

STATE BUILDING AND  
DEMOCRACY IN  
SOUTHERN AFRICA

*Botswana, Zimbabwe,  
and South Africa*



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Pierre du Toit



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# ❁ CONTENTS ❁

<b>FOREWORD</b> , <i>Richard H. Solomon</i>	viii
<b>PREFACE</b>	xi
INTRODUCTION	
<b>Africa's Future: Democratic Stability or Impending Anarchy?</b>	1
<b>PART I ❁</b>	
<b>BOTSWANA: The Strong State and Strong Society</b>	15
1. Constructing State and Society	17
2. The Dynamics of State-Society Interaction	45
<b>PART II ❁</b>	
<b>ZIMBABWE: The Strong Society and Weakening State</b>	75
3. Rhodesia: The Contest for Hegemony in a Divided Society	77
4. Zimbabwe: Reconstituting State and Society	115
<b>PART III ❁</b>	
<b>SOUTH AFRICA: From Apartheid to the Autonomous State?</b>	149
5. The Apartheid State and the Divided Society	151
6. The Contest for Hegemony	181
<b>PART IV ❁</b>	
<b>TOWARD SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY</b>	215
7. The Incentives for Sustaining Democracy	217
<b>EPILOGUE</b>	243
APPENDIX	
<b>State Building and Conflict in Divided Societies</b>	249
<b>NOTES</b>	281
<b>INDEX</b>	341



## ❖ FOREWORD ❖

**S**omething remarkable seems to have happened in South Africa: democracy. After decades of minority rule, racial division, and violence, South Africans agreed to work together politically within the framework of a constitutional democracy, an agreement that culminated in the April 1994 elections that ended apartheid. Where once the political system dictated discrimination, it now respects difference; where once racial inequality was mandated, now political equality has institutional support.

Less widely noted in the West—but no less remarkable—the past decade has witnessed the cessation of divisive conflict and the beginnings of democracy in several other countries of southern Africa. In Namibia and Mozambique bloody struggle has been replaced by elections and postwar reconstruction. Even in Angola, where earlier peace accords broke down, the warring factions finally may be ready to work together in peace. Southern Africa, a region of the continent that until recently was wracked by violence, is now transforming itself into an area of stability, raising prospects for an economic takeoff.

But what are the prospects for these hopeful developments taking root and enduring?

Answering that question is a central objective of this book. Pierre du Toit, himself a South African and a frequent contributor to the debate on his country's democratic transition, takes a long, hard look at the prospects for democratic sustainability in South

Africa and neighboring Botswana and Zimbabwe. These three countries share many similarities, yet have very different political track records. His analysis of Botswana, which gained independence peacefully three decades ago, is both enlightening and encouraging; enlightening not least because few people, even among African scholars, are familiar with Botswana's impressive economic and political development since the end of colonial rule; encouraging because Botswana is arguably the most successful democracy in continental Africa.

Du Toit's assessment of Zimbabwe, though equally illuminating, is a good deal less heartening. Tracing the country's history from the 19th century through to the 1990s, he finds that the legacy of British colonial rule and of the civil war that led to the demise of the undemocratic Rhodesian regime is a Zimbabwean state where, despite constitutional safeguards, democracy is underdeveloped.

As he explores the contrasting experiences of these three countries—assessing the influence of each nation's precolonial and colonial heritage, ethnic composition, and economic and environmental circumstances—du Toit finds that democratic outcomes depend on the degree to which democratic institutions are imbedded in a wider network of state and social institutions. Where a state is both strong and autonomous, and where a civil society is strong, democracy can survive and grow. Where those conditions are absent, democracy is unlikely to endure.

The implications of this conclusion are evident throughout southern Africa and far beyond, confirming or questioning assumptions about democratization in many areas of contemporary policymaking and academic endeavor—areas in which the United States Institute of Peace has long worked to promote research, awareness, and discussion. Pierre du Toit, a former Jennings Randolph Peace Fellow at the Institute, has written a book that promises to stimulate debate on topics ranging from the nature of divided societies to the preconditions for democratic success, from the causes of ethnic conflict to its management and resolution, from the promotion of democracy and stability throughout the world to the prospects for political freedom and peace in Africa in particular.

Recognizing the importance of these topics for the U.S. policymaking and scholarly communities, and for many Americans in other walks of life, the United States Institute of Peace has devel-

oped an extensive track record of research support and dissemination of policy-relevant and academically insightful scholarship. To take the example of Africa, over just the past two years the Institute has published John L. Hirsch and Robert B. Oakley's reflections on peacekeeping in Somalia, *Somalia and Operation Restore Hope*; UN special representative Mohamed Sahnoun's analysis of earlier international intervention in the same country, *Somalia: The Missed Opportunities*; David Smock's edited volume on foreign intervention throughout Africa, *Making War and Waging Peace*; and a workshop-inspired Special Report, *Dealing with War Crimes and Genocide in Rwanda*.

On the subject of ending violent conflict in southern Africa, the Institute has published Cameron Hume's firsthand account of mediation in Mozambique, *Ending Mozambique's War*, and Peter Gastrow's analysis of South Africa's National Peace Accord, *Bargaining for Peace*. The Institute's Grant Program has also supported conflict resolution training by nongovernmental organizations through grants to organizations in Somalia and South Africa.

In the tradition of this Institute effort, *State Building and Democracy in Southern Africa* represents our continuing commitment to providing readers with the tools needed to better understand and debate the prospects for peace and democracy in Africa and elsewhere around the world where political reformers struggle for nonviolent change and open politics.

Richard H. Solomon, President  
United States Institute of Peace



## ❖ PREFACE ❖

Africa's contribution to the global "third wave" of democratization has thus far been distinctly modest.<sup>1</sup> Events in Africa during the early 1990s do little to suggest that this situation is about to change. Some African countries appear to hover on the edge of anarchy, and seem to be quite remote from any democratic threshold. The spectacular and catastrophic explosions of domestic violence in Somalia in 1991 and in Rwanda in 1994 reveal the collapse of the very institution required to overcome anarchy and impose order—the state. Less dramatic but equally significant is the slow implosion of state institutions in Zaire, so vividly demonstrated by the forests retaking the national road network, which in 1959 still extended over 140,000 kilometers, but which covered only 20,000 kilometers by the early 1970s.<sup>2</sup> Such profound breakdowns in the African state pose the question of whether Africa can be expected to produce any truly significant contribution to the global wave of democratization.

This book takes up this question by examining the requirements for order as well as those for democracy, and by exploring the link between them. The conceptual focus is on the relationship among state strength, societal strength, and democratic viability. The empirical focus is a comparative study of Botswana, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, all of which continue to face the African challenges to order and democracy presented by conditions of scarcity, communal conflict, and environmental constraints. All three states have responded to these challenges differently, with

major implications for their democratic viability. Botswana has succeeded in establishing what is generally considered to be continental Africa's most successful democracy. Zimbabwe has been less successful, emerging from white minority rule and civil war into a semidemocratic state with questionable political and economic liberty. South Africa, the closest comparable case to Zimbabwe, has likewise gone through white minority rule and violent insurrection into a process of democratic transition. Should this transition from the infamous system of apartheid into liberal democracy be sustained, then Africa may well produce what could become one of *the* landmark cases in the third wave of global democratization. A central ambition of this study is to examine what South Africans can learn from the other two African cases about how to secure their own process of transition.

This study differs from other analyses of African politics in its selection of cases and its analytical focus on the role of state strength and societal strength in creating the conditions within which democracy can be sustained. The study examines two related propositions: that democratic institutions are embedded in the wide-ranging institutional network of state and societal institutions; and that the institutions that make up this network must be robust and resilient if effective democracy is to be achieved. The study therefore joins the broad academic debate on the preconditions for democracy. It also addresses the policy debate on how to manage and facilitate transitions to democracy in such a way as to secure stable outcomes. The conclusion reached is that a particular kind of strong autonomous state is a necessary, but still insufficient condition for sustaining democracy. This finding does not challenge the established consensus on the necessary preconditions for democracy, but it does argue for the inclusion of state strength and autonomy on the list of recognized preconditions. Likewise, it adds to the existing body of policy advice on effecting successful democratic transitions by suggesting that policymakers must not only aim for the establishment of a democratic regime but also work to create and maintain a strong and autonomous state in the process of transition.

While academic analysts, policymakers, and practitioners may find value in these conclusions, the results of this study are presented as a book, not as a manual. There is no checklist of do's

and don't's. The study gladly pays cognitive respect to the hands-on judgment of policymakers, who confront policy issues of a singular complexity that no author can hope to anticipate. The insights and recommendations that follow from this study are thus presented at one or more steps removed from such immediate policy detail. Practitioners are invited to make these general findings their own, and to convert them into policy actions appropriate to the specific problems with which they are required to deal.

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