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**LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE:
ALTERNATIONS IN POWER AND
POPULAR PERSPECTIVES ON
DEMOCRATIC DURABILITY IN AFRICA**

by Wonbin Cho and Carolyn Logan

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Looking Toward the Future: Alternations in Power and Popular Perspectives on Democratic Durability in Africa

Abstract

Can democracy consolidate in electoral systems without power alternations? Using public attitude data collected by the Afrobarometer in 16 sub-Saharan African countries (2005-6), as well as country-level variables, this study examines how alternations in power resulting from electoral contests affect mass perceptions of the durability of democracy. Periodic alternation among power holders widens the pool of those who feel that they have a stake in the system, and reminds elected officials that they can be held accountable by voters. Multilevel analysis finds that the public perceives that a lack of alternation among power holders undermines democracy, lessening the chances that it will endure. This perception is more pronounced among those affiliated with the excluded opposition; those who prefer the ruling party are more sanguine about the prospects for a democratic future. This gap in perceptions of democratic durability narrows considerably in systems where one or more alternations have occurred.

Introduction

It has been almost two decades since the African version of the third wave of democratization started in Namibia in 1989, and the prospects for democratization remain one of the most important political issues on the continent. Since emerging from the initial transition phase, however, progress toward the more demanding goals of democratic consolidation and institutionalization has been uneven. Many countries experienced seemingly promising transitions that have since been stymied by rulers who have become adept at manipulating “competitive” elections to their own ends. In Zambia, for example, the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) replaced the incumbent United National Independence Party (UNIP) in 1991 in the first multiparty election following 19 years of one-party rule (and a total of 27 years under UNIP rule). But the MMD now utilizes many of the same manipulative methods to hang on to power that UNIP once employed (Bratton and Posner 1999). The pattern of historic founding multiparty elections followed by declining political competitiveness and entrenchment of ruling parties and presidents has become all too familiar across the continent (Diamond 1999; Bratton 1999). This trend is coupled with the unprecedented phenomenon of competitively elected regimes that survive despite widespread poverty and serious inequalities (van de Walle 2002; Lindberg 2006).

Periodic alternation among the holders of top political office is considered a cornerstone of democracy, and should, in principle, have a number of beneficial effects. Most importantly, it widens the pool of those who feel that they have a strong stake in the system, since opposition parties in the short-term may nonetheless have hopes of becoming the ruling party in the future. Secondly, it reminds power-holders that they may actually be held accountable by voters for their actions and decisions, and could face real challenges to their hold on power if they do not satisfy public demands and expectations. And facing the real prospect that they will eventually find themselves leading the opposition may incline leaders to be more circumspect in allocating powers to the ruling party and strengthen mechanisms of accountability.

Yet even among some of the best performing democracies in Africa, executive power alternations are strikingly infrequent. This raises important questions about the prospects for democracy on the continent. Can democracy consolidate in electoral systems that do not undergo power alternations? Or, will permanent losers abandon democracy and pursue power by other means in order to secure opportunities for themselves that could not be captured via electoral politics? In sum, are the long-term prospects for democracy significantly reduced in countries where *de facto* one-party dominance has replaced *de jure* one-party rule as the order of the day?

To answer these questions, this study examines how alternations in power that result from electoral contests affect mass perceptions of the durability of democracy. We also explore how these perceptions differ among political “winners” who are close to the current ruling party, as compared to “losers” who are affiliated with the opposition. We find that, consistent with expectations, the public perceives that a lack of alternation among power holders undermines democracy, lessening the chances that it will endure. And this perception is, as predicted, more pronounced among those affiliated with the excluded opposition; those who prefer the ruling party are, not surprisingly, more sanguine about the qualities of their democratic system, and the prospects for a democratic future. This gap in perceptions of the durability of democracy between winners and losers narrows considerably, however, in systems where one or more alternations have in fact occurred.

Elections and the Durability of Democracy

Democratic consolidation requires widespread agreement on the rules of the game of competing for power. Such agreement must be built on a broad and deep belief – among both elites and the mass public – that a democratic regime is the most appropriate for the society (Linz and Stepan 1995; Diamond 1999). Public political support (or popular legitimation) is therefore a necessary component of democratic consolidation (Easton 1965). A number of studies have thus used mass-level survey data on popular support for democracy to evaluate the popular legitimacy of political systems (Weatherford 1992; Anderson and Guillory 1997; Norris 1999; Moehler 2005; Cho and Bratton 2006).

This study shifts attention to popular perceptions about the likely durability of democratic regimes. In contrast to indicators of personal support for democracy, which tell us about an individual's own degree of attachment to a democratic system, assessments of the likely durability of democracy tell us about whether individuals think their society as a whole is developing an enduring commitment to democratic practice. We are particularly interested in the effect that the outcomes of national elections have on popular evaluations of how resilient democracy is likely to be.

In a democracy, multiparty elections are a core institution for expressing popular preferences, and connecting citizens and the state. The conduct of repeated multiparty elections is considered a necessary minimal condition to indicate both the presence and consolidation of democracy. Yet only a few studies have explored the direct impacts of multiparty elections on democratization in emerging democracies. Studying nations in Latin America, Seligson and Booth (1995) and Eisenstadt (2004) argue that having a series of free and fair elections promoted democracy by opening up political space for citizens, and inspiring the use of electoral processes as the main vehicle for challenging the ruling regime. This enabled people to mobilize and pursue their interests, petition government and local authorities, and obtain and exchange information. Elections have, in effect, expanded civil liberties.

Similarly, for sub-Saharan Africa, Barkan (2000) and Lindberg (2006a) argue that repeated multiparty elections contribute to democratization. They note that the preparation for and holding of elections often gives rise to increased room to maneuver for political actors, even when the elections are flawed. The space for civil society and the media thus increases, and gains made in the political arena are often then used to increase freedom in the social sphere as well. Lindberg's (2006a) empirical analysis shows that "after third elections regime breakdowns occur only in very rare instances" (3).

Assessments of democratic consolidation based solely on elections have, however, been criticized for risking "the fallacy of electoralism" (Karl 1989). According to this argument, formal procedures for elections do not create a democracy because, as experiences in Latin America and elsewhere have shown, elections can coexist with systematic abuses of human rights and disenfranchisement of large segments of the population. A significant number of Africanists have likewise questioned the role of multiparty elections in advancing democratization on the continent (Chabal and Daloz 1999; Ottaway 1999). Among other things, they note that even when opposition parties are able to oust incumbents through elections, they nonetheless face the same virtually irresistible incentives to maintain neopatrimonial networks, which are typically viewed as an obstacle to democratization.

While these analysts correctly emphasize that elections and democracy are not synonymous, elections nonetheless remain fundamental, not only for the installation of democratic governments, but for broader democratic consolidation. The regularity, openness, and quality of elections provide one signal of whether the basic constitutional, behavioral, and attitudinal foundations are being laid for sustainable democratic rule.

But these analysts make it clear that we need to look beyond just the frequency or even the quality of multiparty elections: outcomes matter too. Thus, in our exploration of the impacts of multiparty elections on popular perception of democratic durability, this study focuses not just on the number of elections, but on the number of alternations in executive power that result. Przeworski (1986), for example, argues that democratization is a process of institutionalizing uncertainty, and that alternation in power leads to manifest institutionalization of uncertainty. In a democracy, no one should be able to win once and for all: even if successful at one time, victors should immediately face the prospect of having to struggle again in the future. A party's current position within the political system should not uniquely determine its chances of succeeding in the future. Incumbency may constitute an advantage in electoral competition, but it should not, in principle, be sufficient to guarantee re-election.

Samuel Huntington (1991) applies a more demanding "two-turnover test" as an indicator of democratic consolidation. He argues that democratic consolidation occurs when the winners of founding elections are defeated and peacefully hand over power in a subsequent election, and the new winners themselves later

peacefully turn over power to the winners of a later election. The first electoral turnover is viewed as a symbol that voters can oust a ruler and opposition groups can be a viable alternative to run the government. However, without the second turnover, we cannot be sure that the new winners are themselves sufficiently committed to democracy to surrender power after losing an election. The second electoral turnover demonstrates that both elites and the public accept democracy as a way of changing rulers, not regimes.

Schedler (2000) criticizes the “two-turnover test” as providing neither necessary nor sufficient indicators for assessing the democratic commitment of political competitors because it is exceedingly specific and context-insensitive. For example, such models cannot account for the enduring historical legacy that continues to significantly privilege the African National Congress (ANC) over other parties in South Africa even in a context of high levels of political and civil freedom.¹ Nonetheless, turnovers can serve as a useful, if imperfect, indicator. The occurrence of electoral turnovers in the first place, and the way political actors – especially incumbent power holders – respond when they do occur, provide strong signals of the democratic commitments of both elites and mass publics. Are power holders willing to submit themselves to a popular vote under conditions where there is a real possibility that they will lose power? Is the public willing to accept the “risk” of overturning the status quo and voting for untested opposition parties? And if the incumbents lose, are they willing to accept the will of the public and peacefully hand over power? Positive answers to these questions clearly demonstrate strong commitment to the democratic rules of the game.

On the other hand, incumbent efforts to suppress competition or otherwise circumvent turnovers, as well as popular aversion to voting against incumbents in the first place, raise stark questions about a society’s level of democratic commitment. In fact, the evidence suggests that a lack of ruling party alternation does not bode well for the consolidation of African democracies. The failure to establish a credible opposition continues to limit the public’s real choices, and provides few incentives for the emergence of a truly responsive and representative political system. Under such circumstances, political elites remain largely disconnected from their constituents. Earlier findings of the Afrobarometer also indicate that leadership alternation has a temporal, positive impact on popular assessments of the extent of democracy, while Africans’ commitment to democracy decays in the absence of alternation (Bratton 2004). In Ghana, for example, citizens’ perceptions of the extent of democracy increased by 30 percentage points two years after they observed an alternation in power following the 2000 presidential election. In contrast, in Zambia, where more than a decade had elapsed since an electoral alternation, popular perceptions of the extent of democracy dropped by more than 10 percentage points between 1999 and 2003. Similarly, Moehler and Lindberg (2007) argue that “power alternations also appear to *generate* shared understandings between winners and losers” (emphasis in original) and that alternations therefore can have critical moderating effects on the polarization that otherwise may cause losers to question the legitimacy of their political systems (3).

But do African publics share these negative perceptions of the implications of a lack of alternations? Do they, like many analysts, interpret successful alternations as a strong indicator of the strength of their democracies, and conversely, a lack of alternations as a sign of democratic fragility? Or might they interpret constancy as a *positive* sign of stability?

In evaluating this question, we must keep in mind that alternations may fail to occur for a variety of reasons. Ruling parties tend to enjoy some “natural” benefits of incumbency, ranging from name recognition to the advantages of even well-regulated control over state resources. But there is little doubt that incumbent administrations often employ a host of increasingly subtle and sophisticated techniques to preserve the appearance of competitive politics while doing their utmost to undermine the opposition and prevent any real challenge to their hold on power. At the same time, the weakness of often disorganized or self-serving opposition efforts also contributes to incumbent success in a number of countries (see, for example, LeBas

¹ The formation of the breakaway Congress of the People (COPE) party after splits formed within the ANC in late 2008 raised the prospect that the effects of this legacy might not be permanent. However, COPE’s relatively weak performance in the April 2009 elections – it placed third after the Democratic Alliance with just 7% of the vote, compared to 66% for the ANC – suggests that the era of ANC dominance of South African politics is far from over.

2006). We would expect that, to the extent that the public recognizes these failures in elite commitment to democracy, their confidence in the durability of democracy will be undermined by a lack of alternations.

But the public must also play a role in bringing about power alternations by showing a willingness not just to participate in elections, but to actually cast votes for the opposition if necessary, ousting incumbents when the governing party performs poorly or does not adequately represent the public interest. Logan (2008) presents evidence that although African publics support democracy in broad terms, they may nonetheless be reluctant alternators. Whether for cultural reasons rooted in a history of consensus-based decision making and deference to leaders, or more pragmatic reasons rooted in fear of instability or of being cut off from the perks of power, Africans appear to be more wary of competitive multiparty politics – and presumably, therefore, of power alternation – than standard liberal democratic theory would anticipate. And experiences such as Kenya’s following the December 2007 elections, or Madagascar’s following the 2001 poll, suggest that publics are not without justification in fearing that alternation, or even just the possibility of alternation, may itself *undermine* rather than strengthen their political systems and threaten social stability (although the recent and much more successful outcome, leading to a peaceful alternation after a similarly closely contested election in Ghana in December 2008, offers a strong counter-example). Thus, while we broadly expect to find that publics, like analysts, will perceive that alternations are good for the future of democracy, we cannot necessarily take a positive linkage between alternations and perceptions of democratic durability completely for granted.

Alternations in Power: The Record in Africa

Based on the relative infrequency of electoral turnovers, the evidence suggests that in many countries democratic commitments may still be quite weak. While the continent has undergone the “routinisation of multiparty elections” (Van de Walle 2003: 299; see also Lindberg 2006a; Bratton 2007), and a significant number of countries have experienced alternations as a result of their initial multiparty election, alternations have in fact become a relatively rare occurrence. Electoral contests led to power alternations in 20 out of 48 sub-Saharan African countries between 1989 and 2005 (Lindberg 2006a). Madagascar and Benin lead the continent with three turnovers each. But the overall pattern is nonetheless fairly clear: in the vast majority of countries, the party that won the first post-1989 “founding” or “transition” election has remained in power ever since (van de Walle 2003).

This pattern of one-party dominance replicates the experiences of the handful of countries that have enjoyed democracy since before the recent transition period beginning in 1989 – i.e., Botswana, Senegal and (with interruptions) the Gambia – all of which also exhibited patterns of one-party dominance (although Senegal has since experienced a turnover in its 2000 national election). Mauritius, which has experienced frequent shifts in the parties comprising the country’s ruling coalition, is the only long-standing exception.

Among those that have made the transition to multiparty politics more recently, only a handful – led by Benin, Cape Verde and Madagascar – have not displayed clear patterns of one-party dominance. There is no question that in many countries access to political office is more competitive than it used to be, and that opposition parties hold more seats in parliament now than in the past. It nonetheless appears that in many cases, African states have merely shifted from *de jure* one-party systems to *de facto* dominant party systems. Van de Walle (2003) notes that “success in the first multiparty election proved to be the key to political dominance in the 1990s” (298), and that the “striking pattern of African transitions has been the absence of alternation” (301). In fact, among the 16 countries included in this study, only two (Benin and Kenya) had changed ruling party in the most recent national election prior to Afrobarometer Round 3 surveys (2005-2006), and none unseated an incumbent national ruler; 10 incumbents were re-elected to serve another term, and in the remaining countries, incumbents did not run, usually due to term limits, but their parties won with new candidates.

But the record of contested or short-circuited alternations must also be noted. There are numerous examples where popular votes in favor of alternation (or that may at least have seriously threatened such change) have been rejected by incumbent power-holders. The outcomes have varied. Madagascar and Benin lead the

continent with three turnovers each. However, while in Benin peaceful alternations followed the presidential elections of 1991, 1996 and 2006, the third turnover in Madagascar following its 2001 presidential election led to a serious political crisis in 2002. The apparently popular but unconstitutional ouster of the re-elected Ravalomanana regime in early 2009 suggests that the events of 2002 were indicative not of the strength of democracy, but rather of its weakness. Electoral alternations have directly translated into more permanent breakdowns in the political process in Burundi, Comoros, Sierra Leone, and the Republic of Congo, while Kenya is still recovering from the violence and instability following its closely contested 2007 elections. In that case, we will likely never know whether the public actually voted for alternation or not (Independent Review Commission 2008).

Crises such as those witnessed in Madagascar in 2002 and Kenya in 2007 may confirm Schedler's critique that neither the number nor even the outcome of a handful of elections constitutes sufficient conditions for the consolidation of democracy. While both Madagascar and Kenya appeared to weather their respective crises in the short term, neither outcome was a given, despite multiple elections *and* one or more turnovers in prior elections. And the impacts of such contested elections on popular perceptions are uncertain. On the one hand, the fact that crises followed elections seems likely to decrease popular confidence in the sustainability of democracy, perhaps sharply. On the other, if both political elites and publics manage to negotiate their way out of a crisis while preserving democracy, it may actually give way to the generalized conviction that storms can be weathered, and democracy is here to stay. The ultimate breakdown of democracy in Madagascar does not, perhaps, bode well in this regard, but we will explore these questions further in the remainder of this analysis.

The Mediating Effects of Party Affiliation

Democracy is, in part, about winning and losing according to a set of rules (Anderson, et al. 2005; Cho and Bratton 2006; Moehler and Lindberg 2007). To be sustainable, it is critical that citizens perceive that a newly introduced democracy is valid and durable whether they belong to the political majority or the minority. We would expect, however, that individuals who belong to the political majority (who we call "winners") are more likely to exhibit positive attitudes about democratic durability than those in the political minority ("losers").

But winning and losing may have different implications depending on a particular country's history of power alternation. As discussed, one-party dominant systems that do not experience regular alternation of power are common in sub-Saharan Africa (van de Walle 2003; Bratton 2004; Lindberg 2006a). In such systems, often characterized by neopatrimonial practices, presidential "big men" concentrate political and economic power in their own hands and distribute patronage awards largely to their own loyal voters: the winners. In such a "winner-takes-all" system without any executive power alternation, losers may not only have low expectations of ever winning elections, they may also harbor realistic fears that they will be permanently shut out from official patronage networks. This may in turn lead them to express negative expectations about the durability of their democratic system, in part because they may not want it to endure!

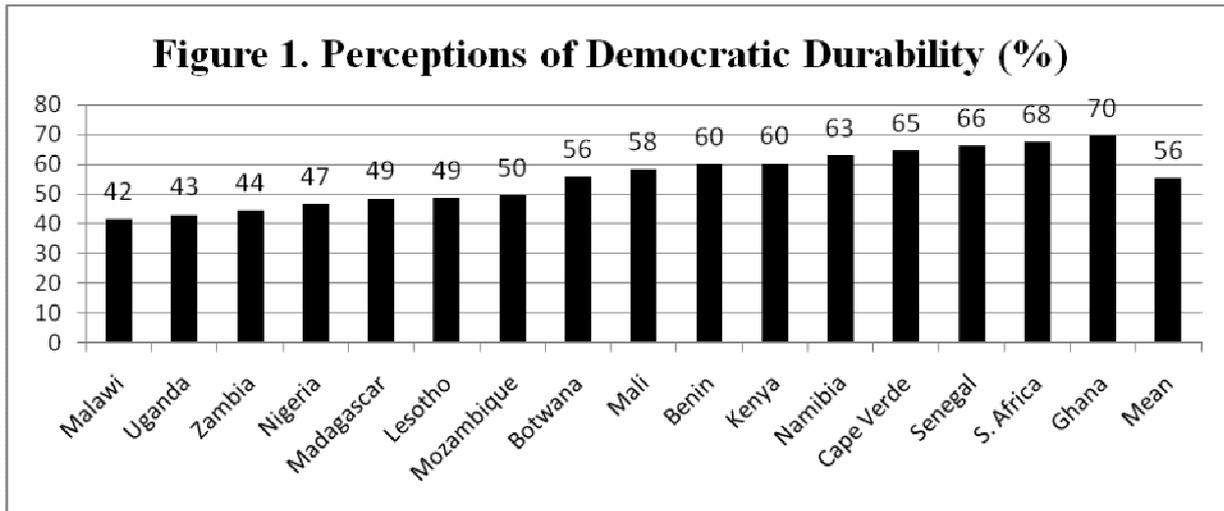
As the number of alternations in executive power increases, on the other hand, losers become winners and winners experience life as losers. Opposition parties that once ruled may perceive a realistic chance of regaining power through future elections. The new winners, conversely, are less likely to feel certain that their hold on power will be permanent. Once election outcomes are no longer viewed as pre-ordained, political elites are more likely to establish a mutual commitment to enforce limits on state authority, no matter which party or faction controls the state at any given time. Voters of all affiliations will increasingly come to make the distinction between the regime and the current government in power, and to associate their expectations and assessments of democracy less with how they personally are faring at the moment (as winners or losers) than with characteristics of the system as a whole. Under such circumstances, we would expect the distance between current winners and losers with respect to their assessments of regime durability to be reduced.

Measurement and Method

This study draws upon individual-level survey data collected during Round 3 of the Afrobarometer in 16 sub-Saharan Africa countries² between March 2005 and March 2006. The data is derived from national probability samples that range in size from 1,161 in Lesotho to 2,400 in South Africa, Nigeria and Uganda, although in the descriptive statistics reported here, the data are weighted to represent each country equally.³

Dependent Variable

The object of explanation in our analysis is citizens' perception of the durability of their democratic system. Respondents were asked: "In your opinion, how likely is it that [your country] will remain a democratic country?"



Source: Afrobarometer Round 3 data.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of favorable responses (percent saying their country is likely or very likely to remain democratic) across these 16 countries. On average, 56 percent of citizens are optimistic about the durability of their democratic system. There is, however, considerable cross-national variation, with just 42 percent of Malawians saying that their country will likely remain democratic, in comparison to more than two-thirds (70) of Ghanaians expressing similar confidence.

Independent Variables

There are two types of explanation proposed in the model: at the country level and at the individual level. The independent variable at the country level is the number of alternations in power between 1989 and 2005. This variable has been built following Huntington's (1991) "two-turnover test." We count it as a turnover when, following an election, the president is from a different party in a presidential system, or there is a new majority party or coalition in parliamentary systems. In countries where term limits have prevented an

² Benin, Botswana, Cape Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Uganda, and Zambia. Two countries surveyed by Afrobarometer in Round 3 (2005-2006) were excluded from this analysis. In Zimbabwe the Afrobarometer used a shorter questionnaire in order to complete fieldwork more quickly in a tense political environment, so a number of the key variables included in this analysis were not available in the Zimbabwe data set. Tanzania was excluded because some of the core questions about democracy were administered differently in Tanzania in Round 3 compared to other countries, and the results may therefore not be fully comparable. For more information on the project methodology, results and publications, see the Afrobarometer website at www.afrobarometer.org.

³ Samples of this size yield a margin of sampling error for country statistics of +/- 2 to 3% at a 95% confidence level. Note that Afrobarometer surveys are concentrated in countries that have undergone at least some degree of political and economic liberalization, so the results cannot be taken as representative of sub-Saharan Africa as a whole.

incumbent from competing again, we do not count it as a turnover when the new president comes from the same party as his predecessor. Finally, in the unusual case where there has been no alternation in the presidency, but the opposition takes control of the legislature (as happened in the 2004 Malawi elections) we code this as 0.5 points.

Table 1. Country Context

Country	No. of Alternations in Power, 1989-2005 ^a	No. of Successive Repetitive Multiparty Elections ^b	2005 GDP Annual Growth Rate (%) ^c	2005 FHI ^d
Benin	3	4	1.4	2
Botswana	0	8	4.8	2
Cape Verde	2	3	3.4	1
Ghana	1	4	2.0	1.5
Kenya	1	3	-0.1	3
Lesotho	1	3	2.3	2.5
Madagascar	3	5	-0.7	3
Malawi	1.5	3	1.0	4
Mali	1	4	2.2	2
Mozambique	0	3	4.3	3.5
Namibia	1	4	1.4	2
Nigeria	0	2	0.8	4
South Africa	1	3	0.6	1.5
Senegal	1	6	1.2	2.5
Uganda	0	2	3.2	4.5
Zambia	1	3	-0.3	4

a. If the incumbent government did not retain power after founding elections, for example, Namibia in 1989, Lesotho in 1993, and South Africa in 1994, we treated this case as an alternation in power.

b. Numbers are as of Dec. 31, 2005. Source: Lindberg (2006) and African elections database available at <http://africanelections.tripod.com>

c. Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators 2007.

d. Source: Freedom House. Average score of political rights and civil liberties.

The main independent variable at the individual level is partisan status. This is a dummy variable that measures whether a respondent is a “winner” who feels close to the ruling party (code=1), or is either affiliated with the opposition, or unaffiliated (i.e., a “loser” or a “non-partisan”, (code=0)).⁴

Control Variables

Our model also includes a series of control variables that account for other factors that may also have an impact on citizen perceptions of the political systems. The control variables can again be divided into country-level and individual-level variables.

At the country-level, we include three control variables. By including the number of successive multiparty elections, we can essentially test whether the public buys into arguments about the importance of the sheer number of multiparty elections for democratic consolidation. Including the 2005 GDP growth rate allows us to examine whether the public perceives that the future of democracy will be determined more by politics or by economic performance. We also control for the current level of democracy by including the 2005 Freedom House rankings, using an average score of political rights and civil liberties.

At the individual level, we control for assessments of election quality to test whether the public may be concerned more with how elections are conducted than with their outcomes. We also control for support for

⁴ A second dummy variable, codes non-partisans (as well as those who “don’t know” if they have a party affiliation) as 1, and both winners and losers as 0.

democracy and for multiparty elections so that we can separate what is perhaps mere wishful thinking (those who support democracy presumably want it to endure) from more critical analysis of democratic prospects. We similarly control for current levels of satisfaction with democracy to distinguish predictions based simply on present democratic performance from those based on a more critical assessment of the level of societal commitment to a democratic future.

We also include additional tests of whether confidence in democracy is based primarily on instrumental assessments of regime performance rather than on political or procedural criteria by including individual-level economic performance evaluations (personal and national). Finally, we control for demographics. Coding procedures and descriptive statistics for all variables are described in the appendix.

Multilevel Analysis

In order to explore citizens' perceptions of the durability of their democratic system, our data set for this study is constructed with both individual and country level variables. Due to the multilevel structure of the data set – survey respondents are nested within countries – we estimate our model using multilevel analysis (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002). Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis creates a number of statistical problems, including underestimating the standard errors for country-level variables, which constitute key independent variables in this study. OLS also assumes that there is constant variance and no clustering. Multilevel analysis, in contrast, allows us to estimate a model with varying intercepts and slopes, and provides for a direct estimation of variance components at both levels of the model (Steenbergen and Jones 2002).

Given our theoretical goal, our multilevel model requires the specification of three equations:

$$Perceptions_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}winner_{ij} + \dots + \beta_{kj}x_{kij} + \varepsilon_{ij} \quad (1)$$

$$\begin{aligned} \beta_{0j} = & \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}alternations_j + \gamma_{02}number\ of\ multiparty\ elections_j \\ & + \gamma_{03}2005\ GDP\ growth\ rate_j + \gamma_{04}FHI_j + \delta_{0j} \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

$$\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{01} + \gamma_{11}turnover_j + \delta_{1j} \quad (3)$$

The first equation models the influence of k individual-level predictors on citizens' perceptions of the durability of their democratic system across j countries. Equation 2 models the effects of the number of turnovers, along with other control variables, on cross-national differences in popular perceptions of democratic durability. Equation 3 models the interaction between the number of turnovers and partisan status (winner). The interaction is captured by estimating the effects of the number of turnovers in a country on the coefficient for "winner" in Equation 1. Unlike OLS, multilevel analysis does not assume that country-level predictors completely account for the variation in the individual-level parameters with the disturbance terms in equation (2) and (3).

Results

Table 2 shows the results for our models estimating the direct effects of the number of alternations in power and partisan status (Model 1), as well as the interactive effects of these two variables (Model 2), on popular perceptions of the durability of democracy. The results provide clear evidence in support of our main hypothesis: individuals in countries with a greater number of alternations in executive power perceive their systems to be more durable than those who have not experienced alternations. Model 1 shows that the coefficient for turnovers is positive and statistically significant.

While there have been debates about the effects of multiparty elections on democratic stability in emerging democracies, this result clearly shows that if those elections lead to power turnovers that are eventually accepted by key political actors, then people are more likely to expect their democratic system to endure. As

we have noted, in many countries there are numerous impediments to actually ousting incumbent ruling parties, including risk-averse publics that may be unwilling to upset the status quo, as well as ruling parties that do their best, through both fair means and foul, to preserve their position in power, and opposition parties that fail to compellingly demonstrate that they are serious contenders and well-suited to ruling their countries. When turnovers occur despite these hurdles, the public, like many democracy analysts, appears to interpret this as indicative of a strong commitment – perhaps especially among political elites – to preserving democratic norms.

Our results also show that people who feel close to the party in power have more positive attitudes about the durability of their democratic system: as expected, citizens in the political majority think the political system is more likely to survive than those in the minority. This may suggest that losers simply do not trust the democratic commitments of the current winners as much as winners themselves do. Perhaps losers believe, for example, that the winners are holding on to power by undemocratic means, and that winners thus undermine – and would perhaps go so far as to overturn – the democratic system in the interest of hanging on to power. Alternatively, their greater pessimism about democratic durability may reflect a sentiment among losers that the system does not seem to be working in their favor, and that perhaps they would be better off with an alternative system. A next step in this analysis will be to explore this question further.

Table 2. Individual and Country-Level Predictors of Perceptions of Democratic Durability

Independent Variables	Multi-level Model 1		Multi-level Model 2	
	Coefficients	S.E.	Coefficients	S. E.
<i>Fixed Effects</i>				
Country-level				
Alternations in power	0.061*	0.026	0.070*	0.027
Alternations x Winner			-0.034*	0.016
Number of multiparty elections	-0.027	0.015	-0.027	0.015
2005 GDP growth rates	-0.038*	0.016	-0.039*	0.016
Democratization (reversed average FHI, 2005)	0.069*	0.023	0.070*	0.023
Individual-level				
Winner	0.066**	0.018	0.093**	0.022
Non-partisan	-0.008	0.018	0.009	0.018
Support for multiparty elections	0.097**	0.018	0.097**	0.018
Quality of elections	0.068**	0.007	0.068**	0.007
Support for democracy	0.151**	0.015	0.151**	0.015
Satisfaction with Democracy	0.316**	0.007	0.316**	0.007
National economy	0.045**	0.007	0.045**	0.007
Household economy	-0.006	0.007	-0.006	0.007
Age	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001
Education	0.010*	0.004	0.009*	0.004
Gender (Female = 1)	-0.022	0.013	-0.022	0.013
Urban	0.025	0.014	0.026*	0.014
Constant	1.750**	0.124	1.747**	0.124
<i>Variance Components</i>				
Country-level	0.006*	0.002	0.006*	0.003
Individual-level	0.645**	0.007	0.644**	0.007
-2 x Log Likelihood	39887.61		39889.61	
N	16568		16568	

Note: Entries are Restricted Maximum Likelihood estimates of coefficients.

* = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$

To test the hypothesis that alternations in executive power will moderate the effects of partisan status (winner vs. loser), Model 2 includes a cross-level interaction term between “winner” and alternations in power. The results show strong support for our argument that greater numbers of alternations in executive power narrow the gap in perceptions of democratic durability between the political majority and the minority. In contrast to a system with no alternations, where losers may fear that their position is permanent, and also perceive that democracy may be less enduring, in a system that has experienced alternations, winners and losers have exchanged places, perhaps more than once. As a result, both sides may have greater commitments themselves to the benefits, and hence the longevity, of the democratic system, and their confidence in elite commitments may be strongly reinforced as well.

Looking at the other country-level variables, the results show that once the number of alternations in power is accounted for, the direct effect of the number of successive repetitive multiparty elections is not statistically significant.⁵ This is not consistent with previous studies arguing that repeated multiparty elections contribute to democratic consolidation in young democracies (Seligson and Booth 1995; Barkan 2000; Eisenstadt 2004; Lindberg 2006a; Lindberg 2009). Election quality (an individual-level variable) is significant though. Thus, while a series of multiparty elections may connect people to the state and expand the political arena for citizens, the mere number of elections is far less important than either their quality or their outcomes in influencing popular perceptions of democratic durability.

Our models yields the perhaps unexpected result that economic development is negatively associated with popular perceptions of the durability of the democratic system at the country level. The annual GDP growth rate for 2005 has a negative, and significant (though relatively small), impact on the dependent variable. Table 1 and Figure 1 suggest the possible sources of this finding. In particular, South Africa, where the perceived durability of democracy is quite high (68 percent), had a well below-average GDP growth rate of just 0.8% of GDP in 2005, while the opposite is true for Uganda (43 percent and 3.2 percent per annum, respectively). We also note, however, that individual-level evaluations of the national economy are significantly and *positively* linked to perceptions of durability, although again, the relationship is quite weak. While these contradictory findings merit further exploration, they suggest that, at the least, Africans do not believe that actual rates of economic growth make or break the prospects for democracy.

Not surprisingly, we find that the current level of democracy (based on the 2005 Freedom House indicators) has a positive, significant impact on popular perceptions of democratic durability. Citizens in countries that are already more democratic are more likely to believe that their democratic future is secure than those in lower-ranked systems. This finding is reinforced by the fact that satisfaction – an individual-level indicator of the supply of democracy – is very strongly linked to perceptions of the future of democracy. In general, then, the more democracy people have now, the more democracy they expect to have in the future. Commitment to democracy and democratic institutions also matters: those who support democracy and who believe that elections are unequivocally the best way to select leaders exhibit more confidence in their countries’ democratic prospects than non-democrats. This perhaps suggests an element of wishful thinking: those who want democracy are more likely to expect to continue having it. But it may also reflect an individual’s sense of his or her own commitment to – and willingness to defend – democracy – and perhaps an assumption that this commitment is popularly shared, and can thus help to secure a democratic future.

Finally, we note that age and gender have no significant effect on popular perception of democratic durability, but more educated respondents are more optimistic about democracy’s prospects. The results on urbanization are mixed – it is only significant in one of the models – suggesting that any relationship between urban residence and perceptions of durability is tenuous.

⁵ At the $p \leq .05$ level.

Conclusion

The prospects for democratic consolidation in many of Africa's struggling electoral political systems remain uncertain. While political and social rights and freedoms are far better protected now than in the past, there has been far less progress toward achieving many of the other features of a high quality democracy as described by Diamond and Morlino (2005). One of the most significant failures in many countries may be the lack of true competitiveness that still characterizes a majority of African electoral systems. In country after country, leaders have learned how to "work the system," achieving, often as not, the appearance of competition – relatively free elections with the participation of multiple parties – without real substance, thus avoiding any actual threat to their hold on power, and with it, any necessity to be accountable to the public. This failure is clearly demonstrated by the *infrequency* of alternations, which stands in such sharp contrast to the quite high frequency of elections.

There are many reasons for a lack of true competitiveness, ranging from political cultures that shape the attitudes and choices of mass publics, to political maneuvering on the part of self-serving elites. The implications are not yet fully understood. If Huntington's two-turnover test is right, then many of these countries cannot look forward to a democratic future. And yet, Botswana, with one of the continent's longest standing and most resilient electoral systems – and one of its highest rated democracies according to Freedom House – has yet to experience an alternation of ruling party after 42 years of multiparty politics.

One place to begin a further exploration of the actual implications of alternations – or a lack thereof – for democratic consolidation is with the assessments of citizens themselves. Certainly their predictions about the future of democracy in their countries are not infallible. But publics can be quite good judges of their own countries' characters. For example, popular assessments of the extent of democracy across countries coincide quite closely with external ratings such as those produced by Freedom House.⁶ We do not yet have evidence to indicate how good the public is at assessing the durability of their democratic regimes, but certainly these assessments seem worthy of close analysis and consideration.

Our findings reveal that, to at least some extent, African publics do side with the analysts on this issue. Lack of power alternations clearly and significantly reduces the public's expectations about democracy's future prospects. Moreover, political "losers" are also more negative about democracy's future than political "winners," though these effects are moderated by increasing power alternations, when winners and losers trade places.

But our findings also suggest that, at least in the view of many Africans, Huntington and others may overstate the case. The public agrees that lack of turnovers undermines the prospects for democracy to some extent. But they also consider other features of their political systems when they make their assessment. In the popular analysis, competitiveness and power alternations are far from the sole determining factor that Huntington would seem to suggest. Satisfaction with democracy, or with the perceived quality (as opposed to the outcome) of elections, for example, also weigh heavily in popular judgments. Thus, we can conclude that African publics do indeed view a lack of power alternation as a political weakness, but perhaps not an insurmountable one.

⁶ The correlation between Freedom House's 2005 Index of average score of political rights and civil liberties and public assessments of the extent of democracy measured by the Afrobarometer in (2005-2006) for the 16 countries included in this study is .709. If all 18 countries surveyed by Afrobarometer in 2005-2006 are included (i.e., adding Tanzania and Zimbabwe), the correlation rises to .803.

Appendix: Question Wording and Response Codes

Dependent Variable

Perception of the durability of democracy system:

In your opinion, how likely is it that [your country] will remain a democratic system?

1 = Not at all likely, 2 = Not very likely, 3 = Likely, 4 = Very likely

Independent and Control Variables

Winner:

Which party do you feel close to?

1 = The party or parties in government, 0 = Opposition parties, none/no affiliation or don't know

Non-Partisan:

Which party do you feel close to?

1 = None/no affiliation or don't know, 0 = Ruling party or parties and opposition parties

Support for multiparty elections:

Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose statement A or statement B.

A: Since elections sometimes produce bad results, we should adopt other methods for choosing this country's leaders; B: We should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open, and honest elections.

0 = Agree very strongly with A, 0 = Agree with A, 1 = Agree with B, 1 = Agree very strongly with B.

Quality of elections:

On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election? Was it:

1 = Not free and fair, 2 = Free and fair, with major problems, 3 = Free and fair, with minor problems, 4 = Completely free and fair

Support for democracy:

Which of these statements is closest to your own opinion?

1 = Statement A: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.

0 = Statement B: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.

0 = Statement C: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.

Satisfaction with democracy:

Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in your country? Are you:

1 = Not at all satisfied, 2 = Not very satisfied, 3 = Fairly satisfied, 4 = Very satisfied

Current national economy

In general, how would you describe the present economic condition of this country?

1 = Very bad, 2 = Fairly bad, 3 = Neither good nor bad, 4 = Fairly good, 5 = Very good

Current household economy

In general, how would you describe your own present living condition?

1 = Very bad, 2 = Fairly bad, 3 = Neither good nor bad, 4 = Fairly good, 5 = Very good

Age

Actual age

Education

0 = No formal schooling, 1 = Informal schooling only, 2 = Some primary schooling, 3 = Primary schooling completed, 4 = Some secondary school/high school, 5 = Secondary school/high school completed, 6 = Post-secondary qualifications, 7 = Some university, 8 = University completed, 9 = Post-graduate

Gender
0 = Male, 1 = Female

Urban
0 = Rural, 1 = Urban

Table A.1: Descriptive statistics

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Perception of democratic durability	18195	2.87	0.91	1	4
Winner	22720	0.39	0.49	0	1
Non-partisan	22720	0.42	0.49	0	1
Support for multiparty elections	22720	0.82	0.38	0	1
Quality of elections	20658	3.03	1.06	1	4
Support for democracy	22720	0.64	0.48	0	1
Satisfaction with democracy	19501	2.60	1.01	1	4
National economy	22220	2.62	1.26	1	5
Household economy	22641	2.65	1.19	1	5
Age	22470	36.6	14.94	18	130
Education	22631	3.10	2.03	0	9
Gender (Female)	22720	0.50	0.50	0	1
Urban	22720	0.39	0.49	0	1

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