

**THE IRON CAGE OF DEMOCRACY:
INSTITUTIONAL SIMILARITY AND STASIS IN AFRICAN
POLITICAL PARTY SYSTEMS**

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ABSTRACT

This paper asks (a) how to understand the development of new institutions in nascent democracies, and (b) what explains the persistence of institutional forms that do not conform to rationalist expectations of competitive efficiency. Much scholarship focuses on the power of strategic coordination under formal rules to shape democratic institutions, such as the form of the party system. This article contends that strict rationalist explanations of party systems leave unexplored the ways in which individual politician's and voter's strategic calculations are bounded by the organizational imperatives of systemic competition. Sociological theories of institutional development better explain the organizational logic driving party system *origin and endurance* in new democracies. The article uses original interview data from three contrasting cases of party system development in Africa to highlight the empirical puzzle that drives this conclusion: despite seemingly analogous democratic origins, largely similar conditions of low economic development, high ethnic heterogeneity, and weak state capacity, as well as comparable formal electoral rules in pairwise combinations, the party systems across Africa demonstrate incredible cross-national variation in the ways in which political parties organize and compete for power. Additionally, party systems maintain these varied forms over time rather than converging on a "most efficient" model. A focus on the particular mechanisms of reproduction through institutional isomorphism contributes to the research agenda of explaining institutional development, change, and stability.

RESUMEN

Este artículo se pregunta (a) cómo hay que entender el desarrollo de nuevas instituciones en las democracias nacientes y (b) qué explica la persistencia de formas institucionales que no conforman las expectativas racionalistas de eficiencia competitiva. Buena parte de los estudios se concentra en el poder de la coordinación estratégica bajo las reglas formales para dar forma a las instituciones democráticas, tales como el formato del sistema de partidos. Este artículo sostiene que las explicaciones estrictamente racionalistas de los sistemas de partidos dejan sin explorar las formas en que los cálculos estratégicos de los políticos individuales y los votantes son limitados por los imperativos organizacionales de la competición sistémica. Las teorías sociológicas del desarrollo institucional explican mejor la lógica que guía el *origen y la persistencia* de los sistemas de partidos en las nuevas democracias. Este trabajo usa datos originales de entrevistas en tres casos contrastantes de desarrollo de sistemas de partidos en África para resaltar la anomalía empírica que guía esta conclusión: a pesar de los orígenes democráticos aparentemente análogos, las en gran medida similares condiciones de bajo desarrollo económico, alta heterogeneidad étnica y débil capacidad estatal, así como la existencia de reglas electorales formales comparables en combinaciones de pares, los sistemas de partidos a lo largo de África demuestran increíble variación entre naciones en las formas en que los partidos políticos se organizan y compiten por el poder. Adicionalmente, los sistemas de partidos mantienen estas formas variadas a lo largo del tiempo en lugar de converger en el modelo "más eficiente." Enfocar los mecanismos particulares de

reproducción a través del isomorfismo institucional contribuye a la agenda de investigación orientada a explicar el desarrollo, el cambio y la estabilidad institucionales.

Despite seemingly equivalent democratic origins, and largely comparable conditions of low economic development, high ethnic heterogeneity, and weak state capacity, nascent party systems across Africa demonstrate incredible variation in the ways in which political parties organize and compete for power: from highly volatile systems with a proliferation of personalist, particularistic, and geographically limited parties to highly stable systems with a few nationally organized, deeply rooted parties that provide alternating majorities (Kuenzi and Lambright 2001; Riedl 2008). These democratic party systems differ cross-nationally along multiple dimensions: the level of party system institutionalization (Mainwaring and Scully 1995), the number of parties (Duverger 1954; Taagepera and Shugart 1989; Cox 1997), the degree of intra-party cohesion (Cox and McCubbins 2001; Hicken 2002), and the degree of party system nationalization (Chhibber and Kollman 1998, 2004).¹ Given the established variation of third wave democratic party systems in Africa, two related but distinct puzzles emerge: first, political party organizations *within* each national system exhibit extreme organizational homogeneity. They do not reflect the variety of viable party models apparent across the continent; rather, they converge on a common form within each country even where the particular organizational model adopted appears suboptimal. Second, these initial divergences across national party systems have exhibited “lock-in,” defying expectations of adaptation through increased coordination and learning that would predictably follow periods of extreme uncertainty and change such as democratization. Identifying the common cause of both organizational homogeneity and institutional stasis is therefore important in two respects. It provides a theoretical approach to understanding the form and functioning of important and under-explored *formal institutions* in developing democracies, particularly in Africa where the conventional wisdom has prioritized informal structures.² Secondly, it applies sociological institutionalist theory to explain path dependence, exploring the *causal mechanisms* of institutional reproduction that force convergence and stability and constrain alternative options (DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Mahoney 2000; Page 2006; Thelen 1999 p. 397; Greif and Laitin 2004 p. 636).

THEORY: POLITICAL PARTY SYSTEMS AND INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVES

In contradiction of Duverger's theory and rationalist perspectives on the emergence of party systems, democratic African party systems appear to be better explained in terms of more sociological theories of organizational development, both in terms of formation and patterns of stability (Duverger 1954). A strict rationalist institutionalist approach has argued that institutions represent efficient equilibrium solutions, building on the assumption that market competition ensures the selection of efficient organizational structures and practices (Shepsle 1986; Knight 1992). However, in order to understand the highly internally competitive yet seemingly suboptimal forms of party systems which persist across a range of democracies, it is necessary to focus on the ways in which institutionalized democratic party competition constrains and channels organizational rationality within each particular environment. This article advances a sociological theory of interorganizational influences that generate intrasystem conformity and allows for the diffusion and persistence of "irrational" operating procedures within the party system, which endure despite their seeming incongruity with certain functions they are intended to perform (Meyer and Rowan 1977; DiMaggio and Powell 1991).

What would the rationalist institutionalist approaches presume in practice? Given gains from economies of scale, many rationalists would predict that in order to perform key tasks such as winning a national majority, gaining access to the resources of government, or carrying out a legislative agenda (Cox 1997), large groups are often better able to accomplish these tasks than smaller groups (Aldrich 1995; Chhibber and Kollman 2004; Hicken 2009). And yet we see the persistence of many party systems with an extremely high effective number of parties (ENP) (Laakso and Taagepera 1979), a surplus of parties that even advocates of multiparty systems would characterize as excess and are often described as "hyper-inflated" (Lijphart 1977; Powell 2000).³

Furthermore, well-grounded expectations about the nature of uncertainty and limited information in founding democratic elections would lead rationalists to expect that initial elections would be characterized by high degrees of volatility and low levels of attachment between parties and voters, but that over time all national systems would increasingly institutionalize at approximately the same rate (Converse 1969). According

to Downs, we would expect party organizations to converge to a similar model based on what is most efficient for attracting voters and maximizing power, following general theories of competitive adaptation (1957). In addition, for new institutionalists in economics and politics, institutions are defined as the outcomes of purposive actions by instrumentally oriented individuals; they are provisional, temporary resting places on the way to an efficient equilibrium solution. Institutions constitute “temporarily congealed tastes” (Riker 1980) or “regularities in repetitive interactions... that provide a set of incentives and disincentives for individuals” (North 1986: 231). Therefore, we would expect the party system to evolve over time, as the product of conscious design, responding to selection effects and increased coordination between both candidates and the electorate. But again, the empirical evidence demonstrates that often party systems remain quite stable following their original period of formation (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Riedl 2008; Hunter 2007; Tucker and Powell 2009 show high volatility often due to oscillations between existing parties). Even given the rational attempts by party leaders to expand beyond the existing cleavages, the system remains resilient to the idiosyncratic demands of those who wish to influence it. The party system persists over time, frequently in a suboptimal form, because party system “outcomes at any given point cannot be understood in terms of the preferences of actors existing at that same point in time, but must be explained as the product of previous choices, that were shaped by institutional conventions and capabilities” (Powell 1991 p. 189). The party systems are not the product of conscious design, but of the exercise of power at the point of the system’s formation. Party systems are thus the result of complex interdependencies and path-dependent development processes that frequently have unintended beneficiaries.

Additionally, and perhaps most influentially, rationalist scholars have focused on the relationship between electoral and constitutional rules to determine the nature of the party system. First, electoral rules, particularly plurality rule, encourage the strategic behavior of both politicians and voters. Electoral rules force coordination around those candidates who appear viable to avoid wasting votes and resources, and ultimately determine the number of viable candidates (Duverger 1954; Cox 1997). Because this coordination is focused at the district level, national level institutions further shape party coordination across districts (Boix 2007; Hicken 2009), and therefore presidential

electoral rules and the distribution of power between branches of government also affect the character of the party system (Shugart and Carey 1992; Hicken 2009). These theories are beneficial in describing the existing formal incentive structure and, given the stability of existing electoral systems (Boix 2007), the maintenance of the party system within this framework. However, the rationalist institutionalist perspective tells us little about the original choice of electoral laws by the political actors involved in their formation, particularly the choice of formal rules that would not seem to advance their interests even at the point of construction, or the creation and endurance of suboptimal party organizations in relation to these rules. Secondly, from an empirical point of view, this perspective cannot explain the cross-national variation of party systems that share electoral and constitutional frameworks across Africa.

Beyond the empirical inability of the rationalist approach to explain the variety of party system outcomes apparent in the developing democracies, the theoretically important question to address is how to understand institutional formation and the particular mechanisms of reproduction over time. The third wave of democratization provides a rare opportunity to assess the choices of political actors in the transition period, their strategies of action based on existing distributions of power and resources, and the ways in which the party system, once established, perpetuates itself and becomes a constraint to all competing players.

A final theoretical point is imperative in this discussion. While a portion of the existing party systems are described here as suboptimal, or irrational, this is merely shorthand to describe party systems that do not fit rationalist expectations of adaptation and aggregate utility maximization. The reality that these systems embody is much more complicated and exposes the overlap of competitive and institutional logics. The party systems are inherently internally competitive, and each party must operate efficiently within the bounds determined by the system itself. The party system buttresses the competitive struggle among organizations within it and conditions the range of viable forms.⁴ This produces in-system organizational homogeneity; from an external viewpoint these parties may appear suboptimal but from within the institutionalized environment the parties reflect general societal pressures of rationalization, as they face constraining processes that force the units in the population to resemble other units that face the same

demands. As such, they are the optimal responses to the constraints and opportunities provided by the existent party system.⁵ The key insight is that understanding the nature of the party system itself is a precondition for predicting strategic behavior and optimal organizational forms within it. In the African democracies considered here, the goals of maximizing the chances for achieving political office, and therefore winning votes, are undisputed amongst party leaders, and the nonideological nature of the competition for power and access to the state creates no barrier to possible strategic adaptations (Hyden 2006; IMD 2004; Salih 2003; IDEA 2007). Inter-party competition is keen; indeed, a competitive system is the key factor shaping the organizational rationalization of political party system form and function, and yet competition does not result in predictable party organizational forms for similar structural and electoral systems. Rather, the balance of power during the democratic transition shaped the forms of party organization that emerged for the founding elections and became constraints to future change, defining the nature of party competition in each national system.

A Theory of Party System Emergence and Endurance: Institutional Isomorphism

Given the inability of rationalist perspectives to explain the plurality of third wave transition outcomes, I offer an organizational theory of party system development that provides a single argument for both the form of the party system (including the surprising degree of organizational homogeneity within each national system) and its reproduction over time.

The character of emergent democratic party systems is best explained according to a theory of *institutional isomorphism*, which channels the dynamics of transition power struggles into particular, predictable organizational forms, shaping the nascent party system and serving as the long-term mechanism of lock-in. Drawing on DiMaggio and Powell, institutional isomorphism can be explained in terms of three interrelated pressures: coercive, normative, and organizational (1983). In their general application: “1) *coercive* isomorphism stems from political influence and the problem of legitimacy; 2) *mimetic* isomorphism results from standard responses to uncertainty; and 3) *normative* isomorphism is associated with professionalization” (p. 150). To broadly summarize from

this seminal work and apply it explicitly to democratic competition, I characterize coercive pressures as the set of mandates, rules, and regulations within the system. Mimetic pressures describe the rational strategies of emulation and modeling of a successful competitor, and normative pressures define the relevant competitors and infuse a shared conception of what it means to participate and compete in the system. These isomorphic processes can be usefully applied in the context of a competitive political marketplace to explain the organizational similarity of competing political parties and party system equilibrium.

I hypothesize that these three mechanisms of organizational homogenization provide important insights into understanding institutional processes in the competitive system of multiparty democracy. Coercive pressures transmit the existing power structures embodied in the hierarchical legal system of rules and regulations that are particularly influential in shaping the initial features of the party system during its foundational period, and contribute to institutional stasis over the long term.⁶ In the African democracies, eligibility rules of party registration act as barriers to entry, either making party formation difficult or facilitating it with low barriers to entry. The resulting limitation or proliferation of political parties ties directly to the preferences and power distribution of the rule makers involved in the transition, but the consequences of such rule systems, once established, impinge upon all competing parties and force continued convergence within the system.

Secondly, mimetic pressures define rational strategies of imitation and modeling in the context of great uncertainty inherent in new multiparty competition. New parties attempt either to emulate the previously authoritarian incumbent party (where it remains powerful and successful) or to differentiate in order create something entirely new (where the authoritarian incumbent model is discredited by its own implosion or failure to mobilize support). Mimetic pressures to emulate a successful party model or differentiate from a failed and discredited model are influential to party leaders constructing the new organizations, as well as to voters who will determine which party models survive and thrive, setting the stage for future rounds of emulation. Particularly in Africa, where access to the state is contingent upon making prudent vote choices (e.g., a constituency linked with the victorious party, rather than the opposition, which could then be

marginalized in resource distribution), voters are highly rational in attempting to select a party capable of electoral success and use cues from existing models in this calculation.

Thirdly, normative pressures create the very criteria by which people discover their preferences by establishing the logic of relevant competition, and, therefore, the *structure* of the political party system. Normative pressures predetermine the conception of viable choices within the party system, through a shared understanding of the position of each party vis-à-vis potential rival or coalition parties. Normative pressures, similar to mimetic pressures, shape both party leaders' conceptions of what is possible within the system as well as voter perceptions of rational and strategic voting strategies. That is, voters and party leaders alike want to conform to shared perceptions of a "successful" party or competitive electoral strategy in order to maximize their likely chances of victory and postelection benefits. Inter-party relations reflect these normative understandings, particularly the degree to which existing parties see themselves as archrivals or potential collaborators (the degree of competitive rather than ideological polarization) and the extent to which there is a strictly defined understanding of these relationships versus a shifting and amorphous sentiment (the degree of coherence).

In sum, I argue that in the new African democracies political competition does not consistently produce the most efficient outcomes. Rather, democratic party competition replicates the conditions of the system's founding, embedding institutional logics that continue to drive the nature of the system over repeated contests. Organizational rationalization derives from the competitive *political process* that induces institutional similarity both in party system founding and continued practice. The empirical evidence of the coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphic processes should be most observable in the *eligibility rules, party organizational models, and inter-party polarization and coherence* that shape the organizational forms, competitive positions, and actions of the new political parties and constrain the multiparty system to maintain its character over the long term (Figure 1). The barriers to entry, organizational forms, and structure of competition reinforce each other, functioning as external constraints to party system transformation and shaping expectations, strategies, and relations between the emergent parties.

FIGURE 1

**OBSERVABLE INDICATORS OF INSTITUTIONAL ISOMORPHISM
IN POLITICAL PARTY SYSTEMS**

Institutional Isomorphic Processes (DiMaggio & Powell)	Theoretical Application to Political Party Systems	Implications for Party System Activity: The Range of Outcomes ←----->	
Coercive	Barriers to Entry: Eligibility Rules	Restrictive party registration requirements: Few parties can form (encourages party aggregation into a few broad organizations)	Permissive party registration requirements: Many parties can form (encourages personalism and party proliferation)
Mimetic	Organizational Modeling	Emulation of authoritarian incumbent model (national territorial coverage, organized party structures, mass membership)	Differentiation and innovation towards new models of party and electoral organizing (independent candidates, "movements," and limited regional bases)
Normative	Structure of Party Competition	High polarization (competing parties viewed as rivals, clear opposition) and High coherence (all parties agree on nature of inter-party relations)	Low polarization (competing parties viewed as mutable coalitions) and Low coherence (amorphous and fluid inter-party relations)

In the majority of African democratic transitions, the extent of initial authoritarian incumbent dominance in establishing the new multiparty system determines the form of the system at the outset. Where authoritarian incumbents are weak, transitions are more open to influence from nascent opposition forces, and their immediate incentives and organizational imperatives create pressures for more permissive eligibility rules (which allows for party proliferation), organizational innovation, and low polarization and coherence in new inter-party relations. Where authoritarian incumbents are strong, they attempt to write the rules of the democratic system in their own favor, limiting participation through restrictive eligibility rules (which encourage nascent opposition forces to aggregate in order to compete), organizational emulation, and high polarization. The ruling party sets the stage for its own commanding victory in the founding election but simultaneously creates opportunities for eventual defeat by setting the foundation for a strong and coherent opposition.

In Africa we see that those party systems that are initiated in open, participatory, and transformative democratic transitions *retain* high levels of volatility and weak party-citizen attachments, whereas those that are established in very controlled transitions continue to play out the dualistic, highly structured competition in future rounds and provide fertile ground for national party organizations and deeply held partisan identities. Once established, the formal rules and informal structures of competition have enduring impact on the character of the party system through continued isomorphic pressures.

Institutional isomorphism is thus the mechanism through which political parties within a given system come to resemble one another. Furthermore, isomorphic pressures are *also* the means through which the system maintains its character over time, exhibiting “lock-in” even given conditions of high party volatility and suboptimality. Though party leaders attempt to learn from their own experiences and their counterparts across state borders, they are hamstrung by the nature of the national party system, which they must continually emulate or see their own party wither away.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA

In order to assess the competing approaches to institutional formation and persistence, I compare three cases of African democracies that provide pairs of similar and contrasting electoral rules. Zambia and Ghana are both presidential systems with single-member district plurality rules (150 districts in Zambia and 200 in Ghana). Benin, on the other hand, is a party-list proportional representation system, divided into twenty-four multimember constituencies, allocating between three and six seats per district. The comparison of these three cases is highly instructive as they have all been hailed as models of democracy on the continent, yet only Ghana has established a stable national party system. In Zambia and Benin, the electoral systems offer a stark contrast yet the party systems are acutely similar, characterized by extreme volatility—including frequent victories by independent candidates and the continual emergence of new parties, excessive party proliferation, and highly regional party organization. Both Zambia and Benin provide key examples of sustainable multiparty democratic competition that does not converge to efficient party system models. Ghana provides the alternative case, a

two-party catchall system, to demonstrate that *the same isomorphic processes* are at work in the development and perpetuation of intra-system organizational homogeneity in an opposite form. Furthermore, these three cases allow us to hold a number of alternative factors relatively constant, as they all face structurally similar conditions of extremely low levels of economic development and high ethnic heterogeneity.⁷

These cases of new democracies are particularly useful because they allow analysis of both pre-entry and post-entry period strategies. The sequential analysis of the case study highlights the institutional logics that drive the struggle for power, and the mechanisms of reproduction that demonstrate how party system equilibrium outcomes are by-products of the political process through which institutions are created and become deeply embedded over time. In countries such as Benin and Zambia, where the authoritarian incumbent was extremely weak and had little to no control over the dynamics of the democratic transition, the resulting party system continues to replicate that vacuum of power and the cacophony of disparate and unconnected groups that formed rapidly to attempt to access power. In other examples such as Ghana, where the authoritarian incumbent dictated the terms of the transition and won founding elections, the opposition formed in response to this dominating presence (despite obvious attempts by the incumbent to cripple it, as the clear main rival). Over time, the dualistic quality of government versus opposition has been maintained in two solid, coherent, and durable parties. The cross-national empirical analysis provides evidence to support the claim that competitive institutional isomorphism maintains both highly structured, polarized competition as well as highly fluid, adaptable competition as an equilibrium condition within the national system. Interviews with over 170 national party officials past and present, particularly those critically involved in party creation, as well as informants and observers, allow a comparison of the logic of party formation.⁸ These data will be used to evaluate the three mechanisms of institutional isomorphism that shape the structure of party competition within each system.

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS: ORGANIZATIONAL HOMOGENEITY AND STASIS THROUGH ISOMORPHIC PRESSURES

The three institutional isomorphic processes (coercive, mimetic, and normative) demonstrate the ways in which the vacuum of power in Benin and Zambia resulted in rapid party proliferation, incomplete organization, and volatile inter-party relations and the ways in which the competitive pressures of the party system force continued convergence to this model. Benin and Zambia present some of the most extreme cases on the continent, with incredible levels of volatility where parties are constantly redefining and reshaping themselves in the context of the next competition and often in relation to very specific local calculations. Ghana provides a counter example of a case in which the *same isomorphic pressures* are at work, upholding a completely contrary system of highly dualistic, nationally organized competition. In these opposing examples, the same mechanisms produce highly variable party systems which feature intra-system organizational convergence and sustain those systems by locking in particular players, modes of organization, and normative understandings of competition.

Archives of the constitutional crafting deliberations and interviews conducted with key political leaders who were engaged in the rule making process of the democratic transition in all three countries emphasized a parallel finding: the choice of electoral system was based mostly on precedent (related to both colonial experience and early independence era multiparty systems) and were not highly contested or debated issues among the main stakeholders in the rule-making process.⁹ This might be expected in cases such as Ghana, where the incumbent party was powerful and wanted to maintain the status quo rules that it had become accustomed to, but the same occurred in Zambia and Benin, where opposition forces, intent on creating rules that were transparent and likely to be well understood throughout the country, had a preference for sticking with precedent (Asante 2006; Doussou 2005). The main concern of the disparate forces was to increase overall understanding of how votes translated into seats and, by extension, increase the legitimacy of the process and reduce the risk of conflict associated with contested electoral outcomes (Holo 2005). These broadly shared sentiments demonstrate that electoral rules were not viewed as crucially important for shaping the nature of

democratic multiparty competition by key players within each system, either during the founding period or in retrospective analysis (Ninsin and Drah 1991a).

Coercive Isomorphism: Eligibility Rules

Benin

In Benin, the implosion of the authoritarian incumbent Parti de la Révolution Populaire du Bénin (People's Revolutionary Party of Benin, or PRPB) created an unusually wide political vacuum in which the new party system was established. This void encouraged the multiplication of embryonic political groupings that sought to compete for power via the formation of parties. Exiles, business leaders, and local association and community leaders were mobilized through their participation in the transition's *conférence nationale* (national conference), and became the "entrepreneurs" who quickly formed nascent political parties to compete in elections (Bako-Arifari 1995; Heilbrunn 1993). These heterogeneous forces lacked any anti-incumbent unity that would encourage their self-identification as a cohesive group and instead saw themselves as individuals representing their own local constituencies, according to their call to participate in the national conference. Individual participants had incentives to try to ensure their own access to the electoral arena and maintain their representative role, in part by creating rules that would allow them to compete in the founding elections.

Individual incentives combined with a shared context—newly free from authoritarian dictates and reacting against the limitations of the past—shaped the guiding principles of the new rule makers: to prioritize participation and freedom of association. In concrete terms this meant that they allowed and even encouraged the formation of any new party imaginable. The Preparatory Committee for the National Conference debated extensively the risks and benefits inherent in creating more or less stringent requirements for party registration, particularly whether the number of legal political parties should be capped. Given the nature of the democratic transition, the vast majority of participants in the conference were reformers, united in their view that "liberty cannot be limited."¹⁰ The general expectation was that ongoing elections would eventually and naturally limit the number of parties, as those that were not successful would die away and coalitions would emerge, leading to an organized rationalization of the competitive parties.¹¹ According to

members charged with drafting the legal documents, the goal was to allow the reform process to take its course by offering opportunities for broad participation and natural regroupings of social and political interests (Doussou 2005). Given the overwhelming desire to prevent the restrictions of the previous regime, the conference participants tried to limit their rule-making role so as to avoid dictating the terms of the new system from the top down and instead let a natural evolution run its course.¹² “The conference continually prioritized freedom of expression, liberty, and association. This was most clearly reflected in the registration requirements for new political parties” (Adeloui 1998).

The *Charte des parties politiques* (Political Parties Charter) that set the eligibility rules for party registration established extremely low barriers to entry; it required no national distribution quotas or numerical requirements for the founding members of a party.¹³ Within a month after the inauguration of the new constitution, thirty parties officially registered with the Ministry of the Interior in order to compete in the February 1991 founding elections. Even given the lax requirements, these parties could not present fully national lists of candidates to cover the positions available in the sixty-four seats in the new national assembly, representing eighteen constituencies across the country (Karinthi 1999). According to the examination of the party dossiers by the transitional government just five weeks prior to the elections, not a single party had fully completed the dossier, reflecting the lack of national organization on the part of the parties and the lack of restricting rules in terms of the system at large (Haut Conseil de la Republique 1991). The transitional government, rather than prohibiting competition to limit the number of parties, provided an extension to all parties to permit better coordination prior to the elections. The result was the election of nineteen parties, highly localized around their constituency or district bases, to the first legislature (Ministère d’Etat 1999 p. 36). The party registration rules created during the democratic transition allowed for party proliferation and the extreme personalization and regionalization of politics. The consequences of the lax eligibility rules have persisted over time, exemplified by the rapid creation of new parties and electoral alliances following the 2007 presidential victory of independent candidate Yayi Boni. In preparation for the legislative elections, dozens of new parties and electoral alliances were registered and presented at elections,

and in consequence, only three of the twelve parties elected to the national assembly in 2007 had been present in the previous legislature (IPU Database, 2007).

Ghana

Equivalent coercive isomorphic pressures reinforce a diametrically opposed equilibrium condition in Ghana: strong, nationally organized governing and opposition parties in a highly stable, dualistic party system. The authoritarian incumbent party in Ghana, the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), dictated the transition by maintaining the authoritarian legal code and instruments of state repression throughout the party formation process and founding elections. One of the most important elements of formal rule making in the transition process in Ghana was the decision about how new parties could be formed and registered. The government retained a ban on political party formation during the entire Consultative Assembly “to ensure that the process of constitutional deliberation [was] non-partisan” (*Daily Graphic* 1992). This delayed party formation but also helped force the opposition’s unified focus on defeating the incumbent party as the target of their campaign for transformation.

Following the constitutional debates, party registration opened according to very demanding requirements. The PNDC mandated unilaterally that party registration requirements would be extremely rigorous for embryonic opposition. The Political Parties Law of 1992 (passed by the incumbent PNDC Assembly) legislated that registration of a political party shall be made to the National Electoral Commission through an application that, in addition to a party constitution and registration fee, calls for at least one *founding member of the political party from each of the 160 districts*. Moreover, within sixty days the party must provide evidence of the existence and location of *national, regional, and district offices in each locality* (PNDC Political Parties Law 1992). The high level of organization necessary to have physical offices in all 160 districts, as well as founding members across the country meant that nascent parties faced a very high barrier to registration, and without formal registration they were not legally allowed to operate. Furthermore, clearly stated in the political parties law was the threat of refusal of registration and de-registration if parties failed to comply with the

requirements or failed to submit the annual accounting and auditing documents necessary (Kangah 2006).

These high barriers to entry forced the majority of citizens interested in joining a party or running as a candidate to ally with one of the two main contenders, which had established the necessary infrastructure and assets for party maintenance. Because it is difficult to fund and oversee party operations in each district, for parties to be truly competitive they require a significant number of members of parliament to be elected, particularly because the representatives in the National Assembly serve as the major source of party funding and it is therefore necessary to pool resources to sustain the party (IMD 2004; IEA 2004; Morrison 2004; CDD 2005; Commey 2006). Overall, the regulations for party registration established during the democratic transition have been successful in avoiding party proliferation and limiting entrants into the political marketplace.¹⁴

Mimetic Isomorphism: Models of Party Organization

Benin

The drastic dissolution of Benin's former authoritarian party and its general negation in the public eye made its model of nationalist mass party organization invalid. New parties sought to establish themselves through more direct relations rather than replicate the failed model of the past. Whereas the PRPB had focused on establishing a national infrastructure of party functionaries and prioritized card-carrying membership, many new parties preferred to eschew membership cards and sought mainly to identify with *grand electors* (community leaders) who could mobilize their followers to deliver votes for a given party or candidate.

Precisely because local associational leaders, exiles with a regional home base, prominent local businessmen, and community tribal and religious leaders formed the new parties quickly, new party organizations were extremely particularistic and locally based (Ministère d'Etat 1999). The goal of many embryonic parties at the founding elections was to win a legislative seat in the party's home district, with the secondary goal of linking up to the presidential victor. This strategy contributed to a pre-election party focus on the local and a post-election focus on joining the national cartel. Many parties

that registered in Benin only placed candidates and competed in one or two districts, a pattern that continues into the present period.

The implosion of the incumbent party further relates to the patterns of regional and local level concentration in voting. Because new parties were not forced by regulations or competitive incentives to cover the national territory in the founding elections, the most immediate goals were individual victories by district to gain a foothold in the new system. Once the system *began* with this logic, it prohibited new forms of party organization from emerging; in subsequent competitions those who attempted to supersede the local organization mode to build a national party had little to offer individual candidates and were punished electorally as they had not made the necessary linkages with community powerbrokers via localized parties.¹⁵ An analysis of 2003 legislative elections confirms that party constituency bases remain extremely regionally concentrated, as parties receive between 45 and 78 percent of their votes from only two of the twelve administrative departments (CENA 2003). These departments are geographically contiguous, further emphasizing that parties cater to a very specific and targeted population.¹⁶ The surprise is not that parties have focused on smaller, manageable targets at the outset, but rather that they have been unable to build or eschewed building broader party organizations over time that could promise a greater capture of power, due to the isomorphic pressures of competing effectively within *this* system.¹⁷

Ghana

Whereas in Benin the mimetic pressures were at work to encourage completely new forms of party organization and electoral mobilization (owing to the discredited view of the incumbent example), in Ghana the incumbent's strength and organizational breadth and depth established a model to follow and emulate to achieve successful party organization.

Both the incumbent NDC and the opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP) focused on bolstering their national party organization, building their "foot-soldiers in the field," and converting their extensive networks into votes across the country in order to win the elections. The organizations were based on the mass party model of the independence-era

parties and the grass roots, “revolutionary” participation that the PNDC propagated. The model focused on strong linkages between national, regional, district, and local level party agents to tie the leadership of the party to their mass base. The three main groups of supporters of the incumbent regime included those who generally supported the PNDC due to their earlier revolutionary rhetoric or later economic and political liberalization reforms, those who had specifically benefited from PNDC largesse in the past or were affiliated via local patrons who held positions within the PNDC government, and those who were generally fearful of change and the possible violent repercussions that an alternation would bring. These constituencies covered a large swath of the population, across the national territory, and were not limited by geographic zone per se. The PNDC, as it transformed into the democratically competitive National Democratic Congress (NDC), worked hard to unite these various constituencies through the party organization, building party affiliation through membership in the party organization. Similarly, the NPP was made up of disparate communities of antiauthoritarian groups and had to work diligently to bring these diverse members into a functional party organization, replete with intra-party elected positions and staffed headquarters in each district.

The 1992 presidential elections garnered electoral support for the NDC in all ten administrative regions of the country, with the NDC party machine active in each. The NPP had to mobilize nationally as well to be competitive against the dominance of the incumbent’s reach. As an opposition party, the NPP clearly faced difficult obstacles to national representation but was still able to win constituencies in six of the ten administrative regions in the 1992 founding presidential elections and increased the geographical span of its support in the 1996 and 2000 elections (culminating in a victory in 2000). By the 2004 elections, in which the NPP were incumbents, the party won constituencies in every region, as did the NDC. Electoral Commission monitoring of the number of political party offices across the country in 2000 found that of the 120 electoral districts across the country, the NDC had offices in 110 and the NPP in 107, showing impressive national coverage in some of the more remote areas of the country (Tetteh 2000). As a comparison, the next most organized political party, the Convention People’s Party (CPP), had sixty-seven district offices in 2000, along with three constituency seats won in two districts in the 2004 elections. This stark difference in

party organization reflects the arduous challenges of party building and maintenance in a developing country and the domination of competition by the two main contenders following the same model of organization. In Ghana, the mimetic pressures forced institutional convergence to organize parties across the national territory and create multiple levels of administrative linkage, reinforcing the highly stable and dualistic character of party competition in the national system over the long term.

Normative Isomorphism: Structure of Competition

Zambia

As was the case in Benin, the authoritarian incumbent in Zambia, the United National Independence Party (UNIP), was decimated by the democratization process, and the incumbent's weakness left a void in the structure of party competition. Although UNIP presented candidates in the founding elections, it was widely held responsible for the political and economic failures of the previous decades, and it received less than 25 percent of the vote as compared to 75 percent garnered by the heterodox coalition of the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD). The discredited authoritarian incumbent, UNIP, did not appear to be a viable competitor and therefore could not serve as an anchor to establish the newly competitive party system with coherent government and opposition camps. Rather, the democratizing movement swept up an incoherent blend of opposition forces (business elites hurt by the previous system, academics and democratic reformists, former politicians cast aside by UNIP, and other opportunists), and their overwhelming victory initially left no recognizable opposition (Mbikusita-Lewanika 2006). UNIP's continued presence was not a sufficient threat to force the incoherent, heterogeneous, and uninstitutionalized opposition movement to stay together but it was enough to prevent a viable alternative from emerging. The country, generally supportive of the broad MMD agenda of political and economic liberalization, and wanted the coalition to have the backing it needed to accomplish these tasks. UNIP was incapable of providing a unifying theme around which a new opposition could organize. And as the MMD defectors began to multiply and split off to create numerous new parties, contributing to the party system's fragmentation, they had no incentive to ally with the defunct UNIP, the former authoritarian party they had worked to defeat. UNIP was a party that was past its prime,

and its continued presence served only to further inhibit a cohesive opposition, as the MMD began to disintegrate from within following its landslide victory.

Additionally, the transition experience provided an important lesson *against* loose coalitions promising an easy victory but lacking a binding cohesion. Those disenchanted with the MMD did not want to form another broad coalition that lacked any common cause beyond the defeat of the sitting government. Their recent experience of unseating UNIP and then being sidelined within the new government taught them that “the opposition can unite broadly to win and come to power, but that individually they might still lose out from within that coalition” (Muunga 2006). According to Akashambatwa Mbikusita-Lewanika, a key MMD founder and an early defector, the lesson of UNIP’s defeat and MMD’s fragmentation was that it was better to rely on one’s own personal party rather than be caught up in a heterogeneous coalition that does not truly reflect your own interests (2006). Furthermore, those who left MMD early represented a diverse mix of regional powerbrokers who had been excluded from coveted positions as well as disenchanted academics and reformists; they too lacked any reason to coalesce to form an effective opposition (Mwanakatwe 1994, p. 249). The lack of competitive structure in the party system fueled party proliferation, personalism, financial weakness, and lack of a national organizational structure, and the reliance on a few regional strongholds as a constituency base. The ruling MMD attempted to exacerbate the condition of opposition weakness by coopting potential challengers through poaching, and the opposition remained too unorganized and fragmented to stop the practice (Simutanyi 1997, p. 30).

The relevant parties continue to shift in accordance with the fates of their individual leaders, which contributes to the incoherence in inter-party relations and the preference to establish or maintain one’s own personal party rather than contribute to an existing organization. The nature of the democratic transition did not provide a compelling structure of competition that could define inter-party relationships, and thus the normative isomorphic pressures were forces for indiscriminate relations between parties based on frequently shifting and nebulous calculations of advantage.

Ghana

Whereas the normative understanding of competitive party competition in Zambia was shaped by the weakness and virtual absence of the authoritarian incumbent, which created an amorphous and often temporary set of alliances between the governing party and potential competitors, in Ghana the intense rivalry and the nature of dualistic campaign (a coherent party of opposition pitted against the incumbent) began at the democratic transition and has remained over time, even after multiple successful alternations.

Given the context of continued authoritarian control over the democratization process, the essence of party competition in Ghana's founding elections centered on a dyadic competition between the reigning PNDC regime and the unified opposition that coalesced to challenge the supremacy of the authoritarian incumbent. The opposition was able to unify rapidly as the only plausible alternative to the incumbent due to two main factors. First, the unaltered nature of the incumbent party (undergoing only a name change from PNDC to NDC) allowed the opposition to compete on a cohesive antiauthoritarian platform. The first electoral campaign rhetoric focused heavily on the opposition's call to vote for "democracy" and linked the (P)NDC to its revolutionary, authoritarian origins. The opposition NPP was careful to market itself as open to all who were opposed to continued (P)NDC reign, which allowed new elements to be incorporated within its ranks. The (P)NDC campaign also used this dialectical approach, arguing that a vote for the incumbents was a vote for stability, status quo, and reflected confidence in the direction of the current regime and a desire to maintain its leadership.

Secondly, the NPP emerged quickly as the principal opposition because it built rapidly from national networks that shared antiauthoritarian perspectives—incorporating professional associations (particularly the lawyers association, as well as university and medical organizations) and social networks (such as the Danquah-Busia independence leaders and descendants) (Jonah 2006; Ninsin 2006). These associations and traditions provided a national base and human infrastructure for rapid party organization to mobilize in opposition to the authoritarian incumbent.¹⁸ The founding elections of 1992 centered on a theme of "P/NDC versus 'the rest'" (Obeng 2006); and "the rest" congregated around the NPP banner due to their initial organizational advantages and

anti-incumbent platform. This dualistic logic has continued into the present period, as evidenced by the NPP's presidential and legislative victory in 2000 and the NDC's triumph in the 2008 presidential contest. The polarized and coherent structure of incumbent versus opposition has remained, but the two main parties have alternated sides in the equation.

In both Zambia and Ghana the normative isomorphic pressures define the relevant relations between potential party competitors, but the nature of those relationships represent divergent modes of contestation. The cross-national data analysis of party competition structure discussed in the following section demonstrates that these patterns have endured from the democratic transition into the contemporary multiparty system.

Persistence and Lock-In

To test the ability of isomorphic pressures to lock in the unique competitive pressures created in the conditions of each party system's founding, this section will assess party representative responses cross-nationally to compare the inter-party coherence and polarization of each party system. Using surveys I conducted with party officials at the national and district level in each of the country case studies, I evaluate party system coherence and polarization through party members' assessments of party competition. These data reflect the ways in which democratic contests have sustained a shared perception of *what competition is about (coherence) and to what extent the competitors view themselves as arch-rivals or merely players in the same game (extent of competitive polarization)*. The institutional isomorphic processes would lead us to expect observable systemic differences: systems will be characterized by high competitive polarization and high intra- and inter-party coherence where all of the party representatives' assessments of each party's position in relation to another view the main competing parties similarly, as antagonistic rivals. Systems will be characterized by low competitive polarization and incoherence where parties' self-assessment of their competitive relations portray a structural void in which amorphous inter-party relations and an undefined structure of competition result. Because ideological position on the right-left spectrum is not an organizing framework in these African democracies, the concept of intra- and inter-party coherence assesses the party officials' perceptions of the competitive structure of the

party system. Kitschelt et al. measure coherence using ideological position questions (1999); I measure whether the parties are internally coherent in their assessments of their own competitive position vis-à-vis other parties and whether the parties are in agreement across the system regarding their competitive relations. Likewise, “polarization” is not meant here to refer to ideological polarization but rather competitive polarization in the extent to which parties consistently compete against each other as rivals or could conceivably cooperate as allies.

The data suggests the *interrelated* nature of the three isomorphic processes, demonstrating the ways in which they would reinforce the same system over the course of time. The model and depth of party organization influences the intra-party coherence, because the quantity and quality of information and training that party representatives receive about party competition and party system relations is dependent on the links of communication that flow from the national executive to local level party branches. Secondly, eligibility rules influence the difficulty of creating new parties, and in the context of party proliferation and rapid party formation, it is difficult for any inter-party assessments to maintain validity in a shifting competitive environment. These data, therefore, reflect the parallel processes at work in the coercive, mimetic, and normative forms of institutional isomorphism that are driven by the extent of authoritarian control over the democratization process.

Political party members were asked to indicate on a scale of 1–10 if the given party combinations were very close in agreement (1) or not at all in agreement (10) in regard to their goals, strategies, and visions for the future.¹⁹ Intra- and inter-party coherence would mean that the responses to this question have a small *standard deviation*; party members within and across each party share a similar perception on how parties relate to each other in competition, as is the case in Ghana. Polarization is reflected in the *mean*; party systems that are organized according to a dualistic structure of rival competition would be likely to identify the main parties as “not at all in agreement,” because competitive pressures force them to continually attempt to differentiate between the party in power and the opposition as presenting a clear alternative to the other. Again, this is the case in Ghana; in Zambia there is a more limited sense of organized polarization due to the maintenance of the MMD in power

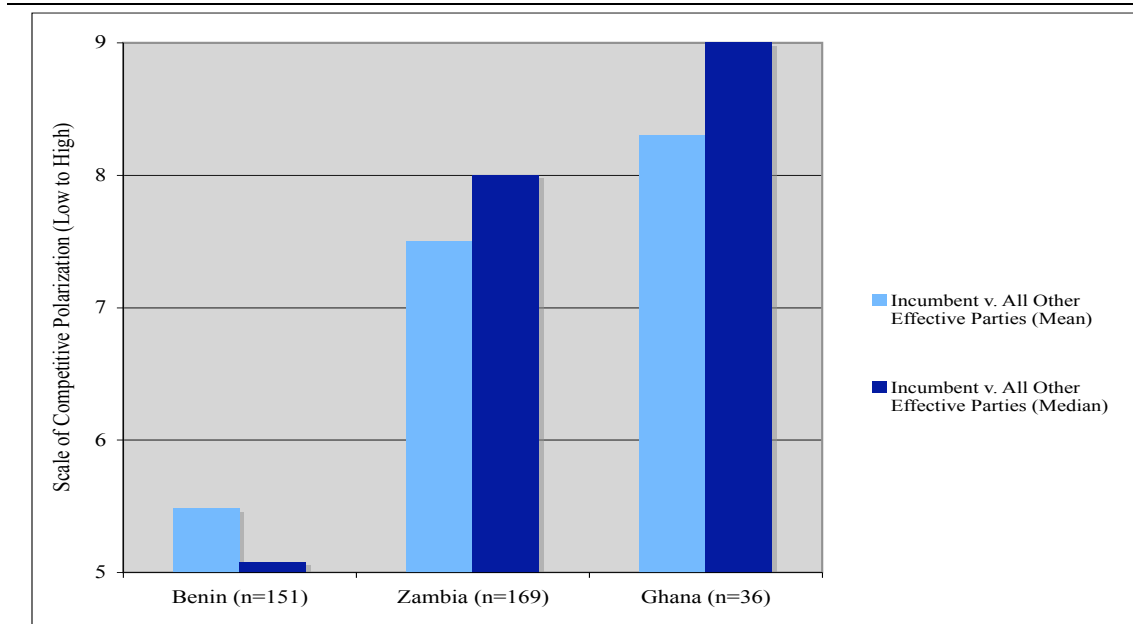
since the transition to democracy despite numerous but uncoordinated and therefore unsuccessful efforts by the opposition to unseat it. In Benin, there is no clear understanding of the parties in relation to one another, leading to low polarization and high incoherence. These data are exhibited in the cross-national comparison of the incumbent party in relation to all effective parties in the system for competitive polarization (Figure 2) and in relation to its primary rival as perceived by all effective parties in the system for competitive coherence (Figure 3).

Interview Question: Indicate if the given party combination is close in agreement or not at all in agreement in regard to their goals, strategies and visions for the future.

[Scale: 1 (close, in complete agreement)–10 (not at all in agreement)]

FIGURE 2

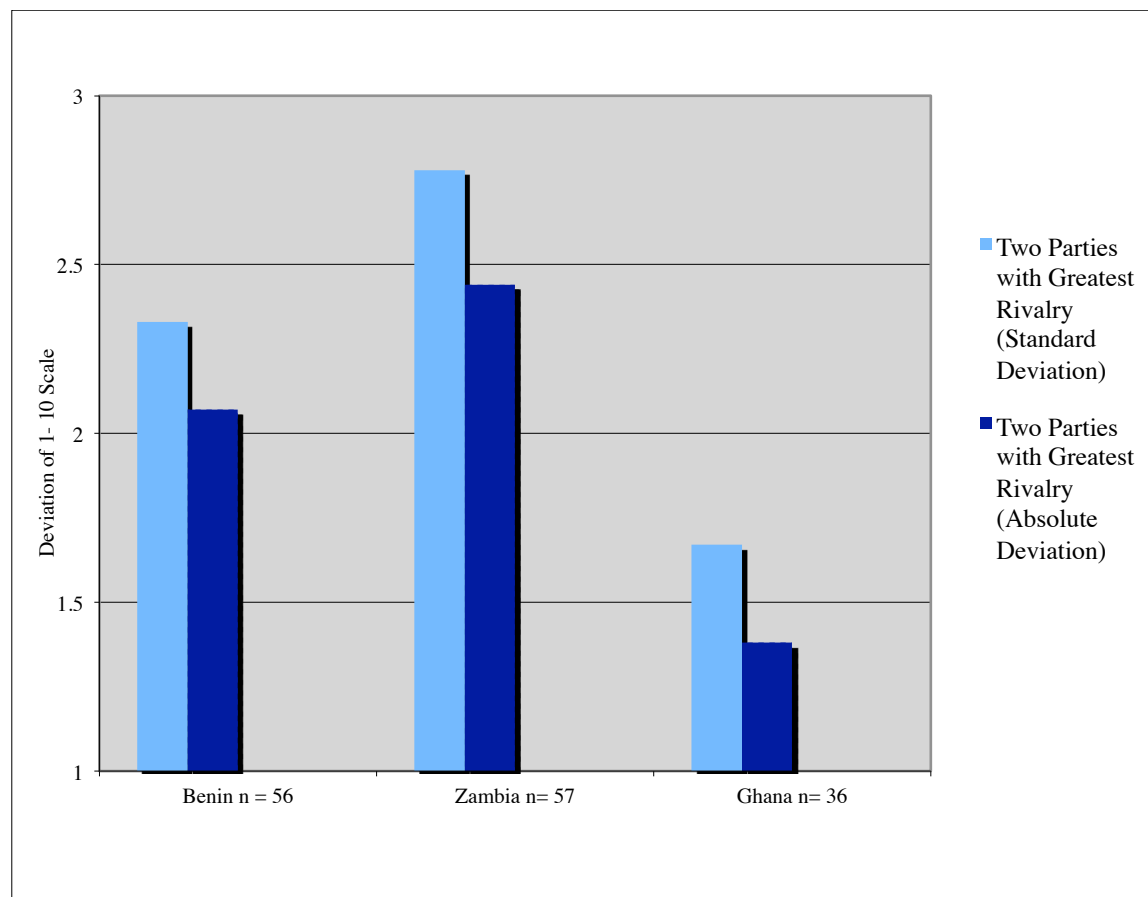
COMPETITIVE POLARIZATION



Source: Data from Riedl surveys 2005–06.

FIGURE 3

COMPETITIVE COHERENCE



Source: Data from Riedl surveys 2005–06.

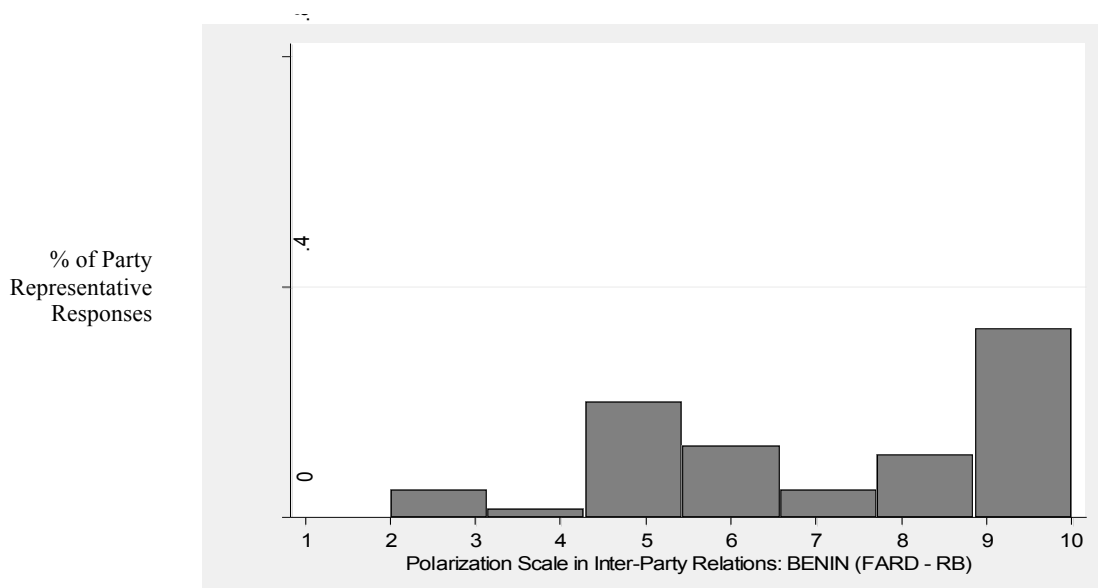
In the quantitative cross-national analysis, the level of polarization between the incumbent and rivals is highest in Ghana, as measured by both mean and median calculations. While the pairs selected for measuring inter-party coherence in all three countries are those which have the most historically antagonistic relationship and have self-identified as rivals, in Benin and Zambia the nature of mutable coalitions and shifting alliances provides incentives to each party to define inter-party relations as differentiated while remaining open to future partnership.²⁰ Party representatives are hesitant to draw too sharp of a line in any relationship, given that the future may necessitate their coming together in a new strategic alliance. This was stated by many in Benin and Zambia, who explained their responses in ways similar to Etienne Sogbedji, the Parti Social-Démocrate

(Social Democratic Party, or PSD) constituency secretary in Djakotomey, Benin: “There is no eternal opposition in politics, all is negotiable. It comes down to resources and advantage, and the strength of a party must be its relationships, its ability to influence and offer something in these negotiations” (2005).

Benin and Zambia exhibit little coherence in assessing the structure of party competition, with responses across the scale from 1 to 10. In Benin, even the most antagonistic relations between the two former presidents do not transfer into a clear oppositional polarity for the members of their associated parties, the Renaissance du Benin (Benin Renaissance, or RB) and the Front d’Action pour le Rénouveau et le Développement (Action Front for Renewal and Development, or FARD). While 22 percent of the party members surveyed felt that the RB and FARD were very distant in their relations by giving a score of “10” (as their history of intense electoral rivalry would indicate), still 20 percent felt that these parties were neutral or even close in agreement (5 or less). The bimodal nature of the responses, with a minor mode at the halfway point of 5, indicates a large degree of uncertainty on where the parties stand in relation to one another, and a strategic preference for a “neutral” response (Figure 4).

FIGURE 4

**HISTOGRAM OF BENIN’S INCUMBENT AND MAJOR
OPPOSITION PARTY RELATIONS**

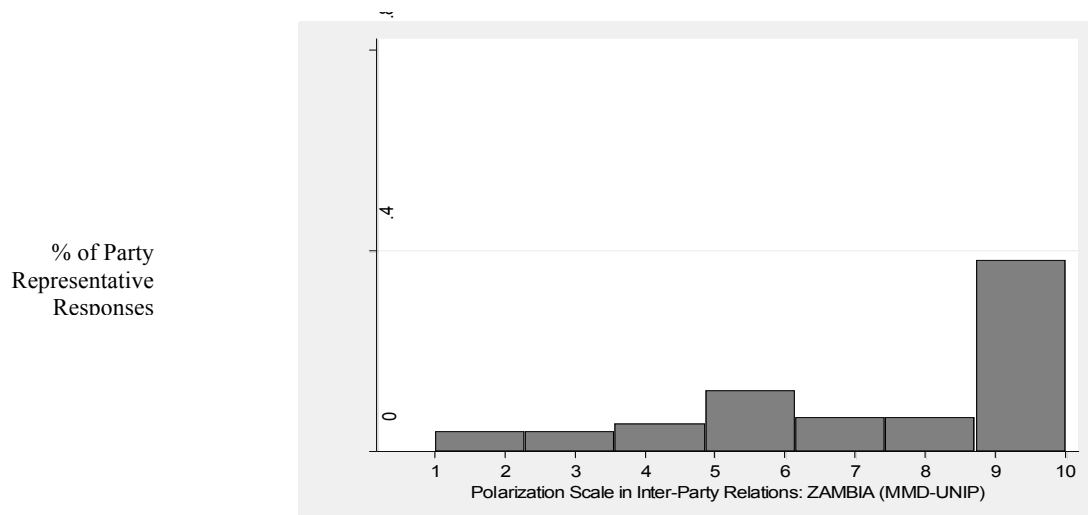


Source: Data from Riedl surveys 2005–06.

Similarly, in Zambia there is a high degree of uncertainty in party member assessment of the relationship between the incumbent party MMD and their historical rival UNIP.²¹ While the plurality of respondents recognized the gulf between the incumbent party and the opposition, there is a large amount of uncertainty and incoherence among the party members' assessments, as 28 percent felt that the relations were neutral or close (5 or less). This survey was administered in the run-up to the 2006 elections, and parties therefore had ever more reason to understand their competitive position and be coherent in their assessments because of opposition attempts to make a united alliance against the incumbent MMD. But even given these electoral incentives for coherence, nearly one third of the respondents still believed the two historically rival parties were not adversarial (Figure 5). Many party representatives expressed their hesitancy to identify *any* party as an enemy, keeping open strategic options for alliance and coalitions partners in any given context.

FIGURE 5

HISTOGRAM OF ZAMBIA'S INCUMBENT AND MAJOR OPPOSITION PARTY RELATIONS

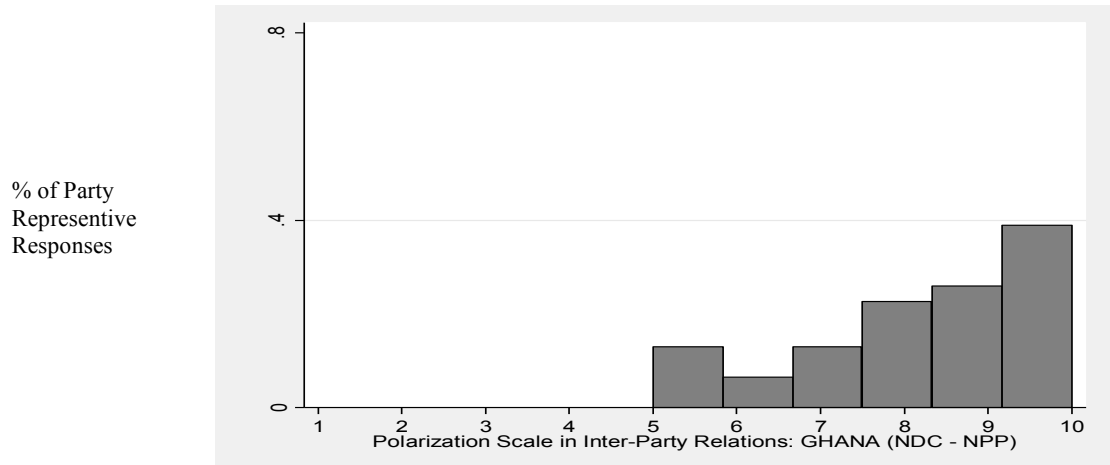


Source: Data from Riedl surveys 2005–06.

In Ghana, there is high agreement on the antagonistic or contentious nature of the main contenders, with 84 percent of respondents providing a response at the polarized end of the scale, between 8 and 10. Party representatives were coherent and all understood the relationship between the former authoritarian party, the NDC, and its primary challenger, now in government, the NPP, to be the key rivalry defining party competition (Figure 6).

FIGURE 6

HISTOGRAM OF GHANA'S INCUMBENT AND MAJOR OPPOSITION PARTY RELATIONS



Source: Data from Riedl surveys 2005–06.

The cases of Zambia and Benin, on the one hand, and Ghana on the other, support the argument that institutional isomorphic pressures shape the emergence and endurance of very distinct party systems, driving all component parties within the system to resemble each other through the coercive, mimetic, and normative mechanisms of institutional homogeneity. Because competition is the driving engine of organizational rationalization, each type of party maintains its own characteristics according to the role it plays *within the system*.

CONCLUSION

This analysis provides insight into the nature of multiparty competition in third wave democracies. In some contexts, locally based, direct, and personalized relations aggregate within coherent national parties that supersede heterogeneous social conditions. While patronage politics remains central to competition, locally powerful personalist brokers are incorporated into one unified party. In other contexts, the party system remains based on amorphous coalitions of localized and personalized parties that represent direct relations between a politician and a constituency. The small and particularistic parties do not establish a maximum winning coalition by seeking new constituency bases, nor do they fade away into oblivion.²² These diverse outcomes represent the variety of ways that democratic party systems are functioning and continually reproducing themselves. This paper describes the process by which such different political party systems have emerged and are *maintained* according to the *same competitive pressures*. Institutional isomorphic processes are the mechanisms that structure the enduring nature of the party system, according to the extent of authoritarian incumbent domination over the democratic transition. The enduring structure of party competition and character of party organization are established through coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphic processes. The competitive marketplace of the founding elections presents a critical point in the establishment of the party system: where the authoritarian incumbent party dominates the competition, sets high barriers to entry, and models the appropriate form of organization in the initial elections, the character of the party system is forged around this dominant force. Isomorphism is also at work where the authoritarian incumbent party is weak or nonexistent, because the embryonic parties form in reaction to the void of power and offer new models of organization and logics of competition to redefine the multiparty era in contrast to the example provided by the ancien régime.

Original incentives and capabilities set in place institutional logics over the course of democratic competition that are unanticipated but shape the enduring nature of the party system, maintaining organizational homogeneity by the very necessity of contestation. Institutional isomorphism explains the emergence of the diverse forms of

new multiparty systems and the mechanisms which lock in a certain competitive logic and party system character. I describe how *new parties form*, how the party *system* emerges through a competitive logic, and why these characteristics *endure* over time despite potential alternations in power and changes in structural conditions.

This analysis contributes an important insight back to organizational theory and the concept of institutional isomorphism. We should expect that the interrelated isomorphic processes described here are only at work within a well-institutionalized *democratic* regime context, because this alone allows for the essential routinized competition that drives convergence and endurance. It is important to recognize, however, that a *weakly* institutionalized party system (characterized by high electoral volatility, weak party organization, and tenuous links to established social groups) can be maintained over time precisely because institutional isomorphism is occurring at a *high* level. An additional implication of this research is that regime type has consequences for institutional form and endurance: democracy, due to its unfettered political competition, encourages enduring organizational homogenization, while potentially stunting competitive adaptations.

ENDNOTES

¹ These dimensions, as noted by Hicken (2009), are not mutually exclusive. In fact, this analysis will show how and why they co-vary in important ways.

² There are notable exceptions, with important recent contributions on political party systems in Africa, such as van de Walle (2002), Carbone (2007), Salih (2003), Lindberg (2007), Erdmann (2004), Mozaffar, Scarritt and Galaich (2003).

³ Examples of these hyper-inflated party systems exist across the world, and are common not just in Africa: from Romania to Kosovo to Brazil and beyond, the difficulties associated with a large number of parties is widely addressed in the literature (see Hicken 2009 p. 7; Sartori 1976; Laver and Schofield 1990; Mainwaring and Shugart 1997; Cox and McCubbins 2001; Franzese 2002; Shugart 2001).

⁴ Thus, there are various ways in which institutional arrangements that are not necessarily optimal may nevertheless persist over time. “Once a particular set of social arrangements are in place, they embody sunk costs—economic and psychological—that cannot be recovered. Shared expectations arise that provide psychological security, reduce the cost of disseminating information, and facilitate the coordination of diverse activities. Efforts at change are resisted because they threaten individuals’ sense of security, increase the cost of information processing, and disrupt routines. Moreover, established conceptions of the “way things are done” can be very beneficial; members of an organizational field can use these stable expectations as a guide to action and a way to predict the behavior of others. These are not necessarily stories about inefficiency or maladaptation, but rather plausible accounts of how practices and structures reproduce themselves in a world of imperfect information and increasing returns” (Powell 1991, p. 194).

⁵ This analysis agrees with Weber’s perspective that competition will select out nonoptimal forms, but argues that the (party) system itself imposes a rationale of what is optimal according to organizational imperatives within that context, rather than a universal (context-free) concept of optimality (Weber 1968).

⁶ Party registration rules reflect the immediate distribution of power at the democratic transition. Those who have the power to set the rules will do so to their perceived advantage, yet these rules often have unintended consequences over the long term and do not embody the goals of social actors who cannot predict how the social processes and institutional pressures will combine to create new challengers over time. (See Riker (1980), which argues that any institution with distributional biases is subject to political manipulation.) The fact that electoral rules stay

surprisingly stable over time (Nohlen 1984; Boix 2007 p. 518–19) is evidence that coercive forces are part of the system, generating institutional continuity beyond the sporadic inducements of power struggles.

⁷ Levels of per capita GDP range from \$323 (Benin), \$272 (Ghana), and \$371 (Zambia) in \$US 2000 for each country's last election year. These do not vary dramatically from the level of the founding democratic election year in the early 1990s; Benin \$275; Ghana \$216; Zambia \$317 (World Bank Development Indicators). The fractionalization scores of politically relevant ethnic groups (Posner 2004) are also similar for Benin (0.33), Ghana (0.44), and substantially higher in Zambia (0.7). Ethnicity remains a critical mobilizing identity, linking voters to parties, yet the ethnic fractionalization in society cannot explain why party systems aggregate groups to a greater or lesser extent. (See also Posner 2005).

⁸ In each country, the four research locales include the national capital as well as three district capitals that vary according to urban/ rural cleavages as well as by the degree of ethnic heterogeneity. Two rural cases were selected along with the major "second city" in the country to represent an urban, developed locale that was a significant distance from the capital. The two rural cases were similar in population size and level of development but one was largely ethnically homogeneous and the other represented a very heterogeneous population for the country. The author conducted interviews with four party officials from each of the major parties represented in the legislature in each of these subnational cases to compare responses gathered with equal sampling. In most cases in Benin and Zambia, the regional nature of party organization meant that there were not four party officials for each party in each sub-national case. The total number of interviews, including national level party members in the capital, is 177.

⁹ See also Boix (1999), who relates a similar logic for India.

¹⁰ The proportion of reformers present is particularly relevant, given that the representatives of the old political class were in favor of general limitations on party formation, but did not have the power to enforce their preferences (Doussou 1993, p. 196).

¹¹ They also had faith that the political party charter stipulation that required national unity would prevent tribal or regional appeals (Republique Du Benin 1990: Article 5).

¹² The eligibility rules established that could be considered restricting were meant to *privilege* new entrants and inhibit established interests associated with the ancien régime. The three critical limitations that were established were term limits, exclusion of the military, and an age exclusion. In the founding elections, this was particularly significant because the military exclusion

prevented a significant cadre of PRPB leadership from eligibility, and the age limitation prohibited independence era presidents from competing as executive candidates, allowing new candidates to attempt to fill the void and reinforcing the volatility that was a byproduct of the party registration rules. (Ministère d'Etat 1999; Hounkpe and Laleye 2005; Adamon 1995; Houdou 2005).

¹³ A total of 120 members had to be identified, with 10 members representing each of the six departments. In practice, this meant that only the founding members of a party had to submit their personal details along with the demand for registration to the Minister of the Interior, accompanied by a list of 120 names. Therefore the founding members could be a very few individuals from the same constituency, equipped with a list of total names from other departments (Bako-Arifari 1995, p. 15 ; République Du Benin 1990).

¹⁴ Many at the time of transition criticized the party registration process as limiting freedom and the right to associate. (Ninsin and Drah 1991a p. 28-30); Some opposition members charged that the law was a deliberate attempt to restrict, harass, and limit their choices and functioning (Oquaye 2004, p. 492 and 504).

¹⁵ The Soglos' attempt to build the *Renaissance du Benin* and their subsequent defeats are a prime example.

¹⁶ The regional patterns of voting established since the transition provides evidence to counter the hypothesis that ethnic demographics shape the nature of the multiparty system, as the changes in the relevant political identity have paralleled regime changes over the decades since independence, as suggested by Posner's analysis in Zambia (2005).

¹⁷ Attempts made to build national parties have been largely rebuffed both by the citizenry and politicians alike, wary of past national models and of ceding their newly found liberties to a monolithic organization. Individual legislators who had recently created parties, won a seat in parliament, and bargained their way into the national cartel had no need to give up their autonomy and link their fate with a particular national leader when they already had the benefits of being "in government." Consistently, party attempts to construct a national organization have failed, often at great cost to the party and candidates who attempted it because they focused their energy and resources on promoting a system in their long-term interest but on that was widely rejected by the other players.

¹⁸ An important element of Ghanaian party formation is the degree to which contemporary parties have endeavored to build their foundations of constituency support by linking to historical traditions of independence era leaders and their associated political networks. While the

Nkrumahist and Danquah-Busia cleavage of independence-era politics retains great salience in popular affiliation across generations, the divide between these two historic camps was *re-shaped around the powerful structuring force of the transition competition*. The historical legacy associated with the Nkrumah tradition lost much of its competitive relevance over time as many key leaders were incorporated into the revolutionary PNDC regime, due to the overlapping leftist orientation. That left the Danquah-Busia tradition as the “liberal” ideology to serve as a foundation for opposition to the new force of the PNDC. While the Nkrumahist tradition retained an emotive power, and a few parties have tried to capitalize on these sentiments, the *meanings of these identities have been remade to fit into the new multiparty era* (Gyimah-Boadi 2006).

¹⁹ In a pilot survey, I had party members use this same “scale of agreement” to measure more specific programmatic positions, to proxy coherence in programs and policies. However, all party members who took this portion of the survey protested that these policy positions were not relevant in assessing party relations. Instead, they argued for a more “relational” metric of affiliation, whether parties were in opposition or possible allies in the national competition for political power. The wording of this question was used to reflect that broader sense of how parties view themselves in the struggle for power.

²⁰ In Benin: FARD and RB; in Zambia MMD and UNIP; in Senegal PS and PDS.

²¹ In both Benin and Zambia, the standard deviation is similarly high between the incumbent and other possible opposition parties.

²² My argument and data do not suggest that parties and party competition are not important in some contexts. Rather, I highlight that while parties play a critical role in *all* countries, they do so in *different forms*, exhibiting multiple modes of organization, competition for power, interest representation, and influence on governance.

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