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Fair-weather opposition

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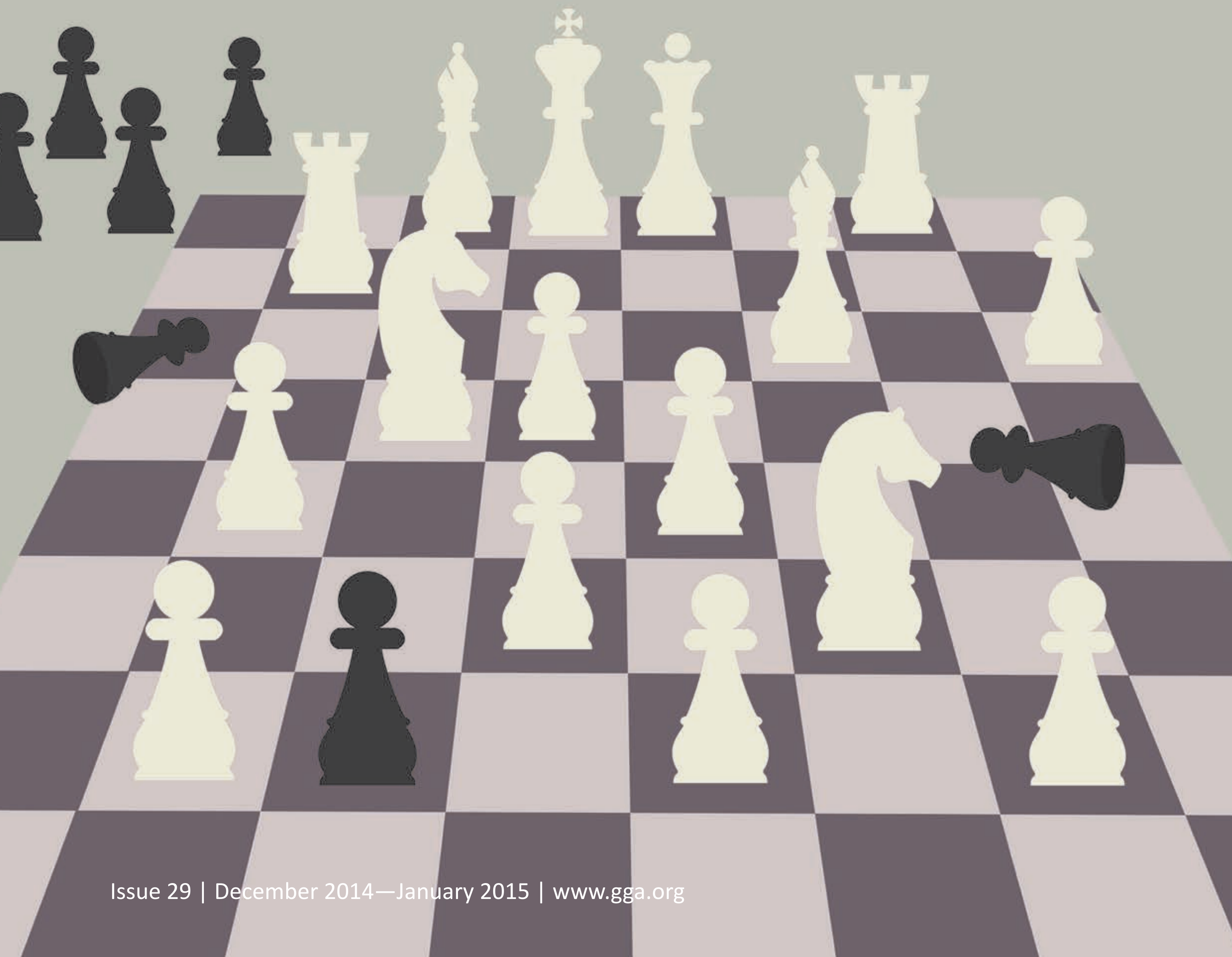
Africa's opposition: in pieces



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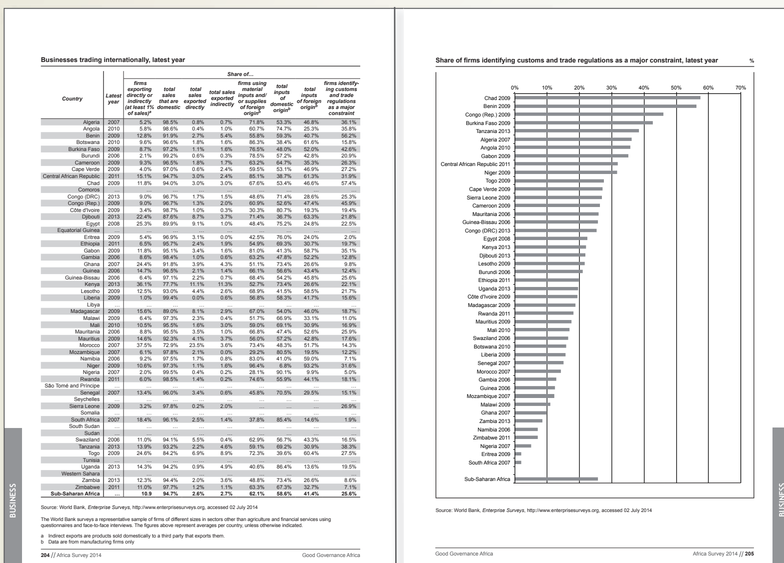

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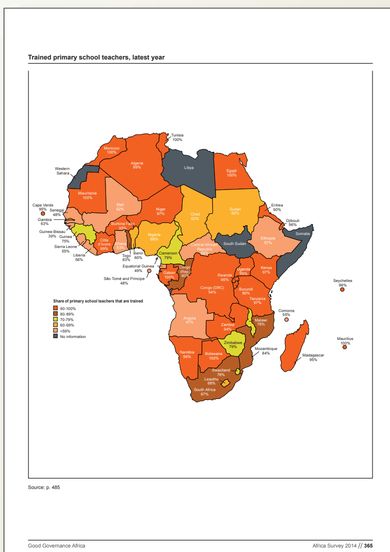

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About our contributors

Simon Allison is the Africa correspondent for the Daily Maverick, based in Johannesburg. He has previously reported from Egypt, Palestine and Somalia for the Asia Times and Agence France-Presse (AFP).

Karine Barzegar is a Paris-based reporter who has worked for Al Jazeera English, the Associated Press, *Nouvel Observateur*, Slate and TV5 Monde. She has reported from Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and other places.

Eloïse Bertrand works as Sahel programme associate for Search for Common Ground, a peace-building NGO based in Washington, DC. She holds a master's degree in African politics from the School of Oriental and African Studies in London.

Kris Berwouts has worked for several Belgian and international NGOs over the last 25 years. From 2007 to 2012 he was the director of EurAc, a network of European NGOs focused on central Africa. He now works as an independent expert on that region.

Kamissa Camara is the senior programme officer for west and central Africa at the National Endowment for Democracy. She is a democracy and governance specialist with expertise on the Sahel region. She writes for *Africa in Fact* in her personal capacity.

James Copnall is the author of "A Poisonous Thorn in our Hearts: Sudan and South Sudan's Bitter and Incomplete Divorce". He has reported from over 20 African countries including Côte d'Ivoire, Morocco, South Sudan and Sudan as a BBC correspondent.

Jinty Jackson is a freelance journalist who has covered Mozambique and Swaziland for AFP. Her writing has been published in the *Mail & Guardian* in South Africa and *Alternatives Economiques* in France, among other publications.

Modou Joof is based in Banjul, Gambia's capital. He is managing editor of *The Voice* newspaper and editor of Front Page International, a blog. His writing has also appeared in *The African Voice* newspaper in Dublin, Ireland.

Mark Kapchanga is a senior economics writer for *The Standard* newspaper in Nairobi, Kenya. He holds an MSc in financial economics from Jomo Kenyatta University as well as a master's in multimedia journalism from the University of Kent.

Victoria Kelly is a journalist based in Lusaka, Zambia. She has written for several publications in South Africa, the UK and Zambia. Before moving to Africa she was a financial journalist in London, writing for the *Daily Telegraph*, Reuters and others.

Moses Khisa is a Ugandan PhD candidate at Northwestern University, Chicago, focusing on contemporary institutional evolution in Ethiopia, Ghana, Rwanda and Uganda. He writes a weekly current affairs op-ed for Uganda's *Observer* newspaper.

Brian Klaas is a Clarendon scholar and researcher at Oxford University. He has also served as a political adviser on Madagascar to the International Crisis Group and the Carter Center's election observation mission for Madagascar's December 2013 elections.

Rian Malan is a Johannesburg-based journalist best known for his 1990 memoir, "My Traitor's Heart". A collection of his subsequent work, "Resident Alien", was published in 2009. Mr Malan has also made several award-winning documentaries.

Kristen McTighe is a Cairo-based journalist. She has covered the Arab spring uprisings, and has reported from Algeria, Morocco and Western Sahara. Her work appears in the *International New York Times* and Global Post, an online news site.

François Misser is a Brussels-based journalist. He has covered central Africa since 1981 and European-African relations since 1984 for the BBC, *Afrique Asie* magazine and Germany's *Die Tageszeitung* newspaper. He has written books on Rwanda and the DRC.

Ray Ndlovu is a journalist based in Zimbabwe. He writes for South Africa's *Business Day*, *Mail & Guardian*, *Sunday Times* and *City Press* newspapers. In Zimbabwe, his work is published in the *Financial Gazette*, Zimbabwe's largest business weekly.

Patrick Nduwimana is the director of Bonesha FM, an independent Burundian radio station. He has also reported for Reuters news agency since 2002, covering political, economic, financial and business news.

Ben Rawlence is working on a book about Somali refugees in Kenya with the support of a fellowship from the Open Society Foundation. He is the author of "Radio Congo: Signals of Hope from Africa's Deadliest War". He lives in London.

Eleanor Whitehead is a reporter at the *Financial Times* focusing on business, policy and development. She has a particular interest in sub-Saharan African consumer markets. Her work is also published in *Business Day*, *Forbes* and *The Independent*.

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John Endres	CEO
Constanza Montana	Editor
Daniel Browde	Deputy editor
Karen Hasse, Stephen Johnson, James Stent, Kate van Niekerk	Researchers, typesetters
Jami Gavin	Researcher
Leith Davis	Cover design

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Democratic Republic of Congo: Etienne Tshisekedi

Legendary fighter with an empty victory list

Portrait of an eternal challenger

by Kris Berwouts

Congolese opposition leader Etienne Tshisekedi, 81 years old, travelled to Belgium in September for medical treatment just as Joseph Kabila, the country's president, was expected to install a government of national cohesion.

Mr Kabila had announced the formation of this government in October 2013, after three weeks of "national dialogue" organised to broaden support for the regime.

This meeting divided the opposition. On one side was Léon Kengo wa Dondo, speaker of the senate and leader of a joint platform of opposition parties called the Republican Opposition. When he accepted Mr Kabila's invitation to participate, he positioned his party squarely in the Kabila government camp.

A more radical section of the opposition clustered around Vital Kamerhe and his Union of the Congolese Nation and Martin Fayulu, leader of the Citizens' Commitment for Development (ECIDE) party. They refused to participate in the discussions because they considered them meaningless, anti-constitutional and not much more than a congress of the presidential majority. They suspected that Mr Kabila was manoeuvring to stay in power beyond 2016, when he finishes his second and, according to the constitution, last term.

Messrs Kamerhe and Fayulu deride Mr Kengo as a sell-out: they think his supporters will rubber stamp the regime's strategy as long as they can be part of Mr Kabila's government.

© VoteTshisekedi

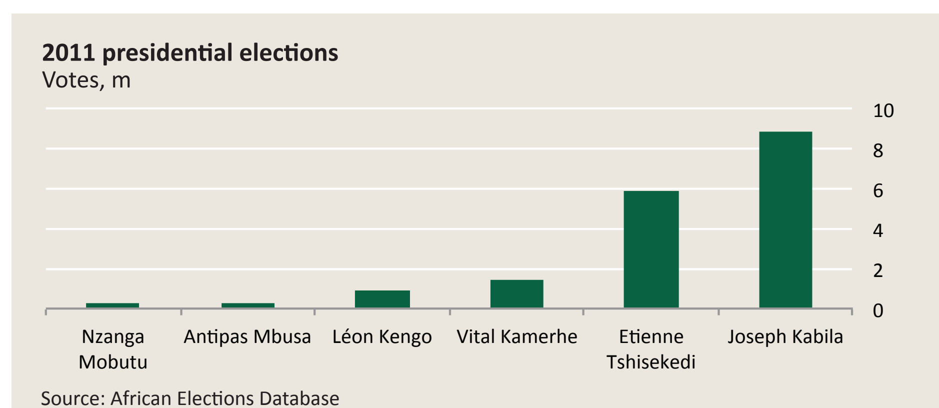
Tshisekedi talks

Since the November 2011 elections, the DRC's political opposition has been at sea and rudderless. Mr Tshisekedi has declined to steer it mostly because he considers himself the DRC's elected and legitimate president. A presidential candidate in the 2011 election, Mr Tshisekedi lost with 32.3% of the vote to Mr Kabila's 48.6% in polls that were marred by widespread allegations of fraud.

Mr Tshisekedi has simply refused to concede defeat.

This attitude has not only hindered the deployment of a

coherent and collective opposition, it has also weakened Mr Tshisekedi's own party, the Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS). After the 2011 elections Mr Tshisekedi forbade his elected members of Parliament (MPs) to take up their seats until he was installed as the DRC's rightful head of state. They ignored him. The confusion increased with the national dialogue: some UDPS MPs agreed to participate and others decided against it.



It was not always like this for Mr Tshisekedi, who cut his political teeth under Mobutu Sese Seko, dictator of this country when it was still called Zaire. He was born in 1932 in the Kasai, in the south-central region. He started his political career as justice minister in the government of South Kasai when this diamond-rich province declared independence in August 1960. After this secession was squelched, he joined Mr Mobutu and became a minister in several of his governments. For many years, Mr Tshisekedi was a prominent member of the executive bureau of Mr Mobuto's Popular Movement of the Revolution (MPR) party.

Considered one of the architects of this party stronghold, Mr Tshisekedi later devoted many years trying to demolish it. In November 1980 he led a group of 13 MPs who published an open letter critical of Mr Mobutu. A few weeks later, Mr Mobutu stripped Mr Tshisekedi of his parliamentary mandate and barred him from exercising his civil and political rights for five years.

This did not stop him, however, from forming his own political party, the UDPS, on February 15th 1982. One month later the police arrested him, the beginning of many years in and out of prison and house arrest. Despite his persecution, the UDPS managed to spread rapidly throughout the country.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, many African leaders lost their importance as Western pawns on the cold war chessboard. Democracy and human rights displaced geopolitical interests in Africa. The continent's leaders found themselves compelled to open political boundaries. On April 24th 1990 Mr Mobutu abolished the one-party state. Mr Tshisekedi was allowed to resume his political activities and his party was officially registered on January 17th 1991.

Mr Mobutu's last years were very confusing: in 1991 he organised the National Sovereign Conference (CNS) and invited 2,000 delegates from the country's various social, political and geographic interests. Its mandate was to agree on a blueprint for the country's future. On August 15th 1992, the CNS appointed Mr Tshisekedi prime minister. This did not last long: before the year ended, Mr Mobutu installed a counter-government with his own prime minister.

Then in 1994 Africa's "great war" began, sparked by the genocide in neighbouring Rwanda. It led to the collapse of Zaire in 1997, when the current president's father, Laurent Kabila, backed by Rwanda and Uganda, chased Mr Mobutu out. But Mr Tshisekedi failed to recognise the relevance of this new development. He never tried talking with the rebels. They never called him either. Mr Tshisekedi faded from the political scene.

But he returned in 2002 as a delegate to the Inter-Congolese Dialogue (ICD) at the Sun City resort in South Africa, organised to unite all armed and unarmed parties in the conflict in a transitional government. Mr Tshisekedi's ambition was to represent the opposition parties as vice-president. He failed and refused to sign the ICD's final agreement.

Mr Tshisekedi then went to Kigali, Rwanda's capital, to negotiate with the rebel group, Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD), which had started the war with Rwanda's support. They had not signed the ICD agreement either. Mr Tshisekedi's attempts to form a coalition with these rebels alienated many Congolese, particularly those in the east, where the war's impact had been highest.

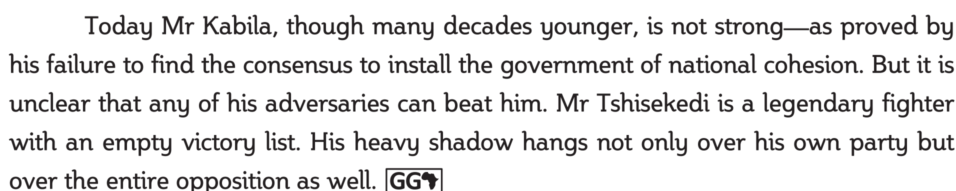
His UDPS did not participate in the transitional government that lasted from 2003 to 2006. The man who claimed to be the Congolese champion of democracy decided to boycott the multi-party elections in 2006, the first held in the country in four decades.

In December 2010, after another long absence spent in Europe for undisclosed medical reasons, Mr Tshisekedi emerged again to stand in the 2011 elections, just in time to capitalise on the anti-Kabila sentiment in Kinshasa and the western provinces.

Again Mr Tshisekedi made a political error and lost. Mr Kabila had changed the constitution in January 2011: he limited the presidential election to one round, thus avoiding facing a challenger in the second round who might win with the support of the other losing candidates. Mr Tshisekedi felt strong enough to stand in the elections without forming a coalition with the other opposition parties, a costly mistake.

Now apparently ill in Brussels, it is unclear if Mr Tshisekedi will ever return, and unlikely that he will ever again embody the people's dismay about the lack of progress under Mr Kabila.

Today Mr Kabila, though many decades younger, is not strong—as proved by his failure to find the consensus to install the government of national cohesion. But it is unclear that any of his adversaries can beat him. Mr Tshisekedi is a legendary fighter with an empty victory list. His heavy shadow hangs not only over his own party but over the entire opposition as well. GG



Few political rights exist in Ethiopia and even fewer voices criticise the government

The right to remain silent

by Ben Rawlence

The right to remain silent is one liberty not denied to critics of the Ethiopian government. Most other political entitlements have vanished. This explains the puzzle of Ethiopia's invisible political opposition: it is so battered and brutalised, tattered and torn, that what is left of its pieces may never fit together again.

The current government is mostly to blame. It came to power in 1991 after it toppled the communist military junta led by despot Mengistu Haile Mariam. The victorious coalition of ethnic militias promised a new dispensation, based on the concept of "ethnic federalism".

But nearly a quarter of a century later, Ethiopia remains a de facto one-party state. As countless analysts have noted, including successive European Union election observation missions, there is no separation between the government bureaucracy and the ruling Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). No political space is allowed to dissenting voices.

Most critics are behind bars, the first and main reason for the absence of a political opposition in Africa's oldest independent nation.

Of the 547 members of Parliament (MPs), only one is from an opposition party. Girma Seif Maru of the Unity for Democracy and Justice party (UDJ) is the lonely MP—window dressing whom the government allowed to win a seat in the last general election in 2010. But large swathes of the UDJ are in prison.

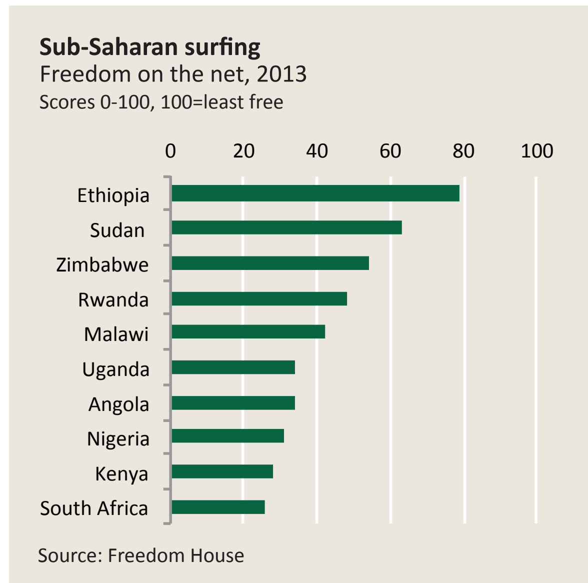
Other opposition party members, including Bekele Gerba, a leader of the Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement, and Olbana Lelisa of the Oromo People's Congress Party, were imprisoned days after meeting with representatives from Amnesty International in 2011.

Andualem Arage, the UDJ's vice-chairman, and another UDJ leader, Natnael Mekonnen, were put behind bars for debating the 2011 Arab spring rebellions. So was outspoken journalist Eskinder Nega, who posed questions about the possibility of a similar Ethiopian movement in his online pieces. In June 2012 Mr Andualem was sentenced to 75 years in prison, while Messrs Eskinder and Natnael got off lighter with 18 each.

They are just three of the thousands of government critics silenced in the slammer. Barely a month goes by without news of fresh arrests and detentions. In July, four more leaders of the UDJ, Arena Tigray and Semayawi ("Blue") opposition parties were detained. In addition, Andargachew Tsige, an Ethiopian opposition leader and British citizen, was arrested in Yemen and extradited to Addis Ababa, the capital, in July. He is facing the death penalty for allegedly plotting a coup in 2009.

In July 2013, thousands of people took to the streets of Addis Ababa demanding

the release of some of Ethiopia's estimated 30,000-40,000 political prisoners, according to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. The protestors also called for the repeal of a draconian anti-terror law that has been exploited to target legitimate opposition members. Crackdowns and arrests followed, including the detention of 40 UDJ activists who had distributed flyers encouraging people to protest.



The second reason for the opposition's muffled voice is fear: a decade or more of repression has taken its toll. The government spies on dissidents in the diaspora and uses its control of food aid to literally starve the opposition at home, according to Human Rights Watch. Yet, Ethiopia's citizens seem to passively accept each new transgression of their rights. They are just too scared to fight back.

A brief emancipatory moment swept Ethiopia in 2005. The ruling EPRDF, under the leadership of the late Meles Zenawi, allowed the forerunner of the UDJ, the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), a degree of freedom to campaign in the general elections that year. In polls that appeared relatively free, 174 opposition MPs were elected.

But the CUD disputed the results and protests erupted in the capital. Police killed nearly 200 unarmed protestors and arrested 40,000 CUD members and sympathisers in a nationwide clampdown, according to media reports. The memory of that brutality still casts a long shadow. Since then, the government has given no quarter.

This is the third factor explaining Ethiopia's invisible opposition: the government controls every aspect of daily life. In 2010 Human Rights Watch documented the strategic use of food aid, agricultural inputs such as seeds and fertilisers, access to microcredit, teacher training and even university admissions to encourage support for the ruling party.

It worked. In the 2008 local election the ruling party won 99% of the votes and 3m local government seats. In the 2010 general election, the debacle of 2005 was avoided and voting was peaceful. The EPRDF took 99.6% of the parliamentary slots, leaving the UDJ with the one decorative seat.

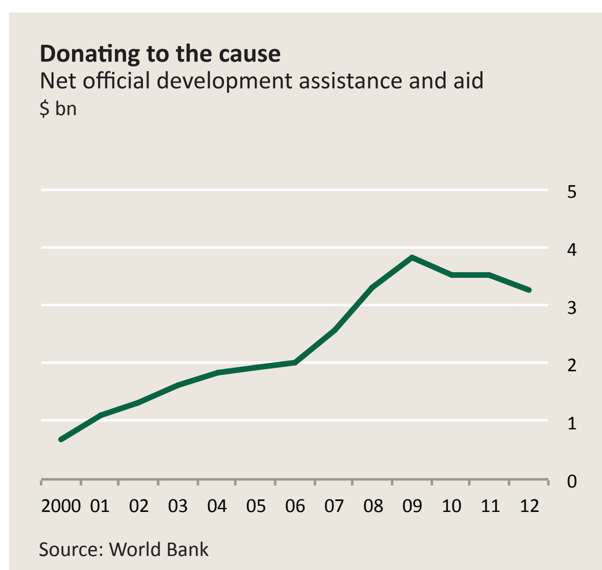
The final squeeze on the political opposition and any form of dissent has been the use of repressive laws. The 2009 anti-terror law has a sweeping definition of terrorism. Another 2009 law bans NGOs that engage in human rights or advocacy activities

from receiving more than 10% of their funds from abroad. It also requires all NGOs to re-register with a new government agency. This legislation closed down Ethiopia's critical organisations and made hundreds of activists redundant.

As long-time Ethiopia observer, René Lefort, commented in July in an article on the Open Democracy website: "When the political space is impermeable, the inevitable internal conflicts can only overflow into the ethnic and/or religious sphere."

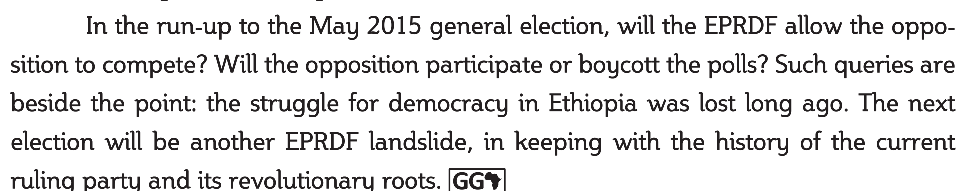
They have. The government has been jostling for the last two years with the Muslim community that objected to government attempts to interfere in the appointments of the Islamic council. Every Friday, peaceful protests are held at mosques in Addis Ababa. Every Friday security forces shut them down and jail religious leaders, as reported in the media and acknowledged implicitly by government statements.

In June more protests erupted just outside Addis Ababa in opposition to what is considered a discriminatory plan by the city council to expand the capital and displace many of the ethnic Oromos who live at its edges. The government often makes blanket accusations against critics based on their ethnicity, linking them to banned ethnic-based militias such as the Oromo Liberation Front and the Ogaden National Liberation Front, active in Ethiopia's eastern Somali region. At least 5,000 ethnic Oromos have been arrested between 2011 and 2014 based on their actual or suspected opposition to the government, according to an October 2014 Amnesty International report.



The EPRDF has portrayed itself as a vanguard party, charged with a sacred duty to articulate the "developmental state". Its dictum is "You are either with or against us." It has evolved a rich rhetoric for those who oppose it by labelling them "anti-development" or "neoliberal". In the meantime, the state's command economy depends on dollars from "neoliberal" donors. It took $3 billion in external assistance in 2012, according to the World Bank, more than any other country in Africa.

In the run-up to the May 2015 general election, will the EPRDF allow the opposition to compete? Will the opposition participate or boycott the polls? Such queries are beside the point: the struggle for democracy in Ethiopia was lost long ago. The next election will be another EPRDF landslide, in keeping with the history of the current ruling party and its revolutionary roots. GGA



Kenya: has Raila Odinga lost his taste for battle?

The faded promise of Raila Odinga's opposition coalition is part of a disheartening pattern in Kenyan politics

The fraying of CORD

by Mark Kapchanga

Raila Odinga cut his political teeth as a dogged opposition fighter in the 1990s. He was imprisoned three times for anti-government activity under the former president, Daniel arap Moi. His campaign to unseat Mr Moi's successor, Mwai Kibaki, led to the violent 2007-2008 impasse and his appointment as prime minister in a unity government. But since his defeat to Uhuru Kenyatta in the March 2013 election, Mr Odinga has gone uncharacteristically quiet.

In 2013 Mr Odinga's party, the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM), joined the Wiper Party and the Forum for the Restoration of Democracy-Kenya to form the Coalition for Reforms and Democracy (CORD). Mr Odinga ran for president on the CORD ticket with Wiper's leader, Mr Kalonzo Musyoka, as his running mate. CORD lost to Mr Kenyatta's Jubilee coalition in a closely-fought election.

Since then "CORD appears to have lost direction," said Jason Ondabu, a political analyst. "It is thriving more on public rallies than on holding Jubilee…to account."

© ODM

Off the rails

Internal divisions have weakened the coalition, Mr Ondabu said. At a political rally in September in Kenya's eastern Machakos County, Wiper's Mr Musyoka accused other CORD leaders, whom he did not name, of being agents for the ruling Jubilee coalition. Meanwhile CORD is split between young leaders and the old guard, which includes Mr Odinga, 69, and Mr Musyoka, 60.

Opposition parties "play the important role of shadowing government and proposing alternative strategies for management of public affairs", said Kamotho Waiganjo, a member of the Commission for the Implementation of the Constitution (CIC), a Nairobi-based government body.

But CORD has tabled just one motion before Parliament in the last

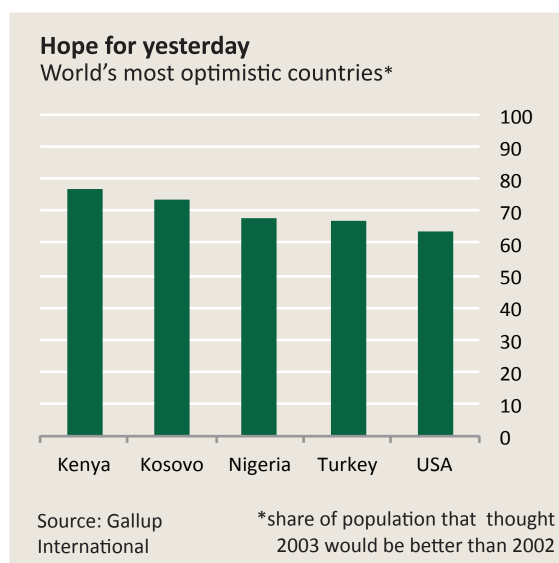
year. It sought to impeach the internal security cabinet secretary after a series of deadly incidents linked to Islamist militants the Shabab, including the Westgate Mall attack in 2013 that left more than 67 people dead. The motion was withdrawn two days later under unclear circumstances.

During Mr Odinga's three-month stay in the United States earlier this year, the coalition failed to present an alternative budget for the 2014-15 financial year. Presenting an alternative budget is customary for the Kenyan opposition.

A well-thought-out shadow budget would have helped CORD regain its footing, said Kenyan-born Mohamed Wehliye, senior vice-president at Riyad Bank in Saudi Arabia. "It would have swayed Kenyans [into thinking] that the opposition is alive. It would also have painted a positive picture of an opposition that not only criticises the government but is also ready to provide…solutions to address poor health care, insecurity and unemployment."

Mr Odinga denies his party has lost relevance. He blames the new constitution for CORD's perceived weakness. This new framework document, adopted in August 2010, altered the traditional roles of the opposition by barring a presidential candidate and his running mate from sitting as members of Parliament (MPs).

This means that neither Mr Odinga nor Mr Musyoka can head critical parliamentary committees such as the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), which has customarily been headed by the opposition leader. In keeping with this tradition, Ababu Namwamba, of Mr Odinga's ODM party, is the current PAC leader. Most Kenyan commentators, however, view him as a pale shadow of Mr Odinga and other past PAC chairs such as Mr Kibaki and Mr Kenyatta.



CORD's performance is par for the course: leaders promising to turn over a new, more democratic leaf have routinely disappointed citizens of this east African country.

In 2002 for example, Kenyans were the most optimistic people in the world, according to a Gallup International poll of 65 countries that year. This was one month before the January 2003 election in which Mr Kibaki's National Rainbow Coalition defeated the Kenya African National Union (KANU), which had ruled Kenya for 39 years.

Regrettably, the optimism was short-lived. Mr Kibaki's regime became quickly engulfed in high-level cases of corruption and greed, including the Anglo Leasing

scandal and the $98.7m Triton oil theft, among many others. This was coupled with a crackdown on media freedom.

"Opposition politics was practically dead then," said Edward Kisiang'ani, a politics professor at Kenyatta University. Mr Kenyatta, then the leader of KANU, the official opposition party, chose not to check government operations, Mr Kisiang'ani said. "It was a well-calculated tactic to support one of their own," he said, explaining that Mr Kibaki and Mr Kenyatta are both Kikuyu, Kenya's dominant ethnic group.

Mr Kenyatta's strategy bore fruit in the 2013 elections: Mr Kibaki supported Mr Kenyatta to become Kenya's fourth president.

Kenyans are once again paying a heavy price for the lack of opposition. "Political opposition plays a... critical role in checking government excesses," said the CIC's Mr Waiganjo.

But this countervailing force is missing and Mr Kenyatta's government has been implicated in several corruption scandals. These include the $3.7 billion standard gauge railway controversy and the $279.5 million school laptops tender. For Kenyans it brings back unwanted memories of the sleaze that stained the Moi and Kibaki administrations.

Kenya's next elections are scheduled for August 8th 2017. Mr Odinga needs to change tack for his party to become a relevant force again. He needs to show how CORD could tackle Kenya's crucial problems: terrorism, food insecurity and high unemployment.

He also needs to delegate party operations to youthful leaders such as MP Tawfiq Ababu Namwamba, 39, and Ali Hassan Joho, 38, the governor of Mombasa County. These young Turks can compete effectively with the youthful Mr Kenyatta, 53, and his equally dynamic deputy William Ruto, 47.

Finally, Mr Odinga must act to transform CORD into a truly national organisation. Kenyans perceive the party as a collective of his Luo tribe, controlled by Mr Odinga's relatives such as his cousin, Jakoyo Midiwo, the party's chief whip.

If Mr Odinga does not make these moves, the coalition does not stand a chance and competitive politics in Kenya will remain weak. The question is: does the old campaigner have any fight left in him? GG

Economic and social progress have come at a cost to political freedom

Stability's shadow

by François Misser

While Rwanda has a multi-party system, in practice it is a one-party state because the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), led by President Paul Kagame, tolerates little public dissent.

The RPF was originally a political-military movement. It was created in neighbouring Uganda in 1987 by Rwandan Tutsi refugees who had fled there after the 1959 overthrow of the Tutsi-led monarchy. While most of its initial members were Tutsi, the RPF is not a Tutsi party. It has Hutu members and its aim is to establish a non-ethnic regime, according to its political programme released in 2008.

The 1994 genocide ended when the RPF's military wing, the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA), defeated the old Rwandan army (known by its initials in French, FAR) which perpetrated the genocide. Mr Kagame was the military commander who led the RPA to victory in July 1994.

Of Rwanda's 11 registered parties, all but two—PS Imberakuri and the Democratic Green Party of Rwanda—have joined the RPF-led ruling coalition. These parties both formed relatively recently, in 2008 and 2009 respectively. Their political influence is minimal.

Historical reasons explain this one-sided political system. Many Rwandans identify the multi-party system, which prevailed between 1990 and 1994, with the 1994 genocide of almost 1m Tutsis and politically moderate Hutus. Before this mass murder, party ideology was closely connected to ethnicity.

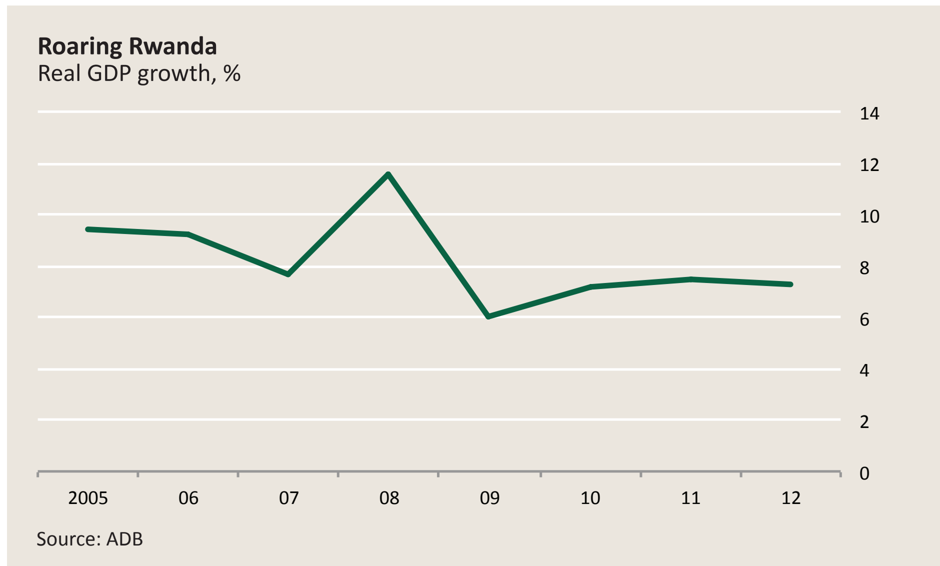
Since Mr Kagame has taken over, he has banned the mention of ethnicity, which appeared on identification documents under the previous regime and facilitated the genocide. Some critics claim he uses this prohibition to quash dissent and free speech in the name of promoting ethnic cohesion.

© ITU/J.Ohle

Paul Kagame

Rwanda has achieved remarkable economic and social

progress in the last 20 years. Since 2005 GDP has grown at an average of 8% a year, according to the African Development Bank (ADB). In 2012 the rate was 7.7% and it was expected to remain above 7% in 2014.



Rwanda is perceived as the fourth least corrupt country in Africa in 2013 after Botswana, Cape Verde and Seychelles, according to Transparency International, the Berlin-based watchdog.

Mortality of children under the age of five decreased from 76 to 52 per 100,000 between 2008 and 2013, according to UN figures. Primary school enrolment increased from 86.6% in 2006 to 91.7% in 2011. Literacy among 15-24 year olds rose from 76.8% in 2006 to 83.7% in 2011.

The proportion of the population living in poverty decreased substantially from 79% to 63% between 2000 and 2011, according to the latest World Bank figures.

Though Rwanda has made much progress it has been at the cost of free speech, association and other basic human rights.

In the most recent presidential election, in 2010, Mr Kagame barely had any competition, running against three of his political allies. He won 93% of the vote in the August 2010 poll, with a voter turnout of 97.5%, according to the Stockholm-based International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

The Rwandan opposition sits in an uncomfortable—and sometimes dangerous—position. André Kagwa Rwisereka, vice-chairman of the opposition Democratic Green Party, was found partially beheaded in July 2010, a month before the election. No one was ever prosecuted for the crime.

Bernard Ntaganda, leader of the opposition PS Imberakuri, was arrested in 2010 and charged with planning "unauthorised" demonstrations and "divisionism", after making public speeches criticising government policies. Sentenced in 2011 to four years in prison, Mr Ntaganda was released in June 2014.

The beheading and arrest, as well as the incarceration of other dissidents and journalists, are a clear message to anyone who might challenge the government. The government began cracking down on the independent press in the late 2000s in advance of presidential elections, according to an April 2014 report from the Committee to Protect Journalists, a New York-based NGO.

In April 2014, Paris-based Reporters Without Borders posted on its website that it was "worried" by the arrest of radio journalist Cassien Ntamuhanga. It mentioned that two other journalists had fled abroad and that a news website had been hacked. "While apparently not linked, these events have helped to fuel a climate of fear and self-censorship among media personnel," according to the watchdog's website.

Several leaders of unregistered opposition parties are in prison. Deogratias Mushayidi, leader of the People's Democratic Pact-Imanzi (PDP-Imanzi), is serving a life sentence for his alleged involvement in grenade attacks that killed ten people in Kigali in 2010.

Victoire Ingabire, president of the unregistered United Democratic Forces (FDU) was sentenced in 2010 to 15 years in prison for allegedly transferring money to the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (or FDLR, its initials in French), a Hutu armed group established in the Democratic Republic of Congo after the 1994 genocide.

© victoire-ingabire.com

Victoire Ingabire

Ms Ingabire has been accused of genocide denial because in 2010 she asked why the victims of the "Hutu genocide" had not been recognised. Genocide denial is against the law in Rwanda and is punishable by imprisonment.

The squelching of debate and free speech in Rwanda has not had the intended effect, making the social reconciliation process unstable, wrote Maina Kiai, the UN's special rapporteur on the right to free assembly, in a June report.

While Mr Kiai commended Rwanda for its "progress in the areas of good governance, including rule of law and institution-building, and in ensuring stability and security", he noted that the country's approach to achieving reconciliation is undermined by the limited space given to dissenting voices. "Several interlocutors emphasised that Rwanda favours a political order based on so-called 'consensus'," Mr Kiai wrote. "But

this consensus is led by the ruling party and, as a result, discourages public criticism and dissent."

The prevailing political mood in Rwanda is so closed that many Rwandan politicians have gone abroad to create political organisations. One of the most active of these is the Rwandan National Congress (RNC), formed in 2010 in Bethesda, Maryland by former close collaborators of Mr Kagame, including Theogene Rudasingwa, the former RPF secretary-general.

In a joint meeting held with the FDU-Inkingi in Johannesburg in 2013, the RNC called for the release of "prisoners of conscience" and the opening of political space. The RNC does not provide estimates on how many such prisoners are held in Rwanda.

While it continues along the road of economic and social progress, it is desirable for Rwanda to have a more open democratic system.

The Coalition of Political Parties for Change (or CDC, its initials in French) is the most recent opposition group, formed in May 2014 in Brussels. The CDC brings together four groups: the Rwanda Dream Initiative, the party of Faustin Twagiramungu, a former prime minister; the FDLR; the Rwandan Democratic Union; and Mr Ntaganda's wing of the PS Imberakuri.

Exiled politicians have also been targets of violence. On May 16th 1998, Rwanda's former minister of the interior, Seth Sendashonga, was shot dead in Nairobi. His murder was "likely to be directly connected to his frequent criticisms…of human rights violations by the current government and security forces in Rwanda", according to a 1998 Amnesty International report.

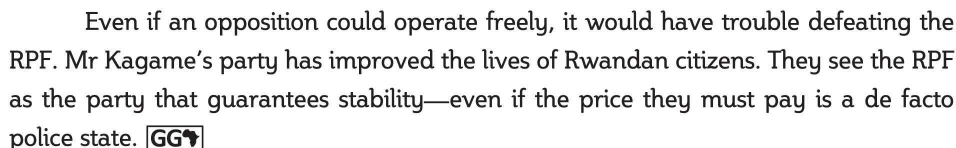
In June 2010 and September 2011 another RNC leader, Gen Faustin Kayumba Nyamwasa, escaped two assassination attempts in South Africa. Gen Nyamwasa may have been considering military actions with the FDLR against Rwanda, suggested a 2010 UN report.

More recently, on December 31st 2013, one of the founders of the RNC, the former Rwandan military intelligence chief Col Patrick Karegeya, was killed in a plush Johannesburg hotel. No one has been arrested for his murder.

While it continues along the road of economic and social progress, it is desirable for Rwanda to have a more open democratic system. This depends on creating a model that does not question the genocide while also opening up the political space.

Although Mr Kagame's government can be credited for much of Rwanda's development gains, some Rwandans and foreigners regret that these advances were not achieved in a more open political system.

Even if an opposition could operate freely, it would have trouble defeating the RPF. Mr Kagame's party has improved the lives of Rwandan citizens. They see the RPF as the party that guarantees stability—even if the price they must pay is a de facto police state. GG



Government undermines the opposition at every turn

No room to move

by Patrick Nduwimana

Tension is mounting in Burundi ahead of presidential, legislative and municipal elections scheduled for 2015. The opposition, the press and other government critics are finding their political space increasingly narrowed by new laws that forbid public gatherings and restrict the media.

In June 2013 a restrictive press law was passed. A draft law imposing tight controls on non-profit organisations poses a further threat to free expression. The ruling party's youth wing is intimidating, harassing, raping and killing members of the political opposition with impunity, according to international human rights groups. Proposed changes to the constitution to allow the president to run for a third term, although defeated by one vote, threatened to reverse gains made in consolidating Burundi as a peaceful and democratic nation. A new law governing land is considered by many to have an anti-Tutsi bias, fuelling ethnic unrest.

Since independence in 1962, rivalries between the usually dominant Tutsi minority and Hutu majority have plagued this tiny east African country, sometimes spilling over into the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda. When Tutsi extremists assassinated Hutu politician Melchior Ndadaye three months after he was elected president in 1993, in Burundi's first multi-party election, the country began its slide into a 16-year civil war.

Hold on tight: Pierre Nkurunziza

The war officially ended in 2009. The following year Burundi held its second election by universal suffrage. After the municipal polls, five leading opposition parties complained of vote-rigging and withdrew from the presidential and parliamentary elections. This left the door open for Pierre Nkurunziza and his National Council for the Defence of Democracy–Forces for the Defence of Democracy (CNDD-FDD, from its French initials) to win unopposed. Mr Nkurunziza had already been

in power since 2005, when members of an interim parliament chose him as president.

After the 2010 elections Burundi "experienced two years of instability and violence…generally blamed on the activities of the CNDD-FDD youth wing, the *Imbonerakure* [meaning "those that see far"], the intelligence services and the police," according to a July 2014 report from the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), a South African-based think-tank. "Most opposition leaders fled the country, leaving a political vacuum."

Once hailed as a peace-building success story, this nation of nearly 10m people spun into uncertainty in February 2014, after the junior party in the governing coalition, the Tutsi-led Union for National Progress (Uprona) quit the Hutu-led government, raising fears of new ethnic unrest. Bernard Busokoza, Burundi's vice-president and a leading Uprona member, had opposed the proposed amendment to constitutional term limits. The president sacked him.

This followed a pattern that has emerged in the last decade, in which Mr Nkurunziza has politicised state institutions such as the police and army and has stifled the opposition's ability to challenge the ruling party, according to the ISS. Ethnic Tutsis also accuse a government-appointed land commission of ruling in favour of Hutus. "Tensions are compounded by limited economic growth…and limited infrastructure," the ISS report stated.

Burundi is one of the world's poorest nations, with a per capita income of $280 in 2013, according to a 2014 World Bank report. It is also one of the hungriest, according to the 2014 Global Hunger Index, an annual survey published by the Washington, DC-based International Food Policy Research Institute, Welthungerlife, a German NGO, and Concern Worldwide, an international humanitarian organisation. The UNDP reports that 58% of children in Burundi face chronic malnutrition.

Since narrowly defeating the constitutional amendment in March, opposition MPs claim the government has deployed local authorities and police to harass, intimidate and split their parties. "Opposition leaders are victims of judicial harassment," said Léonce Ngendakumana, chairman of the Alliance for Democratic Change (ADC-Ikibiri), a coalition of eight opposition parties.

On October 2nd Mr Ngendakumana was sentenced to a year in jail and fined $600 for slander after writing to UN chief Ban Ki-Moon. In his letter he warned of an impending genocide in Burundi, based on the attacks by the CNDD-FDD's youth wing against opposition members. He remains free pending an appeal.

Another opposition leader, Agathon Rwasa, is not only battling a pending criminal case, but also what he claims is the ruling party's deliberate division of his party, the Forces for National Liberation (FNL). The Congolese Tutsi community filed a criminal complaint against Mr Rwasa in August 2013 over his alleged involvement in the killing of 166 refugees in August 2004.

After his party came second in the 2010 municipal poll with 15% of the votes, Mr Rwasa boycotted the presidential poll and then fled the country, citing fears for his safety. His FNL colleagues fired him shortly afterwards. Although he returned in August 2013 after a near two-year absence, the FNL elected another leader in October 2013.

Mr Rwasa, however, denounces this move as a ruling party ploy and claims he is still the legitimate FNL chairman. "The interior minister has ordered all local government authorities across the country…to stop me from meeting my supporters," he said. "The ruling party is using all kinds of strategies to make sure the reunification process of [the FNL] does not take place."

The Tutsi-dominant Uprona is also divided by internal disputes that it claims the ruling party has created.

"Political parties that can compete with the CNDD-FDD have been split into two factions, one of which is backed by the ruling party," said Tatien Sibomana, spokesman for a faction of Uprona. Opposition parties have been either "destabilised or simply dismantled", he said.

In addition to Uprona and the FNL, the Union for Peace and Development (UPD) has also split into rival factions. The government suspended the Movement for Solidarity and Democracy (MSD) between March and August 2014, after clashes with police. A court sentenced 21 MSD members to life in prison for "insurrection". Another ten were sentenced to ten years and 14 were sentenced to five. The MSD chairman and former radio journalist Alexis Sinduhije escaped police custody and fled to Belgium. Burundi's government has issued an international warrant for his arrest.

In June the government adopted a restrictive press law that threatens the protection of sources and restricts the subjects on which journalists can report. Under the new law, journalists can be prosecuted and made to pay heavy fines for reporting about issues such as the economy or national security.

Burundi's government denies that it is dividing the opposition or curbing freedom of expression and assembly. "Every day in the media we hear opposition parties and civil society criticising government's actions, even criticising the head of state, without fear," said government spokesman Philippe Nzobonariba.

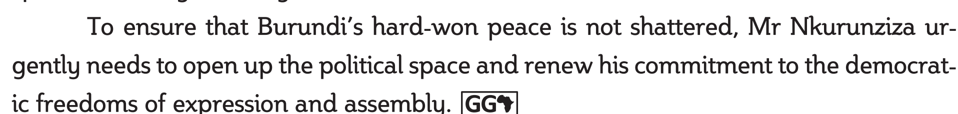
Political observers reject the government's line. "Ahead of the 2015 elections, the ruling CNDD-FDD is doing everything it can to weaken opposition parties that might challenge it," said Achille Barancira, a political science lecturer at Université Lumière in Bujumbura, the capital. "When one is in power, one wants to stay there and all means are useful for that purpose," Mr Barancira said.

But Mr Barancira did not heap all the blame at the government's door. He also criticised opposition party members who are easily bribed.

In addition, he expressed serious concerns about the fairness of the elections scheduled for May and June 2015. "What kind of credibility can we give [to elections]… in which all serious candidates will be either in prison or still in exile?" he asked.

As the government denies its opponents the political space to operate, anger is mounting. The 2015 elections could be a powder keg that sees this anger explode and spread into neighbouring countries.

To ensure that Burundi's hard-won peace is not shattered, Mr Nkurunziza urgently needs to open up the political space and renew his commitment to the democratic freedoms of expression and assembly.



The ruling NRM, fused with the state, keeps a firm grip on power while opposition parties suffer internal organisational failure

The challenged life of the challenger

by Moses Khisa

In the early years of African independence, military regimes and single-party dictatorships ruled most of the continent's countries. Competitive elections were rare.

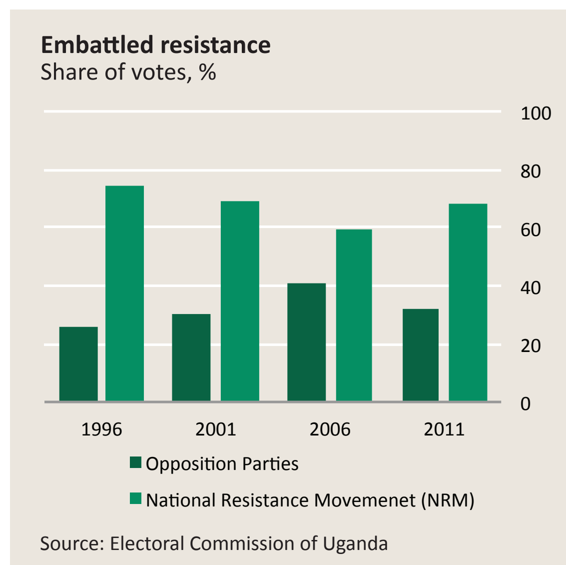
From the early 1960s to the end of the 70s, only about 55 elections were held in Africa, averaging three per year, wrote American political scientists Daniel Posner and Daniel Young in 2007 in the *Journal of Democracy*. Most of these were not competitive, multi-party polls; they were merely referenda that served to endorse autocratic rule.

Incumbent parties and their leaders won all these elections with the exception of Somalia's first president, Aden Abdullah Osman, who lost to Abdirashid Ali Shermarke in 1967. (Mr Osman set the record as the first African president to step down peacefully after serving two terms.)

A slight improvement took place in the 1980s, with about 36 African elections, or 3.6 per year. Only one incumbent party lost, in Mauritius, in 1982.

In the next decade, a wave of democratisation in Eastern Europe set in motion a renewed push for competitive party politics in Africa. From 1990 through to 2005, Africa held more than 100 elections, averaging nearly seven elections each year.

Currently, at least ten elections are held in Africa every year. Yet one constant remains: a weak opposition and dominant ruling parties. The latter still win 80% of all elections held.



Opposition parties' victories in national elections have been few and scattered—in Benin and Zambia in 1991, Ghana in 2000 and 2008, Kenya in 2002, Côte d'Ivoire in 2010, Senegal in 2012, Zambia again in 2012, and Malawi in May 2014.

Uganda is an unambiguous example of a single-party system and a weak and fragmented opposition. The country's experience with multi-party politics is tenuous.

From independence in 1962 to the capture of power by Yoweri Museveni's guerrilla rebels in 1986, only one multi-party election was held: in 1980, when Milton Obote's Uganda People's Congress (UPC) defeated the Democratic Party (DP) and the Uganda Patriotic Movement (UPM) in a highly disputed election.

Since 1986, the National Resistance Movement (NRM) has maintained a firm grip on power. Its chairman, Mr Museveni, now 70, will be running for a record fifth five-year term in 2016. Having ruled unelected up to 1996, Mr Museveni's combined stay in power by 2016 will total 30 years, making him one of Africa's longest-ruling authoritarian leaders.

In a rather bloated national legislature of 385 seats, including unelected members of cabinet, the ruling party holds an absolute majority of 295 backed by a few dozen independents. The combined opposition has only 60 members of Parliament (MPs). This dominance is duplicated at the local, district and sub-county levels.

Mr Museveni has exploited legal and extra-legal manoeuvres to cripple opposition to his increasingly authoritarian rule. Shortly after assuming the presidency, he banned political parties for 19 years until a 2005 referendum restored multi-party politics.

2011 NRM election posters

Mr Museveni is quick to chide his opponents: "There is no genuine opposition in Uganda," but rather "political careerists and purveyors of falsehoods", he told a victory party in the capital Kampala after the March 2011 elections.

The structure of Uganda's national politics, the historical interplay between society and state and the internal weakness in political parties have crippled the country's opposition. Three factors explain why.

First, much like other African countries with little experience in liberal principles, the ruling NRM continues to promulgate an environment that is hostile to multi-party politics. From Mr Obote's single-party system of the 1960s and Idi Amin's dictatorship in the 70s to Mr Museveni's no-party politics in the 80s and 90s, the military has played a preponderant role and displaced competitive elections.

"In those countries where the military has been a key political player—in Angola, Egypt, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Sudan, Uganda, etc—state resources are deployed to ensure retention of power by the ruling party," said Augustine Ruzindana, deputy secretary-general of the main opposition party, the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC). Thus, "mobilisation, membership recruitment, and fundraising are made impossible or difficult for opposition parties," Mr Ruzindana added.

In Uganda, the state is synonymous with the ruling NRM. The state's coercive machinery is directed at defeating the opposition as witnessed during the 2011 walk-to-work protests against high food and fuel prices.

The NRM and Mr Museveni equate opposition with subversion of the state, making Uganda's political structure fundamentally unprogressive. While in developed democracies official opposition is a government-in-waiting, "in Africa, opposition parties are seen as detractors and enemies of the ruling parties or even the nation," noted Asnake Kefale, a politics professor at Addis Ababa University.

Second, Africa's limited experience with open and competitive politics means long-standing political constituencies are not aligned to clear ideological persuasions, according to Richard Joseph, a political science professor at Northwestern University in the US.

Instead, parties are founded on religious affiliations, regional and ethnic blocs, as was the case with two Ugandan parties: the UPC, which is mainly Anglican and based in the east and north; and the DP, largely Catholic and rooted in central Uganda.

Today religion and ethnicity play a less prominent role. But the main opposition party, the FDC, nevertheless lacks a clear-cut political constituency. It is not a party for workers (a very small fraction of the population), the middle class (equally very small), or the peasant masses (who are the majority).

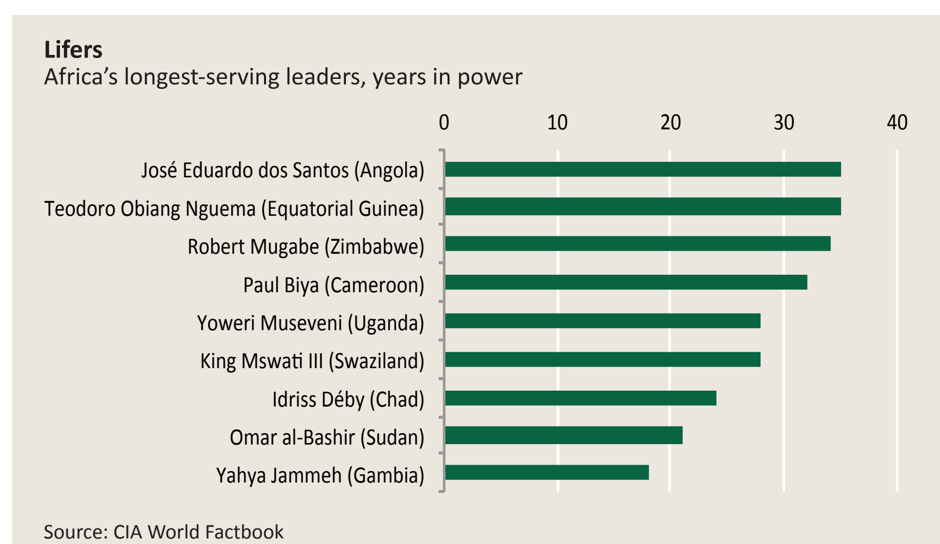
Without a political base, the FDC cannot raise funding from party members. "Most people will find it easier to contribute [to] weddings and burials the year round than contribute on a sustained basis to political party activities," said Mugisha Muntu, a retired army general and now FDC president.

Third, and arguably most important: the state controls material resources in a country where the ruling party is firmly entrenched. Uganda is one of Africa's most privatised and liberalised economies. But the state remains a big business player and indirectly wields a financial whip.

"There is a desk in the Internal Security Organisation that monitors all business activities remotely associated with the opposition," three-time losing presidential candidate, Kizza Besigye, said over lunch in Kampala in July. Such businesses are denied government tenders, targeted by the tax agency and subjected to other crippling

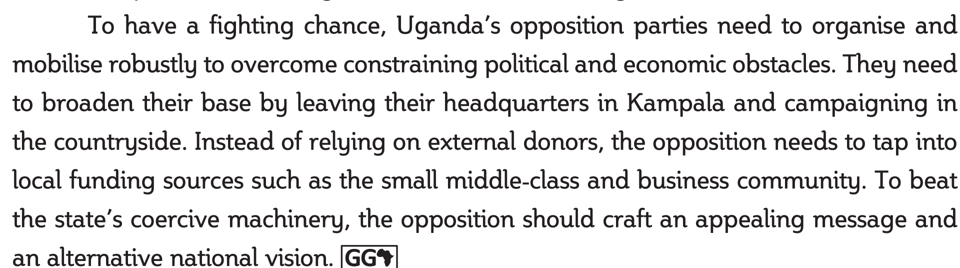
government constraints, he said.

For Frederick Golooba-Mutebi, columnist for *The East African* newspaper, a vital problem for opposition parties is that “they have no money”. Unable to raise funds, Uganda’s opposition parties cannot recruit and retain quality leadership and a credible following. “They have limited reach: no party structures, hardly any regular contact with their supposed supporters and members, and total absence of activities geared at recruiting new members,” Mr Golooba-Mutebi added.



Critics and opposition leaders accuse the NRM of gross incumbency abuse. Incumbency, however, can backfire when the party in power is confronted with a well-organised opposition, for at least two reasons.

First, precisely because of perceived and actual incumbency advantages, ruling parties suffer succession struggles as members jostle for positions when a long-reigning ruler finally bows out. This happened in Ghana in 2000 (with Jerry Rawlings) and Kenya in 2002 (with Daniel arap Moi). It could have transpired in Uganda in 2006 had Mr Museveni not bribed MPs to remove term limits, as reported in local and international media and alleged by some MPs.



Second, the electorate can be rallied to vote out the incumbent party for its poor performance. Organisational failures within the FDC and other opposition parties, however, have prevented holding the NRM to account in Uganda.

To have a fighting chance, Uganda’s opposition parties need to organise and mobilise robustly to overcome constraining political and economic obstacles. They need to broaden their base by leaving their headquarters in Kampala and campaigning in the countryside. Instead of relying on external donors, the opposition needs to tap into local funding sources such as the small middle-class and business community. To beat the state’s coercive machinery, the opposition should craft an appealing message and an alternative national vision. GG

Egypt: parties v individuals

Electoral law reserving the bulk of parliamentary seats for independent candidates will entrench executive power

Taming the tiger

by Kristen McTighe

Hossam Eldin Ali sits in his office in Maadi, an upscale neighbourhood on the outskirts of Cairo. He complains of the obstacles he faces in creating his new liberal opposition party, the Liberal Youth Party.

To register, he says, he needs thousands of signatures of supporters from across the country, each certified by the authorities—a feat that will cost about $100,000, he estimates. To run his campaign he must get police permission because a new law bans protests without prior approval. Media coverage is almost impossible because the press is hostile to anyone opposing the regime, he says.

Despite these roadblocks, Mr Eldin Ali, 38, is determined to create a strong party. But his biggest hurdle, he says, are new laws designed to weaken parties.

Two days before he left office in June 2014, former interim president Adly Mansour passed a law reserving 420 of Parliament's 567 seats (about 75%) for individual candidates who do not run on a registered party ticket. Individual-candidate systems favour local, powerful businessmen or political actors eager to ingratiate themselves with a president, over opposition parties.

"We believe this was done on purpose" to bolster the president and keep the opposition down, Mr Eldin Ali says. "It means we won't be able to get a majority in Parliament" to counterbalance the president's power, he adds.

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Unchallenged: Abdul Fattah al-Sisi

Since the July 2013 military overthrow of Egypt's first freely elected president, Muhammad Morsi, space for dissent has shrunk. After labelling Egypt's largest opposition group, the Muslim Brotherhood, a terrorist organisation, the interim government banned its political wing, the Freedom and Justice Party. It also excluded other Islamist parties under a clause in the country's new constitution that outlaws religion-based parties.

With last May's presidential election dominated by former army general Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, and the country heading towards a Parliament comprised of individuals and not political parties, many fear Egypt is returning to the days when the opposition

was co-opted and became a tool to legitimise authoritarianism.

When Mr Sisi swept the May poll with 96.1% of the vote, foreign observers from the European Union and other independent monitoring groups concluded that the repressive political environment made a genuinely democratic election impossible.

Hamdeen Sabahi, of the left-wing Egyptian Popular Current party, was Mr Sisi's sole challenger. He admitted before the election that he believed the playing ground was uneven, but still participated. During the election, Mr Sabahi's campaign withdrew its monitors from polling stations, complaining that security forces were excluding, assaulting and even arresting their observers. Despite this, Mr Sabahi accepted the results.

Following the 2011 revolution, when Mubarak-era restrictions on forming new parties were lifted, a host of newly formed liberal parties with little experience in mobilising voters gained few seats.

For many, this was evidence that he was no more than a pawn used to legitimise the election. "He knew the elections were manipulated and he still accepted the elections: this isn't real opposition," says Ahmad Abd Allah, a leader of the now-banned April 6 Movement, one of the pro-democracy youth groups that led the 2011 revolution which toppled Hosni Mubarak. "Hamdeen Sabahi was just part of the game."

The 2014 constitution grants wide-ranging powers to Parliament. Its mixed system framework allows the majority party or coalition to form a government with its leader as the prime minister and the second executive authority after the president.

But these powers will be irrelevant without strong parties. For this reason, opposition forces have roundly condemned the new electoral law.

"Egypt has become adept in putting into place electoral systems that look democratic on the face, but really what they've done is they've cherry-picked provisions and put them together into a system intended to confine competition," says Michele Dunne, senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace's Middle East programme and a specialist on Egypt.

Mr Sisi and his supporters claim the new law opens the political process to independent individuals without party backing. Following the 2011 revolution, when Mubarak-era restrictions on forming new parties were lifted, a host of newly formed liberal parties with little experience in mobilising voters gained few seats. Islamists, notably the Muslim Brotherhood, with a long history of organised opposition, became the dominant force in Parliament.

Ms Dunne says she expects to see competition at a local level, with supporters of the pre-revolutionary regime and pro-military figures competing against each other, while liberal parties will be at a disadvantage. The clause in the new constitution that bans religion-based parties means Islamist parties are excluded almost entirely.

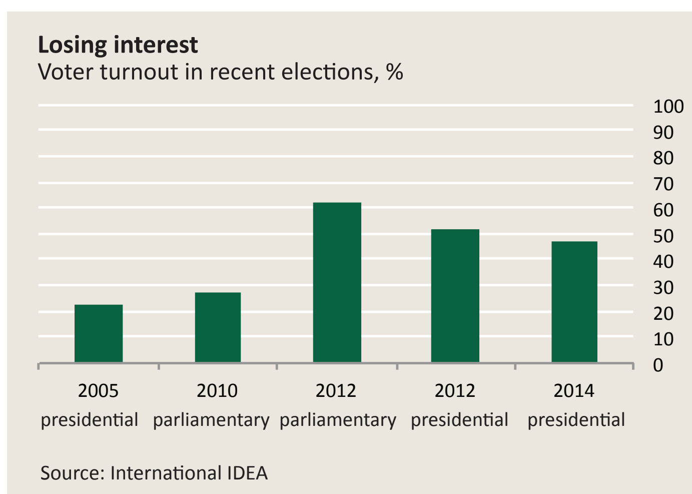
During Mr Morsi's rule, the Islamist-dominated Parliament pushed through

similarly controversial electoral laws, seen by the liberal opposition to favour Islamists.

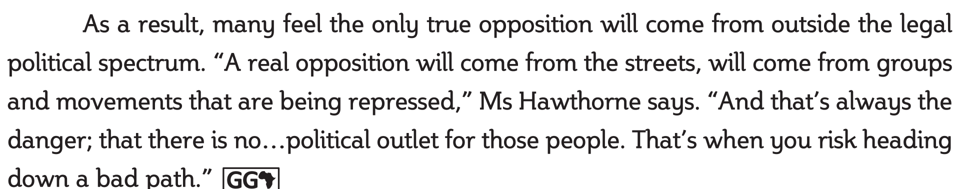
Ironically, it is members of the old guard, banned from politics while the Islamists ruled, who will benefit from the latest system, Ms Dunne says. "What we've seen repeatedly, including from the Brotherhood when it was in power, is those in power trying to impose their will on the others, as opposed to hammering out deals among different political actors, such as you've seen in Tunisia," Ms Dunne says.

Amy Hawthorne, a resident senior fellow with the Atlantic Council's Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East, says "legal opposition" is "a strange term when you have a protest law that doesn't allow people to protest, and very, very circumscribed rights and freedom, and there isn't really opposition allowed…in any meaningful way."

Under the new electoral law, Egypt's Parliament will be fractured and confusing. Many independent candidates, detached from political parties, will be unable to cohere in any significant way to offer a check on executive power. "Unfortunately, it may provide further example to the Egyptian public of how ineffective civic politics and civilian politicians are," she says. Parliament will become a "very feckless body that can't get anything done, thereby further reinforcing the image of Sisi and a military-backed president as the only real alternative…who can be competent and effective".



Many Egyptians, particularly the youth, have already shown signs that they are losing faith in the political process altogether. In Egypt's first presidential election after Mr Mubarak's removal, in 2012, voter turnout was 52%, according to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), a Stockholm-based intergovernmental organisation. In May's presidential elections, only 46% of nearly 54m registered voters cast ballots, according to the government, even though voting was extended by one day to boost turnout. "The youth don't believe that there is a democratic process. They aren't interested and this won't allow for real political parties to develop," April 6's Mr Abd Allah says.



As a result, many feel the only true opposition will come from outside the legal political spectrum. "A real opposition will come from the streets, will come from groups and movements that are being repressed," Ms Hawthorne says. "And that's always the danger; that there is no…political outlet for those people. That's when you risk heading down a bad path." GG

Algeria: progress?

The political opposition in this north African country is still divided along secular and Islamist lines

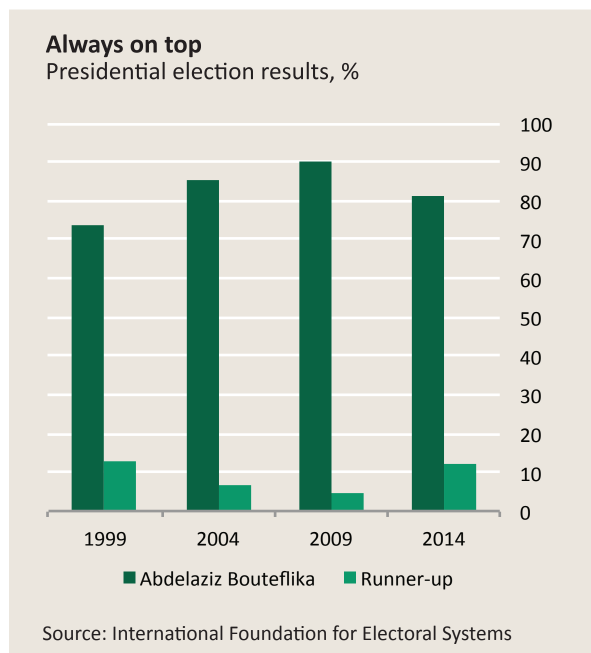
Stumbling towards unity

by Karine Barzegar

In September, Ali Benflis, a former prime minister and twice-defeated presidential candidate, released a 278-page report detailing alleged electoral fraud during Algeria's most recent presidential election.

The April 17th poll handed President Abdelaziz Bouteflika—77 years old, wheelchair-bound and scarcely seen in public since suffering a stroke in 2013—his fourth consecutive five-year term with 81.5% of the vote.

The fraud report includes copies of letters and polling station records showing dead voters on the electoral roll and male voters casting ballots for women without proxy documents. It also accuses the Algerian government of misusing state resources to benefit Mr Bouteflika. The alleged fraud was "massive, obvious and contemptuous" and amounted to "major political violence", according to the report, which has been published on the web.



So far the government has not responded to the report's allegations of systemic fraud. In April, during the electoral campaign, when Mr Benflis first raised the dangers of vote-rigging, Mr Bouteflika responded by accusing him of "terrorism through television".

The report was released three months after opposition parties met with the goals of building a unified opposition bloc to Mr Bouteflika's government, reforming Algeria's institutions and paving the way for new elections. About 400 people representing various opposition parties as well as intellectuals and human rights activists had met in June and created the National Coordination for Liberties and Democratic Transition (CNLTD). This umbrella group unites secular political parties—including Jil Jadid (Arabic for "new generation") and Rally for Culture

and Democracy (RCD)—with Islamist parties such as Ennahda and the Movement of the Society for Peace (MSP), the latter close to the Muslim Brotherhood.

The CNLTD declined government invitations to take part in recent talks to reform the constitution. Held in June and July by Ahmed Ouyahia, a former prime minister and the president's current chief of staff, the discussions involved about 100 leaders from government, NGOs as well as labour leaders and academics. In its refusal, the CNLTD said the government was using the discussions to divert attention from its lack of serious reform plans.

"President Bouteflika has launched these consultations to gain time, to distract the population and to send signals of democratic openness to foreign powers, to give the image of a country that is changing, but it is a cosmetic manoeuvre," said Abdelaziz Rahabi, a CNLTD member. "What proves my point is that Ahmed Ouyahia said he presented his findings to the president and we haven't heard anything about it since."

Jil Jadid's leader, Sofiane Djilali, sees the formation of the CNLTD as a good beginning to unite opposition parties and have them speak with one voice, a first since Algeria's independence. "Political opposition in Algeria has matured a lot," he said. "Its strategy is beginning to appear and it is shared by a group of partners whose approach and ideological references are eclectic."

The CNLTD held more conferences in September and October, part of its continuing effort to promote its agenda and change the perception that the Algerian opposition is split between Islamist conservatives and secular reformists. This picture is not far removed from reality because the coalition is still divided by differences in ideology and the role of religion in politics.

"The opposition has started to gather around the CNLTD, and we see alliances between secular and religious parties that didn't exist before," said Mouloud Boumghar, a law professor who works in Paris and in Algiers. "But it seems like the [Islamist] MSP holds the upper hand, and parties like RCD, who've been in charge in the past and even took part in previous governments, are now lagging behind."

The presence of Islamist parties in the alliance is one of the reasons the Barakat civil movement—a notable absentee—did not join the CNLTD.

A group of journalists, intellectuals, doctors, teachers and others founded Barakat (which means "Enough" in Algerian Arabic) in the run-up to the 2014 poll. They called for a boycott of the April election, denouncing the 2008 constitutional amendment that allowed the president to serve more than two consecutive five-year terms.

Barakat has more than 37,000 followers on Facebook. Its demonstrations in Algiers in March and April drew hundreds. Although these numbers are small, they are noteworthy given that a law forbids rallies in the capital and the country seems to be under military rule. Police harassed, beat and arrested the protestors.

Since the April election, Barakat has held discussions with other opposition groups but has remained independent, asserting its will to stay a civilian and secular movement. "Algeria has had a very painful history with terrorism and Islamism and we cannot fall into the same traps," said Amira Bouraoui, a Barakat founder. "We want a

secular state," she said.

"Our platform insists on the separation of religion and politics," Ms Bouraoui added. "We can talk with parties such as [the] RCD and Jil Jadid, but not with those who do not recognise the role of women. We cannot advance with people who do not put their cards on the table regarding the very concept of democracy."

Another secular party, the Socialist Forces Front (FFS), has also refused to join the CNLTD. Instead, it has participated in government-hosted meetings, preferring to work on "bilateral ties with political and social forces", according to its first secretary Mohamed Nebbou. The absence of the FFS, Algeria's oldest opposition party founded in 1963, also weakens the coalition.

© Mouvement Barakat

Enough already!

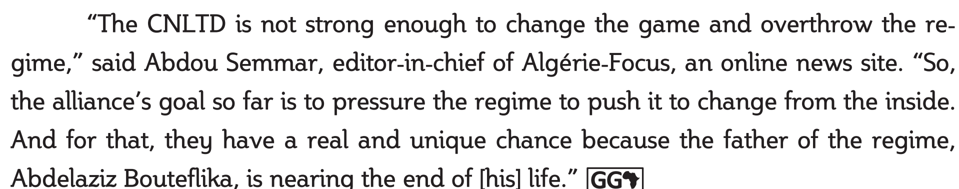
The FFS boycotted parliamentary elections in 2002 and 2007 as well as presidential polls in 2009 and 2014. During the 2012 parliamentary election, however, it chose to run and won 27 seats in the 462-seat People's National Assembly, the Algerian Parliament's lower house.

Some of the parties in the CNLTD alliance are stuck with their own demons: old partisan structures, corruption, double-talk and lack of independence in decision-making. To help accelerate decision-making in the alliance, Mr Benflis has recently proposed the establishment of a think-tank that includes coalition members.

The alliance's major flaw, however, is its failure to reach the Algerian public. In a September press release, the coalition stressed its commitment to "involving the Algerian people in the reform process". It had announced that it would hold public meetings in various cities including Algiers, Constantine, Oran and Ouargla, starting in October.

"We have been banned from organising our meetings five times in a row in October," Mr Djilali said in early November. "And the administration doesn't give us any reason for the ban."

Mr Bouteflika may not have reacted publicly to the opposition's attempts to unite or to its accusations of electoral fraud. But remarks made by ministers and others in the ruling party coalition show that the government is taking notice.



"The CNLTD is not strong enough to change the game and overthrow the regime," said Abdou Semmar, editor-in-chief of Algérie-Focus, an online news site. "So, the alliance's goal so far is to pressure the regime to push it to change from the inside. And for that, they have a real and unique chance because the father of the regime, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, is nearing the end of [his] life." GGA

A split opposition offers citizens little hope for change in this turbulent country

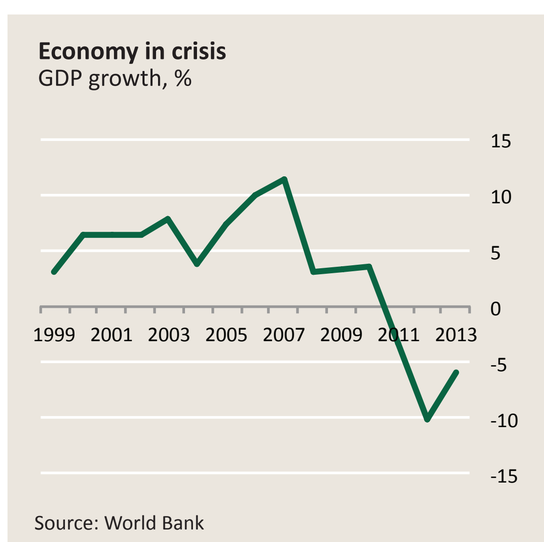
Khartoum doldrums

by James Copnall

In June 2012 and September 2013, young Sudanese took to the streets in several cities, including Khartoum, the capital, and Omdurman, the nation's commercial hub. They threw rocks at police and set up makeshift barriers in back alleys. Burning tyres sent columns of smoke twisting into the sky.

The partial and then full removal of fuel subsidies sent prices soaring and fuelled these riots. In many of these protests, demonstrators called for the removal of President Omar al-Bashir and his regime, which they blamed for years of war and the growing economic crisis that followed the secession of oil-rich South Sudan in 2011.

In power since 1989, Mr Bashir is Sudan's longest-serving leader. His 25-year rule has been one of the most divisive periods in the country's turbulent history. Millions of Sudanese oppose him and his National Congress Party (NCP). In theory, this should strengthen formal political avenues for dissent such as opposition parties. Instead, they grow weaker and less relevant each year.

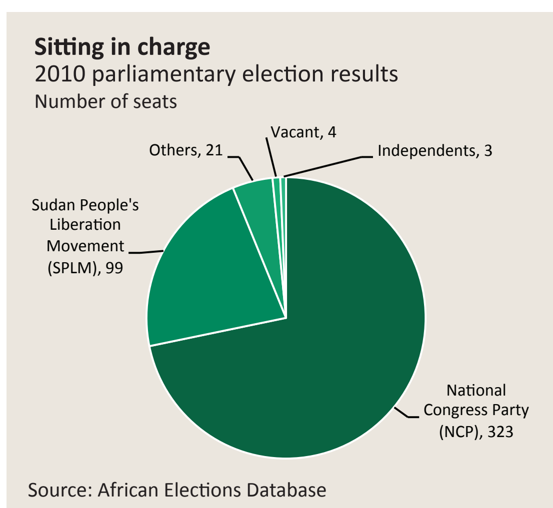


Opposition parties did not organise the 2012 and 2013 demonstrations. The protests ignited spontaneously or were organised by youth protest groups. One of the reasons Mr Bashir and the NCP have survived so long is that many Sudanese are unwilling to take risks for the opposition because they are not convinced these parties would run the country any better than the ruling party.

The history of independent Sudan's political parties explains this reluctance. For decades after the country raised its flag in 1956, different iterations of two sectarian forces dominated Sudanese politics: the National Umma Party (NUP) and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). The NUP's support is largely drawn from the Ansar, an Islamic sect. Its leader, Sadiq al-Mahdi, is both imam of the Ansar and the NUP leader. Like many of the Sudanese elite, he has been around for decades—he served briefly as prime minister in the late 1960s. The DUP, which originally wanted Sudan to form a union with Egypt, is based on a similar model. Mohammed Osman al-Mirghani is both

the imam of the Khatmiyya sect and the DUP head.

These parties have been in and out of government since 1956, often as part of unstable coalitions in the democratic interludes between periods of military rule. Many progressive Sudanese have objected to the lack of democracy within these parties and their quasi-feudal relationship with their largely rural support base. Those looking for alternative politics were once largely split into two currents: the communists and the Islamists. The former have dwindled in significance, following domestic repression and the end of the cold war. The latter grew in strength, from a base in the universities, and under the leadership of hardline ideologue Hassan al-Turabi. The Islamists convinced President Jaafar Numeiri to introduce sharia or Islamic law in 1983, exacerbating the conflict with the largely non-Muslim southern Sudan.



Source: African Elections Database

When Mr Bashir seized power in 1989, he was under the de facto control of Mr Turabi, as explored in "A History of Modern Sudan" by Robert Collins. For a decade Mr Turabi's Islamists, backed by Mr Bashir's military might, pursued a radical course. They banned opposition parties and dismantled the powerful trade union movement. Many Sudanese fled into exile. In 1999 Mr Bashir won a power struggle with Mr Turabi, which led to a new sort of political opposition in Sudan: disaffected Islamists. Mr Turabi formed his Popular Congress Party (PCP) in 1999. In late 2013, a veteran NCP Islamist, Ghazi Salaheddin, dismayed by the brutal suppression of the September protests, formed his own Reform Now party, also along Islamist lines.

By then, Mr Mirghani and the DUP had entered into a coalition government with Mr Bashir's NCP. Ahead of the 2010 elections, most of the opposition parties were grouped in a loose coalition, the National Consensus Forces (NCF). Since those elections, which Mr Bashir won comfortably, the NCF leaders have routinely made declarations about "taking to the streets", a call for popular protests to bring about regime change. Their threats have been empty. Popular protests have been either spontaneous or led by amorphous youth groups like Sudan Change Now and Girifna ("We are fed up" in Arabic).

The relative failure of the NCF and the old opposition parties to mobilise Sudanese opposition is a result of at least four factors. First, it is extremely difficult to operate as an opposition party in Sudan. The government does not allow public demonstrations or rallies without permission, and permission is never granted. Sudanese opposition leaders also get little access to state media, which is still the way most of their

countrymen access news. Security forces often arrest critical voices too: the NUP's Mr Mahdi spent a month in jail in mid-2014 after he criticised alleged atrocities committed by Sudanese military forces in Darfur.

Second, many Sudanese simply do not believe the Sudanese opposition would be better than the government. The same figures have been in charge of the opposition parties for decades, and were not particularly successful at earlier stints running the country. Mr Mahdi's second period as prime minister, from 1986-1989, is remembered for political instability and economic chaos. Many now wonder whether the ageing luminaries Mr Mahdi or Mr Mirghani have anything new to add. Both are critical of the regime in public but have ties to the government: both have sons who accepted high-profile posts within Mr Bashir's administration. "Sadiq [al-Mahdi] is with the government, then against it; you cannot trust him," says one young man in Khartoum who asked to be known only as Ahmed. "And Ghazi [Salaheddin] and Turabi were with Bashir for so long, they're just the same as him."

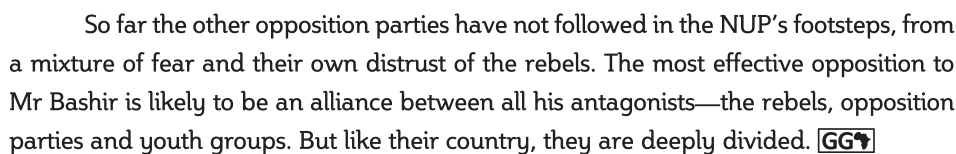
Third, the opposition parties are divided, despite the impression the NCF tries to portray through its joint statements. The DUP was enticed to join the government's coalition in 2011 in return for a few ministerial posts. In January 2014, Mr Bashir set up a consultative process, called the "national dialogue". It has further split the opposition. Mr Salaheddin called it "dead" after Mr Mahdi's arrest in May, which caused the NUP to pull out.

Fourth, opposition in Sudan has often been military in nature. Khartoum is still fighting civil wars against rebels in Darfur in the east, the Nuba Mountains in the south-west, and the Blue Nile state in the south-east. The more radical opponents of Mr Bashir's regime, in particular from these conflict areas, believe the rebels are more likely to bring about change than Khartoum's neutered opposition politics. The leaders of the unarmed opposition parties, many outside the capital complain, are drawn from the same Khartoum elite that has dominated politics for decades.

In August 2014, the NUP's Mr Mahdi signed the Paris Declaration with a loose coalition of rebel groups known as the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF). This agreement was "a breakthrough for a peaceful political settlement in Sudan", Mr Mahdi told *Africa in Fact*. It calls for an end to the civil wars and the creation of a fairer Sudan based on recognition of its diverse population. The NUP and the SRF also promised to boycott the elections scheduled for April 2015 unless they were organised by a transitional government.

This alliance, between the armed opposition and the most prominent leader of the unarmed opposition, scared the ruling NCP. Mr Mahdi's daughter Mariam was detained for a month after she returned to Khartoum from France, and Mr Mahdi has not returned home.

So far the other opposition parties have not followed in the NUP's footsteps, from a mixture of fear and their own distrust of the rebels. The most effective opposition to Mr Bashir is likely to be an alliance between all his antagonists—the rebels, opposition parties and youth groups. But like their country, they are deeply divided.



Is South Africa's new parliamentary superstar good for democracy?

Blowtorch or blustering charlatan?

by Rian Malan

"Today was a great day for democracy," said Julius Malema. It was August 21st 2014 and the portly commander-in-chief of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) was talking to a TV crew outside South Africa's National Assembly, an "august chamber" whose decorum had just been shattered by Mr Malema and his comrades, 24 young black men and women sporting red overalls and matching industrial hard hats.

South Africa's Parliament is a venerable institution, established in 1853. One does not wear boots and overalls in such a place. Nor does one cheek the presiding officer, refuse to shut up when ruled out of order or hammer one's desk with a red miner's helmet while chanting, "Pay back the money!"

As the entire world now knows, the money in question was the 246m rand (about $22m) used to upgrade the private rural residence of President Jacob Zuma in Nkandla, in KwaZulu-Natal. Public Protector Thuli Madonsela had ruled that some of this expenditure went beyond what was needed to protect the president and that he should refund a portion of the money spent.

At the start of question time on August 21st, Democratic Alliance (DA) opposition leader Mmusi Maimane rose to inquire about Mr Zuma's position on another matter, only to receive an airy brush-off: the matter had been referred to the appropriate committee, Mr Zuma said, and therefore, the question was not really a question. Mr Maimane nodded and sat down again.

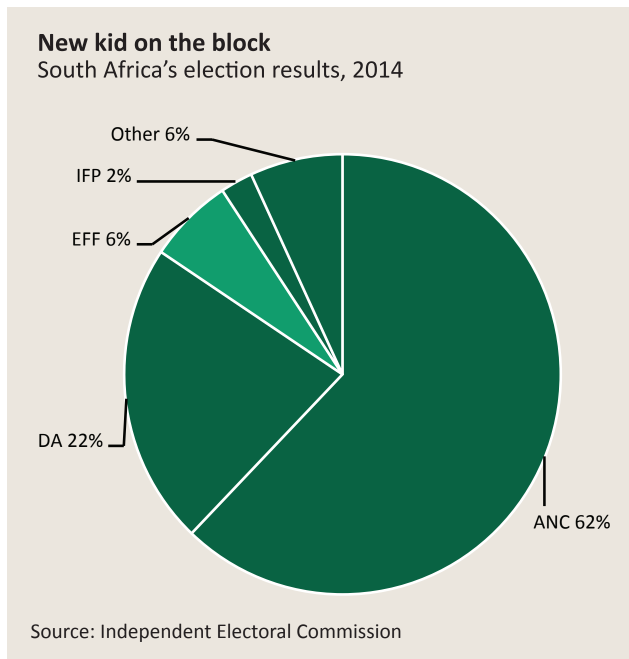
This was par for the course in an assembly where Mr Zuma's African National Congress (ANC) has been dominant for two decades: opposition parties demand accountability; ANC leaders ignore them.

Then Mr Malema leapt to his feet to ask about Nkandla. Mr Zuma attempted to fob him off with more procedural waffle. But the young challenger had a very different game in mind. "We want a date when we will get the money," he thundered. "We are not going to leave this house before we get an answer!" Lesser fighters leapt up behind him, shouting "Where's the money?" Other members of Parliament (MPs) rose up too, and pandemonium ensued.

"I will throw you out if you don't listen!" shouted the speaker, Baleka Mbete. Struggling to make herself heard above the noise, she ordered the sergeant-at-arms to evict Mr Malema's rabble. But they stood their ground, jeering, hammering on their desks and chanting insults. In the end, Ms Mbete declared an adjournment and called the riot police, who seemed unsure as to what law had been broken, if any. According to Mr Malema, there was also an attempt by ANC staff "to beat us up but we barked at them and they disappeared because they are cowards". He and his red squad remained

in their seats until the uproar died down and then left of their own volition.

The man at the centre of this electrifying piece of guerrilla theatre was born into desperate poverty in 1981 and raised by his grandmother, a domestic servant in the northern town of Polokwane. He joined the ANC at age nine and became president of the ANC Youth League 18 years later. In a country where nearly half the population is under 25, the youth league has always been a springboard to greater things for ambitious young men. Mr Malema was clearly one of those, an aggressive hustler who constantly drew attention to himself by staking out positions to the left of his party's leadership. Nationalise the mines, he declared. Seize white-owned farmland without compensation. Fulfil the promise of the Freedom Charter by taking over banks and monopoly industries.



By 2011 Mr Malema had become such a threat to his elders that they booted him out. Political obituaries were written but Mr Malema secured funding from anonymous kingmakers. He came back in 2013 as the founder of the Economic Freedom Fighters, a political party billed as an "army of the poor". Despite a late start, the EFF won 6.35% of the vote in the 2014 general election—enough to send 25 fighters to mau-mau the National Assembly.

After the "Battle of Question Time", Mr Malema declared that he had made history. "There has never been opposition since 1994," he said, referring to the date Nelson Mandela became president. "Today was the first time the ANC saw it."

Well, not really. From its first day in power, the ANC has faced opposition from mature politicians skilled at duelling with points of order, committee manoeuvres and procedural technicalities. These rites made sense in Britain, from whence they came. But in South Africa, the ANC's unassailable majority rendered them largely pointless. Consistently returned to power with at least 60% of the vote, the ruling party was always able to control parliamentary committees, outvote challenges and shield leaders like Mr Zuma from hostile scrutiny.

This idyll has now ended, according to Mr Malema. The ANC "has met a real match", he said. "We are here to make them run for their money."

This was vintage Malema. "Juju", as he is known to friends, is a charismatic populist in the tradition of Juan Perón of Argentina, Hugo Chávez of Venezuela and perhaps Idi Amin of Uganda. He is short and heavy, with a shaven head and bulldog jowls. When he says, "We are not going to be bullied by the ANC," you believe him. And when he adds, "If they are looking for a fight in the streets, we are ready," you believe that too.

But is he really the champion of democracy he claims to be?

There is no doubt that millions of South Africans were thrilled to see someone standing up to the government and demanding an explanation for at least one of the myriad corruption scandals currently facing us. Equally pleasing was the spectacle of smug ANC leaders growing incandescent with rage as they assailed Mr Malema's followers as "hooligans" beset by "infantile disorders".

The result was extraordinarily enthusiastic press coverage. News24's Georgina Guedes gushed that Mr Malema was doing a "brilliant" job. Eusebius McKaiser of *The Star* found him "very impressive". Gareth van Onselen of *Business Day* compared Mr Malema to the DA's parliamentary leader and found Mr Maimane desperately lacking: "Does [Maimane] set the oppositional agenda? Is he the most forceful leader, the most charismatic? Do his words command attention and his actions necessitate change? The answer to all these questions seems to be a resounding 'no'.... Maimane is the glow of a dying ember; Malema is a blowtorch."

© Wim Steytler

One-piece salute

In short: only Mr Malema is tough enough to stand up to and defeat the mighty ANC.

Maybe so. But what then? Mr Malema is quick to condemn corruption these days, but during his Youth League heyday, he was pork-barrelling with the best of them, miraculously acquiring houses, cars and a farm on his modest Youth League stipend. (South Africa's tax authorities have confiscated most of these assets; and Mr

Malema has yet to stand trial for the allegedly rigged tenders that financed them.)

Mr Malema is also quick to present himself as a staunch constitutionalist. "The rot has eaten away the government of this country," he said earlier this year. "The only thing left for us is the constitution. Let us protect it with everything we have."

"This man is a democrat? I certainly hope so," says Anthea Jeffery. "But I wonder. Democrats usually argue with their opponents, rather than threaten to kill them."

Another fine sentiment, but does he really believe it?

Mr Malema's very first appearance in South African newspapers in 2002 involved a student protest in downtown Johannesburg that degenerated into looting and violence. According to his biographer Fiona Forde, his campaign for the ANC Youth League presidency relied heavily on intimidation. Back in 2007, when he and Jacob Zuma were still allies, he famously declared himself willing to kill on behalf of the president. There is implied violence in his support for Zimbabwean tyrant Robert Mugabe, and in his depiction of whites as "thieves who should be treated as such". In September 2014 he was at it again, threatening to take up arms if the ANC used violence to block his rise to power.

"This man is a democrat? I certainly hope so," says Anthea Jeffery. "But I wonder. Democrats usually argue with their opponents, rather than threaten to kill them."

Ms Jeffery is head of policy research at the Institute of Race Relations, a Johannesburg-based think-tank. Like many South Africans, she was hugely amused by Mr Malema's mau-mau campaign, which has turned "Pay back the money!" into a catchphrase gleefully deployed against all manner of dubious characters by South Africa's stand-up comedians. On the other hand, she feels the media has overstated Mr Malema's significance.

"The wily old guard of the ANC saw Julius coming a mile off and began stepping up their own radical rhetoric," she says. "They saw that Julius was trying to challenge from the left, but they had their own leftist prescriptions to counter this. Unlike Malema, they also had the power to start translating these ideas into law."

In a new book titled "BEE: Helping or Hurting?", Ms Jeffery tracks this process back to 2011, when the ANC first suspended Mr Malema. She shows how it gained traction at the ANC's 2012 national conference in Mangaung (formerly Bloemfontein), where Mr Zuma famously announced that the second phase of the South African revolution was about to begin. The rest of the media reported his speech and fell asleep. Ms Jeffery, almost uniquely, kept her eye on the ball, tracking radical policy proposals as they moved into draft bills and, in most cases, into measures since adopted by Parliament, if not yet signed into law by the president.

According to Ms Jeffery, it is naïve to believe that the ANC remains committed to the National Development Plan (NDP), a programme whose moderate precepts were warmly applauded by the World Bank, the IMF and foreign investors. She believes the party has quietly abandoned the NDP and is poised to move rapidly leftward, a move

that could render Mr Malema irrelevant.

Since Ms Jeffery's analysis is not exactly conventional wisdom, sceptics might wish to suspend judgement until they have read her dissection of the 2013 Protection of Investment Bill, which strips foreign investors of the right to appeal to international arbitrators if the South African government seizes their assets. Or the 2013 Mining Amendment Bill, which allows the government to take control of oil or gas fields developed by private companies and pay whatever compensation it pleases. Or a new land reform proposal that requires farm owners to give up 50% of their land, effectively without compensation.

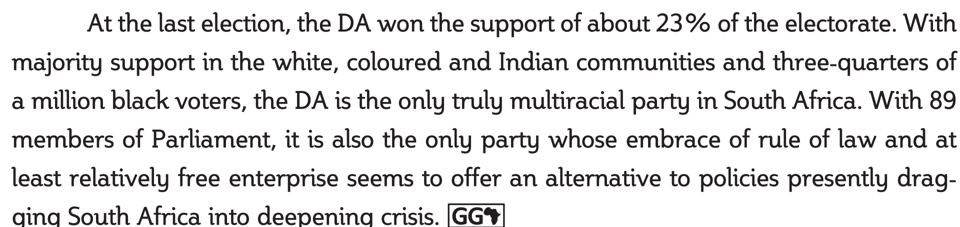
Also of interest is the draft 2013 Expropriation Bill, which empowers thousands of officials at all three tiers of government to expropriate property of virtually any kind. This should be read alongside the aforementioned Investment Bill, which seeks to allow the government to do so without compensation—provided that it is acting as "a custodian" for the previously disadvantaged.

If Mr Malema wins, South Africa will become a socialist people's republic, devoid of economic growth and foreign investment. If Mr Zuma prevails, ditto. If the nation is to avoid this fate, we have to look for salvation elsewhere.

This would in theory enable the state to confiscate any business as "custodian" and then invite blacks to apply to run it without paying anything. The process could be expedited if the property on which this business stands is subject to a land claim. So it is perhaps not coincidental that the ANC has recently re-opened the land claims process and expects to receive close to 400,000 new claims over the next five years.

Lay these ANC laws alongside the EFF's manifesto and it becomes clear that any ideological differences between the parties are less significant than the rivalry between their respective leaders. This clash produces showers of sparks, but does the outcome really matter? If Mr Malema wins, South Africa will become a socialist people's republic, devoid of economic growth and foreign investment. If Mr Zuma prevails, ditto. If the nation is to avoid this fate, we have to look for salvation elsewhere.

Since June 2014, when the EF Fighters made their parliamentary debut, the DA has taken a public battering simply for being itself—a sober, hardworking party staffed by MPs and researchers whose heads are perpetually buried in dull position papers and whose leader, Mr Maimane, is a politician in the suave Barack Obama vein; a thoroughbred alongside Mr Malema's dray horse. It irked me to see him belittled simply because his manners are better than Mr Malema's. Would we really prefer a blustering charlatan?



At the last election, the DA won the support of about 23% of the electorate. With majority support in the white, coloured and Indian communities and three-quarters of a million black voters, the DA is the only truly multiracial party in South Africa. With 89 members of Parliament, it is also the only party whose embrace of rule of law and at least relatively free enterprise seems to offer an alternative to policies presently dragging South Africa into deepening crisis. GG

Madagascar: personality trumps principle

In this poor island nation, everyone wants to be on the side that is winning

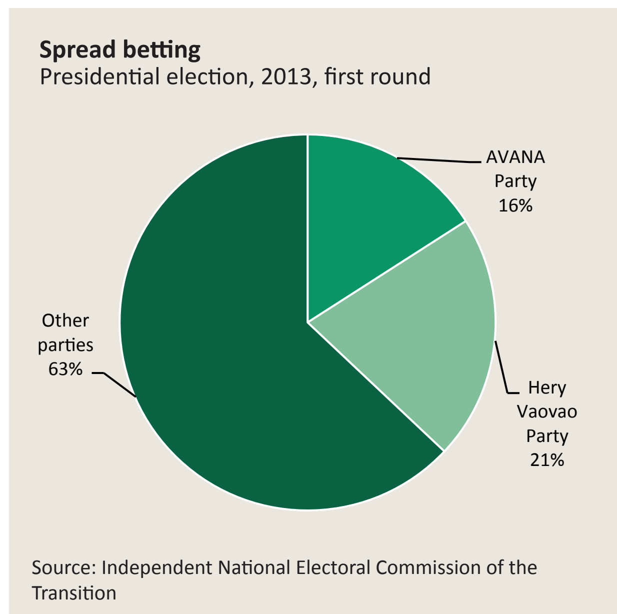
Fair-weather opposition

by Brian Klaas

Political parties in Madagascar are often empty shells, little more than ways to legitimise individual candidates with the illusion of a broader movement. Similarly, opposition parties here are usually façades with no ideology or platform. They tend to rush to the centre of state power like moths to a flame, quickly contradicting the notion that they are in opposition at all.

The most recent experience of non-existent opposition began last year, when Madagascans voted in the December 2013 presidential run-off election. Most voters were not interested in electing either of the men on the ballot. Instead, each candidate stood as a proxy for two sidelined presidents, neither of whom was deemed eligible to run—due to a combination of technical reasons and pressure from international partners, notably the Southern African Development Community.

Coup president Andry Rajoelina—installed in 2009 after a military takeover—was deemed ineligible after submitting his paperwork after the registration deadline. The deposed president, Marc Ravalomanana and his wife, Lalao (who later sought to run in his place) were both deemed ineligible because they were still in exile in South Africa and Madagascar's election law requires that prospective candidates reside on the island for at least six months preceding an election.



The first proxy candidate, Dr Jean-Louis Robinson, was the anointed heir of Mr Ravalomanana, the two-term president (who returned to Madagascar in October and was promptly placed under house arrest). Dr Robinson's rival was Hery Rajaonarimampianina, the favoured successor backed by Mr Rajoelina. Given that the run-off was a proxy battle between these two men—one exiled in a coup, one that launched the coup—tensions ran high heading into the final days of campaigning.

As is normally the case in Madagascar, the "parties" of both candidates had been tailor-made for this election and for these candidates. Dr Robinson formed his AVANA (Rainbow) Party just months before the election. Similarly, Mr Rajaonarimampianina was the founding member of the Hery Vaovao Party, a play on words using the candidate's first name. (*Hery* means "forces", and *Vaovao* means "new", so the party is known as "New Forces".) Catchy, but hardly the recipe for a party based on anything other than one individual personality.

As an election observer, this author attended Dr Robinson's *faradoboka*, or final campaign rally. It was held at the Coliseum stadium in the capital Antananarivo two days before the vote. The atmosphere was electric, as Mr Ravalomanana's partisans found themselves on the brink of morphing from a sidelined opposition party into a powerful ruling regime.

Mr Rajaonarimampianina, the newly elected president, was eager not simply to become a marionette. He sought to distance himself from his mentor, Mr Rajoelina.

Dr Robinson's speech to the crowd of 15,000 sounded like a rallying call for Mr Ravalomanana, still exiled at the time. He promised the ecstatic crowd that, if elected, he would bring Mr Ravalomanana back. On campaign posters, flyers, and T-shirts, Mr Ravalomanana's likeness dwarfed Mr Robinson's. Across the city, at Mr Rajaonarimampianina's competing rally, it was much the same: former President Rajoelina's likeness not only loomed over Mr Rajaonarimampianina on banners and posters, he also stole the show by dancing on stage in front of his proxy candidate.

Neither campaign rally was remotely about policy. This was never about what either candidate would do once he was in power; it was about whom he would bring to power. It seemed clear at the time that one camp would win and one would become a fiercely antagonistic opposition party—even if their opposition was based on personality rather than principle.

Mr Rajaonarimampianina won the election two days later by a margin of 53.5% to 46.5%. Dr Robinson initially alleged widespread fraud but eventually accepted the result. Nonetheless, as inauguration day approached, the stage seemed set for a stark and possibly deadly divide between the two camps. When Mr Rajaonarimampianina took office on January 25th, the inauguration was marred by a grenade attack that left a child dead and 33 wounded. It is still unclear who launched the attack or why.

However, soon after this grim omen everything changed: proxy and patron split. Mr Rajaonarimampianina, the newly elected president, was eager not simply to become a marionette. He sought to distance himself from his mentor, Mr Rajoelina, as outlined in a May 2014 report from the Brussels-based International Crisis Group, a think-tank.

As a result, in a bizarre turn of events, nearly every member of Parliament that had been Mr Rajoelina's ally just weeks earlier—and had actively campaigned for Mr Rajaonarimampianina—now turned against the new president. Conversely, nearly

everyone who had campaigned for Dr Robinson now backed the president, their former rival. This counterintuitive inversion makes sense in the context of Madagascan politics, where political alliances are forged on the basis of power rather than policy.

Shortly after the new president took power, it was unclear who would wield real authority, the new president or the former president. Both camps, regardless of their affiliation during the election, gambled as to where state power—and the patronage that comes with it—would lie.

Over time it became clear that Mr Rajaonarimampianina had consolidated his power and effectively sidelined Mr Rajoelina—at least for the time being. As a result, there is now virtually no opposition to the regime, only petty internal rivalries in the massively big tent alliance that has become the ruling coalition, as described in the September issue of the *Indian Ocean Newsletter*, a regional publication.

This fluidity arises from political opportunism fuelled by 42 newly-elected "independent" candidates, who avoided affiliation with a political party simply so they could flock to the ruling coalition when it crystallised. Initially, MAPAR—Mr Rajoelina's parliamentary coalition (the French acronym for "Friends with Andry Rajoelina")—held the largest number of seats (49), but far from a majority.

© US State Department

Hery Rajaonarimampianina: a new force?

Today, independents, MAPAR and Mr Ravalomanana's movement all appear to be working together: the new president and his prime minister face no genuine opposition.

"In Madagascar, you could say that there is a sort of 'winner takes all' politics," said Juvence Ramasy, a politics professor at the University of Toamasina on the country's east coast. "Everyone wants to be with the winning party or at least the person in power. This shows not only the structural weakness of political parties, but also the lack of ideology in the island's party politics."

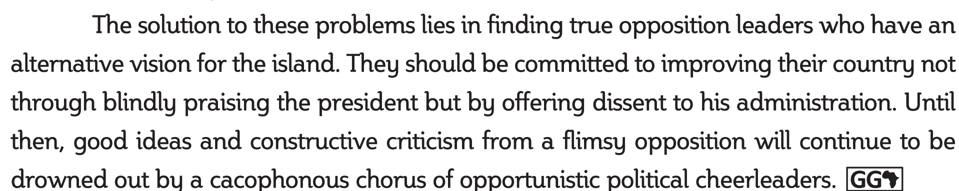
In some countries, like Zimbabwe, for example, the iron grip of a long-standing ruling regime has prompted the development of an opposition clearly and consistently opposed to the government. Yet in Madagascar, where opposition parties have

The Coliseum stadium in Antananarivo

a reasonable chance of winning elections, that fluidity of power has ironically undermined policy-based politics. Elected officials chase whoever holds the reins of power at any given time.

This toxin of flimsy opposition has consequences. With power rather than vision guiding political actors, Madagascar has made little concrete progress in the nine months since the landmark inauguration of its first post-coup leader. Opposition parties are supposed to challenge the ruling regime, exposing poor policies and proposing better alternatives. Yet Madagascar has a silent opposition, so this has not happened. At first glance, this might appear to be the sort of post-election unity many African nations would envy. In reality, it is symptomatic of Madagascar's political disease: letting short-term pursuit of power cripple sound policy-making that could contribute to long-term stability and growth.

Policy-based visions are needed urgently on this long-suffering island. The political crisis ushered in by the coup cost Madagascar more than $8 billion, three-quarters of its annual GDP and more than 15 times the government's annual health-care budget, according to a 2013 World Bank assessment. The bank's most recent estimates suggest that more than 92% of the population lives on less than $2 per day, making Madagascar one of the world's poorest countries.



The solution to these problems lies in finding true opposition leaders who have an alternative vision for the island. They should be committed to improving their country not through blindly praising the president but by offering dissent to his administration. Until then, good ideas and constructive criticism from a flimsy opposition will continue to be drowned out by a cacophonous chorus of opportunistic political cheerleaders. GGA

The opposition parties in this southern African mountain kingdom have few policy differences

Personality, not politics

by Simon Allison

Saturday August 30th 2014 began as a regular lazy weekend morning in Maseru, the picturesque capital of Lesotho. It ended with the prime minister in exile, a policeman shot dead in his barracks, and the army patrolling the streets.

Suddenly, Lesotho was facing its most serious constitutional crisis since South Africa invaded in 1998—and most observers were taken completely by surprise.

They should not have been. Like most political dramas, this one had been building for quite some time.

The chain of cause and effect could take us back decades through Lesotho's independence, the establishment of the monarchy, and its colonial experience. A more useful starting point to explain the current impasse, however, comes in 2012, with Pakalitha Mosisili firmly ensconced as prime minister, a position he had held for 14 years.

It is never easy to maintain such political longevity, and Mr Mosisili had accumulated more than his fair share of enemies. Most dangerous, however, were those gathering like sharks within the ranks of his own ruling party, the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD). Mothetjoa Metsing, the former communications minister, led this internal opposition. It eventually became so vociferous that the relationship between the prime minister and the party's national executive committee broke down completely.

Mr Mosisili, apparently full of regret, was forced to resign from the party and formed a new party, the Democratic Congress (DC). "I couldn't believe that I was the one leaving the LCD," he said at the February 2012 press conference where he made public the decision. "As I am sitting here today announcing that I have left the LCD and I am now a leader of the Democratic Congress, my heart is still crying for the strong bond of love I had cultivated for that party over the years."

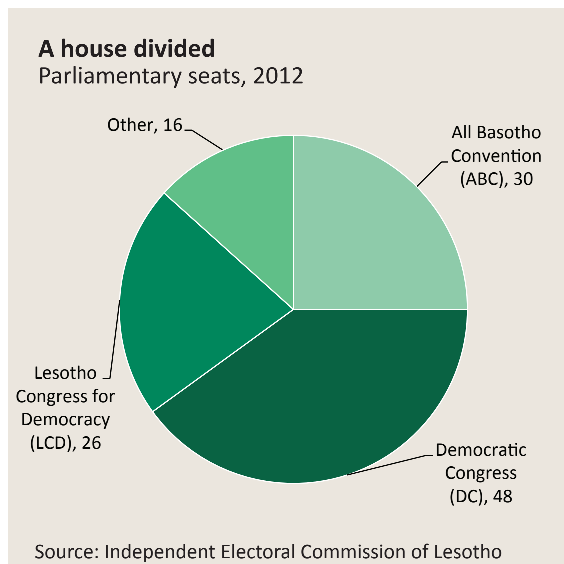
Mr Mosisili stayed on as prime minister, with many LCD members of Parliament (MPs) joining him in crossing the floor to the newly-formed DC party—enough to form a majority in parliament.

So far, so good for Mr Mosisili, who had outwitted his squabbling lieutenants in the LCD. But with an election just around the corner, those lieutenants were plotting their revenge.

It did not matter, ultimately, that Mr Mosisili and his brand new party still managed to win the most votes in the May 2012 polls, garnering 48 of Parliament's 120 seats. By failing to win an outright majority, the DC was reliant on finding coalition partners to form a government. No one, however, was interested in joining forces with the man who had dominated Basotho politics for so long.

Instead, Mr Metsing, now the LCD leader, aligned his 26 seats with the 30 garnered by Thomas Thabane's All Basotho Congress (ABC, also an LCD offshoot). A third party, the Basotho National Party, led by Thesele Maseribane, joined this coalition with its five seats, giving the alliance 61 seats and the narrowest of majorities.

Mr Thabane's inauguration on June 8th 2012 as prime minister was a historic day. It was proof, after Mr Mosisili's long stint, that Lesotho was a functional democracy where political change could and did happen.



"The real winner of this election is no other than the people of Lesotho themselves," Mr Thabane said in his inauguration speech at a packed Setsoto Stadium in Maseru. "Their will takes precedence over our personal wishes. Let us get on with the business of governing and of developing our country for the benefit of our people and the future generations."

He appealed to his fellow political leaders to let "the dust of the election campaigns" settle, and warned—presciently, as it turned out—against further divisions. "We, the people of Lesotho, are fortunate that we are a homogeneous nation that speaks one language, that practises a common culture and that is united by kinship. We are untouched by the sentiments of tribalism or religious schisms. It would be folly to allow ourselves to be divided by the differences of our political opinions."

Coalitions, however, are notoriously difficult to manage. They are, after all, usually alliances of convenience rather than principle. It did not take long for tensions between Mr Thabane and Mr Metsing, the new deputy prime minister, to emerge. The pair struggled to work together, with Mr Metsing accusing Mr Thabane of being non-consultative and authoritarian. For his part, Mr Metsing was perhaps frustrated to once again be the bridesmaid and not the bride, which seems to be the story of his political career.

These differences came to a head two years later, in June 2014. Mr Metsing announced plans to take the LCD out of the ruling coalition, and then to form a new government with former Prime Minister Mosisili's DC. "We have decided that we can no longer endure the humiliation that the honourable Dr Thabane is inflicting upon the LCD by his unilateral and undemocratic conduct," Mr Metsing told journalists.

But Mr Thabane was a step ahead of Mr Metsing. The day before his coalition collapsed, Mr Thabane succeeded in persuading King Letsie III to suspend Parliament

for nine months, thereby preventing a vote of no confidence and the formation of a new government. He told the king—whose role is almost entirely ceremonial and has been minor in the current crisis—that suspending Parliament would give the squabbling party leaders time to sort out their differences.

Then South Africa stepped in. Lesotho is important to South Africa, not just because it surrounds the tiny mountain kingdom. (Lesotho is only marginally larger than Gauteng, by far South Africa's smallest province and where most of its industry is concentrated.) Lesotho matters because Gauteng's current and future water supply depends on the existing and future dams that are part of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project. South Africa's water security depends on a stable Lesotho.

Under the guise of the Southern African Development Community, South Africa muscled the three coalition leaders, Messrs Thabane, Metsing and Maseribane, into mediation. Several rounds of talks culminated in the Windhoek Declaration, agreed on July 30th, in which Mr Metsing agreed to remain in Mr Thabane's coalition, and Mr Thabane agreed to ask the king to re-open Parliament.

Neither kept their promise, however, and the tensions between them began to heighten. Mr Thabane's signature anti-corruption drive suddenly snared Mr Metsing, who found himself in court on August 1st having to answer questions about dodgy tenders and strange deposits into his bank account. Mr Thabane, meanwhile, was fast losing confidence in his armed forces, led by Lieut-General Tlali Kamoli, who happened to have been appointed by Mr Mosisili. Lieut-General Kamoli is said to be friendly with both the former prime minister and Mr Metsing.

The question of the armed forces' allegiances pushed Lesotho to the brink. On August 29th Mr Thabane announced that he was replacing Lieut-General Kamoli, explaining later in a letter to South Africa's president, Jacob Zuma, that he was concerned that the army chief wanted to overthrow his government. On August 30th, the army suddenly appeared on Maseru's streets on the pretext of maintaining public order. Troops occupied police stations and one policeman was killed.

Lieut-General Kamoli claimed that police were about to provide arms to political parties, and that he was acting to protect the state. The prime minister, however, had a different point of view. Mr Thabane rushed for safety to South Africa, claiming that the army had led a coup against his government; meanwhile, the army chief appointed to succeed Lieut-General Kamoli went into hiding and was unable to take up office immediately. (He has subsequently, but reports suggest that a significant proportion of the army remains loyal to Lieut-General Kamoli.)

Bizarrely, Maseru and the rest of the country remained largely unaffected by the crisis. Schools stayed open; workers went to work; and most government services continued as usual while the politicians traded accusation and counter-accusation. After several days, Mr Thabane returned to Maseru under the protection of South African troops and South Africa stepped up its mediation efforts.

Over the course of a month, and with the personal intervention of both Mr Zuma and Cyril Ramaphosa, South Africa's deputy president, a deal was reached that

acknowledged that Mr Thabane's administration was no longer tenable. Although Mr Thabane remains in charge, elections were brought forward by two years to February 2017. Parliament resumed business under a mandate strictly limited to the passing of the national budget.

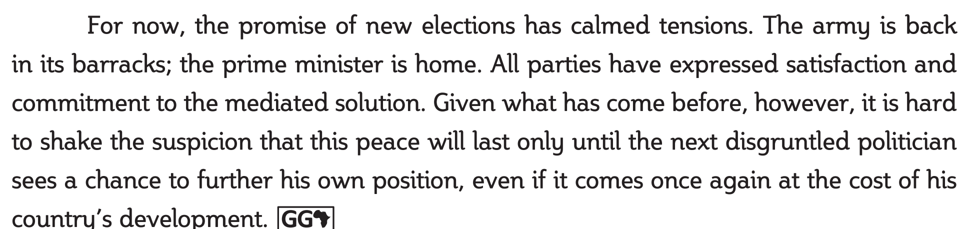
Lesotho, in other words, is treading water until the next election. The prime minister is powerless and the Parliament is not allowed to pass legislation. In their individual bids to assume more control of the country, Lesotho's leaders have left it rudderless, and the country is effectively running on autopilot. It is unclear yet what this will mean for Lesotho's long-suffering citizens. It is not going to help solve the country's real issues, such as poverty, service provision and healthcare.

© OER Africa

Maseru from Parliament Hill

And for what? Their squabbling was not over issues or policy. It was about personal power. All three of the country's main parties are related: Mr Thabane's ABC and Mr Mosisili's DC are both offshoots of the LCD. Their policies are largely indistinguishable. The differences between them have more to do with the geographic spread of their constituencies than programmes or strategy.

"Basically, the ABC these days is an urban party, splitting votes with the small labour parties, while the LCD and DC have broader bases throughout the country," explained John Aerni-Flessner, an African history professor at Michigan State University, and a specialist on Lesotho. "ABC has been trying for some time, without a lot of success, to expand its base into rural areas, and LCD and DC have been trying to get more urban voters."



For now, the promise of new elections has calmed tensions. The army is back in its barracks; the prime minister is home. All parties have expressed satisfaction and commitment to the mediated solution. Given what has come before, however, it is hard to shake the suspicion that this peace will last only until the next disgruntled politician sees a chance to further his own position, even if it comes once again at the cost of his country's development. GG

Mozambique: the comeback

A long-time opposition party comes out of the bush and returns to the political stage

The Dhlakama effect

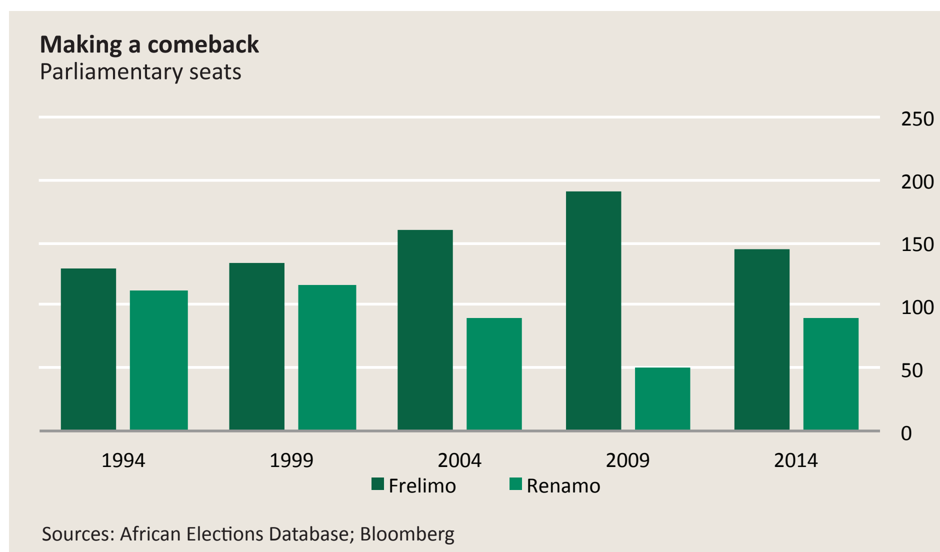
by Jinty Jackson

A poster affixed to the crumbling exterior of Renamo's campaign office in Maputo, Mozambique's capital, shows Afonso Dhlakama as a much younger man. The photograph of the opposition leader—thick, 1980s-style coiffure and large, rimless spectacles—is a throwback to the cold war era.

This image, used in every presidential contest for the past 20 years, created an even more striking juxtaposition during the 2014 race. Mr Dhlakama, now in his mid-sixties with snow-peppered hair, campaigned in front of giant billboards plastered with this picture of his younger self. It was Mr Dhlakama's fifth unsuccessful bid for the presidency since agreeing to end a long civil war in 1992 and transform his rebel movement into an opposition party. Renamo is the Portuguese acronym for the Mozambican National Resistance.

Mr Dhlakama lost to Filipe Nyusi of the ruling Mozambique Liberation Front, known by its Portuguese acronym, Frelimo, in the October 15th presidential and parliamentary polls. The incumbent president, Armando Guebuza, was constitutionally prevented from seeking a third term.

Despite Mr Dhlakama's disappointed response—he has called the elections a "masquerade"—the results suggest that he and his party succeeded in winning back a large chunk of the electorate lost over the past decade. Mr Dhlakama won 37% of the vote, coming a respectable second to Mr Nyusi with 57%. Renamo raised its



Sources: African Elections Database; Bloomberg

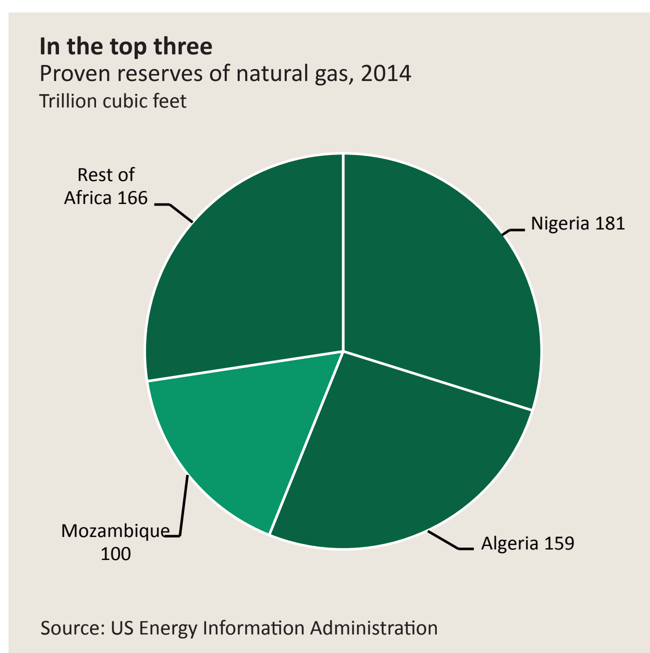
parliamentary seats substantially from 51 to 89 against against Frelimo's 144 seats in the 250-member Parliament.

In the late 1990s Renamo had more than 2m voters. Ten years later its support had slumped to under 700,000. After narrowly losing to Frelimo's Joaquim Chissano in 1999, Mr Dhlakama garnered just 16% against Mr Guebuza in 2009. Shortly after this dismal showing, Mr Dhlakama moved from Maputo to the northern city of Nampula and was rarely seen in public.

It helped that in 2014 his main opponent was Mr Nyusi, a former defence minister, but a virtual political unknown. Still this does little to explain the remarkable comeback of this opposition figure many had already relegated to the scrapheap of history.

The "Dhlakama effect", as it was widely called during the run-up to the polls, was the campaign's big surprise. People crammed onto rooftops to hear him speak and streamed onto landing strips to greet his plane.

Curiosity was part of it. In October 2012 Mr Dhlakama relocated to a remote civil-war era camp in the foothills of the Gorongosa mountains, in Mozambique's central region. The move was timed to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the end of the civil war between the then Marxist Frelimo and his forces—aided by apartheid South Africa and the white-minority regime in Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe. Many of those who came to see him wanted to find out for themselves whether rumours that he had been assassinated in the bush were really false.



I first met Mr Dhlakama in late 2012 at his camp in Satunjira, where I interviewed him for the French news agency, Agence France-Presse. Living in a mud and grass hut, he was a lonely but determined figure. He believed Frelimo would send assassins for him and surrounded himself with soldiers.

It was easy then, to dismiss him as a hangover from the cold war as he reminisced about South Africa's former president, P.W. Botha and Jonas Savimbi, the Angolan rebel leader. Yet Mr Dhlakama had made some shrewd calculations about the "interests" he was likely to disrupt by his move to the bush.

Foreign coal companies depend on a rail link running through central Mozambique, where he and his followers had holed up, and big oil companies were closely monitoring the country's stability ahead of an expected natural gas boom in the north.

Mozambique's proven natural gas reserves (in the far northern Rovuma basin) jumped from 4.5 trillion cubic feet to 100 trillion cubic feet in 2014, placing it third in Africa behind Nigeria and Algeria, according to the US Energy Information Administration. The country is also starting to exploit one of the world's largest coalfields in the north-western region.

Mr Dhlakama threatened to disrupt the export routes if his demands were not met. These demands included greater representation on electoral organs and the reintegration of Renamo fighters into Mozambique's armed forces. He accused the Frelimo government of breaking the 1992 peace agreement by denying public service jobs to opposition members and purging the armed forces of Renamo men. The peace agreement had stipulated a 50-50 split of the army.

© Voice of America

Well suited: Armando Guebuza and Afonso Dhlakama

"There will be confrontation," Mr Dhlakama warned. This was necessary "for us to have finances", he said. Mozambique's natural resources had altered the political game. Renamo argues that the Frelimo ruling elite has kept the economic opportunities resulting from the resource windfall to itself. "This is not the Renamo of yesterday," he said. "This country is ours."

While the return to full-scale civil war that many feared did not materialise, there were casualties on both sides in April and October 2013. Mr Guebuza's Frelimo government was heavily criticised for its failure to find a negotiated way out of the impasse.

Official silence surrounds the true cost of the fighting. No official figures were ever confirmed but local media suggested that government forces had suffered high fatalities in fighting near the Satunjira camp. Suspected Renamo militants killed scores

of civilians.

"There are a lot of doubts about what happened in Satunjira," said Elizabete Azevedo-Harman, a research fellow with Chatham House, a London-based think-tank. "People are very sceptical, so they start…[saying], 'Is Renamo right? Were they really trying to kill [Mr Dhlakama] or not?'" she added.

After months of negotiation, Renamo and the Frelimo government signed a peace pact on September 6th at the presidential palace in Maputo. The lavish ceremony was reminiscent of the signing of the 1992 peace accord. Many of the same players were present. As in 1992, Italian diplomats and Catholic clergy played a key role in bringing Mr Dhlakama in from the cold, travelling into the bush to fetch him. Former President Joaquim Chissano—who signed the 1992 accord—looked on as Mr Dhlakama did the honours again, this time with Mr Guebuza his signing partner.

On the eve of elections, the government gave in to more of Mr Dhlakama's demands, agreeing to integrate Renamo fighters into the army and police and also to give financial aid to veterans too old for service.

The negotiation had borne fruit. In April 2014 the Frelimo-dominated Parliament approved changes to the existing election laws, allowing opposition parties greater representation on electoral organs. Renamo won extra seats on the National Electoral Commission and opposition party members were appointed at every level of this secretariat that is charged with running the polls. All participating parties were allowed to nominate staff to man polling stations.

On the eve of elections, the government gave in to more of Mr Dhlakama's demands, agreeing to integrate Renamo fighters into the army and police and also to give financial aid to veterans too old for service. While not all items on Mr Dhlakama's original list of grievances had been ticked off, this was enough for the opposition leader to sign the peace accord paving the way for his return.

In the vacuum left when Renamo boycotted the 2013 local elections, a rival opposition party, the Mozambique Democratic Movement (MDM), mopped up support in some of Renamo's former strongholds like Zambezia and Nampula provinces. Many predicted the MDM, under Renamo-breakaway Daviz Simango, would supplant Renamo as the official opposition in 2014. That was not to be: Mr Simango garnered 6% of the presidential vote. Mr Dhlakama's return to the mainstream political fray was dramatic and decisive.

Capacity crowds greeted him in traditional Renamo strongholds like western Tete and central Beira, hailing him as a "saviour" and a "survivor". Even in Maputo, a traditional Frelimo fiefdom in the south, thousands of supporters banged drums and danced around his car.

"He is a good person. He fought for us," said 20-year-old Nelson (who declined to give a last name), frantically snapping pictures on his mobile phone. He was one of

many young people who came out to see Mr Dhlakama in the capital.

Like Nelson, many of those drawn to Mr Dhlakama's campaign were too young to remember the 1975-1992 civil war, in which an estimated 1m people died. Yet they remember Renamo's recent skirmishes with government forces in central Mozambique.

"For a lot of the youth he represents…anti-Frelimo spirit," said Chatham House's Ms Azevedo-Harman. "For the new supporters it is about the last two years." Mr Dhlakama, she says, embodies "someone who forced Frelimo to give up something, someone who stopped Frelimo".

The MDM's Mr Simango was the real loser in the 2014 polls. He garnered less than 6% percent of the presidential vote. The MDM increased its parliamentary presence from eight to 17 seats. The party had tried, unsuccessfully, to leverage its image as a "civilian" alternative to the two "armed" Frelimo and Renamo parties.

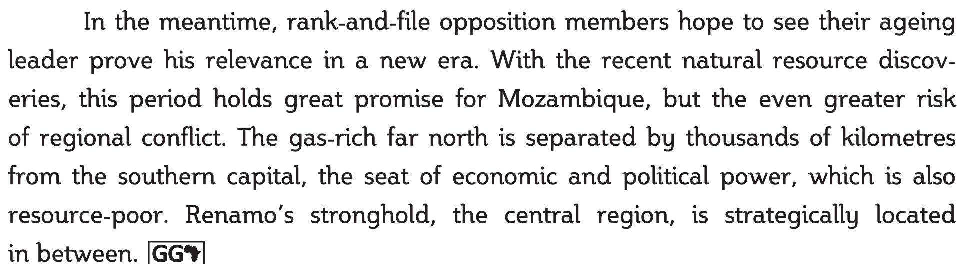
Instead, Renamo's ability to strong-arm political concessions from the ruling elite "confirmed people's intuition that only through strategic demoralisation of Frelimo it is possible to achieve meaningful change", said Victor Igreja, a Mozambican anthropologist. Where that leaves the democratic process in Mozambique remains to be seen.

As for Renamo's long-term political survival, much will depend on whether it can overcome its long-standing weaknesses, in particular its top-down, military-type leadership structure, which has seen other strong figures pushed out over the past few years.

In returning to the bush and reviving a cold-war conflict, Mr Dhlakama may have played his trump card. It will not be easy for him to resort to military tactics any time soon and still save face. Even though he condemned the 2014 polls, he promised the international community he would not resort to violence.

In returning to the bush and reviving a cold-war conflict, Mr Dhlakama may have played his trump card. It will not be easy for him to resort to military tactics any time soon and still save face.

Mr Dhlakama hinted that he would push for some form of "negotiated solution" with Frelimo. Negotiations of this kind, however, have never been Mr Dhlakama's strongest suit. "He is always good at running campaigns," Ms Azevedo-Harman said. "He is charismatic and easy with people...but he is terrible post elections." She pointed to Mr Dhlakama's inability to negotiate with Frelimo successfully following previous polls.



In the meantime, rank-and-file opposition members hope to see their ageing leader prove his relevance in a new era. With the recent natural resource discoveries, this period holds great promise for Mozambique, but the even greater risk of regional conflict. The gas-rich far north is separated by thousands of kilometres from the southern capital, the seat of economic and political power, which is also resource-poor. Renamo's stronghold, the central region, is strategically located in between. GG

Zambia: public order

The government uses a colonial-era law to control and confine opposition parties

Paper handcuffs

by Victoria Kelly

With the death of Michael Sata, Zambia's president, opposition parties in Africa's second-largest copper-producing country may find their political space a little wider.

Mr Sata, 77, died in London on October 28th while receiving treatment for an undisclosed illness. There had been much speculation during the year about Mr Sata's health. He had been out of public view for three months during mid-2014, resurfaced in September to open Parliament, but then missed Zambia's celebrations on October 24th to mark 50 years of independence from Britain.

Now a succession battle looms ahead of the presidential by-election which must be held within 90 days, according to the constitution. An obvious heir to Mr Sata's Patriotic Front (PF) party has not emerged despite much jostling during the late president's prolonged absences. Former party secretary, Wynter Kabimba, had been tipped as a possible successor before Mr Sata fired him from the party in August. Other names in the frame have included the finance minister, Alexander Chikwanda, and justice and defence minister Edgar Lungu, who was acting president at the time of Mr Sata's death.

In the interim, the vice-president, Guy Scott, has taken over. Under the current constitution, Mr Scott cannot stand as the PF's presidential candidate in the upcoming election because his parents are not Zambian or of Zambian descent. The constitution would need to be amended if he were to stand. Such a change would have to be passed

© Muna Musiitwa

Michael Sata campaigning during the 2011 elections

through the National Assembly, which, although unlikely, is not impossible in the next three months. Mr Scott is popular with the public even though he is white. He is often described as being "more Zambian" than most Zambians.

As this magazine was going to press, Mr Scott fired Mr Lungu as the PF's secretary-general and then reinstated him the next day after Mr Lungu's dismissal triggered riots in Lusaka, the capital. Mr Lungu remains the defence and justice minister. Some political observers speculated that his removal reflected political manoeuvring among party factions before the upcoming election.

Whatever happens, observers will follow closely the interim government's actions. Prior to Mr Sata's death, the opposition had accused the ruling party of intimidation and harassment, as well as denying free assembly and other constitutional rights.

In particular, opposition leaders had pointed to what they described as repeated abuse of the Public Order Act (POA). Critics, who include not just the opposition but civil society and human rights groups, claimed the government was using the law to stop campaigning by opposition parties.

Police often used the act to deny permission to meet on the grounds of inadequate staff, "after which police responded in force at rallies to arrest opposition leaders and their supporters", according to a 2013 US State Department report. In contrast, PF supporters, who were sometimes armed, often held rallies without submitting prior notification, with little police interference, the report said.

The POA is a legacy of Britain, which ruled Zambia when it was called Northern Rhodesia until independence in 1964. Written in the 1950s, the law stipulates that individuals must notify the police at least seven days in advance if they wish to hold a public meeting.

A later clause allows for the arrest and imprisonment of those taking part in a public meeting that does not have a permit—which is confusing since there is no earlier mention of the need for a permit.

This and other inconsistencies make the POA "an outcast in a democratic society", said McDonald Chipenzi, executive director of the Foundation for Democratic Process, an NGO based in Lusaka. "The POA has been used to…deny political parties the right to canvass for support ahead of any electoral contest," he added.

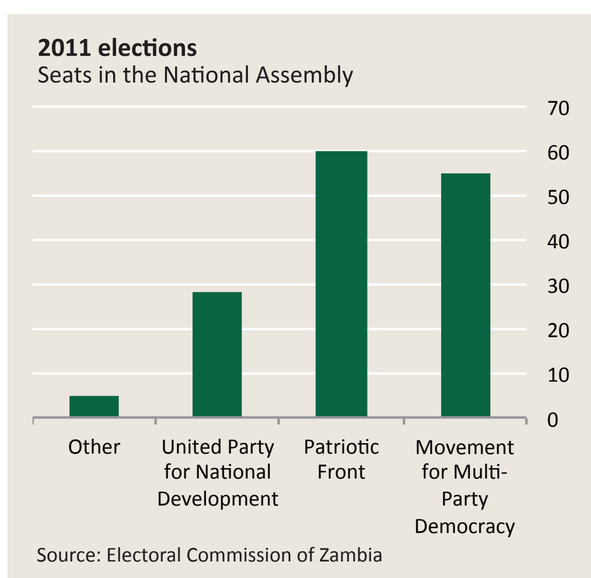
Use of the law to prevent campaigning by opposition parties has become a particularly sensitive issue in light of the unusually high number of by-elections held since the PF came into power in 2011. In the last three years, 22 parliamentary by-elections and over 100 local government elections have been held at an average cost of 3.5m kwacha ($550,000) for each, according to Zambia's electoral commission.

Observers blame the PF's failure to secure a majority in the National Assembly after the 2011 election for this glut. Mr Sata and his PF narrowly defeated the former ruling party, the Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD), winning 60 seats to the MMD's 55. The United Party for National Development (UPND) won 28 seats, independent candidates three. The Forum for Democracy and Development and the Alliance for Democracy and Development won a seat each.

Hakainde Hichilema, the UPND leader, has blamed the government's abuse of the POA for creating an uneven playing field. "How can we enthuse voters if we are not allowed to campaign?" he asked.

Mr Hichilema's UPND, which envisages a strong economy and vibrant private sector as a foundation for tackling poverty and unemployment, came third in the 2011 poll. Since then, the perception has been growing that the UPND is gaining ground. The party has won several new seats in Parliament through by-elections, while the MMD, the largest opposition party, has lost seats. Amid growing public disillusionment with the PF's apparent failure to meet certain election promises, such as a new constitution, observers see Mr Hichilema as a contender in the next election.

This may partly explain why the opposition leader says the ruling party has persistently targeted him. Mr Hichilema says the police have detained him on numerous occasions—for offences ranging from defaming the president to instigating violence—and disrupted UPND rallies and meetings. "This is the first regime in which we have seen a clear manifestation of a desire by the ruling party to wipe out the opposition," he says.



The UPND is not alone. MMD leader Nevers Mumba can also readily recount several incidents in which he has been detained under the POA. Mr Mumba, a former vice-president, was elected MMD leader shortly after the party's defeat under Rupiah Banda in 2011.

In one episode in December 2012 police arrested Mr Mumba and a delegation of 15 MMD members while they were paying a courtesy call to Chief Nkana on the Copperbelt, a competitive electoral patch in central northern Zambia. When the group left, Mr Mumba says, armed police accused them of holding a meeting without a permit, arrested them and detained them overnight.

Mr Mumba says this is just one of many occasions where the police have disrupted public or, in this case, private MMD meetings.

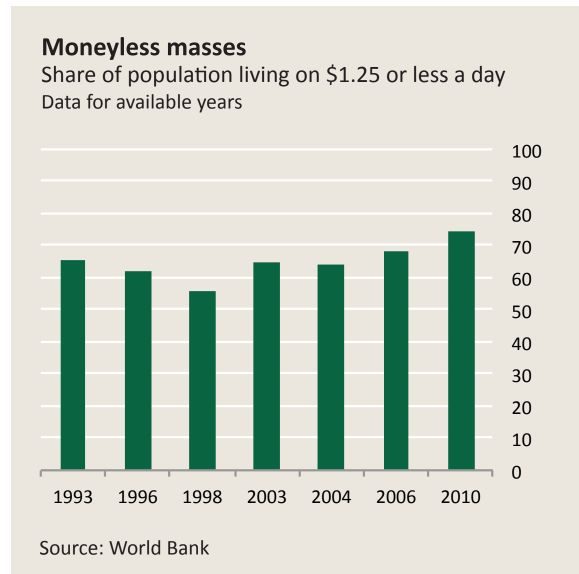
The government denies that the police have arrested opposition MPs for failing to produce a permit at meetings. It argues that it has detained only those holding a public meeting without prior notification, or those who have defied the police by holding rallies even after they were denied permits because of insufficient police staff.

Stephen Kampyongo, deputy minister of home affairs, says the POA is the only

legislation available to "manage tensions between freedom and order". He claims that opposition parties have "equal opportunities to participate in political campaigning". He points to their several by-election victories since 2011 as evidence.

The media is another space in which opposition parties struggle to find a voice. The government owns two of the four main dailies, *The Daily Mail* and *Times of Zambia*. ZNBC, the radio station with the widest national coverage, is also state-run.

Meanwhile, many consider the privately-owned *Post* newspaper pro-government because of its strong support for the PF in the 2011 campaign. The paper's support was apparently rewarded when several members of its editorial team were elevated to government positions shortly after the election.

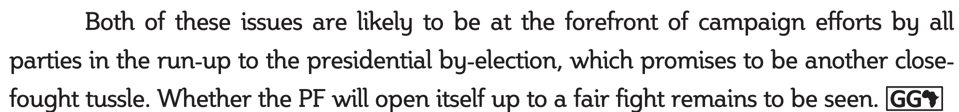


"The public media is highly skewed towards government," says Edith Nawakwi, leader of opposition party the Forum for Democracy and Development and a former finance minister when the MMD was in power. "Even if someone in the ruling party sneezes in an extreme way they will report on that." In contrast, opposition parties often find it difficult to get column inches unless it suits the media's editorial agenda, she says.

Opposition parties, however, have access to alternative media outlets. Zambian news websites and blogs have proliferated in recent years. Although the accuracy of their content is sometimes questionable, they offer opposition parties a platform. Facebook and community radio stations offer other outlets.

Now that a presidential election is imminent, the parties will have to address the country's problems. Although GDP growth has averaged around 7% over the last five years, some 74.3% of Zambians still live below the poverty line of $1.25 per day, according to World Bank figures. Poverty is particularly acute in rural areas.

Unemployment also remains high, especially in the formal sector where only around 900,000 people have jobs, according to the central statistics office. With nearly half of Zambia's 15m-strong population under 18, pressure on the country's limited job market will grow massively in coming years.



Both of these issues are likely to be at the forefront of campaign efforts by all parties in the run-up to the presidential by-election, which promises to be another close-fought tussle. Whether the PF will open itself up to a fair fight remains to be seen. GG

Zimbabwe: the stalled Movement for Democratic Change

Morgan Tsvangirai should take the blame for the collapse of Zimbabwe's major opposition party

Whatever happened to the MDC?

by Ray Ndlovu

The Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), Zimbabwe's largest opposition party, is at its lowest ebb since its formation in 1999. Split into factions and plagued with infighting, it poses no threat to the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (Zanu-PF) or its leader Robert Mugabe, in office since 1980. MDC boss Morgan Tsvangirai—once a darling of the masses at home and a figure of hope abroad—is a shadow of the man who just six years ago seemed poised to topple Mr Mugabe.

High-level defections hit the MDC in March, when several key officials broke away to form the MDC Renewal Team. Among them were Tendai Biti, the country's former finance minister and MDC secretary-general; and Elton Mangoma, the former energy minister and MDC treasurer-general.

"Mr Tsvangirai is in the same league of wartime veterans such as Mr Mugabe and he must now go," Mr Biti told *Africa in Fact*. "He has played his part and he must now leave it for the next generation."

Mr Tsvangirai's attempts to court back the defectors have so far fallen on deaf ears. The MDC Renewal Team, and a smaller MDC faction led by Welshman Ncube, a lawyer and former MDC secretary-general, have spurned his efforts at dialogue. Mr Tsvangirai finds himself isolated and his former political force is a fading memory.

Mr Tsvangirai built his reputation in the 1990s as secretary-general of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions. As a labour leader he pressed Mr Mugabe's government to improve workers' conditions and living standards. Mr Tsvangirai moved into full-time politics in 1999 when he became the MDC leader.

© Nick Clegg

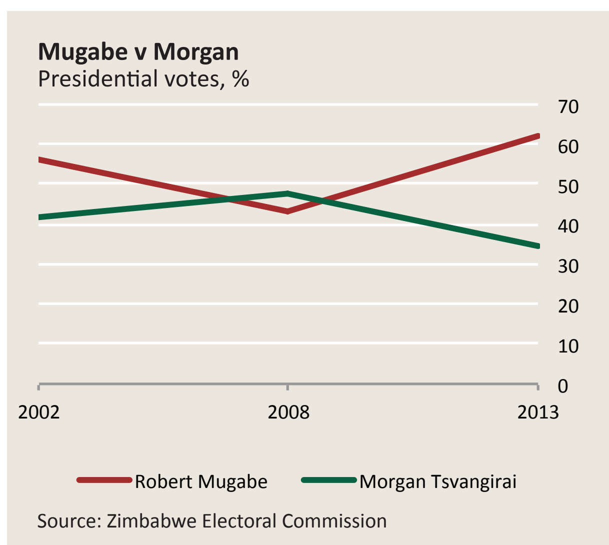
Time up?

At the time he also enjoyed popular support from civil society organisations, white commercial farmers and students. The violent farm invasions in 2000 were a boon for the opposition leader. He spoke out strongly against the invasions,

casting himself as a champion of liberal democracy. He had the international community eating out of his hand.

The pinnacle of his rise came during the dramatic March 2008 presidential elections. In the first round of voting, Mr Tsvangirai won more votes than Mr Mugabe, 47.9% to 43.2%, just short of the 50% or more necessary to prevent a second round of voting.

Political violence escalated leading up to the run-off, with Zanu-PF militias killing nearly 300 MDC supporters, according to a 2008 report from Human Rights Watch, a New York-based watchdog. Five days before the poll, Mr Tsvangirai pulled out of the contest on the grounds that his participation would result in more of his supporters dying.



Since then, Mr Tsvangirai and the MDC have slid downhill. The descent culminated in the 2013 poll, which was deemed free and fair by the African Union and the Southern African Development Community. Mr Mugabe handed the MDC a resounding defeat, winning 61% of the vote to the MDC's 33%. What happened between these two very different sets of elections?

Mr Tsvangirai blamed electoral misconduct for his party's loss in the 2013 poll. "We had judged that our sheer numbers were going to overwhelm the electoral mischief Zanu-PF had planned," he wrote in his memoir, "Personal Reflections", released in July. "[But] we underestimated the level of subversion of the people's will that had been planned." After its defeat, the MDC claimed it had compiled a dossier detailing the fraud, but it did not make it public nor submit it to election observers.

For many disgruntled party officials, this response hints at a serious character flaw: a refusal to own up to the electoral loss. "The leader takes responsibility and the blame that comes with it," the MDC Renewal Team's Mr Mangoma said.

His former boss "tarnished the MDC brand and brought the party into disrepute" after media revelations in 2012 of extra-marital affairs, Mr Mangoma said.

Popular frustration with Mr Tsvangirai grew during the rule of the government of national unity, formed in February 2009 after the previous year's electoral impasse. Mr Tsvangirai served as prime minister but played a subservient role to Mr Mugabe. Mr Mugabe kept key ministries—military, police, foreign affairs, mining and media—for

Zanu-PF, leaving less powerful ministries such as health and education to the MDC. During Mr Mugabe's absence on foreign trips, Mr Tsvangirai played second fiddle to Mr Mugabe's deputy president, Joice Mujuru.

Compounding this humiliation is Mr Tsvangirai's loss of grassroots support. His original support base criticise him for enjoying the perks of power while not doing enough to push for political reforms. During the unity government, Mr Tsvangirai moved into a $5m mansion in the posh Highlands suburb in Harare, which he still occupies more than a year after his 2013 defeat.

Since the end of the unity government, Mr Tsvangirai has failed to articulate clear programmes to voters, said Phillan Zamchiya, the former regional co-ordinator of the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition and a research fellow at Oxford University.

Mr Tsvangirai misread the popular mood by failing to tackle issues Mr Mugabe made paramount during his rule, Mr Zamchiya said. "Throughout the [2013] campaign, Tsvangirai was conspicuous for largely neglecting the topics of indigenisation, sanctions and the legacy of the liberation war, all of which were central to Zanu-PF's campaign," he said. Mr Tsvangirai mistakenly "thought Zimbabweans were more concerned with day-to-day, bread-and-butter issues", he said.

"In the end, Mr Mugabe…presented himself as the custodian of the revolutionary past [and] depicted Mr Tsvangirai as being without history and so…without the credibility to lead Zimbabwe," Mr Zamchiya said.

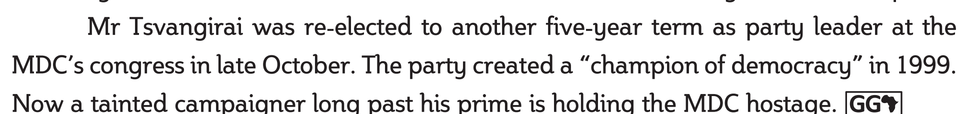
With the MDC split, political observers claim that only a united opposition could challenge Zanu-PF at the next election in 2018. "I do not see how a fragmented opposition is going to stop the ruling party from retaining power—unless Zanu-PF were to implode before the next election, which can only happen after Mr Mugabe's death or incapacitation," said Charles Mangongera, a political analyst based in Harare.

"I do not see how a fragmented opposition is going to stop the ruling party from retaining power—unless Zanu-PF were to implode before the next election, which can only happen after Mr Mugabe's death or incapacitation."

The problem is that opposition party leaders are wary of any alliance with Mr Tsvangirai, who has made it known that he is keen to lead such a coalition. At a Harare press conference in April, Mr Tsvangirai asked former members to join him under a "big tent".

The MDC fissures and the disarray of the opposition is a godsend for Mr Mugabe. Zanu-PF has its own internal problems linked to the appointment of a successor to the 90-year-old president. Party members will vote for a new leader at Zanu-PF's elective congress, which will be held in December 2014, after this magazine went to press.

Mr Tsvangirai was re-elected to another five-year term as party leader at the MDC's congress in late October. The party created a "champion of democracy" in 1999. Now a tainted campaigner long past his prime is holding the MDC hostage. GGA



Will opposition parties work with the military in the transition government following the departure of Blaise Compaoré?

Extension discord

by Eloïse Bertrand

Burkina Faso was recently rocked by massive protests that led to the resignation of long-serving president Blaise Compaoré and an army-led transition.

As this magazine was going to press it was unclear who would form the interim government that the army had promised to install. Under Burkina Faso's constitution, the president of the Senate should take over after the president has resigned and an election should take place in 60 to 90 days. This provision, however, is irrelevant because the Senate has never been established. The president of the National Assembly, who could have legally led this transition, is considered a ruling party insider and has lost every drop of legitimacy.

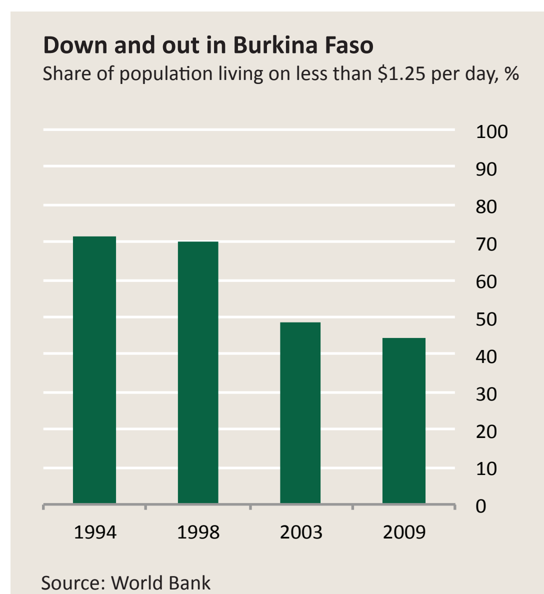
The opposition, customary leaders and foreign diplomats have been meeting with the army, which seized power after Mr Compaoré resigned October 31st after days of massive anti-government protests. "The opposition is playing an important role in ongoing talks with the army on the transition," said Imad Mesdoua, an analyst with Africa Matters, a London-based consultancy. It "will be the central player in the drafting of a road map to decide who will be the key managers in the transition, alongside the army." Mr Compaoré had been in power for 27 years, making him one of Africa's

© The Speaker

Like a house on fire

longest-serving leaders. After staging a military coup in 1987, he established political institutions, including a national assembly, allowed the formation of political parties and held elections. But his recent attempts to amend the constitution and run for a fifth term sparked massive protests that ended with demonstrators setting the parliament building on fire, looting other public and private property and forcing the president to flee to neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire.

Opposition parties and other disgruntled citizens held large rallies in the last year against changing the presidential term limits. Growing social and economic dissatisfaction, particularly among young people, have fuelled these protests. Two-thirds of Burkina Faso's 17m citizens were under 24 in 2010, according to UN figures, and Mr Compaoré was the only leader they ever knew. In 2009 46.7% of the population was living below the national poverty line, according to the latest World Bank figures. According to a government agency that monitors employment, 51% of the country's youth between 15 and 29 were jobless in 2012. The protests were about the populace's unhappiness with the widening gap between the wealthy ruling elite and the poor as much as their dissatisfaction with the attempts to change the constitution.



Mr Compaoré's regime had already been weakened in January 2014 when several leaders from his Congress for Democracy and Progress (CDP) party defected and created a new opposition party, the People's Movement for Progress (MPP, its initials in French).

The deserters left because they felt ignored, according to several key MPP members. "It's the impossibility to act from within the party to carry through our ideals of democracy…that led us to leave reluctantly," said Simon Compaoré (not related to the former president), one of the MPP's founding members and the former CDP mayor of Ouagadougou, the capital. They also disagreed with the party's management and its support for changing the presidential term limits.

Disaffection within Mr Compaoré's party can be traced back to 2012, when the CDP overhauled its executive bureau. Influential party members—including former party president Roch Kaboré and former party vice-president Salif Diallo—were dropped in favour of a group of Mr Compaoré's friends and relatives. Today Mr Kaboré is the MPP president and Mr Diallo his deputy.

The MPP's formation initially raised much suspicion. Some opposition members, especially among the more radical parties, interpreted it as a ploy by Mr Compaoré to extend his power. Through hard work, and with time, the MPP activists have convinced the rest of the opposition that their defection from the CDP is genuine. The MPP now participates in joint opposition activities, such as marches and meetings, led by Zéphirin Diabré, leader of Parliament's largest opposition party, the Union for Progress and Change (UPC).

"Attacks and manoeuvres against the MPP coming from the majority party confirm that they are perceived by the latter as one of the most serious adversaries among the opposition parties," said Philippe Ouédraogo, a leader of the Party for Democracy and Socialism/Metba, another opposition party, before the uprising.

© Erin A. Kirk-Cuomo

President no more

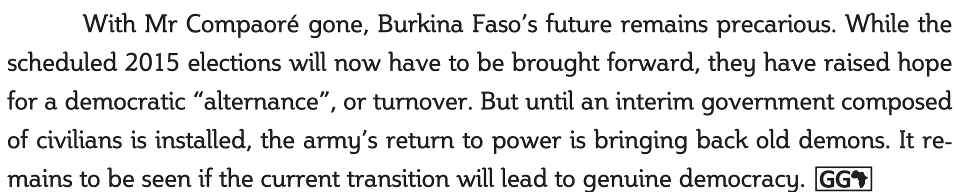
Prior to Mr Compaoré's resignation, the opposition and civil society were united in their common struggle against the constitution's revision. "An opposition coalition including or led by the MPP…has a serious chance to beat the CDP's candidate in 2015, especially if Blaise Compaoré is not himself a candidate," Mr Ouédraogo said in early October.

But without a common enemy, unity might be more difficult to achieve among parties with different visions and agendas. "The opposition is not as united as we think, there are deep divisions," Mr Mesdoua said. "As discussions over leadership emerge, those divisions will worsen and egos will undoubtedly clash."

With Mr Compaoré out of the picture and the CDP in disarray, political observers will closely monitor the shifts in Burkina Faso's political parties as they vie for power. "If the MPP were to assume state power, would it be able to implement internal, economic and foreign policies truly different from what are currently in practice?" Mr Ouédraogo asked before Mr Compaoré stepped down.

The MPP's Simon Compaoré admits this is a legitimate question as many of its members were part of Mr Compaoré's government for years. But it also means that this new party has the experience to ensure that "never again will someone try to modify the constitution to eternalise himself in power," he said.

With Mr Compaoré gone, Burkina Faso's future remains precarious. While the scheduled 2015 elections will now have to be brought forward, they have raised hope for a democratic "alternance", or turnover. But until an interim government composed of civilians is installed, the army's return to power is bringing back old demons. It remains to be seen if the current transition will lead to genuine democracy. GG



These half-dozen opposition parties refuse to participate in another sham election

Loaded dice

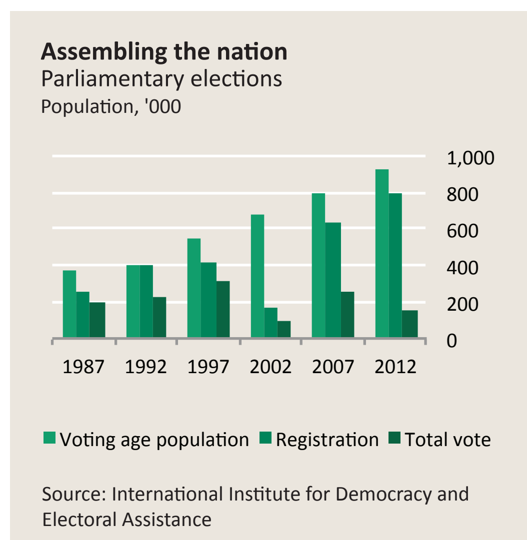
by Modou Joof

Gambia's President Yahya Jammeh wants the world to think he is a democrat. Two years after seizing power as a 29-year-old officer in a 1994 coup, he held elections. He won. Since then he has won three more: in 2001, 2006 and 2011—all widely criticised polls.

But this democratic façade is crumbling. Six of the main opposition parties in Gambia have vowed to boycott the next presidential election, scheduled for November 2016, after the head of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) rejected their calls for electoral reform in 2012. So far they have not participated in the March 2012 parliamentary and the April 2013 local elections. Only one opposition party has contested the ruling Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC) party in these two elections.

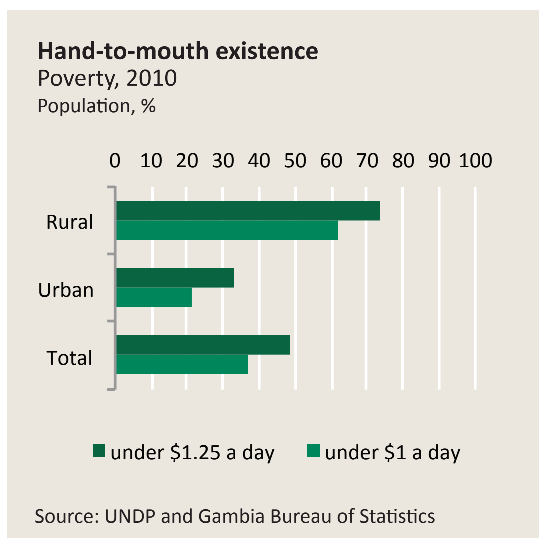
"There is no gain contesting an election that will not be free and fair," said Ousainou Darboe, leader of the United Democratic Party (UDP), which received 17% of the vote in the 2011 poll, more than any other opposition party.

Popularly known as the "Group of Six", these opposition parties asked the IEC to end Gambia's "first past the post" electoral system, which gives victory to a candidate with a simple majority. Instead, they want a "second-round" system, where a candidate who wins less than 50% faces a run-off election. First past the post favours a powerful incumbent since it spares him the threat of facing a coalition united behind one candidate in the second round.



The six parties have also called for an end to the arrest and intimidation of their supporters. Twelve members of the opposition UDP's youth wing were arrested in February 2014 for "unlawful assembly" and acquitted in court a month later. The coalition also wants the ruling party to practise neutrality in the hiring of civil service employees, especially in the police and armed forces.

They also demand transparency in the operations of parastatals such as the



ports authority and the electricity company, which the six opposition parties accuse of bankrolling the ruling party.

Gambia is one of the poorest countries in the world. Almost 50% of the country's 1.8m people live below the poverty line of $1.25 a day, according to the World Bank. Yet party leaders—both opposition and the ruling-aligned—drive flashy cars, own properties in expensive neighbourhoods in Banjul, the capital, and send their children to universities abroad.

Despite the ongoing electoral boycott, Gambia's opposition parties try to make their voices heard in a media that often practises self-censorship because of the country's "intolerant and unpredictable" government, according to Reporters Without Borders, a Paris-based watchdog. Journalists convicted of libel or sedition face jail terms.

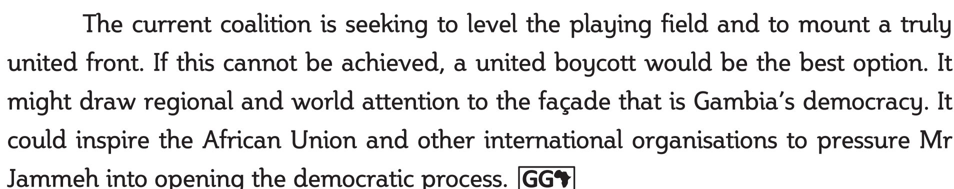
The government shut *The Standard* newspaper and Taranga FM radio station from September 2012 to January 2014 following the publication and broadcasting of articles that criticised the government's execution of nine prisoners in August 2012.

A 2013 law introduced a 15-year jail term and a fine of about $100,000 for anyone who uses the internet to "make derogatory statements [or] incite dissatisfaction" against the government or public officials. "This has led to self-censorship among journalists," said the Gambia Human Rights Network, an international grouping of human rights organisations, in a 2014 report.

In addition to electoral and media constraints, funding is a perennial problem for opposition parties. Party leaders mostly fund political activities from their own pockets. In July 2013, the leader of the National Democratic Action Movement asked Gambia's diaspora to send money to support party activities at home.

The Group of Six's joint boycott is a sign that the Gambian opposition may be uniting, but it has tried this before, unsuccessfully. While one opposition party has failed to join the boycott, two other parties have not joined the coalition but have not participated in any elections either. A coalition of opposition parties in 2005 split shortly before the 2006 presidential election when party leaders failed to agree on who should lead the alliance. This might happen again.

The current coalition is seeking to level the playing field and to mount a truly united front. If this cannot be achieved, a united boycott would be the best option. It might draw regional and world attention to the façade that is Gambia's democracy. It could inspire the African Union and other international organisations to pressure Mr Jammeh into opening the democratic process. GG



Côte d'Ivoire's crippled opposition

The main opposition party in this west African nation should come back to the table

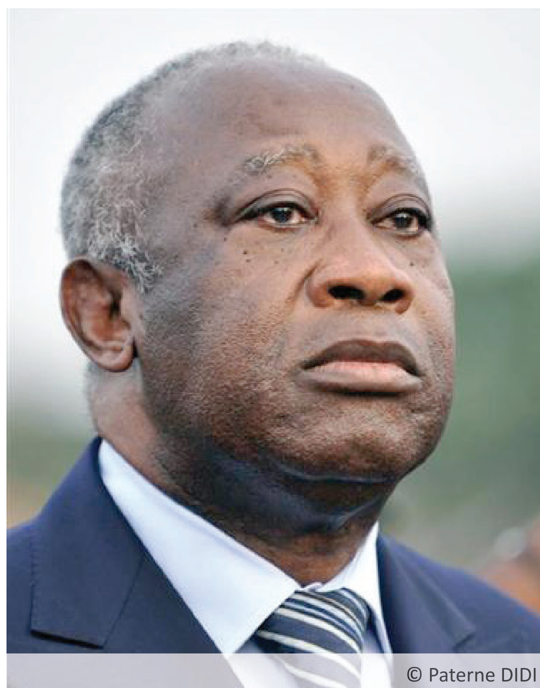
Empty chair policy

by Kamissa Camara

With Côte d'Ivoire's presidential elections slated for November 2015 and the country still recovering from the violence that followed the last polls in 2010, the role of the former ruling party and now the main opposition is anyone's guess.

The Ivorian Popular Front (FPI) ruled this west African nation for ten years under the stewardship of Laurent Gbagbo, the country's former president and the party's founding father. Large blue posters of Mr Gbagbo smiling and wearing sunglasses festoon the FPI headquarters in Abidjan, the capital. In large white font, the headline of these placards reads: "Still standing".

But this is no longer true. Mr Gbagbo is now behind bars at The Hague charged with crimes against humanity, including murder, rape and persecution. He faces a trial at the International Criminal Court (ICC), which is still not scheduled. These charges stem from his refusal to concede defeat in the November 2010 run-off presidential election and the brief but bloody civil war that followed. It ended when French forces captured Mr Gbagbo in April 2011.



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Once proud: Laurent Gbagbo

Since then, the Popular Front has been in disarray and has refused to participate in politics. This withdrawal, known as an "empty chair" political strategy, is the FPI's way of expressing its discontent with the current government led by Alassane Ouattara, who won the 2010 presidential poll. It is unhappy with what it deems the government's harsh treatment and one-sided justice reserved for FPI members. At the time, this move may have seemed politically expedient, a stalemate of silence between the FPI and the Ouattara government. But in the end this play may lead to the checkmate of this once powerful party.

The Popular Front is divided. A minority are in favour of dialogue with the

government, but the majority has dug in its heels and refuses to cooperate. In October 2011 the FPI ordered the boycott of the legislative election held that December. Two years later, the FPI again refused to participate in the 2013 municipal and regional elections.

More recently, in September 2014, the FPI announced suddenly that it would recall its representative from the newly elected Independent Electoral Commission (CEI). It disputes the neutrality of the CEI's president-elect, Youssouf Bakayoko, who headed the commission in 2010. Shortly after the polls closed that year, Mr Bakayoko declared Mr Ouattara the winner at Mr Ouattara's campaign headquarters. But two hours later, the presiding head of the Constitutional Court, Paul Yao N'dré, declared his close friend Mr Gbagbo the winner. This appearance of bias from both sides unleashed a five-month civil war that left 3,000 dead and more than 150 women raped, according to Human Rights Watch.

Neck and neck
Ivorian election results

2010 presidential elections	Share of votes	
	first round	second round
Laurent Gbagbo (FPI)	38.0%	45.9%
Alassane Ouattara (RDR)	32.1%	54.1%
Henri Konan Bédié (PDCI)	25.2%	—
11 other candidates	4.7%	—

2011 parliamentary election	Share of seats
RDR	54.2%
PDCI	33.8%
Others	25.3%
Boycotted by FPI	—

Source: African Elections Database

While the Popular Front's withdrawal from the CEI will not affect the electoral commission's work, it considerably diminishes hopes for reconciliation between these political parties. The FPI's absence from the election management body less than a year before the November 2015 presidential poll also reflects its struggle to find a new vision and move past grievances to reconcile with the Ouattara government.

Côte d'Ivoire is just emerging from a long political and military crisis, which started in the mid-1990s after the death of Félix Houphouët-Boigny, the country's first president. The violent clashes that took place after the 2010 elections were the latest flare-up. However, with Mr Gbagbo now behind bars and former pro-Ouattara forces enjoying total impunity, FPI partisans are critical of what they call two-tier justice in which the spoils belong to the victor and his allies.

"If we want peace and reconciliation in this country, we have to examine the causes before their consequences," said Michel Amani N'Guessan, a Popular Front vice-president and former defence and education minister. "The Ouattara government has judged Gbagbo's partisans unilaterally. Both Laurent Gbagbo and Charles Blé Goudé [head of the FPI's youth wing] are currently at the ICC and none of Ouattara's people can be found there. This is partial justice."

Mr Ouattara has attempted to appease the opposition party by liberating Popular Front political prisoners, Mr N'Guessan admitted. But he has only freed 100 of the 800 FPI members behind bars, "a drop in the ocean" while "the arrests of FPI partisans continue on a daily basis," he added during an interview in October.

Should the FPI decide to boycott the 2015 elections, Mr Ouattara will surely win another term and the Popular Front will fade into oblivion. Should the FPI decide to run, the electorate will perceive their participation as a strong sign of national reconciliation.

Human Rights Watch and the Ivorian Human Rights Movement, a local NGO, were unable to confirm the exact number of FPI detainees. Both groups confirmed that Mr Ouattara has planned to release more in the coming months.

The Popular Front began an internal overhaul in July hoping to "reinvigorate and rejuvenate the party", said the party's president, Pascal Affi N'Guessan (not related to Michel N'Guessan). It has given 200 party jobs to younger and more highly educated partisans.

The Popular Front's efforts to recover its former strength have been bumpy. Its deep internal divisions are the major threat to its longevity and have significantly diminished its prominence in Ivorian politics.

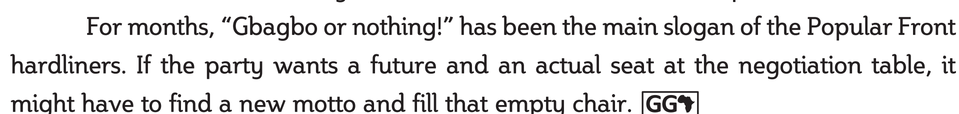
With presidential elections a year away, the Popular Front must step up its game. In September it received a symbolic slap in the face when the head of the Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI), Henry Konan Bédié, threw his party's support behind Mr Ouattara. Even though the ruling party—the Rally of the Republicans (RDR)—and the PDCI have long been political allies, this official announcement further pushes the FPI to the sidelines of Ivorian politics.

Should the FPI decide to boycott the 2015 elections, Mr Ouattara will surely win another term and the Popular Front will fade into oblivion. Should the FPI decide to run, the electorate will perceive their participation as a strong sign of national reconciliation. Victory, however, will not be easy. The party won 38% of the votes in the first round of the 2010 presidential elections and 45.9% in the second round.

Leaving such a big chunk of the electorate without a choice will not help Côte d'Ivoire's citizens put aside their differences. "The FPI's participation in the 2015 elections will allow Ivorians to put the sad events of 2010 behind them," said Wodjo Fini Traoré, a human rights activist. "The FPI's refusal to participate in the upcoming elections would be disastrous for Côte d'Ivoire. Everybody needs to participate. We want the electoral process to be as inclusive as possible."

In December, as this magazine was going to press, the FPI general assembly was set to convene to decide if they will name a candidate in the 2015 presidential election.

For months, "Gbagbo or nothing!" has been the main slogan of the Popular Front hardliners. If the party wants a future and an actual seat at the negotiation table, it might have to find a new motto and fill that empty chair. GG



The creation of Nigeria's first credible opposition party met with great excitement in 2013. Will it maintain its momentum?

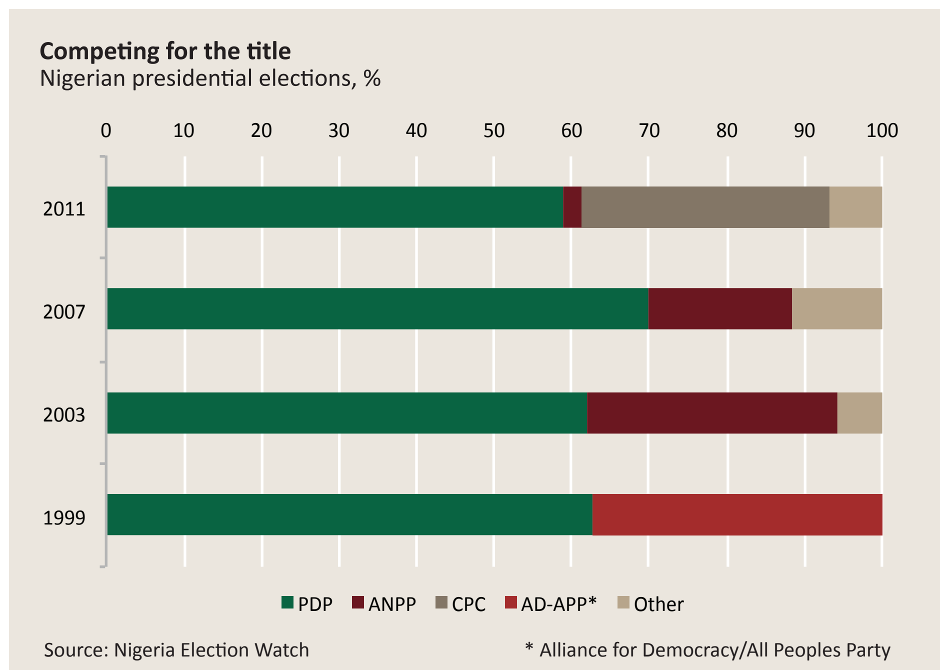
A new beginning and an old ending

by Eleanor Whitehead

Nigeria is a political paradox: a multi-party democracy that has been led by just one party since it transitioned from military rule in 1999. For 15 years, no opposition has come close to challenging the dominance of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Not, at least, until the All Progressive Congress (APC) emerged in 2013 as the first credible opponent in the history of this country's civilian rule. Suddenly, the game seemed to have changed.

The APC was created when four opposition parties—the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP), the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) and the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC)—merged in February 2013.

Competing for the title
Nigerian presidential elections, %



Source: Nigeria Election Watch

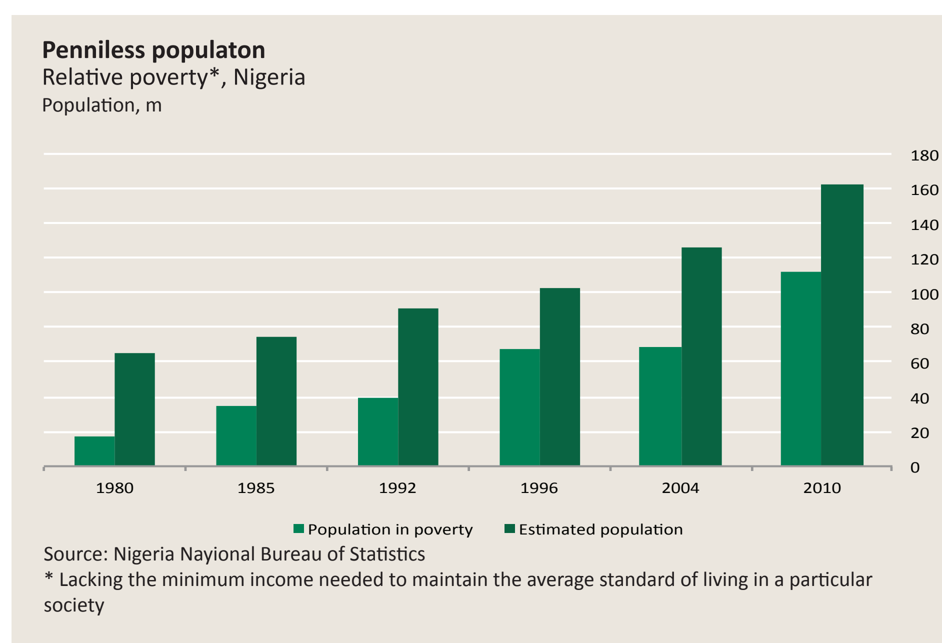
* Alliance for Democracy/All Peoples Party

The news of their unification met with great excitement. This was not the first effort at amalgamation. But in the past, mergers between minor, regional opposition parties were tabled at the last minute and invariably crumbled under pressure from in-fighting and competing political or ethnic interests.

By seeing the merger through, the APC broke new ground. Why the resolve? "The past attempts were half-hearted," the APC's national publicity secretary Lai

Mohammed told *Africa in Fact*. Now it is different, he said. "This time it was clear to the leadership of all the parties that the only way to survive was a merger. As long as they remained small, regional parties it would be easy for the PDP to make mincemeat of them," he said. "So they started early, and each party went with no conditionalities."

The result is the first opposition party with potential to appeal to communities and ethnicities across the country. This, Mr Mohammed declared, is history in the making: "The first time in the history of elections in Nigeria that a ruling party will go into elections with a truly national, broad-based opposition which can really pose a challenge."



Since the new party's formation, the PDP has had plenty of worries. Shortly after the APC was born, five ruling party governors defected to the new opposition. In February 2014 it won a major asset when Atiku Abubakar, a former vice-president, joined its ranks.

More signs are emerging that the PDP's popularity is diminishing. President Goodluck Jonathan won just under 59% of votes in the 2011 election, down from the 70% taken by his predecessor, the late Umaru Yar'Adua, in 2007. Over that time, the ruling party's strength in both the Senate and House of Representatives decreased. And according to Mr Mohammed, a 2013 APC survey found that 70% of Nigerians were unhappy with the PDP leadership.

This is unsurprising. Despite vast oil wealth, a larger proportion of Nigerians are poor today than a decade ago. According to the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics' most recent figures, 61% of the population lived on a dollar a day or less in 2010, an increase of almost ten percentage points since the last measurement was taken in 2004. More

recently, the World Bank noted in 2013 that "poverty reduction and job creation have not kept pace with population growth, implying that the number of underemployed and impoverished Nigerians continues to grow." Crumbling infrastructure, industrial-scale oil theft, endless corruption scandals, and a worsening insurgency in Nigeria's north-east have further undermined the leadership's credibility.

The APC has tried to position itself as the harbinger of a new beginning. "At no time in our national life has radical change become more urgent," Tom Ikimi, chairman of the APC merger committee, said at the party's inauguration last year. It would offer "our beleaguered people a recipe for peace and prosperity", he added.

© Atiku Abubakar

Atiku Abubakar: presidential ambitions

That optimism was tempered in recent months. The PDP has reclaimed control of Adamawa and Ekiti, states in Nigeria's north-east and south-west respectively. At the same time, several high-ranking APC politicians (including Nuhu Ribadu, the influential former head of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission) have returned to government ranks.

The APC did win back some momentum when the speaker of the House of Representatives defected to their fold. Still the government has the advantage of cash on its side. Sarah Tzinieris, principal Africa analyst at Maplecroft, a risk advisory company, pointed to "allegations that the ruling party has used bribes and political favours to entice their return". The to-ing and fro-ing has increased political instability in the nation of more than 170m people, she added.

The APC faces further obstacles. The two rival parties have similar political platforms, so much rests on the choice of leader. The APC will likely settle on a northerner, in response to a growing feeling that the southern-led government has neglected the needs of the country's mostly Muslim north.

The selection of a leader from candidates including Mr Abubakar and former military leader Muhammadu Buhari will take place in December, after this magazine goes to press. But the process may be stormy. Analysts argue that in-fighting, politics, and the failure to rally around a single candidate could threaten the party at a time when the PDP has already chosen Mr Jonathan as its presidential candidate. There is still the chance that the coalition could crumble, Ms Tzinieris argued, because the process of deciding jointly on a presidential candidate "will prove particularly contentious".

Nigeria's previous presidential vote was among the bloodiest in its history, with over 800 reported dead by Human Rights Watch. With tensions running higher than ever this time around, another outbreak of religious and ethnic unrest is likely.

The APC's candidates also need to remodel their reputations. "Many of the APC's potential leaders are going to find it hard to escape the image of self-interest, because they have only jumped ship recently," said Martin Roberts, west Africa analyst with IHS, a risk consultancy. "Atiku has left the PDP twice purely to fulfil the ambition of becoming president."

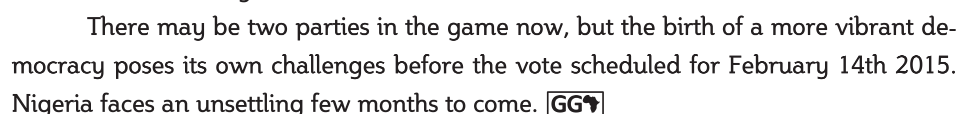
These elections will be more closely fought than any since 1999, but a change of guard is highly unlikely. The PDP can draw on "vast country-wide patronage networks" to maintain power, Maplecroft's Ms Tzinieris said. Access to oil revenues will also bolster its electoral war chest.

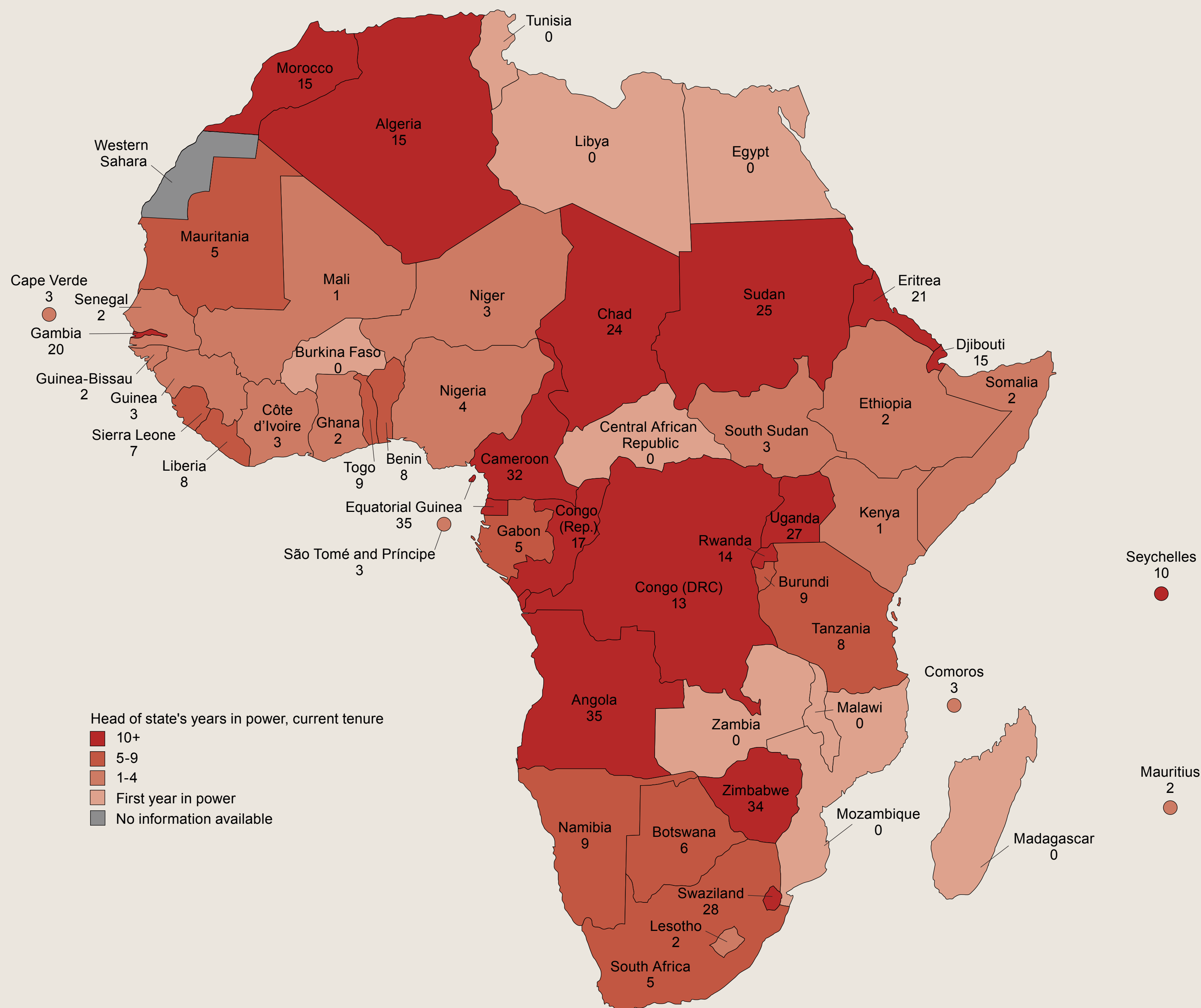
With more at stake than ever, it is assumed that the PDP will ensure victory through whatever means necessary. "This vote will be very well controlled by the PDP," IHS's Mr Roberts argued. "Holding on to power is too important to leave to chance. Many senior PDP figures fear that if they did lose power they would spend the rest of their lives fighting off corruption allegations and being pursued in various court cases."

Vote rigging is likely, he added, but the government has other means at its disposal, including leveraging its control over appointed state police commissioners. The APC also fears that the government will attempt to postpone ballots in the three states under emergency rule in Nigeria's troubled north-east, where support for the opposition is strong.

Nigeria's previous presidential vote was among the bloodiest in its history, with over 800 reported dead by Human Rights Watch. With tensions running higher than ever this time around, another outbreak of religious and ethnic unrest is likely. "In the event of a northern APC candidate losing out to Jonathan, there is a real risk that post-election tensions would escalate in northern states as well as the country's middle belt," Ms Tzinieris argued.

There may be two parties in the game now, but the birth of a more vibrant democracy poses its own challenges before the vote scheduled for February 14th 2015. Nigeria faces an unsettling few months to come. GG





Thirst for power

Source: CIA World Factbook, calculated by GGA

Excludes ceremonial president (Ethiopia) and constitutional monarch (Lesotho).

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www.gga.org

Telephone: +27 11 268 0479

Email: info@gga.org

Physical Address: 4 Biermann Avenue, Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196

Postal Address: PO Box 2621, Saxonwold 2132, South Africa

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GOOD GOVERNANCE AFRICA