

M. Basedau, G. Erdmann and Andreas Mehler (eds), Votes, Money and Violence: Political Parties and Elections in Sub-Saharan Africa, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Scottsville, 2007, pp 301. ISBN 1 86914 119 6

In this pacesetting piece of literature, the editors introduce the book by examining the state of research on the main themes as a basis for offering a general overview of issues to be tackled later in this volume; that is, political parties and electoral systems in Africa. Research in this regard is said to be either lacking or inadequate and convincing reasons for this state of affairs are given.

The first contribution comes from E. Gryimah-Boadi, who in the initial instance gives a personal experience with political parties in his home country, Ghana. He goes on to espouse political parties in new African democracies, especially how elections and patronage play(ed) a critical role in defining these democracies to which he notes, “African political parties have authoritarian legacies, manifested in frequent attraction to “strong” and hegemonic leadership. Internal democracy tends to be poorly developed and there is over-emphasis on loyalty to the party, and especially loyalty to the party leader” p.25. Several deficiencies of African political parties and electoral systems are also alluded to. Boadi exposes the politics of patronage, which he regards as another negative phenomenon on African politics.

Gero Erdmann analyses political parties research in comparison to what the researcher terms “Western European bias” vis-à-vis characterizations of African political parties with regards to party functions. Using the “cleavage” model, he goes on to clarify the

differences that exist between European and African political parties. To that end, he notes that the Western model requires modifications.

Peter Burnell does well in his task of responding to Erdmann's contribution on party research. He appreciates this piece and attempts to answer the three fundamental questions regarding political parties in Africa, and these have more to do with these parties' differences, functionality and dynamism. It is made clear that in studying political parties in Africa, it should be borne in mind that the continent is unique in its own right. For its part, much if not all of, Africa is undergoing some important changes hence research should respect this significant statistic to avoid misleading "comparisons". In the same vein, functions of political parties in Africa, whether in the ruling or opposition circles, should not necessarily be expected to be the same with those of parties in so-called democracies. The author adds a crucial observation to the effect that there has been too much focus on "formal" politics when "informal" politics in Africa seems to be more important. This is said to be so given informal politics' special role in the maintenance of social peace. We are further enlightened by Burnell's caution that the prevalence, therefore, of ethnicity-based political parties in Africa might after all be a reflection of the integrative role played by these organisations on the continent.

In investigating the representation of social groups in political parties, Vicky Randall uses case studies of ethnic groups, civil society organisations and women. An engaging background is given, discussing the very concept of political representation as defined by scholars before him. Even for the newest reader in the discourse of representation, the

three respective forms: formal, mandated and descriptive representation are easily discernible. Randall singles out patrimonialism as a tenet of political party functionality in Africa, which may well explain widespread ideological bankruptcy in most political parties. By way of a thorough analysis of clientelism, ethnicity itself and regionalism, the author explains with the aid of classic case studies, the important, but often overlooked fact that political behavior has generally been more to do with regionalism than ethnicity *per se*. With the possible exception of South Africa, representation of civil society in political parties has been difficult and from this read, it is largely because aligning the two's strict interests is an unsustainable project. Randall confirms the fear that despite the introduction of the famed quota systems in political parties, women remain grossly underrepresented and again with the still questionable exception of South Africa, they continue to be used by parties in seeking political support. An interesting observation that could warrant further research is the striking prevalence of women seeking representation mainly, though not exclusively, in former liberation war parties.

In a highly scientific and near-complicated use of research methodology approach, Mathias Basedau sets out to offer answers to the important question, "Do Party Systems Matter for Democracy?" It is a highly engaging piece of mature work; requiring thorough concentration if one is to make head and/or tail of this first class research-based examination. The inclusion and exclusion of case studies is satisfactorily and adequately explained, and they are pruned to a modest eight. Though highly controversial in terms of contextuality, Basedau commendably uses the acclaimed Pedersen and Freedom House indices to unpack the respective party systems. He admits that most of the major

questions left unanswered have more to do with information scarcity, with the added requirement of “time-consuming research”. Readers will emerge wiser of the fact that, explanations of the democratic health of sub-Saharan Africa ought to desist from simplified assumptions for at play are various complex and interconnected factors that may confuse cause-and-effect. The analysis is boosted by a highly considered categorization of the sampled countries as either “Free”, “Not Free” or “Partly Free” after taking into systematic account of the key variables namely, “institutionalization, fragmentation, polarization and a combined values assessments”.

Christoff Hartmann traces the post-independence electoral pattern in sub-Saharan Africa. Whereas elections have been predominantly controversial in this part of the world, Hartmann is somewhat firm that this has tended to blind scholars from crediting the overall improvement of electoral politics. I hope, however, that Hartmann acknowledges the fact that elections in Africa still take place within the ambit of ruling incumbents to the extent that opposition parties’ chances are severely curtailed courtesy of professional cheating. Good examples include testing the independence of (Independent) Electoral Commissions, access to voters’ rolls, delimitation, media impartiality, verdicts of local and international observers and monitors e.t.c. He discusses the various electoral systems to set the ground for his analysis of electoral reform in sub-Saharan Africa which culminates in a comparative analysis of electoral system changes pitting formerly British, French and Portuguese colonies and also in the other remaining five countries not in these brackets. The author gives a useful insight into the various factors that influence electoral

reform and by far the most important of these has to do with calculations by political elites in their pursuit of power hence the timid commitment only to cosmetic reform.

Matthjis Bogaards takes the reader through a comprehensive survey of the party and electoral experiments that have been tested in Africa, in a bid to manage ethnicity and identity-based conflict. Centered on the key functions of “blocking”, “aggregation” and translation, Bogaards brings out how particular countries have come up with system designs that are tailor made for their specific ethnicity context. Electoral practitioners are however challenged to be more innovative if the predominantly heterogeneous society in Africa is to be peacefully harnessed in electoral arrangements without annihilating their respective rights to express and articulate their particularistic interests.

The all-time inviting subject of political parties and violence in Africa is well handled by Andreas Mehler. With a rather sizeable sample from Francophone Africa, one begins to appreciate the crucial “other side of” the violence coin. The author proves why violence may not reflect political immaturity after all as it is used differently by both ruling and opposition parties as a means to an end, albeit after serious calculations. Quite interestingly yet again, attributing violence to political parties is not to be a product of analytic simplicity for there are various, interested “parties” to violence. It is important therefore to understand whether Africa’s bloody transition process is essentially the cause or outcome of violence.

According to Liisa Laakso's analysis, the very nature of the phenomenon of transition breeds violence and this is understandably so because transition is very unpredictable business. In Africa, it is worsened by the fragility of the state whose institutional capacity in formulating predictable policies is dismally limited. In the same vein, the state's traditional privilege of monopolizing the use of force is not guaranteed either. In remarks that may well explain the current Kenya imbroglio, Laakso traces how from 1992, for example, ruling political elites violently embraced ethnic politics as a way of ensuring calculated electoral victory. The classic "swallowing up" of Zanzibar by Tanzania attests to the violent electoral conditions that have maintained Chama Cha Mapinduzi's stranglehold on power. The author does well to identify, in Zimbabwe, the key actors in the violence matrix, correctly fingered as youth militia and war veterans, all mobilized around the nationalist-military alliance in ZANU (PF). In the final analysis, electoral violence seems to take various forms, but emerging from this study, is a pattern where disenfranchisement is preferred given the difficulties associated with outright rigging.

Paul Nugent contributes last, coming in with one of the topical issues surrounding African elections in "Banknotes and Symbolic Capital" courtesy of a well-researched Ghana case study. The central and consistent theme here is that indeed vote-buying is alive in electoral systems. Dexterity is however a minimum requirement for vote buying has to be skillfully employed and managed, or it has boomerang effects. Pooling vote-buying resources happens to be so difficult for the opposition than the incumbents, who happen to influence political party funding.

In their concluding remarks, the editors admit that there is still need for scholarly enquiry as “other contributions raise a number of research topics and point to further lines of research”. (pg.276). These relate to, *inter alia*, the salient aspects of political party organisation, factionalism, representation, funding and the need to thoroughly analyse the interconnections between almost all the factors that this important volume has discussed. This is a highly recommended read for all interested in political science in particular and development studies in general. It adds a particularly crucial element of African politics that has hitherto been a subject of only cheap commentary and analytically lazy insinuations.

Reviewed by:

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