

The background of the cover features a map of Southern Africa, including South Africa, Lesotho, and Swaziland, constructed from a mosaic of grey and white wooden planks. The map is set against a dark grey background with a repeating pattern of white, stylized, interlocking geometric shapes. The Democracy Works Foundation logo is positioned in the top left corner.

**DEMOCRACY  
WORKS**  
FOUNDATION.

# **POLITICAL PARTIES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA: STATE OF AFFAIRS**

NOVEMBER 2021

**A research report by Democracy Works Foundation**

# Foreword

Political parties are central to modern-day representative democracy. Given the extent to which they provide policy choices to voters, it is acknowledged that representative democracy is inconceivable without political parties. They largely form and shape political processes in any multi-party democracy. Among other things, they are meant to be the main vehicles for political representation, social mobilisation and the main mechanism for the organization of government and the channels for democratic accountability. Whereas all countries of southern Africa, except Eswatini, are governed by political parties, they (political parties) are some of the least trusted and least understood institutions. Political parties have been subjected to very little research and introspection, at least in the southern African context. Baseline information and data on the nature and state of political parties and party systems in many countries are either hardly available or not up to date. This lack of knowledge is worsened by the fact that within the region, political parties tend to be very fluid, changing not only their names, but sometimes their ideological stance. Very little is known about the major challenges facing political parties, and how these could be addressed to improve democratic performance. That which we know tends to be limited to the formal aspects of political parties. Given the influential role that political parties – both governing and opposition – have on various countries' policies, it is important for citizens, civic organisation, development partners and political parties themselves, to have a better understanding of these institutions. Understanding the genetics of political parties could very well be part of the answer to the question, why is democracy not delivering?

Democracy Works Foundation (DWF), with funding from the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA), therefore undertook a regional study in nine countries that aimed at understanding the political parties and party systems with a view of reflecting on optimal ways in which political parties in the region can be supported as part of the strengthening of the democratization processes. The countries targeted included Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa and Zambia. As part of the study, DWF produced country specific reports that informed the development of the regional comparative analysis and a strategy paper on engaging political parties in the region.

DWF would like to express its gratitude to Prof Boniface Dulani of the University of Malawi who was the Principal Researcher for this regional study. Together with the DWF team, he coordinated and provided technical guidance on the conduct of the research. DWF also recognises the input from a team of independent researchers that undertook the study in their respective countries. This study draws extensively on their contributions. These include Dr. Carlos Pacatolo (Angola), Dr. Kebapetse Lotshwao (Botswana), Prof Balingene Kahombo (Democratic Republic of Congo), Ms Mary PSDA Silva (Eswatini), Ms Lydia Macheli (Lesotho), Mr Enea Katundu (Malawi), Mr.

Hermenegildo Mulhovo (Mozambique), Ms Thato V Mmatli (South Africa) and Mr Goodbye Goteka Chinyama (Zambia). A special recognition also goes to Ms Fannie Nthakomwa, the DWF Senior Technical Advisor who played the role of a Project Coordinator and Ms Tadala Chumachiyenda, the DWF Regional Programme Officer who supported the implementation and organisation of the study. The support provided to ensuring the smooth implementation of the project is greatly appreciated. In addition, DWF is grateful for the support that was provided by its Country and Head office staff on the research. Specifically, to mention a few including Mr Augusto Santana (Angola), Dr Charity Kruger (Botswana), Ms Kholu Tsumane (Lesotho), Ms Ennetie Mbúka (Malawi), Mr Melusi Matsenjwa (Eswatini), Ms Talent Mathuthu (South Africa), Ms Sandra Mutyambizi (South Africa) and Ms Liz Matebele (South Africa). We also are indebted to a number of stakeholders and partners that were consulted as part of this study. Without their cooperation, this research would not have been possible. The study was made possible with the financial support of OSISA. The views expressed in this report are however solely those of our independent experts.

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## Acronyms

AAB	Action Alternative pour le Bien-Être et le Changement
AABC	Alliance des Acteurs pour la Bonne Gouvernance du Congo
ADC	All Democratic Corporation
ADRP	Alliance des Démocrates pour le Renouveau et le Progrès
AFDC	Alliance des forces démocratiques du Congo
AMK	Alliance des Mouvements du Kongo
ANC	African National Congress
AUM	African Unity Movement
BCP	Basutoland Congress Party
BLM	Black Land First (BLM),
BLP	Botswana Liberal Party (BLP)
CENI	Commission Électorale Nationale Indépendante
CFM	Community Freedom Movement
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DA	Democratic Alliance
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FPTP	First Past the Post -Electoral System
FRELIMO	Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (Liberation Front of Mozambique)
LLN	Lesedi la Botswana
MPLA	Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (National Front for the Liberation of Angola)
MS	Mouvement Social
NAC	Nyasaland African Congress (NAC)
NDC	National Democratic Congress
NDF	New Democratic Front
NDP	National Democratic Party
PD	Progressive Democrats

PLUA	Partido da Luta Unida dos Africanos de Angola (Party of the United Struggle for Africans in Angola)
PPRD	Parti du Peuple pour la Reconstruction et la Démocratie
PR	Proportional Representation
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
UDPS	Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social
USP	United Socialist Party
WHP	White Horse Party

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# 1.0 Introduction

Although political parties are a relatively new feature of democratic politics, they have become a very important cog in contemporary democracy. Such is the importance of political parties in modern democratic politics that the words of Schattsneider (1942) “democracy is unthinkable save in terms of political parties,” continue to ring true in 2021, almost eight decades later. This is despite evidence suggesting that across the world, political parties are losing public trust and are increasingly viewed with dissatisfaction by citizens and politicians alike. Many see them as unrepresentative, elitist and having very little in common with the average citizen. In an era where social media has significantly reduced the gap between the governors and the governed, political parties are suffering from declining membership, especially among the youth, who largely see them as archaic institutions that belong to a bygone era. This view is summed up most succinctly by Bartle and Bellucci (2009) when they argue that in an age of ever more flexible voters and media driven politics, political partisanship comes across as outdated. Meanwhile, Ellisson (2021) contends that the contemporary Western political landscape is characterised by people turning away from political parties and that this might signal a future with more open and direct democracy, with less mediation by parties and professional politicians.

The challenges of declining political party membership are further compounded by poor internal management practices and rules that impose limits to the way in which political parties can operate. Notwithstanding these challenges, recent scholarship continues to agree with Schattsneider (1942) that political parties are critical to the achievement, performance, functioning and stability of democracy (Corrales, 2001; Mainwaring and Scully, 1995; Gibson, 1996; Matlosa et al., 2007; Booyesen, 2021.)

Among others, political parties aggregate and represent interests, formulate public policies, mobilise and channel voters, link leaders and activists, recruit

and train future political leaders, structure electoral choices and coordinate the formation of government (Norris, 2004). Such is their importance in modern democratic politics that as Coppedge (1994) notes, the collapse of democracy in many countries is often preceded by the collapse of political parties, which culminates in coup attempts and the emergence of populist leaders.

The importance of political parties in a democracy does not, of course, rest only on their formation and mere existence, but also their having the requisite resources and conducive environment to function properly. It is against this background that this study on political parties and party systems in Southern Africa was commissioned. The study sought to undertake a holistic review of the state of political parties in the region and offer an understanding of the context within which they operate. By adopting a regional scope, this study builds on previous works of a similar nature, notably that by Matlosa et al. (2007), which focussed on the roles of political parties in democratisation in region. However, apart from being nearly 15 years old, the Matlosa study focused mostly on the legal context within which political parties operate and their organisational structures. Not much emphasis was placed on other equally important dimensions of political parties such as the extent of involvement of citizens and inclusivity of disadvantaged groups including women and youth, popular perceptions and the political parties' ideological orientation, among others.

This report provides a background of the evolution of political parties in nine Southern African countries of Angola, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), eSwatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, and Zambia. The narrative for each country is contextualised within key political developments over time, from the colonial to the independence and democratic era. The study draws from rich and extensive case studies, generated by country-experts who prepared country papers that served as background material for the regional report. The list of country researchers is presented in Table 1 below:

**Table 1: Research Team for DWF Study on the State of Political Parties in Southern Africa**

Country	Country Researcher
Angola	Dr. Carlos Pacatolo
Botswana	Dr. Kebapetse Lotshwao
Democratic Republic of Congo	Prof. Balingene Kahombo
eSwatini	Ms. Mary PSDA Silva
Lesotho	Ms. <u>Lydia Macheli</u>
Malawi	Mr. Enea Katundu
Mozambique	Mr. Hermenegildo Mulhovo
South Africa	Ms. Thato .V. Mmatli
Zambia	Mr. Goodbye Goteka Chinyama

## **2.0 Evolution of Political Parties in Southern Africa**

Political parties in Southern Africa have had a long and colorful history, dating back to the nationalist struggles during the colonial era. The history of political parties in the region can be classified into three broad periods: the colonial; independence and democratic era (mainly the post-1990 period).

### **2.1 Political parties during the colonial era**

In the early years of colonial rule, most of the nascent organisations that morphed into political parties started off as societies that sought to advance the welfare of indigenous African societies. For example, in eSwatini, the country's first political party started off as the Swazi Progressive Association (SPA), which was founded in 1929 to advance the welfare of Swazi peoples. In 1959, the SPA transformed and registered as the Swazi Progressive Party, becoming the country's first indigenous political party. Political parties in Malawi and Zambia emerged through a similar transformation as they were originally established as indigenous societies before eventually taking on political roles. In both countries, local Native Associations that were founded in the first two decades of the 20th Century ultimately transformed into political parties as they increasingly embraced political objectives to agitate for independence from colonial rule. For Malawi, the various Nyasaland Native Associations merged to form the Nyasaland African Congress (NAC) in 1943, becoming the country's first indigenous political party. In Zambia, a local

federation of African Societies merged to form the African National Congress in 1948, which ultimately spearheaded the fight against colonial rule. The first political parties in Mozambique also emerged through a similar process in the early 1960s, which saw the merger of three movements to form the Liberation Front of Mozambique (FRELIMO). The Democratic Republic of Congo also underwent a similar process when various societies merged to form the Bakongo Alliance (*Alliance des Bakongo or ABAKO*), which was founded in 1940 to serve as a platform for fighting for political independence.

In a number of countries, however, political parties were founded with the clear goal of fighting for independence from the outset. In South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC) was founded in 1912 with the primary mission of bringing African peoples together as one people, to defend their rights and freedoms against an exclusive white supremacy government in the Union of South Africa formed in 1910. Similarly, the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP), became Lesotho's first political party when it was founded in 1952 with the goal of leading the protests against colonial rule. In the first half of the 1950s, Angola also saw the formation of several political groupings, notably the Party of the United Struggle for Africans in Angola (PLUA) and the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), which were founded in 1953 and 1954 respectively. Both parties had the goal of fighting against Portuguese colonial rule. In Botswana, the first political party was formed in 1957 called the Bechuanaland Federal Party led by L.D. Raditladi based in Serowe in Bangwato territory. However, this party was quickly replaced by a more nationalist Bechuanaland Peoples Party led by Kgaleman Motsete. The latter's main objective was to fight racial discrimination and liberate the country from British 'protectorate' rule.

## **2.2 Political parties after independence (1960-1990)**

At independence, all the nine countries in the study adopted legal systems that allowed for multiparty politics. However, with the exception of Botswana, most of the triumphant nationalist leaders soon dispersed with political pluralism by adopting new constitutional frameworks that designated their

countries as one-party states. This included Angola, the DRC, Malawi, Mozambique, Lesotho, and Zambia. The declaration of one-party rule stemmed from arguments advanced by the victorious independence leaders, who portrayed multipartism as a Western concept that was out of sync with the communal African society. Consistent with the modernisation theories that were dominant in the 1960s, these leaders further contended that multiparty competition undermined nation building and development, as political parties tended to mobilise along ethnic and regional lines. This view is illustrated most vividly in the classical work of American sociologist, Seymour Martin Lipset (1959:75) when he contended that “only in a wealthy society in which relatively few citizens lived in real poverty could a situation exist in which the mass of the population could intelligently participate in politics and could develop the self-restraint necessary to avoid succumbing to the appeals of irresponsible demagogues.”

While most countries in the region were content in only banning multiparty politics, the Kingdom of eSwatini went even further, when King Sobhuza II issued a decree in 1973 banning political parties altogether. Political power—executive, legislative and judicial powers – were instead all vested in the King. The banning of all or only opposition political parties however, did not mean that political groups did not exist in the region. Among the formal one-party states, opposition parties were either only compelled to operate underground or from exile.

For South Africa, the formal adoption of Apartheid rule in 1948 led to many of the indigenous political groupings being kept out of contesting for political office until the system of apartheid came to an end in 1994 with the formation of a democratic government led by Nelson Mandela. Thus, although indigenous political parties continued to exist, their operations were largely proscribed by law. In Botswana, meanwhile, the retention of competitive democracy meant that various political parties founded prior to independence proliferated and continued to seek political office while new ones emerged over time without any limitations.

### **2.3 Political parties after 1990**

The democratic revival of the early 1990s saw the unbanning of opposition political parties, including in South Africa. This has led to a proliferation of new political parties across the region. However, the legacy of authoritarian rule in the region still shapes the structure of many of the new political parties, which frequently mimic the organizational styles of the authoritarian era political parties. In a quest to become catch-all organizations, most of the new generation political parties are less agenda or ideology driven. This contributes partially to their fragility and a lack of commitment from their supporters. Not surprisingly, many of the new political parties die in their infancy unless they are able to win power, which gives them access to state resources as a means for survival.

To safeguard the new political gains, most national constitutions specifically provide for multiparty systems of government. As we demonstrate below, some countries, such as the DRC, have made declaration of one-party states a crime of treason that is punishable by death<sup>1</sup>.

While political parties have now become a ubiquitous feature of politics in the region, eSwatini remains the only solitary outlier, as political parties have not been allowed to contest for political office since the 1973 royal decree issued by the late King Sobhuza. Although a new Constitution for eSwatini that came into force in 2005 unbanned political parties, they are still not allowed to contest for elected political office. This has led to continued struggles and demands by various sectors of eSwatini's population to allow political parties in the country to freely contest for political office. In June 2021, these demands led to an outbreak of demonstrations and protests as many eMaswati openly joined the calls to remove the 1973 decree and allow political parties to operate legally.

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<sup>1</sup> See Article 7 of the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

### **3.0 Methodology**

This paper draws on case-study research conducted by a team of country-researchers in nine southern African countries of Angola, Botswana, the DRC, eSwatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, and Zambia. Data collection in each country employed a largely qualitative approach and included: key informant interviews with various political stakeholders that included representatives of the key ruling and opposition parties as well as smaller parties, academics, government officials, the media and CSO representatives. Interviews were conducted either face to face or by telephone. The researchers also reviewed key documents such as constitutions, laws, archival material and existing secondary data in each of the countries. The qualitative approach was chosen largely because of its ability to provide depth and scope in shedding light into the environment within which political parties in the region operate and providing explanations on the state of political parties in these countries. Besides providing explanations, the qualitative approach was preferred because it is a key method to identify and interrogate political and ideological meanings as embedded within public documents, speeches, reports and newspaper articles.

A standard data collection tool that included open-ended questions was developed and used to collect data in each country. This was accompanied by a standard reporting template that each research used to summarise the country findings. The country reports were presented at a two-day workshop that was originally meant to be presented in person but had to be changed to a virtual format due to a spike in COVID-19 cases in the region. During this workshop, researchers gave presentations of the key findings from their countries and were given comments and asked to revise their papers before submitting final copies. All but one of the researchers were able to submit drafts and final versions of their country reports. However, the eSwatini researcher was unable to share an accessible version of their draft report. As a result, this report had to rely on the compilation of the eSwatini PowerPoint presentation and other secondary research undertaken by the Lead Researcher to supplement the material on eSwatini.

In compiling this report, the lead researcher drew additional insights from findings of recent Afrobarometer survey data to supplement the sections of the report where public opinion data was necessary. The Afrobarometer regularly undertakes surveys in eight of the nine countries except for the DRC. The most recent Afrobarometer data was from surveys conducted for seven of the eight countries between 2019 and 2021. However, at the time of writing, data for the 2021 Afrobarometer survey in Mozambique was not available. As a result, we drew from the 2018 Mozambique Afrobarometer survey instead.

**Table 2: Date for Afrobarometer Survey Data Used in the Report**

	<b>Country</b>	<b>Most Recent Afrobarometer Survey</b>
1	Angola	2019
2	Botswana	2019
3	Democratic Republic of Congo	-
4	eSwatini	2021
5	Lesotho	2020
6	Malawi	2019
7	Mozambique	2018
8	South Africa	2021
9	Zambia	2020

Source: Afrobarometer

## **4.0 Research Findings**

This section presents key findings from the study. The findings are presented along eight dimensions, namely: (i) political party governance; (ii) the political environment; (iii) political culture; (iv) the functioning of political parties, (v) political party funding; (vi) public perception of political parties and (vii) challenges facing political parties.

### **4.1 Political Party Governability and Governance**

The political environment, especially as it relates to the number of registered political parties, is mostly determined by the prevailing rules that govern the registration and regulation of political parties in each of the seven case study-countries. Where the rules are permissive, then the number of political parties, *ceteris paribus*, should be high. On the other hand, when the registration requirements are restrictive, then few groups can afford to register as political parties, resulting in fewer political parties being registered.

In order to understand the governability and governance of political parties in the southern Africa region, the country studies sought to establish the rules governing registration and deregistration of political parties, asking whether the rules are applied impartially and whether these rules promote competition or not. Additionally, the study examined the landscape for individuals who would like to contest for political office outside of a political party platform as independent candidates.

#### **4.1.1 Registration of political parties**

The registration of political parties across Southern Africa is governed by different types of laws. These include national constitutions, electoral laws and other pieces of legislation. Among the nine countries under study, all but one country (eSwatini), provide for multiparty democratic politics in their national constitutions. This is exemplified by the Bill of Rights in the South African Constitution (1996), which expressly guarantees the freedom for "*every citizen... to make political choices*" and the right for citizens to "*create*

*political parties, to take part in party activities, recruit members and campaign for a political party or cause”.*

Such is the desire to safeguard political pluralism. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)’s Constitution for instance, goes further to stipulate, in Article 7, that any attempt to establish a single party state would constitute the crime of highest treason, which is punishable by death.

While the legal frameworks in the region save for eSwatini, provide for multi-party politics, the laws governing registration of political parties differ from country to country. Four groups of countries can be noted:

- a) Those with laws which specifically govern the registration of political parties such as Angola, Malawi, Mozambique, DRC.
- b) Those where political parties are registered as Societies such as Botswana, Lesotho, Zambia.
- c) Countries where the registration of political parties is through the Electoral laws such as South Africa.
- d) Countries where existence of political parties is not allowed such as eSwatini.

#### **4.1.1.1 Registration under specific political party legislation**

Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Malawi and Mozambique have specific laws that govern political party registration. Under these jurisdictions, political parties are directly registered as entities that seek to contest for political office.

The relevant laws in the four countries are: Law No. 04/002 of 2004 in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which governs Organisation and Functioning of Political Parties. Among other things, this law prescribes conditions for creation and dissolution of political parties, including their rights and obligations. In Angola, political parties are governed by the Law on Political Parties (Law no. 22/10, de 3 de December 2010). This law defines political parties as

citizen's organisations, of a permanent and autonomous nature, constituted with the fundamental objective of democratically participating in the political life of the country, to compete freely for the formation and expression of the popular will and for the organisation of political power, in accordance with the Angolan Constitution, with the law and with its statutes and programs, intervening, inter alia, in the electoral process, through the presentation or sponsorship of a candidate.

The law goes further to state that the constitution of political parties is free, that is, it does not depend on any authorisation, provided that they have a national character and scope, and must be legally registered.

In Malawi, registration of political parties is governed by the Political Parties Act of 2018. This Act stipulates that for a political party to get registered, it must have at least 100 persons who are eligible to vote in each of the country's 28 districts.

In Mozambique, political parties are registered under the Article 8 of Law 7/91 - 23 January 1991. This law mandates the Ministry of Justice to register and deregister political parties upon satisfaction of a set of criteria that includes name of the party, address, date of the party's creation, designation and composition of the central bodies as well as party statutes. For the DRC, political parties are registered under law of 15 March 2004. Apart from determining guidelines for organisation and functioning of political parties, this law further prescribes conditions for their creation, dissolution and their rights and obligations. To qualify for registration, political parties have to apply through the Minister of Home Affairs and pay an administrative fee of US\$10,000.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>See Interministerial Order No.25/CAB/VPM/MININTERSECAC/GKM/134/2019 and CAB/MIN/FINANCES/2019/121 of 27 December 2019 Setting the Rates of Duties, Taxes and Fees to Be Collected at the Initiative of the Ministry of the Interior, Security and Customary Affairs (2019) art.1, p.3.

#### **4.1.1.2 No specific laws on political party registration**

##### *a) Registration under Societies Act*

For the countries that have no specific law that governs political parties, there are two categories, the first of which is a group of countries that use alternative legislation, where political parties are registered under legislation governing registration of Societies. Under these jurisdictions, political parties are treated as voluntary and informal associations of society, where people share commonly understood values, customs and attitudes to their roles in politics. For example, in Botswana, Lesotho and Zambia, political parties are registered under the Societies Act of each country.<sup>3</sup> In these jurisdictions, parties are thus not treated any different from any other Societies with the only exception being that these groupings seek to participate in political activities whereas other organisations are not permitted to do so.

However, in these jurisdictions, political parties, whether registered under the Societies Act or not, need to take certain follow-up steps to take part in political competition. Botswana has arguably the most relaxed rules among this group of countries as political parties registered under the Societies Act are automatically granted a certificate that authorises them to operate and take part in political activity including elections without any further registration.<sup>4</sup> The parties simply have to inform the Independent Electoral Commission of their election symbol so that the IEC can include them on the ballot papers.<sup>5</sup>

In Lesotho, political groups registered under the Societies Act are further required to register under the country's National Assembly Electoral Act of 2011 for the purposes of contesting in elections. This two-step process raises the possibility that a political party, even if duly registered under the Societies

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<sup>3</sup> See the Societies Act of Botswana (1972); the Lesotho Society Act.No.20/1966 and the Societies Act of Zambia (Cap 119 of the Laws of Zambia)

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Acting Secretary General of the BMD, 20 March 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

Act, can fail to contest in elections if it does not take the second step of registering under the National Assembly Electoral Act.

Registration under the Societies Acts makes the process of registering political parties easier, as the rules for such registration are usually not as onerous as those that exist specifically for registering political parties. In Zambia, for example, political parties only need to demonstrate that they have at least ten members in order to be registered as a political party under the Societies Act. These ten members then undergo thorough security checks. By contrast, the Political Parties Act (2018) in Malawi stipulates that a political party should show that it has not less than one hundred members, all of whom have to be eligible voters, in each of the country's districts at the point of applying for registration. Similarly, in the DRC, political parties have to pay a registration fee of US\$10,000. The ease of registration under the Societies Acts owes to the fact that the law is usually designed to provide for the registration of different societal groups, including a variety of Civil Society Organisations that might not be political in nature. However, while registration requirements are usually lighter, a key drawback of registering under the Societies Act is that the process is subject to the decision of a government minister, who might decide to refuse registration on political grounds.

*b) Registration with Electoral Commission (South Africa)*

South Africa does not make any provision for political party registration even as Societies. Thus, it is evident that any group can be formed and seek to participate in politics as long as they fulfil the requirements for political participation. The only formal step required of political parties is the requirement for them to register with the Independent Electoral Commission in order to participate in public elections (Electoral Act 1998, 26). Under this Act, a party is defined as "any registered party, and includes any organisation or movement of a political nature which publicly supports or opposes the policy, candidates or cause of any registered party, or which propagates non-participation in any election". Registration of political parties to contest on national and municipal level is deemed affordable, as only R500 and R200

respectively is required, along with a deed of foundation signed by supporters and proof of publication in the Government Gazette. Once a party has been registered, a certificate of registration is issued by the chief electoral officer and the registration is published in the Gazette (Electoral Commission Act 1996, 15[5]).

#### **4.1.1.3 No political parties allowed (eSwatini)**

Although eSwatini adopted a liberal democratic constitution at independence in 1968, which granted rights to citizens to form political parties that could compete in elections, this was abrogated by King Sobhuza II in 1973 through a royal proclamation. Under Article 11 of the 1973 proclamation, political parties were banned on the grounds that they “cultivate and bring about disturbances and ill-feelings...[and] are hereby dissolved and prohibited.”<sup>6</sup> The proclamation went further to order that “any person who forms or attempts or conspires to form a political party or who organises or participates in any way in any meeting, procession or demonstration in contravention of this decree shall be guilty of an offence and liable, on conviction, to imprisonment not exceeding six months.”<sup>7</sup> All executive, legislative and judicial powers were, meanwhile, vested in the King (ibid, Article 3).

Although King Sobhuza II passed away in 1982 and was succeeded by his son, Mswati III in 1986, the status of political parties in the country remained the same as those under the 1973 Decree to the effect that political parties remained banned until 2005 when a new Constitution was adopted. Among several clauses, the eMaswati are guaranteed the enjoyment of several rights and freedoms, including the “freedom of peaceful assembly and association” (Article 25 of the eSwatini Constitution, 2005). This provision goes further to state that a person shall not be hindered in “the enjoyment of the freedom of peaceful assembly and association...for the promotion or protection of the interests of that person.” Although this provision does not specifically mention political parties, some legal scholars of eSwatini politics have argued that the clause allows political parties to be established. However, they remain banned

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<sup>6</sup> See Article 11 of the Proclamation by his Majesty King Sobhuza II, 12th April 1973

<sup>7</sup> Article 13 of Sobhuza II Proclamation, 1973.

from contesting for elected office. Be that as it may, it appears an academic argument to contend that political parties can exist but that they are not allowed to seek elected office, which would render their existence meaningless since political parties are defined for the specific purposes of seeking elected office.

Despite there being no provision for the formal establishment of political parties and the proscription against political party contestation for elected office, there are various groups that operate as political parties but are not formally recognised as such. Among the most notable groups/political parties in eSwatini include: the African United Democratic Party; the Communist Party of Swaziland; the Economic Freedom Fighters of Swaziland; the Ngwane National Liberatory Congress; the People's United Democratic Movement; the Sive Siyinqaba National Movement, and the Swazi Democratic Party.

#### **4.1.1.4 Fairness in application of political party registration laws**

While the laws on political party registration are applied fairly in countries such as South Africa and Lesotho, this is not the same across the region. In Malawi and Zambia, for example, the evidence adduced suggests some partiality in their application.

For South Africa, a leader from the Women Forward party in South Africa noted that the laws are so liberal that it is even possible for prisoners to start political parties:

In my experience there is nothing that bars people from taking advantage of the fairness of the law. When we started Women Forward I said I wish there was a party called Youth Forward because there's nothing that stops the youth from starting their own party. There are no legal barriers which would stop anyone from starting their own party. Even prisoners can start their own party, so in South Africa everyone has the leeway if they can garner enough resources, they can use the legal instruments we have to start their own party. Furthermore, the laws which regulate political party activities are applied fairly and without favor because in some way or the other people are held accountable, even if they try to dodge it in the courts, they will be held accountable in the courts of public opinion (cited in Mmatli, 2001:9).

On the other hand, in Malawi, there has been one example where a party in power (the Democratic Progressive Party, DPP) used the country's Political Parties Act of 2018 to frustrate the registration of the UTM Party, after the then Vice President, Saulos Chilima, resigned from the DPP to form the UTM. This episode made one interviewee to comment that:

On paper the rules...are impartial. However, the actual administration of the rules, for example going by the experience of UTM in 2018, the registration rules are not impartially administered, especially if a new party emerges from a strong background like UTM did. (cited in Katundu, 2021:5)

Zambia too has experienced attempts by ruling parties to frustrate the registration of opposition parties. As Chinyama (2021) notes in his country report, the Zambian Registrar of Societies and the Minister of Home Affairs can influence the registration and deregistration process in favour of the ruling party. For example, in August 2019, the Registrar of Societies deregistered the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) on the grounds that it did not have a party constitution. The action was challenged in court and temporarily halted pending judicial review.

The differential application of registration laws in countries such as Malawi and Zambia thus calls for a disaggregated strategy for the engagement of political parties in the region, focussing on those countries where the rules are not evenly applied in order to level the playing field.

#### **4.1.2 *De-registration of political parties***

Across the region, political parties can be de-registered on account of failure to fulfil several set conditions. These include: failure to adhere to registration requirements; evidence that the original registration was fraudulently obtained, the party is in violation of the national constitution and other laws; where the activities of the party threaten or undermine national unity, integrity of the state and the democratic constitutional order; receipt of financial or material support from a foreign country, as is the case in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, DRC.

In Malawi, the provisions for de-registration not only include failure by the political party to adhere to national constitutional provisions and laws, but also failure to adhere to the party constitution. This includes failure by political parties to hold a convention for a period of at least five consecutive years from the date of the party's registration or from the date the party held its last elective convention.

In instances where political parties are registered as entities for contesting in elections, they can be deregistered if they fail to participate in elections. For example, in Malawi, a political party can be deregistered if it fails to secure at least a seat in parliamentary elections; or at least five per cent of national votes; or at least two seats in local government elections or ten per cent of the total national votes in the local government elections in two election cycles; or where the party has been dissolved in accordance with its constitution (Katundu, 2021).

Other grounds for deregistration of political parties include cessation to exist or dissolution or non-functionality. This is the case in Angola, DRC, Mozambique and Malawi. Political parties can also be deregistered when they are declared insolvent or where they pursue their goals through unlawful means which are contrary to the public order or morality, security and national defence. This is the case in Mozambique.

Deregistration of political parties in the region is, however, a rare occurrence. In South Africa, there is only one political party- the Black Land First (BLF), which was deregistered in 2019 for violating the Electoral Act proviso that no party may be discriminatory or prejudiced in its values against any member of society. Following a petition by the FF-Plus party, which had argued that BLF was a racist and Black Supremacist organisation, the party was deregistered. However, after amending its constitution to allow white people to register as members, BLF was allowed to re-register as a political party.

In Botswana, several political parties, including the Botswana Liberal Party (BLP) and the Lesedi la Botswana (LLB) were deregistered on account of

inactivity and lack of membership. Meanwhile in Zambia, only one political party was ever de-registered, namely the National Democratic Congress (NDC) on the grounds that it did not have a constitution. However, this decision was challenged in court and temporarily halted, pending a judicial review. Table 3 presents details of deregistered parties in the region.

**Table 3: Political Parties that have been deregistered by country in Southern Africa**

Country	Political parties de-registered	Reason(s)
Angola	Before new laws were introduced in 2011, Angola had 127 political parties. However, many have been de-registered with only 11 existing in 2021.	Failure to achieve at least 0.5% of the valid votes in the 2012 general elections.
Botswana	Botswana Liberal Party (BLP) Lesedi la Botswana (LLB) New Democratic Front (NDF) United Socialist Party (USP)	No activity/ no members  Dissolved and merged with another party. Dissolved and merged with another party
DRC	No data	
eSwatini	N/A	N/A
Lesotho	Community Freedom Movement (CFM) Progressive Democrats (PD) All Democratic Corporation (ADC) African Unity Movement (AUM) White Horse Party (WHP) Lekhotla La Senkatana (SSD)	These parties were deregistered for non-participation in Elections, no office space where the parties operate from, no elections of governing structures as required by the parties' constitutions, no keeping of register for new and old paid-up membership and filling such with the commission annually. One of the parties challenged IEC's decision in Court but the Court ruled in favour of IEC and the parties were all deregistered.
Malawi	0	
Mozambique	No data	
South Africa	Black Land First (BLF)	Violation of the Electoral Act provision that states no party may be discriminatory or prejudiced in its values against any members of society
Zambia	National Democratic Party	Party had no Constitution. The decision was however successfully challenged in court and the party was reinstated.

**Source:** Country Reports (various), Southern Africa Political Parties project, 2021.

While deregistration of political parties is usually done on the grounds of non-compliance with the law, it is often viewed by the deregistered political parties as part of a broader strategy by ruling parties to weaken them. For example, in Zambia, the deregistration of the National Democratic Party, was largely considered to be revenge exacted by the ruling Patriotic Front (PF) since the leader of NDP was a former PF member who had been expelled from the party. In some cases, deregistration can be instigated by other competing political parties striving to claim contested political territory or constituencies. This appears to have been the case with the Black Land First in South Africa, whose deregistration was sought by the Freedom Front – Plus, a political party that propagates Afrikaner nationalism in the country.

### **4.1.3 Independent candidates**

Although political parties are by nature the primary vehicle through which individuals seeking elective office can contest, five of the eight countries in the study extend the right to contest for elective political office to independent candidates (Table 4).

**Table 4: Space for Independent Candidates in Southern Africa**

<b>Country</b>	<b>ARE INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES ALLOWED?</b>
Angola	No
Botswana	Yes
DRC	Yes
eSwatini	N/A
Lesotho	Yes (For constituency level under FPTP only)
Malawi	Yes
Mozambique	No
South Africa	No (although a 2020 Constitutional Court ruling declared parts of the Electoral Act that prevent independent candidates from contesting as unconstitutional).
Zambia	Yes

**Source:** Country Reports (various), Southern Africa Political Parties project, 2021

A common factor that appears to determine whether a country allows independent candidates to stand or not appears to be the type of electoral system in use. On one hand, countries that employ the First Past the Post electoral system to elect legislators (Botswana, DRC, Malawi and Zambia) are among those that allow independent candidates. On the other hand, countries that employ a party-list Proportion Representation electoral system, such as Angola and Mozambique, do not allow independent candidates to contest for elective political office.

Although until recently independent candidates have not been allowed under South African Electoral laws, which, like Angola and Mozambique, uses a party-list PR system, the country's Constitutional Court passed a ruling in June 2020 that invalidated sections of the Electoral Act that prevent independent candidates from contesting in elections. The Court went further to order Parliament to amend sections of the law to allow independent candidates to run for provincial legislatures and the National Assembly. It remains unclear, however, if Parliament has made the requisite amendments and what form they will take.

Lesotho, which employs a Mixed Member Proportion system of electing legislators, allows independent candidates to contest at constituency level where First Past the Post (FPTP) is applied.

Although independent candidates are allowed in most of the jurisdictions in Southern Africa, their performance differs from country to country. Independent candidates have thrived in the DRC, where former President Joseph Kabila twice contested and won the presidency in 2006 and 2011 on an independent ticket. In Malawi, the number of independent contestants in presidential, parliamentary and local government elections has grown exponentially as public confidence in political parties has waned over time. Many of the independent candidates have gone on to win legislative and local government seats.

In Botswana and Lesotho, independent candidates tend to perform very poorly, owing to lack of support and resources and the fact that they usually

lack a clear policy agenda. Throughout their political history, Botswana and Lesotho have only had one independent candidate each winning a legislative seat. In the most recent Botswana and Lesotho elections, 24 and 44 candidates respectively contested for legislative office on independent tickets but none of them won (Lotshwao, 2021, Macheli, 2021).

The main argument in favour of allowing independent candidates to contest elections is that it creates room for candidates who are frustrated by the political party system to still seek elective office, whilst giving the supporters of such candidates an option at the ballot box. The obvious concern is that proliferation of independent candidates can be a major threat to the survival of political parties. Indeed, looking at eSwatini, the main argument by the ruling elites is that by banning political parties from contesting in elections, the country's system allows for the election of individuals who appeal to the public beyond political party labels, and hence, making it very democratic. It is an argument that has previously been advanced in Uganda, which practiced "no-party democracy up until 2005.

## **4.2 The Political Environment**

In order to understand the political party landscape in the region, the study first sought to get a general overview of the political landscape as it relates to political parties in the study countries. Among others, the study attempted to establish the number of active and inactive political parties; the competitiveness of the political environment, especially with regard to the possibility of opposition parties winning elections, which is seen as a major hallmark of democratic consolidation and the state of media access among ruling and opposition political parties.

### **4.2.1 *Number of political parties***

In the eight countries where political parties are allowed to operate, the number of registered political parties varies from at least 7 in Botswana to over 603 in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). As discussed earlier in the background section, the age of political parties ranges from those that were founded in the first half of the 20th Century such as the African National

Congress in South Africa to newer ones that have only been recently formed to contest the most recent elections in countries such as Zambia. Although, as discussed, eSwatini does have political parties, the underground nature of their operations means that it is not currently possible to ascertain the exact numbers of political parties in the country.

However, it is important to note that some of the political parties are inactive, as demonstrated by their failure to field candidates at any level in the most recent elections in the country. For example, in Angola, out of the 55 registered political parties, 45 failed to field a candidate in the most recent national elections, leaving only ten parties that can be considered as active. Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa and Zambia, between them, also have high numbers of registered political parties that are, however, inactive. It is perhaps only Botswana that does not appear to have any inactive political parties.

The main reason for party inactivity includes lack of financial resources to field candidates during elections and for paying for administration staff, rentals and related operational expenses in between elections. Table 5 presents numbers of registered, active and inactive political parties in each of the countries that were studied.

**Table 5 : Number of Registered, Active and Inactive Political Parties in Each Country**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Number of Registered Political Parties</b>	<b>Number of Active Political Parties</b>	<b>Number of Inactive Political Parties</b>
Angola	Over 55	about 10	Over 45
Botswana	7	7	0
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	Over 603	603	Although 603 political parties participated in the last elections, many are inactive.
eSwatini	-	-	-
Lesotho	40	Around 28 - 33	Around 7 – 12
Malawi	Over 50	6	Over 44
Mozambique	67	Over 33	Less than 33
South Africa	95	48	47
Zambia	33	15	18

**Source:** Country Reports (various), Southern Africa Political Parties project, 2021

The high proportion of inactive political parties in the Southern Africa, on one hand, points to the liberal nature of the registration rules, which make it possible for many parties to register. However, the high number of political parties that are registered is suggestive of a clear lack of focus among the political parties, many of whom lack a clear agenda and reason for their existence. While political pluralism is to be welcomed, having too many political parties can be a threat to political stability. This can especially benefit incumbents and ruling parties, as having too many political parties frequently results in vote splitting among opposition parties.

#### **4.2.2 Competitiveness of the political environment**

There appears to be relatively high levels of competition between ruling and opposition parties in Southern Africa, especially around election time. The

picture of the operating environment for opposition political parties is, however, mixed. It varies from a permanency of political violence linked to electoral processes in the DRC to a competitive environment for all political parties, albeit with sporadic incidences of violence in countries like Angola, Lesotho and Malawi.

While opposition parties have recently won elections in countries such as Malawi (2014, 2020) and Zambia (2011, 2021), this is not commonplace. Instead, ruling parties are very entrenched and rarely lose power. As a result, some political parties are almost permanently confined to playing the role of the opposition. A good number of countries have a single dominant party system with post-independence ruling parties still remaining in charge. Examples are Angola, Botswana, South Africa, and Mozambique.

#### **4.2.3 Media access**

Despite the presence of legislation across the region requiring that state broadcasters grant equal coverage to parties during campaign time, evidence has been gathered of state media's bias towards the ruling party in most countries. This is reflected in the fact that they allot more time to ruling parties and, in some cases, go to the extent of airing anti-opposition propaganda. In his report on Angola, Pacatolo (2021:20), for example, cites the words of one Angolan and civic activist, who pointed out that "opposition political parties do not enjoy equal or positive treatment in the State media (...) and that the [state media] are transformed into propaganda organs of the ruling party". A similar observation is made by Kahombo (2021:16), who notes that the national television in the DRC (*Radio Télévision Nationale Congolaise (RTNC)*) gave "limited access to opposition candidates and parties during the 2006 and 2011 elections, and, instead, behaved as if it was a private property of the ruling regime." Other countries in the region, notably Malawi, Zambia, Lesotho and Mozambique, make similar reports of public media that is largely biased in favour of ruling parties.

Even when opposition political parties are featured on public media, the evidence gathered from the country studies suggests that political coverage is

still largely skewed in favour of ruling parties. Given that the public media frequently has much broader reach in coverage and is free, the limited access for opposition political parties forces them to opt for private media platforms, which are usually commercial and require payments, placing further financial stress on opposition political parties.

Private media is accommodative of the opposition in some cases. However, the private media is frequently affiliated to, or biased towards, specific parties in some countries. A case in point is the DRC where private media, for the most part, are owned or financed by political actors from the ruling or the opposition sides. The ownership patterns mean that these media houses confer preferential treatment on political parties and groupings of their owners. In yet other cases such as Angola and Zambia, attempts have been made to control what is said on private media and silence critical voices on such platforms. Chinyama's (2021) portrayal of media access and how regulatory authorities target private media while leaving the public media free despite similar accusations of political bias is very illustrative. The case of privately owned Muvi Television is offered as a classic demonstration of how Zambia's media regulatory authority, the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), has been used to target private media deemed to be giving platforms to opposition political parties in the run up to the country's general elections in 2021. Within a span of a few months, IBA issued warnings to Muvi Television twice over accusations of "unprofessional conduct" after the station aired interviews with the presidents of the Economic and Equity Party (EEP) and the Poor People's Party. In March 2019, the IBA also suspended the licence of another private television station, Prime TV, for nearly a month after a leader of the country's erstwhile ruling Patriotic Front Party accused the station of bias. This is despite the fact that the government owned media in Zambia never entertained opposition and divergent views.

Furthermore, coverage on such media is limited to parties (mostly opposition and ruling in some cases) who have the financial muscle to pay for it.

The proliferation of social media however presents alternative platforms for political parties to engage with their supporters in an interactive manner.

However, the findings from the country reports suggest that most political parties in the region are failing to utilize the available digital platforms. With the exception of South Africa, most political parties in the region are not active on social media and often have old websites that are not regularly updated with new content. This is despite recognition that the new media offers a powerful engagement tool for political parties, as illustrated by one Zambian key informant, who highlights the superiority of social media as a tool where citizens and party supporters can “provide feedback to the political parties on various issues,” (Chinyama, 2021).

There are many opportunities for political parties to build capacity for utilizing digital media platforms. The Institute for Democracy Electoral Assistance (IDEA), for example, operates a Digital Parties Portal, which contains tools that can enable political parties to use social media platforms. The tools on the portal were specially chosen so that they can be used by established and upcoming political parties in contexts with stable internet infrastructure as well as those that lack sufficient and consistent connectivity.<sup>8</sup>

### **4.3 Political Culture**

Political parties are only as strong as their members. However, it appears that across the region, political parties hardly have updated lists of their membership. With little investment in research, political parties hardly ever undertake systematic scans of the political landscape to determine the proportion of citizens that profess partisanship and what share belong to the different political parties. Not surprisingly, this study did not adduce much evidence in terms of the proportion of citizens that profess party membership in a number of the countries in the study. Instead, the evidence from the research shows that membership of political parties among citizens in the Southern Africa region is varied.

Political membership remains very strong for one group of countries while remaining very weak in others. Among the countries where a relatively high proportion of the citizenry profess membership of political parties are

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<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/tools/digital-parties-portal>

Botswana, Malawi and Mozambique. Party affiliation is, however, low in Angola, Lesotho, South Africa and Zambia.

### **4.3.1 Citizen Participation in Political Parties**

Citizen participation in political party affairs in the region is, for the most part, very minimal. In a majority of the countries, citizen participation in political parties does not go beyond the role of supporter. Most political parties in the region do not have comprehensive lists of their members, which makes it difficult or impossible for them to determine their actual support base beyond numbers that show up during campaign gatherings.

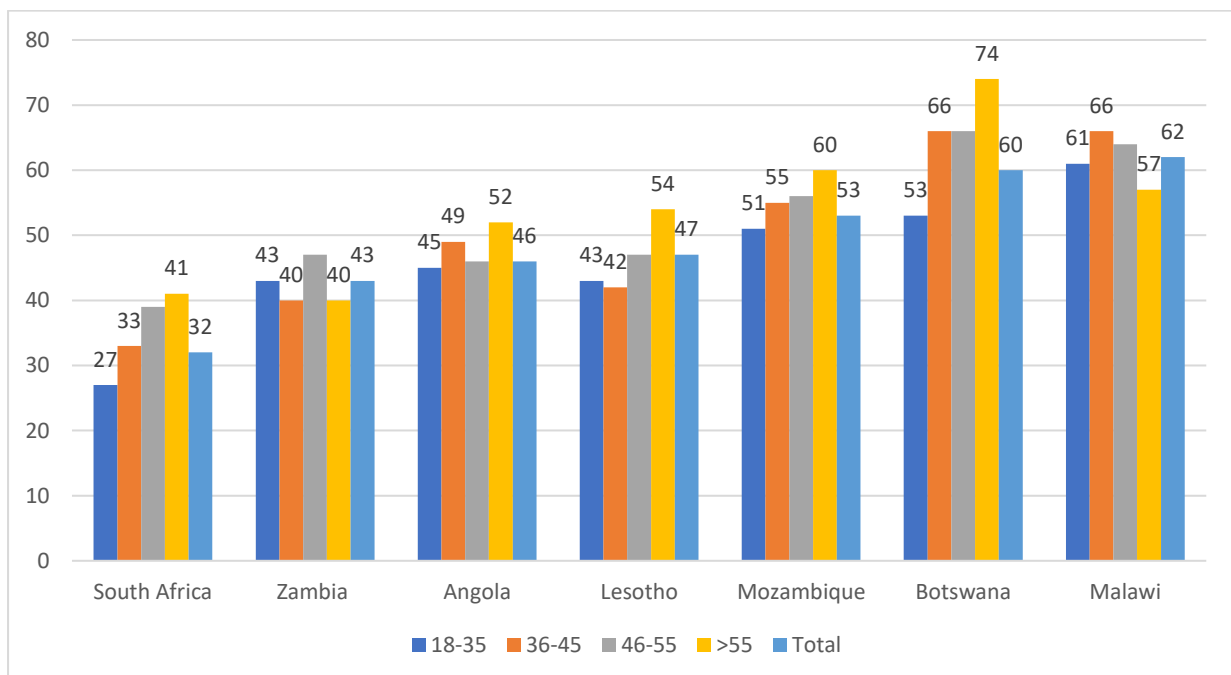
Most party followers do not pay membership fees as the party-follower relationship takes on a benefactor-beneficiary character. There is growing voter apathy as the number of citizens disgruntled with the empty promises made by party representatives is increasing. There appears to be increasing awareness among the electorate that campaign promises, while seeming to be populist, are short-term and do not represent a commitment to truly improve the livelihoods of ordinary citizens.

Ordinary citizens' engagement with political parties is at best sporadic and less meaningful. Most party representatives engage ordinary citizens through community meetings whose numbers increase substantially during times of electoral campaign. These meetings/rallies do not present an opportunity for meaningful interaction. Rather, they serve to market party manifestoes and to woo attendees to vote for their candidates. Overall, only a small proportion of citizens in the various Southern Africa countries make contact with the political party of their support or elected representatives. This state affairs belies the fact that there are many opportunities for political parties to engage with their supporters, particularly using digital platforms. The value and need for engaging using digital platforms have most recently been demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in restrictions on public gatherings.

### 4.3.2 Political Partisanship among Southern African Citizen

Evidence from Afrobarometer surveys shows that partisan identification is closely associated with age and levels of education. Across the countries for which data are available, the youth, on average, profess much lower levels of political partisanship compared to older citizens. Membership of political parties among the youth in the region ranges from a low of 27% in South Africa to a high of 61% in Malawi. In six of seven countries for which recent Afrobarometer data is available, profession of partisan proximity among the youth (18-35 years) is below the national average. Only in one country (Zambia) do the youth identify with political parties the same way as other age groups (Figure 1).

**Figure 1 Membership of Political Parties in Southern Africa by Age, 2018-2021)**

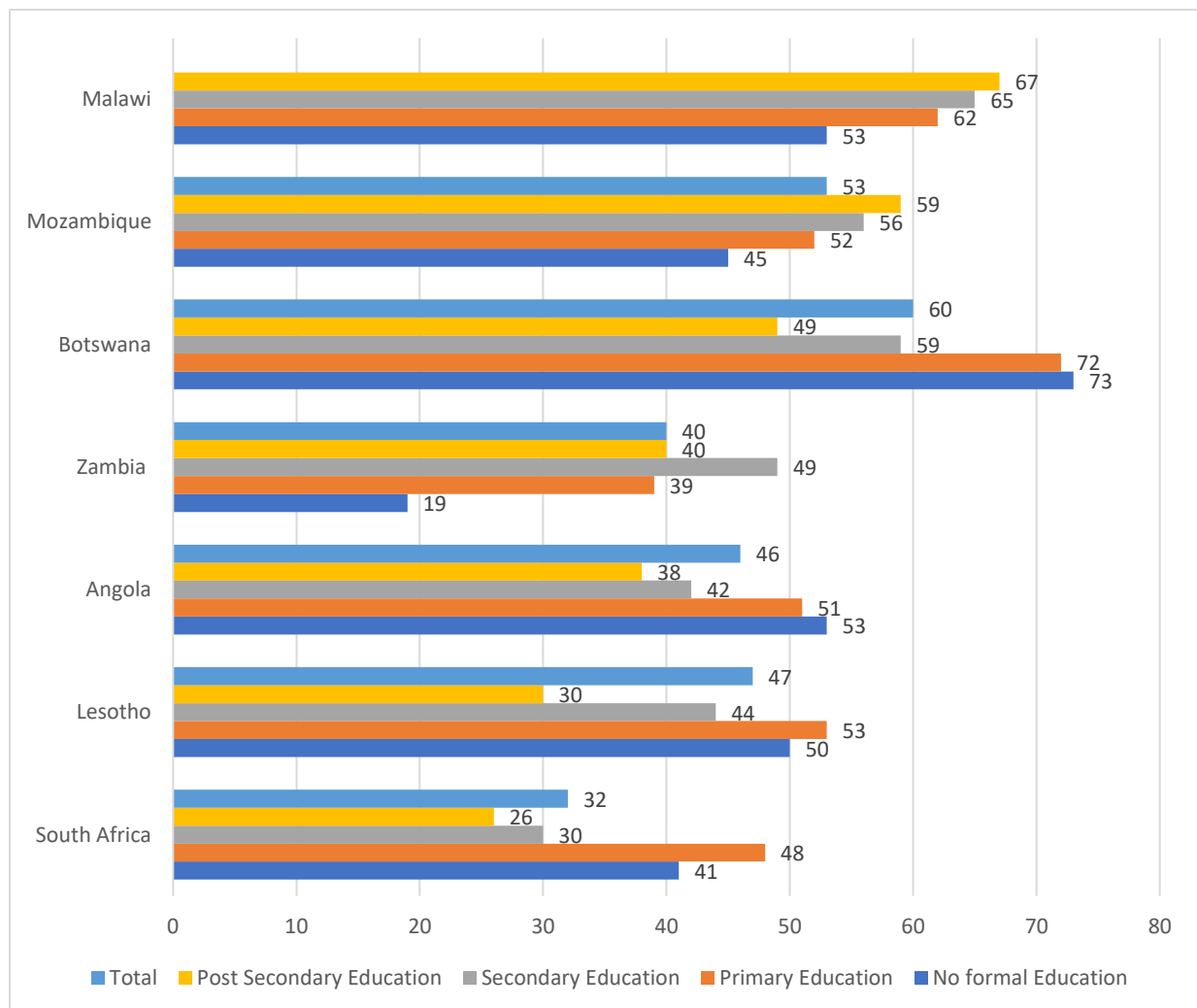


**Source:** Afrobarometer, various.

In addition to age, the other key determinant of partisanship appears to be education. On average, more educated citizens in the region appear to be drifting away from political parties compared to the less educated. In South Africa, for example, citizens with no formal education are about twice as likely

to profess membership of a political party compared to those with post-secondary education. In Lesotho, there is a twenty-percentage point difference in partisanship among those with no-formal education and those with post-secondary education. The only exceptions are Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia, where partisanship is higher among more educated citizens compared to those with low education levels. In other words, political partisanship in the region is increasingly becoming a preserve of the less educated (**Figure 2**).

**Figure 2: Political Party membership in Southern Africa by education (Afrobarometer, 2018-2021)**



### 4.3.3 Political Inclusivity: women and youth

Across the region, there are efforts to make political parties more inclusive, especially of youth and women. As members of SADC, all the countries in the

project have signed up to the SADC commitment of seeking to promote the representation of women in decision making bodies. Specifically, SADC's Protocol on Gender and Development, adopted in 2008, commits member countries to "put in place affirmative action measures with particular reference to women in order to eliminate all barriers which prevent them from participating meaningfully in all spheres of life and create a conducive environment for such participation."<sup>9</sup> The protocol goes further to explicitly call upon member states to ensure that "by 2015, at least fifty percent of decision-making positions in the public and private sectors are held by women"<sup>10</sup>.

There is evidence from all the country reports that political parties are making concerted efforts to attract women and youth members. However, the final results are still negligible. Instead, political parties in the region are mostly dominated by men, mostly in their adult to older ages. For example, in Lesotho, the number of women and youth in top political party positions is negligible, notwithstanding the fact that the country's laws require political parties to cater for women, youth and people with disabilities in their activities. Despite these laws, Basotho political parties make no effort to introduce policies that promote greater inclusivity. Malawi also suffers similar challenges of inclusivity of women and youth among political parties. While political parties frequently claim to be trying at attracting women and youth in their ranks, youth and women are largely relegated to holding "symbolic, instrumentalist, and mostly non-elected positions" (Katundu, 2021). It is not surprising, therefore, that one Malawian key informant described the situation regarding political party inclusivity in the country as 'hopeless,' noting that:

Many political parties are not practicing inclusivity. They are dominated by males in various roles...however, on the other hand most parties have shown commitment by having youth and women wings within their parties

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<sup>9</sup> See Article 5 of the SADC Gender and Development protocol, 2008, available online at: [https://extranet.sadc.int/files/2112/9794/9109/SADC\\_PROTOCOL\\_ON\\_GENDER\\_AND\\_DEVELOPMENT.pdf](https://extranet.sadc.int/files/2112/9794/9109/SADC_PROTOCOL_ON_GENDER_AND_DEVELOPMENT.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, Article 12

though they are not very effective in decision making due to patriarchy syndrome.<sup>11</sup>

The inclusion of women and youth in political parties is slightly better in countries that employ PR-Electoral Systems. In Mozambique, for example, women make up 42.3% of the composition of the 2020-2024 Parliament, a marked departure from its predecessor where only 37.2% of members were women. Although South Africa fairs better in terms of having a high number of women in elected national positions, political parties remain a predominantly older-male preserve, as illustrated in the following quotation from a youth female researcher within the ruling African National Congress (ANC):

Women don't get campaign support from the ANC. The 50-50 rule to have 50% men and 50% women in all structures within the party was a mountain. Still women are expected to do the work and organise themselves. It's women's responsibility to find that platform for themselves. There is no actual incentivisation or support to elevate women up the ranks. The ANC has a Women's Charter developed in the 1990s to assist women members to progress in the party, but other than that there is no campaign support directed to ensure that women get elected....

However, not all countries employing PR-list electoral systems are as inclusive of women and youth. In Angola, political parties are not required to reserve spaces for women on their election lists or in their own internal structures. As a result, women remain grossly underrepresented in the political space. Of the ten major political parties and groupings that won seats in the National Assembly in the 2018 legislative elections in DRC<sup>12</sup> none is headed by a woman. Only one woman was among the 18 presidential candidates that

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<sup>11</sup> Response of NICE Trust representative.

<sup>12</sup> PPRD : 53 seats ; AFDC-A : 41 seats ; UDPS/Tshisekedi: 32 seats; Alternative Action for Well-Being and Change (*Action Alternative pour le Bien-Être et le Changement (AAB)*) : 30 seats ; Social Movement (Mouvement Social (MS)) : 25 seats ; Alliance of Actors for Good Governance of Congo (*Alliance des Acteurs pour la Bonne Gouvernance du Congo (AABC)*) : 23 seats ; Kongo Movement Alliance (*Alliance des Mouvements du Kongo (AMK)*) : 23 seats ; MLC : 22 seats ; PPPD : 22 seats ; Alliance of Democrats for Renewal and Progress (*Alliance des Démocrates pour le Renouveau et le Progrès (ADRP)*) : 22 seats.

contested in the Angolan presidential elections in December 2018. In the end, only about 50 women out of 500 members of the National Assembly were elected in the legislative elections, and 18 out of 108 senators.

The low number of women and youth holding senior political party positions or seeking high elective office in the region can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, a lack of resources by these two groups. This situation is compounded by the fact that across the region, political patronage is a key factor in political mobilisation. Without resources, women and youth face insurmountable challenges to compete with established males on an equal footing. Secondly, culture plays a role in the exclusion of these two groups. In many countries and societies in the region, prevailing cultural and traditional norms perceive politics as an exclusive domain for older males. This is illustrated most vividly in the following words by a South African key informant:

The public space and political spaces are considered to be for men. ...It's still considered to a large extent that women are being done a favour, even with party secretaries who are mainly men because they are the gatekeepers. So, women have to fight in their numbers to push each other up. ... In 1952 when women were allowed to vote, the men within the ANC were very upset even though it would grow the party. (cited in Mmatli, 2021:20)

As for the youth, the prevalent political culture in most of the region sees this as a group that cannot be entrusted with responsibility. As a result, very few holders of senior political party positions or elective office are in the youth category. This is despite the fact that the population structure across the region is mostly made up of youth. Nowhere is this anti-youth bias illustrated than in the fact that across all the case study countries, constitutional rules impose a minimum age limit of 35 as the age at which anyone can contest for the top-most executive office (the exception being the DRC, which has a 30-age limit). Thus, with the exception of the DRC, no youth can ascend to the highest office of president in the region even if they can enjoy popular public appeal. It is interesting to note that for monarchs, individuals can be crowned at the age of 18 as was the case with King Mswati III, when he assumed the eSwatini throne in 1986.

**Table 6: Minimum Age requirements for legislators and Political executives in Southern Africa**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Minimum Age requirements for Legislators</b>	<b>Minimum Age requirements for executive (Presidents/Prime Ministers)</b>
Angola	18	35
Botswana		35
DRC	25 legislators and 0 for senators)	30
eSwatini		
Lesotho		
Malawi	21	35
Mozambique	18	35
South Africa		35
Zambia		35

Source: National Constitutions (various)

It is also important to point out that even in the few cases where political parties have made efforts to accommodate women and youth in their leadership ranks, this has not often translated into women and youth issues taking centre stage. This is due to the insidious culture of patriarchy and gerontocracy in most southern African societies, which generally prioritises male dominance whilst ignoring the voices of women and youth. Advancing the cause of women and youth, therefore, needs more than the tokenism of having a few women and youth in leadership positions in favour of real mindset and cultural shifts that treat women and youth as equal partners in the political space.

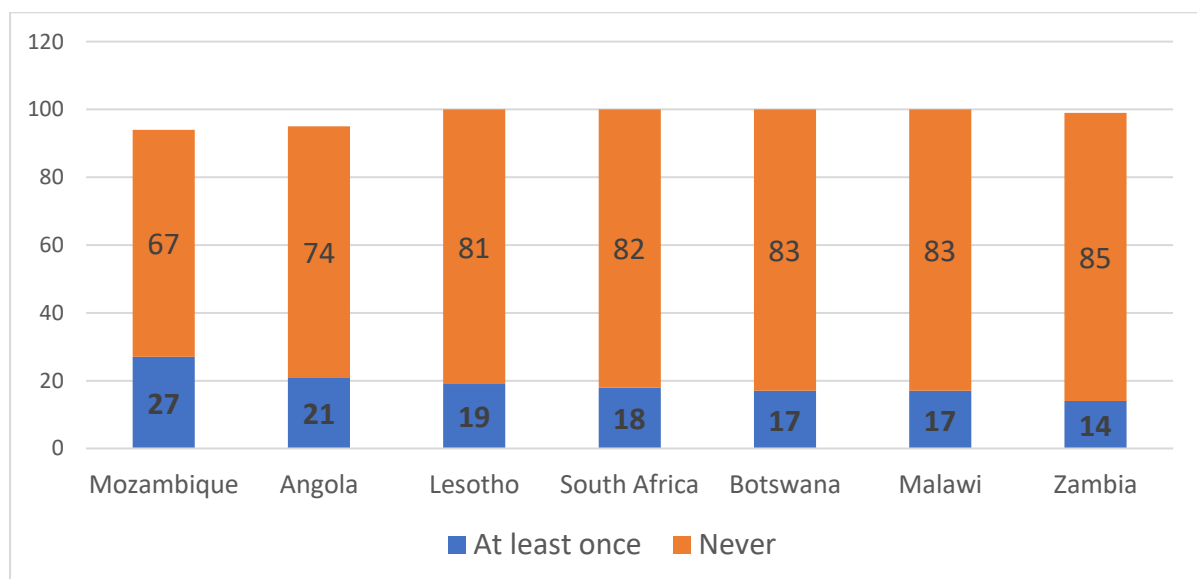
#### **4.3.4 Political engagement**

The general consensus across the region is that the levels of citizen engagement with political parties are on the decline. In nearly all the counties in the study, political engagement tends to peak during elections, after which most citizens retreat to their daily lives, leaving the affairs of government and political parties to professional politicians. Even when citizens engage with politics, it is increasingly among themselves rather than reaching out to the political decision makers. This is succinctly summed up by one key informant from South Africa when she notes:

I don't think citizens are engaged, but I think they know the platforms are available to raise their issues....people might be disengaged, but they may still know the channels to speak up to. The channels are there, but they are not always effective and that is what discourages people from sharing their views. (cited in Mmatli, 2021:14-15).

The evidence from survey data gives further credence to the limited engagement between citizens and political parties in the southern Africa region. When respondents in the Afrobarometer surveys were asked if they had contacted a political party official or leader in the preceding twelve months, very few responded in the affirmative. The highest proportion of respondents who said they had made contact with a political party official in the preceding ten months for the seven countries for which data are available was Mozambique, where 27% said they had made contact. For all the other countries, however, large majorities of nearly eight in ten citizens, said they had not made any contact with political party officials **(Figure 3)**.

**Figure 3: Citizen engagement with Political Party officials, 2018-2021**



Source, Afrobarometer, 2019-2021

The failure of political parties to engage with the wider citizenry is suggestive of minimal levels of vertical accountability. This state of affairs can lead to failed citizen-ownership of parties whilst simultaneously increasing prospects of political party capture since political leaders are less beholden to their supporters, instead prioritising their links with benefactors.

#### **4.3.5 Fluidity of party membership**

The evidence adduced from the nine case studies shows that there is high fluidity in party membership among the rank and file in the region. This results in changing patterns of party membership, with a high proportion of party members drifting from one party to another. However, there are laws in some southern African countries such as South Africa, Zambia, Malawi and Botswana (since 2021) that prevent elected representatives from ditching parties on whose ticket they were elected. Other countries such as Lesotho have no such laws and elected representatives are free to cross the floor. While some party supporters, especially the elderly, tend to be more committed to one party, the youth frequently change their party allegiance from time to time.

Regional voting patterns are prevalent in the countries of the region with parties getting a lion's share of the vote in regions from which their leadership comes from.

Various states in the southern African region profess to be multiparty democracies. This is evident in their legislation which provides space for the formation, existence and free rein of various political parties. Furthermore, a considerable number of political parties bear the word "democracy" and its various forms such as "democratic" in their names. This appears to be the creation of an accommodation of ruling and opposition parties (and their coalitions).

While there is a degree of tolerance amongst parties on various sides, the region's countries are not free from violence between supporters of various political parties with levels increasing particularly during the period around election time. Within parties themselves, there is intolerance of opposing views as most are led by a dominant figurehead who has all followers either fall in line or fall out of favour. This creates a personality cult in which the party and the leader are inseparable as party leaders of most of the political parties are mainly or often the persons who formed the political parties or inherited leadership from the founding leader. It is perhaps not surprising that the result has been splits in various parties and the formation of new

ones as those considered renegade are expelled or not given space in existing parties. In some cases, internal party structures and courts have been called upon to resolve intra-party disputes with mixed outcomes.

While party constitutions embody democratic principles, questions arise regarding whether such “democratic” activities are truly democratic or superficial with the intent of presenting adherence to democratic principles. While main parties hold congresses for party delegates to elect leaders, the same cannot be said of small parties. During such conventions real competitors for the top leadership position appear to be shoved out of the way leaving only those competitors who do not present a real threat to the present leadership and their anointed successors.

#### **4.3.6 Political violence**

One indicator of political intolerance is the extent to which political competition degenerates into violence. Across the region, the modal answer to a survey question on whether political competition sometimes degenerates into violence was yes. The extent to which political intolerance manifests itself is reflected in the designation of special areas as territories of certain political parties and no-go zones for others, especially those in the opposition. In Zambia, for example, political candidates seeking elective office are sometimes barred from campaigning in areas that are considered strongholds of certain parties, both ruling and opposition. This problem is also reported in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where, as Kahombo (2021) notes, electoral politics is permanently associated with a logic of confrontation between the competing parties and candidates. In areas where peace is lacking and state authority ineffective, armed groups have been mobilised by candidates to steal the votes and impose their election on other parties.

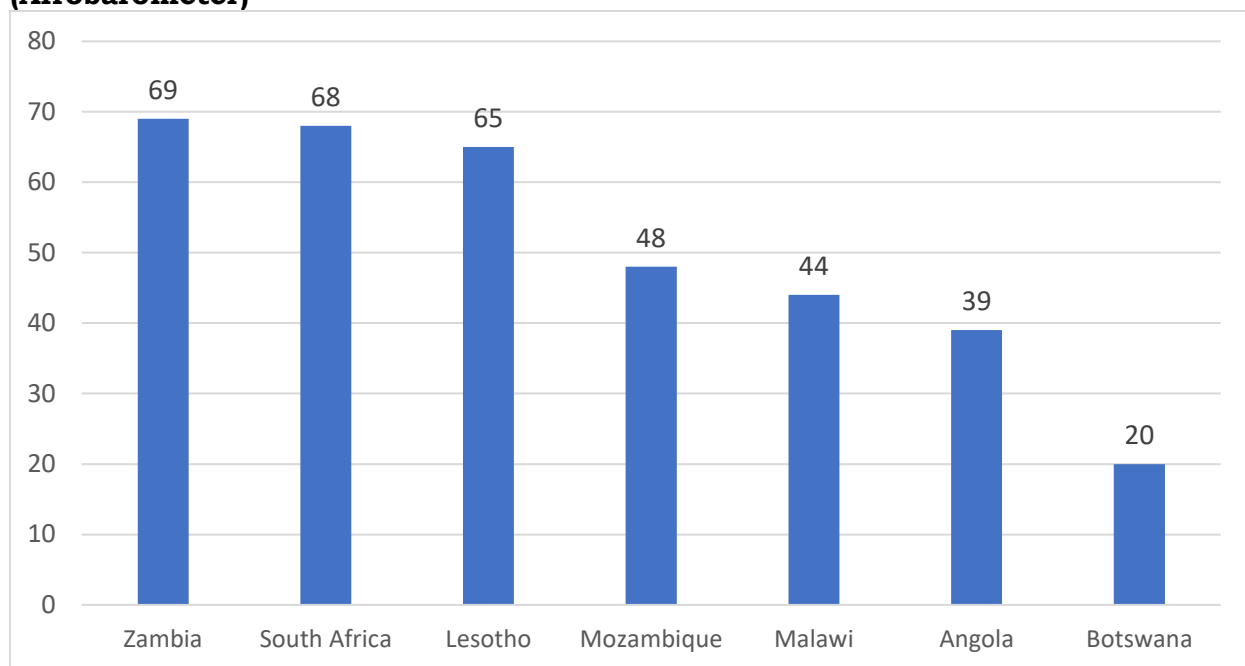
The problem of inter party violence has not spared some of the region’s strongest democracies either. For example, in South Africa, political competition is equally reported to lead to violence, as an informant in Mmatli (2021:15-16) notes:

I remember when I was a presiding officer in Umlazi in 1994. I didn't understand how serious it was that I was on IFP terrain as an ANC member. The polling station was in the hostel and the majority of the people voting there were IFP. You had to know the dynamics of the areas, so when you came in wearing an ANC t-shirt there, you had to be very careful because they would've killed you. So even when voting in 1994 you still had to know which area you would vote at so that you're protected by the numbers. When the DA went in they were very bold and they gave new political parties permission to do the same. The boldness of the DA to go into the communities, they were not liked but they did it anyway, and worse they were African members of the DA. The numbers spoke in favour of the DA because of the message of inclusivity and unity of all races in their campaigning, that's why they could move into African communities so boldly, but they still had to be careful.

In Botswana, meanwhile, the experience of party violence has largely been between competing sides within parties. As Lotshwao (2021:15-16) points out, internal party conflicts in Botswana have at several intervals, degenerated into violence during party congresses. Ultimately, these conflicts have resulted in party splits, as happened during the 2017 Botswana Movement (BMD) party congress. After one group was refused entry into the congress venue, a confrontation erupted that ultimately led to the splitting of the BMD into two parties.

The frequency with which political competition degenerates into violence among and between partisans is also reflected in public opinion surveys. On one end, 69% of Zambians agree that political competition frequently denigrates into violence in their country, seconded by South Africa, where 68% share the same sentiment. The least politically charged country is Botswana, where only one in five of the country's citizens hold the view that political competition sometimes results in political violence.

**Figure 4: Political Competition and political violence in Southern Africa (Afrobarometer)**



Source: Afrobarometer, 2019-2021

#### **4.4 Political Party Funding**

Political party funding in the Southern Africa region is largely derived from public and private sources. It is meant to cover administrative and campaign costs. Among other funding sources, various national and political party constitutions list public funding, membership fees, grants, donations, bequests, legacies, income from publications and other saleable items, revenue from all forms of investments, and proceeds of fundraising functions as sources of party funding. While the law in countries such as Botswana and Malawi permits political party funding from foreign sources, other countries such as Angola and DRC prohibit such kind of funding.

However, political parties are overwhelmingly secretive about their sources of funding and do not disclose details of such to their party supporters and the general public. Party members contribute very little to the financing of their parties with little revenue collected from membership fees across the region.

#### **4.4.1 Public financing of political parties**

There are variations regarding public financing when one looks closely at the situation in each of the southern African countries. To begin with, public party financing legislation exists in all but one of the seven study countries. The only exception is Botswana, the oldest multiparty democracy in the region. In the case of the DRC, political parties do not receive public funding despite the existence of legislation granting them state funding apparently for economic reasons. In countries like South Africa and Malawi, new party funding laws have been passed recently whose spirit appears to be to bring sanity in the area. These laws have brought optimism amongst various quarters with regard to promoting transparency and accountability when it comes to political party funding. However, the outcome of their implementation is yet to be seen since the necessary framework for their implementation has not been enacted in Malawi and their implementation has just commenced recently in South Africa.

There are concerns that proportional allocation of public funding to parties according to the legislation in various countries favours large parties over smaller ones thus keeping the former dominant at the expense of the latter. The law in Lesotho is a good example. It states that a party that has not yet contested elections is eligible for campaign funding when it has 500 paid up-membership, votes garnered by a party in the previous elections is used as the basis to get campaign funding where a party has contested elections and party funding is based on how many seats the party has in the National Assembly.

Legislation governing public financing of political parties in the southern African countries stipulates that the recipient parties should account for their funding. Provisions are laid out in these laws to ensure that parties report to authorities tasked with overseeing and enforcing the implementation of laws on the expenditure of public resources provided to them by law. Among others, these authorities are the Financial Court in the DRC, the Independent Electoral Commission in South Africa and the Registrar of Political Parties in

Malawi. Despite cases where parties have been denied funding for non-compliance, the enforcement of such laws remains very weak.

#### **4.4.2 Private financing of political parties**

Party financing legislation in some countries also extends to private funding. Disclosures of sources of funding for amounts exceeding certain thresholds are mandatory according to party financing laws in Malawi, Lesotho and South Africa, among others. South African legislation goes further than the laws of other countries on private party financing which provide for bilateral funding by also promoting multilateral funding. According to the country's report, the Rainbow Nation's Political Party Funding Act of 2018 goes further to establish "a new Multiparty Democracy Fund (MPDF) which will accept private donations and disburse these to political parties represented in national and provincial legislatures," (Mmatli, 2021:26-27)

The authorities overseeing party financing from public coffers are also charged with doing the same when it comes to private party financing. The laxity that exists with regard to oversight of state financing is also prevalent when it comes to oversight of funds from private sources. Political parties are supposed to account for their funding according to stipulations provided by various national laws. For example, the law in Lesotho obliges political parties that receive public funds to report to the Independent Electoral Commission within a period of six months. Similarly, Malawian law states that a political party which receives funding from the State shall keep proper books and records of accounts in relation to state funds. They are further required to balance their accounts for a particular year and produce statements of final accounts for submission to the Registrar who shall forward a copy of the accounts to the Auditor General and the Clerk to the National Assembly. Party compliance to reporting rules, where it is existent, appears to be mostly cosmetic with weak enforcement of legislation governing accountability of party finances.

There appears to be growing suspicion among citizens that political parties exist for the self-enrichment of their leaders and as a means for them to wield

political influence and attain government positions together with the access to state resources that these bring. This view is captured most succinctly in the Mozambique country report by Mulhovo (2021:15-16) when he notes that

lack of transparency and accountability of funds that political parties receive from the Mozambican state and others, is one of the factors that lead to the distance and distrust of citizens in relation to the real intentions of political parties .... People think that political parties are only spaces for achieving individual goals of accumulating power and wealth and not for conveying ideas of development and nation-building.

While direct evidence of illicit funding may not be commonplace, questions that have been asked, suspicions that have been raised, utterances that have been made, and revelations that have emerged provide strong indications that political parties receive illicit funding.

Furthermore, it is a well-known fact that ruling parties benefit from state resources. Among other things, their donors are awarded government tenders so that they can plough the proceeds back into the parties (Katundu, 2021; Pacatalolo, 2021).

## **4.5 Public Perception of Political Parties**

A healthy political environment relies a great deal on a close relationship between the citizenry and political parties. Where political parties exude public confidence, they enjoy the trust and confidence of the people. However, if political parties are seen as distant from the citizenry, pursuing agendas that prioritise their own interests or those of the party leadership, they lose the confidence and trust of the larger public. This is particularly problematic for groups such as youth and women, who largely feel excluded from the political space as political parties are largely seen as dominated by the elderly men.

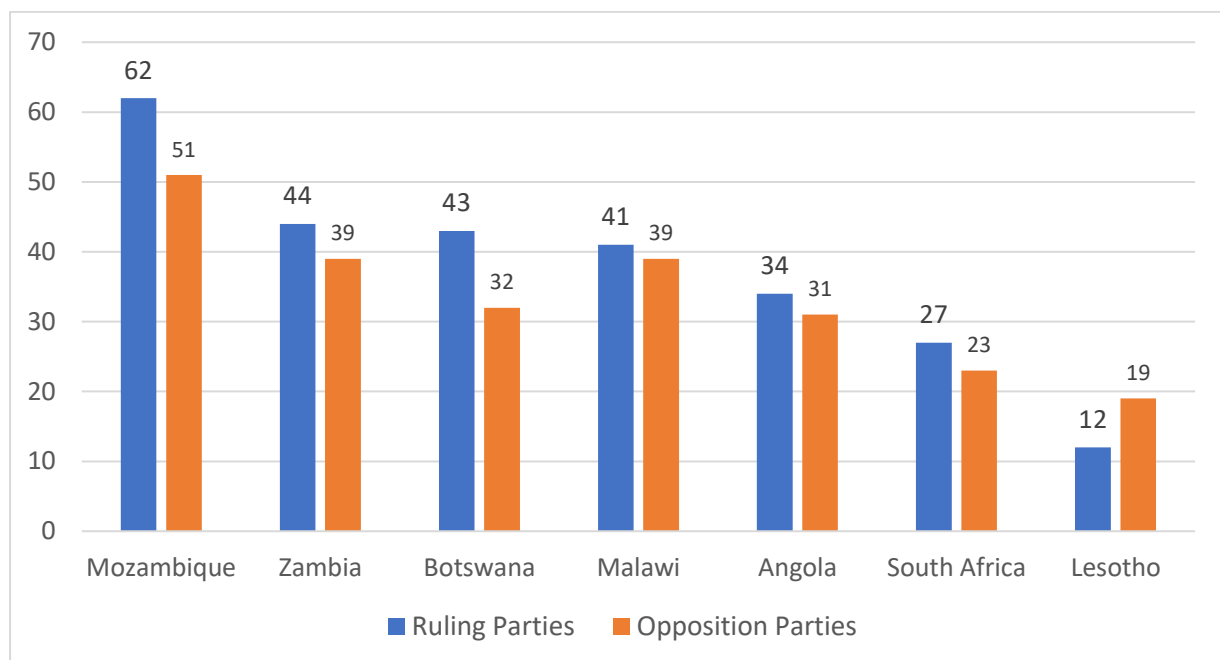
### **4.5.1 Public Trust in Political Parties**

The evidence from the study shows that generally, popular trust in political parties in the southern Africa region is very low. Many young people do not

trust political parties, while party leaders often complain that the youth are unwilling to get involved.

Across the region, public trust in political parties is generally low. Political parties are generally regarded as elitist, less connected to the people except when they seek votes, out of touch and corrupt. Among the countries where survey data are available, Mozambicans express the most trust in political parties, both ruling and opposition, while Basotho are the least trusting of political parties. Political instability, which has characterised Basotho politics, appears to be the main factor eroding public trust in political parties in that country. While all parties suffer from low levels of trust, the problem is compounded for opposition political parties (**Figure 5**).

**Figure 5: Public Trust in Ruling and opposition political parties in Southern Africa, 2018-2021 (Afrobarometer)**



Source: Afrobarometer

For the countries in the study for which Afrobarometer survey data is available, in all but one, are ruling parties trusted more than opposition political parties. This might be a function of propagandised media coverage of opposition political parties, which ultimately leads to less likelihood of party alternation during elections. It is only in Lesotho where opposition political parties are more trusted by the public than the ruling party.

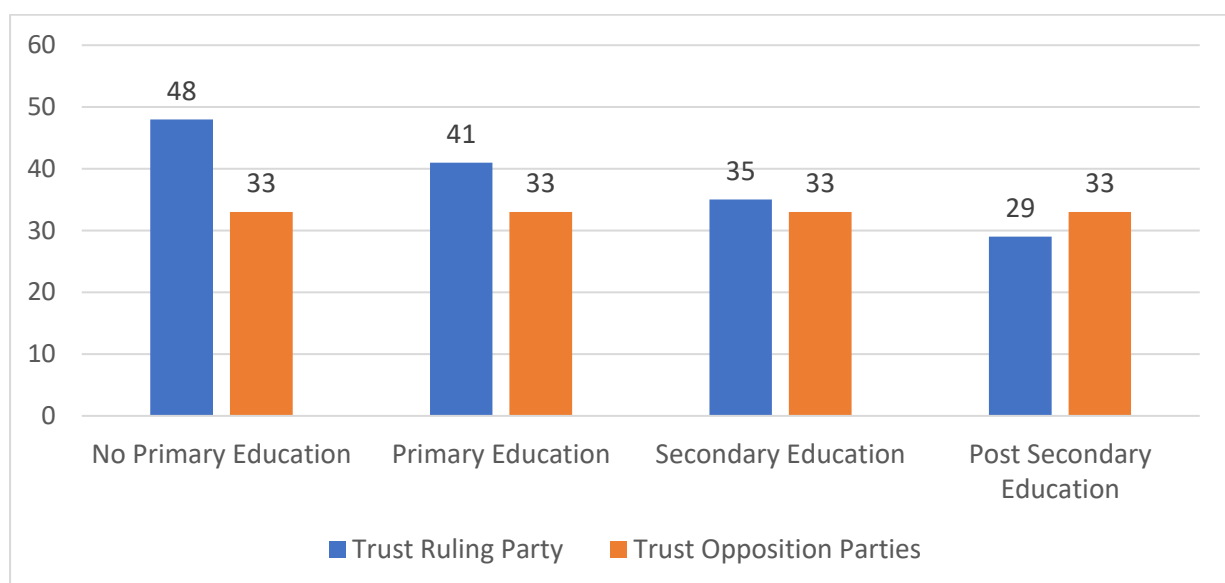
However, even in this particular case, the levels of trust for both opposition and ruling parties are very low.

#### **4.5.2 Factors that affect public trust of political parties**

Several factors affect public trust in political parties. The noteworthy ones include: media coverage, that is whether it is balanced, biased or not in favour of ruling or opposition parties; public perception of political parties, especially whether they consider them as representative of the ordinary person, out of touch or anachronistic. More importantly, a closer analysis of the Afrobarometer data shows that education and age of citizens in the region also have important influence in determining whether citizens trust political parties and especially which parties they trust between the ruling and opposition political parties.

In terms of education, generally, more educated citizens are less trustful of political parties. It is noteworthy that while less educated citizens in the region tend to trust ruling parties more than the more educated, the opposite is true among educated citizens, with those with post-secondary education preferring to trust opposition parties more (Figure 6).

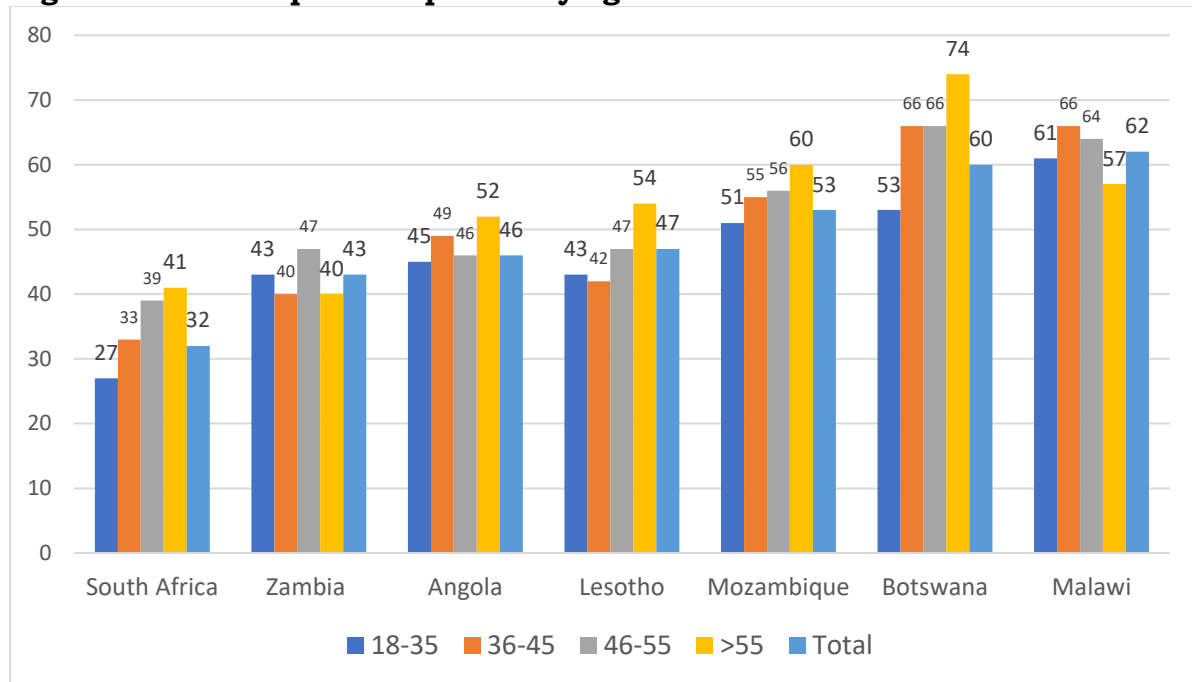
**Figure 6: trust in ruling and opposition political parties in Southern Africa by education**



Source: Afrobarometer

When it comes to age, the youth in the southern African region tend to be less trusting of political parties generally compared to the elderly. Put simply, the older the citizen, the more likely they trust political parties, all things constant (Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Trust in political parties by age in Southern Africa**



Source: Afrobarometer

## 4.6 Challenges facing Political Parties in Southern Africa

Political parties face numerous challenges in Southern Africa. The challenges can be classified into systemic and structural challenges.

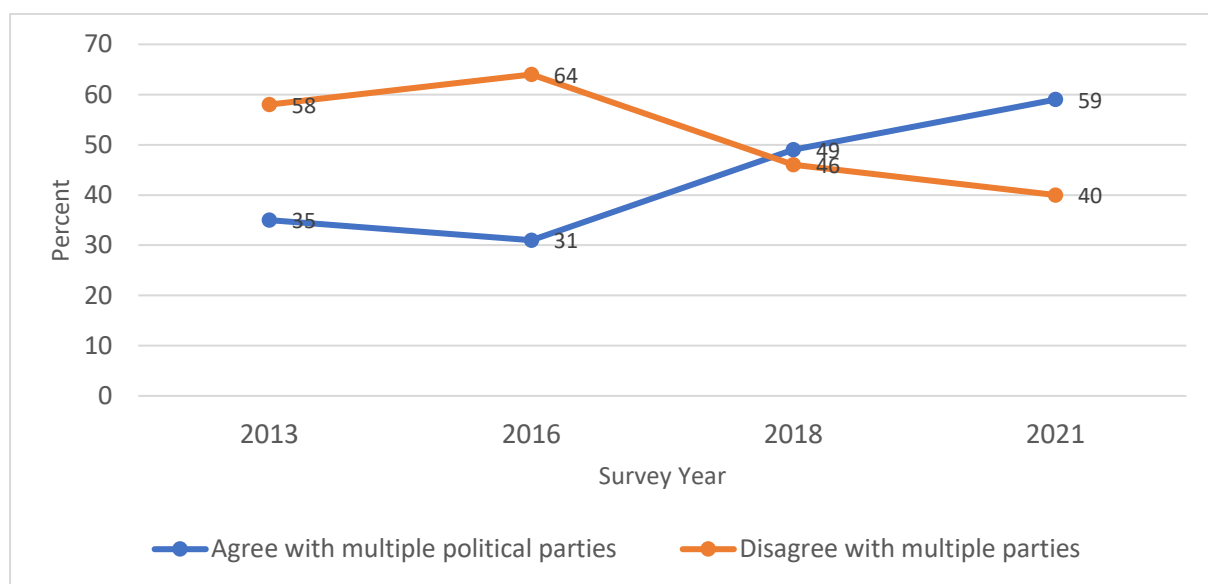
### 4.6.1 Systemic challenges

#### 4.6.1.1 Legal Environment

The primary systemic challenges apply to the legalisation of political parties. While the legal frameworks in eight of the nine study countries allow for the existence of multiple political parties, as discussed earlier, eSwatini is the only outlier where political parties remain banned to this day. Under these circumstances, political parties can only operate underground, with political leaders facing the perpetual threat of criminal prosecution. With political parties banned for almost half a century in eSwatini, their existence also faces another existential threat in that public perception has during this time been

largely influenced by state propaganda that paints political parties as a foreign concept that stands to erode the way of life of eMaswati. However, this propaganda notwithstanding, many citizens have increasingly warmed up to the ideas of multiparty competition. According to the 2021 Afrobarometer survey, 6 in 10 of eMaswati hold the view that many political parties are needed to make sure that they have real choices in who governs them. This is nearly double the 31% of eMaswati who held the same view only five years previously (Figure 8)

**Figure 8: Proportion of eMaswati who agree that political parties are needed in the country, 2013-2021 (Afrobarometer)**



Figures are for respondents who agree or agree very strongly with statement that says “Many political parties are needed to make sure that Emaswati have real choices in who governs them.”

#### 4.6.1.2 Financial challenges

Funding is crucial for parties to play their rightful role as key agents of democracy. However, across the entire region, with perhaps the exception of ruling parties, most political parties in the region face enormous challenges in raising adequate finances to remain active and participate fully in politics. In countries such as Mozambique, Malawi, Lesotho, Botswana, Angola, the DRC, Zambia, a paucity of financial resources means that political parties are often unable to pay their staff, settle office rentals or meet the basic

requirements for registration. The enormity of party funding, and the extent to which it disproportionately affects opposition political parties, is illustrated most succinctly in the words of one opposition party leader from Botswana, who notes that:

Lack of party funding in Botswana leads to a scenario where opposition parties lack resources to mount credible challenges to those in power. Meanwhile, the ruling party enjoys advantages that come with incumbency and sometimes outright receives kickbacks from entities wishing to do business or doing business with the state. The ruling party is opposed to state funding because it does not lack funding, and any funds that come would have greater returns per pula for opposition parties who are currently badly funded as opposed to returns for the ruling party. It is a self-preservation move essentially, (cited in Lotshwao, 2021:22)

Even where political parties levy membership fees, payment rates are so low so much that political parties hardly generate sufficient resources from this funding stream. In most cases, membership fees are so low that the overall contribution to party finances is negligible. Mulhovo (2021:20) aptly sums this view up when he points out that in Mozambique, membership contributions to political parties “are weak and represent almost nothing in their overall funding.” This is despite the fact that membership fees have the potential to offer the most sustainable source of funding for political parties.

Faced with weak financial base, most political parties fail to operate meaningfully. In Lesotho for example, the country study shows that most political parties, especially those in opposition, struggle to pay their office rental, printing manifestos, and other campaign materials (Macheli, 2021). In the DRC, meanwhile, Kahombo (2021) notes that funding challenges means most political parties have no offices and end up operating from the homes of their founders.

Not only do the financial challenges hamper day to day activities of political parties, but they also threaten their sustainability and survival. In Malawi,

Lesotho, the DRC, Mozambique, and Zambia, for example, many political parties fail to even field candidates in elections because of a lack of financial muscle to support their candidates. This challenge leaves candidates to fund their own campaigns, leading to the exclusion of the poorer members of society, who are disproportionately women and youth. This problem contributes to small political parties opting to participate in elections by entering into coalitions with larger and more financially vibrant parties. In countries such as the DRC and Malawi, where registration of political parties is dependent on participation in elections, such arrangements ultimately threaten the survival of a healthy multiparty political arena.

The lack of adequate funding streams further exposes political parties in the region to all manner of capture by rich elites. In return for funding, the few financiers wield significant influence in the policy agendas of most political parties whilst leaving them beholden to their benefactors. In his study of the DRC, for example, Kahombo (2021:22) gives an example of a political party whose leader went as far as taking a bank loan and mortgaging his property to finance the elections of the party's candidates. However, as Kahombo further notes, such contributions are part of a calculative move to enable the financier to gain control over the party and use it for the purpose of personal political positioning in future government.

As we shall see later, the dependence on single benefactors creates a cascading challenge of political parties that are less accountable to their members, as is the case in Botswana, the DRC, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and South Africa.

Related to financial challenges, political parties in the region exhibit a general lack of administrative capacity, especially in the areas of accounting, management and research. Even where political parties receive state funding, as is the case in Angola, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique and South Africa, most political parties fail to account properly for the funds due to their capacity challenges, which contributes to delays in accessing future funds. This

challenge is particularly compounded for opposition political parties, who face a possibility of losing their only reliable sources of funding.

#### **4.6.1.3 Unequal playing ground that mostly favors ruling parties**

The effects of the challenges that political parties face in the region often affect opposition political parties more than those in government. While ruling parties often draw upon the advantages of incumbency, including drawing from public resources, opposition political parties have to rely on their own innovativeness to keep their operations afloat.

Not only are opposition political parties in the region disadvantaged in terms of resources, but they often face challenges in accessing the most important public media platforms, which are often monopolised by the ruling parties. This appears to be a common problem across the region, with South Africa being the only exception. The net effect of this monopoly of public media is that ruling parties are not only better known, but opposition leaders are often vilified, further reducing their chances of securing electoral victory, as illustrated in the Zambia report:

Apart from the independent media, the public media, including television, does not typically cover opposition political parties. By contrast, the ruling party receives a great deal of favourable coverage. The extent of the coverage for the ruling party, especially during election campaigns, creates an uneven playing field between the ruling party and the opposition parties. (Chinyama, 2021:15)

#### **4.6.2 Structural challenges**

Apart from the systemic challenges outlined above, political parties in the Southern Africa region also face a myriad of structural challenges that limit their ability to operate effectively.

##### **4.6.2.1 Poor governance**

One of the common challenges facing political parties is bad governance, which is exemplified by failure to adhere to the party constitution, political

clientelism and corruption. This is succinctly illustrated by one key informant from Zambia, who points out that:

Most political parties are formed around dominant individuals with presidential aspirations and remain largely leader-driven and leader-financed. Generally, the parties are identified by their leaders' names, not by the party's name or its ideology. (cited in Chinyama, 2021:28).)

Similar challenges are cited in Malawi, where it is reported that:

Almost all the major parties are run as family affairs...the founder syndrome has been a catalyst for succession disputes and defections of prominent personalities. This is because the founding families make it difficult for healthy competition to exist in the parties. The party founders try to keep the party leadership in the family. Although the party constitutions are generally well-written, they are mainly ignored. Conventions and conferences are not held regularly. The parties' highest bodies remain unelected for prolonged periods and account to no party members except those in the high command. Leadership succession issues have torn parties apart in recent times. (Katundu, 2021:26)

These challenges are reported in nearly all countries in the study, resulting in succession battles that frequently lead to party splits. These in turn undermine chances of such parties mounting effective campaigns and winning the elections.

The challenges of bad governance appear to stem from a palpable lack of understanding of the functioning of political parties in many countries in the region. For example, in Mozambique, the common view is that most of the smaller political parties even struggle to structure themselves properly while in many of the other polities, most political parties tend to structure themselves along the founding nationalist parties and have failed to evolve and adapt. Examples being Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi and Zambia. By failing to adapt to contemporary realities, this copy and paste approach in

the structuring of political parties results in the creation of political parties that are out of sync with contemporary realities, further contributing to their alienation from the public.

#### **4.6.2.2 Weak intra-party democracy/ Party fragmentation**

For political parties to play a meaningful role in democratic politics, it is important that they practice democracy at the party level first. However, evidence adduced in this study shows that this is far from happening. Instead, most political parties dispense with even the very basic democratic principles. Due in part to high levels of intolerance of opposing views, intra-party democracy is often very weak across the region. This leads to the emergence of the challenge of party fragmentation, as surmised by a key respondent from Malawi:

As the political party leadership pushes for their favourite candidates to win the primary elections through hook and crook, the popular candidates break away and stand as independents” (cited in Katundu, 2021:26).

The best illustration of the effects of lack of intra-party democracy is perhaps Lesotho, where party splits have been a hallmark of the country’s politics from the time the country’s ‘mother party’, the Basutoland Congress Party, was founded in 1952. Since then, the party has given birth to so many offshoots, which have in turn given birth to more offshoots due to a general failure to accommodate alternative and competing viewpoints. Similar party splits have occurred in the DRC, especially among opposition political parties, rendering them incapable of mounting a unified opposition or effectively fighting during elections.

#### **4.6.2.3 Inter-party intolerance**

A related challenge to lack of intra-party democracy is inter-party intolerance. Despite the adoption of democratic constitutions that guarantee the right for individuals to pursue political agendas of their choice, it would appear many citizens in the region are yet to fully embrace the idea of political pluralism. Instead, many citizens are intolerant of individuals that hold different

viewpoints from theirs, to the point of engaging in violence against political opponents. In the DRC, such intolerance has led to the establishment of political no-go areas, while in Zambia, political opponents are often treated as enemies of war. This challenge has not spared the region's strongest economic power, South Africa. In this case, lack of tolerance of opposing views within political parties frequently degenerates into violence, as explained by one political party interviewee:

Politics can be war without a gun, but sometimes it can be a war with real weapons...During campaigning seasons the fear I have is that political parties don't speak loud enough about areas that are no-go areas. An ANC cadre can't go to certain areas, a DA member can't go to the hostels during campaigning. We still have the no-go areas, it shouldn't be part of our culture, but it should be spoken of at the same time. We are seeing cases around the world that there is violence, it's very volatile and it doesn't have to be that way." (cited in Mmatli, 2021:15)

#### **4.6.2.4 Administrative Challenges**

A related structural challenge facing political parties is in the area of administration. The evidence adduced from the study shows that in many countries in the region, most political parties lack resources, people, equipment or capacity to effectively operate a political party administrative infrastructure on a day-to-day basis. In several countries, notably Lesotho, DRC, Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia, most political parties do not have full time staff, lack office space to operate from, especially at provincial and district levels.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

This study has examined the state of political parties in Southern Africa, tracing their historical origins from the colonial era through to independence to the democratic revival of the 1990s to the present. With the exception of eSwatini, the legal environment is currently conducive for the operation and

existence of political parties. The constitutional and legal rules have made the establishment of political parties feasible and many have taken advantage of these rules to found political parties. The evidence from the cross-national study shows that while registering a political party is relatively easy in at least eight of the nine study countries, keeping parties active and vibrant is a major challenge. As a result, many political parties are dormant and only a few are active in each country. Political parties in the region face a challenge of poor engagement with the citizenry. Few citizens profess membership to political parties, and fewer still make contact with political party leaders when they have a civic problem. Political parties are mostly male dominated, facing a challenge of inclusivity as women and the youth are usually kept out from important leadership positions or completely kept out altogether. Political parties in the region face numerous challenges, including funding, organisational, as well as internal – party democracy. However, they remain an important feature in the political space, requiring nurturing to ensure their survival as otherwise it is hard to imagine democracy in the region without political parties.

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