

## ❖ INTRODUCTION ❖

# Africa's Future: Democratic Stability or Impending Anarchy?

**P**ace, prosperity, and democratic stability are valued but rare commodities in Africa. In parts of West Africa these goods appear to be utterly unobtainable. For example, Robert D. Kaplan finds Sierra Leone devoid of almost every condition conducive to such outcomes: The official government effectively controls only the capital city (and then only by day), the interior is a contested terrain in which four armies vie for ascendancy, and the official borders of the state are cartographical fictions. People, goods, and money traverse these boundaries with impunity, beyond any control by the state. In the cities, social and economic decay is destroying the fabric of communities as rapidly as new migrants arrive from the ecologically devastated countryside.

For Kaplan, Sierra Leone is a microcosm of the kind of anarchy he predicts will envelop all of West Africa and much of the underdeveloped world: "the withering away of central governments, the rise of tribal and regional domains, the unchecked spread of disease, and the growing pervasiveness of war." At the core of this coming anarchy Kaplan is describing lies the decay and collapse of the political institution of the modern state: "West Africa is reverting to the Africa of the Victorian Atlas. It consists now of a series of coastal trading posts, such as Freetown and Conakry, and an interior that,

owing to violence, volatility and disease, is again becoming, as Graham Greene once observed, 'blank' and 'unexplored.'<sup>1</sup>

This vivid doomsday scenario holds grave implications for the democratic prospects of the African continent. Democratic practices are embedded in the institutions of the modern state. Where states decay and dissolve, democracies are also likely to falter. The likelihood of a livable, democratically stable future for virtually any African state in a continent beset by problems of this order seems remote. To examine this question seriously may lay one open to charges of wishful thinking. Yet the aim of this study is to take up this very issue and consider the problems of securing democratic stability in African states. The focus is precisely the same one identified by Kaplan: to explore the link between the durability of democratic practices and the resilience of the state structures within which these practices are conducted.

This study's broad focus on Africa is narrowed down to a comparison of Botswana, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. The most important consideration behind that selection is the policy problem of democratic transition in South Africa. For most of this century South Africa epitomized the deplorable features of state-driven racial discrimination and exploitation through the infamous policies of apartheid. For decades it was considered the least likely case for successful democratization, but since early 1990 the country has entered into an extraordinarily complex process of transition toward democracy. Few, if any, directly comparable examples of successful transition are available to South Africans to guide them through this unfamiliar landscape. Yet this study asks whether South Africa can learn from other *African* countries about successful democratization. This question is somewhat unusual, given the dismal political, social, and economic track record of most of the continent's independent states. Against this backdrop one might expect that if there is anything to be learned, it is what to avoid. This study does indeed look for what to avoid, but it also looks for examples of actions that are worth emulating.

Botswana is arguably the most successful democracy in continental Africa. It has exhibited continuous democratic stability since independence in 1965, coupled to remarkable economic progress. Clearly there must be something positive to draw from this case. Zimbabwe, markedly less democratic but still, in com-

parative African terms, a success story, is generally considered the example most comparable with South Africa. It has also proceeded further along the route on which South Africans set out in 1990. A revolt against white minority rule led to a violent civil war between 1972 and 1980 that culminated in constitutional negotiations and the inauguration of democracy in independent Zimbabwe in 1980. Since then, both the democratic quality of political life and the economic prosperity of the country have declined in the face of adverse circumstances. From this qualified success South Africans may be able to learn what should be avoided as well as what can be applied to their own situation.

The concept of democracy is therefore central to the study. The prevailing tendency among many political scientists is to define democracy in procedural terms. An authoritative definition is Samuel P. Huntington's: "The central procedure of democracy is the selection of leaders through competitive elections by the people they govern."<sup>2</sup> Scholars engaged in the study of divided societies tend to add a further criterion: not only should voters be free to express their choice of rulers, but the expression of choice should result in parties alternating as rulers and as opposition. Democratic institutions should not only allow this alternating to occur but also encourage the process. The case for this extended definition of democracy is strongly argued by Donald L. Horowitz.<sup>3</sup> This concern is understandable: in divided societies floating voters tend to be rare, and electoral majorities and minorities are likely to coalesce in more or less permanent units, thus perpetuating the positions of those in power and those deprived of power. Neither Botswana nor Zimbabwe can boast elections in which a ruling party has been defeated. Yet neither can be written off as completely undemocratic.

The approach adopted in this study goes beyond Huntington's minimal definition but stops short of insisting on the criteria set by Horowitz. The procedural criterion set by Huntington is used in conjunction with the criterion of citizenship of equal value. This is a very flexible yardstick. Citizenship provides the basis for making claims against the state. In democracies, states are obliged to submit to certain kinds of claims, namely, those that demand equity in the provision of public goods. Public goods can range from physical to symbolic commodities; included is the entire range of civic

rights and obligations that characterize democracies. With this yardstick one can also judge the extent to which the perennial losers in elections in both Botswana and Zimbabwe have a quality of life that is meaningful and democratic. Useful insights may also be gained as to how to secure and enhance democracy for both the electoral winners and the electoral losers in South Africa after apartheid.

Four considerations behind the selection of cases for study also should be pointed out. First, the unit chosen for analysis is a state, not a society, community, group, or region. The interaction between states and other such social units is analyzed, but with the state as the primary focus. Second, the theoretical perspective developed in this study to assess problems confronting the selected African states draws on the literature on so-called divided societies and, it is hoped, contributes to the theory of that body of work. The selected African states therefore have to conform to the definitional attributes of divided societies. Two of the cases, Zimbabwe and South Africa, are generally accepted as such, while the third case, Botswana, is more often considered an exceptional example of an African state that is basically undivided. It is argued later that despite notable differences between Botswana and the other two cases, all three are functionally equivalent units of analysis and that Botswana should be considered a potential or incipient divided society.

A third consideration is the requirement that Richard Rose calls "bounded variability" and Arend Lijphart calls the "comparable cases" yardstick.<sup>4</sup> That is, the cases selected for comparison should be "similar in a large number of important characteristics (variables) which one wants to treat as constants, but dissimilar as far as those variables are concerned which one wants to relate to each other." The advantage of such a selection lies in the fact that "while the total number of variables cannot be reduced, by using comparable cases in which many variables are constant, one can reduce considerably the number of operative variables and study their relationships under controlled conditions without the problem of running out of cases."<sup>5</sup> With only three cases under examination this requirement becomes crucial.

Botswana, South Africa, and Zimbabwe share a number of sociopolitical as well as economic features. The populations of all

three countries were profoundly influenced by the Mfecane, a social, political, and military transformation that affected many societies throughout Southern Africa during the first half of the 19th century. All three cases experienced colonial rule, and all three had Britain as the metropolitan power. All three had important white minorities in their populations and still do. Cultural pluralism, extending well beyond the white-black distinction, is a prominent feature of each case. The forces of modernization, as measured in the phenomena of urbanization, industrialization, and technologically sophisticated networks of communication, are operative in each of the three cases. All three fit in the same categories within the global political economy: in the ranks of the South rather than the North, or, if you prefer, as part of the Third World instead of the First. All three have young populations; almost half of Botswana's population was under the age of 15 by the end of 1991, and almost 45 percent of Zimbabwe's. South Africa and Botswana are close in relative standards of living; Botswana leads with gross domestic product (GDP) per head at U.S.\$2,585 versus U.S.\$2,474 for South Africa. Zimbabwe lags at U.S.\$617 per head. As for life expectancy, the three countries are remarkably close at 63 years for South Africa and 61 years for the other two.<sup>6</sup>

Broadly similar attributes notwithstanding, there are a number of important differences. British colonial rule in South Africa was achieved through methods of conquest that differed greatly from the methods used to gain control over what became Southern Rhodesia. Both these cases again stand apart from the way Bechuanaland (now Botswana) became a British possession. The direct political impact of white minority domination in what became Zimbabwe and in South Africa has no equivalent in the colonial history of modern Botswana. These minorities differed in size (both relative and absolute), ethnic composition, historical memory, and political as well as economic power. The overall extent of cultural pluralism in South Africa also exceeds that of Zimbabwe and of Botswana. While all three states are experiencing rapid modernization, South Africa has a far bigger industrial base, is more urbanized, and has a larger population than the other two. South Africa covers an area roughly twice the size of Texas, with a population of around 40 million in the early 1990s. Zimbabwe, about

the size of Montana, has a population of about 10 million people. Botswana, a territory almost the size of Texas, has a population of just over 1.3 million, making it the country with the third lowest population density after Mongolia and Australia. The economic performance of Botswana has outstripped that of the other two. It produced an average annual increase in real GDP of 14.2 percent for the years 1965–80, second highest in the world after Oman. From 1980 to 1991, growth rates remained high at an annual rate of 9.3 percent, third highest in the world after South Korea and China. In crucial aspects of government performance Botswana also outstripped its two neighbors. It recorded the highest services growth rate in the world for the decade 1980–90, with an average annual increase of 11.9 percent.<sup>7</sup> It follows that each case can therefore also be placed into a distinct slot within the broad categories South and Third World.

These finer distinctions make it possible to meet the fourth criterion for selecting comparable cases, that is, “to maximize the variance of the independent variables.”<sup>8</sup> The primary independent variables used in this study consist of forces that shape the extent and patterns of social control among the populations of the cases. The three cases illustrate the impact of different kinds of British colonial imposition on the patterns of social control that existed in the colonies. They also illustrate the differential impact of white minorities on the networks of social control within sectors of society as well as the state. A comparative perspective can be achieved on how these two factors, plus cultural pluralism and modernization, have contributed to forming class and/or ethnic solidarities. The impact of these ethnic solidarities on patterns of societal and state social control can also be assessed. The different kinds and quality of leaders produced by these forces in each of these populations, and the impact of leadership on networks of social control located both in and beyond the state, can be evaluated. Finally, the power relations that are produced by asymmetrical relations of interdependence between adversaries within states, between states within the regional economy, and between states in the global economy can be analyzed.

These forces are the primary independent variables whose impact on and shaping of societally and state-based patterns of social control are examined in this study. Social control is exercised by a

given agency when it “involves the successful subordination of people’s own inclinations of social behavior or behavior sought by other social organizations in favor of the behavior prescribed by (its own) rules.”<sup>9</sup> These patterns of social control in turn are examined as crucial determinants of the processes of state building and democratization.

Comparative analysis is the parallel analysis of events within selected units, such as states, which are presumed to have occurred because of internally generated causal factors: “What happens in each country is considered as independent of what happens elsewhere.”<sup>10</sup> International relations explores the causal effects of interactions between states in an international system. The interdependence of states challenges the validity of a method of analysis that permits the search for causality to extend only to politically defined boundaries. “For comparative analysis,” writes Richard Rose, “the critical question is the extent to which the idea of states operating independently in parallel is being eroded by changes in the international system.”<sup>11</sup> Comparative study needs an analytical framework that can respond to the theoretical demands contained in this challenge.

The interdependence of Botswana, South Africa, and Zimbabwe follows from their geographical contiguity and shared colonial experience. An interlinked economic infrastructure, especially with regard to rail and road networks as well as shared markets for both commercial products and labor, grew as socioeconomic modernization proceeded in the colonies, and later the independent states, of southern Africa.<sup>12</sup> By the 1980s the regional economy had acquired some distinctive characteristics. The first was the dominant position of South Africa in the region. In 1988–89, while the GDP of Botswana stood at U.S.\$4.88 billion and Zimbabwe’s at U.S.\$5.80 billion, South Africa’s GDP was U.S.\$87.50 billion—between 15 and 18 times greater than its neighbors’.<sup>13</sup> Within the region as a whole, South Africa accounted for 87 percent of electricity generated, 88 percent of steel produced, and 84 percent of cement produced. South Africa produced 75 percent of the region’s exports and received 68 percent of its imports.<sup>14</sup> The second feature is what has been described as asymmetrical dependence. In 1984–85 South Africa was contributing 82 percent of the imports of Botswana while receiving only 6 percent of Botswana’s exports.<sup>15</sup>

Zimbabwe was more favorably placed, with 18 percent of its imports coming from South Africa and 20 percent of exports going to South Africa. Both countries were also unfavorably engaged with South Africa with respect to rail and road links, ports, and access to petroleum products.<sup>16</sup>

These structural features are repeated in the global context. Although Africa accommodates 12 percent of the world's population, in 1988 it generated only 2.8 percent of the global GDP versus the 31 so-called core countries, which produced more than 80 percent of that GDP. Africa lagged far behind on other major indicators as well; per capita gross national product (GNP) in 1985 was U.S.\$683 (versus the core country figure of U.S.\$10,169); literacy was 45 percent (versus the core country figure of 99 percent and the global level of 69 percent); and the economic sector produced only 3.4 percent of the world's exports (versus the core country figure of more than 77 percent).<sup>17</sup>

This context of inequality and interdependence became the source of increasingly intense political conflicts after the decolonization of the region. From the conflicts grew a number of policy issues that affect the well-being of not only these three states but others in the region as well. Problems arise from the abundance of small arms in the subcontinent (one estimate places the number of Kalashnikov rifles in circulation in Mozambique by 1991 at 1.5 million); from civil war, which creates rebel bands and refugees with little regard for international boundaries and legal conventions; from population growth, drug trafficking, and AIDS; and from the environmental interdependence on water resources.<sup>18</sup> The extent to which this interdependence influences the dynamics of domestic politics in each of the three cases is addressed through the analytical framework adopted in this study.

The core proposition of this framework is that democratic stability requires a certain kind of state strength and a certain kind of societal strength. A strong state is needed in which the identity of citizenship is salient and in which the institutions and capabilities of the state remain autonomous and do not become the personal domain of any particular set of incumbents. A strong society in which the norms of civility prevail—that is, a civil society—is also required.<sup>19</sup> The impending anarchy Kaplan sees emerging in certain West African states stems directly from

the pervasive conditions of state weakness and societal weakness within the region.

Sierra Leone exhibits the qualities of a weak state. No single jurisdiction applies: the population is effectively ruled by four armies, each carving out a territorial domain within what is supposed to be a single sovereign unit. The official rulers cannot even command their own enclaves with authority: by night, criminal gangs hold undisputed power in the capital city of Freetown. Each powerholder rules over a subject population on his own terms. "Informal" systems of justice enforce rules reflecting the interests of the powerholder. These conditions rule out one of the most basic requirements for democratic governance: that every individual be recognized as a citizen and that a single authority, the state, engage all citizens on an equal basis in the exercising of reciprocal rights, obligations, and duties.

Nor is the identity of citizenship itself of great value to the peoples of this West African region. The economic activity authorized and formalized by the laws of states are paralleled by informal economic networks, beyond state control and subject to arbitrary and discriminatory practices completely incompatible with those that citizens of democratic states claim in terms of their human rights. Claims for state protection, even if they could be formally registered, are unlikely to be effective. When the party against which such claims are presented—the state—is as fragmented as Sierra Leone, then it is unable to meet such obligations, even if the incumbents of the state wanted to.

Whether the incumbents even sense such an obligation is another matter. Kaplan cites a report on the Sierra Leone coup in which one of the leaders is said to have used the powers of the state as an instrument of revenge. He ordered the execution of his childhood benefactors to nullify previous experiences of personal humiliation. This action reflects an ethos and practice of state action in which the state is used as the personal property of the incumbents. It violates the norm of state autonomy and is again entirely hostile to the conditions required for nurturing democracies.

These West African examples also exhibit the features of weak societies, marked by civil disorder and the absence of institutions, rules, and practices of society conducive to democracy. Traditional values and ways of life either unravel or start producing socially

disruptive effects. Kaplan notes that the extended family system, as currently practiced in the modern urban environment of West Africa, in effect undermines social stability through the inadvertent spreading of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). The mass population movements triggered by environmental catastrophes add to the turmoil that leads to social decay and normlessness. The end result is an environment of desperation where individuals have to survive and cope without recourse to public institutions, rules, and practices, or societal norms, values, and conventions. Under these conditions of state and societal weakness the idea of recognizing the moral dignity of a fellow citizen as the basis of civil conduct becomes a hugely risky strategy, for no shared identity or loyalty is there to buttress such mutual trust. Instead, the most trusted loyalties seem to be the most basic ones: family, clan, village, tribe, and ethnic group.

The basic thesis argued by Kaplan is that in the next few decades African states will decay further, and African societies will unravel even more. States are likely to succumb under the strains of environmentally generated conditions of scarcity, cultural and racial conflict, and unsustainable boundary demarcations. The end result is bound to be pervasive ungovernability, utterly incompatible with the requirements for stable democracy. This study examines three African states that have confronted in the past and continue to confront these conditions of conflict and scarcity. The findings of the study challenge the dismal prognosis of inescapable anarchy and show that African democratic stability is attainable provided that both state strength and societal strength are present.

The comparative analysis of the link between state building and democratic stability in three southern African countries begins with Botswana. (Readers unfamiliar with the theoretical literature and nomenclature relevant to state building may find it helpful to turn first to the appendix to this book, where key concepts and terms are discussed in detail.) The evolution of the modern state of Botswana has been shaped by precolonial as well as colonial experiences; these experiences and their impact on both society and the emergent modern economy are described and analyzed in chapter 1. The chapter presents an overview of the social, political, and economic contexts within which democratic politics, arguably the most successful in Africa, are conducted.

In chapter 2 an explanation for the remarkable (by African standards) democratic track record of Botswana is developed. It is argued that specific characteristics of the Botswana state contributed to its relative strength and autonomy. The strength of the state ensured that politics came to be conducted within the jurisdiction of the state, not beyond it. The kind of state autonomy that developed in Botswana made the state an adequate arena within which democratic politics could be conducted. This autonomy ensured that politics evolved into contests about who gets what (and when and how they get it) *within* the state, not contests about the character of the state itself. It is also argued that the way these state attributes evolved influenced the character of Botswana society in such a way that society was strengthened. This societal strength has buttressed democratic practices and contributed to the resilience of constitutional rules.

Colonial politics in Southern Rhodesia was shaped dramatically by the rebel state of Rhodesia. This state, characterized as an ethnic state, highly undemocratic and partisan, shaped society along racially imposed lines. The response escalated into a contest for hegemony in which the Rhodesian notions of statehood, peoplehood, and democracy were challenged in every sense. The resulting civil war weakened the Rhodesian state to the point of capitulation, also weakening society by eroding the social fabric of many communities. In chapter 3 the salient features of the Rhodesian state and society are described and are contrasted with those of Botswana, and the chapter concludes with an analysis of the impact of the contest for hegemony on the strength of both state and society.

In chapter 4 the dynamics of state-society interaction in independent Zimbabwe are described. An explanation is offered as to why Zimbabwe is markedly less democratic than Botswana. The explanation focuses on some of the weaknesses of the Zimbabwean state, which are traced to specific policy choices made by the state leaders in Zimbabwe since independence. The contrast with the policy choices of state leaders in Botswana, who confronted a similar set of constraints, is highlighted and explained. The core proposition emerging from this chapter is that state leaders in Zimbabwe have been guided by a different *ethos of state action* than has been the case in Botswana since independence.

The implications of these actions and policy choices for state strength, societal strength and cohesion, and democratic stability are shown.

The principles, practices, and policies of apartheid in South Africa are described in chapter 5 from a state-centered perspective. It is argued that the apartheid state, like its Rhodesian counterpart, was partisan and undemocratic and delivered public goods in a highly inequitable manner. The impact of apartheid on South African society through racially imposed social engineering is well known, but chapter 5 also shows how these policies weakened society in many ways. Less familiar are the sources of weaknesses in the apartheid state. Unlike Botswana, and like Rhodesia, South Africa was ultimately weakened by certain crucial features and was unable to confront effectively the hegemonic challenge of the 1980s.

The escalating confrontation between the apartheid state and its major challengers had by the late 1980s assumed the characteristics of a contest for hegemony. In chapter 6 the impact of this confrontation on society (a further weakening of its social fabric) and on the state (an overall erosion of state strength) is described. The mutually hurting stalemate that led to formal negotiations is analyzed, and the formal outcome of negotiations is assessed. The extent to which the new constitution is a step toward the construction of an autonomous state and therefore is a viable forum for democratic conflict resolution is also examined.

In the last chapter the comparative insights from the three cases are taken together to assess the question of democratic viability in the three. For Botswana the question is sustainability: How long can the current level of democratic success continue? For Zimbabwe the question is extendability: What factors can contribute to making the country more democratic? For South Africa the question is, What must be done to sustain the new democratic constitution? All three questions produce similar, if not identical, answers. In Botswana the factors that erode the strength of state and society have to be curtailed. A number of such environmental, social, economic, and political factors are identified. A similar set of factors undermines the strengthening of both state and society in Zimbabwe. It is then argued that to secure democracy in South Africa, yet similar forces will have to be confronted.

In both Botswana and Zimbabwe the particular ethos of state action that guided public policymaking shaped the extent to which state leaders could measure up to these forces. The study closes with an examination of the learning process that the prospective leaders of the postapartheid South African state have undergone since 1990 and compares it with the formative experiences of the leaders of the two other states. This comparison yields the final perspective on the prospects for democratic stability in South Africa after apartheid.

