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Elections and Democracy in Southern Africa

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Cape Town, December 2014

Arnold Wehmhoerner provides an analysis of elections across the SADC region with a long view stretching from the end of the Cold War. A new dawn in democratic elections has not always heralded improved democratic practices as the politics of patronage heavily influences electoral outcomes. This article analyses SADC member states on a country-by-country basis to look at their performance in recent years.

Introduction

25 years ago the Berlin Wall came down, an event which symbolizes the end of the Cold War which had had significant repercussions for Southern Africa. Countries could no longer hide behind the “West” or the “East” but were exposed to international pressure to introduce political reforms. The proxy wars in Angola and Mozambique could not be continued, apartheid could not be maintained, and countries with one party rule had to introduce multi-party elections.

In 1989, the Namibian people voted for the first time in non-racial elections for a constitutional parliament and the country became independent in 1990. In the same year Nelson Mandela was released from prison and four years later South Africa had its first non-racial elections. In 1990 Mozambique, in 1991 Zambia and in 1994 Malawi had their first multi-party elections and Madagascar became a constitutional democracy in 1992.

The results of the 1991 elections in Zambia came as a shock to African leaders. Kenneth Kaunda, the hero in the fight for independence and founding father of the Zambian nation was defeated in the first multi-party elections. Up to then the first generation of leaders after independence thought that the support for them and their liberation parties would be indefinite; “until Jesus comes” claims South African President Zuma even still today. The new elites realized the threat of elections to their powers. The politics of patronage and the control over the electoral process and over the media, especially over television, by the governing party were since then important tools to stay in power.

SADC (Southern African Development Community) is sending observer missions to every election in Southern Africa. The label “free and fair” is not always given and sometimes the missions simply state that the results reflect the will of the majority of the people despite the observance of several shortcomings in the electoral process. In fact, the lack of capacity and the lack of proper infrastructure in some countries make it difficult to run an election according to international standards. Observer missions have to consider this and have to be careful before condemning an electoral process. This situation naturally opens several avenues for manipulation.

The credibility of SADC suffered considerably after having validated the 2008 elections in Zimbabwe. Other international observer groups condemned the manipulation of the electoral roll and of the counting process, but especially the intimidation of opposition members before and during the elections through beatings and killings which remained un-prosecuted by the state organs. It seems that SADC was not willing to force President Mugabe to step down and to accept defeat. After a court battle of four years by the South African weekly “Mail and Guardian” the high court ordered the South African government to release a report which was written by two judges for the South African government about the 2002 elections in Zimbabwe. The two judges already then reached the conclusion that the elections were manipulated by the Mugabe regime but the South African government deliberately did not make this public.

SADC is an important international organization to mediate and reconcile national conflicts. The power sharing agreement in Zimbabwe after the 2008 elections was a viable approach to the conflict. Unfortunately SADC lacked the will or the leverage to force President Mugabe to adhere to the agreement. In Malawi SADC stopped an unconstitutional succession after the death of President Bingu wa Mutharika and secured that the Deputy President Joyce Banda took over according to the constitution. For many years SADC accompanied the difficult process in Madagascar from a coup d'état in 2009 to elections in 2013; even barring the leader of the coup and the ousted president from running in these elections. After an attempted putsch in Lesotho in August 2014 SADC brokered a political agreement that re-opened parliament for the first time since June and pushed the national elections forward by two years to 2015.

The litmus test for democracy is the peaceful transfer of power through free and fair elections. The politics of patronage and the control over the electoral process but also the emotional link of the electorate to their liberation parties and the lack of convincing alternative parties resulted in the fact that this peaceful change of government through elections still is in Southern Africa rather the exemption than the rule. Today, in seven of the fifteen member states of SADC the same party is in power since independence: in Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. The five elections which took place in Southern Africa this year (2014) and the two in 2013 confirmed this trend.

Table 1: Recent Election results in Southern Africaⁱ

Country	Year of Independence	Last election	Winning party	Government party since	President
Angola	1975	August 2012	MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola)	1975	Jose Eduardo dos Santos
Botswana	1966	October 2014	Botswana Democratic Party (BDP)	1966	Ian Khama
Madagascar	1960	December 2013	New Force for Madagascar	2014	Hery Rajaonarimampianina
Malawi	1994 ⁱⁱ	May 2014	Democratic Progressive Party (DPP)	2004 (except 2012-2013)	Peter Mutharika
Mozambique	1975	October 2014	FRELIMO (Front for the Liberation of Mozambique)	1975	Filipe Nyusi
Namibia	1989	December 2014	SWAPO (South West Africa People's Organisation)	1989	Hage Geingob
South Africa	1994 ⁱⁱⁱ	May 2014	ANC (African National Congress)	1994	Jacob Zuma
Zambia	1964	2011 (next Jan. 2015)	PF (Patriotic Front)	2011	Michael Sata (died Oct. 2014)
Zimbabwe	1980	July 2013	ZANU-PF (Zimbabwe African Union-Patriotic Front)	1980	Robert Mugabe

Country Profiles

Angola

The ruling party MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) of Marxist orientation was formed in 1956 to fight for independence from the Portuguese. After the revolution in Portugal the country became independent in 1975 and a civil war followed between MPLA and UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola), another liberation movement. Both sides were used during the cold war as proxies by the super powers. The Soviet Union and Cuba supported the MPLA and USA and South Africa supported UNITA. After the end of the cold war a peace deal between the two organisations led to multi-party elections in 1992 which were won by MPLA, but declined by UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi. The UNITA insurgency continued until 2002 when Savimbi died.

The multi-party elections in 2012 were won by MPLA with over 70%, down from 80% in 2008. UNITA reached 18%, up from 10% in 2008. Observers judged that the election results in 2012 generally reflect the will of those Angolans who turned out to vote (voter's participation dropped to 63%) but that they were not fair. The voters' roll was not published before Election Day, the audit of the voters' database was dubious, the Electoral Commission did not respond to complaints of opposition parties and the public media was biased towards the ruling party.

The country has vast petroleum reserves and is heavily dependent on its oil income despite efforts to diversify the economy. After the end of the civil war growth rates of up to 20% were achieved, although from a low base. In spite of this, standards of living remained low for the majority of the population and the country has some of the worst life expectancy and child mortality rates in the world.

Botswana

Ian Khama, the son of Botswana's first post-independence leader Seretse Khama, and his Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) won the October 24, 2014 elections with 36 parliamentary seats. Two opposition parties gained 15 and 3 seats respectively. The convincing results hide that the BDP for the first time after independence in 1966 received less than 50% of the votes, 42% in fact down from 52% in the last elections in 2009. Botswana's first-past-the-post voting system secures that the BDP stays in power for a further five years.

Botswana is hailed as Southern Africa's best functioning democracy and Ian Khama as a rational and ascetic leader, however, also with authoritarian traits. He is one of the few African leaders who stood up against China and Zimbabwe's President Mugabe. The BDP managed to escape the "resource curse" as the diamond wealth is converted into generous social welfare benefits. The government, however, is criticised for failing to diversify the economy and for the lack of incentives for foreign investment in order to relax the dependency on diamonds.

Madagascar

The country gained independence in 1960 from France. After going through a number of different constitutional periods the country is governed as a constitutional democracy since 1992. President Marc Ravalomanana who came to power in 2001 was ousted in 2009 by capital Antananarivo's mayor Andry Rajoelina in a coup d'état and forced into exile in South Africa. Ravalomanana was accused of tax evasion and made responsible for the fatal shooting of 60 protesters by the presidential guard in the last week of his presidency. SADC stepped in and mediated a process of transition from the coup to the restoration of democracy. Both, Ravalomanana as well as Rajoelina, were banned from running in the next elections.

The elections which were finally held in December 2013 were considered by the international community as being fair and transparent. They were won by Hery Rajaonarimampianina who was widely regarded as a proxy for the previous ruler, Rajoelina. However, as soon as he was in power he cut the strings to his master. Observers believe that he "seems genuinely committed to healing the wounds that have been inflicted on Madagascar in the five years of turmoil"^{iv} after the coup. He can now prove his reconciliation skills because Ravalomanana returned to Madagascar in October 2014 clandestinely. The government put him under house arrest and SADC considered his return to be an "unacceptable provocation" despite the fact that the SADC road map for Madagascar provided for Ravalomanana's return after the elections. If the new government manages to clear this issue diplomatically the preconditions for further peaceful development are encouraging.

Malawi

Malawi gained independence in 1964; and after 30 years of one-party state under Kamuzu Banda the first multi-party elections took place in 1994 which were followed by another four elections up to 2014. The political system is characterized by instability caused by constitutional disputes and floor crossings. Bingu wa Mutharika who was re-elected by a landslide in 2009 died unexpectedly of a heart attack in 2012. Supporters around his brother Peter Mutharika unsuccessfully^v (also because of interventions from outside the country, especially SADC with South Africa) tried to prevent Joyce Banda from taking over the presidency to which she was entitled due to her position as Vice-President.

Joyce Banda dissolved her cabinet in October 2013 after 10 officials were arrested on corruption charges. After the corruption scandal was exposed donor countries suspended aid to Malawi - as much as 40% of the budget. To the electorate it was not clear whether Joyce Banda was leading in exposing the corruption or whether she was involved personally. Consequently she lost the 2014 presidential elections to Peter Mutharika despite the fact that he faced treason charges. Joyce Banda's intermezzo as state president obviously could not challenge the hold on government institutions of Peter Mutharika's

Democratic Progressive Party. Joyce Banda claims that the elections were rigged. Malawi is one of the poorest countries in Southern Africa which needs a responsible leadership to make progress. The unsolved corruption scandals in which the new government seems to be involved will make a clean start unlikely.

Mozambique

The political system is still dominated by the two factions who fought each other during the civil war which raged through Mozambique from 1977 to 1992: on the one side the Marxist FRELIMO (Front for the Liberation of Mozambique) which fought the Portuguese since 1964 until independence in 1975 after which they established a one party state under Samora Machel and on the other side RENAMO (Mozambique National Resistance) which was supported by the South African apartheid state. After the introduction of a multi-party system in 1990 the difference between the parties at the 1999 elections was just 5%. RENAMO was excluded from the government and resorted time and again to guerrilla warfare; again just shortly before the elections 2014 which took place in October.

FRELIMO's candidate Filipe Nyusi won with around 60% of the votes and RENAMO's Alfonso Dhlakama trailed with around 30%. RENAMO claims that the 2014 elections have been manipulated like the previous ones by FRELIMO. It is possible that Dhlakama would return to the bush. The country needs stability because vast reserves of coal and gas have been discovered which need to be tapped, shared and redistributed to the majority of the people who so far have not participated much in the country's fast growing economy. Southern African leaders, therefore, urge FRELIMO to include RENAMO into the new government to create the much needed stability. Looking back at the history between the two rival organisations this seems to be very unlikely.

Namibia

The liberation party SWAPO won the 6th Parliamentary elections in November 2014 convincingly and could even increase its majority by 5% to 80%. Its candidate for the presidency, Hage Geingob, did even better than the party and was elected by over 87% of the voters. He will be the third president of the country; after three terms of the founding father Sam Nujoma and two terms of Hifikepunge Pohamba. SWAPO consists in its majority of Ovambos, the tribe which originally lived in the northern part of the country. It is an achievement for the multi-racial attitude of the party to make Geingob from the minority tribe of the Damara president. Geingob served as Prime Minister in the first cabinet of Sam Nujoma and again under Pohamba. He commands the necessary administrative skills to be head of government and knows how to handle the party. The opposition parties could not convince the electorate that they are viable alternatives to SWAPO which is in government since independence in 1989. The country wide

proportional election system supports the representation of smaller parties in parliament. There are altogether 10 parties in parliament with 77 seats for SWAPO and 17 seats for the opposition parties. The DTA (Democratic Turnhalle Alliance) is now the official opposition party with 5 seats while the RDP (Rally for Democracy and Progress) - a split-off from SWAPO under the leadership of former SWAPO heavyweight Hidipo Hamutenya – was reduced to 3 seats.

The elections were free and fair although SWAPO used its advantage as the government party. Namibia is the first country in Southern Africa to use an electronic voting system. Corruption does exist but on a lower level than in other Southern African states. Transparency International lists the country on rank 57 out of 177 countries on its Corruption Perception Index. The economic performance of the country is better than in South Africa with growth rates around 5% during the last years. It intends to become the world's second largest uranium producer after Kazakhstan. The country with its small population of just over 2 million is doing well like its other neighbour, Botswana; but also faces the same problems namely the lack of diversification of its economy.

South Africa

ANC and President Zuma were re-elected in the May 2014 elections with over 62% despite the many scandals that rocked the country since he became president in 2009. The losses of the party were around 3%, similar to what the party lost from 2004 to 2009. The critical reflection in the press of the Marikana massacre when 60 miners were killed by the police and the continuous judicial proceedings concerning the arms deal scandal or the recent Nkandla scandal (President Zuma's house was upgraded with taxpayers money under the pretext of security) seem not to have deterred the ANC supporters. The emotional link to the liberation party is still strong. The largest opposition party, the DA (Democratic Alliance) won the Western Cape Province a second time and could gain votes in urban areas. It seems that educated blacks who are less bound by traditional values are easier to convince to turn their backs on the liberation party. The municipality elections in 2016 shall indicate if this trend can be continued.

The performance of the Zuma administration is mixed. The situation of the poor population could be improved as far as access to basic services like housing, water, electricity and sanitation is concerned. Living conditions were further raised by social welfare payments to every third South Africa. A black middle class emerged which, however, is heavily relying on the public sector which had been increased by 20% between 1998 and 2011. With growth rates around 2% in recent years this hand out policy cannot be continued. The government failed to attract foreign investment and to diversify the economy in order to lessen the reliance on the commodity sector. The necessary jobs were not created to absorb the growing youth unemployment which is around 40%. The populist EFF (Economic Freedom Fighters) of Julius Malema mainly get their support from this group of unsatisfied young people and the party won

at their first election 20 seats in parliament. South Africa's outlook is bleak with rising corruption and low economic performance.

Zambia

On 28th October 2014 Michael Sata, Zambia's President and leader of the ruling PF (Patriotic Front) died. He was succeeded by Vice President Guy Scott who is now the first white head of state in Southern Africa in post-colonial times. The presidential by-elections will be held on January 20, 2015, but Scott cannot run for president because his parents were not born in Zambia. Sata had left the succession question open. At the nomination congress in December 2014 the PF split into two factions each of them nominating a different candidate for the upcoming elections. This weakens the party considerably and it may lose the 2015 elections. The former ruling party, the MMD (Movement for Multiparty Democracy) is also plagued by factional battles. This opens the floor for the first ruling party after independence, UNIP (United Party for National Development) which had been side-lined for the last 40 years.

Zambia became independent in 1964 and was ruled by the founding father Kenneth Kaunda and his UNIP in a single party state until the first multiparty election in 1991 which Kaunda lost to the MMD. The MMD ruled for twenty years until being beaten by the PF of Michael Sata in 2011. Over 60% of the population are still living below the national poverty line. The country depends heavily on its copper export and has managed in recent years continuously good growth rates of the GDP, in 2013 around 6%.

Zimbabwe

After a 15 year long struggle Zimbabwe became independent in 1980. Zimbabwe's first Prime Minister, Robert Mugabe, established a one party state (ZANU-PF) in 1987. In 1999, after growing dissatisfaction in the population about corruption and meagre economic progress, the opposition party MDC was established which won a majority of the parliamentary seats in 2008 and its leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, out-pollied Mugabe for the post of president in the first round. After a wave of brutal suppression and after many of his supporters had been killed, Tsvangirai withdrew from the run-off election. Mugabe won unopposed and installed himself as state president. In September 2008 after long negotiations and under the guardianship of SADC and former South African President Mbeki a power sharing agreement was signed between ZANU-PF and the two factions of MDC. Although Tsvangirai became Prime Minister in the national unity cabinet Mugabe's party ZANU-PF kept control of the security organs so that the climate of intimidation continued.

The power sharing agreement ended with the election in July 2013 (the date was set against the will of the opposition) which was won by President Mugabe and his party. International election observers were not allowed in the country. While SADC declared the elections credible the MDC and neutral

observers complained about manipulation of the electoral roll and that the elections could not be fair in a climate of suppression. Despite the doubts about the correctness of the election President Mugabe was chosen to be First Deputy Chair of the Executive Council of the African Union.

The positive economic progress that took place under the government of national unity vanished and the country is again at the brink of bankruptcy. Although the European Union eased some of the sanctions investors shy away from Zimbabwe where the battle for the succession of the 90 year old Mugabe has begun. At the ZANU-PF congress in December 2014 Mugabe was re-elected president of the party and will be the candidate for the 2018 elections. He appointed Justice Minister Mnangagwa Vice-President who is presently well set to succeed Mugabe.

Summary

According to Freedom House two countries, Angola and Zimbabwe are rated “not free” (see Table 2). Elections in those countries are not free and fair, together with those in Madagascar and Mozambique. It is not surprising that Angola and Zimbabwe are also considered to be the most corrupt countries in Southern Africa according to the Corruption Perception Index of Transparency International. This negative assessment is supported by the low ranking of those countries on the Ibrahim African Index of 2013. Elite enrichment takes place in an abominable manner in Angola and Zimbabwe. Despite the authoritarian controls in these countries their elites still feel obliged to pay lip service to parliamentary democracy and to go through election exercises in order to keep the image of being democratic.

Three countries are rated “free”: Botswana, Namibia and South Africa. Elections in those countries are free and fair and as far as corruption is concerned they seem to have fewer problems. On international ranking Botswana and Namibia are even in the group of the top third of Transparency’s Index. In South Africa corruption is on the increase and the country dropped 18 places within three years.

Table 2: Democracy Ranking

Country	Electoral Democracy ^{vi}	Free ^{vii}	Ibrahim African Index 2013 Rank out of 52 ^{viii}	Corruption Index 2013 Rank out of 177 ^{ix}	HDI ^x 2014 Rank out of 187	GDP per capita 2010-14 US\$ ^{xi}
Angola	No	Not	39	153	149	5668
Botswana	Yes	Free	2	30	109	7317
Madagascar	No	Partly	37	127	155	471
Malawi	Yes	Partly	16	91	174	226
Mozambique	No	Partly	20	119	178	593
Namibia	Yes	Free	6	57	127	5462
South Africa	Yes	Free	5	72	118	6618
Zambia	Yes	Partly	12	83	141	1540
Zimbabwe	No	Not	47	157	156	905

The “not free” and the “free” countries are all ruled by the liberation party which became the government party at independence. It seems that this criterion does not have an influence on the democratic nature or on good or bad governance performance in those countries. While Namibia and South Africa are countries which have become independent quite recently (25 years ago) and still have to face the long term stability test, Angola, Zimbabwe and Botswana already have a long history of independence. The time that passed since independence seems not to explain the decline towards autocratic rule in Angola and Zimbabwe on the one side and the development into a functioning democracy in Botswana on the other side.

Four countries of the group presented in this article are rated “partly free” (Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, and Zambia). This coincides with a low development status of which an indication is the low ranking in the HDI (Human Development Index). They are all in the lower quarter of the Index. Also the GDP per capita is low, as little as 226 US\$ in Malawi. Low levels of income and education as well as poor infrastructures make it difficult to apply criteria like transparency and control of the government through an informed public which are essential for a system of parliamentary democracy. However, elections take place in a regular manner and coup d’états like the one in Madagascar are seldom and are condemned by its Southern African neighbours.

Since 1990 regular elections have become the rule in Southern Africa. Even the leaders who rule their countries in an autocratic manner like in Angola and Zimbabwe claim to be democratic and keep the façade of multi-party parliamentary democracy. In order to justify dictatorial regimes none of the leaders claim to follow the “authoritarian development state model” which has been economically successful in Asia.

Most of the liberation parties which became government parties managed to stay in power until today (MPLA in Angola, BDP in Botswana, FRELIMO in Mozambique, SWAPO in Namibia, ANC in South Africa, and ZANU-PF in Zimbabwe). They use the resources of the government and the control over the media to their advantage. But the emotional link of the people to their liberation parties must not be underestimated as an important factor in winning elections and to stay in power. This is also true for Angola and Zimbabwe. If change of government through elections does not take place as often as it is the case in many Western democracies the liberation movements turned government parties in the “free” and “partly free” countries cannot be blamed. It is part of the colonial legacy that people stick to their liberation parties.

Endnotes

ⁱ The other SADC member states which are not reflected in this table are: Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lesotho (mini state within South Africa), Mauritius, Seychelles, Swaziland (absolute monarchy next to South Africa), and Tanzania.

ⁱⁱ First multiparty elections after 30 years of one party rule by President Banda.

ⁱⁱⁱ First non-racial elections

^{iv} Peter Fabricius: *Madagascar: The puppet cuts his strings* in www.politicsweb.co.za 30.05.2014

^v The already dead president was flown to South Africa allegedly for medical treatment in order to gain time.

^{vi} According to "Freedom in the World" 2014, a yearly survey from the US-based NGO Freedom House. Electoral Democracy is judged by four criteria: 1. Multiparty political system 2. Universal suffrage 3. Regular elections with ballot secrecy and absence of massive voter fraud 4. Open political campaigning

^{vii} See Footnote 6

^{viii} Ibrahim Index of African Governance considers 100 variables from more than 30 independent African and global institutions with four categories: 1. Safety & Rule of Law 2. Participation & Human Rights 3. Sustainable Economic Opportunities 4. Human Development

^{ix} Corruption Perception Index of Transparency International

^x Human Development Index 2014, United Nations Development Programme

^{xi} GDP per Capita (current US\$), World Bank