

# Candidate Selection and Party Stability in New, 'Divided' Democracies

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## Abstract

This dissertation is about how political parties – competing in 'divided' societies – select parliamentary candidates, and whether variation in such selection mechanisms influences party stability. The subject of our investigation, then, is quite specific; but it is joined at the hip with a bigger question in comparative politics: the conditions under which democracy can survive in 'plural [divided] societies' (Lewis 1965; Lijphart 1968). Such countries face a stern test: 'free institutions', according to J. S. Mill (1958 [1861]: 230), 'are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities'. Considering such hard cases, 'consociational' theorists have argued that carefully designed institutional structures can dampen the destabilising influences of social and ethnic diversity (Andeweg 2000). The consociational prescription, however, is predicated on the notion that politicised cleavages can support discrete political parties; proportional 'power-sharing' arrangements, in turn, provide politicised groups with institutional expressions and act as a powerful palliative in divided societies.

In Africa's new democracies, *pace* consociational expectations, multiparty systems are an exception, rather than the rule. In southern African countries all democratic countries – save Lesotho – have a 'dominant' political party (Bogaards 2002). This peculiarity of electoral competition complicates the causal link between proportional electoral institutions and democratic stability. Do (dominant) political parties – considered by some authors to be inherently oligarchic (Michels 1959 [1915]) – provide sufficiently broad representation to politicised groups to act as an equivalent to multiparty competition? How do parties contain the destabilising pressures of factional groups competing for positions of power? In this dissertation, we look at how political parties filter the 'accommodative' incentives of proportional electoral systems by focusing on an important mechanism of factional regulation and determinant of parliamentary representation – the selection of parliamentary candidates – that has long been recognised by Western political scientists as 'the crucial process of the party' (Schattschneider, 1942: 64).

This dissertation, then, has two key components: first, we describe how parties select candidates to represent them in the lower house of parliament; second, we explain whether variation in selection mechanisms influences the background of parliamentarians and stability of political parties. As a comparative case-study, the first of its kind in Africa, we examine how four major political parties in two of Africa's 'consensual' democracies, Namibia and South Africa, select parliamentary candidates. We focus on the candidates that were selected to represent each party in the 2004 elections. We draw on a range of qualitative research techniques including semi-structured interviews with party leaders, officials, candidates and members. This dissertation makes a contribution to the literature on political institutions and democratisation, democratic theory, and political parties.