

## *Notes on the Study of Political Parties in the Third World*

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### **Introduction: Establishing the Context**

The research on political parties in developing nations is difficult to aggregate and to place in a comparative context. The reasons are many. The body of work is at best modest in size as well as uneven in focus, theoretical conception and empirical execution. Often comparative or more generalizable indicators and conclusions must be extracted from studies intended to clarify social developments over broad periods of time or, alternatively, within carefully set historical boundaries (the colonial; the transition from the colonial period to independence; post-independence developments; political conditions under specific national leaders, as examples). The efforts are broad stroke, primarily descriptive and usually interwoven with historical accounts and explanations of the social, economic and cultural factors that condition the life of a country. The range appears to run from mega-theories—or, more accurately, broadly generalized interpretative sets of categorizations and conclusions applied to a region or a collection of countries (the research itself is seldom theoretically focused), supported by interpretative essays and expert, professionalized observation and background knowledge—to case studies of differing degrees of elaborateness. There is little in between.

Often the information on political parties is presented within a discrete, study-specific and nation-specific framework. Primarily the contribution is by area specialists and reflects their training and outlook and the search for broad explanatory themes. Consequently, it also is of primary interest to other area specialists and not suited to the needs of comparative investigation of the operations and contributions of the political parties within a variety of political and societal settings.

In many respects, the research is essentially political anthropology. The canvass is large and the questions for which answers are sought formidable: the forces that condition political development and economic vitality; the

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factors that encourage democratization or repression in a nation or a region; the use and significance of political and social institutions, including political parties, and their relative contribution to the governing system, including the representation of interests (and especially elite concerns); or the peculiar path of evolution the country has followed over time. Many would argue that these *are* the significant questions; efforts to understand the fundamental social forces driving a country.

The research contrasts markedly with that done on industrialized nations (Janda 1993). The differences in approach and execution between political party study in developing countries and that dominant in parties in the United States could not be more stark. Essentially it combines basically all of the elements found in the American politics to varying degrees within each of the individual studies. If the mainstream American parties' research can be characterized as incremental, discrete, empirical, analytically sophisticated and conceptually self-conscious, Third World parties' research alternatively could be described as broad, comprehensive, thematic, qualitative, non-theoretical or conceptual, and impressionistic (that is, events and developments as seen and evaluated through the eyes of sensitized experts in the field). For the most part, cross-national or cross-regional studies are not the concern. Making analytic sense of Mexico's, Tanzania's, Egypt's, Nigeria's or Peru's development and present condition through an examination of a country's ethnic, cultural, religious, economic and political history is.

Clearly access, cost, reliable data and field conditions limit what is possible.<sup>1</sup> What might be useful is to apply the conceptual and analytic tools of research on the political parties in industrialized nations, or as found in the considerable body of work on all aspects of the American party system, to comparative analyses of developing parties' systems. This type of research approach could yield a broader appreciation of the role of the political party in national development and democratization (or de-democratization), the social forces that condition its operation, and the consequences of its activities. Efforts of this nature would contribute to a clearer cross-national perspective and a comparative appreciation of the place of parties within different types of political regimes. Such work in developing nations relevant to political parties, while not unknown, may well be in its intellectual adolescence.

Such contentions could provide the basis for a debate on the scope and relative merits of competing approaches to the study of political parties in the Third World. What is gained in scope and sensitivity, and in the fundamental quality of the questions addressed, may be sacrificed in precision and in a focus that prized replicability and comparative understanding. An argument could be made for either point of departure. Quite clearly the effort to

understand the dynamics of political transformation in individual countries is highly significant. Those that engage in it would likely argue that such research explains questions of fundamental importance and compares more than favorably to the narrow-gauge studies familiar to Americanists. The point is well taken. For our purposes, the basis of the argument is not that the research lacks significance or that it could be done better, but that we might be at a take-off point, ready to employ techniques and approaches found successful in analyzing the political adaptability and representativeness of parties in the United States, or in other industrialized nations, to the operations of Third World parties and politics. The intent would be to increase understanding through more highly specialized and empirically sophisticated work, a second-stage analysis if you will, in a move toward a more comparatively scientific and broadly theoretical understanding of the political developments taking place. There is much to be done in these terms. The range of topics and party conditions is rich in potential research opportunities. The efforts would be both challenging and well beyond the type of limited focus that have marked most studies of American parties.

What this paper proposes to do is to look at a number of the issues and problems in the study of Third World political parties by briefly examining party systems in three different contexts, a variation of that conventionally used to distinguish among party types (competitive party, no-party and one-party systems), across six different countries (Mexico, China, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Kenya and Haiti), and the reasons given for the developments found. The countries examined do not exhaust the possible variations. Rather, they help make explicit the enormous variety of operations, focus and activities in which political parties engage. In turn, they contribute to several observations on the nature of political parties' research in developing nations that form the conclusion of this paper.

For the most part, the description and explanations advanced in the following call on some of the more recent research and theorizing on the individual party systems, supplemented when appropriate with work long established as significant in the field. The approach is eclectic. A re-reading of studies done a generation ago and those of more recent vintage, regardless of the intellectual quality or the sophistication of the original research, makes clear how rapidly Third World events can change and how quickly yesterday's democracy can be transformed into the contemporary period's autocracy. Under such conditions, which are not infrequent, the explanations put forth to explain the nation's representative style and more specifically the contributions of the political parties to these developments quickly become suspect.

### The Relevance of Political Parties in Developing Countries

In examining political parties in Third World countries, it is worth remembering a few basic facts. A number of conditions confound the comparative analysis of political parties in developing societies. Some of the factors are generic to political parties the world over, others are peculiar to the nature of the immediate society in which they find themselves. Some of the problems were evident at birth. As Samuel J. Eldersveld has noted, parties were created to fulfill different and non-congruent functions: "Parties came into existence to perform somewhat contradictory roles: (1) to provide an organizational base by which elites could mobilize resources and compete with each other for votes under the new democratic elections and thus maintain themselves in power; and (2) to provide the organizational base by which new claimants to elite status could mobilize support and thus oppose those in power and eventually dislodge them from power" (Eldersveld 1982, 13). The two objectives are not comfortably wedded in nation-states. The political parties by definition *have to do both* to qualify as democratic parties. Political leaders are quite content with the first, the use of party or other organizations to mobilize the support needed to keep them in power and, in the process provide a legitimation for the regime. They are considerably less enthused about the second (even in countries with evidence of the emergence of clearer democratic alternatives in recent years, such as Korea and Taiwan, as well as those more sensitive to any critiques of their stewardship), often believing any criticisms of them personally or of their actions while in government or any efforts to depose them (however legal) constitute threats to the integrity and security of the state and are therefore seditious. Political opponents are then subject to arrest and imprisonment or worse. The role of political parties intended to perform both functions can be perverted, ending in an exclusive reliance on one (maintaining order, mobilizing support) and consequently a party of autocratic control rather than one of democratic accountability.

As Joseph LaPalombara observes: "The transference of power from one party to another, especially the first transfer that occurs within a party system, is often the critical testing point for the legitimacy of the system" (1966, 412). It is a marking point in the institutionalization of a democratic order as significant in the early stages of the advanced democracies of North America and Western Europe as in those of Africa, Asia or Latin America.

And significantly, political parties, whatever their nature, are more experienced and receptive to competitive efforts to capture power and contest leadership positions and therefore potentially more instrumental in achieving democratic goals than are other social institutions. "Parties, even

in totalitarian systems, are experienced in the art of internal elections while bureaucrats and military officers are accustomed to a process of selection and promotion by higher officials. Governing juntas of bureaucrats and military men are thus rarely prepared for the politics of peacefully electing their own leader or of having leadership peacefully pass from one person to another” (Weiner and LaPalombara 1966, 412). This is one reason such juntas, fragile in form and suspicious of non-authoritarian procedures for adaption, fail to last and also a reason such leadership is intolerant of the structures and culture of a democratic politics.

A second point: in his overview of parties and elections in independent African nations, Fred M. Hayward notes that a variety of means other than parties have historically been available for leadership choice. They were more consensual among both elites and followers and more cautious in deciding choices than might have been expected from observation of the practices alone. Tradition, limits on authority, conditions for removal and agreement as to goals were more often than not implicit in the selection process. Speaking of these early tribal practices, Hayward says:

Patterns of consultation and election have . . . been described throughout Africa. . . . Although the nature of the election, or the process of choosing among candidates, differs from one African society to another, it tends to be similar in its reliance on representation, consultation, [and] consensus or majority agreement (1987, 5).

Earlier practices have conditioned African conceptions and uses of elections in the modern period. The criteria as to adequacy of performance are explicitly outcomes of the experience within Western industrial nations. Western standards as to openness, fairness, honesty, competitiveness and representation now dominate worldwide norms as to what constitutes the democratic electoral experience (Crotty 1991, 1993). Within this context, Hayward contends that African elections in the post-independence era have been more influential than many might have thought:

. . . there is extensive evidence that elections serve vital legitimating functions, have much more mass impact than is often assumed, and are significant tools for public expression and evaluation of government. In spite of violence and pressures, voters have frequently demonstrated great individual initiative and independence. It should also be emphasized that in a number of cases the electoral process has operated effectively within the context of open competition and democratic norms (Hayward 1987, 2).

In turn, elections cannot be meaningful within any democratic context if it were not for political parties. The parties provide the popular mobilization; educate prospective voters (how to cast a ballot and its meaning, who to support and what the issues of significance are)—a formidable job in

countries without democratic heritages; recruit and campaign for contenders for a wide range of public offices; represent interests and push government programs; and hold those in power electorally accountable for their acts. How well the parties perform these activities, or are even permitted to engage in them, of course varies by country and time period. But open, fair and competitive democratic elections are not possible without a vital party system.

This then would be the third point. Political parties are a necessary requirement for a from-the-bottom-up, mass-elite linkage of representation, control and accountability if any type of democratic electoral, and broader political, system is to succeed. Democratic government is unlikely and may not be possible in the absence of competitive political parties.

Political parties are a reflection of their societies. Their electoral base, coalitions, leaders and programs in addition to the niche they fill in the politics of the society are a direct product of a country's historical circumstances, political values and tolerance for democratic norms. They do not command a privileged, independent status, superimposed by outside forces, ideological commitments or an inherent appreciation for their contributions. Rather, they are ingrained in the fabric of a society and indicative, through their operations, of its strengths and weaknesses. They also can serve in part, judging the extent to which they effectively fulfill their functions, as an indicator of the stage and vitality of the country's democratic evolution.

And finally, it is useful to provide a reminder of the importance of political parties in nation-building. In their influential *Political Parties and Political Development* (1966), LaPalombara and Weiner led a team of specialists in examining four areas relevant to the role of parties in society: national integration; political participation; establishing the political legitimacy of the state; and conflict management. As they note:

These problems as crises often arise before political parties emerge and . . . may be significant in shaping the types of parties and party systems established. But . . . our concern is with the impact of existing parties and party systems on the handling of these problems . . . parties and party systems . . . are not only the product of their environment but also instruments of organized human action for affecting that environment (1966, 399-400).

In his *Creating Political Order* (1966), a title that nicely captures a common perception of the parties' role in a developing state, Aristide R. Zolberg writes:

It is naturally to the party that the rulers everywhere have assigned the performance of major tasks which they hope will lead to political integration. They involve supervision, control, and co-ordination of all the other instruments of government; supplying individual and communal incentives for development; training both adults and children

for citizenship in the new nation; serving as the concrete expression of that nation; acting as the major channel of communication between the leaders and the population and between the center and the localities, both downward by instructing the population concerning decisions, programs, and tasks, and upward in securing for the leaders necessary information and support (1966, 93-94).

Zolberg adds that the tasks of the political party in a developing nation are substantial both because they “must undertake many tasks which in other societies are performed by other political agencies . . . but also because the new states were born very suddenly and everything must be done all at once” (Zolberg 1966, 94). The problems implicit in this characterization for orderly democratic development should be clear.

Zolberg is discussing party demands in Africa. The same pressures would apply in varying degrees to any developing nation forced to redefine itself to meet the performance expectations of the contemporary period.

In this essay, we look in broad terms at the types of party systems found in Third World countries, with particular attention to the rich varieties of one-partyism. We proceed from there to indicate perspectives for comparative evaluations by presenting, as others have done, qualifying criteria potentially useful in approaching a comparative analysis of parties in developing nations. The key may be to evaluate the society and its political culture—democratic or quasi-democratic, various strains of authoritarian or, rarer in today’s world, totalitarian—and to compare the parties within the broader context of the state’s embrace of democratic objectives.

We begin by looking at no-party, competitive party, and, more extensively, one-party systems.

## **Types of Party Systems**

### **No-Party Systems**

No-party systems are a clear indicator of social chaos. Orderly government, much less a democratic polity, cannot exist without some form of stabilized party representation. The absence of an identifiable and accepted party system indicates a social and political institutional structure built on exploitation and greed, violence and repression. The gap in living conditions between the elite in power (or with access to power; economic oligarchies in military regimes for example) and the rest of society produces extremes of class and economic polarization. Control is exercised through force. Political parties are clearly a threat to the status prerogatives of the rulers. Political representation through any kind of mass groupings or popular association would be, at best, *ad hoc*, ineffective, visible only in certain periods and highly dangerous for the participants.

Haiti, Burundi, Somalia, and arguably Cambodia, Angola and any number of other countries enduring civil wars (or in the immediate after-war period of consolidation) provide examples. The failure of a party system to take hold reflects the inability of the society to develop any consensus, tolerate social or ethnic differences, however developed, and move beyond the political and economic poverty that define their existence. Chaos is the order of the day and those at the bottom of the society, with few if any protections, pay the price.

Two examples of “no-party” states are presented, Haiti and Nigeria. No debate is likely to arise over Haiti. Nigeria is another matter. While Haiti constantly balances on the brink of anarchy, Nigeria is a country with formalized institutions of representation and an on-again, off-again tradition of democratic politics. Since independence a generation ago, it has held elections—in 1979, 1983, and 1993—that although marred by charges of fraud and corruption did provide a competitive party politics and the basis for an elected government. Political power, however, has been wielded by the military, who act as the society’s gatekeepers, deposing civilian governments at will, determining when elections can be held, and which political parties will compete. The military has ruled for most of the post-Independence period. In such a context, the party system does not adequately perform its representative functions. The country does not have a functioning multi-party system. Rather, the parties are reconstituted in different guises at the will of the ruling junta. The parties’ identity and continuity is unclear and their effectiveness in gaining office or governing minimal. Nigeria is not a one-party state; the military retains power through force. Hence the characterization as a “no-party” state.

First, there is Haiti.

*Haiti.* I am most familiar with the case of Haiti, a country whose social order could be characterized as anomic. Little social institutionalization of consequence exists beyond the military—ill-prepared and disorganized as it might be. The country is ruled uneasily by an alliance of military leaders and an economic oligarchy of extensive wealth (but constituting only an estimated 2 to 5 percent of the total population). The consequences are predictable: rule by force; no limit on the authority of the state or the police; no effective assurances of representation; unrestrained political killings, torture and imprisonments; and economic conditions and health standards that rank as the poorest in Latin America and among the worst in the world.

Haiti has experienced a bloody history, as a colony under France, during its fight for independence and since its independence in 1804. Repression and violence have been hallmarks of its existence. What may have been



its first reasonably democratic election (and last until 1990) took place in 1957. The results proved to be unfortunate. “Papa Doc” Duvalier won and introduced a reign of terror that lasted until his death, equal to any the nation had experienced in the past. “Papa Doc” died in 1971 and his son “Baby Doc,” then only eleven, took office as “President-for-Life.” “Baby Doc,” after a corrupt and exploitive but less repressive tenure in office, was driven from the country in 1986. The apparatus supporting the terror, brutality and greed of the Duvalier era remained, as did most of the military leaders and ruling elite that had benefitted from it.<sup>2</sup>

An election was called in 1987 to chose a new president and a national assembly. Expectations were high. With no democratic tradition to call on, the electoral system was created *de novo*—the political parties, the civilian council to administer the vote, the procedures for enrollment and certification of the results and the rules to govern electoral conduct. The procedures developed, while slightly irregular, could have proven serviceable.

Despite international pressure, the military and its armed para-military supporters were determined that no vote should take place. On election day, they attacked prospective voters, media representatives and international election observers. Between 20 and 30 people were killed in one polling place alone in Port-au-Prince, and anywhere from 200 to 500 in the country as a whole (the real figures are unknown). The election was cancelled.

The military then held its own election (with an estimated rate of participation of 5 percent) and installed its own candidate, a former contender in the aborted previous election and one with ties to the United States government. Tiring of his performance and several efforts at independent action, the military forced him out of office. He was to be followed by a succession of *de facto* military rulers and puppet civilian governments.

A new election was scheduled in 1990, this time under international scrutiny from the United Nations, the Organization of American States, and official and quasi-official monitoring groups, including former President Jimmy Carter’s Council of Freely Elected Heads of Government. In some instances the international election groups actually helped in the administration of the election.

The election went off well and the Rev. Jean-Paul Aristide, an advocate of liberation theology and a former Roman Catholic priest who ministered to the slums, was elected president with 67 percent of the vote. Aristide and his reform administration were driven from office in a matter of months by the military, which resumed their control of the country, its economy, and a profitable drug trade that had arisen since 1987.

The United States and the international community rallied behind Aristide, brokering an agreement between the exiled president and the ruling

junta that would have returned Aristide to power, and democratic processes to Haiti. The military leaders signed the pact but later refused to honor it, in one instance turning back an American military ship with international technicians and advisors as called for in the agreement. The situation is volatile and is likely to remain so.

Professional, social and economic groups that could mediate representation and influence government policy either do not exist or do not act in this capacity in Haiti. There are no broad political movements to organize the masses; the systematic killing of Aristide's advisors and followers serving as an example to any tempted to follow his path. The national assembly, courts, and local government are ineffective and subject to the will of the military. Imprisonment, torture, and human rights violations are rampant.

In such a context, political parties have no voice. They can not organize, mobilize groups, recruit candidates or campaign for public office. The parties that spring up for election can run into the dozens. Rather than mass-based, nationally representative institutions, they are primarily small groups of hangers-on, office-seekers and relatives hoping for payoffs of various kinds. The groups form and reform and enter into coalitions with other such candidates or military leaders at the local level depending on conditions, prospects of success, the assassination of contenders, and other factors that might condition short-term success.

In no sense is there a party system, nor will there be one until the prerequisites of democratic representation are accepted. Political parties play no role in such a system and, worse, there are no incentives for the rulers to make any concessions to democratic practice. The lesson, then, is a negative one. If nothing else such systems do serve to emphasize both the derivative nature of political parties within a society and the value of their contributions to a stable and, in this case, humane political order.

There are other forms of "no-partyism." A multitude of parties in a loose and fractious multi-party system, each ineffective in its own right, lacking a national base, and exacerbating the cleavages that exist in a society rather than attempting to bridge them can have the same effect—and lead to similar outcomes—as having no parties at all. Nigeria provides an example.

*Nigeria.* "Nigeria remains very much a country in search of a form of government to successfully institutionalize democracy," Paul A. Beckett (1987, 114) argues. This contention is undoubtedly correct.

Great hope was held for the development of democratic institutions in Nigeria. During its sixty years of British colonial rule, limited elections were introduced, the basis for a parliamentary system implanted and a civil service was developed, all meant to provide an "institutional transfer" of

democratic processes to the new nation, by far Africa's largest and expected to be one of its richest and most politically powerful.

The realities of day-to-day colonial rule did little to promote a national commitment to democratic values. In addition, there is the question of Nigeria's size and its enormous heterogeneity. It contains a population estimated to be in excess of 100 million at present, including ethnic groups speaking roughly 250 different languages. It is a country divided by regional, tribal, religious, class and cultural differences.

The grafting did not take. Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has experienced civilian rule for only nine years. The institution from the colonial era that did take root was the administrative state:

... it is striking that the progress the country has made with its most central and critical problem (finding a way for ethnic, regional and religious sections of the country to live together in peace and to share [the concept of] "Nigeria") has come not through electoral democracy but via a process of creative adaption (mainly during the periods of military rule) of the state's federal dimensions ... a subtle but very significant process by which Nigeria has adapted the bureaucratic institutions inherited from British colonialism, providing elements of responsiveness and representation that help to explain how "military dictatorship" has often seemed more satisfactory to Nigerians than "democracy" through elections. The bureaucratic state has been better able ... to adapt and relate to that communal basis of social and political organization which [has been] ... a central characteristic of political interaction from the beginning (Beckett 1987, 112).

While these are again Beckett's words, another long-time student of Nigerian politics, Larry Diamond, basically agrees, sensing a democratic undertone to much of what has occurred:

It is revealing of the nature of the society and its political culture that every Nigerian military regime has committed itself, at least verbally, to an eventual return to civilian rule, and no regime that has seemed to betray this democratic commitment has been able to survive. Although military rule has been the norm in Nigeria—having governed for almost two-thirds of the time since independence—it continues to be viewed as an aberration or correction, a prelude to something else (Diamond 1988, 69).

Beckett goes beyond this to suggest a less obvious continuity between periods of military control of the government and the considerably less frequent civilian rule:

... we would see the two—democratic and military government—as forming part of a single system that, taken as a whole, represents Nigeria's experience so far with democracy. Such a system solves its problems of changeover, when such is needed and/or desired by "the nation," via military coup; but it then gets out of military rule by transition to electoral democracy. ... In this sense, somewhat paradoxically, military coups that suspend Nigerian "democracy" really are part of a larger (if vaguer) conception of democracy (Beckett 1987, 113).

'Paradoxical' may not catch the contradiction. The Nigerian situation may represent one country's adaption to a form of governance suited to its history. To go beyond that interpretation is questionable. Whatever it might demonstrate, it does not meet any recognizable theories as to democratic representation.

In effect, leadership succession and group recruitment and representation is being resolved through military takeovers. There is a presumption in all of this that a democratic strain underlies the nation's evolution and that eventually it will prevail. Perhaps this is so. It is a contention that is hard to defend in light of the country's experience, the severity of its economic and ethnic problems, the ineffectiveness of the experiments with civilian leadership and the persistence of military rule. Basically, the military serves as the custodian of governmental power. The civilians serve at its pleasure; elections are held when it decides they are necessary; and political parties are sporadically resurrected in different forms to meet its needs and requirements. The persistence of an authoritarian strain in the nation's politics seems far clearer than its commitment to democratic processes.

A brief look at its party/electoral history is convincing. During the early post-independence period (1960-1966), the parties were built on tribal and regional loyalties. The elections of 1979, intended to end one of the recurring periods of military control, experienced an initial field of 150 political parties, evidence of the inability to field a reasonably small number of nationally viable coalitional parties (the field was eventually reduced to five through the military's identification of those they considered the most viable). The results of the elections of 1979, in which three of the major parties controlled 80 percent of the vote, demonstrated the same inability to bridge regional and ethnic divisions: "None of these three parties did well outside 'home' areas" (Beckett 1987, 102). Tendencies and electoral divisions found in the earlier period contributed to the overthrow of the civilian governments and continued into the second period.

The government did complete its term of office, and elections in 1983—unlike those of 1979—were held under civilian administration. The same five parties competed with the governing party winning again and actually extending its appeal among supporters of the other parties. One consequence was the beginning of talk about the possibility of instituting a one-party state, a development some observers believe might result in a more broadly representative political system (Diamond 1988, 68). It never happened. A few months later the military again assumed power. "Scarcely a voice was raised against the suspension of the Second Republic [i.e., civilian rule between 1979 and 1983]. To the contrary, there was every evidence as well as *anger* directed against the corruption, violence, and

mismanagement that was now said to be the essence of Second Republic 'democracy'" (Beckett 1987, 106-107).

After elaborate planning (began as early as 1987), elections were again held under military auspices in 1993. This time two parties were to compete. "The military government did not just decree the two parties into existence, it wrote their constitutions and manifestos and funded them" (O'Brien 1993, 41). The military voided the results and created an interim government under its control to provide a transition to yet another election. The parties acquiesced and some of their leaders were allowed to hold public office. "It is only a madman who argues too much with a man carrying a gun," said one party official, quoting Nigeria's first president (O'Brien 1993, 41).

The Nigerian parties have been unable to form and retain national political coalitions or to govern effectively and honestly on the rare occasions when they hold office. The country as a whole has proven incapable of sustaining fair elections or a democratic government. A multi-party politics that embodies an extreme factionalism, continually re-invented party systems dependent on the judgment of military rulers as to who can compete and when and under what conditions, and unable to maintain even the facade of civilian rule or any type of party institutionalization, fails to meet even minimal standards of democratic representation. Nigeria is similar to Haiti in its inability to sustain democratic government; the corruption and repression present in its politics (while not as virulent as in Haiti, nonetheless these are conditions of political life); its failure to sustain a functioning party system or relevant electoral processes; in short, the basic institutions of democratic representation. In this sense, it can be characterized as having a "no-party" system. While the conditions are far from identical in the two countries and the role of the nascent party systems differ substantially, resulting in variations of the "no-party" system, there are similarities in the administration of the government. It is not a comparison that the leaders of Nigeria, or those who sympathetically observe its evolution, might care to acknowledge.

### **Competitive Party Systems**

The easiest to place in comparative perspective and the most democratic in operation are the competitive party systems, both those of a two-party nature and those featuring a moderate multi-partyism. While not common, they do exist in Third World countries (for an example of categorizations, see Weiner 1987; Coppedge and Reinicke 1991; Gurr, Jagers, and Moore 1991; and Gasiorowski 1991). A number are found in former British colonies, the explanation being that Westminster fostered "tutelary"

democratic experience which prized orderly succession and ritualized democratic values. Weiner, one of the proponents of this point of view, writes:

The British tradition of imposing limits on government, of establishing norms for the conduct of those who exercise power, and of creating procedures for the management of conflict has had a powerful influence on the creation of democratic systems in the Third World. . . . *every country with a population of at least 1 million (and almost all the smaller ones as well) that has emerged from colonial rule since World War II and has had a continuous democratic experience is a former British colony.* Not a single newly independent country that lived under French, Dutch, American, or Portuguese rule has continually remained democratic (1987, 20).

While the British “tutelary” approach may be a precondition conducive to the introduction of democracy, by itself it is not sufficient for sustaining democratic practices in newly emerged states. Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda and Tanzania are examples of countries moving from initially democratic forms to authoritarian ones.

This is far from the whole answer, however. Latin American countries have a distinctively different history, gained their independence much earlier, have better structured social institutions (including a parties’ base in the electorate) and have experimented with democratic rule, interspersed with periods of military government, in many cases for over a century. Western forms of democratic government have long been familiar in Latin America. Civil wars, the power of economic elites, military takeovers, the suppression and subjugation of indigenous populations, the rise of revolutionary movements, a restricted electoral base, weakly organized parties, a historically conservative Church and a hierarchical social order have all served to undermine effective democratic practices, giving rise periodically to dictatorships of considerable duration.

Latin America becomes distinctive in political party terms only in the modern period. Liberal democracy as practiced in Western Europe and North America remains the ideal, the goal to which all participants in the political system claim to aspire, and in that sense Latin America falls more squarely into the Western political tradition than either Africa or the Middle East, but at the same time, modern political parties [have] fail[ed] to develop along typical ‘Western’ lines, or at least to move to the center of the stage as they have done in Western Europe since the Second World War (Cammack, Pool and Tordoff 1990, 94).

The Latin American culture and experience has been unique.

As mentioned earlier, there has been a sustained push in the international community, significantly more assertive since the collapse of Communism in the former U.S.S.R. and in Eastern Europe, to invoke democratic norms and to insist on democratic procedures in governing, especially

evident in judging election procedures and outcomes within Third World countries. The commitment to these values and a willingness to act to implement them are bound to have long-run consequences favoring more competitive party systems.

Finally, such efforts still fail to explain the exceptions. Costa Rica is an example. For reasons peculiar to its own sense of identity and its historical circumstances, a country located in a traditionally unstable and undemocratic corner of the world consciously and deliberately committed to democratic institutions and a competitive party politics as the preferred form of political management. The country is not wealthy, has a large middle class and lacks the extremes of poverty and wealth found in other Third World nations. All contributed to the collective decision to adopt and, at least as significant, sustain a democratic politics (Peeler 1985).

Democracy can be fragile in developing nations, with periods of democratic government alternating with authoritarian rule. Still, there does appear to be a dynamic running in its favor, a push toward long-run democratic objectives and, as a consequence, more competitive party and electoral systems. If so, this category of political party types, presently the least substantial, should grow significantly over time.

### **One-Party Systems: Selected Examples**

One-party systems are more the norm in developing nations. They better serve the needs of the state, or at least those of its leaders, for order and stability and they offer protection to the haves in the society. For the military, the economic oligarchies, and the autocratic leadership that dominate in most Third World countries, they provide a comfortable and familiar vehicle (and one closer to the authoritarian traditions inherited from colonial periods) for conducting public affairs without the messy and uncertain demands associated with competing parties and open elections.

The institutions of the state, including the parliamentary and judicial processes, are weakly articulated and without real power, and, where found, the written constitutions (more statements of long-term national aspirations than enforceable legal documents) mean little. The nation in general and its elites in particular do not hold democratic values; the country has had little-to-no experience with democratic self-government; and its culture and traditions emphasize order, class stratification and the powers and privileges of the chosen. Under such conditions, one-party government, more orderly and peaceful than a “no-party” politics and eschewing the political uncertainty implicit in a competitive party politics, ideally services the elite’s needs.

There are, however, many types of one-party politics, each responding to differing national and cultural forces. Some are more benign than others (Sartori 1976 posits a number of different one-party models). The range of possibilities extends from totalitarian systems meant to organize and control the institutions in the society and to proscribe as much of the citizenry's private life as possible to less intolerant, less efficient models that at least profess to be democratic. The latter allow considerable leeway in social behavior and economic choice in areas not seen as directly threatening to the welfare of the state or its leaders.

The following examines three models of one-partyism. The differences in development and behavior by nation are significant. As this examination suggests, what could prove useful for comparative undertakings would be more sophisticated, real-world measures of one-party operations and impact within a society, judged from a less stringent democratic perspective (than, for example, is applied to competitive party systems).

The one-party systems examined are Mexico, Nicaragua and Kenya.

*Mexico.* Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, or PRI) has held power since 1929, the longest continual domination of government in the contemporary world. Its political system "has long defied easy classification" (Cornelius and Craig 1991, 23). It has been labeled as democratic, quasi-democratic or some form of moderate, or more restrictive, authoritarian. While it does feature civilian control of government—one indicator of democratic governance—it has a highly centralized, heavily bureaucratized political structure with virtually autocratic powers of presidential decision-making. It is maintained in office through a closed party system that offers little meaningful popular participation and presents voters with no real electoral choice. "Mexico has had no significant twentieth-century experience (and precious little prior experience) with democratic rule. . . . Mexican politics has displayed considerable disdain for the public competition and accountability integral to liberal democracy" (Levy 1989, 459).

It is difficult to think of a country as democratic in any conventional sense when a president can be selected through *destape* (or the "unveiling"), the announcement of the decision of the incumbent. The presiding president's choice will, in truth, be the next president; the thus-anointed PRI candidate has never lost the party's endorsement nor has he ever lost an election. One consequence has been in recent years a succession of largely unknown technocrats to the presidential office.

Whatever its political system may be classified as, its one-party rule is unique. Richard R. Fagen and William S. Tuohy describe its workings as follows:



... a presidentially centered coalition, operating through both the PRI and the governmental bureaucracies, sets the main directions of public policy, regulates a vast system of recruitment and patronage, and adjudicates the conflicts and strains that arise in the conduct of ordinary and extraordinary political and public business ... the President and his circle set national priorities, mediate conflicting claims on public resources, allocate men and money, select and elevate to office all state governors, many municipal presidents, and thousands of other candidates and officials, and manage and manipulate the symbolic capital of the Mexican Revolution—all with minimum reference to either the legislative or the judicial branch of government, and probably with fewer constraints imposed by the PRI members and the bureaucracy than generally imagined (1972, 20).

The PRI manages to stay in power through a skillful mix of factors: the nurturing in the population of a sense of legitimacy as a symbol of the country's nationalism and its Revolution; the selective distribution of public goods and personal rewards; the effective use of administrative powers and through the control of regional and local governments as well as major industries in the private sector; the command of the police and the military and a willingness to use force as needed (normally after the failure of other alternatives) to coerce compliance with its directives or enforce unpopular decisions (as against striking labor union members for example); the cooptation of opponents through incorporation in the government, lucrative contracts, changes in policy directions or the distribution of private benefits; and the ability to set the rules for, and adjudicate the results of, electoral competition.

Broad participation in any form of decision-making within the party or the government is severely restricted. Candidate recruitment and leadership succession at all levels is decided within the party. The outcome of the vote in all but the rarest of cases is known in advance. While "the appearance of electoral competition is crucial to the regime's claims of democratic legitimacy" (McDonald and Ruhl 1989, 581), the elections themselves "serve primarily to legitimize existing policies and to demonstrate mass support for the regime" (Craig and Cornelius 1980, 377).

Why people participate at all in elections tells much about the system in general and the peculiar hold the PRI has on the Mexican people. The voter views

... his activities on behalf of the official party as an opportunity to express gratitude for assistance received from previous or incumbent administrations as well as his solidarity with the goals of the Mexican Revolution and its heirs within the PRI (Craig and Cornelius 1980, 367).

Being also pragmatic, voters realize that they increase their chances of either holding on to what they have or of gaining future rewards through participation.

The result is rule by a political and economic oligarchy that, less predictably, commands widespread popular support. The situation is unique. There is considerable discontent and obvious social inequities exist, severe enough that one would assume a mass-based, revolutionary party normally would be anxious to redress them. Such is not the case. Yet the role of the PRI and its basic approaches to policy are widely accepted.

The system seems to derive its basic legitimacy in the eyes of the governed from three sources: (1) its origin in large-scale civil strife and turmoil; (2) its role in promoting economic and social development since the 1930s; and (3) its performance as a distributive apparatus which has dispensed concrete, material benefits (however limited or short-run) to a large proportion of the Mexican population since the 1930s (Craig and Cornelius 1980, 378).

Mexicans are not insensitive to the faults of the system: a hierarchical and highly bureaucratized state; limited social mobility; the waste and corruption of government; the officially sanctioned violence; the failure of government programs to redistribute wealth so as to provide adequate basic social services; and, more generally, the extremes in living conditions and the difficulty involved in day-to-day survival. The result is an “apparent contradiction between strongly supportive attitudes toward the system and highly negative evaluations of actual government performance” (Craig and Cornelius 1980, 377). The blame for problems is directed at lower-level party functionaries and public officeholders, not against the political or economic system nor against the PRI. Whatever its shortcomings Mexicans still “view the government as the most likely source of concrete benefits for the poor, especially in situations of acute short-term need” (Craig and Cornelius, 1980, 378).

And finally, and tellingly, there is a collective memory passed down through the generations of the civil disorder and social upheaval that gave birth to the Revolution and to the PRI and “a residue of fear that the divisive, destructive forces within the country might be unleashed once again if the established regime were to be seriously established” (Craig and Cornelius 1980, 378). If Ann L. Craig and Wayne A. Cornelius are correct in their analysis of the cultural forces that serve to legitimate the PRI and the governmental structure the party controls, it goes a long way to explain the strength of the PRI’s appeal and its longevity.

The results have much to recommend them. Mexico has enjoyed political stability and a predictability in its politics and public policies that is

unusual; it has not undergone the widespread repression and periodic cycles of military control experienced by other major Latin American nations, including Brazil, Argentina and Chile; the involvement of the state in the economy has been significant but selective; it has experienced decades of economic expansion and development that despite periods of inflation and high unemployment have been impressive; its institutional structures have proven resilient and—as with the recent emphasis on free-market economics—adaptable; and, as indicated, the party and the political system have enjoyed broad public support. These constitute noteworthy accomplishments. The PRI's ability to maintain its dominance, its durability in governing, its generally benign one-party rule and its broad popular acceptance are unique among one-party states.

*Nicaragua.* Nicaragua provides an example of a mass political party attempting to survive, and prevail, in a society that has undergone a series of fundamental transformations during a very short span of time. The party is the FSLN (Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional, or Sandinista Front of National Liberation). It has managed to move from a revolutionary guerilla movement to a governing, electoral, and—more recently—opposition party, and has done so while keeping its identity, basic principles, and decision-making structures largely intact.

The story of the FSLN can be briefly developed.<sup>3</sup> It was founded in the 1960s as both a guerilla movement and a political force (from the beginning its leaders sought political power by organizing in the urban slums). It consisted of a number of factions, or tendencies, united by opposition to the Somozas, a fierce nationalism (of which Sandino, an opponent of American intervention assassinated by the first of the Somozas, served as a symbol), and a crude and romanticized revolutionary ideology.

Most of the original members of the FSLN were student activists from working-class or middle-class homes—highly nationalistic, morally repelled by Somoza, and troubled by the wretched social conditions in their country. . . . Their nationalism was distinctly anti-Yankee. They regarded the Somoza regime, created and sustained by the United States, as the logical outcome of the century-old U.S. intervention in their country's affairs (Gilbert 1988, 5).

The FSLN's organization became more formalized in 1979 in anticipation of the demands of running the country following its victory. An initial nine-person directorate was created to equally represent the three contending guerilla factions, and Daniel Ortega, a leader of the moderates, was chosen to speak for the electorate and to serve as chief executive of the country. Ortega subsequently ran as the FSLN's presidential candidate in the election of 1984, and served as Nicaragua's president up until the FSLN's defeat in

the 1990 election. The Sandinistas' loss in that election to Violeta Chamorro (widow of Pedro Jonquin Chamorro, a conservative newspaper editor and national hero whose death in 1979 served to trigger the revolution) and the UNO (National Opposition Union) coalition of fourteen unrelated political parties that backed her initiated a new era of FSLN politics.

In terms of ideology, the FSLN endorsed an eclectic package of traditions and schools of thought which included an emphasis on nationalism combined with elements of Marxism, Catholic social thought and classical democratic values. Its early leaders were inspired by Castro's revolution in Cuba and looked on Che Guevara as something of a patron saint, not unusual for revolutionary movements in Latin America in the 1960s. Donald C. Hodges writes:

The ideology of Sandinismo is a composite of the national and patriotic values of Sandino and of the ethical recasting of Marxism-Leninism in the light of the philosophical humanism of the young Marx. . . . it coexists with other independent social and political doctrines. It shares with the liberal tradition a belief in basic human rights but interprets them differently. It shares with the new Christianity a special bond based on belief in the ultimate redemption of the poor and oppressed. And it shares with the Marxist philosophical tradition the cult of a new socialist man predicated on Marx's early discussions of alienation—before he became a communist and developed his materialist interpretation of history.

. . . This official Sandinista ideology is buttressed by several unofficial ideologies wedded to liberation theology . . . . As for the country as a whole, the FSLN's policy is to tolerate ideological diversity even when some ideologies are hostile to the FSLN (1986, 288-289).

Add to this a reliance on Lenin's conception of a "vanguard" party to lead the nation toward a class-based socialist state.

The FSLN has borrowed in whole or in part from ideologies that reinforce its own predilections as to social needs and state objectives. There is both a generality and a vagueness to all of this. Much of what is taken to be the Sandinistas' guiding philosophy is not clear with regard to what is to be attempted or how they intend to achieve their ends.

Their approach has been reasoned and pragmatic, a major factor in contributing to their continued viability. While they continue to hold to socialist objectives, they are willing to approach these in a decidedly moderate and consensus-building manner. As Dennis Gilbert explains:

The immaturity of Nicaraguan society requires a two-stage revolution. The gradualist character of their conception reinforces the need for a vanguard to guide the country through a complicated process of historical change. But the vanguard seems to be only one step ahead of the people it leads. Nearly a decade after coming to power, the FSLN is sure that it wants socialism but not quite sure what that means (1990, 40).

Many of what the Sandinistas have accepted as temporary and short-term efforts instrumental to achieving long-run objectives continue in place. They may well come to permanently define the party. If so, the FSLN will be seen as a more flexible and less dogmatic party than many would have predicted when they assumed power.

On paper, the FSLN is a mass-based revolutionary party with a broad resemblance to the communist parties of the People's Republic of China and Cuba. There are differences, however, and they are fundamental. First and foremost, the personalism that has marked the leadership of Castro's Cuba and Mao's China is conspicuously absent in Nicaragua's FSLN. The omission was intentional. An early decision was made to avoid such personalism, which many in the FSLN believed to be anti-democratic and a prelude to one-man rule. It is said that one reason the dry and unexciting Daniel Ortega was chosen to speak for the directorate, instead of (for example) the more dynamic Tomas Borge, an FSLN founding member, was that Ortega—"flexible, tolerant, and unpretentious" (Gilbert 1990, 44)—possessed few of the skills or ambitions that might lead to one-person rule.

The party's leadership is a collective enterprise, with the various factions permitted to voice disagreement and push for alternative strategies within party councils. Once decided, however, all of the directorate is expected to back the decisions reached and the leader (in this case, Daniel Ortega) is required to implement them on behalf of the party. Ortega is accountable to the directorate for his actions. The curious thing is not that factional, personal, and political rivalries have emerged—these would appear to be unavoidable in such a coalitional arrangement—but that the party has managed to adapt and persevere to the extent it has.

In its rhetoric and its action the party has embraced democratic goals. The elections of 1984 and 1990 were held both in response to international pressures and to fulfill the party's own pledges. While not unflawed, both were essentially democratic in operation. In 1987, Nicaragua under Sandinista leadership adopted a new constitution, that, although continuing to centralize authority in a national government, was considerably more democratic and more influential in governing than any of the shadow constitutions that preceded it under the Somozas.

The Sandinistas have organized trade unions, teachers, women, agrarians, veterans and professional organizations and affiliated these with the party (although they also allow independent and competing mass organizations). More controversially, they have also organized neighborhood associations some saw as close to the Cuban model. The party maintained that these were intended to provide a forum for local concerns and a means through which these could be addressed, in effect an avenue of grassroots

representation. These groups did have the power to allocate government services and implement programs in their areas and they did provide a mechanism for electioneering and even military recruiting, in essence serving as extensions of the state and a vehicle of social control (Ruchwarger 1987). Finally, in this context, the party itself was not open: prospective members had to serve a probationary period and meet certain standards before being accepted. In all, the FSLN does have the trappings and organizational apparatus that distinguish the one-party state. It is the manner in which these have been adapted to the country's conditions and how they have been applied in practice that makes the FSLN distinctive.

In office, the Sandinistas worked to aggressively redistribute wealth, provide medical services to the needy (in limited supply due to the war) and reallocate the land of wealthy owners as well as the significant holdings taken from the Somoza family. Their land policy has caused a continuing friction with the United States. Many of the former owners appealed for help through the United States government and the issues raised as to ownership and compensation continue to haunt both the Chamorro government and American-Nicaraguan relations.

The banks and many industries were nationalized. The FSLN took control of the police, military and state security agencies, by agreement retaining administration of the police and military under Humberto Ortega, Daniel Ortega's brother, after the Chamorro government took office. It reorganized the educational system, although it did introduce ritualized symbols into the schools (and other organizations) intended to develop support for the Sandinistas and legitimate their association with the state. It attempted to legislate equality for women and to introduce a number of social programs intended to aid the *campesinos* and the working classes that formed its base.

While a number of priests and members of Catholic religious orders associated themselves with the FSLN to the extent of serving in its government, its relationship to the Catholic Church in Nicaragua has been strained and its relations with the Vatican hostile. Its initially harsh treatment of the indigenous communities on the East Coast has been moderated. In part the Sandinistas had little knowledge or experience with the culture and values of the indigenous areas; also in part these served as a recruiting ground for the Contras and a significant base of their strength.

Also while in power the Sandinistas engaged in a decade-long, bloody and debilitating war with the United States-backed Contras. The Reagan administration attempted to subvert the rule of the Sandinistas. It carried out what it called low intensity warfare through surrogates. It also attempted to undermine its economy and isolate it both economically and diplomatically from the rest of the world.

In many respects the strategy worked, although at a fearful price both to the Nicaraguan people and eventually to the Reagan administration. The war ravaged the economy, which has yet to recover. Eventually the administration's policies in Nicaragua also brought into question its own credibility and undermined its effectiveness during Reagan's second term, by-products of the Iran-Contra affair.

The Sandinista economic and social policies were only partially implemented. By any measure, however, Nicaragua is more democratic after the FSLN's tenure in office, more concerned with mass welfare, participatory decision-making and individual rights than at any time before. The contrasts with the Somoza dictatorship that preceded it could not be more pronounced.

There are ironies in all of this. Not the least of these is that a revolutionary movement gained power through force and then gave it up through peaceful electoral means. Such behavior does not fit the stereotype of the mass party in the one-party state.

Another is the continued United States' ambivalence towards Nicaragua. The end of the Cold War and ascension to power of the conservative Chamorro government would seem to ease any concerns the Americans might have of the nation's policies and intentions. The United States government has been reluctant to provide extensive financial or technical aid or to actively engage in any type of institution-building.

Finally, the FSLN remains the most powerful political organization within Nicaragua and the country's only real political party. Its leadership structures and mass support continue intact, factors that have favored a type of alliance with the Chamorro government. It is an arrangement that is resented by many in UNO and in the United States.

The Sandinistas remain the country's only national party. UNO, a coalition of opposites formed only to oppose the Sandinistas, is neither a political party nor an effective electoral or governing organization. In many respects, the country is still a one-party state even while the dominant party is out of power. There are no effective or broadly-based opposition parties.

As indicated, the FSLN's ideology, clear in sentiment, is bastardized in origin and murky as a guide to action. There is a tension implicit in the Sandinistas' commitment to democracy and in its embrace of social objectives as the ultimate definition of party success.

The FSLN's conception of democracy emphasizes democratic results over democratic process and popular 'participation' over electoral institutions . . . . The FSLN [has] never clarified the relationship between its conception of popular participatory democracy and the Western-style constitution formally adopted in 1987 (Gilbert 1990, 34).

In much of democratic theory it is the process that is paramount; of greatest importance is how decisions are made and who meaningfully participates in them.

Practical considerations, as in the past, may resolve any tensions in theory that might arise for the Sandinistas. The fact that the party must regroup to contest the next presidential election in 1996 should go a long way in deciding which conception of representative democracy it adheres to and the importance of electoral processes in its calculations.

The final chapter has yet to be written on the FSLN or on Nicaragua as a one-party state. Pragmatic adaption to historical circumstances within a broad, if vague, commitment to a class-driven equalization of social resources appears to be the defining essence of the FSLN and its one-party approach. How far and to what extent a political party can adapt without changing its basic nature has yet to be established. If anything, the experience of the Sandinistas serves to illustrate the variability in one-party approaches to state power.

*Kenya.* The British had a plan to introduce competitive party systems and democratic institutions into Kenya and other soon-to-be former colonies. On paper it looked promising. Joel D. Barkan describes it as follows:

As they had sought to do in other colonies, the British attempted to phase in a system of electoral and parliamentary democracy in Kenya that was of a multiparty nature. The idea that the future of democracy in the new states of Africa and Asia would turn on the existence of a healthy competition between parties committed to alternative policy programs and which would be played out between the party of “The Government” and the party of “The Loyal Opposition” was central to the British conception of political development. Individual colonies would be “ready for independence” when they had evolved multiparty electoral systems and parliamentary institutions that respected interparty competition. Democratic government would emerge through the establishment of the classic balance between majority rule and minority rights, a balance that could only be achieved through interparty competition . . . the prospect of single-party regimes was regarded as an anathema—not only by the British, but by the rest of the Western World, especially the United States (Barkan 1987, 218).

In practice it proved significantly less successful than hoped. Kenya is one example; Nigeria another.

In retrospect, programs for democratization operated under the constraints of a colonial administration on one side and pressure for a quicker independence on the other. They were also implemented at a period when Britain’s power had declined noticeably and it was being forced to disengage—conditions not likely to assure success.

This certainly was the situation in Kenya. Responding to threats to their dominance, one from Jomo Kenyatta and his Kenyan African Union (KAU) and the other from an armed rebellion (the “Mau Mau” uprising), the British



reacted by: outlawing national party organizations (regional and local parties were permitted)—a ban not lifted until 1960, three years before independence; jailing Kenyatta and other party leaders; restricting the franchise (turnout was less than 3 percent in the elections of 1957 and 1958); and limiting candidates for office to those loyal to the colonial government.

Unfortunately, such lessons were well learned. The local party organizations persisted after independence, developing into the equivalent of personalized political machines. The national-level parties that emerged in the 1960s were essentially coalitions of these local one-party groupings. Elections turned on local rather than national concerns.

The more established and larger of the two major parties formed after independence, Kenyatta's Kenya African National Union Party (KANU), had roots extending back into the colonial era. Its principal opposition, the Kenya Africa Democratic Union (KADU), of which future president Daniel arap Moi was an early supporter, basically formed as an out-party coalition representing those not initially included in KANU.

Distinctive geographic and ethnic groups provided the social bases of each of the two parties. Their membership did not overlap significantly. Shifting alliance among the local party chieftains was the key to elections. No discernible national policy differences existed between the parties, one by-product of a machine/clientelistic approach to politics. By 1964 the opposition KADU party disbanded, its leaders (including Moi) joining KANU. Kenya officially became a one-party state.

The party in comparison with other one-party states was a loose and fractious coalition of local parties each concerned with particularistic rewards that served their immediate constituencies. Small opposition groups did surface occasionally to challenge the party's authority or even more rarely attempt to form a new political party, but their electoral appeal was limited and their leaders could face imprisonment. The one-party system was comfortably in place by 1969. In 1982, opposition political parties were prohibited by law.

The one-party system that emerged under Kenyatta could be described as a "network of patron-client relationships" with striking similarities to the politics of the post-World War II American South as described by V.O. Key, Jr. (1949).

Kenyatta's nationwide machine was held together by four related ingredients of which the periodic holding of parliamentary elections is probably the most important. The three additional factors consisted of Kenyatta's skills as an individual leader; a set of clearly understood rules by which the game of clientelistic politics would be played; and sufficient patronage and access to state resources for loyal clients (Barkan 1987, 226).

The dominant party provided an umbrella organization for factional, personal and regional fights to be played out. The one condition of party membership was a personal pledge of loyalty—not to the state or the party but to its leader, Kenyatta.

Party members were directed to concern themselves with local issues such as community development. “Harambee,” as the movement came to be called, focused on building schools, roads, health clinics and communal agricultural improvements at the community level. Party members were not expected to concern themselves with broader public issues or the conduct of national government. Kenyatta, elected president after independence, would see to these.

The “Harambee” system also was intended to foster a spirit of reward and compromise in the nation’s politics and among local parties and to assist in the economic and political development of the country. Consequently it also had nationalistic and vague but real ideological overtones. Elections, however, were another matter, decided on issues of who got what:

Elections are, for all practical purposes, referendums on incumbents’ assistance to self-help development projects in their constituencies. Those perceived by the electorate to have strong performance records are reelected, while those with weak records or records surpassed by a challenger’s go down to defeat (Barkan 1987, 230-231).

The pluses of such a system were its continuity, stability and predictability. Everyone benefitted to some extent. Local needs were directly tied to national party politics and public officeholding and formed the core of the party’s agenda.

The weaknesses of the system were many. It encouraged corruption and a sense of immediate personal gain from elections; it did not allow a basis for an opposition party to develop and contest elections; and it fostered an inattention to issues of national concern and the problems of governance. Its most glaring fault was the opportunities it provided to develop a more repressive one-party state. This is exactly what happened when Daniel arap Moi succeeded Kenyatta as president.

If Kenyatta’s tenure as president, despite its faults, can be labeled one of Africa’s “relative successes,” Moi’s restructuring of the party and its relation to the state can be used to illustrate another trend in Africa: the emergence of a one-party state. The party loses its independent identity and, in this case, is transformed from a base coalition of loose interests into an extension of the state’s, and the president’s, police power. This transformation is precisely what makes Kenya a valuable case study.

The single-party state is characterized by

. . . (a) the use of the party, not just as a means of mobilizing regime support, but as an adjunct to the security forces in monitoring and controlling opposition; (b) confusion of party tasks with public tasks through use of administrative bodies to carry out party functions; and (c) the propagation of a single party platform, with little or no tolerance of internal dissent (Widner 1992, 7).

The political party in this context is the exact opposite of a democratic party representing mass interests and managing social conflict through group bargaining and electoral combat. Rather it has been transformed into an extension of the state and an instrument of control and repression.

Jennifer A. Widner identifies five schools of thought as to why this occurs. These are:

—First, the failure to accept and internalize within the society and its leaders democratic rules of the game.

—Second, a “weak states, strong society” approach that emphasizes the necessity of an artificially constructed (and therefore not perceived as legitimate) state to use the party to establish order and enforce control within a heterogeneous and ethnically diverse society.

—Third, a dependency theory explanation that focuses on the desire of an authoritarian government to protect foreign interests and investments and the economic elite that profits from these in the society.

—Fourth, the needs of a state-centered economic development policy (as opposed to one relying on private capital and free-market incentives) that concentrates political and economic power in a government and the economic interests that directly benefit from the state’s control.

—And fifth, a “bureaucratic-authoritarian” model, a concept associated with Guillermo O’Donnell and associated researchers of Latin America in particular. This model specifies that as capital is channeled into development schemes, often in partnership with foreign investors and in compliance with international lending agencies’ emphasis on classical economic free-market formulas, the proportion of resources devoted to domestic consumer needs decreases. Under such conditions, technocrats, bureaucrats, and the military ally themselves to depress political participation and undermine institutions of democratic representation (such as political parties) in order to maintain their control.

As Widner notes:

The conditions all five approaches posit for the rise of single-party systems and for the merging of party and government correspond well with the public statements of African leaders during the 1960s and 1970s . . . these men worried about threats to their rule and to their lives that communal conflict, international intervention, poverty, and the concentration of wealth created (1992, 21-22).

In the case of Kenya, a number of factors contributed to the demise of Kenyatta's machine politics/clientelistic party system: the localism that eroded any base of support for a national party politics; the extreme factionalism and fragmentation that precluded any viable intra-party, or inter-party, opposition coalitions and parties to emerge; the state cooptation or weakening of economic and social organizations within the society that might have served to mediate interest demands; and the willingness of the state to employ its police powers to control dissent. The restrictions on political freedom and party and independent group activity all served to short circuit representative structures and encourage the fear of disorder that a repressive one-party state is called on to suppress.

These approaches may have relevance in charting the transformation of states into one-partyism (see Widner 1992, 22-37). A society's economic and cultural base predicts to one-party control. If so, there would appear to be little opening for a competitive party politics or a reasonably democratic political experience.

### **The Role of Political Parties in Democratic Transitions**

There is an extensive literature on democratic transition.<sup>4</sup> In addition, in virtually all studies of political parties in developing countries the parties are placed within a context, and judged implicitly or explicitly, in relation to their commitment to democratic ends and their contributions in furthering democratic interests. The overwhelming presence or the utility of this point of departure goes unquestioned. The consequence is that assessments of political parties, whatever their intellectual starting point—organizational analysis, electoral typologies, historical evolution, constituent development, societal cleavages, political economic perspectives—all employ often latent judgments as to their value to a democratic society. Most of the Third World parties do not do well by this criteria, possibly one reason they appear to be less a topic of concern and exploration than might otherwise be expected.

Secondly, and counter-intuitively, they do not appear to be primary actors in the transition from authoritarian to democratic regimes. Quite the contrary is the case. As shown, they can be and often are principals in the move from more democratic to less democratic political systems, and not infrequently they become an arm of the state used to further its control. They can evolve even into para-military organizations whose hierarchical structure, centralized decision-making, inter-changeability of leadership and objectives with those of the government, and intolerance for dissent further non-democratic ends.

The parties directly contribute to few fundamental moves in the other direction. It appears that the system itself must be basically democratic, and that within this context the political parties can be instrumental in maintaining and even expanding its representative features, and thus solidifying the hold of democratic institutions.

They do not come first, though. The parties appear to follow other developments in the society and the advent of other social agencies in the move towards democratization; they are reactive rather than proactive social institutions, derivative rather than creative forces for change. Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, in summing up conclusions of the extensive series of studies that appeared as the "transitions from authoritarian rule" project, report that

Political parties usually play a minor role in . . . [democratic] mobilizations and pressures . . . most of the effort is borne by unions, professional associations, social movements, human rights organizations, religious groups, intellectuals, and artists. Parties are frequently in too great a disarray, too divided, or too busy choosing their own leadership, to accomplish such a task (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1991, 57).

Party strength depends both on the context of the society's electoral rules and values and on social developments in the electorate. For example, Adam Przeworski reports in discussing the difficulty of assessing the validity of identifying the determinants leading to democratic transitions that the "universal franchise was established in Western Europe when the proportion of the labor force employed outside agriculture passed 50 percent" (Przeworski 1991, 47). Such a development, of course, is a necessity for a democratic party system. Is this, as he says, a "magic threshold," a predeterminant that all societies must meet before they can become democratic? It is not likely.

If this is the case, then the place to begin is by specifying the conditions suitable for democratic representation. It is a common approach and one in which Robert A. Dahl's theorizing in relation to polyarchies is often invoked (Dahl 1971, 1956; see also DiPalma 1990). There have been efforts, in fact, to quantify Dahl's concepts and related measures and thus provide an empirical gauge of a country's "democraticness"—its relative degree of democratic institutionalization (Inkeles 1991). Through qualitative evaluations as well (the more common approach), the stages of development in a country's movement towards a more democratic society has been a subject of continuous assessment and debate.

Przeworski offers another approach. He reviews the conditions under which authoritarian regimes outlive their usefulness, thus permitting a liberalization. These include such developments as the regime having

satisfied the needs that led to its institutionalization; its loss of legitimacy for whatever reason; irreconcilable differences among those represented in the ruling elite, necessitating appeals to outside interests for support; and international pressures to adopt democratic procedures, a point discussed previously (Przeworski 1991, 50).

It is his contention that “Democracy means that all groups must subject their interests to uncertainty. It is this very act of alienation of control over outcomes of conflicts that constitutes the decisive step toward democracy” (Przeworski 1991b, 58). There must also be a willingness to allow the institutions of democracy—political parties, elections, parliaments—to resolve the conflicts. One problem is “how to institutionalize uncertainty without threatening the interests of those who can still reverse the process” and another is to protect a group’s interests “not only against the forces associated with the old regime but also against their current allies” who will be competing within the new system for political rewards. The answer may rest in compromise and consensus over the form of democratic rule-making (Przeworski 1991b; 1991a).

For present purposes a democratic political order can be specified as one with the following characteristics:

1. Representative political institutions with a division of real power among the executive and legislative branches in particular and with an independent role of consequence for the judiciary.
2. An open, responsive and competitive party system with a national structure and coalitional base. One-party systems, at best, are not effective democratic tools. A multi-party system with a large number of weak parties with little representative or governing capacity approaches the “no-party” concept.
3. A fair and inclusive electoral system that functions to select the leadership and determine policy directions.
4. An economy largely separated from state control, providing private access to independent wealth, social advancement and status within the society.
5. A social structure not polarized around extremes of wealth and poverty.
6. A basic agreement on, and willingness to abide by, the democratic rules of the game and to use the society’s democratic process for conflict management.
7. A recognition of, and protection for, the rights of the individual.

8. The development of social, economic, cultural, professional and ethnic associations to mediate group demands and provide competing centers of power within the society.
9. A media free of government interference to communicate the information needed for informed decision-making.

This conception is broad and institution-based, although not necessarily broader than others used in studies of Third World parties. The main point would be that democratic processes and values guide governing. The outlining of such institutions sets the parameters within which the party system operates.

It is worth reminding ourselves at this point that the majority of developing countries experience authoritarian rule, and are likely to do so for years to come; the assessments of countries as to their degree of democratization can change quickly in response to real-world events; and that any such classifications of party system as to their durability and contributions to democratic representation appear broad and of limited use in empirical research and, in retrospect, can seem arbitrary and misguided. The research on the dynamics of transitions to or away from authoritarian or democratic political orders is primarily subjective, atheoretical and descriptive with little predictive or explanatory power. The need for comparative, theoretically-driven research in the area should be a priority.

Questions can arise as to closeness of researchers to their subject-matter. It would appear that for some the wish for a democratic evolution is father to the judgment; the situation observed is placed in the best possible light.

Within this context, some general propositions can be advanced concerning the conditions that favor a party system contributing significantly to democratic politics.

1. The more developed the linkage institutions in a society, the greater the prospects for party success. These linkage institutions would precede party development, have a firm base in the society and serve to aggregate and mobilize interests on their own. The parties' coalition would be built upon such groups, a second-stage coalitional and mass linkage organization needed to effectively contest for political power through elections. "Independent voluntary associations formed to pursue their collective interests through political action are inclined to resist government actions to restrict their rights to organize, raise money, solicit support, express their views, and influence government" (Weiner 1987, 22).

The party assumes the role of an additional brokerage agent, serving to inter-connect the mediating groups into larger and more powerful electoral coalitions.

2. The coalitional base of the parties has to be broader than one ethnic, religious or (to a lesser degree) class group. The objective should be coalitional and heterogeneous rather than socially homogeneous and ideologically pure parties. The broad-based parties have a better chance for electoral success and for serving the representative and conflict management needs of the society.
3. The parties need to have a national presence, as against a regional or overly localized base of operations and focus for representation. A political party system built on regionally strong but not overlapping party constituencies is likely to be weak. The result normally is a factionalized party system incapable of adequately representing its members' concerns and equally incapable of governing.
4. The party system, as with the economic system, should be independent of state control and the electoral procedures reasonably fair and inclusive.
5. The system should incorporate into the electorate and into the party system all major economic sectors. The poor must feel that they can affect events and receive adequate attention to their needs within the existing party system. The upper classes in turn must see the parties and the electoral process as the best means to achieve their ends and must have a willingness to engage in open electoral combat with competing economic sectors in the society. This presumes, then, that all accept the outcome of elections as legitimate and binding.
6. The perception that a competitive party politics is both the appropriate vehicle for resolving social questions and the one most likely to lead to success. If other avenues are available—direct access to government, cooperation with others in an oligarchic control of power, alliances with the military, or party representation restricted to the better-off residing in urban locations (at the expense of rural areas)—and prove more productive, the party system and eventually the entire democratic order is weakened and de-legitimized.

The extent to which individual parties or party systems function in these regards raise questions worth exploring and they provide a context for



developing a comparative agenda for research on political parties in the Third World.

### **Conclusion**

Even a brief assessment of political parties in developing countries is sufficient to indicate the rich diversity of the types found, the limited comparative work available and the intriguing nature of the questions that can be explored. The canvass is much broader than, for example, in the study of American parties (Crotty 1991), although an application of the more conceptual and empirically-based approaches employed in analyzing political parties in the United States and other industrialized nations might broaden considerably the opportunities for analysis and the research available. Such studies are practical, of course, only to the extent that informants are accessible and reliable data available—not insignificant concerns in such research.

There may well be major hurdles to expanding, both in conception and in number, the research on political parties in developing nations. There is, however, much going on that has received relatively little academic attention. If party dynamics and the parties' contributions to the electoral and governing systems are to be explained, students of political parties would do well to explore what is occurring in the Third World.

### **NOTES**

<sup>1</sup>An example of the difficulties implicit in the research is provided by Jennifer A. Widner in the writing of her book on Kenya's one-party state. Government restrictions created problems for her research: "... within a day of the author's arrival, records of harambee meetings [a focal point of the analysis], which are licensed by the government, were placed under the sole control of the head of internal security. Suspension of clearances for foreign political scientists then in the country meant that on-site interviews threatened the careers of those whose lives are chronicled in the text" (Widner 1992, 223). She was able to use other archival data and to interview Kenyans when they traveled outside of the country.

<sup>2</sup>A selective if uneven body of research on Haiti exists. For recent introductions to the history and political condition of the country, see Abbott (1988), Wilentz (1989), James (1963); Diederich and Burt (1986), Bellegarde-Smith (1990), Dupuy (1990), and Crotty (1987, 1988).

<sup>3</sup>Nicaragua was an object of considerable academic attention in the 1980s. For various accounts of the different developments, see Vilas (1986), Black (1981), Walker (1986); Walker, ed. (1982), Booth (1985), Harris and Vilas, eds. (1985), Walker, ed. (1987), Lake (1989), Russet and Vandermeer, eds. (1983), McDonald and Ruhl (1989), and Tulchin and Walter (1991).

<sup>4</sup>For some of the more recent overviews and summaries, see Diamond, Linz and Lipset, eds. (1990), Diamond and Plattner, eds. (1993), O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead, eds. (1986), O'Donnell and Schmitter (1991), Weiner and Ozbudun, eds. (1987), Diamond, Linz and Lipset, eds. (1986), and Baloyra, ed. (1987).

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