

## **Matthias Basedau, Alexander Stroh, Gero Erdmann: The Institutionalisation of Political Parties in Anglophone Africa: Study Results, Causes, and Correlations**

Since the mid-nineties, most sub-Saharan countries have been holding elections on a regular basis, with a number of candidates or parties standing for election in each case. However, Africa's parties as such have their deficits, such as a weak organisation, loose membership, the dependence on 'big men', a lack of programmes, and personalist quarrels – deficits that, taken together, may be termed 'low institutionalisation'.

This gives rise to the following basic questions: To what degree are certain parties in the English-speaking African countries institutionalised? Is there a connection between institutionalisation and the degree to which democracy has been realised, including its dynamic? And, finally, how may these different degrees of institutionalisation be explained?

It is by no means clear what institutionalising a political party actually means. However, we can distinguish four dimensions of party institutionalisation: A high degree of societal integration (a), the party's appearance as an independent organisation (b), a high level of organisation (c), and coherence and cohesion (d). These characteristics are registered in an index of the institutionalisation of political parties (IPP); in the case of Africa, however, the amount of data available is unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, this study investigates the three most important political parties of five anglophone African countries, namely Botswana, Ghana, Malawi, Tanzania, and Zambia.

First off, it may be said that the degree to which the political parties concerned are institutionalised differs greatly. While Tanzania's CCM reaches 7.3 on a scale of 8 points, the BDP comes in at 6.4 and Ghana's NPP at 5.5. This being so, good institutionalisation is by no means the preserve of any one country. While parties cannot be categorised clearly, most of the political parties investigated, except for the three named above, show obvious institutionalisation deficits.

What attracts attention is the long-standing dominance of the CCM and the BDP, parties that are most strongly institutionalised in their respective systems. Other former unity parties are institutionalised to a much lower degree.

It seems that neither a party's age nor its electoral success play a significant role for its degree of institutionalisation, even though it should hardly be possible for smaller political parties to attain the higher levels. Looking at the four dimensions, you need to differentiate as well, since there is no dimension in which all political parties show exclusively high or exclusively low values, to say nothing of homogeneity. This being so, the political parties investigated have no common institutionalisation profile; rather, they are distinguished not only by their own individuality but also by a characteristic performance in the various dimensions of institutionalisation.

When compared to each other, the parties of the countries investigated hardly differ in the depth of their societal roots; however, they do differ in their autonomy and cohesion. While Tanzania's and Ghana's political parties are quite capable of preserving their cohesion, the loyalty Malawi's activists, MPs, and party leaders show towards their parties looks rather bad. Thus, the dimensions of autonomy and cohesion are responsible for the fact that the countries are classified into two groups. In the overall index, Botswana, Ghana, and Tanzania occupy similar ranks; their political parties show a medium degree of institutionalisation.

The fact that each of the five countries investigated has held three successive multi-party elections shows that they all have a minimum degree of democracy. Nevertheless, there are differences. From their trends in democracy development, Botswana and Ghana may be called democracies, whereas Malawi, Tanzania, and Zambia appear as hybrid regimes. However, even within those two groups of countries, you have to differentiate: While Botswana has been stable for years, Ghana is experiencing an upward trend, as the change of government in 2000 showed. In Malawi and Zambia, on the other hand, developments are taking a downward course.

In politics, political parties constitute the central mediator between the population and the government. Naturally, political parties that are strongly institutionalised may fulfil this task better than those with a low degree of institutionalisation, since the latter lowers the members' confidence in having their expectations fulfilled, together with the parties' competitiveness and decision-making efficiency. It seems that there is a connection between the parties' degree of institutionalisation and their tendency to develop democracy. The higher their degree of institutionalisation, the more likely they are to put democracy into practice.

A look at the dynamic of democracy development provides results that are even clearer: While the weakly institutionalised political parties of Malawi and Zambia show a relatively low level of democracy as well as a negative democracy development, things look more positive for the political parties of Botswana and Ghana – and, to some extent, even those of Tanzania.

Nevertheless, a causal connection between institutionalisation and democracy development should be postulated with reserve, since correlations exist only in comparatively few cases. Moreover, it may be possible that it is not democracy which influences institutionalisation but vice versa, or that both factors depend on other determinants such as, for example, the economy, the country's political culture, or the behaviour of the elite.

Now, what causes the differences in the degree of institutionalisation of the parties investigated? This question should be handled with care, especially as it is fruitless to contrast the framework conditions prevailing in the countries concerned – Malawi and Zambia on the one hand, and Botswana, Ghana, and Tanzania on the other – since all countries have one thing in common: The British colonial and electoral system. In trying to explain the current situation, the time factor is of no use either. Rather, it is likely that there are diverse factors responsible for the different degrees of institutionalisation.

One reason for the higher degree of institutionalisation of the CCM compared to the UNIP and the MCP is that it remained in power even after the system change which, in turn, resulted as much from the CCM's intensive endeavours to embed itself in society as from its machinations in high politics. One cause for the strong institutionalisation of the two political parties that were founded in Ghana in the nineties, at the time of the regime change, is a regulation in Ghana's political parties act which dictates that all parties registered in a district should have a permanent office there. Another is the traditions of their precursors back in colonial times, which left their heritage behind. For Botswana's political parties, the time factor plays an important role: The multi-party system which has been in existence without interruption from 1966 onwards offered the political parties favourable framework conditions for a stable development. What is more, the BDP benefited from its considerable successes in governing the country. One reason for the low institutionalisation of the BNF is its lack of coherence – in concrete terms, its division in 1998, which led to quarrels between the two new parties, the BNF and the BCP. On the other hand, the BDP was able to preserve its cohesion despite violent fights between its wings. Finally, the weak institutionalisation of young government parties comes as a surprise, including, for example, Zambia's MMD.

If we look at the causes and consequences of the institutionalisation of political parties in English-speaking Africa, what we see is a complex picture. Many political parties show significant institutionalisation deficits, even though they differ greatly and have no common institutionalisation profile. What has to be said is that the governing parties of countries with a high level of democratisation are also those that show the highest degree of institutionalisation, so that a correlation between institutionalisation and democracy development seems obvious.

To serve as a working tool, an index of the institutionalisation of political parties (IPP) requires well-founded data which, however, do not exist at the moment for many African countries and political parties. Yet such data would be an indispensable basis for a comprehensive and exact picture of the correlation between democratisation and institutionalisation.