

Part V: Conclusion

Africanists allude to the relationship between party system institutionalization and conflict; unfortunately, many researchers marginalize, and in many cases wholly disregard African political parties because they do not follow the pattern established in Western Europe. Similarly, conflict theories provide contradictory findings and fail to account for important political events that are inextricably linked with conflicts. African political parties often operate in nations that are weakly organized and that are relatively young. They are properly characterized as dysfunctional and corrupt. In fact, many scholars and policymakers lament the conflicts in Africa and bemoan the corrupt parties. Often there are descriptive accounts about how parties contribute to conflict by excluding and marginalizing ethnic minorities (who are often excluded from the benefits of clientelism). Yet, despite these faults, parties do operate and do have a substantial impact upon the African landscape.

Empirical research into the relationship between African political parties and conflict is woefully deficient. In fact, numerous qualitative case studies descriptively highlight the interaction between weak political party institutions and conflict. I have attempted to bridge this gap by quantitatively examining the link between party system institutionalization and conflict. The results of this study, although preliminary, indicate that there is strong evidence that party system institutionalization is a significant predictor of conflict.

The potential implications from this study are tremendous because they suggest that if the goal is to reduce conflict and thereby increase development and economic growth, then foreign aid may better aimed at making the party system more robust and accountable. To disregard this political institution as an essential component in reducing conflict will likely ensure that conflict will continue unabated and corruption will continue to flourish.