of a comparative approach. A reflection about the resulting limitations, and the pointing out of promising avenues for further investigation should make this analysis worthwhile nonetheless.

## 4. Theoretical discussion

### 4.1. Precursor: 'party strength'

The complexity of the issue at stake starts at the level of definition. What do we mean by a 'strong' party or opposition party? Many studies rely on election results for their measurement of strength, Duverger (1954: 281f.) has suggested to look at votes and parliamentary seats. Surely, this can give us an idea of a party's visibility among the citizenry, about the latter's perception of the party's quality, and can – if traced over time – indicate the stability of a party's vote share or its continued existence (see also LeBas: 27). However, these numbers should rather be treated as *outcomes* of party strength and be accompanied by more qualitative observations (*ibid.*: 25). Matters are complicated by the risk to slide into normative assumptions about what a party should do. The prevalent tendency to speak of institutionalisation of parties or party systems takes a more technical approach and thus suggests the ability to 'measure' and compare strength across parties and countries (see e.g. Basedau/Stroh 2008).

Taking all this into account, this paper is based on the argument that a party can be considered 'strong' if it fulfils its function of *aggregating and representing interests*. This has implications for the party system as a whole which is supposed to offer alternatives for different social groups to select their representatives. As Duverger (1954: 372) puts it, representation describes the “resemblance between the political opinions of the nation and those of parliament”. This further calls for a certain predictability of policy options: the “stability in who the main parties are and in how they behave” (Mainwaring 1998: 68). This in turn requires the opposition to uphold their existence and differentiate themselves from the incumbent party.

LeBas (2011: 5f.) adds another vital dimension. She argues that in contexts of hybrid regimes parties fulfil more than the classical function of representing interests in parliament. They are involved in the democratic transformational struggle and thus are important actors for popular mobilisation.

In sum, opposition parties can be considered strong when they enable and mobilise the electorate to voice their opinion at the polls through presenting an identifiable alternative. This raises the question of how parties can achieve this task. How can they aggregate and represent interests, how are they informed about what is of concern to the electorate? Obviously, for the translation of interests into political representation communication is vital (Poguntke 1998; Allern 2010: 57). Linkages describe different forms of such institutionalised interaction.

## 4.2. Linkages

### Direct and organisational linkages

Linkages can be categorised according to different levels of aggregation. Starting with a party's own organisational apparatus, Duverger (1954: 5ff.) speaks of “direct parties” when they are linked to individual citizens through membership cards. They rely especially on their membership organisations and in order to increase the number of party members, branches are set up to enhance visibility at the local level (ibid.: 23). “Indirect parties”, on the contrary, are made up of groups such as trade unions or co-operative societies which in turn consist of members. Horizontal links connect the different bodies with and within the party via their respective elites (ibid.: 51). Duverger argues that indirect parties are often an outcome of a situation where associations existed before political parties were allowed (ibid.: 15). The historical origins of parties remain crucial (ibid.: xxix), even if over time all tend to develop into direct parties.

Poguntke (2002) presents us with a slightly different classification between direct linkages with individuals and organisational linkages with intermediary groups. Compared to Duverger he advances our discussion by illustrating the actual mechanisms through which linkages contribute to the 'strength' of a political party in the above sense. He posits that organisational linkages embed a party in a political environment that helps to aggregate interests at an intermediate level. Parties can thereby more easily detect the most relevant issues that are of concern to their voters (ibid.: 5). Contrary to that, the direct type of linkage forms a less influential connection, as it conveys not as much information about citizens' preferences to a party and does not bind the voter as strongly. The different types of linkages similarly affect the effectiveness of political accountability processes. Poguntke illustrates that individuals can only try to enforce policy responsiveness through the withdrawal of their support in the form of either membership or vote. This is far less effective than if the elites of organisational intermediaries decide to mobilise or withdraw support on a large scale (ibid.: 6). Parties thereby face higher costs when not providing stable and cohesive interest representation. Verge (2012: 47), who focusses on parties' rationales, adds that the collaboration with groups does not only provide informational and organisational resources, but also secures credibility in the eyes of the electorate.

Given this importance of organisational linkages, there is a growing literature which looks specifically on parties' relationships with interest groups and other societal organisations (see Allern 2012). It is mostly concerned with western Europe, and authors aim to test for example the assumption that linkages are withering away due to the “cartelisation” of parties (Katz/Mair 1995).

While African parties might face very different problems than too much state funding, their detachment from social groups is in some respects similar (Kopecký/Mair 2003).

For the purpose of being able to describe relationships between groups and parties, Thomas (2001b: 281ff.) suggests a typology. His classification is based on different levels of intensity and power relations. It starts with the “integration model”, where party and interest group are almost identical as often one was created by the other. This could for example refer to what Duverger calls ancillary organisations<sup>5</sup>. In the “cooperation model”, a party and an interest group are non-hierarchically aligned, usually based on a shared ideology and often arisen from historical circumstances. These are usually the most enduring and stable linkages. In the “dominant party model”, party and group are separate entities but the latter is dominated by and dependent on the former in all its actions. In the “separation model”, group and party are very independent of each other, and the group possesses no partisan attachment. It may thus align with a party on an ad-hoc basis and in pragmatic, unideological ways. Its occurrence is argued to be on the increase and is often observable in policy arenas that have become depoliticised (Thomas 2001b: 283). Thomas' approach is especially important because it also points to the possibility of the *absence* of linkage. He (ibid.) includes the “non-involvement model”, where there are no direct relations between a group and a party, usually – and often observed – because of a group's decision to influence politics from “without”. Many pressure groups may choose to remain outside political institutions (see also Allern 2010: 5).

In sum, linkages are vital for enabling parties to fulfil their task of representation and aggregation of interests, where especially organisational intermediaries make these processes more effective. The following will give a brief overview of the reasons that have historically been given for the emergence of linkages. The theories will be revisited in the empirical analysis that follows.

### Societal origins

Linkages were traditionally assumed to be inevitable outcomes of ideological affiliation and shared interests. In the study of Western European party systems partisan voting patterns have traditionally received most attention (Kitschelt 2000). The programmatic linkage between parties and voters is based on the notion that parties solve the problem of social choice by offering the electorate a package of coherent policy positions. This enables continuous representation without necessitating

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<sup>5</sup> Such as youth movements, women's organisations, or sports clubs. These are directly connected to a party and have the function of gathering support and strengthening membership bonds (Duverger 1954: 17).



constant votes on every decision (see Aldrich 1995). In their widely-cited contribution, Lipset and Rokkan (1967) developed a sociological theory of cleavage structures, where certain groups of the population are distinguishable on ideological grounds. Along four lines of differentiation (rural/urban, capital/labour, centre/periphery, and church/state), citizens are said to have conflicting interests which are represented by respective political parties. It is thus assumed that out of the cleavage structure of the citizenry preference variations arise which somehow automatically crystallise into linkages between the electorate and parties.

These concepts have been questioned for their applicability to new democracies, where the historical processes of party formation and socio-economic developments were markedly different (van Biezen 2005). Whether parties or citizens in Africa can be categorised into what western Europeans would call 'left' and 'right' is a valid question (Conroy-Krutz/Lewis 2011). Yet, the discussion about the applicability of the cleavage model risks focussing on whether there actually are societal divisions in the above sense, given the lack of 'class struggle' or an industrial revolution (Thomson 2010: 87). This, it can be argued, would essentialise societal structures rather than ask what accounts for their political relevance. For example Erdmann (2004) argues that Lipset and Rokkan can be applied to African party systems if slight alterations are undertaken such as attributing greater significance to ethnic and regional cleavages. He does acknowledge the role that parties can play in actively politicising ethnicity – rather than assuming 'ethnic parties' to be an inevitable outcome (ibid.: 71). However, while explicitly distancing himself from the primordial view of ethnicity, this does not yet translate into his research approach.

Rather than treating the translation of cleavages into political factions as an 'automatic' process, it needs to be asked how parties actively create support bases and how they contribute to structuring the electorate. Only that will allow us to understand the contingency of party systems and thus the political and historical factors that account for different outcomes today. In this respect especially the role of elites and the importance of intermediary organisations have received attention (Przeworski 1985: 99ff.), as political actors need to be present to capture and manifest societal structural divisions (Bartolini/Mair 1990). This has implications for understanding existing voting patterns, as well as the scope that new parties have.

### Parties' strategies

Compared with many of the above concepts that were derived from studies of Western European democracies, the work on new democracies takes a step forward. Verge's (2012) analysis of Spain

offers a way to investigate parties' strategies for reaching out to interest associations, thus taking up the above remarks about the importance of parties' active *creation* of linkages and thereby manifestation of cleavages. This applies to new democracies as well as to new parties which enter an existing party system – in situations of 'ad-hoc' party formation. Verge's approach allows for a directed search for the strategies that parties might pursue for this aim. She distinguishes broadly between the creation of new social organisations, the penetration of pre-existing interest groups, and the collaboration with associations via communication platforms. Parties could, for example, invite groups to contribute to the development of a manifesto (ibid.: 55). Her explanations for the differences she finds between parties point to the effects of their ideologies and organisational traditions; but also to the character of civil society itself. If it is weak, creation of new social organisations and infiltration might be more feasible approaches than collaboration. Moreover, Poguntke (2002: 16f.) argues that new parties often face difficulties when all intermediaries are already linked to existing parties. Thus, he concludes, especially those 'late-comers' have to invest in concerted linkage techniques which require resources and strategic efforts. Taking up his above distinction, besides direct appeals to individuals via the media or at public gatherings, parties could approach intermediary organisations (ibid.: 4).

These perspectives are regarded as particularly useful because they allow us to question the incentive structure of different periods that parties encounter (see also Allern 2010).

With regards to the new democracies of Sub-Saharan Africa these findings based on new European democracies promise to be more illuminating than applying only the usual Lipset/Rokan approach. Given for example the need to explain why ethnicity is more salient in some countries than in others, this perspective will allow us to approach societal divisions from a new angle.

## **5. Empirical analysis**

### **5.1. Opposition parties in Zambia and Ghana today**

In line with the economic reform programmes prescribed by the International Financial Institutions, Rawlings' regime had significantly increased the user fees for public health services since the mid-1980s (Fusheini/Marnoch/Gray 2012). With the democratic opening of the regime in 1992 this topic immediately featured large in public discourse. Self-help insurance associations and the wider public demanded change. After Rawlings had failed to substantially reform the health system, the oppositional New Patriotic Party (NPP) soon started to mobilise votes for the 2000 elections based on this discontent about the 'cash and carry' system. They promised a more equitable system and universal health insurance (Carbone 2011). The NPP subsequently won the elections and thereby ended the 19-year rule of Rawlings and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) in the third multi-party elections of the country. By 2004 the National Health Insurance Scheme was adopted (ibid.).

This above story clearly presents a counter-example to Bleck's and van de Walle's observation of parties which fail to pick up on public opinion. In fact, it supports the impression that is suggested by much of the literature – that Ghana is one of the democratic success stories of the continent with a consolidated party system (e.g. Carbone 2003; Morrison 2004; Whitfield 2009). In the footsteps of Nkrumah and Danquah, later Busia, a two-party system has evolved with distinguishable alternatives that can be considered 'rooted' in society. Further more, voting behaviour is said to be based on socio-economic issues rather than on ethnic affiliation (Jockers et al. 2010).

Zambia was initially praised for its broad-based democracy movement which ousted Kaunda's United National Independence Party (UNIP) from office in the first multi-party elections in 1991 (see Rakner 2011). However, disappointment about this promising case would follow soon. Not only because the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) adopted a not-so-democratic political style once elected (Burnell 2001; Momba 2003), but also because in the years to follow no viable opposition emerged (Rakner 2001). Since then, Zambia's party system is described as lacking ideological differentiation (van de Walle 1997), and as fluid and fragmented (LeBas 2011: 215). For example in the 1996 elections, 36 parties registered and only seven of them had a manifesto (Rakner 2011). In stark contrast to the above Ghanaian example, grievances that prevail are not carried into the political arena (Larmer/Fraser 2007).

Starting from these observations, the following analysis will adopt a “backward-looking” approach (see Scharpf 1997: 23ff.) in order to shed light on what accounts for these different outcomes. It will start by looking more closely at the end of colonial rule, at which point both countries seemed to be

starting off with somewhat similar constellations. Given the supposedly best-case scenario of Ghana, it will be possible to investigate at which points the two trajectories diverged.

The most basic hypothesis derived from the theoretical discussion is that linkages matter for parties' success at representing social groups. Moreover, it was argued that linkages can broadly have two origins. On the one hand, societal cleavages can give rise to affiliations between citizens, interest groups and parties – based on shared political aims. On the other hand, cleavages require politicisation, manifestation and activation – which means 1) that existent divisions will not automatically translate into political representation, and 2) that parties can contribute to structuring the electorate through directed strategies.

This leads to two overall questions which guide the analysis: 1) to what extent can linkages account for the differences in party strength?, and 2) which factors explain the different intensities and types of linkages between Ghanaian and Zambian parties with their respective societies?

## **5.2. Linkages in comparison**

### 5.2.1. Colonial endowments

The most crucial foundations for subsequent party system developments were laid in the late colonial and early independence periods<sup>6</sup>. While in Ghana it was possible for Nkrumah's CPP and the oppositional UGCC/UP to establish respective cross-regional support bases as well as linkages with different societal groups; in Zambia Kaunda co-opted a regionally fragmented opposition into UNIP and forged linkages only with the copperbelt region.

In Ghana the British had to some extent collaborated with indigenous farmers in the production of export crops (Austin 2010), leaving along the coast relatively wealthier indigenous classes than would be found in most inland regions (Amin 1972: 504). Further more, they had invested in a “limited but superior” educational system, producing a small national elite (Apter 1964: 263). A class-like division thus arose – even if paralleled by an ethnic cleavage between Akan and non-Akan Ghanaians (Osei 2011: 118). Given this multiplicity of identities, the choices made by arising political parties were subsequently vital for politicising the former rather than the latter divide.

Together with 'traditional' chiefs, which were favoured by the British as the new ruling elite, the indigenous educated class became one side in the anti-colonial struggle. Support came from various, sometimes long-established associations, which had proliferated especially between the

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<sup>6</sup> Obviously, the colonial period does not represent the beginning of African history. Yet, due to the emergence in this time of those parties which are of interest for this analysis, it is here chosen as a starting point.

two world wars (Apter 1964: 269). In 1947 the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) was founded by Danquah and others, with Nkrumah as his secretary, aiming for control of the government of the Gold Coast (ibid.: 271). Two years later, however, Nkrumah split from the UGCC to found the more radical Convention People's Party (CPP). Organised first in towns, supported by diverse groups of 'ordinary' citizens, it soon spread into the villages and built up a mass-based organisational apparatus. Its linkages with for example farmers' and youth organisations helped the CPP to expand its organisational network (ibid.: 271ff.). At the same time, the UGCC was organisationally less tightly connected but had close affiliations with for example urban business groups (ibid.: 281). Both parties, the UGCC and the CPP, were thus linked to distinct social groups (Osei 2011: 106) – with the national better-off elite on the one, and the less well-off masses on the other side. Nkrumah's socialist background helps to understand his directed appeal to the 'masses' and hence the politicisation of primarily this particular 'class' cleavage. Duverger (1954: 24f.) argued that ideology is the key variable to understand a party's organisational approach: socialist parties aim for mass recruitment through branches widely spread across a polity (see also Verge 2012: 56). Soon the CPP's auxiliary organisations would be growing (Apter 1964: 293f.), existing organised life be penetrated, branches proliferating and especially the rural population would be 'politicised' (ibid.: 296, 300).

At this critical juncture, the path of Zambia's party system took a different turn, even though initially the political constellation looked similar to that in Ghana. In the anti-colonial struggle, Kaunda had split from Nkumbula's African National Congress (ANC) in 1958 to form the more radical UNIP (Macola 2008: 20). However, their respective followers were not divided on economic but on regional grounds. Colonial rule in Zambia had cemented language groups through missionary and educational activities (Posner 2003: 130). Moreover, forced migration into the copperbelt and along the railways had led to the dominance of Bemba speaking Zambians in the rapidly urbanising areas (ibid.: 134). Because the industrial centres were the main site of political activity, Kaunda formed linkages primarily with the unions of the copperbelt which led to the political marginalisation of rural citizens. They thus supported the oppositional ANC. However, their grievances were of primarily local nature which fragmented the rural population and hence the opposition – politics became regionalised (Baylies, Szeftel 1984a: 8). The anti-colonial struggle in Zambia thus corresponds with Mamdani's observation: people protested in the languages that the colonial regime had imposed on them (Posner 2003: 142). The fact that Kaunda, contrary to Nkrumah, did not have a strong socialist motivation, further contributed to his failure to generate

mass-based support. It can be argued that his vague humanist orientation (Baylies, Szeftel 1984a: 9f.) was primarily an invention for justifying his single-party system (Larmer 2008: 100).

Kaunda's subsequent strive to unite the nation across ethnicities can be deemed responsible for two connected developments. Firstly, the “inclusive elite-bargains” he forged with local elites (Lindemann 2011b) prevented the activation of rural-urban cleavages similar to those in Ghana. It can be argued that Kaunda 'mistook' rural grievances for potential linguistic/ethnic sentiments, as colonialism had centralised resources in the urban Bemba-speaking region (Baylies/Szeftel 1984a: 5; Carey 2002: 55). Secondly, his attempt to unite everyone within UNIP clearly weakened the opposition, as he co-opted much of the elite. Even after UNIP's victory in the 1964 elections, the ANC retained support in specific regions in the South (Macola 2008: 36f.; Baylies/Szeftel 1984a: 9). However, both UNIP and the ANC targeted the copperbelt for linkages and both failed to politicise the peasants (LeBas 2011: 84; Lindemann 2011a: 1848). The ANC's own financial problems (Macola 2008: 30) and Kaunda's early harassment of the opposition (ibid.: 43) additionally prevented it from rooting itself in society.

In Ghana, the opposition was able to survive. The Avoidance of Discrimination Act introduced by Nkrumah in 1957, when his own CPP had already become a “party of solidarity”, forced the oppositional forces to unite across regions (Apter 1964: 280). They came together under Busia's leadership as the United Party (UP), maintaining the initial support base of the NGCC (Boafo-Arthur 2003: 211f.). This reinforced cross-ethnic cleavages and would subsequently ensure the survival of the Busia-tradition.

### 5.2.2. Single-party rule

Throughout Ghana's eventful political history, the two party traditions were able to survive through organisational networks, and Rawlings established his own linkages. In Zambia on the contrary, Kaunda continued his internalisation of all dissent and manifested ethnic cleavages as well as the unequal representation of social groups.

Without going into much detail of Ghana's political history, what stands out is the stable persistence of the two major parties' traditions.

In the two short intervals of civilian rule both factions reappeared – although in new forms (Boafo-Arthur 2003). The Progress Party (PP), an offspring of Busia's UP, defeated the National Alliance of Liberals (NAL), a party led by an Nkrumahist in 1969, and ruled for three years (African Elections

Database 2012). In 1979 the People's National Party (PNP) of the Nkrumahist line was elected into office. Again, their main opposition came from the Busiaist camp in the form of the Popular Front Party (PFP) (ibid.; Boafo-Arthur 2003). Two points should be made about this consistency. First, it was clearly enabled through the persistence of both parties' organisational and personal networks (Jeffries/Thomas 1993: 343). Although the Busia-camp, as Morrison (2004) argues, was under more repression through the course of these decades, it managed to retain its organisational basis through several “long-standing autonomous professional organizations” (ibid.: 427). Secondly, it should be pointed out that these stable patterns were not entirely based on respective programmatic linkages. Carbone (2003) emphasises that the ideological division had always been accompanied by an ethno-regional cleavage. The Danquah-Busia tradition had throughout the various periods been particularly strongly rooted in the Ashanti region (also Jeffries/Thomas 1993: 346). Moreover, Osei (2011: 109) notes that for example the 1979 elections saw very similar campaign promises and differed mostly in styles of communication and political images. For both traditions it can thus be said that the ideological differentiation was supported by regional, and clearly also charismatic, “cognitive shortcuts” (Fridy 2007: 294).

The last regime before the democratic transition was led by Rawlings who would eventually transform his Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) into the National Democratic Congress (NDC). Dickovick (2008) argues that similar to Nkrumah, Rawlings' politics were guided by a “heterodox leftism” which manifested itself in his broad organisational reach, including in the countryside. Moreover, he reinforced the existing non-ethnic cleavages by his campaigns against the wealthy business elite – driving many of them into Busia's dormant networks (Carbone 2003). Whether one wants to call it leftism or populism – Rawlings placed much emphasis on 'ordinary' people's representation and participation (Thomson 2010: 45).

Finally, on a more general note, it can be argued that the unstable political situation and frequent regime changes in Ghana have led to a largely independent civil society. To use Thomas' (2001) terminology, there was not enough persistence for a thorough “integration model” between a ruling party and interest groups to emerge. This could be argued to have led to less material dependence, given that groups remained aligned also with non-incumbent parties on a “cooperation” basis. The importance of Ghana's strong civil society will become visible later on.

With similarly broad strokes, the authoritarian years in Zambia can be described as mainly continuations of the previously identified trends.

In 1971 the oppositional United Progressive Party (UPP) was founded by Kapwepwe, a UNIP-

defector, yet possessed little programmatic coherence and was largely based on regional support (Larmer 2008: 99). It also directed its appeals at the copperbelt where people began to feel marginalised and deprived of economic progress (Baylies, Szeftel 1984a). After being banned in 1972, some UPP members rejoined UNIP, others went underground. From then on the latter used large private gatherings such as weddings to maintain their presence (Larmer 2008: 109). The other opposition party, the ANC, had almost completely joined UNIP by 1973, except for some regional ANC leaders in the west (Baylies/Szeftel 1984a: 18f.). Kaunda's incentive to co-opt the opposition thus remained, as competition could still be feared. He placed much emphasis on 'tribal balancing' in his cabinet (Lindemann 2011a: 1849) and thereby increased intra-party competition on ethnic grounds (Larmer 2008: 103). Because MPs were continuously criticised for neglecting their local constituencies, they responded by trying to cater for regional concerns – which had similarly “parochialising” effects (Baylies/Szeftel 1984b: 52; also Gertzel 1984: 88).

Attempts were made to expand the organisational basis of UNIP. Yet, the local branches and various party wings which were built after 1973 only reinforced the overproportional attention to the copperbelt (Baylies, Szeftel 1984b: 34). It can be said that UNIP failed to mobilise the masses, and remained throughout a “party of the petty bourgeoisie” (ibid.: 45).

UNIP's linkages with organised interests conveyed a similar picture. Within his state corporate structures Kaunda had close relations with the leadership of the Zambian Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), and to some extent with business and farmers' associations – though the latter were considerably weaker (Rakner 2001). Business was in fact more represented through individuals in the party (Baylies/Szeftel 1984c: 72). Further more, it became clear that the ZCTU's internal communication was insufficient to speak of mining workers' representation through their leadership (Gertzel 1984: 90ff.). The picture that presents itself is thus one of two classes: a political, materially better-off elite on the one, and the majority of citizens on the other side – mirroring the uneven economic structure that Zambia had inherited from colonial times (Amin 1972).

Kaunda's approach to critical voices outside the party was comparatively soft (Momba 2003) – his style much less confrontational than that of Rawlings. However, as Lungu (1986: 410) puts it, this can be regarded as the “crux of the matter” – as it undermined the formation of a powerful, independent and coherent opposition.

### 5.2.3. Democratic transition

The first multi-party elections marked another critical juncture for party developments. In both countries, existing linkages shaped the nature of popular mobilisation, as well as subsequent



patterns of linkage formation. Ghana's parties benefited from their long-established networks; while the MMD in Zambia repeated the minimal mobilisation patterns of UNIP. In both countries new parties face severe difficulties to form linkages, due to the organisational structures they encounter, and due to a lack of financial resources.

In Ghana, the Movement for Freedom and Justice (MFJ), consisting of the National Union of Ghanaian Students (NUGS), the Trade Unions' Congress (TUC) and other professional organisations, had formed in 1990 and protested for change (Nugent 1995; Osei 2000). Rawlings was in the meantime pursuing his own notion of democratisation but also starting to give in to their demands (Nugent 1995: 170ff.). The opposition parties allied in the Alliance for Change and boycotted the first elections of 1992 in protest against unfair competition (Boafo-Arthur 2003; Jeffries/Thomas 1993). Besides a powerful civil society and the private press, it was their long-standing networks which enabled the fast and broad mobilisation (Osei 2011: 127). Especially the "well-oiled machinery of the NPP" (Nugent 1995: 224), and private clubs established in the 1980s in honour of Danquah, Busia and Nkrumah were vital for the quick revitalisation of the parties (ibid.: 221; Boafo-Arthur 2003; Jeffries/Thomas 1993: 343). But also Rawlings benefited from his PNDC network of ancillary organisation and mobilised votes in his favour in 1992 and 1996 (Jeffries/Thomas 1993: 361). The party scene after the democratic transition is thus largely marked by continuities of previous trends.

While in Ghana the main parties' linkages not only helped to mobilise for reform but also reinstalled the familiar party system once again, Zambia's pre-transitional patterns impacted less favourably on the MMD and the party system.

The MMD consisted of a broad but unstable coalition with limited reach. Against common perception, LeBas (2011) emphasises that the support for the pro-democracy movement did not stretch out deeply into society. Two factors account for this. First, the ZCTU was characterised by internal divisions between the leadership and the rank and file. Although relations between ZCTU leaders Chiluba andimba, and UNIP had deteriorated since the early 1980s (Gertzel 1984), the ZCTU did not support the first economic protests by Zambian workers (LeBas 2011: 154). Thus, by the time the ZCTU entered the MMD, there was already a lack of internal cohesion and thus, it could be argued, a lack of interest aggregation on the side of the unions. Secondly, the MMD was made up of several elites with diverse interests, and continued UNIP's tendency to build maximum coalitions within the party (Lindemann 2011a: 1854). The MMD was launched in 1991 at a

conference attended by big business people, academics, members of the UPP, and other UNIP-defectors (Baylies/Sefztel 1992: 83). Chiluba and Zimba were brought into the movement early on in order to broaden its support base (ibid.: 85). The unions became effective mobilisers (LeBas 2011: 39), but did not reach out to groups outside the union structures (ibid.: 171). It can be argued that the MMD was primarily influenced by business interests (Burnell 2001: 247) and continuously failed to widen its support network (LeBas 2011: 42; Carey 2002: 68). Speaking with Duverger's words, it seems that the MMD failed to develop from an indirect party, where constituting groups are linked on the elite level, to a party with direct linkages.

The fact that the MMD was largely elite-based does, however, not yet account for the absence of other parties' attempts to form linkages. At this point, Widner (1997) comes to mind, as it is striking that in Zambia the organised civil society did not provide many incentives for parties to approach them. This is due to several factors. Firstly, the organisational legacies of UNIP were clearly marked by a lack of infrastructure in rural areas (Rakner 2001). LeBas (2011) argues that organisational structures of interest groups and their networks can be used by different parties, once they have been established. Thus, also new parties felt the effects of UNIP's as well as the MMD's failure to politically organise the masses. Secondly, more recent developments further weakened civil associations. Rakner (2011, 2001) points to the effects of economic liberalisation. The shrinking of the formal organised workforce (see also Mulenga 2008) has weakened economic interest groups and thus undermines the MMD's (and other parties') incentives for forging linkages (Rakner 2001: 523). The fact that international aid has replaced many groups with professional NGOs (Rakner 2011) – which might prioritise relations with international donors (Rakner/Svåsand 2010) – further impacts on the linkage strategies that parties can adopt. Moreover, with regards to the trade unions it can be added that the ZCTU's former heavy dependence on UNIP and the enforced centralisation under single-party rule account for its rupture of 1994 (Mulenga 2008).

Lastly, it needs to be asked which linkages new parties possess, or attempt to forge.

In Ghana the Nkrumahists and Busiasts were shown to be rooted deeply in society, while Rawlings and his NDC were somewhat less well-established by the time of the democratic transition. Yet, in the 2008 elections the NDC managed to mobilise non-voters and to win over voters from the other parties (Weghorst/Lindberg 2011). This might be explainable with its concerted efforts at reaching out to the rural population (Carbone 2003). However, the NDC had already entered the multi-party system with considerable resources. Many smaller parties have not survived, not being able to make use of these organisational, human and material endowments (Boafo-Arthur 2003). Moreover, in

Ghana civil society groups tend to address the government “from without”. For example the TUC has chosen to remain unpartisan (see Ghana Trade Union Congress 2008), given its historical experience: its alignment with the CPP had secured material resources but brought discrimination by subsequent regimes (Beckmann et al. 2010). Several civil society groups today monitor democratic transparency (Gyimah-Boadi 1999: 412f.), or co-operate with parties on particular issues. Such as the the Ghana Medical Association and the Ghana Pharmaceutical Association which supported the NPP in formulating the new health policy after it had assumed office (Fusheini/Marnoch/Gray 2012). Given that the “separation model” characterises groups and parties today, independent and reliable funding sources become especially important for new parties to build up their own organisational structures.

In Zambia, the party system was long characterised by a lack of a viable opposition against the MMD, despite wide-spread popular dissatisfaction. Given the structural endowments described above, new parties face particular difficulties in reaching out, having little organisational infrastructure that they can make use of. Further more, UNIP's attempts at reinstitutionalising itself have been impeded by harassment through the MMD (Momba 2003).

However, the new Patriotic Front (PF) has increased its vote share over the last decade. Employing a large-scale populist pro-poor campaign (Jackson 2011), it won the latest presidential and parliamentary elections of 2011 (African Elections Database 2012). According to Afrobarometer surveys, the number of Zambians feeling “close” to a political party has increased from 52 to 60 percent between 2005 and 2009 (Afrobarometer 2005, 2009). The pattern of respondents' replies as to which party this is implies a growth in PF supporters (ibid.). Whether the PF's electoral success can be explained by concerted linkage strategies is difficult to judge. For the purpose of this paper, some preliminary attempts at tracking their linkage strategies can be made. Making use of Verge's (2012) research tools, the PF constitution of 2011 (Patriotic Front 2011) reveals that mass organisations are being established. Moreover, the PF has entered into a dialogue with civil society groups, hosted by a German political foundation (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2012) and has been reported to be working together with farmers' groups to “promote good agricultural activities for small-scale farmers” (AGRA Watch 2012). In how far these linkages with societal interests will contribute to coherent policy making needs to be seen. Yet, they suggest a possibility that the Patriotic Front might undertake efforts to structure the electorate through politics directed at rural constituencies. And this, in turn, would imply that political coherence can grow even from a populist starting point, if linkages are established that increase policy responsiveness over time.

## 6. Conclusions

This paper set out to investigate why some African countries see strong opposition parties while others do not. A theoretical discussion led to the argument that linkages increase parties' ability to aggregate and represent interests. Moreover, it was argued that not only societal cleavages are necessary for linkages to emerge, but concerted political strategies employed by parties. Thus arose the question which factors shape parties' scope for linkage-building. In Ghana the post-independence manifestation of class-based differentiation, together with large-scale organisational outreach by the CPP have laid the foundations for strong parties until this day. In Zambia, on the contrary, existing economic inequalities were not translated into political factions as regional fragmentation induced the subsumption of all social groups within the ruling party. In addition, UNIP and the MMD failed to lay notable organisational foundations beyond the copperbelt region. These and resource constraints prevented the emergence of a strong opposition until recently.

A number of wider conclusions can be drawn out from these findings. Firstly, civil society needs to be treated as an endogenous variable. Rather than assuming that its weakness inhibits parties from forming linkages (Widner 1997), it has to be asked which factors inhibit parties from mobilising and organising their constituencies. Secondly, rather than attributing new parties' failure at picking up on public opinion to their young age (Bleck/van de Walle 2011), it also has to be asked which organisational structures there are that they can utilise. Thirdly, it became evident that not all authoritarian regimes leave the same legacies. Depending on their ideological intentions and mobilisational strategies, post-authoritarian starting points were markedly different. The linkages approach also enables us to look beyond incumbents' material advantages and ask which political advantages long-established linkages entail. Fourthly, by pointing out that strong party systems not only rely on ideological traditions but also, quite plainly, on organisational collaboration, it can be derived that the possibilities for new parties increase through directed efforts at linking up with intermediary bodies. This, of course requires the necessary resources as well as politically motivated associations. On this note, lastly, as a policy implication it needs to be asked whether financial and other support should be directed at political parties rather than at technical and professional NGOs.

The above said, the insights gained from this analysis must be treated with modesty. While the theoretical discussion might have conceptually differentiated the frequently heard reference to African parties' 'lack of social roots', its arguments retain a degree of tautology. Surely, a party with stable linkages can be considered strong. Is this a causal chain, or the same thing? Thus, what is more important is the question of what accounts for different intensities of linkages. And here the

discussed theories gave only a limited answer. What was argued beyond relied on secondary sources and own reasoning and the novelty of the findings can be questioned. However, while the 'answers' might have been known, the employed perspective of linkages has led to some new questions. These concern primarily the incentive structure which new parties face today. What shapes the strategies they pursue for linking up with (organised) interests? Moreover, adopting a theoretical angle that originated outside the literature on *African* parties will perhaps contribute to shaking up our familiar repertoire of variables.

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