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Pelizzo, Riccardo; Nwokora, Zim

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Party System Change and the Quality of Democracy in East Africa

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Party System Change and the Quality of Democracy in East Africa

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Riccardo Pelizzo
Graduate School of Public Policy,
Nazarbayev University.
E-mail: riccardo.pelizzo@nu.edu.kz

Zim Nwokora
School of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Faculty of Arts and Education, Deakin University
E-mail: z.nwokora@deakin.edu.au

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Party System Change and the Quality of Democracy in East Africa

Riccardo Pelizzo & Zim Nwokora

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore in greater detail the nexus between party system change and democratic qualities. In doing so, we do not simply assess whether, how and to what extent qualities of democracy in East Africa are affected by the instability of the patterns of inter-party competition (fluidity of the party system), but we also plan to show how the sub-components of party system fluidity (frequency of change, scope of change, variety of change) influence the democratic qualities. By disaggregating fluidity in its constitutive elements and by testing how each of them affects the qualities of democracy, we find that while the frequency of change has a beneficial impact on the qualities of democracy, the other sub-components of fluidity—namely, the "scope" and "variety" of system change—have a consistently negative effect on democratic quality.

JEL Classification: D02, D72, H00, H11, H89, O00, O10, O43, O55
Keywords: party system change, East Africa, South East Asia, fluidity, democracy

1. Introduction

The study of democracy has gone hand in hand with the study of political parties, with many contending that parties are a necessary, albeit insufficient, condition for the existence, survival and consolidation of democracy. The literature shows that parties can organize democracy in various ways. In the established democracies, party democracy has evolved through distinct phases; and scholars have developed models to capture the features of each period (see e.g.,

Blyth and Katz, 2005; Katz and Mair, 1995; Asongu and Nwachukwu 2016a, 2016b). In developing democracies, perhaps most especially Africa, the evolution of party politics has been "unusually compressed" (Bogaards, 2015). The parties that emerged when democracy spread across the continent from the late 1980s onwards were not anchored in enduring social cleavages, as had been the case in Western Europe, and were mostly "electoralist" from birth (Bogaards, 2015).

In both Western and African contexts, there has been a "crisis of democracy" in recent years. In the West, democracies that had been long been considered high-performance systems appear to be suffering a decline in their capacity (or at least perceived capacity) to deliver effective governance. To a large extent, this crisis of democracy is a crisis of party democracy. Public confidence in political parties and the institutions they inhabit has fallen (Diamond and Gunther, 2001), and parties are often viewed as little more than self-serving cartels that sustain themselves by drawing resources from state coffers, and have no desire to satisfy voters' needs and demands (Blyth and Katz, 2005; Katz and Mair, 1995).

Given the region's checkered history with democracy, the crisis of democracy in Africa is less surprising but also more serious. Here, the problem is the struggle for democratic consolidation. Although elections are now widespread across the continent, meaningful inter-party competition remains exceptional and alternations in power are rare (see e.g., Bogaards2004; Bogaards 2008; Cheeseman 2015). At the same time, the process of consolidation must occur in what are, in general, extremely challenging contexts for governance, with economies that often lack diversification and the requisites of sustainable growth; societies that are characterized by significant ethnic fragmentation; and populations burdened by regular health and welfare emergencies.

As in the Western crisis of democracy, political parties have come under scrutiny. The absence of institutionalized parties has been cited as a drag on democratic development. But even when African parties resemble their Western manifestations, they often look more like the cartel model, with its functional problems, than its more effective predecessors. As Bogaards (2015) explains, Africa's governing parties display several of the hallmarks of cartelization, including a heavy reliance on their control of state resources; detachment from any grassroots activity; and a distancing of the party leadership from ordinary citizens. In short, regarding the relevance of the cartel model, "Africa is no exception."

The purpose of this paper is to examine the nexus between political parties and the quality of democracy in Africa. In particular, we focus on party system change and the East Africa region. While it has long been recognized that the static attributes of party systems—such as their extent of fragmentation and polarization—influence democratic governance, it is only relatively recently that researchers have become aware of the impact of party systems' dynamic properties—or, in other words, the effects of party system change (see especially Mainwaring and Scully 1995). Utilizing the index of party system fluidity (Nwokora and Pelizzo 2015; Pelizzo and Nwokora 2016), which taps the extent to which the functional properties of a party system transform over time, we examine the relationship between party system change and the quality of democracy, as measured using various indicators. We do so with a concentration on the East African region, which contains significant, but perhaps underappreciated, diversity in terms of both party system dynamics and democratic governance.

The paper proceeds as follows. In the next section, drawing on theoretical work by Leonardo Morlino (e.g., Morlino1986; 1996; 2001; 2004), we present a framework for assessing the qualities of a democratic system. In so doing, we stress the importance of party systems as

determinants of democratic quality. However, we also note that the potentially beneficial impact of a party system depends on it being reasonably stable. Establishing the extent to which party systems are stable, and how this relates to democratic quality, is the central problem investigated in the remainder of the paper. In the article's third section, we explain our reasons for focusing on East Africa. In the fourth section, we present the results from our empirical analyses. Consistent with our theoretical priors, we find that countries with more fluid party systems tend to have lower quality of democracy scores. But we also find that the sub-components of fluidity—namely, the frequency, scope and variety of system change—contribute in different ways to this overall effect. Specifically, while frequency has some beneficial effects, scope and variety have consistently negative effects on democratic quality. The concluding section summarizes the preceding analyses and discussion.

By examining the relationship between party system fluidity and the quality of democracy, we follow previous research by Nwokora and Pelizzo (2015), which investigated a similar problem but for a different region, South-East Asia. While we adopt a similar empirical strategy, this paper goes beyond this previous research by examining the effects of the various sub-components of the fluidity index. Furthermore, our findings from this study provide a basis for comparing East Africa and South-East Asia in terms of party system change and its impact on democratic quality.

2. Political Parties and Democratic Consolidation

A. "Democracy"and Its Consolidation

The study of "democracy" has always been central to political science. Among the issues that receive significant attention are the questions: what is a democracy in theory and in

practice(Katz, 1997); how does a democracy come into being (Mainwaring, 1989); and what factors determine democratic regime survival and longevity (Mainwaring, 1993; Przeworksi et al., 2000). Among the factors that have been cited as being important determinants of whether (or not) a democratic regime is likely to consolidate and survive are political culture and values (Almond and Verba, 1963; Putnam, 1994), forms of government (Linz, 1994), socio-economic development (Przeworksi et al., 2000; Epstein et al., 2006) and, above all, legitimacy which, following Lipset (1959: 86), might be defined as "the capacity of a political system to engender and maintain the belief that existing political institutions are the most appropriate or proper ones for society."

Lipset (1959)regarded legitimacy as an affective or emotional attachment to a political system for what might be described as "cultural" reasons. Thus, the Weimar Republic failed, he argued, because the culture of the Junkers after WWI was not pro-democratic. In Lipset's view, legitimacy was not performance-based. In fact, he argued the reverse: had the Weimar Republic enjoyed some legitimacy, it would have been able to survive economic catastrophe. Huntington (1993), by contrast, noted that legitimacy could come in many guises, one of which was performance-based. Thus, he argued that while democratic regimes have some procedural legitimacy that non-democratic regimes lack, they are also prone to collapse if they are unable to tackle major economic crises. Developing this idea that legitimacy is multifaceted, Morlino (2001) distinguished various kinds of legitimating processes.

According to Morlino, one important distinction concerns whether the legitimating process is "exclusive" or "inclusive". Legitimacy can be said to be exclusive when some important segments of the socio-economic elite "do not accept democratic institutions" (Morlino, 2001:227), and inclusive when "all the political organizations are integrated and involved in the

acceptance and the support of democratic institutions". The second key distinction concerns the process of anchorage, or precisely how political/partisan elites and (civil) society build ties that bind. More fully anchorage refers to "the emergence, the formation, the transformation or the disappearance of anchors which connect or even control civil society" (Morlino, 2001:228). These anchors may be formal organizations or informal social relations, and in particular party organizations, clientelism, neocorporatism and/or gatekeeping. Party organizations are distinctive because they are instruments of permanent participation, which represent, aggregate and integrate society into the political system and decision-making. Clientelism is a system in which individual, unorganized and unprotected individuals depend on political parties and, especially, the institutions which parties control in order to garner resources and benefits. Neocorporatism is an arrangement characterized by "stable agreements, business associations and strong trade unions which contribute to the preservation of those agreements" (Morlino, 2001:231). Gatekeeping refers to parties' and party elites' ability to regulate which interest groups and socio-economic elites can gain access to decision-making.

In his empirical analyses, Morlino (2001: 234) focused on three of these four anchors (strength of party organization, strength of clientelism, and gatekeeping) and found, for example, that Italy, but also Greece, is characterized by the presence of very strong party organizations and that parties control the society (by actively performing their gate-keeping function and by practicing clientelism)—which is why Morlino concluded that, in Italy, democratic consolidation was not achieved through elites (as occurred in Spain) nor through the state (as occurred in Portugal), but instead through political parties.

B. Political Parties and Democratic Consolidation

The anchors play a role not only with regard to the consolidation of democracy but also with regard to determining the quality of a democracy, which, in turn, is a significant determinant of whether a democratic regime is able to survive. The quality of democracy, Morlino (2005) argued, involves six dimensions:

1) Rule of law;

2) Inter-institutional accountability;

3) Electoral accountability;

4) Responsiveness to (a) the policy needs of citizens and (b) the public services that need to be provided to citizens; but that also concerns (c) provision of symbolic goods; (d) provision of private/material goods to the voters; and (e) legitimacy of democratic institutions.

5) Freedom; and

6) Equality.

The performance of a democratic regime in each dimension, argued Morlino, is a function of the characteristics of the country, including its level of political participation; the effectiveness of its bureaucracy; what kinds of authoritarian legacies and pre-authoritarian traditions it follows; its international situation; social structure; and natural resources. For example, the rule of law is undermined by the survival of norms and legislation crafted by the authoritarian regime or by the fact that the judiciary may not be properly independent; vertical accountability may be undermined by the presence of right- and left-wing extremist groups, a non-democratic culture, cynicism and statism; and responsiveness may be undermined by the absence of an effective public sector.

Political parties and their leaders are important determinants of democratic quality. They are instruments of permanent participation, integration, representation, expression and aggregation. They need to exist in the plural for inter-party competition to be even minimally democratic. They are the instruments without which there cannot be any electoral accountability. They translate demands from individuals and groups into political, public issues and take stances on these issues that are closer to or farther from what the electorate wants (4.a and 4.b). They provide benefits symbolic or otherwise to the members and supporters (4.c) and provide material goods to citizens (4.d). This is why political parties play a key role both in the consolidation of democracy and in securing the quality of the democratic regime.

The constitutions of many African countries suggest that political parties were expected to be vital to the functioning of these political systems. African constitutions grant citizens the right to form and join political parties and, moreover, present parties as instrumental to the expression of suffrage (Benin, Chad, Comoros, Djibuti, Gabon, Mali, Niger); to shaping political will and management of public affairs (Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Mauritania); and in the civic education of the society (Burkina Faso, Comoros, Guinea, Rwanda). Some provisions – such as Article 52 of the Constitution of Rwanda, article 75 of the Constitution of Burundi, Article 6 of the Constitution of Gabon and Article 175 of the Constitution of Niger – explicitly acknowledge multi-partism as an essential ingredient of democracy, while other provisions, such as Article 77 of the Constitution of Liberia, go so far as to declare that "the essence of democracy is free competition of ideas by political parties and political groups."

In the course of our empirical analyses we plan to show that political parties do affect the quality of democracy, but also that this impact may be beneficial or detrimental depending on the

extent to which the pattern of inter-party competition is stable. Specifically, we do so by investigating whether the fluidity of party systems (Nwokora and Pelizzo, 2015; Pelizzo and Nwokora, 2016), or the extent of their instability, erodes several of the qualities associated with a high-quality democracy. This question is of importance not only to scholars, but also practitioners working in the field of democracy promotion and consolidation. In addition to analysing the relationship between fluidity and democratic quality, we also disaggregate fluidity into its constitutive components to see which democratic qualities are affected (and in what way) by the various subcomponents of fluidity.

3. Applying the Morlino Framework in East Africa

Morlino's theorization of democratic consolidation and the qualities of democracy has been widely used to evaluate democratic regimes, often in single-country case studies (e.g., Un, 2011; Ferrara, 2011; McCarthy, 2011); to ground analyses of the relationships among the various qualities of democracy, using either a regional sample (e.g., Morlino, Dressel and Pelizzo, 2011; Morlino, 2012; Morlino, 2014) or a global sample (e.g., Diamond and Morlino, 2005); and to explore how democratic qualities are affected by other variables (e.g., Morlino, 2001; Morlino, 2005). Building on this work, and especially the third line of inquiry, Nwokora and Pelizzo (2015) investigated the qualities of democracies in South East Asia, showing that their performance is affected both by party system attributes such as the fragmentation of the party system, as measured by the Effective Number of Parties (Laakso and Taagepera 1979), but also by party system instability as captured by the index of fluidity.

We follow their empirical strategy but, as well as examining the effects of fluidity, we test the subcomponents of the fluidity index, to see whether there are distinct consequences

associated with the frequency, scope and variety of system change. Furthermore, we focus on the East African region (rather than South East Asia). In studies of African politics, this region often receives less attention that West and Southern Africa. In part, this may be because it is often thought that the latter regions contain the continent's more successful democracies. For example, for Mattes and Boadi (2005), there are no stronger democracies in Africa than Ghana and South Africa. This view might have had some merit in 2005, but it needs to be revised in light of more recent developments, especially since 2000as several African countries have experienced spells of sustained economic growth and socio-economic development, which have created the conditions for a deepening of democracy. As a result, East African countries such as Mauritius and Kenya score as well as, or even higher than, Ghana and South Africa according to widely used measures of democratic-ness.[1] For our purposes, the observation that East Africa now has some reasonably successful democracies suggests that there is ample variation to examine the determinants of democratic quality in this region.

This region is also diverse in other ways. As Table 1 below shows, East African countries vary significantly in terms of their level of democracy, as captured by the Polity 2 variable; political and civil rights and liberties, as captured by the Gastil index of Freedom House; but also in their geographical size, population, and wealth.[2]For example, in Freedom House's "Freedom

[1]For example, the "Polity 2" variable in the widely used Polity IV dataset indicates that, in 2015, the overall level of democracy in Ghana was not as high as in Cape Verde, Mauritius or Kenya. Similarly, even though South Africa's democracy was on par with Kenya's, it was not as strong as Cape Verde's or Mauritius's.

[2]The table includes only those countries that are included in our sample; several other East African countries are excluded, for reasons we explain in a moment. For the Polity 2 variable,

in the World" report, one East African country was classified as "free," four were classified as "partly free," and one was regarded as "not free" based on classifications relating to their Gastil index scores. Income per capita in the region varies from a minimum of 340 US dollars in Malawi to 9780 dollars in Mauritius. The region displays considerable variation in terms of population, with a minimum of 1.2 million people in Mauritius to 99 million in Ethiopia. These countries also differ in terms of their geographic location, and in particular whether they are landlocked, coastal or islands. Thus, East Africa includes small, rich, insular, highly democratic, free countries such as Mauritius, but also large, landlocked, low income, highly autocratic, non-free countries such as Ethiopia.

Table 1: Diversity in East Africa

Country	GNI per capita	Population (in millions)	Location	Polity 2 score	Gastil Index score	Freedom status
Ethiopia	590	99	Landlocked	-3	6.5	Not free
Kenya	1340	46	Coastal	9	4	Partly free
Malawi	340	17.2	Landlocked	6	3	Partly free
Mauritius	9780	1.2	Island	10	1.5	Free
Tanzania	920	53.4	Coastal	3	3.5	Partly free
Zambia	1490	16.2	Landlocked	7	3.5	Partly free

Given such diversity, these countries provide an ideal sample to investigate whether party system change has a clear and consistent effect on the quality of democracy, despite such diversity. Our empirical analysis focuses on the six East African countries that have held at least 10 elections between independence and 2012, and that have not experienced a democratic breakdown or serious disruption in the administration of elections. Once these conditions are introduced, countries such as Djibuti, Eritrea, Madagascar, Rwanda, Uganda and Zimbabwe have

higher scores mean "more democratic" and lower scores mean "less democratic"; for the Gastil index, lower scores mean "more free" and higher scores mean "less free."

to be discarded, and therefore our analyses focus exclusively on Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Tanzania and Zambia.

4. Empirical Analysis

Extending his theoretical work of democracy, Morlino (2004) proposed criteria for assessing the qualities of a democratic regime in practice, in a manner that is consistent with the notion of "democracy." This framework analogizes from industrial and marketing conceptualizations of "quality" and proposes that democratic quality can be a reference to (a) the procedures or methods of the regime; (b) the structural characteristics of the regime, which might be described as its content or outputs; and (c) the extent to which the regime is able to satisfy its "customers" (i.e., citizens), or its outcomes.

Procedural qualities can be tapped by measuring the extent to which a political system ensures the rule of law, electoral and inter-institutional accountability, and political competition. Sub-dimensions can be identified for some of these dimensions. For instance, with regard to the rule of law, Morlino suggested that there were at least two relevant sub-dimensions: the extent to which a political regime protects, respects, values and secures the physical integrity of its citizens; and the level of corruption in the political system. The output or content of a political system is assessed on the basis of its ability to secure liberties and rights along with an equitable distribution of resources. The third dimension concerns the ability of a democratic regime to produce specific outcomes and results, and can be operationalized in terms of two sub-dimensions: the effectiveness of governments; and the level of legitimacy that the political system enjoys among its citizens. Additional details on the operationalization of these procedural sub-dimensions, variable choices and data sources are provided in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Dimensions, variables and data sources

Dimensions	Sub-dimensions	Component	Variable	Data source
Procedures	Rule of law	Physical integrity	physint	Cingranelli, David L., David L. Richards, and K. Chad Clay. 2014. "The CIRI Human Rights Dataset." http://www.humanrightsdata.com. Version 2014.04.14.
		Corruption	Control of corruption	Worldwide Governance Indicators
	Electoral accountability	Electoral selfdetermination	elesd	Cingranelli, David L., David L. Richards, and K. Chad Clay. 2014. "The CIRI Human Rights Dataset." http://www.humanrightsdata.com. Version 2014.04.14.
	Inter-institutional accountability	Accountability to other institutions	xconst	Polity IV
	Political competition		parcomp	Polity IV
Output	Freedom	Freedom	Civil liberties Political rights	Freedom House, Gastil Index
	Equality	Gini	Gini	World Bank Development Indicators
Outcome				
	Legitimacy	Satisfaction with demoracy	Satisfaction with democracy	Afrobarometer
	Government effectiveness	Government effectiveness	Government effectiveness	Worldwide governance indicators

We examine whether and how these democratic qualities are affected by party system variables. While acknowledging that party systems are multidimensional, we focus our analysis on two of their important aspects. First, we measure the "fragmentation" of party systems, or their number of parties, using Laakso and Taagepera's (1979) "effective number of parties" indicator, which has been widely used in comparative research. Secondly, we measure the "fluidity" of party systems, or the stability of their patterns of inter-party competition, using Nwokora and Pelizzo's

fluidity index. Drawing on the classic party systems framework developed by Giovanni Sartori ([1976] 2005), this index synthesizes three ways in which a party system can change over time: the frequency of system change, or the number of times that a party system change from one (Sartori) type to another during a specific time period; the scope of system change, or the mechanical distance of the two most different types observed during that period; and the variety of system change, or the number of distinct types that appear during that period.

It is important to note that stable party systems, with a low fluidity index score, may arise in circumstances that are not highly democratic. This is the case when the party system is "stabilized" through mechanisms, implemented by the governing party, to restrict competition. The high level of party system stability that can be observed in Tanzania might be explained in such terms, since this is a relatively low-quality democratic regime in which there have been serious allegations of election rigging, with the potential complicity of the National Electoral Commission (see e.g., Ng'wanakilala, 2015).

In Table 3below we present the results of descriptive statistical analysis of the 12 variables, including the two independent variables (ENP and fluidity), included in this study. As can be seen, the fluidity of East African party systems varies from a minimum of0.26 in Malawi in 1992 and 1993 to a maximum of 6.67, again in Malawi, this time after the 2009 elections, with a regional average of 2.54.The effective number of parties (ENP) varied from a minimum of 1.51 recorded in Tanzania after the 2005 elections to a maximum of 5.07 recorded in Zambia after the 2001 elections, with an average of 2.66

Physical integrity, which we measure using a variable called PHYSINT from the Cingranelli-Richards (CIRI) Human Rights Database, varies from "0," which indicates a

government that does not at all respect the physical integrity of its citizens, to “8,” which means that the government has full respect for the physical integrity of its citizens. While for most of the other variables, the data cover the whole 1992-2012 period, the data for this variable are only available for the 1992-2011 period. In the East African region, PHYSINT varied from the lowest possible score(0),recorded in Ethiopia in 1994, 1995 and 2005, to the highest possible score, recorded in Mauritius in 1992. The regional average for the period under study was 4.27.

The level of corruption, measured using the Control of Corruption variable from the Worldwide Governance Indicators, can vary from a minimum of -2.5 to a maximum of +2.5. In our sample, it varies from a minimum of -1.15recorded in Ethiopia in 1996 to a maximum of0.65 registered in Mauritius in 2010, with a regional average of -0.5.Electoral self-determination reflects voters’ ability to freely choose or change political leaders and thereby affect the direction of public policy in a country. It is measured on the basis of the ELECSD variable in the Cingranelli-Richards (CIRI) Human Rights Dataset. It takes the value “0” when a country in a given year does not legally enshrine the right of self-determination by electoral means; the value “1” when this right exists but is not adequately enforced; and the value “2” when this right exists and is fully respected. As with PHYSINT, the other variable from the CIRI dataset, the data for ELECSD cover only the shorter 1992-2011 time span. In this period, for the countries we study, ELECSD varied from 0to 2,with an average of 1.08.

Inter-institutional accountability, measured on the basis of XCONST, is a 7-point variable that takes the value “1” when the government is not subject to any kind of scrutiny and not accountable to any other institution, and “7” when the government is very accountable for its actions. In the 1992-2012 period in East Africa, XCONST varied from a minimum of 1recorded

in Zambia in 1992 and 1993 to a maximum of 7 recorded in Kenya in 2011 and 2012 and in Mauritius in every year under analysis.

The level of civil liberties and political rights is measured using indexes computed by Freedom House. Both are expressed on a seven-point scale, where “1” indicates the maximum level of protection for such rights and liberties and “7” indicates complete disregard for them. In East Africa, for the period under study, scores ranged from 2 (recorded in Mauritius for the whole 1992-2012 period)to7(in Malawi in 1993), with an average of 3.84. The scores for political liberties varied from a minimum of 1 (registered in Mauritius for the whole 1992-2012 period)to a maximum of 7 (in Malawi in 1992),with an average of 3.75.

Data concerning the Gini index of income inequality are taken from the World Bank Development Indicators dataset, which unfortunately provides rather patchy information on inequality in the region. This database includes inequality data for only 43 of the 126 country/year cases included in our sample. Specifically, we have two data points for Mauritius (2006, 2012); three for Malawi (1997, 2004, 2010) and for Tanzania (2000, 2007, 2011); four for Ethiopia (1995, 1999, 2004, 2010) and for Kenya (1992, 1994, 1997, 2005); and seven for Zambia (1993, 1996, 1998, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2010). Income inequality in these countries and for these years varied from a minimum of 29.8 registered in Ethiopia in 2004 to a maximum of 65.8 recorded in Malawi in 1997, with an average of 44.7. It is interesting to note that inequality in Ethiopia, Mauritius and Tanzania was always below the regional average, whereas in Malawi, Kenya and Zambia the level of inequality was below the regional average in only one year and otherwise was much higher.

Data on the level of satisfaction with democracy was collected by the Afrobarometer in five waves of survey research carried out in 1999-2001, 2002-2003, 2005-2006, 2008-2009 and 2011-2013. No information on the satisfaction with democracy was collected in these surveys for Ethiopia; only in 2011-2013 was data collected in Mauritius; responses were collected in Kenya for only the last four waves; while the survey was administered in each of the five waves in Malawi, Tanzania and Zambia. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with the way democracy worked in their country. They could report to being "not satisfied" at all, "not very satisfied,""fairly satisfied" and "very satisfied." The percentage of respondents who were very or at least somewhat "satisfied" varied from a minimum of 27.5 per cent in Malawi in 2005-2006 to a maximum of 87.9 per cent in Kenya in 2002-2003. On average 59.1 per cent of the respondents surveyed in these five surveys reported they were reasonably satisfied with democracy in their country.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Independent and Dependent variables

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean
Fluidity	126	.25	6.67	2.54
ENP	100	1.51	5.07	2.66
Physint	120	0	8	4.27
Control of corruption	84	-1.15	.65	-.50
Elesd	120	0	2	1.08
Xconst	123	1	7	4.67
Parcomp	123	1	5	3.34
FHCL	126	1	7	3.84
FHPR	126	1	7	3.76
Gini index	23	29.8	65.8	44.7
Government effectiveness	84	-1.28	.96	-.4049
Satisfaction with democracy	43	27.5	87.9	59.1

Nwokora and Pelizzo (2015), in their analysis of the determinants of the qualities of democracy in the South East Asian region, collected data that was similar to the data that we have collected here. In Table 4 below, to gain a sense of how East Africa and South East Asia compare in terms

of their party systems and democratic qualities, we present descriptive summaries (mean scores) for the variables that appear both in this study and Nwokora and Pelizzo's analysis.

Table. 4: A Comparative Assessment of party systems and the Quality of Democracy in South-East Asia and East Africa

	East Africa	South-East Asia
Variable		
Fluidity	2.54	4.16
ENP	2.66	2.83
Physint	4.27	3.95
Control of corruption	-.50	-
Elesd	1.08	.80
Xconst	4.67	4.7
Parcomp	3.34	3.16
FHCL	3.84	4.03
FHPR	3.76	4.2
Gini index	44.7	39.22
Government effectiveness	-.4049	-
Satisfaction with democracy	59.1	-

The data in the table suggest that South East Asia and East Africa have nearly identical levels of inter-institutional accountability and are also similar in terms of party system fragmentation (ENP), political competition and civil liberties. East Africa does better than South East Asia in terms of PHYSINT and Political Rights, but not as well in terms of income inequality. In fact, even though party systems in South East Asia and East Africa have similar levels of fragmentation, East African party systems are noticeably less fluid (i.e., more stable)than their South East Asian counterparts. This observation raises the question of whether, and how, the greater party system stability observed in East Africa influences the quality of democracy in this region.

B. Party Systems and the Quality of Democracy in East Africa

Nwokora and Pelizzo (2015) showed that higher levels of party system instability in South East Asia were associated with lower quality of democracy scores, and thus concluded that fluidity was detrimental to the quality of democracy. More specifically, they found that, except for facilitating inter-institutional accountability, party system instability was associated with less respect for the physical integrity of citizens; greater corruption; and lower levels of foreign direct investment, which the authors treated as a proxy for international legitimacy. If these findings are suggestive, we would expect that the relatively stable party systems in East Africa should be a good thing for the quality of democracy in this region. But is this actually the case?

To test this conjecture, we correlated the index of fluidity against the variables associated with the various democratic qualities that were discussed above. The results of this analysis show that higher levels of party system instability are associated with lower quality of democracy scores in East Africa. This is the case whether we focus on the quality of democratic procedures, outputs or outcomes. Starting with procedures, the correlation coefficients presented in Table 5 below show that party system instability tends to undermine the rule of law, however the latter is measured, because as fluidity increases both respect for the physical integrity of citizens and corruption control decline. Furthermore, while greater fluidity may not affect the quality of political competition or the level of inter-institutional accountability, it is associated with a significant reduction of electoral accountability.

Party system instability also reduces the ability of democratic regimes to protect and promote freedom and equality. More fluidity may not significantly affect income inequality, but it does appear to lower the level of civil liberties and political rights. Greater fluidity is also associated with lower levels of government effectiveness and lower legitimacy for the political system. This particular set of findings suggests not only that party system instability is a

problem, but also that it is perhaps a more serious problem in East Africa than in South East Asia.

Nwokora and Pelizzo (2015) also report that the fragmentation of the East Asian party systems increases the level of inter-institutional accountability. But when it comes to political freedoms, fragmentation has a detrimental impact on the level of physical integrity, corruption control and foreign direct investments. Not only does this effect remain large and significant after controlling for the instability of the party system, but it is generally larger than the impact of party system instability on these democratic qualities.

The East African data tells a different story. The ENP variable, though it does appear to be positively related to the level of political competition and negatively related to perceptions of democratic legitimacy, has no statistically significant impact on the specific qualities of democracy, while party system instability, as noted earlier, has a detrimental impact on democratic procedures, outputs and outcomes.

Table 5: Correlation analysis (significant results)

	Fluidity	ENP
Physint	-.398 (.000)	-.019 (.851)
Control of corruption	-.314 (.004)	.197 (.102)
Elesd	-.261 (.004)	.011 (.914)
Xconst	-.124 (.172)	.133 (.188)
Parcom	-. 073 (.422)	.221 (.027)
Fhcl	.209 (.019)	.066 (.515)
Fhpr	.347 (.000)	.163 (.105)
Gini index	-.199 (.363)	.022 (.929)
Government effectiveness	-.410 (.000)	.166 (.170)
Satisfaction with democracy	-.444 (.003)	-.329 (.031)

These findings have important, practical implications. Most critically, they suggest the importance of stabilizing party systems in order to improve the quality of democracy. While the

literature has long recognized the importance of effective parties for the functioning of democratic systems, it is only relatively recently that attention has extended to consider the consequences of party system dynamics (see especially Mainwaring, 1995). Contributing to this literature, our results support the contention that making party systems more stable should be a goal for development practitioners. Thus, an important question for researchers is how this might be accomplished. Our understanding of this particular problem remains at a primitive stage, despite there being large and sophisticated literatures on the related concepts of party and party system institutionalization (see Bertoa, 2016).

One plausible conjecture is that the factors that are believed to generate, or at least support, institutionalized parties and party systems are likely to also facilitate more stable (i.e., less fluid) party systems. This is a reasonable conjecture not only because of the intimate connections between the concepts, and measurements, of institutionalization and fluidity; but also based on some empirical coincidences—for instance, Basedau and Stroh (2008) find that Tanzania's parties are reasonably well-institutionalized (by African standards) and this party system also has a low fluidity score (only Mauritius's is lower), while parties in Malawi and Zambia are weakly institutionalized and these party systems are much less stable.

If this conjecture is basically sound, then the stabilization of party systems might be enhanced by introducing constitutional rules that confirm the centrality of parties to public affairs; or through moves to professionalize and strengthen party organizations, which may necessitate arrangements to secure parties' funding base. However, there are serious limitations associated with these proposals. As noted earlier, many African countries already include provisions in their constitutions relating to political parties—so there is certainly the aspiration for parties to organize politics—but whether party systems have actually become more stable as

a result of such measures remains unclear. Similarly, because parties may need to stabilize their revenue stream in order to boost their organizational capacity, there is a risk that efforts to promote the professionalization of parties may inadvertently encourage parties to deepen their dependence on the state—in short, the cartelization dynamic may be intensified.

A greater dependency of parties on state resources (or foreign donors) would not be the goal, of course, and it would be much better if African parties could become mass member organizations with financial and ideological roots in their societies. After all, the connection of social cleavages to party organizations was the basis for the institutionalization of party systems in Western Europe. However, very few African parties have a deep and enduring connection with the cleavage-defining groups in their society—as noted earlier, many have been electoralist from the start—and therefore the institutionalization and stabilization of African party systems may require a somewhat different path.

C. Disaggregating Fluidity: How Party System Change Matters

If we understand the fluidity of a party system to be a function of the frequency, scope and variety of system change during a country's electoral history, there may be value in developing a better understanding of how each of these sub-components relates to the quality of democracy. These dimensions of instability may not impact on democratic quality in the same way and by analyzing them separately we can identify which form of instability is most detrimental to democratic quality. To do so, we perform two analyses. First, we correlate the frequency, scope and variety of party system change against the ten variables that we have used to assess the quality of democracy. Following this, we perform a series of linear regressions (OLS) to assess the impact of each independent variable while controlling for the others.

The variety sub-dimension captures the number of distinct party system types that have existed in the course of a country's electoral history. The results of the correlation analyses presented in Table 6 below sustain the claim that this sub-dimension is the most important and the most detrimental for democratic quality. In fact, each of the nine correlations between variety and the quality of democracy variables shows that an increase in the variety of party system change is consistently and significantly, from a statistical point of view, associated with a worsening of the democratic qualities.

Table 6: Effects of Fluidity's Components (statistically-significant correlations)

	frequency	scope	variety
Satisfaction with democracy	-.379 (.012)	-.388 (.010)	-.469 (.001)
Government effectiveness	.059 (.594)	-.395 (.000)	-.697 (.000)
FHCL	-.120 (.182)	.438 (.000)	.275 (.003)
FHPR	-.279 (.002)	.352 (.000)	.266 (.003)
ParCom	.188 (.038)	-.019 (.836)	-.336 (.000)
Xconst	.329 (.000)	-.242 (.007)	-.207 (.022)
Elecsd	.195 (.033)	-.376 (.000)	-.301 (.001)
Coc	.159 (.149)	-.383 (.000)	-.599 (.000)
Physint	.162 (.077)	-.633 (.000)	-.278 (.000)

The scope sub-dimension captures, along an ordinal scale, how much difference there was between the two most-different party system types that existed in the course of a country's electoral system. Once again, the results of the correlation analysis sustain the claim that this "scope" variable is very important and also detrimental to the qualities of democracy. In fact, eight of the nine correlations between scope and the variables employed to assess the democratic qualities show that an increase in scope is consistently and significantly related with a worsening

of the democratic qualities. Only the level of political competition is indifferent, and therefore not affected by, increases in the scope of system change.

The frequency of party system change, the third sub-dimension of fluidity, captures simply how often—that is, on how many separate occasions—a party system changed from one type to another. Of the three sub-dimensions of fluidity, this is the least important and least detrimental. Only four of the correlations yield statistically significant coefficients: a higher frequency of party system change is associated with lower levels of satisfaction with democracy, but a higher frequency of party system change is associated with more secure political rights, greater inter-institutional accountability and more electoral accountability.

These findings suggest not only that some sub-dimensions of fluidity pose a greater threat to democracy and its qualities than others, but also that some sub-dimensions may actually have opposing effects on democratic qualities. This means that while a simple correlational analysis may be unable to reveal precisely how the various democratic qualities relate to an aggregate measure such as fluidity, and may suggest that fluidity has little or no impact on specific aspects of democracy, in fact these qualities may be profoundly affected by particular sub-components of fluidity.

To establish more precisely how fluidity's sub-components impact on the quality of democracy, we performed a second analysis, testing multiple regression models. The results of these regression analyses, which are presented in Table 7 below, show that once we control for the effects of scope and variety, the frequency of party system change has a consistently positive impact on democratic qualities. A higher frequency of party system change is associated with greater respect for the physical integrity of citizens, better corruption control, greater electoral

accountability, more inter-institutional accountability, greater political competition, more secure political rights, improved civil liberties and a more effective government. Hence, if the frequency of party system change does not pose a threat to the democratic qualities, then the problem is not that a country's party system is not stable per se, but how precisely it has tended to change. This is the central implication of the results reported in Table 7.

Table 7: Results from Multiple Regression Models of Fluidity Components

	Intercept	Frequency	Scope	Variety	R-squared
Physint	5.81 (.000)	10.826 (.000)	-.676 (.000)	-.712 (.005)	.492
Control of corruption	.554 (.000)	4.467 (.000)	-.045 (.099)	-.678 (.000)	.592
Elecsd	1.524 (.000)	4.651 (.000)	-.110 (.001)	-.432 (.000)	.311
Xconst	4.466 (.000)	15.426 (.000)	-.183 (.059)	-1.066 (.000)	.293
Parcom	4.151 (.000)	7.950 (.000)	.131 (.031)	-1.112 (.000)	.290
FHPR	3.114 (.000)	-14.849 (.000)	.274 (.002)	1.199 (.000)	.344
FHCL	2.754 (.000)	-6.356 (.001)	.291 (.000)	.596 (.003)	.274
Government effectiveness	1.004 (.000)	3.949 (.000)	-.037 (.145)	-.761 (.000)	.659
Satisfaction with democracy	106.400	-29.576 (.571)	-2.321 (.483)	-10.052 (.183)	.237

On the other hand, eight of the nine regression coefficients for variety are statistically significant and show that variety has a consistently detrimental impact on democratic qualities—even after controlling for other variables. Higher variety leads to less respect for the physical integrity of citizens, lower ability to control corruption, less electoral and inter-institutional accountability, less political competition, fewer and less secure political rights and civil liberties, and less government effectiveness. This set of findings suggests that while the frequency of party system change does not threaten the quality of democracy, the observation that a party system displays

in its historical development a large number of different patterns of inter-party competition is quite problematic.

Those democratic qualities may not be undermined by the fact of party system change but by the manner of change is also corroborated by the fact that five of the nine regression coefficients for scope are statistically significant and show that scope consistently has a negative impact on democratic qualities. Thus, the fact that a party system displays considerably different patterns of inter-party competition in its historical development is bad news for democracy. The larger the range of party system types experienced, the lower is respect for the physical integrity of citizens, the lower is the level of electoral accountability, the level of political competition, and political rights and civil liberties.

These findings supply a clear message: party system change is beneficial, but only within certain limits. Hence, the goal for development practitioners is even more challenging than we suggested earlier since it involves introducing mechanisms to foster party system change, while also minimizing the chances for such change to take extreme forms. Too much instability makes democracies dysfunctional and, in the end, more likely to be replaced by other regimes which, though perhaps appealing at first, in the end are neither gentler nor kinder than democracy.

5. Conclusions

The analyses performed in this paper confirm that party systems matter. They matter because they affect democracy: its specific qualities, its overall quality and potentially its ability to survive. It has been known for a long time that party system attributes, especially fragmentation and ideological polarization, have a significant impact on the functioning of democratic systems.

The “wrong” attributes undermine government stability, government effectiveness, erode the legitimacy of the democratic system and, eventually, create the conditions for its demise.

Our analyses show, however, that democracy is influenced not only by party system attributes, but also by party system instability. Unstable party systems undermine the quality of democracy, and by doing so they may end up compromising a democracy’s capacity to survive. This conclusion is consistent with what Nwokora and Pelizzo (2015) suggested in their analysis of party system change and democratic qualities in South East Asia. But our analyses also show that once we deconstruct fluidity into its component units—frequency, scope and variety of party system change—the relationship between democratic quality and party system instability is complex and somewhat contradictory because while the frequency of party system change does not have, or at least does not always have, a detrimental impact on democratic qualities, the scope and variety of change always do.

These findings raise important, practical questions about whether and how to generate high-functioning party systems. This problem is complicated by our mixed results, which suggest that, overall, a stable party system is desirable, but some forms of system change are also beneficial to democratic quality. As is well known, the design of structures to achieve desirable political outcomes is an extremely challenging exercise. The basic problems, however, are complicated further in light of our findings. On the one hand, stabilizing a party system should be the goal; but this objective should be qualified by the desirability of obtaining a limited form of instability. In short, the ideal institutional environment is one that generates a “just right” balance of stability and instability. Although it will be difficult to identify exactly what mechanisms should be used to achieve such outcomes, this is a problem that warrants more serious study.

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Riccardo Pelizzo is an Associate Professor in the Graduate School of Public Policy at Nazarbayev University. His research focuses on parties, party systems and parliaments. In collaboration with DrZimNwokora, he is attempting to revisit Sartori's framework for the analysis of party systems. Before focusing on the fluidity of party system, Nwokora and Pelizzo

attempted to refine and expand Sartori's theorising on predominant party systems as evidenced by their article 'Sartori Reconsidered: Toward a New Predominant Party System' (*Political Studies*, 2014).

ZimNwokora is a Lecturer in Politics and Policy Studies at Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia. His research concentrates on political parties, political competition and public policy, with a comparative and theoretical focus. His previous work in these areas has appeared in outlets such as *American Politics Research, Australian Journal of Political Science, Party Politics*and *Political Studies*.