ABSTRACT

PARTY REGULATION IN EAST AFRICA: ETHNIC PARTY BANS IN COMPARISON

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The re-introduction of multiparty politics in Africa gave rise to a hitherto unknown wave of party regulation across the continent. While the regulations cover a wide variety of topics such as party finance, internal organization, registration procedures and campaign procedures, it is particularly striking that almost all sub-Saharan countries opted for specific rules on ethnic and other identity based parties. Given widespread fears that ethnic parties might foster violent conflict, African lawmakers chose in a majority of cases to outlaw this type of party. While the banning of identity based parties has therefore become a dominant paradigm in both the political discourse and the legal practice in sub-Saharan Africa, academic research has up to now largely neglected the issue.

This paper takes a closer look at three country cases in Eastern Africa: Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. Initially all of them followed different strategies in dealing with identity based parties after 1990. However, Kenya and Uganda finally opted for a regulation model that closely resembles Tanzanian party regulation. The paper discusses first the justification each country has given for its party regulation, and in a second step presents some first findings on the implementation of the laws as well as their impact on political parties and party competition in the three countries. In a final step, the effect of party bans on democracy and violent conflict in the three countries will be discussed. The paper draws on field research done by the author as well as research undertaken in the context of a larger project on ethnic party bans in Africa.