

Spring 4-27-2009

Informal Institutions: Proportional Representation and Single Party Dominance in South Africa

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University of Mary Washington

**Informal Institutions:
Proportional Representation and Single Party Dominance in South Africa**

An Independent Study Project
Submitted in Candidacy for Departmental Honors

Department of Political Science and International Affairs

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Defended April 27, 2009

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Many thanks to Dr. Ranjit Singh, Professor of Political Science, and Dr. Donald Rallis, Professor of Geography at the University of Mary Washington- advisors of this project.

I. Introduction

On February 2, 1990 President FW de Klerk shocked parliament by taking the first step in dismantling the fifty-year old system of apartheid. He announced the unbanning of several political parties including the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan-African Congress (PAC), and the release of all political prisoners. That morning he could hardly have realized the momentum which the process would soon take, eventually leading to the first holistically democratic elections by 1994.

In 1993, South Africa began the transformation process by passing the interim Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. It provided that a National Assembly be created the following year, using a system of proportional representation (PR) with a closed party list to choose individual representatives. While the system of PR was used in the 1999 elections, the final 1996 Constitution required that a further process be created by legislation for elections in the new millennium. Accordingly, the cabinet established the Electoral Task Team to study and draft legislation for the future.

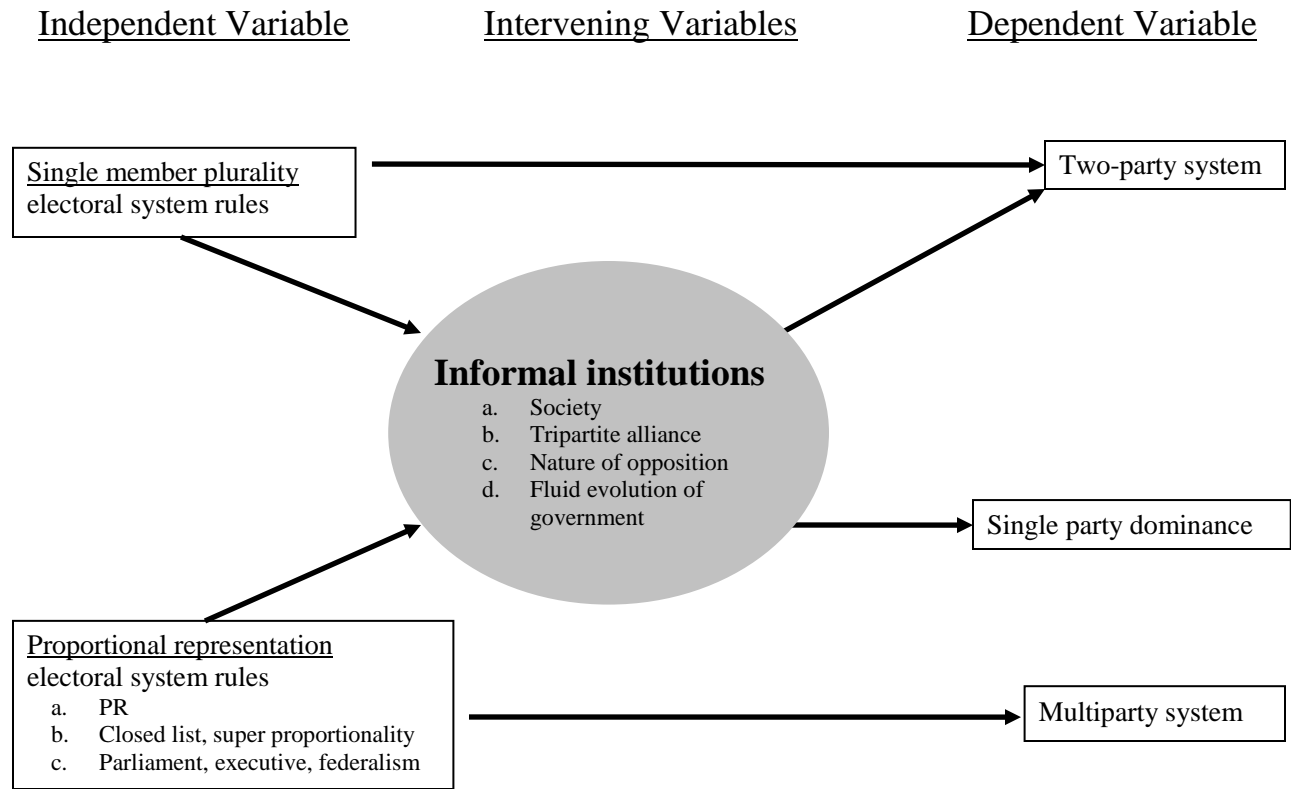
While operating with severe time constraints, the Task Team managed to publish a thorough study on South African elections thus far, including extensive stakeholder interaction. The report concluded that the electoral system had served the country well during the difficult transition, continued to receive significant support, and should not be entirely overhauled. Most individuals surveyed were generally satisfied with the fairness of the system, however expressed a desire for more public debates, and for the election of national representatives with social and political ties to an individual's area. A majority of the team's members agreed that increasing accountability to constituencies in the electoral system was necessary, and drafted legislation to reflect this. While the Task Team's study was published in 2003, to date, the system has not been changed to reflect the Team's recommendations. Furthermore, the overwhelming presence of corruption, especially in municipality governments, has led to increasingly severe criticisms of the lack of accountability that officials have. Many of these problems can be identified by examining the role of the party system that has developed in relation to the electoral system.

Proportional representation was implemented as the best way to create a stable society in the face of the turmoil of transition. It was assumed that a diverse and vibrant multi-party system would evolve to both include fringe groups in the new government, and reconcile the large groups in society. While the system provided a peaceful transition- something that many thought

would be impossible- the implementation of PR has not yielded a true multiparty system. This thesis attempts to explain the emergence and maintenance of single party dominance as an effect of the rules within the electoral system. These rules in turn interact with several informal institutions that, in turn, mitigate the normal multiparty effects of PR.

The independent variable in this study is the electoral system of the country, which includes all formal rules and practices used to translate votes into seats. While this thesis focuses on PR, other systems are analyzed to place the study in a comparative context. To understand single party dominance in this perspective, understanding the electoral system alone is not enough. South Africa contains a set of distinct informal institutions that interact with the independent variable to produce single party dominance, the dependent variable. Formal institutions refer to *de jura* laws, systems, and regulations that have been put in place as or through government structures. Informal institutions, on the other hand, are social, political, and governmental changes that have occurred without changing written rules.

To make this comparative argument this thesis will begin with a discussion of electoral systems in general, and explain the normal ways in which certain electoral systems produce certain party systems. This background will make understanding the South African system possible, as well as formal rules of the electoral system that are part of the independent variable of PR. The third section reveals the informal institutions that are the crux of this thesis: society, the tripartite alliance, the nature of the opposition, and the fluid evolution of government. The interaction of these intervening variables on the system of PR is what causes single party dominance. Before concluding, there will be a discussion of possible alternatives to the South African system, and how changing the electoral system could diminish the effect of the intervening variables.



II. Election System Overview

Introduction

The field of election study has grown enormously over the past few decades. The end of World War II brought about an enormous push for democratic reform in Eastern Europe and around the world, and with it an invigoration of studying what type of election system is best for each country in its specific circumstance. Two trends have occurred: existing governments that have reformed have experimented with new “mixed systems,” yielding a variety of revealing and favorable results. Second, in the Third World especially, the viability of democratic governments is often centered on engineering a correct type of election system. In these latter cases, movement leaders, nations, and intellectuals come together to create and perfect an election process to serve the diverse and specific interests of each country. By engineering institutions that will provide a democratically elected government, they hope solve conflict in the short run, and to normatively change the perceptions of the population towards rule by the people in the long run.

A significant amount of literature explores what kinds of systems will yield what kinds of results (Grofman 1986). For example, there is general agreement that a single member plurality (SMP) will produce two parties, both attempting to appeal to the “median voter” (Sartori 1986: 55). When the *electoral* rules and government institutions are created, the hope is that a *party system* and population favorable to democracy will occur. However, because the correlation between election and party systems does not hold fast when applied across the gamut, it is essential to understand in which circumstances the system would not produce a democratic process in practice if we wish to succeed in this establishing democracy. This section will demonstrate that (a) the election system alone cannot predict the type of party system that will develop, even though it might good indicator in many cases, and (b) the *process* of a stable election system alone cannot holistically produce the *practice* of liberal democracy, as is often hoped.

Electoral Systems

Election systems are instruments used to “determine the means by which votes are translated into seats in the process of electing politicians to office” (Farrell 2001:4). The main types of election systems can be broken down into single member plurality (SMP), proportional representation (PR), the single transferable vote (or alternative vote), and mixed systems that are

in some way a conglomeration of these elements. The body of literature that describes each is vast, as is theory of the party and government system that will result with these electoral systems. However, the following section examines the large number of exceptions to general predictions of each system. We must therefore look beyond the election system alone if new governments are going to create formal institutions hoping that certain competitive party system with a check on power will be created.

Single Member Plurality

Single member plurality (SMP), (also known as first-past-the-post,) is used to describe a system in which the single winner is the candidate with one more vote than any other candidate, or a plurality. The most distinguishing aspect of this approach is that the district magnitude (defined as the number of candidates elected in each district) is always one, and therefore extremely easy to understand and evaluate (Farrell 2001:20). The system can be called winner take all because one more vote than the second candidate will ensure that only the candidate with the most votes will be elected to the position. There are many criticisms of this system, generally focusing on the losing candidate being denied complete access to influence the system (Reynolds 1995).

Party System Because this paper attempts to explain the relationship between the electoral system and the party system, it is essential to study what types of party systems result in which types of electoral systems, in general. It is therefore generally agreed that the electoral system can influence the party system. Giovanni Sartori takes the normative approach, arguing that “the direct effect (influence) of electoral systems clearly is on the voter; but if they affect the voter, it may be cogently assumed that electoral systems also, albeit indirectly and derivatively, affect (shape) the party system as a whole” (1986:53). The effect of the electoral system on the party system is more clearly described by “Duverger’s law,” named after the author who argued that SMP makes it more difficult for smaller parties to win. Several authors attempt to explain Duverger’s law further by arguing that voters know that a vote for a smaller third party is wasted, taking an explicitly psychological position (Farrell 2001:162). Regardless of the effect on the electorate, this law is one of the most concrete and often-cited laws of comparative electoral politics. This means that the winner in a district takes all the power that the district has at the representative level, and is the only individual representing the district. Therefore, smaller parties without a real chance to win are grossly underrepresented in government (Farrell 2001:47).

General Consequences While this may be defined as anti-democratic in process, there are several elements that make this system apparently as democratic in practice. The electorate knows who is responsible for what government action, and during elections can choose between two “competing teams of policy makers, providing the winner with the concentrated power to make public policy” (Powell 2000:233). Some argue that this accountability is one of the most important parts of democracy because the government can be held responsible for every decision taken under their administration (Farrell 2001:47). Generally, SMP restricts the number of parties contending for office, facilitates single-party majority governments, encourages large parties to compete for the support of the “median voter,” (the moderate voter in the middle of the political spectrum,) and provides a greater incentive for “strategic voting,” (voting beyond ones immediate preference to gain desired results) (Weaver 2002:112-3). Lastly, this system enforces a strong relationship between the constituency and its elected representative (Farrell 2001:67).

Regionalism exception As we can see, there are many general consequences or predictions we can make about the types of party systems SMP will result. However, there are enough examples of these systems when predictions do not hold true, and it is necessary to look beyond the electoral system to ascertain what elements effected the skewing of the predicted party system. There are notable exceptions to Duverger’s law, most prominently Canada and India, who have SMP electoral systems combined with party systems with three or more significant parties. William Riker modifies the law by presenting an exception when third parties nationally are one of two parties in at least some districts (1986:31). That is, the two parties fighting for a seat in a district might be the strongest two in that region, but not nationally. This exception is important to note as it can lead to extreme exclusion of minority groups from the national government (as in Northern Ireland before the imposition of direct English government (Weaver 2002:112). However, specific national circumstances will dictate how severe and problematic the level of exclusion will be (125). Therefore, we must look outside the purely institutional mechanisms of SMP to evaluate how specific situations or informal institutions will effect the elected government.

Proportional Representation

About half of the world’s democracies use proportional representation, in one form or another (Farrell 2001:68). In such systems, voters usually cast their vote for a party rather than

an individual. Seats are then allocated to members of the party at some proportion to the number of votes cast, with candidates taken from pre-ordained lists. A “closed list” system refers to when this list of candidates is created solely by a party’s internal mechanisms; that is the voters have no extra-party say in the candidate selection. Andrew Reynolds argues that “national, and unalterable, candidate lists allowed parties to present ethnically heterogeneous groups of candidates which, it was hoped, would have cross-cutting appeal” (83). That is, the inclusion of women and minority groups is much easier as candidates can be scattered throughout the list with more traditional candidates. The biggest drawback to this system is that candidates lose their personal connection with their constituencies, creating a national government that is further from the people. Open lists, on the other hand, give voters the choice for a party or a candidate by allowing the electorate to choose which individuals appear on the ballot (83). The mechanisms of proportional representation become more complex when deciding how votes will be translated into seats.

There are several methods used to translate the proportion of votes a party receives at the polls into the proportion of seats they will receive in the legislature. While some (Sartori 1986) say the method chosen to equate votes to seat is less important than other factors, others (Katz 1997) concentrate heavily on the formula used (Farrell 2001:154). For example the “Hare” quota is argued to give more proportional results, whereas the “d’Hondt highest average” with the “least remainder” is argued by many to have the least proportional results (Lijphart 1986:171; Farrell 2001:155). Basic electoral rules can drastically change the foundation and form of government. Others authors, however, deemphasize the importance of the formula used, focusing instead on the manner in which candidates are elected, that is the use national or provincial lists, or district magnitude, examining the number of individuals given seats in each district (Taagepera and Shugart 1989:112; Farrell 2001:154). In sum, PR is far more complex because of the high number of different variables, and the enormous disagreement over what variables are most important to emphasize.

Party System Even with the enormous number of variables available to scholars of PR, there is an easily apparent trend in the type of party system that results. In most cases, PR leads to a competitive multi-party system that includes an array of perspectives from society (Farrell 2001:162). This is especially beneficial for new democracies which want to ensure all voices, especially those on the fringes, do not feel as if they are shut out of the system and resort to

violence (Reynolds 1996:90). PR also gives more power to party elites who, rather than the electorate, decide which specific candidates will hold the elected position. This allows individuals to be part of government who would not normally be chosen by a biased electorate. Bingham Powell describes PR as choosing “political agents to represent their diverse views continuously in post-election bargaining that will influence policy making” (2000:137). This view implicitly emphasizes the primacy of the party in PR electoral systems, a relationship that whose importance will become apparent in this study.

Other Systems

Mixed With SMP and PR as extremes, there is a trend towards mixed electoral systems that combine the proportionality of PR with the strong voter-representative constituency relationship of SMP (Farrell 2001:97). There are interesting cases of such systems in several countries, for example the German system incorporates the proportionality of PR while simultaneously preserving a representative’s closeness with his constituency through SMP by using a bicameral legislature (99-120). The benefits of such systems are obvious, however the type of party system that would result from such an arrangement is more difficult to predict with so many variables in the electoral system.

STV The last general type of election system can be called the “single transferable vote” (STV). While popular with scholars, this is used in very limited cases such as Northern Ireland, and parts of Australia (Farrell 2001:123). This type requires that district magnitude be greater than one, as the electorate cast votes for as many or few candidates as they want, usually by number ranking their choices (127). Sinnott (1995) points out that while the mechanisms of this system are complex, they reveal much about the links between parties and candidate by studying voters and order preferences (Farrell 2001:137). Even though some (Blondel 1969) argue that it has many advantages over both SMP and PR, the limited use of the electoral system makes it difficult to study (Farrell 2001:155).

Stability With the many options available to election engineers, it becomes clear that the debate over which system works best is lengthy, often self-interested, and depends greatly on national circumstance. It is essential to understand that the debate over the party system is not the only variable that authors study when evaluating electoral systems. The practical utility of an electoral system, as well as the degree to which it promotes democracy, must be examined. The most prominent debate is the trade-off between proportionality and

stability. That is, it is generally agreed that the more proportional a system is, the less stable it is (Farrell 2001:20). On the surface, PR might seem more democratic because both the winners and losers are represented in government. However, Beer (1998) argues that a truly democratic government “must not only represent, it must also govern (Farrell 2001:193). Those who argue that PR produces unstable government cite unstable government coalitions, or the anti-democratic principle of parties’ negotiation in coalition building without the say of the people (Farrell 2001:193,196). Along these lines, PR does not offer a clear “forward-looking mandate” while at the polls (Powell 2000:234). It can be argued that PR allows the voices of extreme even anti-system parties to gain control, the most striking example is the rise Weimar Germany (Farrell 2001:199).

Proponents of PR argue that instability is not caused by the electoral system. Some argue that authors often incorrectly equate longevity of SMP systems to stability, and that PR systems have shorter government reign, but are not necessarily less democratically stable (Farrell 2001:29-30). Farrell argues that there is in fact greater stability if the method used to translate votes into seats is highly proportional; Arendt Lijphart points to the fact that governments created by PR have superior records with macro-economic management (Farrell 2001:204). It is essential to understand that the electoral system debate is vast, but that this thesis does not make judgments on the utility of the party system, but rather its causes.

System Reform It is worth mentioning another area of debate in the election field, that of who controls system design, implementation, or reform. Authors in this subfield explore what causes a certain electoral system to be implemented in a specific scenario (Farrell 2001:175). For example the system could be a “product of particular national circumstances,” or cynically, based on “the whims of particular actors” (176). Arendt Lijphart argues that in most cases the elite imposes system on passive voters (183). Grumm (1958) actually reverses the causation, arguing that multi-party transitions or reforms will produce PR electoral systems, not the other way around (Riker 1986:27). This becomes important when examining the normative effects of electoral systems on populations with limited exposure to democracy.

Conclusion The different types of electoral systems produce an array of party systems and related systemic consequences. While there is a general prediction of these results in the literature, the above review has made it clear that an array of extenuating circumstances can disrupt the seemingly straightforward culminations of electoral systems. To be sure, the new

South African electoral system is a prominent example of a PR electoral system that does not result a competitive multiparty system based on coalitions and post-election negotiation.

With a preponderance of evidence and study on PR systems and their reflecting party systems in general, the question becomes: why does South Africa not have the predicted competitive party system? To understand this, one must explore the relationship between the formal institutions of the electoral system, such as electoral rules and government structure, and the informal institutions of the South African case that challenge general predictions.

South Africa Background

Context of Transition On February 2nd 1990 President Frederik Willem de Klerk stood in front of the National Assembly to announce what would become the beginning of the end of apartheid. After 42 years in power, the ruling National Party unbanned opposition groups such as the ANC and the PAC, and began to release political prisoners. First and foremost among these was Nelson Mandela, who had led the opposition symbolically since his 1962 imprisonment. For the next four years de Klerk and Mandela grappled with the intense transition process. In the face of extreme personal tension, the leaders faced an array of political and social challenges before them that only the creation correct institutions could stabilize. Challenges, issues that prevented agreement, included regional integration of the white-dominated Western Cape and the quasi-autonomous Zulu homeland dominated by the controversial Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, a sharp rise in both political and non-political violence among the population in the early 1990s, reigning in violent wings of the Afrikaner right, such as General Constand Viljoen, and the ANC left, land redistribution, intimidation of ANC opposition, the effect of white business in politics, an institution to deal with justice of political atrocities on both sides, the effects of “Bantu” education, and much more (De Klerk 1999; Mandela 1995). This background is important to realize the diversity and intensity of the challenges leaders faced, and why the electoral institutions that created the first majority government were chosen.

Formal Electoral System In 1994 the country elected a transitional government whose purpose was to write the paramount 1996 Constitution. The resulting document called for a bi-cameral legislature made up of the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces (NCOP). Members of these bodies receive seats “in terms of an electoral system that... results, in general, in proportional representation... [and] An Act of Parliament must provide a formula for determining the number of members of the National Assembly”

(South African Constitution). Subsequent transitional government legislation chose a highly proportional system of PR to elect 400 members to the National Assembly- 200 from national closed party lists, and 200 chosen from provincial closed lists. Members sit for a five year period, and elect a powerful President who has full power to appoint his own cabinet (Butler 2004:105). The nine provinces and several “unicities” (independent large city governments) elect their own legislatures simultaneously. In 2002 floor-crossing legislation was introduced to allow members of the National Assembly to change party affiliation at specific intervals in between election cycles (Butler 2004:105-6).

While this describes the formal institutions of the electoral system, there are several trends or informal institutions that have influenced the transcription of the *de facto* electoral system into a fluid party system. It is these formal institutions that lay the comparative groundwork for the paper. To understand the utility of analyzing the South African electoral and party systems, we must fit the country into a larger understanding.

Comparative Context

To start, we need to make it clear that comparative politics can be used to explain South Africa’s system, and why Africa, in general, can aid our understanding of politics enormously. Stephen Lindberg summarizes this debate in the comparative literature while arguing that stable party systems in Africa result in higher levels of democracy (2007:219-221). He agrees with Manning and Hayden (2005) that studying party systems in Africa study leads to “conceptual stretching” because they are in their nascent stages (Stephen 2007:219). He criticizes Mozaffar and Scarrit’s “The Puzzle of African Party Systems” (2005) because they compare institutions across countries that have extremely varied levels of democratization. While he makes these arguments, he creates a qualitative process that allows certain regimes to be studied comparatively. South Africa falls in this “stable” category because the system has “configurations with relatively deep roots in society because of civil war, societal mobilization or ideological orientation” (236). If we are to use Africa, we must create high standards of comparison and rigidity. This was done in the preceding sections that discussed the types of electoral systems in general.

This point is essential as this paper attempts to compare formal rules and institutions and their interaction with informal institutions. “With over forty relatively similar political systems conducting regular multiparty elections, Africa offers an ideal terrain for comparative analysis of

the role of political parties and party systems” (Walle 2003: 398). Even Guemerio O’Donnell argues that the rules being followed are much more important than “parchment” institutions (Bratton 2007:2). Taken together, Africa provides an array of systems that will become enormously helpful when attempting to solve social problems with electoral institutions, and their predicted effects on society. Holistically, an extensive study of election systems and party systems is the first step in allowing us to effectively solve the problems of deeply divided societies and mitigate explosive ethnic conflict (Piombo 2005:447-8; Bogaards 2004:174). It is this first step that is examined in this thesis.

South African System and Society

Institutions Matter In the South African case, comparative politics that focuses on institutions will demonstrate how a society on the verge of explosion was able to use formal institutions to water the fire. South Africa presents a special case only in that society interacts with the formal institutions in very distinct ways. An important aspect of this relationship is that the landscape at the party system level is dictated not only by the overwhelming majority of the ANC during elections, but also by the way the electoral rules shape both the system and society. Gretchen Bauer argues that it is not only society that is important in creating competitive party systems, but institutions perhaps have the biggest impact (2001). Some authors argue that we can understand ANC political dominance because of the “parochial” political culture, that the liberation movement is in power only because the vast majority of the population votes for the party (Lindberg 2006:12). However, saying that because people vote for the ANC purely on the basis of a culture, and this alone dictates the party system ignores the primacy of institutions in shaping the political landscape. First, in the hypothetical cases of different electoral systems, there are some that would not leave the ANC dominant at the party-system level, even if two thirds of society voted for them. For example, Ardent Lijphart’s consociationalism ensures that minorities receive an equal share of national government with veto power, regardless of the vote within the legislature (1985). Giovanni Sartori, a prominent writer on the effects of electoral and party systems on government, differentiates between “constraining” and “unconstraining” electoral systems (1986:54). That is, the electoral system can have a direct effect on the way that the electorate votes and party systems are formed; or on the other hand, the electorate could vote the same way under any system, and the results of the party system would remain the same. This

makes the institutions that translate votes at the election system level into power at the party system level, paramount.

A Normative System Second, electoral systems do not only reflect the wishes of the people, but often have normative effects on the way that people vote. In South Africa, over the long run, extended exposure to democratic institutions, such as the electoral system, will affect the way the electorate internalizes democratic values (Lindberg 2006). The way that institutions affect popular views of democracy are important, especially as the failure of political culture has caused the failure of democracy in other African countries (Melber 2001:25) This can be explained because “popular support for democracy tends to drift downward over time... [but] can be refreshed by alternations in power by way of elections” and help to “re-legitimize democracy” (Bratton 2004:147). Trends throughout Africa show that people are dissatisfied when the incumbent wins repeatedly, so much so that “the father back in the past an electoral alternation... had occurred, the more disillusioned people were with democracy” (155). This observation holds true in South Africa specifically. In 2002 the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) released studies indicating that trust for democratic institutions such as the president, parliament, provincial governments, and the courts were at dangerously low levels. This apathy for the system and disillusionment with the government may deteriorate until the ANC is elected “by a growing proportion of a radically shrinking electorate” (Butler 2004:107). This evaluation demonstrates the need for electoral institutions that will normatively instill democratic values to ensure the peace and longevity of South African society.

This study of the effect of the electoral system on the party system is important because in the long term, if the system as a whole is not viewed as democratic, the system will not effectively normalize democracy in the hearts and minds of the electorate, and may continue the slide from single party dominance towards single party authoritarianism. The importance of finding the causes of single party dominance is central and paramount.

Formal Institutions of the Electoral System

Introduction Now that this study has been placed into the comparative context, we move to what makes the formal rules and institutions of the South African system different than other systems. The general argument in comparative politics is that formal rules of PR should produce a multi-party system. While there are some distinctions in the type of PR that South Africa uses, they do not explain ANC single party dominance independently. This section

argues that there are two aspects of the South African electoral system that are distinct, but if applied to a hypothetical test country independently, would not cause ANC single party dominance. First, the closed list system that is used to choose candidates, and second the extremely proportional nature of the formula used to translate votes into seats. These formal institutions are aspects of the electoral system that constitute the independent variable, and are vital to understand why the intervening variables of informal institutions are mandatory to explain single party dominance in the South African case.

Closed List

The first important and distinct feature of the South African system is the closed list ballot structure. The electorate has no extra-party mechanism for which to choose candidates. The most immediate problem this raises is that elected officials are not held accountable to the electorate, but rather the centralized party. The problems of the constituency relationship are dangerous in the long run because the system gives a significantly decreased incentive for participation (Mattes 2002:33). As the perceived link between a voter and his constituency grows, the less likely he is to vote, and the more apathy he feels for national government. South Africa in fact has the lowest degree of citizen-parliament contact, at 0.2 percent, compared to Namibia (also PR electoral system) at 1.0 percent, and several countries with SMP electoral systems including Zambia (7 percent), and Lesotho (5 percent) (measured by survey asking about perceived constituency-representative contact) (Mattes 2002:33). While these numbers are estimated values of imperial data, they demonstrate that the direct link between the government and the electorate in South Africa is low. These problems with the closed list system have not gone unnoticed by many in South Africa. The National Assembly commissioned The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) Electoral Task Team to release a report on the utility of electoral system since transition. They suggested increasing the number of multi-member districts, while decreasing district magnitude to elect 300 National Assembly members, while retaining the closed national list for 100 members to preserve proportionality. It is suggested that these changes would mitigate the distance between the government and its constituency.

Floor-Crossing Related to the closed list system is the formal rule of floor-crossing that was introduced in 2002, and allows one member of parliament to leave his political party to join another permanently (“South Africa” AEC). Voting with or joining another party for which a member was not elected is especially controversial because of the mechanisms of

closed list PR- that is the electorate votes for a party, not an individual. Before 2002 legislation, the South African Constitution (1996) contained an Anti-Defection Clause that disallowed changing parties. However problems arose when the New National Party (NNP), the remnants of the ruling party during Apartheid, wanted to split from the Democratic Alliance (DA), the strongest current opposition, half-way through their elected term. While NNP members had campaigned and were elected on the DA ticket, they were unable to change allegiance once in their national and regional legislatures.

The introduction of this legislation now allows members to change parties twice during each five-year term, at intervals selected by the president and party leaders (“South Africa” AEC). While the legislation was initiated to solve problems between opposition parties and was supported in the National Assembly by 86 percent of the voting members, the actual results have benefited the ANC more than any other party (Mbeki 2006). [SEE APPENDIX 2] While a ten percent threshold was set as the maximum number of defectors from each party, the ANC immediately gained a two-thirds majority of the National Assembly following the first floor-crossing time period. While Matlosa and Shale (2006) argue that “floor-crossing” itself is not anti-democratic, it becomes dangerous for democratic consolidation when introduced to less developed party system (Masemolda 2007). Their argument is realized by the fact that the ANC gained a non-elected super-majority, enough to independently alter the Constitution. The effects of the closed list system and the implications of floor-crossing will become apparent when compared to the informal institutions of the South African System.

Extreme Proportionality

Arendt Lijphart, the premier scholar in comparative electoral politics, argues that extreme proportionality is the most distinguishing aspect of the South African electoral system (1995). It is a result of the electoral formula used, the district magnitude, the electoral threshold, and the size of the legislatures. Specifically, the entire country is one district, there is no electoral threshold whatsoever, and the National Assembly is particularly large compared to other governments that use PR. Some observers argue that PR leads to a system with too many small parties. While South Africa avoided this problem with only seven parties being elected in 1994, the ANC’s dominance immediately challenges the utility of multi-partyism. Extreme proportionality with a number of small parties leads to increased power for the dominant power (Rimanelli 2000). For opposition parties, this leads to a “dis-empowering” electoral situation that

works “against the development of vibrant and stable multi-party electoral democracy” (Olaleye 2003:2). Taken together, it is obvious that extreme proportionality can be detrimental to the strength of a viable opposition in South Africa. Extreme proportionality becomes important when understanding the role of the opposition with informal institutions.

Institutional Dominance

The final critical aspect of the South African system that does not by itself cause single party dominance, but is important when understanding the effects of the intervening variables, is the arrangement of the government. Specifically, the power of the executive in relation to the rest of government, and then the federal relationship of the system are important.

Presidency The relationship between the presidency and the legislature is fluid, and still being developed. Institutionally, the presidency is responsible for executing laws, and contains the Cabinet, the Presidency, the Directors General, the Treasury, and security enforcement (Butler 2004:93). The Cabinet members are appointed directly by the president, and control over a million public servants. The vast power of appointment that the president has gives him “a huge realm of patronage running into thousands” (94). Furthermore, he is close enough to Government Communications and Information Service that he is easily capable of manipulating the media (94). Institutionally, his powers are checked by the legislature. However, “parliament is a bloated and largely reactive policy-influencing legislature on the Westminster model, but with strict party discipline reinforced by a party-list proportional system” (118). That is, it is the nature of the electoral system that disrupts the formal balance between the check that the parliament has on the presidency. Members of parliament are responsible to the tight party hierarchy rather than the electorate, or a local constituency. Therefore, the impetus to introduce legislation in parliament is minimal, and usually initiated by the president himself.

Federalism The constitution calls for a relatively federal system of government with nine provinces, and local governments and municipalities at the bottom. Sub-national entities are designed to help mitigate the legacies of apartheid. With regionally-based solutions, violence and dissolution from a dominating national government was minimized. The provinces would help implement general policies decided at the national level, tailored to the needs of specific provinces. While a majority of spending occurs at the provincial government, its allocation is strictly dictated by the national government (Piombo 2005:455). The municipal level, including many unincorporated areas, is experiencing an increase in the autonomous control of their budgets and social

spending. Many of the councils are elected by locals, and respond to local demands. They represent the closest connection with people and the government (Butler 2004:104). The importance of these formal institutions for explaining single party dominance become clear when met with the informal institutions of the South African system.

Conclusion

This section has placed South Africa into the context of comparative politics. It has included an examination of the formal electoral and party institutions in general, and in the South African case. A comparison of general party systems to South Africa's demonstrates that the general rules of PR do not dictate or predict single party dominance alone. After an examination of several formal institutions, or electoral rules and government structures, that are distinct in South Africa, it remains unclear how these formal institutions affect the party system holistically in South Africa. While some formal institutions matter- the closed list system, the high degree of proportionality, and the arrangement of the government- they do not in themselves explain the South African party system of single party dominance. However, we now move to explore what happens when these formal institutions meet the informal institutions of South Africa over the past fifteen years. As Goran Hyden puts it, "Africa is the best starting point for exploring the role of informal institutions" (2006:6). In general comparative politics, these will demonstrate the need to study informal institutions that interact with the formal institutions to produce a different result: in this case the party system that causes ANC dominance.

III. Intervening Variables – Informal Institutions

Section II described the formal institutions of electoral systems in general, and then in the South African context. This section introduces informal institutions that are essential to our understanding of the party system that exists today. While no clear division of these institutions is perfect, this thesis will describe how society, the tripartite alliance, the nature of the opposition, and the fluid evolution of government all work together to influence the formal institutions of the country. Together, these explain why single party dominance results in the South African system, and how it contributes to, rather than destroys, the comparative understanding of electoral system – party system politics. To be clear however, the electoral system remains our independent variable. The formal institutions of PR are required for the informal institutions to produce single party dominance. If a SMP electoral system were introduced, the resulting party system could not be explained through the same dynamic of informal institutions.

Society

The first informal institution that is essential to understand single party dominance is the manner in which parties are tied to society. Nicholas Van de Walle argues that one of the most important problems with Africa is that political parties have weak ties to society, especially compared to Europe and Latin America whose parties have historically based membership based on class (2003:300). This feature leads many authors to the conclusion that “at the heart of the contemporary crisis in sub-Saharan Africa lies a deep estrangement between state and society” (Bratton 1994:231). South Africa is indicative of this problem. However some authors argue that using the comparative viewpoint as an attempt to study party roots in society is problematic on the African continent. There has been little work and analysis on the origins of political parties in Africa, and how they tie to classes or deep-rooted ideology (Lindberg 2007:240). This is problematic when examining the extent to which prominent authors that study other areas of the world focus on class society. Seymour Lipset, a prominent author of comparative politics focusing on Latin America, argues that party support is dependent on becoming linked with “deep-rooted sources of cleavage, as parties in the older, institutionalized Western democracies have been” (2000). When placing South Africa in comparative party – society politics, it becomes clear that these ties are necessary to understand democracy, and we do not have a great

deal of empirical research available. These aspects help us understand the comparative context in which the South African party system is studied.

At the Polls There are two fundamental arguments to the nature of ANC domination in the polls. First, that the ANC wins elections because of their popular conception as a liberation movement. The ANC was founded in 1912, but remained an insignificant organization until it began to fight for black freedom. By the 1940's and 50's the party adopted strong anti-apartheid and anti-racial platform driven by a new militant leadership (Bauer 2001:108). In 1960s the party was banned, launched its military wing Umkhonto we Sizwe, and strengthened its international movement to become the leader in the anti-apartheid movement. By the 1980's the banned ANC had created an unofficial alliance with the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and joined the broad United Democratic Front (UDF), a coalition of parties, civil society groups, churches, and exiled groups against apartheid. While the importance of the ANC was diminished for a short time during the 1980s, transition brought assurance that the party and its international figurehead, Nelson Mandela, would become the post-apartheid leaders. This viewpoint emphasizes the regions history of colonial rule and imperial violence, that is today reflected in party systems whose only substantive roots in society are their histories as national movements against oppression (Olaleye 2003:2). The most striking regional example of this is the dominance of Mugabe's Zanu-PF in neighboring Zimbabwe. This despotic leader not only controls his domestic government with an iron fist, but receives little criticism from other African states unwilling to speak against a great African liberator.

The second understanding at the polls is racial. Some argue that the main political parties cater only to their traditional supporters (Piombo 2005:460). For example the Inkarta-Freedom Party continues to emphasize its traditional Zulu base, while the National Party and Democratic Alliance are seen as white parties. Therefore, an electoral base with these perceptions will not be able to create a party system devoid of these stereotypes and prejudices. However it is easy to challenge the assumption that race is a causal factor. Even though there is correlation, there is little convincing evidence that causation exists. Furthermore, people rarely identify with one large racial group, but rather overlap with heritage and class (Habib 2001:212). Data published by the Institute for a Democratic South Africa in 2003 suggests a decrease in party ties being racially-bound. Both party identification and racial identification have been fluid when comparing polling data from 1994 to 2003 (IDASA 2003:6). [SEE APPENDIX 5] An

examination makes it clear that “there is a great potential for opposition parties to win over significant sections of the electorate... [and] the increase in the numbers of ‘leaners’ and ‘independents’ creates the potential for significant electoral shifts in the future” (Habib 2001:215). The discrepancy in the polling data compared to the election results are not contradictory, but rather explain the weakness of parliamentary opposition, which this thesis will discuss as an informal institution shortly. The ANC-voter and racial-voter ties described here can be therefore diminished imperially and empirically.

By examining ANC dominance at the polls compared to survey data, it becomes clear that explanations that discount the electoral system, and focus only on the electorate in Africa are relatively weak and unsupported. We now turn to an essential element of the ANC- its informal ties to society. Across Africa many authors argue that patronage remains paramount to explaining electoral and governing success. In the South African context, if patronage is not paramount, the nature of beneficiaries of ANC rule do not go unnoticed. This can be examined through the relationship of the ANC and its ruling partners- the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). This alliance is an intervening variable that influences the formal rules of the electoral system to increase the likelihood of single party dominance.

Tripartite Alliance

South Africa is governed by a coalition of the ANC, SACP, and COSATU, a relationship whose roots are in apartheid resistance of the 1980s. The alliance is an informal institution of the government that both influences society and at the electoral system level; it is another variable that is specific to this case, and is part explaining why PR leads to single party dominance. COSATU began as the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) in the early 1980s to unite workers in a grass-roots party that would be led from the bottom up, rather than the Leninist top-down model. The federation’s goal was to end apartheid in a manner that would help all workers. In 1985 the federation joined with the other unions, the ANC and the UDF, and changed its name to COSATU (Pillay 2006:169-70).

Importance In the previous section we explained the discrepancy between declining voter-party-race identification and electoral results as the weakness of the opposition. Adam Habib and Taylor Rupert argue that the “tripartite alliance has thus become the principal obstacle to the emergency of a viable opposition and the establishment of truly competitive politics in

South Africa” (2001:219). Roger Southall and Geoffrey Wood disagree with this assessment, arguing instead that a split would be dangerous for democracy, and COSATU’s role in the country would be neutralized as it falls into internal disagreement (1999: 69,79). An examination of the debate between these authors makes it clear that COSATU retains high ties to society, and can explain why other parties have been unable to harness great electoral support.

Debate Habib and Rupert evaluate the role that COSATU has played in government since transition. The trade union successfully carried out its first goal of being a strong and meaningful opposition to apartheid, but has fallen short of its long-term goal of ensuring that workers are well-represented in government (2001:220). Since transition the movement has retained its radical rhetoric, but diminished its active political role. The greatest example of this was the abandonment of the original Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP), and its replacement by the markedly liberal Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy that has been the guiding principle of economy to today. This move, along with subsequent bashing of COSATU’s position has made it obvious that the tripartite relationship is no longer based on equality. In 2002 for example, President Mbeki lashed out at leftists within COSATU telling them to quiet down or leave the organization. In 2004, COSATU pledged its full support for public sector workers striking for higher wages (Pillay 2006:167).

Roger Southall on the other hand, argues that the ANC-COSATU alliance is essential for democracy. The organization is essential for internal opposition within the government, ensuring the ANC does not become too conservative. This is achieved by placing COSATU leaders on 20 percent of their national electoral lists (1999:74-5). However Southall’s view implicitly ignores the benefits of a multi-party system. His argument that internal ANC rivalry will be sufficient for democratic consolidation is misguided. While evaluating the ability of the electoral or party system is beyond the scope of this thesis, there is a preponderance of evidence in the literature and practice that suggests a multi-party system is more conducive to democracy. (For example Namibia’s single party dominance has been primarily responsible for the deterioration of democracy) (Bauer 2001:48).

Society The degree to which COSATU is tied to the people is essentially important to understand its influential role realized by the perceptions of the electorate. Some argue that COSATU is responsible for the high degree of support that the ANC finds at the polls (Pillay 2006: 168; Nevin 2005:30). This becomes problematic for the development of a multi-

party system as the African working class represented by COSATU is the only class strong enough to become a significant base for ANC opposition (Habib 2001:218). This raises the question of whether the SACP and COSATU were brought into the alliance with promises of RDP programs, to merely prevent strong independent opposition. COSATU is perfectly positioned to do this as workers demand and receive consultation with their union structures- something they think they will not receive from a party (Pillay 2006:180). [SEE APPENDIX 6] This survey data demonstrates (a) the amount of trust put in trade unions in South Africa over political parties, and (b) the degree to which the electorate feels their voices will be heard by the party compared to their trade union. Many authors agree that it is hard to measure the actual number of votes that the ANC can attribute to COSATU. As of 2002, 27 percent of all workers in South Africa were unionized (Pillay 2006:175). Furthermore, the creation of the Nedlac business-government economic forum has given all organized workers and business a semi-corporatist formal mechanism to express concerns and influence public policy (176). As business relationships form with corporatist structures, they will be seen as more important than electoral mechanisms. In turn, voting the ANC out of office also removes COSATU, the largest union of trade unions. Therefore, the tripartite alliance has a monopoly on the votes of union members.

Formal Rules This tripartite relationship not only has an effect on the perceptions of the electorate, but also is important when understanding formal electoral rules. That is, the alliance is made possible by the formal institutions of the electoral system. This is possible because the ANC has much to give to union leaders and politicians by way of their control of government. Active COSATU leaders have been given prominent government positions in the 1990's, even though the introduction of GEAR signaled their loss of influence. In many other African countries, labor movements became opposition parties because they were not receiving any voice in government. A prime example of this is Zimbabwe's labor movement, ZCTU. While originally incorporated into the ruling alliance following independence in 1980, their increasing independence led to the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change in 2000, led by Morgan Tsvangirai (Pillay 2006:177). However it is clear that in the South African case, COSATU leaders are given government positions to retain their alliance- a relationship that seems to be viable. This relationship is further made possible is by the ability to place the names of COSATU leaders on national closed lists, thereby guaranteeing labor a voice and representation in government. Therefore, union politicians are practically guaranteed a formal

role in government if the ANC wins enough seats at the polls. In turn COSATU is able give their supporters goods in the way of both legislation and perceived representation. It is clear that the informal relationship that COSATU enjoys, and the potential strength it could have as an opposition party, is a key to understanding ANC single party dominance. Without the formal rules of the electoral system and the ability to ensure union leaders government seats, the ANC would loose the ability to retain COSATU in the alliance.

Conclusion The tripartite relationship is significant for explaining ANC single party dominance because they represent the only other organization with significantly deep but non-racial ties to society. While the amount of literature on the subject is extensive, this thesis does not predict the future viability of the union, but rather its role as part of the government, and its potential to develop into opposition. The conclusion is that the alliance leaves the opposition in a helpless situation. If a primary means for the ANC to communicate and provide benefits for its supporters is in COSATU, and the ANC can appease union leaders by providing them a guaranteed voice in government, it is extremely difficult for the opposition to offer incentives or alternatives.

Nature of Opposition

Traditional theories of the relationship between electoral systems and party systems do not account for the informal obstacles that opposition parties in South Africa face. Low campaign finance and weak legislative allegiance are essential to the understanding of why no party can successfully mobilize enough voters to attain even enough power to challenge the ANC. These informal institutions are a result of the formal rules of PR. It is important to note that the opposition is composed of dedicated politicians who fight hard and give their entire lives to secure a democratic country – their role in government has been effective in securing many of the liberties and benefits that the country can be thankful for. However, when examining the effects of the electoral system with the informal institutions of South Africa, it becomes clear that these parties are undeniably disadvantaged.

Campaign Finance

First, campaign finance is low for the opposition. Across Africa the fact is that limited state resources do not allow for diverse and competitive parties to attain the appropriate funds to spread their message (Ranker 2007:13-14). In South Africa specifically, this creates large swathes of the country that are left unchallenged by the assumed winner as parties strategically

concentrate their appeals (Olaleye 2003:2). This becomes further problematic as the PR system has no minimum percentage required to attain a legislative seat, as do many countries who use this system. Therefore, finance must be distributed amongst many parties, and in theory dilutes the potential strength of one or two stronger opposition parties.

The issue of finance not only weakens the opposition, but also gives the party in power a particular incumbent advantage in that it has all state resources at its disposal. Some authors argue that a party needs a high degree of incumbent resources if that party is to operate effectively outside government (Rakner 2007:13). The situation is not aided by the fact that international aid rarely supports political parties, something that might in fact be essential to democratic transition.

Legislative Allegiance

Second, there is a high degree of weak legislative allegiance in the National Assembly (Olaleye 2003:2). This does not contradict the argument made earlier that party discipline is strong and centralized. If a member wants to significantly criticize his party without being disciplined, he must leave the party to ensure his legislative longevity. This is most obviously seen through official floor-crossing that was allowed by legislation in 2002. [SEE APPENDIX 2] The 1996 Constitution contained a clause that allowed for such legislation to be passed by the National Assembly rather than a more difficult constitutional amendment. The legislation benefited the ANC when they gained a two-thirds majority by recruiting an additional 14 members in early 2003. This shift immediately threatened the strength and viability of other parties. However, the legislation was supported by the main opposition (Butler 2004:106).

While floor-crossing was not only immediately strengthened the legislative dominance of the ANC, side-effects of the legislation are responsible for the maintenance of single party dominance. It is important to note that “while floor-crossing or political migration, in and of itself, is not necessarily undesirable in a democracy,” in some party systems it can be detrimental (Masemola 2007:2). In the South African context, political parties are centrally controlled at the national level. Government members have little control or say over what goes on at the top (Olaleye 2003:1). This is clearly a result of the formal closed list system. When combined with floor-crossing legislation, the result is weakening of smaller parties, and empowerment of the dominant party for two reasons. First, there is an extreme incentive for individuals to join the winning party (Walle: 2003:313). Because the ANC controls the executive and the entire cabinet,

they have an array of posts to give away to woe members of other parties. This accommodation can be seen as IFP leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi remained in Thabo Mbeki's cabinet well after 1996 when other parties left (Butler 2004:40). Second, party leaders can force members out of the party if they challenge command authority (Mattes 2002:26). These powers of the incumbent serve to weaken the opposition to obviously extreme lows.

ANC Perception

The third aspect of the opposition that is essential to understanding single party dominance is the perception of the ANC. It is essential to remember that, as explained earlier, this is not so much because of voter perception, but rather how the ANC defines itself, and formulates policy. Some argue that this is the most important factor to explain success as most parties in South Africa actually offer few policy alternatives. According to some authors, there is "low ideological salience" with more "programmatic homogeneity" because all parties face similar extenuating circumstances (Walle 2003:303; Habib 2001:215). Some go as far as to argue that the failure of a vibrant opposition is the fault of opposition leaders rather than the electorate (Southall 1999:70). While there is validity in the first statement, the lack of a strong opposition can hardly be attributed to the failure of vibrant and vigorous leaders such as Tony Leon and Helen Zille. Rather the role that ANC perception plays is in self-evaluation. Essential is the fact that the ANC continues to define and conduct itself like a liberation movement rather than a political party. This can be seen as the government does not criticize the actions of Robert Mugabe's Zanu-PF in neighboring Zimbabwe, even though the situation is causing enormous flow of persons and an increase in violence in South Africa. The omnipotent attitude has led individuals within the ANC to treat the intuitions of government as mechanisms for their own empowerment (Mattes 2002: 26). Examples of this attitude will become clearer in the next section.

Conclusion After examining society, the tripartite alliance, and features of the opposition it is clear that the opposition must find resonance with the people if they are to be successful at the polls. Some argue that this can only be done through a charismatic opposition leader (Solinger 2001:31), others by dismantling the alliance between the ANC, SACP, and COSATU (Habib 2001:222). Regardless, it is clear that new opposition parties must find a way to tie themselves to society in meaningful ways. As Lise Rakner and Nicolas Van de Walle put it, "democracy will thrive in Africa only if political actors develop a set of informal norms... [to]

legitimize and strengthen the formal rules” (2007:8). Formal electoral rules are combining with South Africa’s informal social intuitions to create single party dominance. However the picture is not yet quite complete. Government has evolved in a particular fashion that has even further aided the longevity of ANC power.

Fluid Evolution of Government

The final piece to understanding the puzzle of single party dominance is the manner in which South Africa’s government has evolved. Formal constitutional rules have yielded informal results that are being institutionalized, and increasingly dictate the longevity of ANC dominance. The components to this include the dominance of the ANC as a party with a way to choose leadership, the increasing domination of the executive branch, and the federal organization of the government. Each of these aspects has evolved in a manner that is conducive to the continued domination of a single party.

Single PARTY Dominant First, the ANC is party dominant rather than individual dominant. As the ANC concentrates power, it does so around the position of the executive and legislative control rather than around an individual. Over the long-term, this means that domination of the party will outlive the favor of an individual. This distinction has been made and studied by several authors (Arnade 1999:379). Many other African regimes have been built on the power of an individual. For example, in Namibia President Nujama single-handedly created party lists, invaded the DRC, and created an extensive cult or personality. However he built this power around himself as an individual rather than a party, and therefore ended with his government (Bauer 2001:37). This occurred often because these “big men” were at the top of patronage and clientelist networks that offered state resources “in exchange for political acquiescence” (Boone 1994:131). In the long run classes would be unified into parties based on the patronage they received.

However South Africa is markedly different than the majority of other African systems. In this case, a new government took over a previous system of relatively democratic structures that were already in place. South Africa “did not share the core features of Africa’s neo-patrimonial regimes” (Bratton 1997:80). Rather, long-term political tolerance was institutionalized, and expanding participation to those denied was much simpler than revamping entire social and political systems (Bauer 2001: 35; Bratton 1997:179). (As a side-note, the National Party’s single party dominance from 1948 to 1994 was markedly different than that of

the ANCs. The electoral system was SMP, and the party was able to retain their dominance through extemporaneous redistricting, or gerrymandering (Lodge 2002.) Because the ANC was a long-term movement, and its first leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki stepped down without the crumbling of the party, it is clear that single party dominance centers on formal and informal institutions. It will not splinter like other single person dominant parties such as the Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD) in Zambia while it retains control of the government (Piombo 2005:450). The evolution and transition of power within the ANC allows it to retain party system level dominance over an otherwise free and fair electoral system. This is important to understand the context in which formal and informal institutions are evolving to give more power the party structures holistically.

Executive Dominance Formal institutional rules contained within the 1996 Constitution place the executive as the dominant entity in the system of government. The branch executes laws, and includes the Cabinet, senior members of the public service known as the Directors General, the Treasury, and the security services. While across the world in general the executive branch has become more powerful, it is through this branch that the ANC has concentrated its power most effectively (Butler 2004:93). Formally, the president appoints all Cabinet ministers, who in turn control about a million public servants within the 29 departments. The majority of disputes within ministries are handled internally, with a very few controversial ones reaching the cabinet-level. Informally, the president's power is far greater. In 1999 Mbeki created policy coordination unit to monitor the lower-level decisions of the bureaucracy, and extend executive control over all decision-making. Some even argue that he his close position with the Government Communications and Information Service allows him to manipulate the media (Butler 2004:94). By law, it is obvious that the position of the president is dominant.

The executive has also become more powerful over time, especially in comparison to the legislature. It is clear that many legislatures in Africa only weakly check executive power, and South Africa is no exception (Ranker 2007:11). Today some argue that "parliament is a bloated and largely reactive policy-influencing legislature on the Westminster model, but with strict party discipline reinforced by a party-list proportional system permitting easy 'redeployment' of disloyal members" (Butler 2004:118). Many authors would agree with this statement (Bauer 2001; Bratton 2007; Lijphart 1985; Rakner 2007). The essential reason that the power of the executive has increased in relation to the legislature is the effect of the closed-list electoral

system. Because the executive is also the head of the party who controls which candidates can be put up on electoral ballots, the ability of members of parliament to oppose the president is non-existent. The most poignant example of the increasing executive dominance was the 1999 29.9 billion rand Arms Deal involving the executive. While the details of the scandal are less important, the subsequent reaction of the legislature to check the president was to ignore it. The National Assembly Standing Committee on Public Accounts (SCOPA), which was headed by the opposition, used the Special Investigation Unit to examine the case. While ANC members passed a resolution supporting the actions of the Unit, they *de facto* distanced themselves to curry presidential favor (Mattes 2002:27). This incident demonstrated the power the executive currently holds over the institution that is supposed to function as a check on abuse. The only branch that remained relatively independent was the judiciary, which was well insulated from party manipulation (Butler 2004:122). However the traditional structure and white domination on the bench makes the perceptions of this institution negative, and hurts its ability to check the executive regardless of its formal role. This works to ANC institutional dominance.

The reaction of members within the legislature was a result of formal electoral institutions. The closed-list nature of the electoral system puts a member's future in the hands of the command structure of power within the party. Therefore, if a member of parliament were to challenge the executive, he would be removed from the party electoral list during the next round of elections. Likewise, if the president were being challenged by a member of the opposition, he could easily woo said member to his party during the next period of floor-crossing. During transition negotiations, the ANC explicitly rejected the full Westminster PR system by demanding that the cabinet was to be controlled totally by the ruling party (even though the GNU did split cabinet portfolios until 1996 (Ottaway 1993:100). In most other countries, governments are created through coalition, and the power of government is rarely given such autonomous control.

Another aspect of executive dominance is the incumbency advantage. Nicolas van de Walle argues that in Africa generally, whichever party "was able to control the chief executive's office, and attain a winning legislative majority following the first election, was then able to consolidate power" (2003:301). The past several paragraphs have focused on more formal concentration of power. However, it is important to note that in Africa especially, a strong executive means a stronger incumbency advantage (Rakner 2007:13). This can be attributed to

the high visibility that the dominant party receives compared to less powerful and under-funded parties. The party in control of the executive, and the entire cabinet and bureaucracy has vast pool of resources to reach a geographically broad electorate. This informal institution is especially important in Africa where financing is not enormous, and must be spread across a large number of parties.

Federalism The final area in which informal institutions of South Africa challenge the traditional conception of formal institutions is the separation of powers between the national and provincial governments. Donald Horowitz argues that “the nexus between electoral rules and the level on which parties compete” are an important yet underdeveloped area (Piombo 2005:448). While literature specific to this case is scarce, it is clear that the evolution of relations between the entities has concentrated the power of the federal executive and the ANC. Formally, the constitution calls for “concurrent powers” and “co-operative governance,” but in reality the state is unitary. The provinces can neither raise revenue nor legislate significantly (Butler 2004:118). Jessica Piombo argues that federal systems empower local groups, and small regional parties, while unitary systems minimize the utility of local groups and elections, and put power in the national executive (2005:453). For South Africa, a discussion of federalism is important because it demonstrates how the *de jura* constitutional requirement of concurrent powers has been diluted to *de facto* national dominance. During negotiations for example, the ANC initially rejected federalism, but subsequently capitulated to opposition groups. This suggests that the party leadership prefers a strong national government in practice. The centralization around the national government is similar to the tight party control exercised through closed electoral lists. Federalism is important because the ANC has weakened the policy-making ability of the provinces, and therefore the ability for opposition parties to build stronger regional bases from which to build power nationally. While a federal or unitary state is a formal institution when it is written down, South Africa is informally similar to a unitary state because of the weakness of the provincial assemblies. Therefore, when PR meets what in practice is a unitary state, a forum for opposition is removed.

An examination of the evolution of government through ANC party dominance, executive concentration, and federalism reveals that informal institutions and norms specific to the South African case are essential to understand why formal institutions and rules do not by themselves explain single party dominance.

IV. Possible Alternative Systems

There is a vast amount of literature that explore possible alternative electoral and government systems that are different than the system South Africa actually uses today. While some were published both before transition as suggestions, many since transition from apartheid have studied the “what ifs.” Because this thesis examines the type of electoral system as its independent variable, it is worth mentioning some of the predicted results had other systems been used in this case. We will briefly examine different PR systems used, plurality, the alternative vote, and conclude with real consociationalism.

PR Many authors agreed, both before and after transition, that PR was the best system to successfully deal with the challenges faced by the country. Arend Lijphart argues that PR would be the best system to use as it has the best record when evaluating representation, voter participation, and controlling economic factors such as unemployment (Reynolds 1996:87). However there are many different ways variables when running PR. For example, South Africa uses the droop quota (that is $\text{votes}/\text{seats}+1$) to translate votes into seats, and uses one national district to elect half the members of the National Assembly (so district magnitude is 200). Andrew Reynolds hypothetically runs the election results in several different ways. (He explicitly assumes that people would have voted the same way if different electoral system had been used, thereby diminishing the importance of strategic voting.) If only provincial lists had been used, the ANC would have more votes from the smallest parties, while the votes received by the second and third most represented would remain the same. [SEE APPENDIX 7] In his examination, the system of PR used in South Africa has been the most effective in diminishing the numerical strength of the ANC in the National Assembly. As this thesis has made clear, it is not just numerical dominance in the legislature that causes single party dominance.

SMP In 1996 Andrew Reynolds examined the possible consequences of using the plurality, (here called SMP) for the South African National Assembly. He argues that SMP system would have caused “racially exclusive and geographically parochial governments. Parties, who receive not even a minimal voice in government, might turn to violence and extra-governmental means in order to make their voices heard. If the 1994 election were re-run using the plurality system, the Freedom Front, DP, PAC, and African Christian Democrats would be completely shut out of the system. [SEE APPENDIX 7] Guy Lardeyret on the other hand argues that a plurality and two-party system would be best because it would force large ethnic parties to

campaign and legislate on non-ethnic platforms (Reynolds 1996:87). However, as this thesis demonstrates, a certain electoral system will not always dictate a concrete party system, even when faced with the informal institutions that are identified here. While Lardeyret's argument of the benefits of a two-party system is well-taken, it is doubtful that a two-party system would have evolved. Furthermore, the vast amount of literature on the effects of PR versus SMP in mitigating ethnic and social violence suggests that a plurality system would not have addressed deep-rooted social problems, let alone the basic foundations of a two-party system. However, an evaluation of the utility in mitigating ethnic or social conflict is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Alternative Vote Many authors argue that only a mixed or special system will work. Donald Horowitz for example argues that only the alternative vote system will work when single member districts in the plurality system are modified to reallocate voters second, third, and subsequent choices for until a candidate receives a majority (Reynolds 1996:87). This would essentially mitigate the effects of the closed list system, in the long run making a member of government more accountable to the people and his constituency rather than the concentrated power hierarchy. While this would mitigate an important aspect of the independent variable in this thesis (the closed list,) Reynolds argues without a closed list, parties would be unable to create parties with broad appeal, one of the most important aspects in a post-conflict society. (1996:92). A closed list allows parties to insert minority candidates, such as women, who would be less likely to receive positions if left entirely to the voter. While there seems to be an advantage in using the alternative vote system for the party system, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to determine whether the utility of PR to mitigate social conflict outweighs the problems it causes of the party system. However the isolation of these informal variables will make altering the system for the future far clearer.

Consociationalism In 1985 Arend Lijphart continued his exploration of consociationalism by arguing that it would be the best way for a peaceful transition in South Africa, and the only way to sustain democracy over the long-run. He argued that the only way that South Africa would be able to successfully move from the violence of apartheid through a peaceful transition would be through consociational democracy. Consociationalism is an elite-based system of governance that works when society is divided into distinct social groups with limited interaction. At the national level, grand coalitions form because each group is willing to compromise to avoid conflict. Peace made at the top is supposed to trickle down to society

(1985:133). This is the current arrangement of government in Belgium, and to a certain extent Netherlands. In her examination of transition negotiations, Marina Ottaway reports that the ANC “equated democracy with majority rule, not with consociationalism, rejecting proportional representation in the executive” (1993:100). However, Andrew Reynolds argues, in 1996, that South Africa has met the basic criteria for Lijphart’s consociationalism by citing Article 88 of the Interim Constitution which gives all parties with more than five percent of the National Assembly a share of cabinet portfolios. Initially, members were included in the cabinet: the NP won six of 27 portfolios and the IFP had three (Reynolds 1996:90). However, under Section 91 of the current 1996 Constitution, the president has full power of appointment and dismissal (South African Constitution 1996). Therefore, while PR is used in the legislature, the presidency is, as Ottaway puts it, run by ANC “majority rule.” If Lijphart’s consociationalism had been adopted in the new constitution, the fluid evolution of government towards the executive would surely be very different. But again, while the party system would be different, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to determine the socially mitigating benefits of a strong executive.

Federalism It is worth briefly mentioning the possible effects of a true federal system applied to South Africa, as was constitutionally mandated. Some authors argue that the weak federal structures have made parties to campaign with broad national appeals rather than divisive regional rhetoric (Piombo 2005:449). While this may have been important for the first years of transition, a federal system more in line with Germany would diminish ANC power within the central government. This should be a possible alternative researched by the IEC if they are commissioned to complete future studies and recommendations for the South African system.

Conclusion An examination of the possible alternative methods of possible electoral systems that South Africa could have used reveals the hypothetical effects of the various electoral rules and institutions on the party system are far from concrete. The pre-transition literature on possible systems concentrates on what type of electoral system will mitigate and minimize ethnic conflict, and maintain the country’s relative peace. It is an area that this thesis mostly ignores. While single party dominance is bad for democracy in the long run, perhaps a system that produced dominance is the only one that would have successfully mitigated social conflict. However this section has examined some of the possible alternatives that need exploration if South Africa is to mitigate the effect of informal institutions on the electoral system.

V. Conclusions

The most striking aspect of the South African transition from more than fifty years of apartheid to mostly democratic system is that it happened at all. While there was a dramatic rise in violence during the early nineties, it was regionally limited, and did not erupt into a national civil war. There is no doubt that the four years of intense negotiation between the National Party (NP), the African National Congress (ANC), and all other stakeholders was not an easy process. By 1993 an interim constitution had been written, with the election of an interim government the following year. The 1999 and 2004 elections both confirmed the nation's commitment to democracy, and further instilled the dominance of the ANC.

While some do not find single party dominance problematic, a comparative study suggests that an unopposed party will continue to concentrate its hold on power. Therefore, this thesis has explained the current party system as a result of the specific way the electoral system interacts with informal institutions. That is, the way that proportional representation (PR) rules, including the closed list and extreme proportionality, have met society, the tripartite alliance, and the fluid evolution of government to produce single party dominance. To alter this situation, a thorough examination of what has been presented here is necessary.

This thesis has also added to the literature of comparative politics by contributing to our understanding of the relationship between electoral system and party systems. Those who attempt to implement new systems need to be aware of the possible outside factors that can influence the party system. One can not assume that PR will always lead to a truly multi-party system, or that a single member plurality (SMP) system will lead to a true two-party system until informal influences are properly studied.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: National-Level Election Results 1994 to 1996

Independent Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC). "Results of Past Elections: 1994, 1999, 2000, 2004."
<<http://www.elections.org.za/Elections94.asp>>

APPENDIX 2: Floor Crossing: change of seats during 2005 floor crossing period

2006. "South Africa: Floor-crossing outcome 2005." EISA. (February).

<<http://www.eisa.org.za/WEP/souresults2004b.htm>>

Party	Seats 2004 (election)	Seats 2005 (floor- crossing)	Gain	Loss	Net
African National Congress	279	293	14	0	14
Democratic Alliance	50	47	2	5	-3
Inkatha Freedom Party	28	23	0	5	-5
United Democratic Movement	9	6	0	3	-3
Independent Democrats	7	5	0	2	-2
New National Party	7	0	0	7	-7
African Christian Democratic Party	7	4	0	3	-3
Freedom Front +	4	4	0	0	0
United Christian Democratic Party	3	3	0	0	0
Pan Africanist Congress of Azania	3	3	0	0	0
Minority Front	2	2	0	0	0
Azanian People's Organization	1	1	0	0	0
National Democratic Convention	0	4	4	0	4
United Independent Front	0	2	2	0	2
Federation of Democrats	0	1	1	0	1
United Party of South Africa	0	1	1	0	1
Progressive Independent Movement	0	1	1	0	1
(Total)	(400)	(400)	(25)	(25)	(0)

APPENDIX 3: High degree of correspondence between seat percentages and vote percentages in the 2004 election

Lijphart, Arend. 1995. "The South African Electoral System: Unusual Features and Prospects for Reform" from NSF research project: Electoral Laws, Electoral Lists and Campaigning in the First Non-Racial South African Elections. <<http://www.fairvote.org/?page=554>>

<i>Party</i>	o <i>Votes</i>	o <i>Seats</i>
ANC	62.65	63.00
NP	20.9	20.50
IFP	10.54	10.75
FF	2.17	2.25
DP	1.73	1.75
PAC	1.25	1.25
ACDP	.45	.50

note: Furthermore, the Loosemore-Hanby index shows that the degree of "over-represented parties" is .82- lower than all other 384 other elections examined by Lijphart.

APPENDIX 4: Voter party perception 1994 to 1999

Habib, Adam. Rupert Taylor. 2001. "Political Alliances and Parliamentary Opposition in Post-Apartheid South Africa." *Democratization*, 8.1: 207-226. Charts on Pgs 213-14. Adopted from IDASA data.

TABLE 2
PARTY IDENTIFICATION OVER TIME (PERCENTAGE)²⁹

	Sept.-Oct. 1994	Sept.-Oct. 1995	June-July 1997	Sept 1998	Oct.-Nov. 1998	Feb.-March 1999	April 1999
ANC	58	37	40	35	34	40	44
NNP	15	9	6	3	3	3	3
IFP	5	5	4	2	2	2	2
FF	2	1	1	<1	<1	<1	1
DP	1	1	1	1	1	2	2
PAC	1	2	2	1	1	1	1
UDM	NA	NA	1*	1	1	1	1
Other	2	1	1	1	1	1	2
Won't Say/ Confidential	3	2	2	<1	<1	1	<1
Independent	12	42	42	56	58	50	45

Note: Party initials as in text. NA means not applicable. *1997 UDM figures refer to the combination of the scores for its predecessor National Consultative Forum and the Process for a New Movement.

Source: Helen Taylor, Robert Mattes and Cherrel Africa, 'Party Support and Voting Intention (1V)', Press Release, 24 May 1999, in <http://www.idasa.org.za>.

TABLE 3
VOTING INTENTION (PERCENTAGE)

	Sept. Oct. 1994	May- June 1995	Nov. 1995	May- June 1996	Nov. 1996	May- June 1997	Nov. 1997	March 1998	July 1998	Sept. 1998	Oct. Nov. 1998	Feb.- March 1999	April 1999
ANC	61	64	64	63	61	62	58	54	57	51	54	59	60
NNP	16	15	14	13	13	15	12	10	9	10	9	8	7
DP	1	2	2	2	2	3	3	5	6	7	5	6	7
IFP	5	2	3	5	6	4	5	5	5	4	5	4	3
PAC	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	1	1	1
UDM	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	4	5	5	2	3	2	2
FF	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1
FA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	1
UCDP	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	>1	1	<1
ACDP	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	1	1	1
AZAPO	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1
CP	<1	2	1	1	1	1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	0
OTHER	<1	1	1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	1	1
DON'T KNOW	12	10	8	11	11	12	12	16	14	21	19	17	15

Note: Party initials as in text. NA means not applicable.

Source: Helen Taylor, Robert Mattes and Cherrel Africa, 'Party Support and Voting Intention (1V)', Press Release, 24 May 1999, in <http://www.idasa.org.za>.

TABLE 1
PARTY IDENTIFICATION (PERCENTAGE)²⁷

	Sept.-Oct. 1994	Sept.-Oct. 1995	June-July 1997	Sept 1998	Oct.-Nov. 1998	Feb.-March 1999	April 1999
No	12	37	37	53	55	46	41
Don't Know		4	4	3	3	3	3

Source: Helen Taylor, Robert Mattes and Cherrel Africa, 'Party Support and Voting Intention (1V)', Press Release, 24 May 1999, in <http://www.idasa.org.za>.

APPENDIX 5: Decrease in racially-based party support from 1994 to 2002

Africa, Cherrel. Robert Mattes. Collette Herzenberg. Lerato Banda. 2003. "Political Party Support in South Africa: Trends Since 1994." *IDASA Afrobarometer*, 6. Pgs 3-7

Voting Intention Over Time (Black Voters)

	Sept /Oct 1994	Oct / Nov 1995	September 1998	Oct / Nov 1998	Feb / March 1999	April 1999	July / Aug 2000	Sept/Oct 2002
ANC	79	62	67	70	76	79	69	55
IFP	6	6	5	7	5	4	6	4
PAC	2	4	2	2	1	2	3	2
DP/DA	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	3	1
UDM	N/A	N/A	2	3	2	2	2	2
NNP	2	4	4	2	1	1	1	<1
ACDP	<1	<1	<1	1	<1	<1	1	2
UCDP	--	--	<1	1	<1	1	1	<1
AZAPO	--	--	1	<1	<1	1	<1	1
Other	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	1	1
Undecided	0	0	12	8	6	6	2	8
Would not vote	3	6	3	4	1	1	2	14
Refused to answer	7	17	2	3	5	3	9	10

Voting Intention Over Time (White Voters)

	Sept /Oct 1994	Oct / Nov 1995	Sept 1998	Oct / Nov 1998	Feb / March 1999	April 1999	July / Aug 2000	Sept/Oct 2002
DP/DA	7	7	41	27	33	37	48	18
NNP	57	49	19	20	18	14	13	6
FF	11	13	7	7	5	7	10	1
AEB	N/A	N/A	NA	NA	1	1	3	<1
ANC	<1	3	2	3	2	2	2	3
UCDP	--	--	<1	1	0	1	2	<1
IFP	4	3	2	2	1	1	1	1
UDM	N/A	N/A	5	5	4	3	1	1
ACDP	2	1	1	2	2	3	1	1
FA	N/A	N/A	NA	NA	NA	4	1	<1
Other	<1	3	3	2	6	2	1	2
Undecided	0	0	11	18	16	14	1	18
Would not vote	5	4	3	4	4	4	2	27
Refused to answer	13	18	6	5	6	5	13	19

APPENDIX 6: Perception polls of COSATU members

Pillay, Devan. 2006. "Cosatu, alliances and working-class politics." In *Trade Unions and Democracy*, ed. Sakhela Buhlungu, 167-190. Cape Town: HSRC Press. Pgs 180 and 181.

A. Showing that workers trust trade unions to a higher degree than political parties**Table 8.7** Workers' trust in political parties (and trade unions), by percentage

	1994		1998		2004	
	Parties	Unions	Parties	Unions	Parties	Unions
Trust	50	96	49	94	54	95
Neutral	12	1	8	4	10	3
Distrust	37	3	43	3	36	3

B. Showing that workers most likely response to government failure is to their trade union**Table 8.9** Workers' responses if government fails to deliver, by percentage

	1994	1998	2004
Pressurise unionists in Parliament	66	70	86
Ongoing mass action	72	53	73
Vote for another party in next election	40	37	42
Form an alternative party	29	33	38
Do nothing	4	0.5	5

APPENDIX 7: Re-running the 1994 South African national elections under alternative systems

Reynolds, Andrew. 1999. *Electoral Systems and Democratization in Southern Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pg 223.

Party	Vote (%)	Plurality (Seats)	Vote (%)	SMD AV (Seats)	Vote (%)	MMD AV (Seats)	Vote (%)	Prov. PR (Seats)	Vote (%)	Nat. List PR	Vote (%)
ANC	62.65	283	71	277	69	282	71	255	64	252	63
NP	20.39	68	17	70	17	63	16	82	20	82	20
IFP	10.54	49	12	53	13	55	14	43	11	43	11
FF	2.17	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	2	9	2
DP	1.73	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	2	7	2
PAC	1.25	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	1	5	1
ACDP	0.45	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0.5
Total	100	400	100	400	100	400	100	400	100	400	100
I.D.		6.7		5.9		7.2		0.8		0.3	