

# Dominant Parties in Liberal Democracies:

## A Contradictio in Terminis?

Comparing dominant party systems in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa

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Research Question: How does the presence of a dominant party influence the stability and democratic quality of a country?

**Introduction**

With only 18% of the countries considered to be liberal democracies, Sub-Saharan Africa is on the bottom of the regions when it comes to the number of liberal and electoral democracies, only to be surpassed by the Middle East [Fre12]. In Sub-Saharan Africa three countries have stood out as being among the most stable liberal democracies: Namibia (since 1990), South Africa (since 1994) and (especially) Botswana (almost right after its independence in 1966 it became a liberal democracy).

What is striking about these three countries is that all of them have been led by a dominant party since their first free and fair elections. Each National Assembly election in Botswana was won by the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), always with results of more than 50% of the vote. In Namibia, both the presidential and the National Assembly elections were dominated by the South West Africa's People Association (SWAPO) with results exceeding 75% of the vote. A similar pattern can be seen in South Africa, where elections have been dominated by the African National Congress (ANC) with percentages of around 60% of the vote. As alternation in office is considered to be an important aspect of democracy, there is some uneasiness about the presence of a dominant party in a democracy. As Giliomee and Simkins state in their book, democracy and one-party domination are like 'an awkward embrace', contradicting each other [Gil99].

In this paper I will argue that one-party domination and democracy do not necessarily have to contradict each other. Through the comparison of the cases of Botswana, Namibia and South Africa, I will try to show that one-party domination does not necessarily have a poor influence on the stability and quality of a democracy

I will start the paper by looking at the origins and characteristics of the dominant party systems and link this to the democratic legitimacy of this dominance. I will continue this thesis by examining how this dominance influences the stability and quality of democracy in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa.

### **Theoretical Framework**

To examine the influence of a dominant party on the democratic stability and democratic quality of a country, I will start with the existing literature and theories on our independent variable (the presence of a dominant party system).

The foundation of research on dominant party systems has been presented by Sartori in his book '*Parties and Party Systems: A framework for analysis*' [Gio76]. In his book Sartori distinguishes between two types of dominant party systems: the 'predominant party system' and the 'hegemonic dominant party system'. Where the latter category refers to a

non-competitive situation where alternation in power cannot occur (due to the fact that the dominant party does not allow any opposition), the first category refers to the case of ‘a competitive political system in which one party outdistances its rivals, with the condition that the dominant party can cease, at any moment, to be predominant’ [Gil99]. Of course this entails the presence of a multiparty system and the possibility of challenger parties defeating the predominant party [Gil99]. As the three cases that will be elaborated are clearly cases of a predominant party, I will focus on this type of dominant party systems.

However, in ‘*Counting parties and identifying dominant party systems*’ Bogaards shows that Sartori’s definition of the predominant party system is not the only definition of a dominant party system (2004). In his article Bogaards compares definitions of party dominance on four different criteria: the threshold for dominance, the inclusion or exclusion of opposition features, the presence of a divided government (in case of a presidential system) and the time-span [Mat04]. Definitions also differ in complexity from a simple definition on share of vote/seats to more complex definitions that contain all four criteria [Mat04]. The difference in definition is also explained by the fact that some authors focus specifically on Sub-Saharan Africa (Vandewalle & Butler and Coleman), while other authors (Blondel, Ware and Pempel) focus on established democracies. Sartori’s definition is applicable to both categories [Mat04]. Table 1 provides an overview of the different definitions of a dominant party system.

**Table 1: Definitions of dominant parties based on the four criteria set by Bogaards**

Author	Coleman	Van de Walle & Butler	Ware predominant	Sartori dominant	Blondel	Pempel
Threshold of Dominance	70% (seats)	60% (seats)	50% (seats)	50% (seats)	45-50% (votes)	Plurality (Votes & Seats)
Opposition	Dispersed	-	Dived	-	Multiple	Inferior position
President	-	-	-	No divided government	-	-
Duration	Single election	Single election	Permanent	Three consecutive elections	Twenty-year period	Substantial period

[Mat04]

When choosing the best definition of a dominant party system for our research it is important to look at how applicable these definitions are to our three cases. Table 1 shows a great variance between the thresholds of dominance set by the authors. It is clearly no coincidence that the authors focusing on Sub-Saharan Africa (Coleman and Van de Walle & Butler) have

set a higher threshold than the other authors. As dominant party systems with very high percentages of seats in parliament are more common in Sub-Saharan Africa, the threshold for dominance tends to be higher than in countries in other continents. Taking into account that countries with a first-past-the-post electoral system (like Botswana) tend to move towards a two party system (in which a party can easily attain over 50% of the seats), I will use a threshold of 65% of the vote, right in between the thresholds set by Coleman and Van de Walle & Butler.

A second factor that is important when picking a definition is the dimension of time/duration of dominance. This dimension varies from a single election to permanent dominance. When applying this to our three cases we can see that dominance of the party in all three countries has been permanent from their democratic transition up and till now. Because a single election does not necessarily say something about the party system in a country (especially the first elections after a transition are often not a strong indicator) and Namibia and South Africa are relatively new democracies, I will follow Sartori's definition of a minimum of at least three consecutive elections.

Thus, to establish whether Botswana, Namibia and South Africa have a dominant party system I will use a threshold of 65% or more of the seats in parliament for at least three consecutive elections.

The second variable I will discuss is the concept of democratic stability. The first important indicator of the stability of democracy is time. The longer a country is a democracy, the smaller the chance of a democracy falling back into a non-democracy.

A second indicator of the stability of a democracy is alternation in office as demonstrated by Huntington's 'two turnover test' [Sam911]. According to Huntington a democracy is stable after it has experienced two cycles of alternation in government without problems, showing that all political parties and political actors respect the electoral rules of the game [Sam911]. Using this definition, a democracy with a dominant party would likely be a less stable (or unstable) democracy. This view of Huntington would be rejected by Arian and Barnes, who claim that a dominant party system promotes stability in a democracy [Ari74].

Besides time and alternation in office, the legitimacy of democracy within society (both in a normative dimension and in a behavioral dimension) is a third important indicator of democratic stability [Diamond]. Diamond measures this support for democracy on three levels: elite level, organizational level and on mass level [Diamond]. On the elite and

organizational level this entails that the elite and organizations explicitly show their believe in the legitimacy of democracy, while on mass level this entails an overwhelming support for the legitimacy of democracy [Diamond]. By overwhelming support, Diamond refers to two-thirds of the population as a minimum threshold [Diamond].

Finally, I will discuss our second dependent variable: the quality of democracy. To consider the quality of democracy we must first define democracy. Both Zakaria[Far97] and Diamond [Diamond] make a clear distinction between the electoral and the liberal democracy in terms of quality of democracy. An electoral democracy is a political system marked by free and fair elections, while a liberal democracy also requires rule of law, separation of powers and the protection of basic liberties of speech, assembly, religion and property [Far97]. A liberal democracy is therefore always an electoral democracy, whereas an electoral democracy is not necessarily a liberal democracy. Thus, when discussing the quality of democracy, I will look at whether Botswana, Namibia and South Africa fulfill the conditions of a liberal democracy.

One of the most used indicators on the quality of democracy is the Freedom House Index which is used every year to rate countries on the dimensions of political and civil rights, ranging from 1 till 7. Table 2 shows how these scores are interpreted in terms of democratic quality by Freedom House and Larry Diamond in his book *Developing Democracy: towards Consolidation* [Diamond]

**Table 2: Quality of democracy according to Freedom House and Larry Diamond.**

FH -Score	Freedom House Label	Diamond’s Label
1.0 - 2.5	Free: A <b>Free</b> country is one where there is open political competition, a climate of respect for civil liberties, significant independent civic life, and independent media	Liberal Democracy
3.0 – 5.0	Partly Free: A <b>Partly Free</b> country is one in which there is limited respect for political rights and civil liberties. Partly Free states frequently suffer from an environment of corruption, weak rule of law, ethnic and religious strife, and a political landscape in which a single party enjoys dominance despite a certain degree of pluralism.	Electoral or Illiberal/pseudo- democracy
5.5 – 7.0	Not Free: A <b>Not Free</b> country is one where basic political rights are absent, and basic civil liberties are widely and systematically denied.	Non-democracy

As Botswana, Namibia and South Africa all score between 1 and 2.5, these countries are considered to be free and liberal democratic countries according to Freedom House and Diamond[Fre12]. However, the literature shows that calling Namibia, South Africa and especially Botswana a liberal democracy is highly debatable. Articles and books like *Botswana, A Minimalist Democracy*[Goo08] and *The Awkward Embrace: One Party*

*Domination and Democracy* [Gil99] argue that for all cases there is discussion on whether these cases are really liberal democracies or just electoral democracies. Therefore, a better and more in depth study addressing the concept of quality of democracy is required.

An in depth look at quality of democracy is provided by Larry Diamond and Leonardo Morlino in their excellent article *The Quality of Democracy: An Overview* [Dia04]. In their article Diamond and Morlino divide the quality of a democracy in eight different criteria: The rule of law, participation, competition, vertical accountability, horizontal accountability, respect for civil and political liberties, equality and responsiveness [Dia04]. Division of power and democratic legitimacy seem to be the underlying foundations of most of these criteria and are therefore central concepts in measuring the quality of democracy. However, the dimension of (socio-economic) equality is debatable as to whether this is an indicator of quality of democracy. Although most authors would consider equality in society to be important, it does not say that much about the quality of democracy but more on the government's performance or ideology. The dimension of equality strongly depends on the ideology of the ruling party (more socialist versus more liberal), or the country itself. For example when you compare Sweden and the United States you can see that there is a great difference in equality within the countries, but not many people would claim this makes Sweden significantly more democratic than the United States. Therefore I decided not to use this dimension in measuring the quality of democracy in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa. Another dimension that I will not use is the dimension of competition. It is clear that in a country with a dominant party system, opposition and therefore competition is of minor importance and this is exactly why I research the phenomenon of dominant party systems in (according to Freedom House) liberal democracies. Still, I will look at the political rights and therefore look at the possibility of other parties to compete for office.

Thus, to sum up, I will use the following dimensions to study the quality of democracy: the rule of law, accountability (both horizontal and vertical), participation and respect for political and civil rights. I will also look at the satisfaction of the voters with the quality of the democracy in their country by looking at the Afrobarometer, because this strongly adds to (or reduces) the legitimacy of a government/dominant party.

### **Operationalization**

In this paper I will use the comparative case strategy with a most similar system design. I will use the most similar system design because, when the characteristics of the selected countries are similar, it results into a more accurate measurement of the effect of the dominant party on

the stability and quality of democracy. The cases of Botswana, Namibia and South Africa are similar because all three countries are located in Southern Africa and belong to the more developed countries of Africa. More importantly, all three countries are considered to be free electoral democracies (by Freedom House) and have a dominant party system (my independent variable). This makes the countries highly suitable cases for my research.

Since independence the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) is the dominant party in Botswana, the South West Africa People’s Organization (SWAPO) is since the democratic transition the dominant party in Namibia and the African National Congress (ANC) is since the democratic transition in South Africa the dominant party in South Africa. My operational definition of a dominant party system uses the following three conditions:

- a) Threshold of dominance > 65% of seats
- b) For three consecutive elections
- c) No divided government

Table 3 shows how the three parties fulfill the conditions of a dominant party by showing the results of the last three National Assembly elections.

**Table 3: Results of the dominant parties in the National Assembly elections**

Country/Election	1999	2004	2009	Divided government
Botswana	BDP: 82,5%	BDP: 77,2%	BDP: 78,9%	No
Namibia	SWAPO: 76,4%	SWAPO: 76,4%	SWAPO: 75,0%	No
South Africa	ANC: 66,5%	ANC: 69,8%	ANC: 66%	No

\* In percentages of seats

Now I have established that the cases all fulfill the conditions of a dominant party system, I will move to the operationalization of our variables. I will start by focusing on the dominant party systems in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa. How did the dominant party system originate and why did the party remained dominant? I will look at the role of the dominant party in the democratic transition, the leadership of the party, the relation with certain ethnic groups and the party performance to explain their dominance. It is important to consider these factors because it is likely to give more democratic legitimacy to the dominant party and therefore the quality of democracy in the country. I will conclude this paragraph by looking at the electoral system. The electoral system is important, because it might distort election results and can therefore be a significant contributor to the dominance of a party.

As I cannot use the two turnover test to measure the stability of a democracy I will look at the endurance of democracy to operationalize democratic stability. Also I will consider the support for democracy within society by looking at the Afrobarometer. With Diamond

[Diamond], I believe that when citizens believe that democracy is the best form of government, a country is less likely to fall back. Therefore I will follow the thresholds set by Diamond. Two –thirds is a minimal threshold of support for democracy, and more than 75% of support for democracy indicates a very stable democracy [Diamond]. Although in the African context it is also important to look at the relation between the army and the government for an indication of the stability of a democracy, it is unfortunately not possible to discuss and operationalize this in this relatively short paper.

For the operationalization of the second dependent variable (the quality of democracy) I will use Diamond and Morlino's dimensions of quality of democracy: the rule of law, accountability, participation, respect for political and civil rights, and democratic legitimacy. I will measure the rule of law, accountability and respect for political and civil rights by looking at the Mo Ibrahim Index, which focusses on several aspects of governance in Sub Sahara Africa through the comparison of African countries. Through the conversion of raw data into an index ranging from 0 – 100 (with 100 being the optimal score), the Mo Ibrahim Index provides an important tool for measuring the quality of African governance. Participation will be measured by looking at voter turnout. This might be a limited operationalization of participation (other forms of measuring participation might be the strength of civil society or membership of interest groups and political parties), but because of the size of this paper and the lack of sources on participation in Africa I will limit my research to voter turnout. The democratic legitimacy will be measured in the paragraphs focusing on why the dominant party stays in power. Government performance, the party's role in the transition period and the leadership of party politicians are likely to be explanations of why so many people vote for the dominant party.

### **The democratic legitimacy of a dominant party system**

For a better understanding of the dominant party system in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa, it is important to study the origins and the consolidation of the dominant party system and the party itself. In this paragraph I will discuss the democratic legitimacy of the dominant party systems by considering the role of the party in the democratic transition, the leadership of the party, the relation between ethnicity and the party and the governance performance. I will conclude this paragraph with studying the influence of the electoral system, as this can reduce the democratic legitimacy of the dominant party. It is therefore important to include the electoral system in our research.



In 1962 Ketumile Masire and Seretse Khama formed the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP). Bechuanaland (as Botswana was called before independence in 1966) was a British protectorate and part of the British Commonwealth [Goo08]. The British gave Bechuanaland a lot of freedom (Botswana was a poor country without many resources at that time and therefore not that important to the British) and this resulted into most power already being in the hands of traditional chiefs. As Khama was the son of one of these traditional chiefs, he was already an important (rich) man before starting the BDP. Shortly after coming back from his exile (because of marrying a white woman) he achieved the status of a national hero due to his natural charisma, his interracial marriage and his status as one of the most rich and influential persons in Botswana. While independency was his goal, Khama and his BDP agreed that this should be done in a slow and gradual way in consultation with the British Empire. When Botswana achieved independence in 1966, Khama and the BDP were rewarded for their leading role in the democratic transition by winning in 28 out of 31 constituencies [Goo08].

In Namibia and South Africa the democratic transition was also led by the political parties that would become dominant in the future. However, these transitions started a lot less smooth than the democratic transition in Botswana. Around the same time the Botswana Democratic Party was founded in Botswana, the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO) was founded in Namibia (SWAPO, 2012). The African National Congress (ANC) was founded around three decades earlier but became a leading organization after the Sharpsville Massacre on 30 March 1960 (ANC, 2012). Both SWAPO and ANC were partly an armed rebel group and partly a political party/organization (although often only active underground) and both organizations fought against the apartheid- regime. After decades of struggling, both organizations transformed into political parties under the charismatic leadership of Sam Nujoma (SWAPO) and Nelson Mandela (ANC). While the struggle had been long and hard, the democratic transition itself was the result of a negotiated settlement and went therefore rather smooth [Hen05].

Comparing the role of the dominant party in the democratic transition in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa shows two striking similarities which could help explain the popularity (and therefore democratic legitimacy) of the parties. The first and most important similarity between SWAPO, BDP and the ANC is their leading role the democratic transition of their country. Being the leading party in the liberation movement is an historic advantage that no other party can ever take away from them and resulted into great popularity of the parties.

A second striking similarity is the presence of a charismatic leader in all three parties. Nujoma, Mandela and Khama all became extremely popular due to their achievement in the liberation and this would only increase during their first years as president of their country. They were the personification of the party and at the same time they exceeded the status of a party-politician by being the founding father of their country. As the statesmen they were, the line between the political party and the government became increasingly diffuse.

Another variable that should be taken into account when trying to understand the dominance of a party is the relation between ethnic/racial identity and the party. In *Ethnicity and party preference in Sub-Saharan Africa* the authors show that the relation between ethnicity and party preference strongly differs from case to case, mostly depending on the influence of historic processes [Bas11]. When applying this finding to our three cases you clearly see the influence of historic processes on the saliency of ethnic/racial identity in a country (especially in Namibia and South Africa). In South Africa the relation between racial identity (the black citizens of South Africa) and the ANC can hardly be overestimated. Several surveys show that most voters still vote according to racial lines in South Africa [Fri99]. The tendency to vote according to racial lines obviously relates to history of apartheid in the country and should be seen as a major contributor to the dominance of the ANC.

Historical processes are also important for understanding the relation between SWAPO and the strong support of the Ovambo tribe in Namibia (92,3% of the Ovambo tribe voted for SWAPO in the 1999 elections [DuT99]). The genocidal Herero war of 1904 and the Nama War of 1905 between the German colonizers and the population of Namibia resulted into a drastic change in the composition of the Namibian population [DuT99]. As the genocide mainly took place in the South of Namibia, the northern tribes (from which the Ovambo was the largest) became the dominant ethnic groups in society (around 50% of the Namibian population is from the Ovambo tribe (CIA world factbook)) [DuT99]. With SWAPO originating in the North of Namibia, and Nujoma being a member of the Ovambo tribe, ethnicity is a very important contributor to SWAPO's dominance in Namibia.

Finally, ethnicity is also an important contributor to party dominance in Botswana. The support for the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) is mostly found in the rural areas where the Bamangwato tribe (part of the Tswana, the dominant ethnicity in Botswana) is dominant [DuT99]. This, combined with the electoral system of first-past-the-post single member constituencies, significantly contributes to the dominance of the BDP [DuT99].

Therefore, the relation between ethnicity/racial support and the dominance of a party is another variable that explains the dominant party systems in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa.

History provides an important base for the dominance of parties. It can be the main reason for becoming the dominant party in the first elections but after a while other factors become more important to voters. In a country with free and fair elections, the party performance will be essential for sustaining dominance. In the cases of Botswana, Namibia and South Africa, party performance equals governance performance. Dominance because of a strong performance would significantly increase the democratic legitimacy of this dominance. Before looking in depth at the government performance in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa I will look at some indicators of government performance in 2011 as shown in table 4.

**Table 4: Ranking of Botswana, Namibia and South Africa on the Index of African Governance**

Indicator/country	Botswana	Namibia	South Africa
Safety and Rule of Law	2	4	7
Participation and Human Rights	5	8	3
Sustainable Economic Opportunity	4	9	7
Human Development	6	10	9
Overall Country Result	3	6	5

\*Ranking on a scale from 1 till 53 (Mo Ibrahim Index 2011)

Although table 4 gives us only a snapshot of the government performance in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa, it shows that Botswana, Namibia and South Africa belong to the best performing nations in Africa today and therefore it gives some indication of the government/party performance.

Botswana shows the most remarkable government performance. At the time of independence Botswana was a country with 25km of tarred road, 8 secondary schools, an infant mortality of 122 out of 1000 and a GNP per capita of US \$14 [DuT99]. The country had to start from almost nothing and it was up to the Botswana Democratic Party to improve these conditions. The party started with investing in infrastructure, education and health care and did this with the revenues of the trade in cattle with the European Union [DuT99]. Later on, this was supplemented by the mining of diamonds. While history shows that in the African context finding natural resources is not always a good thing for a country, in Botswana it resulted into a spectacular GDP growth of an average 12% between 1965 and 1990 [DuT99]. Due to good investments in public goods by the BDP, this eventually resulted into a

spectacular rise on the human development index. After 1990, governance performance stagnated and eventually decreased [DuT99]. This change in governance performance can immediately be seen in the election results dropping from 69% of the votes in 1989 to 53% of the votes in 1993.

In Namibia, governance performance is also essential to understanding why SWAPO remained dominant. The strong economic growth, their policy gradually reducing inequality of land distribution and most importantly regaining Walvis Bay from South Africa have all strongly favored SWAPO’s dominance in Namibian Politics [DuT99].

In South Africa, governance performance is a much weaker indicator of the dominance of the party. When South Africa became independent, it had to overcome a lot of problems (racial tensions, income inequality, HIV/AIDS, and difficult neighbors like Zimbabwe, are just a few examples). Unfortunately the government did not accomplish a lot on these issues. Despite relatively weak governance performance (especially the continuing socio-economic inequality) the results of the African National Congress in elections stayed the same [Hei04].

Thus, where governance performance significantly increases the democratic legitimacy of the BDP in Botswana and SWAPO in Namibia, this is not so much the case in South Africa.

So far, I have focused on aspects that would increase the democratic legitimacy of the dominant party system. In *Constitutional Choices for New Democracies* Lijphart shows that the type of electoral system is significantly related to a country’s party system [Are91]. Therefore, for a better understanding of why Botswana, Namibia and South Africa have a dominant party system I should consider the electoral system in these countries.

The importance of constitutional rules for the dominance of party is especially explicit in the case of Botswana. The minimum age voting age of 21, strict citizenship qualifications, strict procedures, the lack of provision for absentee votes and most importantly the first-past-the-post electoral system with single member constituencies have strongly favored the Botswana Democratic Party [DuT99]. The difference between the number of votes and the number of seats in the last three elections (table 6) demonstrates how the first-past-the-post system is more likely to create dominant parties. This is a strong example of the concentrating effect of the first-past-the-post electoral system as discussed by Lijphart [Are91].

**Table 5: The results of the National Assembly elections of Botswana**

Election / Results	1999	2004	2009
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Percentage of Votes	57,2%	51,7%	53,3%
Percentage of Seats	82,5%	77,2%	78,9%

\*In percentages of votes and seats

In Namibia and South Africa the electoral system creates significantly less bias. Both countries use a proportional representation electoral system although they differ in the number of constituencies (Namibia just one, and South Africa ten from which one entails the entire country and the nine others entail the provinces). According to Lijphart a proportional representation electoral system would likely be associated with multiparty systems and coalition governments [Are91]. It is clear that Namibia and South Africa do not fulfill these characteristics.

As all three dominant parties get over 50% of the votes, it is safe to say that none of the three parties owes his dominance purely due to a misrepresenting transfer from votes till seats. The electoral system is therefore not eroding the democratic legitimacy of the dominant parties.

### **Dominant party systems and democratic stability**

After discussing the dominant party systems of Botswana, Namibia and South Africa and related this to democratic legitimacy, I will focus on the first dependent variable: the stability of democracy and how this relates to the presence of a dominant party in these countries. To measure democratic stability I will start with the survival of democracy in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa. Did the countries fall back from democracy into non-democracy since independence/democratic transition? Looking at the Polity IV index and Freedom House we can be short about this question: the answer is no. For relatively 46, 22 and 18 years, both Freedom House and Polity IV, have marked Botswana, Namibia and South Africa as (at least) electoral democracies.

A second important indicator of the stability of a democracy is the support for democracy in society. Do citizens of Botswana, Namibia and South Africa feel democracy is the best form of government? It is important to consider this question because confidence in the concept of democracy within society makes it more difficult for political actors (the army, a political party or a politician/person) to seize power and end democracy in a country. The most recent Afrobarometer survey *Popular Attitudes toward democracy* [Afr09] provides us with the popular attitudes regarding the demand for and supply of democracy in South Africa,

Namibia and Botswana[Afr09]. Table 6 provides the popular attitudes towards the concept of democracy in these three countries.

**Table 6: Popular attitudes towards democracy in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa**

Country/question	Democracy is preferable to any other kind of democracy	Sometimes a non-democracy can be preferable	It does not matter what kind of government we have	Don't know
Botswana	85%	5%	8%	2%
Namibia	64%	11%	23%	2%
South Africa	67%	19%	12%	3%

[Afr09]

To transform these numbers in an objective measurement for the degree of democratic stability is difficult and strongly depends on how you interpret these numbers. I will follow Diamond's interpretation of support for democracy:

- Unstable Democracy = Less than two-thirds of the population considers democracy to be the best form of government
- Stable Democracy = Over two-thirds of the population considers democracy to be the best form of government
- Very Stable Democracy = Over 75% of the population considers democracy to be the best form of government

[Diamond]

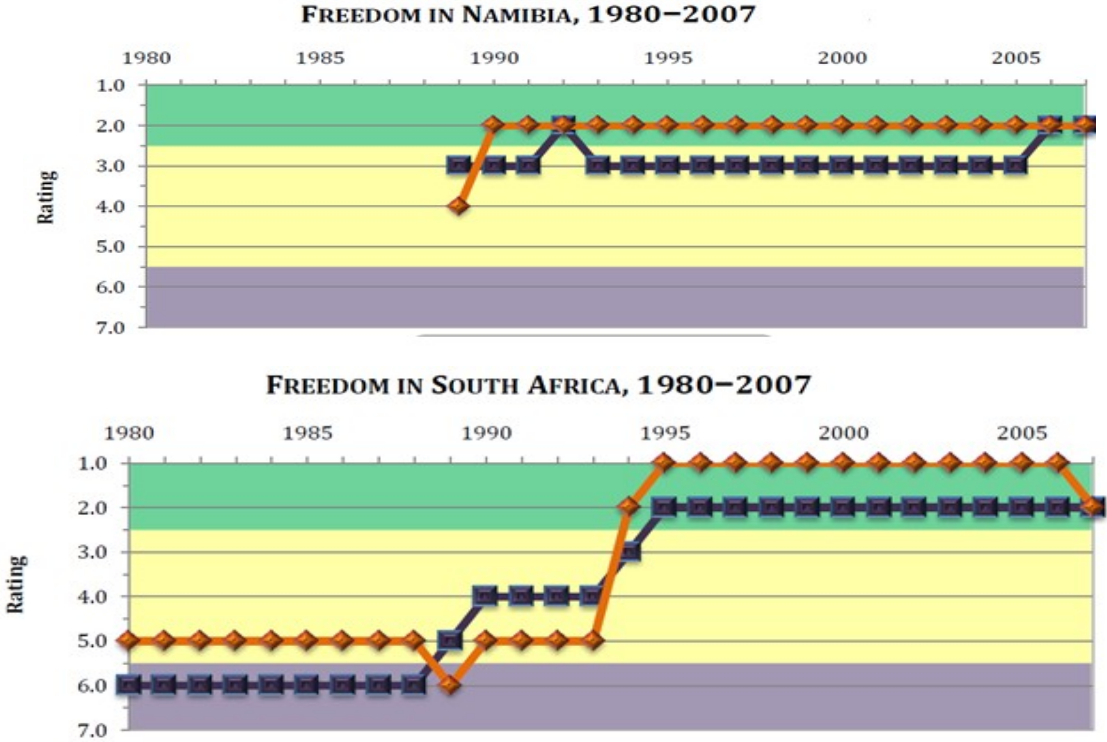
Using these conditions, we can see that both Botswana and South Africa (barely) fulfill the condition of a stable democracy (over 2/3 of the population supports democracy). Namibia does not reach the threshold of dominance and is therefore a problematic case. The fact that the oldest democracy of the three, Botswana, also has the most support for democracy within the population (85%), confirms theories affirming that the longer a country is a democracy the smaller the chance of falling back in non-democracy [Far97][Diamond]. The endurance of democracy and the support for democracy within the population show that Namibia and South Africa score mediocre on democratic stability, and Botswana scores very good on democratic stability. Although this does not necessarily mean that dominant parties create democratic stability (like Arian and Barnes claim in their article *The Dominant Party System: A Neglected Model of Democratic Stability* [Ari74]), it is striking to see that where

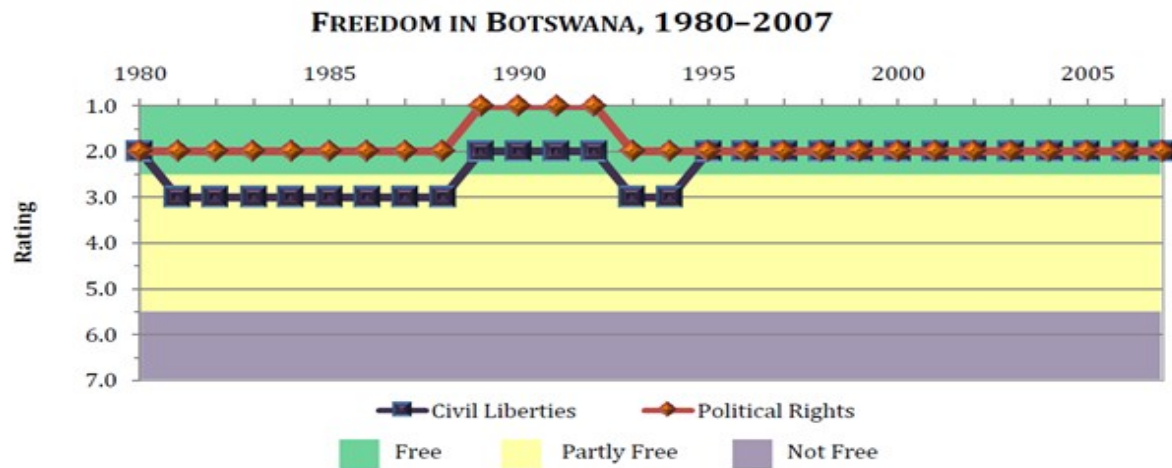
many African democracies did fall back since independence and/or democratic transition, our three cases remained among the most stable democracies of Sub-Saharan Africa.

**Dominant party systems and the quality of democracy**

I will continue with the second dependent variable: the quality of democracy in Botswana, Namibia and Botswana. Democratic quality is hard to define and controversial because of the lack of objectivity and high complexity of the concept [Dia04]. In this paper we will look at five different indicators of the quality of a democracy: the rule of law, accountability, political and civil rights, participation and the popular attitude towards democracy. But first, I will start with an historic overview of the quality of democracy in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa, as provided by the yearly index of Freedom House. Table 7 shows us a timeline of the scores of Botswana, Namibia and South Africa on both political rights and civil rights. The average score classifies a democracy as free, partly free or not free. It is important to note that the dominant parties came to power right after independence (Botswana, 1966) or the democratic transition (Namibia 1990) (South Africa 1995), so only scores after these dates should be taken in account.

**Table 7: Freedom House scores of Botswana, Namibia and South Africa between 1980 - 2007**





[Fre07]

Although table 7 ends in 2007, it shows that, while there is room for improvement (as the ‘perfect democracy’ would score 1 on both political and civil rights), all three countries have been considered ‘free’ democracies by Freedom House. This implies that all countries have a relatively good quality of democracy under the dominant party. I will proceed with examining the current quality of democracy in these countries more in depth.

The first indicator I will use to examine the concept of quality of democracy is the rule of law. To operationalize this first indicator I will make use of the Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance that ranks African countries on a scale from 0 to 100 where a score of 100 is the best possible result. The concept of the rule of law is divided into five different variables:

1. The judicial process (the extent to which the judicial process or courts are subject to interference or distortion by interest groups)
2. The judicial independence (the extent to which an independent judiciary exists. An independent judiciary refers to how far the courts can interpret and review norms and pursue their own reasoning free from the influence of rulers or powerful groups and individuals. This requires a differentiated organization of the legal system, including legal education, jurisprudence, regulated appointment of the judiciary, rational proceedings, professionalism, channels of appeal and court administration).
3. Sanctions (the imposition of sanctions of the United Nations Security Council and/or the African Union on a state, governmental or non-governmental actor(s)).
4. Transfers of power (the extent of the clarity, establishment and acceptance of constitutional mechanisms for the orderly transfer of power from one administration to another.
5. Property Rights (the extent to which government authorities ensure well-defined rights of private property and regulate the acquisition of property).

[MoI11]



Table 8 provides an overview of how Botswana, Namibia and South Africa score on these five variables of the rule of law and is therefore a first indication of the democratic quality of these three countries. It is clear that Botswana scores very good on rule of law, while Namibia and South Africa lack behind. Especially the weak score of South Africa on the judicial process and judicial independence, which I consider to be the most important indicators of the rule of law, are alarming and affect the quality of the democracy of South Africa. Also the score of Namibia on the transfers of power and property rights is critical.

**Table 8: The rule of law in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa**

Indicator/Country	Botswana	Namibia	South Africa
Judicial Process	100	100	66,7
Judicial Independence	100	87,5	75
Sanctions	100	100	100
Transfers of Power	100	66,7	100
Property Rights	82,9	50,6	82,7
Overall Rule of Law score	96,6	81	84,9

Scores of Botswana, Namibia and South Africa on rule of law on the Index of African Governance ranging from 0 till 100, with 100 being the optimal score [MoI11]

The second indicator of the quality of democracy is accountability. I will examine this indicator through the use of the Index of African Governance as well. The concept of accountability is divided into six variables:

1. Accountability, transparency and corruption in the public sector (the extent to which executive can be held accountable for its use of funds and the results of its actions by the electorate and by the legislature and judiciary, and the extent to which public employees within the executive are required to account for the use of resources, administrative decisions and results obtained).
2. Accountability, transparency and corruption in the rural area (the extent to which, at the local level government can be held accountable to rural poor people for its use of funds and the results of its actions and public employees and elected officials are required to account for the use of resources, administrative decisions and results obtained).
3. Corruption and accountability (the intrusiveness of the bureaucracy and the amount of red tape likely to be encountered, as well as the likelihood of encountering corrupt public officials and other groups).
4. Accountability and public officials (the extent to which safeguards/sanctions exist to ensure public officials are accountable and perform competently).
5. Corruption in government and public officials (the level of vested cronyism in, and corruption of, public officials. The vested cronyism element measures the degree to which the decision-making process in the private and/or public sectors is distorted. This includes consideration of whether public contracts, and appointments and promotions to key government and private sector jobs, are awarded based on merit or connections/political affiliations. The corruption element of this indicator assesses the perception of the pervasiveness of corruption among public officials in terms of misuse of public office for private benefit, accepting bribes, and dispensing favours and patronage and private gain).
6. Prosecution of abuse of office (the extent to which there are legal or political penalties for officeholders who abuse their positions. It assesses how the state and society hold public servants and politicians accountable and whether conflicts of interest are sanctioned. It also determines to what extent the rule of law is undermined by political corruption).

[MoI11]

Table 9 provides an overview of how Botswana, Namibia and South Africa score on these six variables of accountability and is therefore another indication of the democratic quality of these three countries. Again, Botswana scores very well with a relatively high amount of accountability. In Namibia and especially South Africa, corruption and lack of accountability is a significantly bigger problem. This erodes the democratic quality of these two countries.

**Table 9: Accountability in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa**

Indicator/Country	Botswana	Namibia	South Africa
Accountability, transparency and corruption in the public sector	100	75	87,5
Accountability, transparency and corruption in the rural area	78,7	66,6	60,5
Corruption and accountability	85,7	71,4	57,1
Accountability and public officials	66,7	66,7	66,7
Corruption in government and public officials	100	80	80
Prosecution of abuse of office	100	85,7	71,4
Overall Accountability score	86,1	75,6	71,6

Scores of Botswana, Namibia and South Africa on accountability on the Index of African Governance ranging from 0 till 100, with 100 being the optimal score [Mo111]

The third indicator of democratic quality is the respect for political and civil rights. This indicator will also be examined through the use of the Index of African Governance. The concept of political and civil rights is divided into five variables:

1. Human rights (the likelihood of a state being accused of serious human rights violations).
2. Political rights (the extent to which people are able to participate freely in the political process, including the right to vote freely for distinct alternatives in legitimate elections, compete for public office, join political parties and organizations, and elect representatives who have a decisive impact on public policies and are accountable to the electorate. The political rights indicator includes assessments of: electoral process, political pluralism and participation and functioning of government).

3. Freedom of expression (the extent to which citizens, organizations and the mass media can express opinions freely. The extent to which freedom of opinion and the press are generally guaranteed, and whether the structure of the mass media system provides for a plurality of opinions are assessed).
4. Freedom of association and assembly (the extent to which independent political and/or civic groups can associate and assemble freely. This variable refers to the degree of freedom to organize politically that is needed to influence political decision-making processes ‘from the bottom up’. It also includes groups that mobilize along ethnic and similar cleavages. It should be borne in mind that these freedoms are not manifest as formal rules under authoritarian regimes; rather, political parties and/or civic organizations implicitly or explicitly dare to anticipate rights that can only be guaranteed in a democratic system).
5. Civil liberties (the extent of various citizens’ freedoms, such as equality under the law, freedom from torture and freedom of expression).  
[MoI11]

Table 10 provides an overview of how Botswana, Namibia and South Africa score on these five dimensions of political and civil rights and is therefore a third indication of the democratic quality of these three countries. I take into account that the first variable of human rights in this case refers to ‘the likelihood of a state being accused of serious human rights violations’ and therefore does not necessarily say something about the accuracy of these accusations and the amount and severeness of these violations. Still, it is clear that all three countries score alarmingly low on political and civil rights. Botswana scores remarkably low on political rights and freedom of expression which is not only bad for the quality of a democracy but also for the stability of democracy. Indeed, a low score on political rights and freedom of expression can turn a democracy into a non-democracy.

**Table 10: Political and Civil Rights in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa**

Indicator/Country	Botswana	Namibia	South Africa
Human rights	50	50	50
Political rights	66,7	83,3	83,3
Freedom of expression	68,7	75,7	74,9
Freedom of association and assembly	88	67,6	71,3
Civil liberties	85,1	81,1	82,1
Overall Political and Civil Rights score	58,8	68,7	67,4/100

Scores of Botswana, Namibia and South Africa on respect for political and civil rights on the Index of African Governance ranging from 0 till 100, with 100 being the optimal score [MoI11]

The fourth indicator of the quality of a democracy is participation of citizens. I will examine the participation in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa by observing the voter turnout of the last three elections (it is important to note that none of the countries has compulsory voting). The results, shown in table 11, show that all three countries score excellent on participation, with voter turnouts equal to or even exceeding voter turnouts in Western democracies.

**Table 11: Voter turnout in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa**

Election/Country	Botswana	Namibia	South Africa
1999	77,1%	62,8%	89,3%
2004	76,2%	84,6%	76,7%
2009	76,5%	67,5%	77,3%

\* Voter turnout in National Assembly elections [Afr12]

To conclude this examination of the quality of democracy in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa, I will look at the popular attitude of citizens towards democracy in their country. Using the results of the 2009 Afrobarometer survey *Popular Attitudes toward Democracy in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa: A Summary of Afrobarometer Indicators, 1999-2008* table 12 displays the satisfaction of citizens with the supply of democracy in their country. In accordance to our previous indicators Botswana scores very well again, with Namibia a little behind and South Africa very alarming. With only 58% of the South Africans considering their country to be almost a full democracy, and less than half (49%) of the country satisfied with the way democracy works in their country, the popular attitude towards democracy in South Africa is more than disturbing.

**Table 12: Popular attitude towards supply of democracy in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa**

Variable/ country	Botswan a	Namibi a	South Africa
The country is a full democracy/ a democracy with minor problems	91%	73%	58%
Satisfied with how democracy works in my country	83%	67%	49%
I am somewhat free/completely free to say what I think in my country	93%	84%	76%
I am somewhat free/completely free to join any (political) organization I want	97%	88%	80%
I am somewhat free/completely free to choose to vote for without feeling pressured	98%	91%	82%

Table 7 up to and including table 12 provide an image of the quality of democracy in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa. Of course, getting an overall score based on our five indicators (rule of law, accountability, political and civil rights, participation and popular attitudes) is subjective as it highly depends on interpretation. It is safe to say that Botswana is the highest quality democracy of the three cases scoring relatively well on most indicators. Consequently Botswana should be considered a liberal democracy. However the low scores on political rights and freedom of expression are critical and show a slight tendency of moving to a liberal autocracy (a liberal but non-democratic form of government). Namibia should be considered as falling somewhere in the grey area between a liberal democracy and an electoral democracy. Overall I consider Namibia's score on accountability and respect for political and civil rights not good enough to call Namibia a full-grown liberal democracy. But as Freedom House scores suggest Namibia is close to achieving this status. South Africa's quality of democracy is alarming. Low scores on accountability, civil rights and a worrying popular attitude towards democracy suggests that South Africa might be on his way to become an illiberal democracy. For now, I will consider South Africa to be an electoral democracy, still far away of becoming a liberal democracy.

### **Conclusions**

The cases of Botswana, Namibia and South Africa show us that due to historic processes, party leadership, party performance and social cleavages within society, the dominant party has great support within society. Therefore dismissing the dominant parties of Botswana, Namibia and South Africa as non-democratic can hardly be justified and is an underestimation of the voters in these three countries.

However the democratic stability and democratic quality of these three countries differ strongly from case to case. Both on democratic stability and on quality of democracy, Botswana scores relatively well. Considering that Botswana's relatively low scores on political rights and freedom of expression show a slight tendency towards a liberal autocracy, I believe that Botswana should be considered a liberal democracy and in many ways an example for other African countries. As the only governing party since independence this success must be attributed to the leadership of the Botswana Democratic Party. The younger democracies of Namibia and South Africa have not (yet) achieved the same level of democratic stability and democratic quality and find themselves in the grey area between electoral democracies and liberal democracies. Whereas Namibia (under the leadership of SWAPO) is gradually moving more and more towards a liberal democracy, South Africa seems to be moving the other way around, towards becoming an illiberal democracy. Weak government performance and lack of accountability combined with the continuing dominance of the African National Congress resulted into disillusionment in democracy in South Africa.

However, we should not look at party dominance as a permanent state, but as one step in the democratic process a country goes through. As Duverger already stated in 1959: '*every dominant party carries within the seeds of its own destruction*' because '*eventually the party wears itself out of office*' [Duv59]. Cracks in the dominant party systems can already be seen in Botswana, where in 2010 the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) suffered a major blow when a significant group of members of parliament and other politicians left the BDP and created the Botswana Movement for Democracy (BMD) [Bot10]. As there have not been any elections since then, it is still unclear how the BMD is going to influence the dominance of the BDP. Also in South Africa dominance does not seem to be permanent and comprehensive. In the Western Cape Province for example, the opposition is in power and also within the African National Congress (ANC) it seems more and more likely that dominance is decreasing. The 2007 race for the presidency of the ANC between Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma and the controversy surrounding the ANC Youth League leader Julius Malema expose several cleavages within the party (hard core versus more moderate for example) that could result into the end of the ANC dominance in South Africa. So far, from the three dominant parties SWAPO seems to be the most stable dominant party but with Namibia's' electoral system of proportional representation, combined with the arrival of a new generation who did not experience SWAPO's and Nujoma's role in the independence, nothing is certain.

Our three cases demonstrate that democracy and the dominant party do not necessarily contradict each other, but do tend to bring along some problems. A dominant party might

bring stability to a democracy, but it might also bring along less favorable implication such as elitism (Botswana), lack of government performance (South Africa) and occasional abuse of power (Namibia/South Africa). Nevertheless, the fact that all three countries belong to the most stable and high quality democracies of Sub-Saharan Africa, suggests that a dominant party system might be the most suitable and most effective party system for African democracies.



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