

Helpt democratie Afrika?

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Summary ‘Does democracy help Africa?’

Western donor countries consider a proper functioning multiparty democracy as one of the most important conditions for achieving more legitimate governance and subsequently economic development and reduction of poverty in their partner countries. Support to free and fair elections is an integral part of the ‘good governance’ agenda of the traditional donor community. The central question in this study is whether the (re-)introduction of a multiparty system and corresponding elections in a number of African countries in the nineties of the previous century contributed to political settlements which are conducive to economic development and transformation. A comparative historical approach has been applied to shed light on the research question. Within this context, in particular the reaction of the political elites to the challenges of a multiparty democracy has been investigated. Since the proof of the pudding is in the eating, a major part of the study focuses on five country cases in sub-Saharan Africa, i.e. Kenya, Uganda, Congo, Rwanda en Ethiopia. Based on these country studies and studying relevant literature a number of common trends and conclusions have been formulated.

Although the abovementioned countries, like elsewhere in Africa, witnessed substantial economic growth, it is clear that a transformation of their economies has not taken place yet. They are just at the beginning of this process. Without a structural change this level of economic growth will not be sustainable. In an effort to try to understand how multiparty democracy influenced the different types of cooperation among political elites, and its implications for economic transformation, the typology on political arrangements in developing countries, formulated by Mushtaq Khan, has been applied.

Seen from the perspective of this typology and based on the findings of the country specific research the conclusion can be drawn that the (re-)introduction of a multiparty system and elections as such did not result in ruling coalitions that were capable of applying a long term agenda conducive to economic development and transformation, or implement these policies for that matter. Political settlements in Kenya and Congo, be it at different levels, fell in the period under scrutiny in the category of *competitive clientelism*. The relative power of the excluded factions and the limited authority over lower level supporters created a situation in which the emphasis was on short term politics and a limited capability to enforce policies. It is evident that the consequences were far more serious in Congo than in Kenya. The structure of the ruling coalition in Uganda developed over time into the existence of a *weak dominant party*. The stability of this political settlement was not so much threatened by excluded factions as it was by political forces within the party itself. In Ethiopia and Rwanda, in which countries the political process was firmly under control of the ruling coalitions, the political settlement does seem to have the characteristics of a *potential developmental coalition*. The weakness of the excluded factions as well as the strong hierarchical nature of the ruling coalition in both countries created a conducive political environment to implement a long term development agenda.

The following trends related to the (re-)introduction of multiparty democracy and elections in the abovementioned countries, could be identified:

- Continuation of the neo-patrimonial nature of the political process

Multiparty democracy offered a new framework, but the nature of the political process in itself did not change fundamentally. Choices by political actors within this context were not so much influenced by motives based on programmatic or ideological convictions, as they were by (in itself politically rational) considerations that were focused on direct reciprocity with their supporters. Exceptions to a certain extent were the ruling parties in Rwanda and Ethiopia.

- Intensified divisions among the political elites

Electoral politics after the (re-)introduction of multiparty democracy resulted in a stronger emphasis on existing differences between political elites (and the population). As political freedoms improved and elections became more free and fair, the divisions between the political elites and the focus on short term political success intensified. In Rwanda and Ethiopia this was not the case. Multiparty elections in these countries hardly had an impact on the political cohesion of the ruling elite.

- Political manipulation of ethnicity remains a serious problem

African societies are pervaded by ethnicity. Many political leaders made use of ethnicity to decide multiparty elections to their advantage and secure their political position. Violence around elections usually had a strong ethnic connotation. In short, multiparty elections often contributed to an increased emphasis on ethnic distinctions in order to gain political advantage. *Moral ethnicity* was defeated by *political tribalism*.

- The use of violence for political purposes continued

Political violence occurred in particular when the ruling party or coalition was unsure about the outcome of elections. When the political dominance of the ruling party was evident, the chance of election violence diminished. Political violence was of course not the prerogative of a multiparty democracy. However, the (re-)introduction of a multiparty system and corresponding elections certainly did not put a stop to political violence.

- Political corruption depended on the nature of specific elections

The misuse of public means for political purposes did not decrease after the (re-)introduction of multiparty democracy in Kenya, Uganda and Congo. In order to win the support of voters, favors had to be distributed on a large scale or promises to that effect had to be made. For this a lot of money was needed. This was hardly the case in Rwanda and Ethiopia, where the outcome of elections were a forgone conclusion given the dominant position of the ruling coalition.

This complex reality did not escape the international donor community either and resulted in a number of cases in a more pragmatic approach. At the same time Western donors continued to consider multiparty democracy and elections as an important priority of their 'good governance' agenda. Partly because of the still existing substantial aid relationship development countries in particular in sub-Saharan Africa, were confronted with the 'good governance' demands and conditions of Western donors.

On the basis of the findings of this study, it appears however that it is not so much the acceptance of Western type political institutions or compliance with generally endorsed liberal-democratic standards,

that determine the possibilities for developing countries to achieve economic transformation and substantial poverty reduction, but rather the nature of the political settlement among the political elites. This conclusion should have consequences for the policy of Western donors with regard to 'good governance'. A 'good governance' agenda that is relevant for developing countries, should not focus on the advancement of democracy or challenging authoritarian regimes. Much more important is (to encourage) the presence of a ruling coalition that is willing and capable to give shape and substance to a long term agenda necessary for economic transformation and to mobilize the necessary resources. It is for this reason that African countries with a political leadership that have a solid power base and a genuine developmental ambition, deserve generous and long term support from the international donor community.