

ABSTRACT

THE CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF COALITION GOVERNMENTS IN AFRICA: EXAMINING THE ATTEMPTS BY KENYA AND ZIMBABWE

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Constitutional amendments in many African countries ushered multi-party politics in the continent in the early 1990s. The multi-party era has seen fierce competition among political parties for the presidency and representation at the parliamentary and local government levels. Unfortunately, party elites have been unable to chart out ideological and programmatic contents that would be the basis for party strength and support. Instead, the support of major political parties in most African countries today are either ethnic or in other ways trivial. Many of the countries are highly polarized as the curtains fall on the reign of nationalist parties and politics gets more personalized and ethnicized. Elections are highly divisive exercises and often threaten the very existence of the state.

In Kenya and Zimbabwe, there have been recent attempts at power sharing to avoid governance crises in the two countries. Kenya has a slightly longer history of power-sharing though. This paper examines the challenges of coalition governments in these two countries and offers suggestions for reforms in the governance order that would improve the political environment for future coalition building. The underlying assumption is that African countries will increasingly have to carve out coalitions of one form or the other to promote shared rule and prevent the collapse of the states. The paper assesses the extent to which Arend Lijphart's nine conditions for consociational democracy – i.e. Balance of power, multi-party system, 'small' size country, clarity of cleavages, crosscutting cleavages, overarching loyalties, representative party system, segmental isolation and federalism and tradition of elite accommodation - are met in these two countries and what the varied degrees of compliance portend for inclusive governance and reforms towards that goal.