

Abstract

ROAPE Panel on Democracy and Local Power III

DISCIPLINED DEMOCRACY AND RESOURCE NATIONALISM IN ZAMBIA'S THIRD REPUBLIC: RESULTS AND PROSPECTS

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Nearly two decades since Zambia's return of multi-party democracy, the country's political system and culture remains undeveloped, for example in its dominance by the Movement for Multi-party Democracy, which has governed continuously since 1991. Whilst orthodox political science tends to portray such limitations in institutional terms (for example the domination of Presidential power), a more convincing explanation locates Zambia's limited democracy in relation to the country's external dependency and the ways in which this has stunted the development of a polity accountable to indigenous aspirations and discontents.

The early 2000s saw the granting of substantial debt relief and an international boom in the price of Zambia's primary economic resource, its copper and cobalt mines. Whilst economic liberalisation restricted the benefits that accrued to Zambians from the minerals boom, it generated widespread discontent at the skewed distribution of mining profits in ways which replicated important aspects of the country's colonial and post-colonial history. This was articulated by the Patriotic Front in the 2006 and (to a lesser extent) the 2008 elections, but has not been strongly articulated by civil society. This paper assesses the prospects for a more sustained expression of resource nationalism of the type which has reshaped democratic politics in Latin America in the last decade, particularly in the context of the global economic downturn.