

Democratisation and Armed
Conflicts in Weak States

Democratisation and Armed Conflicts



Preface

Development cooperation and democracy are closely related. During the recent decade governance issues have received increasing interest from the donor community. Democratic governance is by many, in the practitioner's community as well as among academics, seen as a system for peaceful resolution of conflicts. In spite of this, recent findings show that democratisation in its first stages increases the likelihood of armed conflict.

This paper, commissioned by Sida to the Department of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala University, investigates the relationship between democratisation and armed conflict and puts forward a number of important questions. In particular, it recommends certain precautions, steps and strategies that donors and their partners need to take into consideration when promoting democratisation.

In preparation of the revision of Sida's Strategy for Conflict Management and Peacebuilding (1999), The Division for Humanitarian Assistance and Conflict Management initiated a number of studies to highlight important aspects of development cooperation and conflict management. This study has been produced in cooperation between the Division for Democratic Governance and the Division for Humanitarian Assistance and Conflict Management and it examines one of the core areas of conflict management – the promotion of democracy as a model for peaceful resolution of disputes.



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1. Introduction*

What is the relationship between democratisation and armed conflicts? Why is it that a large number of states, notably found in the developing world, have seemingly failed to move beyond the initial steps of political liberalisation and democratic reforms? What are the possible consequences of the current development for the long-term prospects of democracy and stability in these states? Finally, what is the role of development assistance in relation to these issues? These are some of today's most pertinent questions and they are of great relevance for researchers, politicians and policy-makers alike. This report will attempt to address some aspects of this puzzle.

Drawing on Huntington's classification, a fourth wave of democratisation reached Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, some parts of Asia and the Middle East, and the majority of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa in the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s.¹ Internal and external factors interacted to spark a wave of political liberalisation, followed in many cases by democratic reforms. The initial euphoria within the international community at the beginning of the initiation of political liberalisation was, however, a few years later replaced by growing pessimism. The outcome of the wave of democratisation varied from genuine transformations and relative success, to halted transitions, backslides to authoritarianism, military coups and state disintegration, with the large majority of countries falling somewhere between these extremes. In some countries, escalating and repeated political violence and outbreaks of armed conflicts followed in the wake of initiated transition processes.²

^{*} This report benefited strongly from the discussions on an earlier version presented at a seminar at Sida, Stockholm, in May 2002. Special thanks are extended to the participants of the seminar and to Sida for making it possible. The authors would also like to thank the participants of the Joint Network Workshop held in February 2002 at the University of Western Cape, South Africa, for valuable comments. However, the authors remain solely responsible for the views and conclusions presented in the report.

¹ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratisation in the Late Twentieth Century*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991) According to Huntington, the third wave of democratisation began in Portugal in 1974 and then spread through Southern Europe and Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s. For the sake of conceptual clarity, several authors argue that the present wave of democratisation, closely related to the end of the Cold War, should be referred to as a fourth wave. See for example, Marina Ottaway, "African Democratisation and the Leninist Option", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1, (1997)

² Crawford Young, "The Third Wave of Democratisation in Africa: Ambiguities and Contradictions", in Richard Joseph (ed.), *State, Conflict and Democracy in Africa*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999). See also Michael Chege, "Between Africa's Extremes", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 6, No. 1, (1995)

This development led some scholars to argue that democratising states as part of the foreign policy agenda of Western states to promote peace might prove to be a dangerous strategy, pointing in their study at findings showing that democratising states are more likely to experience armed conflicts than are mature democracies or stable autocracies.³ These findings thus challenged the policy prescription shared by many political leaders in the West, namely that the spread of democratisation around the globe would lead to widespread peace. It also appeared to challenge the theoretical underpinnings of the so-called democratic peace hypothesis, the empirical observation of an absence of war between democracies.⁴

Recent statistical findings support such a correlation between democratisation and armed conflicts, but with some important clarifications. Ward and Gleditsch have shown that as states become more democratic they reduce their overall chances of being involved in wars with other states by approximately half. However, rocky or especially rapid transitions or reversals are associated with an increased risk of war involvement.⁵ When it comes to civil wars, or intra-state wars, studies have found that in-between forms of governance, what is sometimes referred to as semi-democracies, that is, states that are neither fully autocratic nor fully democratic, are more prone to intra-state armed conflicts than are other states. These findings support the notion that changing the mode of governance, no matter the direction, clearly and strongly increases the probability of civil wars. However, such change alone does not explain the higher frequency of conflicts in semi-democracies, as the conflict propensity of semi-democracies does not seem to change over time. 'Consolidated' semi-democracies, where no significant political change has occurred for some time, are still more conflict prone.⁶

These findings have a number of important theoretical as well as policy relevant implications. The dynamics and outcome of the fourth wave of democratisation have raised questions that expose relatively unexplored theoretical frontiers. The empirical experiences of democratisation in large parts of the developing world seem to be at odds with some of the assumptions and predictions found in mainstream theoretical works on democratic transitions and democratisation, as well as in policy related documents influenced by these writings. This report will argue that this is particularly true in relation to ideas about the legitimacy and capacity of the state itself and the ability of the current democratisation process to overcome and outlast pre-democratic structures of power. In short, what is required is an analysis that takes its point of departure in the empirical context in which the democratic transition must set out, advance, and survive.⁷

³ Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder, "Democratization and the Danger of War", *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 1, (1995)

⁴ The democratic peace proposition has spawned a significant academic debate over the years. For a summary of the debate, see Michael E. Brown, Sean M. Lynn-Jones & Steven E. Miller (eds.), *Debating the Democratic Peace*, (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1996)

⁵ Michael D. Ward and Kristian S. Gleditsch, "Democratizing for Peace", *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 92, No. 1, (1998)

⁶ Håvard Hegre et al., "Toward a Democratic Civil Peace? Political Change and Civil War, 1816–1992", *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 95, No. 1, (2001)

⁷ Several authors have pointed out the need to focus more closely on contextual factors in relation to theory and policy development on democratisation. See for example John W. Harbeson, "Externally Assisted Democratization: Theoretical Issues and African Realities", in John W. Harbeson and Donald Rothchild (eds.), *Africa in World Politics- The African State System in Flux*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000, 3rd ed.)

Most contemporary systematic theoretical work on democratic transitions and democratisation has built on the experiences of democratisation in Latin America, Southern Europe and, to some extent, Eastern Europe⁸. Hence, many of these theories take for granted the prior existence of a consolidated and often relatively strong state. However, in many post-colonial states, notably found in Sub-Saharan Africa, and, arguably, in some parts of the Middle East and Asia, the state entity itself is weak and lacks legitimacy. This weakness is further often exacerbated by the lack of capabilities and resources that are required in order to overcome this structural weakness.

It is further commonly assumed that democratisation is to proceed along a relatively set path of political steps, moving relatively peacefully from political liberalisation to democratic consolidation.⁹ However, a large number of countries, from the third as well as the fourth wave, are either stuck in the democratic transition without moving towards consolidation or have already experienced a partial or complete reversal of the transition process. In some cases, the transition was accompanied with large-scale occurrences of political violence or the outbreak of intra-state armed conflict. How can this outcome be explained? As suggested, democracy's development and sustainability in a state is related to its progress in areas of contestation in which the advancement of democracy competes with other interests and goals.¹⁰ Democratisation requires a radical shift in the nature of political power, something which is likely to be opposed by those that stand to lose from such political change. Progress towards democracy therefore, "is likely to be the outcome of conflict, power struggles, possibly even violence, and of non-democratic pacts among political organizations".¹¹

What are some of the possible consequences of these findings for democracy assistance in these countries? Firstly, it seems like there is an apparent need to focus more closely on the empirical context in which the objectives of assistance are to be realised and where the process of democratisation must develop and survive in competition with other structures and interests in society. Secondly, precisely because many countries can be placed somewhere in the uncertain and conflict-prone middle field of democratic transitions, the main task at hand might not necessarily be the question of how to "build more democracy" or consolidate the democratisation process, but rather how to work within the trappings of today's situation. It has been suggested that the outcome of the current, often externally assisted, wave of democratisation risks a "premature closure" of the transition process through the establishment of formal procedures and institutions before a real change in the nature of power has taken place.¹² The positive transitional dynamics of the

⁸ To mention only a few prominent pioneering works; Giuseppe Di Palma, *To craft democracies: an essay on democratic transitions*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Huntington (1991); Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of democratic transition and consolidation: southern Europe, South America, and post-communist Europe*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions About Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991)

⁹ See for example O'Donnell and Schmitter, pp. 7–11

¹⁰ Harbeson, p. 247

¹¹ Marina Ottaway, "From Political Opening to Democratization?" in Marina Ottaway (ed.), *Democracy in Africa- The Hard Road Ahead*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997), p. 7

¹² *Ibid*, p. 3

democratisation process disappears and instead a situation occurs in which a democratic “shell” without content or substance is cemented and superimposed onto more or less unchanged pre-democratic power structures. In this report, this phenomenon will be referred to as “façade democracy”. Such a state of affair is particularly troublesome from a conflict perspective in the light of the above findings about the long-term aspects of the conflict propensity of so-called semi-democracies and the empirical findings regarding the growing numbers of incomplete democratic transitions.

Purpose of the Study

The overarching purpose of this paper is to address the relationship between democratic transitions in developing countries and political violence and armed conflicts. The aim is to discuss and analyse some aspects of this relationship. The study will seek to account for both the short-term perspective on political violence and armed conflict in relation to the change of the mode of governance, in particular the holding of multi-party elections, as well as the long-term perspective, political violence related to the consolidation of semi-democracies or the “premature” closure of democratic transitions. The argument will be made that these two aspects are closely related. The same factors that increase the likelihood of armed conflict in the initial stages of democratisation are most likely at the core of the explanation for the high level of violence in “consolidated” semi-democracies. The common denominator is the weak state. The analytical platform that constitutes the theoretical point of departure for the study is thus the notion of the relative weakness and strength of states. The report will suggest that this notion offers a fruitful approach for analysing the current paradoxical trend of democratisation in many parts of the post-colonial world. Due to limitations in time and space, we have chosen to focus on three key areas of democratisation and development assistance, namely, participation and civil society, electoral politics and political parties, and the military and the security sector.

It is worth pointing out that this report will not unravel any new academic findings. Rather, the purpose is to do an inventory of recent research within a particular field of study, namely that of democratic transitions and political violence. This field, one might argue, seems to belong to something of a “grey zone” of academic research, falling between studies on democratic transitions and democratisation on the one hand, and armed conflicts and conflict resolution on the other. This report will highlight a selected number of contributions within this particular strand of research that, from various angles, marry these traditionally separate academic subjects and attempt to bring light to pertinent theoretical as well as policy-relevant questions. The aim is to see if some general propositions can be inferred about what concerned external actors should, or should not do, if they want to contribute to stable and legitimate systems of governance based on democratic norms and values in developing states.

It should also be noted that this report is about democratic transitions and processes of democratisation leading to conflict, and not about democratisation as a post-conflict method of conflict resolution, even

though many of the arguments may well be applicable also to such situations. The study contains no case studies. However, empirical examples will be given for the purpose of illustrating some of the questions under study. The report will most frequently relate to cases in Sub-Saharan Africa, as the region undoubtedly poses some of the most difficult and challenging questions in relation to state weakness, democratisation, political violence, and development assistance.

Structure of the Study

Chapter two presents the theoretical framework that constitutes the analytical point of departure for the main arguments put forth in this report. The weak state concept is presented on the basis of contemporary theoretical writings. Some implications for politics and policies in states characterised by weak state structures are discussed. In addition, the ideas and assumptions generally underlying the formulation of democracy programs and international assistance for democracy promotion are presented.

Chapter three, four and five will focus more in depth on the three selected aspects of the relationship between democratisation and political violence. The first aspect concerns participation in the weak state and the role of civil society. The second aspect focuses on the role of multi-party elections and political parties. In particular, the “ethnification” of multi-party politics in weak states will be discussed. Further, issues relating to constitutional engineering and conflict management will be discussed based on contemporary theoretical contributions and empirical findings. Thirdly, the role of the military and the security forces in relation to democratisation and political violence will be discussed. Lastly, in chapter six, some general findings and broad policy recommendations will be suggested.

2. The Weak State

An analysis of democratisation that takes its point of departure in the empirical context in which the democratic transition unfolds will have to start with a discussion regarding the state that is to be democratised. What general defining structural characteristics can be attributed to the state in many post-colonial developing countries? As noted earlier, the majority of contemporary theories on democratisation and democratic transitions have built on the empirical experience of democratisation in Europe or in the Americas. These theories, as well as policy-writings influenced by these writings, often assume the prior existence of a Weberian state. This study suggests that the notion of the relative weaknesses and strength of states provide a more fruitful approach to the study of democratisation in post-colonial states.

The argument will be made that the post-colonial state can be defined as weak in at least two analytically different, but related, respects. Both dimensions are related to the state-building process, but pose different difficulties in relation to the issue of democratisation in these states. Firstly, the state is often weak in terms of *low levels of socio-political cohesion and political legitimacy*. Secondly, this weakness may be further exacerbated by the *lack of essential capabilities* at the hands of many political leaders that are deemed essential in order to overcome this structural weakness and build strong states. Precisely because the state is weak, a certain political style of governance often develops in these states that risk further undermining the state and make it less, not more, inclined to development and democratic reforms.

This chapter will suggest that some of the prescriptive political jargon employed in the context of democratisation processes in weak states might be counterproductive under certain circumstances. The argument is thus not that these recommendations are invalid *per se*, that is not the point. The point is, rather, that there is growing evidence that these and other examples of democratisation prescriptions must be further probed and problemized in the context of a historically informed understanding of prevailing empirical realities.

The Strong-Weak State Continuum

Max Weber's definition of the state has remained a benchmark for most contemporary social science analysis. According to the Weberian

definition, the defining properties of the state include the following; “unchallenged control of the territory within the defined boundaries under its control, monopolization of the legitimate use of force within the borders of the state, and the reliance upon impersonal rules in the governance of its citizens and subjects”.¹³ For the purpose of analysing processes of democratisation in developing countries, such a definition is, however, too static and, more importantly, essentially misleading, as it fails to capture the great empirical variety among contemporary states in the international system in the post-colonial era. The great majority of post-colonial states that gained independence in the post-1945 era do not fulfil these criteria. These states gained external sovereignty after independence through international recognition, but have yet to develop the internal sovereignty that defines the basis of statehood in Weber’s definition.¹⁴

According to Buzan, the notion of the relative weaknesses and strength of states provides a way to capture these differences. He argues that the state contains three inter-linked components, the *physical basis* of the state, the *institutions* of the state and the *idea* of the state. The physical basis of the state includes defined territory, population, resources and wealth. The institutions of the state “comprise the whole machinery of government, including its executive, legislative, administrative, and judicial bodies as well as the laws, procedures and norms by which they operate.”¹⁵ The idea of the state is the most vital component of the state, essential to its coherence and purpose, as it provides the mechanism for persuading citizens to subordinate themselves to the state’s authority. Strong and vividly held ideas serve to bind the state into an entity and provide the necessary socio-political cohesion, which gives legitimacy to the state entity. The two main sources for the idea of the state are to be found in the idea of the nation and in organising ideologies that may be political, economic, religious or social in character. “If the ideas themselves are weak; or if they are weakly held within society; or if strongly held, but opposed, ideas compete within society: then the state stand on fragile political foundations”.¹⁶ States where all the three components are clearly defined, well articulated and interconnected to sustain and support each other, are thus stronger than states with the opposite characteristics. Strength as a state thus neither depends on, nor correlates with, power. Weak or strong states, according to Buzan, refers to degrees of socio-political cohesion whereas weak or strong powers refer to states’ relative military and economic capabilities.¹⁷

The Critical Role of Legitimacy

Holsti argues that the critical variable when attempting to explain the relative weakness and strength of states is legitimacy, conceived in two

¹³ Donald Rothchild & John W. Harbeson, “The African State and State System in Flux”, in Donald Rothchild & John W. Harbeson (eds.), p. 7

¹⁴ R.H., Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990)

¹⁵ Barry Buzan, *People, States & Fear- An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991, 2nd ed.), pp. 82–83

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 79

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 97–98

dimensions. Firstly, the vertical dimension, which establishes the connection, the right to rule, between society and political institutions and regimes. Secondly, the horizontal dimension, which defines the limits of and criteria for membership in the political community that is ruled.¹⁸

Vertical legitimacy is thus the belief by the population in the rightfulness of the state and its authority to rule the state. Where legitimacy claims and popular expectations overlap or coincide, the state gains significant strength, as rule is based on consent of one form or another. The horizontal aspect of legitimacy refers to the nature of the community over which formal rule is exercised, to the attitudes and practices of individuals and groups within the state towards each other. In the weak state, there is often no single community, but numerous communities and groups that shape the nature of politics and authority structures. If the various groups and communities within the state accept and tolerate each other, horizontal legitimacy is high. Horizontal legitimacy, however, fails to develop or is destroyed when one group or a few groups or communities systematically and over a period of time oppress, exploit, forcibly assimilate, or threaten the security of other groups and communities. Sudan is just one example where such measures have been frequent. The phenomenon is not, however, exclusive to authoritarian states, Northern Ireland being one example. The political system that institutionalises exclusions sidelines one or some groups in terms of participation, access to power, and allocation of resources. Consequently, those who are excluded find it hard to extend loyalty either to other groups or to the state. Lack of horizontal legitimacy within the society may, therefore, lead to the erosion or withdrawal of loyalty to the state and its institutions, and those that are excluded might seek their own political arrangements. The relationship may also be reverse, dubious vertical legitimacy may create, maintain, or exacerbate horizontal legitimacy.

Legitimacy is a variable rather than a constant. States may thus be placed on a continuum of strength, where the great majority of states most of the time fall somewhere between two ideal-types. At the one extreme are strong states with strong linkages between the components, all encompassed within high degrees of horizontal and vertical legitimacy. At the other extreme are states where central governmental authority has failed or collapsed, that is, where there is no or little public order, the central political leadership commands limited authority or loyalty, and a variety of groups and factions have armed themselves to resist attempt to establish order and integrate the community. Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia and the Sudan are examples of states that are or have been in this category. Over time, however, states move on the continuum in various directions.¹⁹

Closely related to legitimacy is the personalisation of the state. In many states leaders attempt to erase the distinctions between the state and the ruler. Weber coined this phenomenon *patrimonialism*, a situation in which the objective interests of the state are indistinguishable from the

¹⁸ Kalevi J. Holsti, *The State, War, and the State of War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Chapter 5, pp. 82–98

¹⁹ Ibid

subjective interests of the ruler of the regime in power. Contemporary post-colonial states often show a hybrid political system in which the customs and patterns of patrimonialism prevail along side with modern state features. The characteristic feature of *neo-patrimonialism* is thus the incorporation of patrimonial logic into modern bureaucratic institutions. The ruler ensures the political stability of the regime and personal political survival by providing security and selectively distributing services.²⁰ African politics are often characterised by neo-patrimonial norms of political authority and forms of governance. President Mobutu of former Zaire and President Moi of Kenya are frequently cited manifestations of neo-patrimonial authority.²¹ Chabal and Daloz argue that the state in Sub-Saharan Africa is not just weak in term of the Weberian ideal-type, but it is also essentially vacuous because the exercise of central political power has not been separated from the overriding dominance of localised and personalised political contests. In many African countries therefore the state is no more than a façade masking the realities of a patrimonial and personalised state. This façade is largely devoid of any authority in the eyes of the population. The political systems in weak states are in many ways only superficially related to their Western relatives, and in reality it is the patrimonial ways in which power is legitimised which continue to be politically significant. Power is personalised and legitimacy continues primarily to rest on practices of redistribution, in spite of changes in the formal political outlook.²²

The Security Predicament of the Weak State

From a security perspective, the principal distinguishing feature of weak states is their high level of concern with domestically generated threats.²³ According to Job, post-colonial states, “must cope and function within a unique and particularly troublesome security environment”.²⁴ Firstly, within the borders of the state there is rarely no single nation, that is, a socially cohesive society, but often a variety of communal groups contending for their own securities. Second, the regime in power usually lacks the support of some significant component of the population, because the regime represents the interests either of a particular ethnic or social sector; or of an economic or military elite that has taken control. The result is often an absence of perceived popular legitimacy to the existence and security interests of the regime. Thirdly, the state lacks effective institutional capacities to provide peace and order, as well as the conditions for satisfactory physical existence for the population. Fourthly, the sense of threat that prevails is of internal threats to and from the regime in power rather than externally motivated threats to the existence of the nation-state unit. Thus, Job concludes, there is no singular notion

²⁰ Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa- Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 61–63

²¹ Joel D. Barkan, “Protracted Transitions Among Africa’s New Democracies”, *Democratization*, Vol. 7, No. 3, (2000), p. 230

²² Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works- Disorder as a Political Instrument*, (Oxford: James Currey, 1999) pp. 1–2

²³ The overwhelming majority of armed conflicts today are intra-state in character and are taking place in the developing world. Out of a total of 33 on-going armed conflicts in the year 2000, 14 took place in Africa and 14 in Asia. The great majority of conflicts in Asia can be defined as territorial conflicts whereas in the majority of conflicts in Africa the conflict issue concerns the power over government. See Peter Wallensteen and Margareta Sollenberg, “Armed Conflicts, 1989–2000”, in *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 38, No. 5, (2001), pp. 629–644

²⁴ Job, p. 18

of national security and no dominant externally oriented security threat for the typical Third World state. Instead there are competing notions of security advanced by the contending forces within society. The state itself is at issue in most conflicts. Consequently, the result is “less effective security for all or certain sectors of the population, less effective capacity of centralised state institutions to provide services and order and increased vulnerability of the state and its people to influence, intervention and control by outside actors”.²⁵

This internal weakness will in the long run also make the state more vulnerable to external threats, not least from neighbouring states. Buzan’s concept “regional security complex”, captures the notion of security interdependence among states.²⁶ In some regions and under certain circumstances, this dynamic will have positive synergy effects, in others however, it will mainly generate negative effects. In Africa, there are several easily detected regional complexes, notably, the Liberia-Sierra Leone-Guinea triangle, the countries around the Great Lakes, the Horn of Africa and Southern Africa. Thus, the security problems associated with the weak state are easily spread across state borders and are therefore likely to have a negative effect on other weak states in the region, a development that soon tends to grow into a self-enforcing and negative security dynamic in the entire region. The development in neighbouring states may thus be instrumental in determining the success or failure of any process of change.

Ayoob argues that the developing states are now witnessing the typical problems significant for the early stages of state-building, namely, the lack of unconditional legitimacy for state boundaries and state institutions, inadequate societal cohesion; and the absence of societal consensus on fundamental issues of social, economic, and political organization.²⁷ These problems typically arise in the early stages of the state-building process when state-makers attempt to impose order, monopolise instruments of violence, and demand the exclusive loyalties of their populations. This situation, in turn, leads to violence and insecurity as state elites attempt to broaden and deepen the reach of the state, and clashes with the interests of strongmen and segments of the population that perceive the extension of state authority as posing a direct danger to their social, economic or political interests. Given the short amount of time whereby this process must take place, crises erupt simultaneously, becomes unmanageable as they overload the political and military capabilities of the state and lead to an accumulation of crisis that further erodes its legitimacy.²⁸ The problems of state-making and regime security in many post-colonial states are further complicated by two other factors that were either absent or very weak during the early stages of state-making in Europe, namely the demand for

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Buzan defines security complex as “a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another”, p. 190

²⁷ Mohammed Ayoob, *The Third World Security Predicament: State Making, Regional Conflict, and the International System*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), p. 28

²⁸ Ibid, pp. 32–33

political participation by increasing numbers of politically mobilised people and the demand for a more equal economic distribution.

Understanding Politics in Weak States

How do these structural characteristics influence politics in the weak state? What range of choices do political actors have within this structural predicament? The political leadership of the weak state faces a fundamental dilemma. The state must be strong to build more unity within the society, to construct national identities and to create legitimacy by providing security and other services. Yet, the political leadership does not have the resources to accomplish these tasks. In order to obtain them it resorts to predatory and cleptocratic practices or plays upon and exacerbates social tensions between groups in the society, which only adds to these tensions and further erodes loyalties. The weak state is thus caught in a vicious circle. “Everything it does to become a strong state actually perpetuates its weakness”, Holsti argues.²⁹

Job notes that governments in weak states are preoccupied with the short-term political perspective because their security and their physical survival are dependent on the strategies they pursue for the moment. Consequently, it may be rational for regimes to adopt policies that, for example, utilise scarce resources for military equipment and manpower, to perceive opposition movements demanding greater participation as threatening, and to regard communal movements that promote alternative identifications and loyalties as dangerous. Often the choice is presented to and by regimes as one entailing a trade-off between the advantages and hopes of prosperity under conditions of order and the disadvantages of unregulated democracy and disorder.³⁰ To understand politics in the weak state context, Chabal and Daloz argue, one must consider the ways in which individuals, groups and communities seek to take advantage of the resources that they command within the context of political and economic disorder. The state of disorder in many African states, for example, should not be viewed merely as a state of failure or neglect, but should also be seen as a condition that offers opportunities for those who know how to play the system. The failure of the state may have limited the scope for “good governance” and sustainable economic growth, but the weakness and inefficiency of the state has nevertheless been profitable to many African political elites. The development of the formal political institutions and the consolidation of clientist networks within the formal political apparatus have allowed the elite to raise the resources necessary for providing their constituencies with protection and services in exchange for the recognition of their political and social status. The instrumentalisation of the prevailing political disorder may thus function as a disincentive to the establishment of a more properly institutionalised state on the Weberian model as well as implementing a democratic political system. “Why should the African political elites dismantle a political system which serves them so well?”³¹

²⁹ Holsti, p. 117

³⁰ Job, p. 28

³¹ Chabal and Daloz, p. 14

The important merit of the above arguments is that they point to the highly negative potential of patrimonial structures. Undeniably, these structures pose problems for legitimacy, security and for processes of state formation and nation building. However, this should not be perceived of as a zero-sum game, that is, that either the holders of state power pursue a genuine national interest in the Weberian sense or they completely succumb to the structures of private, sectarian interests. Such is not the case. Every state, weak or strong, has both Weberian and patrimonial structures. This is also a continuum and the balance between the two types of structures should be understood as a variable, not a constant. Neither enlightened leadership nor popular pressure from below should be underestimated. Many weak states have made considerable moves towards greater legitimacy. In addition, when legitimacy is really low, even minor improvements in degrees of rule of law and good governance may generate major improvements in terms of closing the legitimacy gap.

Democratising the Weak State

In the 1990s, democratisation has been regarded the standard solution to the problems associated with developing countries. However, it should be clear from the above discussion that democratising the weak state is far from an easy task. Injecting external resources into this process is therefore also complex and hazardous. Nevertheless, according to Thomas Carothers, democracy assistance among all the Western donor countries and to all recipient countries follows practically the same simplistic model. The general content of the democracy assistance portfolio in the mid-1990 was the following;

(...) election assistance around each general election, with growing attention to local elections; aid to the major political parties; a parliamentary strengthening program; judicial reform work; possibly some police aid and small-scale efforts to improve civil-military relations; attempts at strengthening local government; money and training for various NGOs; courses for journalists; and support for independent trade unions.³²

The explanation for the formulation of a basic democracy template, he argues, lies in the use of a common core strategy that democracy promoters usually follow. This strategy incorporates both a model of democracy and a model of how to get there, a model of democratisation. “In other words, it provides answers to the fundamental questions of what political outcomes democracy promoters want recipient countries to achieve and what processes of political change they believe will produce those outcomes”. The model consists of a set of lists of key institutions and processes centred around three main categories, elections, state institutions and civil society. Many donors tend to compare the institutions in the recipient countries with those of their own societies and identify the major discrepancies. These discrepancies are then seen as the causes for the lack of democracy in these countries.

³² Thomas Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad- The Learning Curve*, (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999), p.85

Projects are subsequently built on the notion to bring the various institutions into line with the democracy model. They focus, in other words, on endpoints rather than processes, Carothers argues. The underlying assumption seems to be that if a society can reproduce the institutional components of established Western democracies, it will achieve democracy. The process of transforming institutions is then easily seen as the process of democratisation itself.³³

However, aid to reshape institutions in states that have just embarked on a democratic transition is not a self-contained effort, disconnected from the society in which the institutions are rooted, that is, the structures of powers, authority, interests, loyalties, traditions and legitimacy that make up the dense of socio-political life in that state. One cannot proceed to bring about major changes in the ways these institutions operate without confronting or changing those structures. It is thus necessary to ask why the judiciary or the parliament is weak, whose interests the weakness serves and whose interests are threatened or bolstered by a reform in that area. It might be possible to change the symptoms through institution building, but designing support for democracy promotion cannot change the underlying systemic pathologies. Therefore, Carothers argues, donors should focus on the following questions; what are the interests involved and at stake? Are there powerful ties between the economic and political elite? What is the willingness to reform and why? What are the interests and intentions of the forces of that institution or the patronage network in that body?³⁴

³³ Ibid, p. 92

³⁴ Ibid, pp. 101–102

3. Civil Society and Participation in the Weak State

This chapter will address the issue of participation in the weak state. The point of departure is the existence of an overly strong concentration of power in many developing countries. Those in hold of the executive power often control not only the political power in the country, through the lack of constitutional checks and balances, improper separation of powers, and a low degree of regional or local self-government and decentralisation, but also the economic power. Consequently, large parts of the population have turned elsewhere for the provision of security and essential services. The degree of participation by the people in essential state organs and state-related activities is thus low. Undoubtedly, this is one of the greatest challenges for the introduction of democratic rule.

The solution, according to many democracy promoters concerned with democratisation in developing countries, is the support and strengthening of the so-called civil society in these states. Civil society aid has, during the 1990s, been a central component of democracy assistance in almost all major Western organisations involved in democracy promotion. It is assumed that an important factor in pushing for democratisation is the promotion of local initiatives and the creation of autonomous centres of power to counterweight the power of the state, through the decentralisation of powers and the articulation of group-based interests in society. Civil society is assumed to be “both the force that can hold governments accountable and the base upon which a truly democratic culture can be built.”³⁵ However, the weak state framework points to some important limitations regarding the promotion of civil society as a way to strengthening democracy in these states. In fact, some authors argue that under certain conditions it might even contribute to increased ethnic fragmentation and political violence in these states. Others argue that a flourishing, or vibrant, civil society can neither emerge, nor be sustained, in the weak state context. Attempts to increase participation and decrease the concentration of power are therefore likely to be fruitless unless accompanied with a strategy for state reconstruction. The argument put forth in this paper is that it is equally necessary to support and develop societal organisations and to strengthen the weak state for the purpose of increasing the possibilities of a

³⁵ Marina Ottaway and Thomas Carothers (eds.), *Funding Virtue: Civil Society Aid and Democracy Promotion*, (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment For International Peace, 2000) p. 4

successful transformation to democratic politics. In fact, the democratic development in one end of the “precarious balance” between the state and civil society is likely to be dependent on the development in the other.³⁶

The Civil Society of the Weak State

The meaning of civil society, although a term used frequently, is elusive. However, there is a fair amount of scholarly consensus around a broad view of civil society as one of the basic elements of a society, alongside the state and the market. A commonly used definition in academic writings suggests that civil society is;

*An intermediate associational realm between the state and family populated by organizations which are separated from the state, enjoy autonomy in relation to the state and are formed voluntarily by members of the society to protect and extend their interests or values.*³⁷

Ottaway and Carothers note that this associational realm is highly varied in most countries, being made up of groups that vary between modern interest groups and traditional organisations, formal organisations and informal social networks, political institutions and advocacy groups and those outside the political system, between legal and open associations, secret or even illegal organisations and networks, and between associations that accept the political situations and those that seek to transform it.³⁸ However, when donors and foreign policy makers attempt to strengthen civil society as a means of promoting democracy they often end up concentrating on a quite narrow set of organisations consisting mainly of professional NGOs dedicated to advocacy or civic education work on issues directly related to democratisation, such as election monitoring, voters education, political and civil rights, and human rights. Absent from these programmes are often a wide range of organisations or networks that typically make up civil society in these states, traditional and religious organisations and less formalised social networks.³⁹

Large areas of Africa have never experienced effective penetration by the state, and people in these areas have turned elsewhere, to traditional institutions and networks. Upon these foundations, some voluntary political associations have emerged, peasants’ movements, labour unions, and ethnic welfare organisations. Many of these became political when channelling the protests against colonial rule and later through the call for independence. After independence, some of these became integrated into the state, whereas in other cases, these organisations proved too strong to be subordinated and thus survived as an alternative institutional framework alongside with the state. Most African societies have thus, already since the early days of colonialism, been characterised by

³⁶ One of the most prominent early works on civil society in Africa is Naomi Chazan & Donald Rothchild (eds.), *The Precarious Balance: State and Society in Africa* (Boulder, Westview Press, 1988). See also Harbeson, John W., Donald Rothchild & Naomi Chazan (eds.), *Civil Society and the State in Africa*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994)

³⁷ Gordon White, “Civil Society, Democratization and Development: Clearing the Analytical Ground”, *Democratization*, Vol. 1, No 3 (1994), p. 379

³⁸ Carothers and Ottaway, p. 9

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 11. See also Julie Hearn and Mark Robinson, “Civil Society and Democracy Assistance in Africa”, in Peter Burnell (ed.), *Democracy Assistance- International Co-operation for Democratization*, (London: Frank Cass, 2000), pp. 241–262

plethora of social organisations and social movements. These organisations have been seen as a significant force in politics in many periods, not least in the period leading up to independence, but also in the current transitions towards political liberalisation.⁴⁰ Makumbe argues that in most of Africa, “civil society has been effective in bringing about social and political change.” Indeed, some of the most active civil groups and coalitions were instrumental in the overthrow of authoritarian regimes and the installations of democratic systems in their countries.⁴¹ Bratton and van de Walle places a great weight on the role played by indigenous civil society organisations in explaining the transitions towards democracy on the African continent in the early 1990s.⁴²

However, social, political and organisational forms of pluralism do not necessarily support the kind of democracy that donors want to implement. First, the social pluralism of African countries has a strong ethnic basis that, if politicised, leads more readily to conflict than to democracy. Social pluralism in many parts of Africa is based above all on region, ethnicity, and religion. Second, many active civil society organisations with deep roots in the communities have stayed out of politics and thus have not contributed directly to democracy. This disengagement is, at least partly, a result of the experience of repression under the colonial administrator and the single-party and military regimes.⁴³ Where associations do flourish in many African societies, they are characterised by localism and frequently operate in isolation from the state, rather than in engagement with it.⁴⁴ Third, the kind of organisations that donors prefer, advocacy NGOs directly involved in promoting multi-party democracy, often have weak roots in the community and without real social base.⁴⁵ In addition, NGOs supported by international donors do not necessarily function as agents of democratisation, as some of them are internally undemocratic, led by personalistic leaders and without clear constituencies, and often forced to be responsive to the donors rather than any local constituencies.⁴⁶

Thus, although there is indeed a civil society in many Sub-Saharan African states, it is still comparatively weak, and beset with constraints of “financial, organisational, operational and even environmental nature”.⁴⁷ These constraints make it difficult for civil society in these states to effectively represent, promote and protect the interests of the people in the way that most donors envision it. Some of these constraints are the result of historical factors. Colonial regimes in Africa made strenuous efforts to ensure that no civic groups would emerge and challenge their governance, a pattern that was repeated in the post-independence era in the shadow of the one-party systems. Other constraints are the result of present social, cultural and political conditions. Many civic associations are far from being autonomous as they are often dependent on either the

⁴⁰ Marina Ottaway, “Social Movements, Professionalization of Reform, and Democracy in Africa”, in Carothers and Ottaway, p. 77

⁴¹ John Mw Makumbe, “Is there a Civil Society in Africa?”, *International Affairs*, Vol. 74, No. 2, (1998), p. 307

⁴² Michael Bratton and Nicholas van de Walle

⁴³ Ottaway, “Social Movements...”, p. 78–84

⁴⁴ Oda van Cranenburgh, “International policies to promote African democratisation”, in Jean Grugel (ed.), *Democracy without Borders- transnationalization and conditionality in new democracies*, (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 102

⁴⁵ Ottaway, “Social Movements...”, p. 82

⁴⁶ Cranenburgh, p. 102

⁴⁷ Makumbe, p. 311

state or foreign donors, and often undemocratic, in both their organisational structure and in its operations.⁴⁸ Diamond points out that “civil society organisations in Africa are often crippled by the same problems of poverty, corruption, nepotism, parochialism, opportunism, ethnicism, illiberalism, and willingness to be coopted that plague the society in general.”⁴⁹

Civil Society as a Political Actor

It is commonly assumed that party competition in weak states will increase governmental accountability, deepen contacts between political elites and the majority population, and form a network with emerging interests groups and associations. Simultaneously, the emergence and strengthening of horizontal, as opposed to vertical, links would also contain the power of the patrons. However, Widener argues, this idea rests on a misperceived assumption about the relationship between civil society and political parties in weak states.⁵⁰ In many African states, interest groups are small, fragmented and without substantial legitimacy and there are limited ties between emerging political parties and these new interests groups or associations. In only a handful of countries have parties sought to appeal to the interests horizontal associations represent. Clientelist ties or ethnic differences have more often than not constituted the main lines of cleavage in the emerging party systems. Subsequently, fragmentation and particularism have followed in the wake of multi-party politics.⁵¹

As noted earlier, the problem is not the lack of a civil society as such. In fact, in the 1990s many new forms of associations emerged based on horizontal, often economic, interests, such as trade organisations, unions, consumer groups, and student leagues. Many of these groups were behind the pressures for economic and political liberalisation that were mounting by the end of the 1980s. However, the kinds of relationships most observers assumed would develop between these new associations and political parties have not materialised in most places. With some prominent exceptions, the new political parties that emerged as part of the political liberalisation of the 1990s have made little efforts to win the support of these associations. Instead, they are often highly particularistic and build their constituencies on kin-based or clientelist networks. For example, in Cameroon, the Congo, Kenya, Togo, Niger, Burundi and Rwanda, ethnic, regional or clientelist divisions dominate the party systems.⁵²

Longman argues that, although it is clear that democratic reform efforts failed in Rwanda in the early 1990s primarily due to the nature of the state and the regime, some characteristics of Rwandan civil society also undermined the ability of the supporters of reform to force the government to carry out political change. Civil society’s capacity to challenge the state was compromised by the discontinuity that existed between civil society and political society. Although an expanding civil

⁴⁸ Ibid, pp. 311–317

⁴⁹ Larry Diamond, quoted in Makumbe, p. 311

⁵⁰ Jennifer A. Widener, “Political Parties and Civil Societies in Sub-Saharan Africa”, in Marina Ottaway (ed.), p. 65

⁵¹ Ibid, pp. 65–66

⁵² Ibid, pp. 69–71

society was successful in forcing the state to open up for political competition, the new parties that emerged had little connection to civil society. The parties did not attempt to appeal to the group-based interests that served as the foundations for these associations, but instead they appealed to the population on the basis of regional and ethnic identities. In addition, most of the leaders of these new parties were not taken from the civil society associations, but were mostly people that had previously been involved in state politics. This fact served to limit both the political leadership's legitimacy in the eyes of the population, and its ability to advocate reform.⁵³

What is the explanation for this development? Widener argues that the reason lies in a combination of the character of civil society and the limited extent of economic liberalisation in these states. Firstly, where civil society is highly fragmented and made up of many new small groups and NGOs with unstable memberships that lack genuine constituencies, they are unable to function as a platform for political mobilisation. Where on the other hand these associations are large and fairly encompassing, they have proved more successful. Secondly, the very limited extent of economic liberalisation means that business and other potential donors of political parties often remains hostage to the incumbent government. Financial control is often concentrated into the hands of a few individuals or patrons. In a situation of limited economic means, old clientelist networks and kinship ties remain more appealing and cost-effective to use as a political basis for mobilisation and support.⁵⁴ Thus, Widner argues, some of the activities of donors may actually aggravate the fragmentation of party systems along ethnic lines. Providing direct financial assistance to indigenous NGOs can spur the formation of very small groups as their leaders, including those associated with old clientelist networks, seek to capture a share of the new resources. The proliferation of these groups may actually encourage party leaders to appeal to ethnic or regional ties.⁵⁵

Harbeson notes that much of the theoretical literature on democratic transitions assume increasing levels of political organisational capacity within civil society and political parties to negotiate or impose democratic transitions upon the incumbent authoritarian regime. In addition, they often assume a political organisational activity equal to this capacity.⁵⁶ However, the actual levels of political organisational capacity may not correspond with what is required by the political context in which it takes place;

The record to date clearly indicates a serious, if variable, deficient in the political organisational capacity required to sustain and consolidate democratic transitions in the political contexts of contemporary sub-Saharan Africa. The weaknesses of civil society, political parties, and democratically restricted legislature to consolidate democracy following initial national multi-party elections have been evident to everyone, important indications of success in some quarters notwithstanding.⁵⁷

⁵³ Timothy Longman, "State, Civil Society, and Genocide in Rwanda", in Richard Joseph (ed.), pp. 345–346

⁵⁴ Widener, pp. 65–66

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 80

⁵⁶ Harbeson, p. 242

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 243

Thus, what is generally missing in the general democracy portfolio is a clearer focusing upon how these objectives are to be realised in the political contexts within which they are to be introduced. Where will the organisational capacity be found or be generated to empower newly instituted democratic processes and structures to survive in the political circumstances of weak states? How are these forms to survive and what resources will be drawn upon or created for the purpose of advancing these objectives? These questions are immediately practical but also of theoretical importance, Harbeson argues.⁵⁸

Civil Society vs. the State?

It is commonly assumed that political reforms towards democracy may depend on the extent to which civil society is able to counteract the repressive and centralised state or, more precisely, the overly strong executive power. However, civil society can be no surrogate for the state. Instead, as noted by Monshipouri, the state should play the essential role of “referee, rule maker, and regulator of civil society”.⁵⁹ Bratton also asserts that associational life is most likely to thrive in the presence of an effective state. Civil society does not stand in sharp contrast to the state, but is most likely to expand its political significance in the wake of gradual change by the state itself;

*It (civil society) cannot flourish amid political disorder, lawlessness, an inadequate physical infrastructure, or intermittent essential services. Civic organizations depend upon the state for the creation of certain basic conditions of existence. This implies that associational life will not automatically spring up where the state's collapse is beyond the control of the political elite. Rather, civil society is most likely to expand to fill institutional gaps where the retreat of the state is intended, planned and graduated.*⁶⁰

Lémarchand notes that many authors tend to treat state-society boundaries as given, and consequently locate state and society in separate conceptual niches. However, in the African context there is no clear line of demarcation between state and society. In such circumstances it makes little sense to look for definitions of the civil society grounded in the traditional Western notions.⁶¹ Chabal and Daloz likewise argue that the assumed dichotomy between state and civil society does not reflect the realities of the post-colonial state. Because the state is weak and poorly institutionalised, there is no clear line of demarcation between social society and the state. The holders of power are not functionally or even politically detached from society. The business of politics is conducted along informal vertical channels of relations, such as patron-client relations, linking the elites to the rest of the population. Deeply rooted vertical forms of political accountability ensure strong political links between high and low politics;

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 247

⁵⁹ Mahmoud Monshipouri, *Democratization, Liberalization & Human Rights in the Third World*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995) pp. 52–53

⁶⁰ Michael Bratton, “Beyond the State: Civil Society and Associational Life in Africa”, *World Politics*, Vol. 41, No. 3, (1989), p. 428

⁶¹ René Lémarchand, “Uncivil States and Civil Societies: How Illusion Became Reality”, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 2, (1992), p.178

*Understanding politics in Africa is a matter of identifying the complexities of the 'shadow boxing' that takes place between state and society. But above all, it is a matter of explaining the myriad ways in which political actors, within both 'state' and 'civil society', link up to sustain the vertical, infra-institutional and patrimonial networks which underpin politics on the continent.*⁶²

The counter-hegemonic role assigned to civil society by many democracy promoters is based on the experiences of democratisation in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, where civil society was the source of political resistance to the centralising and totalitarian tendencies of the authoritarian state and the one-party system. However, both the nature of civic organisations and their role in the democratic transitions in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have little resemblance to that of Sub-Saharan Africa or the Middle East. Although repressive, many regimes in Sub-Saharan Africa have lacked the organisational skills and the coercive means of the states in the Soviet Empire or in Eastern Europe or even the Asian communist regimes.

Chabal and Daloz question the potential of civil society in Sub-Saharan Africa to organise politically and challenge the regime. They argue that there is a domestic political opposition genuinely committed to political reform and increased political accountability, with an ability to mobilise strong protests and pressure. However, it is equally true that it has been common for opposition groups to challenge their exclusion from the state in hope that their agitation will earn them co-optation. In addition, the bipolar view of civil society against the regime fails to take into account the extreme fluidity of social and political divisions in Sub-Saharan Africa and the complexity of political actions. In the absence of an institutionally autonomous and relatively impartial state, it is imperative for ordinary people to maintain links with those who have power (albeit limited) by playing on ties of primordial solidarity (nepotism) or of clientelism (since all patrons need followers). "That is why the legitimacy of the 'Big Man', which rests on his capacity to redistribute resources to his clients, is only questioned when he fails as a patron, which is the exception rather than the norm", they argue. Social relations are based on personalised bonds of mutually beneficial reciprocity. Overall there has been little modification in the nature of politics. Despite the institutional façade of the state, it has been profitable, for a larger part of the population to continue to operate according to the informal norms of vertical and personalised relations between state and society.⁶³

Reconstructing the Weak State

Ottaway argues that the focus on civil society and political parties in international donor programmes for democracy promotion is likely to fail unless accompanied with a strategy for state reconstruction. The problem of many African states is not only the absence of democratic institutions for participation, but also the weakness of the state apparatus

⁶² Chabal and Daloz, pp. 17–22

⁶³ Ibid, pp. 26–30

that is necessary to maintain and uphold security, control the territory and implement policy decisions. At the core of the problem is the fact that the state itself is in question and in need of reconstruction.⁶⁴

However, the state itself often remains untouched and unreformed.⁶⁵

In addition, Ottaway suggests that because of the prevailing political culture in many African states, genuine political transformation is likely to take the form of transformation from the top-down through changes at the level of state power. Thus, the process of democratisation has to be undertaken largely from the centre and driven with considerations of power and legitimacy rather than in terms of participation. The lack of participation and articulation of interests through formal political parties is itself a symptom of the political systems in weak states, not itself a cause. Because vertical legitimacy is low, reconstruction of the political system has to develop through changes at the core of state power, before interest articulation beyond the accumulation of personal wealth and security is likely to develop.⁶⁶

According to Ayoob, the competing pull of demands associated with state-making and those associated with democratisation can lead to internal tensions and might pave the way for either state failure or state repression. In the present international climate democratisation is no longer merely a creditable goal for weak states, it has indeed become a political precondition for establishing legitimate state structures. It demonstrates the growing internal and external pressures on Third World elites to conform to international and domestic expectations. There is also an increasing realisation by elites that they cannot build credible states and legitimate regimes without guaranteeing minimum civil and political rights and at least some attempts at distribution of political power, if not participation. The political leadership realises that the survival of the state and the regimes depends on defusing the crisis of legitimacy they face. However, many rulers have resisted this trend and refuse to allow any political participation largely because they fear they will lose political power. In such cases, considerations of regime security clash directly with those of state security and take precedence over it and therefore threatens the survival of the state.⁶⁷ Thus, the trajectories of democratisation and the consolidation of coercive power in the hands of the state must not diverge radically; the two processes should not be allowed to become the polar opposites of each other. Faced with a choice, leaders will invariably opt for political stability and control over democratisation. Democratisation cannot thrive in the absence of the political order only a strong state can provide. Democratisation, therefore, must complement rather than contradict the process of state-making.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Marina Ottaway, *Africa's New Leaders- Democracy or State Reconstruction?*, (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000), p. 11

⁶⁵ Cranenburgh, p. 98

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 119

⁶⁷ Ayoob, pp. 176–180

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 182–183

4. Electoral Politics, Violence and Political Change

The argument will be made that we ought to rethink the established concept of democratic transitions, as it is generally expressed in the existing mainstream literature on democratic transitions and reflected in many policy-related documents on democracy promotion. In particular, the central focus on the role of multi-party elections, preferably held in the beginning of a process of democratisation, has been seriously questioned by a number of scholars. Democratisation in any political circumstances inevitably entails a struggle for power. However, because power is often centralised and personalised in the weak state context, the hold of state power takes on a particularly significant dimension.

Contemporary literature on democratisation suggests that elections in weak states are likely to be unsuccessful for two different, although related, reasons. Firstly, the holding of multi-party elections or the prospects of elections in weak and divided states often work as a highly destabilising factor and encourages an “ethnification” of politics, which in some cases lead to political violence or armed conflicts. Secondly, many authors have seriously questioned whether the holding of multi-party elections in weak states serves as a vehicle of political change, and argues that elections are more likely to lead to sedimentation of the existing power structures through a “premature closure” of the process of democratisation, than a genuine kick off for further democratisation. Interestingly, these two aspects seem to be closely related to the two key aspects of democratisation and violence accounted for in the introduction. Finally, it is commonly argued that certain constitutional mechanisms are more or less conducive to peace and democracy, particularly in the post-conflict context. However, this paper will emphasise that it is not the choice of institutional structures, party systems or political mechanisms per se that matters, but rather the process of getting to a decision.

Rethink the Process of Democratic Transition

Carothers argues that democracy promoters in the West in general rely on one basic model of democratisation when setting out to promote democracy in developing countries. This model centres on the notion of a natural sequence of political steps. Democratisation is assumed to proceed along a relatively set path: due to growing popular pressure, discontent and eroding legitimacy, the non-democratic regime is forced

to initiate a political liberalisation. Subsequently, opposition groups and civil society grow stronger and will eventually pressure the government to hold multi-party national elections. After the election, an elected government will take power and continue the process of democratisation through gradual strengthening of democratic state institutions. As noted by Carothers, the model incorporates a two-ways process, as it is presumed that gradual democratic consolidation involves both top-down change through institution-building and bottom-up change, increased political participation, through the strengthening and diversification of civil society.⁶⁹

This model is mainly built on the experiences from the early third wave of democratisation in the 1970s and 1980s in Latin American and southern Europe. The majority of those countries did not only experience relatively peaceful democratic transitions, but they all more or less followed the same pattern of transition. However, in the aftermath of the spread of political liberalisation and democratic reforms in Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union and Sub-Saharan Africa, the model has been severely discredited. The democratic transitions of the 1990s have seriously undermined the notion that democratisation naturally proceeds in any regular or orderly sequence. Harbeson notes that a major problem with the existing, temporally constrained, election-centric conception of the transition phase lies in the implicit, excessive expectations of this period;

*These expectations include the presumptions that (1) democratic elections will ipso facto produce regime change from an incumbent authoritarian to a new, democratically inclined regime; (2) initial multi-party elections and/or regime change will ipso facto generate the momentum necessary to produce subsequent, broader patterns of democratization; (3) this momentum will be sufficient to generate the means to fulfillment of this broader array of democratization tasks in the "consolidation" phase (...); (4) the initial multi-party election taking place at the national level will lead to democratization processes at subnational levels; and (5) the polity itself will remain sufficiently stable to sustain transition and subsequent consolidation phases of democratization.*⁷⁰

There are thus sufficient empirical and theoretical limitations to the existing knowledge to suggest that researchers and policy-makers alike should rethink the political sequencing of democratisation. In particular, several authors suggests that we ought to reconsider the central role accredited to the role of multi-party elections, as certain conditions of the state and the political system in post-colonial countries seem to make

⁶⁹ Carothers, p. 76

⁷⁰ John W. Harbeson, "Rethinking Democratic Transitions: Lessons from Eastern and Southern Africa", in Richard Joseph (ed.), *State, Conflict, and Democracy in Africa*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999), p. 42

the likelihood of successful multi-party elections in the beginning of a process of democratisation an unlikely event.⁷¹ Although there has been a growing realisation within the donor community in recent years regarding the limitation of this approach, little seems to have changed in practice. The holding of multi-party elections is still implicitly placed at the centre of the promotion of democracy in developing countries. There seems to be a general assumption that elections are something good even if they are not sufficient. Further, democracy promoters often regard the holding of elections as the key that will open the door to broader democratisation. In addition, and equally important to point out, is the strong call for the holding of multi-party elections from segments of the population in these countries. The holding of elections is often seen as both a powerful symbolic event and a real and visible sign of democratic progress in a country. However, election *at all costs* might not just have limited effects for democratisation, it might be directly counterproductive to the process of democratisation in weak states.⁷²

The “Ethnification” of Electoral Politics

Because the weak state is highly centralised, the hold of state power takes on a significant dimension rarely found in Western states today. Post-independence political leaders have often refrained from decentralising the political power through the empowerment of local governments or even within core state institutions, such as the legislature and the judiciary. These branches rarely have the ability to act autonomously from the executive branch. In addition, those in control of the central state institution very often also control significant economic resources. As a result of the poor state of the economies in many weak states, the stakes in politics have thus become extremely high. Political power has become the dominant social good in the sense that those who control the political power very often also control a whole range of other goods in society. In this context, the holding of elections, or the prospect of elections, can work as a destabilising factor in a process of democratisation.⁷³

Lémarchand argues that the empirical evidence from the democratisation processes in Sub-Saharan Africa seems to suggest that democracy in these states is generally perceived as a zero-sum game with definite winners and losers among the different ethno-regional communities.⁷⁴ Young has likewise pointed out that the introduction of competitive political parties often serve to mobilise and politicise regional, ethnic, religious, and racial solidarities in divided states. In these situations, elections might intensify disintegrative pressures on fragile states, without contributing to either stability or legitimacy.⁷⁵ On the African continent, there has been escalating and repeated communal violence directly related to the election process in at least four cases, the Congo, Algeria, Rwanda, and Burundi.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Bas de Gaay Fortman, “Elections and Civil Strife: Some Implications for International Election Observation”, in Joe Addbink and Gerti Hesselting (eds.), *Election Observation and Democratization in Africa*, (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 2000), p. 79

⁷² Cranenburgh, pp. 97–99

⁷³ Ibid, p. 76

⁷⁴ René Lemarchand, “Africa’s Troubled Transitions”, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 3, No. 4, (October 1992), p. 104

⁷⁵ Crawford Young, p. 28

⁷⁶ Ibid, pp. 29–32

Rwanda is often cited as the most dramatic cases of increased ethnic violence directly linked to the holding of multi-party elections. The violence represented a deliberate attempt by a group of people whose exclusive power was being threatened by the peace agreement and the introduction of a democratic power-sharing system, to halt a process that, if completed, was going to deprive them of their power.⁷⁷ However, the open ethnification of politics does not necessarily have to be so destructive. Benin is a good example of the opposite trend. The country has a long history of ethnic rivalries and ethnic conflict and the majority of the members of the incumbent regime and the army were from a particular region and one ethnic group. However, the outcome of the holding of election in 1990 did not only change the ethnic power-balance in the country, but it did so in a remarkably peaceful way.⁷⁸ Thus, in Rwanda the strong ethnic colour of both the government and the army prove detrimental to a transition to democracy. But as the case of Benin shows, in none of the above cases were violence and armed conflict a necessary outcome.

De Nevers attempt to identify those conditions under which democratisation is likely to temper or exacerbate ethnic conflict. She argues that democratisation can prevent or dampen ethnic conflicts if the forces pushing for democratisation recognise and acknowledge the ethnic differences that exist within the state and if they can accommodate the interests of different groups in a way that is perceived to be fair and even handed. Specifically, de Nevers argues, seven clusters of factors help determine whether democratisation mitigates or exacerbates ethnic conflict. The level of ethnic tension when the democratisation process begins, the size and power of different ethnic groups within the state, the ethnic composition of the previous regime and the opposition, the ethnic composition of the military, the speed with which ethnic issues are recognised, the political positions of the leaders of the main ethnic groups, and the presence or absence of external ethnic allies.⁷⁹

The first four factors suggested by de Nevers are structural conditions that exist when the democratisation begins.⁸⁰ In the weak state context, as the above examples have shown, many of these structural conditions are present at the outset of a democratic transition. Democratisation can, however, reduce the prospects and dangers of ethnic conflict in the transition if the transition process can establish a workable distribution of power among the different ethnic groups. De Nevers suggests that democratisation is most likely to succeed in mitigating ethnic tensions if ethnic issues are addressed early in the transition process.

Another issue, also closely related to the dynamics of the transition process itself, concerns the cohesion of the opposition. If all the main ethnic groups in the state are united in opposition to the previous regime, either in a movement or a coalition, democratisation is likely to stand a

⁷⁷ Timothy Longman, "Rwanda: Democratization and Disorder: Political Transformation and Social Deterioration", in John F. Clark and David E. Gardinier (eds.), *Political Reform in Francophone Africa*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997). See also Samuel M. Makinda, "Democracy and Multi-Party Politics in Africa", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 4, (1996).

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 312

⁷⁹ Renée de Nevers, "Democratization and Ethnic Conflict", in Michael E. Brown (ed.), *Ethnic Conflict and International Security*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 61

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 67-69

better chance at avoiding ethnic conflict, de Nevers argues. In addition, whether the political leaders are moderates rather than extremists in their positions, both in relation to how to carry out political change, and in terms of degree of hostility and extremism towards other ethnic groups, is an important factor. In Benin, during the National Conference, there was a relatively high degree of coherence and unity within the opposition, and moderates were comparatively stronger than radicals within both the government and within the opposition, something that is likely to have contributed to the peaceful transition. In Rwanda, however, in spite of perceived initial success, the opposition soon split along a moderate-radical axis, where the radicals soon emerged with the upper hand. Finally, de Nevers argues, if one or more groups are members of an ethnic group that governs a neighbouring state, and this state decides to intervene, the democratisation might face additional challenges.⁸¹

Although the electoral processes in African countries have led to armed conflict only in a limited number of cases, the holding of multi-party elections, or the prospects of elections, have contributed to the large-scale use of political violence and atrocities on civilians in a large number of countries. The multi-party election in Kenya in 1992 and the large-scale violence that accompanied it is an illustrative example.⁸² In a weak state incumbent leaders and local strongmen have at their disposal an endless array of tools with which they can manipulate voter preferences and election outcomes, so as to fit their private, sectarian interests. The behaviour of Charles Taylor's many private security forces in the Liberian countryside prior to the election victory in 1997 provides another illustrative example of the hazards involved when elections take place prematurely in a democratic transition.⁸³

Political Parties in Weak States

Supporting political parties in the weak state context presents a number of complications for the international donor community. In Sub-Saharan Africa, political parties are primarily based on ethnic or regional ties, they tend to lack a clear policy platform or ideological orientation and they often lack linkages to specific societal interest groups or civil associations. In this context, it is highly questionable whether supporting political parties is an effective way to promote democracy.⁸⁴ The most obvious and visible manifestation of politicised ethnicity in new multi-party political systems has been the overt or covert ethnic character of the majority of the emerging political parties.⁸⁵

The party system that developed in the struggle for independence in Sub-Saharan Africa was either based on multiple organisations of ethnic nature or the formation of one dominant party fighting for independence. Elections were held for the purpose of legitimising the outcome of the struggle for independence, as the new power-relations had already been determined. This was the case in Malawi, Tanzania,

⁸¹ Ibid, p. 69–70

⁸² Githu Muigai, "Ethnicity and the Renewal of Competitive Politics in Kenya", in Harvey Glickman (ed.), *Ethnic Conflict and Democratization in Africa*, (Atlanta: The African Studies Association Press, 1995), pp. 178–179

⁸³ See report for Sida conducted by Andrés Jato and Thomas Ohlson, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, after research trip to West Africa in 2000.

⁸⁴ Cranenburgh, p. 101

⁸⁵ Marina Ottaway, "Ethnic Politics in Africa: Change and Continuity", in Richard Joseph (ed.), p. 311

Zambia and Zimbabwe. After independence, it was practically impossible to replace those already in power. The “Independence party” had already acquired a monopolist position that, at least initially, was based on public support. The existing political opposition was based on ethnically expressed discontent, rather than alternative political programmes or policies. The polarisation of ethnically coloured discontent channelled through the party system often resulted in violence, particularly around election times.⁸⁶ Consequently, De Gaay Fortman argues, there is no immediate reason to believe that the (re)-introduction of multi-party systems will lead to a systematic replacement of the political leadership. Political parties in Sub-Saharan Africa are not formed on the basis of distinct views on policies and the public interest, but on attempts to unite people against those in power who they, on the basis of identity factors, tend to regard as enemies. Therefore, Fortman argues, it is likely that elections will trigger violence, and it also explains the reasons why some people and many political leaders equate democracy with violence, instability and disorder.⁸⁷

Same Taxi, Different Driver?⁸⁸

As noted above, a strong emphasis on elections often means less political change than what is usually expected. The new politicians coming to office through the ballot box hardly ever transform the basis of politics, and remain essentially reliant on personalistic and clientalistic mechanisms of internal control within their parties and in their relationship with the electorate. “Formal reforms mask substantive continuity in African politics”, Cranenburgh notes.⁸⁹ Clientelist politics and patron-client networks that link state and society together are still the most prevalent forms of political mobilisation in Sub-Saharan Africa in spite of recent transitions to multi-party politics. The reason, Barkan argues, is mainly because the underlying logic of politics in these states remains the same. The new political leaders mobilise followers in the countryside on the promise of what resources they will bring back from the state to the local community, ranging from political positions for certain individuals to public goods for the community as a whole. Political leaders represent one particular geographical region and the ethnic group or groups residing in that region. These leaders are normally opposed by a fragmented coalition with similar characteristics, but with representation in other regions and other groups. Thus, the introduction of a multi-party system has not meant increased diversity for the individual voter. What appears to be a multi-party system from a distance or within the national legislature is in fact a series of patron-client networks, each representing a distinct ethno-regional constituency.⁹⁰

The case of Zambia clearly serves to illustrate this pattern. Increasing internal and international pressure forced the incumbent regime of Kenneth Kaunda to hold multi-party election in 1991. Yet, as noted by

⁸⁶ De Gaay Fortman, pp. 81–82

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 83

⁸⁸ This was used as a popular street slogan in Liberia in the early 1980s. See Quentin Outram, “Liberia: roots and fruits of the emergency”, in *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 1, (1999), p. 167

⁸⁹ Cranenburgh, p. 97–99

⁹⁰ Barkan, p. 232

Barkan, once in power, the new government of Fredrick Chiluba's Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD) ruled like its predecessor, or worse, through standard patronage methods accompanied with state repression. Although there probably were genuine democracy seekers within MMD at the outset of the political campaign, well in power, these elements were substantially marginalized or changed their views. Politics in Zambia after the introduction of democracy has thus not changed either structurally or in the approach to governance. Neo-patrimonial tendencies are likely to confine because there is a demand for such practices from below given the nature of the state-society relation in large. This is also partly the reason why, in a majority of African countries that have held multi-party elections in the 1990s, incumbent authoritarians have remained in power or have been re-elected, Barkan suggests.⁹¹

According to Chabal and Daloz, the explanation for the limited renewal of political actors lies in the notion of political legitimacy. In Africa, the notion of legitimacy in the political context is based on the expectations of the "sharing of the spoils". The economic crisis among the majority of the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa in the beginning of the 1990s threatened the influences of the major patrons in these states, and many patrons began searching for new resources in order to sustain their legitimacy in the eyes of their constituencies. Unable to satisfy the demands of their clients, the traditional Big Men were challenged in many of the first multi-party elections in the beginning of the 1990s. However, because the very basis of the political system continues to be based on the logic of patron-client relations, the number of new plausible contenders is limited. The limited introduction of democratic reforms has not been able to change the fundamental logic of the political system and has caused no modification in the notion of representation. The understanding of the concept of citizenship and the purpose of the individual vote remains linked to the anticipation of the direct communal (or even personal) benefits which elections have to offer.⁹² Democracy, in the African context, thus means access to resources. As argued by De Gaay Fortman, "If democracy does not deliver, the political system gets into trouble".⁹³

Schatzberg suggests that regardless of the form of government, or the number of political parties present, the substance of democracy will not emerge unless some degree of legitimacy is present. Specifically, certain conditions will have to be met if legitimate governments are to emerge;

First, people will have to eat (in both literal and figurative senses.) There will be no democracy if the new generation of Africa's politicians continue to monopolise the fruits of Uhuru. Both food (material wealth) and political power will have to be shared. In addition, political leaders will have to respect the basic human rights of their citizens. They include- but are not limited to- food, clothing, shelter, and health care. The new political 'fathers' will have to provide these things or else run the risk of losing legitimacy-

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 234

⁹² Chabal and Daloz, pp. 32-39

⁹³ De Gaay Fortman, p. 90.

*regardless of whether they came to power via a national conference, the ballot box, or the gun. (...) Second, elites will have to be rotated so that a much wider range of people have access to power and perquisites of office. (...) Third, the new rulers- many long starved in terms of their access to, and control over, the state- must not overindulge their appetites; they must not eat too much. (...) Fourth, the right of all previously marginalized citizens (...) to speak their minds, express their desires, and give voice to their hopes will have to be respected and protected...*⁹⁴

Democratisation in an authoritarian state means redistribution of the power that so far has been centralised and monopolised. Power will be shared according to certain mechanisms. The political leadership will have to accept institutional uncertainty. Even the winners will have to redistribute power in the system and allow some of the institutions to remain autonomous, in particularly the military and the judiciary. They will further have to accept a separation of the legislative and the executive. "Resistance to democracy is first and foremost a resistance to power redistribution", Ottaway argues.⁹⁵ However, at another, more fundamental level, she argues, the problem of power in a democratic transition is how to generate it and how to do so in ways that are compatible with democratic norms. In a democratic system, power cannot be based on coercion or mobilisation from the top. Generating power lies in organising the interests of various groups, causing a number of constituencies to define their interests in a way that coincides with the goals of a political party or shaping that party's goals so as to appeal to the interests of a large segment of the population. This requires a degree of skilfulness of the leadership but also an active population. Democratisation thus requires a change in the nature of power itself and in the institutions needed to generate it. Ottaway argues that the best-case scenario for the contemporary, externally assisted, democratic transitions on the African continent, is a gradual transition from conflict and tension that makes possible the opening to a deliberate, controlled process of liberalisation, institutional development and democratic consolidation. However, the transitions can also result in the reversal of the process with a return to authoritarianism and repression. This is the worse-case scenario, something we have already witnessed in several cases on the continent. Finally, Ottaway notes, there is the middle way, a less clear-cut but more likely outcome, the premature closure of the transition processes through the establishment of formal procedures and institutions before a real change in the nature of power has taken place. "Couched in the trappings of democracy, such premature closure can be as detrimental to democratisation as repression and much more insidious."⁹⁶

Constitutional Engineering and Conflict Management

Glickman suggests that elections should come later rather than earlier in the democratisation process in multiethnic states, because the early

⁹⁴ Michael G. Schatzberg, "Power, Legitimacy and 'Democratisation' in Africa", *Africa*, Vol. 63, No. 4, (1993), p. 457. (Italics added.)

⁹⁵ Marina Ottaway, "From Political Opening...", p. 5-7

⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 3

period of democratisation creates “opportunities for increasing the stridency of ethnic claims, via expanded popular expectation and via the adversarial or uncontrolled nature of the electoral process”. Hence, constitutional engineering should precede elections, rather than the reverse, as it is likely that the institutionalisation of constitutional mechanisms will generate the emerging civil culture of trust, tolerance and compromise that is deemed necessary for a peaceful electoral process. However, present strategies for democratisation seems to build on the notion that it is the holding of elections that provides the necessary condition for institution-building and constitutional engineering.⁹⁷ Cranenburgh argues that in cases where the respect for the rule of law and protection of civil and political rights are not guaranteed before the elections are held, the elections might directly contribute to political violence and violations of human rights. In many weak states these preconditions are largely absent. Hence, elections in the weak state context inevitably become an instrument for manipulation by the state as well as the opposition.⁹⁸

Ayoob argues likewise that electoral contests in weak states are often perceived as the continuation of ethnic, communal, class, or personal strife by other means. This, he argues, is mainly due to the absence of three factors which are essential for underwriting the legitimacy of political systems and regimes, namely, common notions of the locus of decision making authority, the technique by which decisions are to be made, and the means by which rulers are to be empowered. This explains the fragility of democratic experiments in much of these states. It also explains the risk that the introduction of democratic reforms might be followed by social, economic and political chaos, or reversed by military strongmen acting either in their own interests or in collusion with powerful social, economic and ethnic groups that feel that their interests are threatened by the rhetoric or policies of elected governments.⁹⁹

While democratisation certainly provides a risk of increased ethnic violence, it also provides opportunities for controlling and managing such conflicts through institutional mechanisms. Managing power that recognises ethnic group politics rather than eliminating ethno-political expression emerges as a central task for the new democratic system. Harbeson argues that the African experience has shown that the political circumstances on the continent make it more likely that transitions will result in democratic progress to the extent that they commence with comprehensive multi-party agreements on the fundamental rules of the game, through constitutional reform or “constitution-like pact making”, than if they begin with initial multi-party elections in advance of such rule-making. These pacts can consist of few or many actors, be valid for a few essential issues or cover a whole range of issues, and be temporary or durable in its nature.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Harvey Glickman, “Issues in the Analysis of Ethnic Conflict and Democratization in Africa Today”, in Harvey Glickman (ed.), p. 23

⁹⁸ Cranenburgh, pp. 98–99

⁹⁹ Ayoob, p. 40

¹⁰⁰ John W. Harbeson, “Externally Assisted...”, p. 43

In the conflict resolution literature, power sharing has increasingly been seen as a way of shaping the democratic political game in multi-ethnic societies.. Timothy Sisk argues that power sharing, defined as practices and institutions that result in broad-based governing coalitions generally inclusive of all major ethnic groups in society, can reconcile principles of democracy in multiethnic states. The argument is that simple majoritarian systems contain special problems for ethnically divided societies. Minority ethnic groups fear electoral contests when the principle of simple majority rule is operative as they expect to be permanently excluded from power.¹⁰¹ The most frequently cited form of power sharing is that of consociationalism. According to Lijphart, consociationalism can involve a range of institutional arrangements, although the system, above all, rely on elite cooperation through four basic principles; a broad-based or grand coalition of parties in the executive, minority or mutual veto rights, proportionality at all level of government decision making, through the electoral system and in the allocation of state resources, and group autonomy, either territorial federalism or non-territorial autonomy.¹⁰² However, as noted by Spears, Lijphart uses consociationalism most effectively to explain existing cases of stable democracies in Europe, such as Belgium, the Netherlands, and Switzerland.¹⁰³

Many analysts have argues that the one of main reason why the Bicesse peace agreement in 1992 in Angola between the Movimento Popular de Libertacao de Angola (MPLA) and the Uniao Nacional para a Independencia Total de Angola (UNITA) failed, was the design of the political system. The political system envisaged a strong presidential system and thus, in effect, the presidential election took the form of a “winner-take-all” system. Prior to the elections, both parties were confident to win, and therefore rejected any proposals about introducing a political system based on power sharing. When the early results indicated that UNITA had lost both the legislative and the presidential votes, the party rejected the results and declared the elections fraudulent. Short thereafter UNITA resumed its military campaign and Angola slipped back into full-fledged war. One lesson commonly derived from the Angolan debacle concerns the dangers of winner-take-all constitutional models and the advisability of power sharing systems.¹⁰⁴ Ottaway, however, argues that the idea that a democracy requires power sharing rather than majoritarian systems is “either tautological or highly misleading”.¹⁰⁵ She argues that it is too simplistic too assume that all majoritarian systems are undemocratic and all power-sharing systems are democratic. The important variable is the attitudes the different political actors have towards each other and towards a transformation to a

¹⁰¹ Timothy Sisk, *Power Sharing and International Mediation in Ethnic Conflicts*, (Washington D.C: United States Institute of Peace, 1997, 2nd printing)

¹⁰² *Ibid*, pp. 34–38

¹⁰³ Ian S. Spears, “Understanding inclusive peace agreements in Africa: the problems of sharing power”, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 1, (2000), p. 105–107

¹⁰⁴ Marina Ottaway, “Angola’s Failed Elections”, in Krishna Kumar (ed.), *Postconflict Elections, Democratization, & International Assistance*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), p. 148

¹⁰⁵ Ottaway, “From Political Opening...”, p. 11

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*

democratic political system.¹⁰⁶ This argument is also supported by several empirical studies. Ohlson, for example, has found, based on a comparative analysis of eight different peace accords in southern Africa that there seems to be no correlation between choice of political system and success and failure of peace agreements.¹⁰⁷ Ohlson suggests, however, that if the parties can find a political mechanism that they can live with even if they lose, instead of trying to maximise their gains if they win, the risk of a return to war is reduced. But *how* that is done varies in different contexts. There is no general formula available.

Thus, although the choice of electoral and political system might have some valid explanatory power for the outcome of the election and the success of the transition, the most important factor seems to be the notion underlying the importance attached to design, namely the role of power. Because the stakes of power are high, it is less important whether the outcome of the election will be less power or no power, any outcome that stipulate the loss of political or economic power for at least one party runs a high risk to lead to armed conflict as long as that party or those parties believe that they will be able to strike a better deal through the option of conflict and violence rather than peace and democracy. It has been suggested that power sharing can only work where there is a genuine desire and commitment among the respective leadership, and “sufficient imagination and innovation to create appropriate structures and institutions that simultaneously accommodate all groups.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Thomas Ohlson, *Power Politics and Peace Policies- Intra-state Conflict Resolution in Southern Africa*, (Uppsala: Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, 1998)

¹⁰⁸ Spears, p. 117

5. The Military and The Security Forces

The role played by the military and the security forces is essential to any analysis of democratic transitions in weak states, in particular from a conflict perspective.¹⁰⁹ In spite of its relevance, however, there is surprisingly little scholarly work to date on the topic.¹¹⁰ Likewise, it is not until relatively recently that civil-military relations has been made an issue of growing concern for policy-makers in the West working on the promotion of democracy in developing countries, although the area straddles two of the most central categories for democracy promotion, state institutions and civil society.¹¹¹

Several authors have pointed out that the coercive strength of the military constitutes one of the greatest threats to democratisation in weak states. As one of the most important aspects of democratisation is the subordination of the military under civilian and democratic control, the military establishment is often the institution that stands to lose most from a transition to democratic policies, while also controlling the means available to reverse the transition process. Another, seemingly contradictory problem is related to the eroding legitimacy and disintegration of the military institution itself. In other words, the inherent weakness of the military is seen as equally threatening to democratisation. There are thus at least two dimensions of the problem related to the military and security sector in democratic transitions. Firstly, the role played by the military in determining the dynamic and outcome of the transition process. Secondly, security and stability problems related to the long-term process of a democratic transformation of the military and the security sector. These two dimensions are likely to be closely related to the two dimensions of conflict propensity in transitional states mentioned earlier.

¹⁰⁹ This paper will mainly, although not exclusively, deal with the role of the military. However, the definition of what constitutes the security sector is usually much broader. The security sector is commonly taken to mean all those organisations which have authority to use, or order the use of force, or the threat of force, to protect the state and its citizens, as well as those civil structures that are responsible for their management and oversight. It includes military and paramilitary forces, intelligence services, police forces, border guards and custom services, judicial and penal systems and civil structures that are responsible for the management and oversight of the above. See Malcom Chalmers, "Security sector reform in developing countries: An EU perspective", Joint report published by Saferworld and the Conflict Prevention Network, 2000.

¹¹⁰ See for example Robin Luckham, "The Military, Militarisation and Democratisation in Africa: A Survey of Literature and Issues", in Eboe Hutchful and Abdoulaye Bathily (eds.), *The Military and Militarism in Africa*, (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1998), pp. 1–45

¹¹¹ Carothers, pp. 196–197

The Strength of the Military

According to Luckham, the military establishment and other repressive organs in many African states, “continues to be the single most important obstacle to democratisation”.¹¹² Monshipouri argues likewise that “the active support or acquiescence of the military is the key to any viable and sustained political transition to democracy...”¹¹³ Hutchful argues that, paying too little attention to the military dimension of democratisation might prove “a crucial and potentially costly omission.”¹¹⁴ There can be no transition or consolidation of democracy, unless military and security establishments are brought under some kind of civilian control. However, as pointed out by Luckham, it might be more appropriate to think in term of democratic, rather than civilian control, as many weak civilian autocratic governments have continuously attempted to keep the armed forces under its control, through the use of “bribes, spoils of office, ethnic manipulation of appointments and promotions, penetration of the officer corps by the intelligence services and the ruling party or the use of parallel security structures to counterbalance the regular forces”.¹¹⁵ Is it not just a question of controlling the regular armed forces, since the state’s other security organs, such as paramilitary units, the police, secret service and gendarmeries, are equally responsible for state coercion and just as necessary to bring under democratic control.¹¹⁶

The military often plays a central political role in weak states, as it often is the only state institution with sufficient organisational strength, material capacity, and sometimes even legitimacy, to unite and control the country, albeit through methods of repression. Even in states ruled by civilian autocrats, the military and security organs have often been given a central role. In addition, the military usually has, through its control over the state’s coercive apparatus, the necessary means to carry out its political agenda. However, in some cases the military has played a decisive role in promoting, rather than obstructing, the transition to democracy. The military, Luckham notes, is:

*perfectly equipped to either carry out a political reform, as in Mali, or to re-intervene to reverse it, as in Nigeria, or to dictate the terms and conditions under which the return to constitutional government takes place, or, where the military falls apart, as in Somalia or Liberia, to stall democratisation through armed conflict.*¹¹⁷

Under what conditions are the military likely to promote a democratic transition and when is it not? In cases where the military, often severely weakened by years of political crisis and budget cuts, favour the end to military rule, it has both the means and the motive to work for a successful transition to democratic politics, in spite of strong resistance from other

¹¹² Robin Luckham, “Dilemmas of Military Disengagement and Democratization in Africa, in IDS Bulletin, Vol. 26, No. 2, (April 1995), p. 49

¹¹³ Monshipouri, p. 158

¹¹⁴ Eboe Hutchful, “Military Issues in the Transition to Democracy”, in Eboe Hutchful and Abdoulaye Bathily (eds.), p. 599

¹¹⁵ Robin Luckham, “Faustian bargains: democratic control over military and security establishments”, in Robin Luckham and Gordon White (eds.), *Democratization in the South: The Jagged Wave*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 124

¹¹⁶ Luckham, “Dilemmas...” , p. 56. See also Robin Luckham, “Taming the Monster: Democratization and Demilitarisation” in Eboe Hutchful and Abdoulaye Bathily (eds.), pp. 589–598

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 49

central state institutions, such as the incumbent government. In Malawi, the armed forces played a crucial role in the 1994 transition, as they were successful in blocking efforts by the paramilitaries, loyal to President Banda, in their attempt to destabilise the democratisation process.¹¹⁸ In Benin in 1990, the military refused to face down popular protests against the incumbent authoritarian regime, due to mounting criticism of the political and economic state of the country from within the officer corps.¹¹⁹ In Mali, a reform-minded faction of the military even decided to intervene actively to terminate the regime itself and facilitate the transition to democracy.¹²⁰ A common denominator in all these cases was the deteriorating economic conditions of the army under authoritarian rule. In the face of the deep and sustained economic crisis facing most African states since the 1980s, the military, together with the civilian bureaucrats, have been among the groups in society that have suffered most from the deteriorating state economy. However, in some cases the military leadership, or important factions of the military, have opposed political change and joined on the side of the incumbent regime against democratisation or acted on its own behalf. In Sub-Saharan Africa, there were repeated clashes between the military and indigenous democratic movements and transitional governments in a number of countries, for example in Togo, Zaire, the Congo, and in Niger.¹²¹

According to Hutchful, the failure of the democratic movement in these countries to capture key sectors of the military can be explained at three levels. The first was the virtual privatisation of the military or key units by incumbent regimes in these states. The less professional the military, the less likely it is to act in pursuit of a coherent national interest, to distance the interests of the institution from those of the regime, and to strike compromises based on the long-term professional objectives of the military institution. The second factor was deep-rooted problems in the military institutions. In many instances the decision by the army was as much a reaction to the development within the institution itself as opposition to democracy, Hutchful argues. These grievances were in some cases deflected into hostility against the transitional regime. In Togo, Niger, Guinea-Bissau and the Ivory Coast, the military coups were all direct results of pay disputes and other internal injustices. The third factor, Hutchful suggests, was the lack of military policy among the democracy movements, who paid too little attention to the military issue and tended to underestimate its remaining power. This, he argues, explains why the transition to democratic policies in Benin and Malawi, although both countries with strong military institutions with traditionally strong links to the regime, were able to avoid an alliance between the incumbent political leadership and the armed forces. It also explains why the democracy movement in Togo and Zaire failed, with large-scale violence as the result.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p. 56. See also Denis Venter, "Malawi: the transition to multi-party politics", in John A. Wiseman (ed.), *Democracy and Political Change in Sub Saharan Africa*, (London: Routledge, 1995)

¹¹⁹ Chris Allen, "Reconstructing an Authoritarian State: Democratic Renewal in Benin", *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 54, (1992), p. 47¹²⁰ Hutchful, pp. 44–45. See also Zeric Kay Smith, "Mali's Decade of Democracy", in *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 12, No. 3, (July 2001) p. 74

¹²¹ Hutchful, p. 608. An armed conflict is, for the purpose of this study, defined as a contested incompatibility which concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths. See Peter Wallensteen and Margareta Sollenberg, p. 643

¹²² Ibid, pp. 609–610

Moestrup argues likewise that one likely explanation for the divergence in behaviour between the national armies in Mali and in Niger was the different roles the two armies played under the national conferences held in these countries. While the military was alienated from the national conference in Niger, it was an active participant and supervisor of the conference in Mali.¹²³ The clashes between democracy movements and the military have been most serious where the leadership of the democracy movement and that of the military or the authoritarian leadership have fallen into the hands of rival ethnic, racial or regional groups. In these cases, the military has become the unofficial political party of a particular ethnic alliance.¹²⁴ Nigeria is an illustrative example.¹²⁵

Another important issue in democratic transitions is the question of how to persuade authoritarian rulers, and those associated with the incumbent regime, to cede power, whilst also satisfying the population that justice is being served and that the new political system will not allow the same injustices to occur. Luckham acknowledges that it is not just their desire to preserve accumulated power and wealth, but also their fear of retribution that strongly motivate autocrats to be reluctant and sometimes forcefully oppose a transition to democratic policies.¹²⁶ Comparable dilemmas often arise in the aftermath of protracted armed conflicts, where all sides have been responsible for large-scale human right abuses. The difficulty is to strike a balance in between these two seemingly disparate goals of democracy and perceived justice, or, in the case of post-conflict situations, between peace/stability and justice.¹²⁷ The empirical record from the democratic transitions in Sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s suggests that the ways in which transitional governments deal with these issues is decisive in determine the outcome of the transition process and the level of political violence associated with it. In both Malawi and Benin, two countries characterised by years of repressive authoritarian rule and prominent roles played by the military, the transitional governments approved immunity to the incumbent leadership, and were also successful in carrying out peaceful transitions to democracy.¹²⁸ In other cases, where the transitional governments or the opposition confronted the incumbents and advocated that the incumbents, including members of the military, should be put to justice, such as in Niger, the transitions were accompanied with political violence followed by a military coup that effectively ended the transition process.¹²⁹ One might here add that the National Reconciliation Council in Niger, established by the new military rulers that took power in 1999, has promised to turn over powers to civilian rule within nine months. The new constitution, drawn by the Council, contains a proviso guaranteeing total immunity to those involved in the 1996 and 1999 coups.¹³⁰

¹²³ Sophia Moestrup, "The Role of Actors and Institutions: The Difficulties of Democratic Survival in Mali and Niger", *Democratization*, Vol. 6, No.2, (Summer 1999), p. 182

¹²⁴ Hutchful, p. 48

¹²⁵ See Richard Joseph, "Autocracy, Violence, and Ethnomilitary Rule in Nigeria", in Richard Joseph (ed.)

¹²⁶ Robin Luckham, "Dilemmas...", p. 57

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 57-58

¹²⁸ *Africa Research Bulletin*, June 1992, p. 11034., *Freedom in the World* 91/92, p. 109

¹²⁹ Moestrup, pp. 177-178

The Weakness of the Military

By the end of the 1980's most regimes in Sub-Saharan Africa were under pressure to cut military budgets. The end of the Cold War had resulted in severe cuts in military aid, and military budgets increasingly cut down on equipment and maintenance, while soldiers experienced a sharp reduction in their real wages. Consequently, corruption and a demoralisation of the armed forces spread in most countries. The military and security establishments were performing their tasks oppressively or hardly at all. This development coincided with the development towards democracy in these countries.¹³¹ As noted earlier, some military forces became increasingly reluctant to face down popular protest in the streets, and thus contributed to the successful transition towards democracy. In other cases, however, the growing frustration channelled into opposition against the transitional government and the democratic transition, with political violence as an immediate consequence. In some countries irregular forces developed, such as in Chad, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Somalia, and the Sudan and in Angola. In some extreme cases, the disintegration of states and military forces and the privatisation of the means of violence in countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone and Somalia resulted in the emergence of private warlord armies.¹³² The internal condition of many African armies thus borders on anarchy, with declining discipline and inadequate and outdated equipment. Intra-military conflicts of ethnic or ideological character are frequent. Thus, in many Sub-Saharan African countries, the military lacks both professionalism and institutional stability.¹³³

When considering the role of the military in relations to democratisation and conflicts in weak states, it is thus equally important to consider a number of legacies from the years under authoritarian rule that are likely to be essential for the long-term prospects for democracy and stability in these states. It was in the interest of the authoritarian regime to undermine the professionalism of the military, to isolate the institution from democratic attempts, frustrate the possibility of retribution, dominate any attempt at reforms and entrench its own allies and doctrines in the military forces. In addition, as noted earlier, the political leadership in weak states often creates a particular ethnic coloration in the armed forces, leading to the erosion of social and professional autonomy. In several cases, such as in the case of Zaire under Mobutu, the incumbent virtually privatised the army. It was in the interest of the political leadership to have a low degree of professionalism, as it made it less likely that the military would act in pursuit of any coherent institutional interest and seek an alternative agenda to that of the regime in power. Thus, the erosion of the political power and repressive ability of the military, itself necessary for the development of democracy, does not in itself guarantee peace and stability. In fact, it may pose a danger for the democratisation process as a

¹³⁰ John Uniack Davis and Aboubacar B. Kossimi, "Niger Gets Back on Track", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 12, No. 3, (July 2001), p. 82

¹³¹ Robin Luckham, "The Military, Militarization and Democratization", in *African Studies Review*, Vol. 37, No. 2, (September 1994), p. 59

¹³² Luckham, "Dilemmas...", p. 65. See also William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1998)

¹³³ Hutchful, p. 48

whole. National security, as opposed to regime security and the assurance of law and order, are legitimate and necessary aspects of democracy, but these can only be assured by states that are both strong and responsive. According to Hutchful;

Weak and traumatized armed forces are incapable of such tasks and might even pose a threat to it as they are often incapable of maintaining their own corporate solidarity and conception of long-term corporate self-interest required for effective bargaining in the process of extrication from power.¹³⁴

In some states the most likely consequence of the political defeat of the military is not a democratic and stable state, but the emergence of weak and unstable regimes and military juntas, anarchy, warlordism and banditry. This development might in fact constitute a greater threat to individual security and democracy than authoritarian rule. Thus, the dilemma of democracy is that it demands a well-armed military establishment that is, at the same time, subordinated to civilian and democratic control. An additional problem is related to how to restore discipline in divided and demoralised military and security organs, such that they are capable to restoring public order rather than constituting a threat. Further, new democracies has to face the question of how to re-integrate and cut back swollen, divided and undisciplined military and paramilitary forces.¹³⁵ None of these issues are likely to be an easy task.

¹³⁴ Ibid

¹³⁵ Luckham, "Dilemmas...", pp. 57–59

6. Summary and Conclusions¹³⁶

This paper has sought to problemize previously prevailing conceptions about the process of democratisation in developing countries and how that process relates to phenomena such as state building, institution-building, civil society and the security sector. The primary focus has been on the potential for intra-state conflict and political violence in the context of democratisation processes. The method has been one of reviewing recent literature on democratisation in weak states in order to find a pattern in the most up-to-date academic findings in the field. This final chapter is in two parts: the first summarises the presented findings concerning the relationship between democratisation and violence/conflict in weak states at a general macro-level. The second part attempts to extract from the discussion in the paper some recommendation-style points—also at a macro level—of key importance for development co-operation planners that are concerned with assisting and contributing to peaceful transitions to democracy in weak states.

General Findings

The recipe for transitions to democracy and liberalisation, in the so-called Third World and in former autocracies in general, in the post-Cold War period—as advocated by most Western governments, donor agencies, creditors, financing institutions and international organisations—has up to now been a fairly streamlined one, aiming at attaining the Weberian state model. The rationale used is that the end of the Cold War presents rulers of weak states and autocracies with no other alternative than to democratise the polity and liberalise the economy, that is, introduce genuine multi-party politics, hold multi-party elections, slim down state apparatuses and make them more efficient and less corrupt, abandon patrimonialism, privatise markets and, thus, oil the wheels of the market economy so that revenue is generated for economic distribution policies. This will, in turn, increase state capacity to respond to popular demands and restore the political legitimacy of rulers and regimes in the eyes of citizens. In this way, it is believed, weak states will become stronger, less prone to conflict, more responsive to popular

¹³⁶ This chapter was drafted in collaboration with Thomas Ohlson, Associate Professor at the Department of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala University.

demands, more democratic and human rights-oriented, and hopefully also more equitably integrated into the world economy.

The above is a normative, ideal vision of what would constitute a “good” outcome of current processes of transition and change. However, recent findings on democratic transitions as presented in the previous chapters of this report suggest that there is nothing automatic about such a process. Instead, we are now gradually understanding—from historical processes elsewhere and from current research into today’s empirical realities—that the realisation of the normative goals stated above depends crucially on a number of things, such as the presence of rule of law, separation of powers, capable public institutions and general conditions for a mutually reinforcing alliance between an entrepreneurial class, a vibrant civil society and a vital, strong and proactive state apparatus. We also know that achieving the above normative vision depends crucially on whether or not the specific and local historical, cultural, social, economic, and political and power realities into which a process of transition towards democracy is introduced are being taken into account in designing that process. Consequently, the achievement of an authoritative, democratic, responsible and legitimate system of rule is a complex and hazardous process.

If the above conditions are not present, external resources may instead fuel the continuation of patrimonial malpractice, albeit oftentimes behind a façade of democracy, multi-partyism and nominal good governance, what was earlier referred to as “premature closure” of the transition towards democracy, and one with an embedded conflict potential. There may also emerge more overtly ominous paths to political authority and power, as demonstrated by the cases of Liberia and Sierra Leone during the past decade. These paths involve violence, coercion, illegal resource extraction and so-called warlordism, all in a context of a rapidly deteriorating or collapsed state authority.

At this point, it makes sense to summarise what we mean by the concept of a weak state. The term is somewhat ambiguous, but we argue that a weak state is characterized by 1) lack of societal cohesion and consensus on what organising principles should determine the contest for state power and how that power should be executed, 2) low capacity and/or political will of state institutions to provide citizens with minimum levels of security and well-being, 3) high vulnerability to external economic and political forces, and 4) low degree of popular legitimacy accorded to the holders of state power by portions of the citizenry.

To develop this further, it is concluded from the findings presented in this report that the formal state apparatus, the state bureaucracy, has been weak in terms of structure, resources and performance throughout the post-independence period, in Sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere. The popular legitimacy and authority of a leader at any given level within the state has to a great extent been a function of the efficiency of the patrimonial network that he controls. This suggests that the distinction between objective/collective state interests, on the one hand, and the leader’s subjective/private interests, on the other, is blurred. Legitimacy and authority is achieved through powerful, but informal structures of patrimonialism—vertical patron-client

relationships based on rewards going top-down and legitimacy going bottom-up in the system—that parallel and overlap with the operations of the state’s formal bureaucratic-administrative apparatus. The resources for this quite costly parallel arrangement came, in the past, from Cold War patrons, from official donor agencies and, to a lesser degree, from export earnings and taxation. Now, after the Cold War, these structures have become more difficult to sustain, with the result that both the formal and informal structures of political authority and legitimacy are often being eroded, while democratisation at the same time has become an almost permanent feature of donor conditionalities. As noted, this may lead to premature closure and façade democracy or to warlordism, both outcomes being potentially or overtly conflictual and inherently undemocratic. It should be underlined that what has been termed premature closure of the democratisation process and the ensuing entrenchment of façade democracy would again turn the post-Cold War state into an effective instrument for precisely the clientelism, corruption, malpractice and conflict potential that democracy was supposed to eradicate.

The conclusion, then, is that weak states have problems in democratising, in carrying the process of transition to democracy to fruition. The nature of the problem of democratising weak states has three interlinked dimensions which, taken together, constitute a formidable challenge to participants in the process as well as to the external actors seeking to support it:

- 1) While democracy is, by definition, a method of resolving societal conflicts in a non-violent manner, the route to it, that is, the process of democratisation, is a revolutionary and conflict-generating process. This is so because it involves dramatic changes. These changes include new methods of deciding who is to have political power, new methods for exercising political power and often—and as a consequence—new balances of power and new power holders. It goes without saying that this is conflictual, particularly in a weak state where the hold on state power is often the only route to influence and wealth. The conflict potential is thus very much short term and related to various steps in the process of democratisation.
- 2) The findings reviewed in this study have also underlined another aspect, namely, that the structural conditions for moving successfully from democratisation to consolidated democracy are most often lacking in weak states. The process may therefore be halted or reversed, leading to façade democracy, renewed autocracy, state failure or some other point on the so-called semi-democratic continuum. On this continuum, the conflict potential is more long-term in nature and more entrenched in basic structurally conditioned grievances.
- 3) Prescriptive democratisation, using the constitutional engineering methods and political institutions of strong states as role models, means that a political structure is superimposed onto a political culture that has no intrinsic relationship to this structure. Strong states are strong precisely because their political structures reflect the deeper political culture of their societies. Such harmony is at the core of political legitimacy. If there is no harmony between culture and

structure, the imposition of an alien political structure is doomed to fail one way or the other. The current problem with democratisation processes is that the suggested political structure (parliamentary multi-partyism and general elections) is too simplistic and generalised, while the political culture into which it is inserted has certain perverse and counter-productive (from the point of view of political legitimacy) features. This suggests that both proposed structure and existing culture have to be adjusted or modified to achieve success in the transition to democracy. Such adjustments and modifications are also conflict generating.

In addition to the above three dimensions, it should further be noted that systems of patronage, in particular in Africa and in the former eastern bloc of countries, constitute a formidable societal force: they have survived colonialism, communism or attempts at socialist transformation and the onslaught of structural adjustment. In Africa, in particular, they are grounded in a basically sound political culture of consensus seeking, albeit oftentimes perverted and fragmented with the passage of time. However, it seems advisable to make the positive elements of this formidable strength part of the solution, and not to see it as a key problem that must be eliminated. In sum, it may be that the way forward is to go for a paradox, a paradox we may tentatively call *Weberian patrimonialism*. The following reflections are intended as points of departure for a process aimed at dealing with the problems identified above.

In Lieu of Recommendations: Ten Reflections

1. The arguments made in this paper and the problems identified in the previous section of this chapter do not in any way constitute an argument against development assistance to democratisation processes. To the contrary, they offer powerful arguments and incentives to continue and expand such assistance. However, donor must continuously reassess how, with what purposes and with which effects its funds are spent. This paper suggests that there is a need for such a *reassessment* among donors in general. The risk of generating counterproductive outcomes—such as façade democracy, autocracy or war—must be minimised.
2. Too much attention is still being paid to the exportation of a particular democratic structure. It is in most cases unlikely that an almost exclusive focus on multi-party systems and parliamentary elections is an optimal strategy. It is understandable that resources are invested in such measurable features of our own democratic structures in the West. However, given the problems identified in this paper, less attention should be given to the specific mechanics and constitutional engineering of any one model of democracy. Instead, donors should focus on the concept of legitimacy, vertical and horizontal, as the goal and philosophical point of departure for mapping out democratisation assistance. Political conditionalities should be altered, not abandoned. They should refer to *norms and principles of democracy*—such as tolerance, rule of law, human rights—rather than to specific political structures.

3. Building on the previous point, it is *dangerous to move to multi-party elections too fast*. As this point is both controversial and crucial, it needs some further expanding on. It may be argued that, instead of early elections, a process of democratisation should perhaps in many cases begin by a consensus-seeking exercise, which sets out to create broad national cohesion around the rules of the political game. How should the country be run? How should power be exercised? How should decisions about this be made? How should the problematic issue of the need for retribution and justice versus the need for stability be dealt with? Acceptable ground rules should be identified and codified jointly by all important actor groupings in society. It might be important in many cases to involve elements of the political “third force” in the search for a workable constitution and other ground rules. Third force politicians- while often being less well-known than the incumbent leadership and the core figures in the opposition movement and lacking in popular authority- can often in reality find it easier than the major political actors to represent the voices of the society at large. They might be able to defuse tensions between, for example, the incumbent, the military and the opposition, or prevent them from making elite agreements at the expense of ordinary citizens. In other cases, it might be useful to initiate processes at other levels that parallel the formal democratisation process at national level and create positive synergy effects. This process must be allowed to take time. Without a proper process, the goal will never be achieved. It is difficult to move from inter-group fears and suspicions to shared goals and mutual trust. Furthermore, it takes time to establish a political structure that conforms to age-old political cultures. It takes even more time to modify that culture. After all, Sweden’s transition from autocracy to democracy lasted for over 500 years under much more favourable conditions than those prevailing in today’s weak states. National conferences, broad-based reconciliation forums, constitution-making conferences and “Great Indabas” would seem to be examples of appropriate vehicles, and hence, they should receive external support.
4. The debate on whether the state or civil society should be supported in a democratisation process should be terminated. It is not a zero-sum game. It is *equally necessary to support both societal organisations and the state*. Civil society needs support in order to function as a watchdog on the state and as a vehicle for channelling popular demands towards the state. The state must be supported so that it can meet these demands and lay down the rules for societal interaction. It is futile for a child to demand a weekly allowance from its parents if these parents are broke and unemployed.
5. In a similar vein, it makes sense to support *processes of decentralisation*, but only under certain conditions. Decentralisation in its many forms has the potential to bring political power and political accountability closer to the people and thus increase the sense of legitimate rule and meaningful participation in political processes among citizens. However, there are absolutely crucial caveats to this. There must be something to

decentralise. You cannot decentralise something that was never centralised and workable. A state apparatus that is in effect an empty shell is pointless to decentralise. Similarly, decentralising a kleptocratic system will not solve anything. Decentralisation is pointless or counterproductive as a structure for increased legitimacy if it not filled with content. This means material resources and it means human capital, both of which are goods in short supply in a weak state. Donors can contribute substantially to alleviating such shortages.

6. Donors should, in general, seek to assist in doing something about the *negative dimensions of patrimonialism*. These include political exclusion, the tendency to reward loyalty instead of efficiency and, thirdly, bad forms of corruption. It is also argued in this context that political justice in many cases has pre-eminence over its close companion poverty eradication if the goal, at least if the goal is legitimacy and conflict avoidance. The logic behind this conclusion is simply that leaders at the head of any unjust political structure will always find a way of co-opting added material resources into their personalised patronage system. Put differently, more resources to bad leaders or to a bad system will not improve the distribution patterns within that system.
7. A crucial factor in democratisation processes is to manage the problem of the security sector and its role in the process and in the emerging political order. Soldiers and policemen must review their role and realise that they are loyal guardians of the new political dispensation and protectors of the people. This is at the heart of *security sector reforms* and it is absolutely crucial for democratisation to succeed. Another, and much less frequently discussed dimension of security sector reforms is that it is essential to raise the material standing and status of those that are ultimately to be the guarantors and defenders of the new legitimate and democratic order. Soldiers and policemen must be well-paid and provided with the necessary resources for them to do their job and perform their duties.
8. Items 4 to 7 above have this in common: they *demand more resources for and local ownership of the democratisation process*. Resources for the state must be generated in numerous ways. There is a particular need to support the emergence of a just taxation system, improved administrative capacities and the rule of law. But donor assistance is not only a question of direct resource transfers. They must be complemented by policy changes in other areas, changes that will create a more enabling environment for democratic reform. For example, codes of conduct for foreign companies interested in investing in the country, reductions in the, for weak states, so devastating agro-protectionism of the Western countries and, more generally, improvements regarding barriers of trade. Such income generation is crucial for the authority and legitimacy of the state and of the new political dispensation. Citizens will give legitimacy to the reform process to the extent that it is perceived as their own process and to the extent that it contributes to improvements in their individual security and socio-economic well-being. The logic behind structural adjustment programmes and the majority of measures usually included in such programmes should thus be abandoned.

9. There should be a *regional dimension* when democratisation is supported in a weak state. Borders between weak states are porous. Problems as well as progress spill easily across borders. Therefore, surrounding states may be quite decisive in determining the success or failure of any democratisation process. A new balance between local, national and regional actors and interaction dynamics is a prominent feature in the post-Cold War world. Thus, regional interaction may promote non-violent solutions to transition-related conflicts.
10. The above nine reflections are aimed at supporting non-violent and genuine democratisation. They also place a lot of *responsibility* on the weak state's internal actors. In effect, the "conditionalities" implied could, in certain respects, be seen as more demanding than those belonging to the SAP-era. Similarly, the likelihood of successful donor support would increase immensely if there could be more of co-ordination and cohesion, and less of nationalistic chauvinism and ignorance, among donors. Swedish development assistance is definitely not based on chauvinism and ignorance, to the contrary. But Sweden is a small actor and an important task for this country would seem to be to, together with like-minded donors, influence other and more powerful bilateral and multilateral donors to perceive of the problems and possible solutions to democratisation assistance in a manner conducive to the analyses and findings presented in this report.

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