

# **The role of opposition parties in African hybrid regimes**

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This dissertation seeks to understand what role opposition parties play in a hybrid regime, focusing on sub-Saharan Africa. Opposition parties can curtail incumbents' control over the pace of democratisation (e.g. Bunce & Wolchik 2010; LeBas 2013; Loada 2020). However, it is still unclear to what extent they actually do so, and a common preconception is that these opposition parties are 'weak' (e.g. Olukoshi 1998a; Randall & Svåsand 2002c; Rakner & Van de Walle 2009). In this dissertation, I explore this notion empirically by assessing various dimensions of opposition party weakness described in the literature, including their non-programmatic and short-lived nature, lack of local structures, under-performance, and fragmentation.

Based on a comparative, qualitative, and inductive approach, I study four opposition parties across two countries, Burkina Faso and Uganda. This allows me to observe hybrid regimes in their diversity. My research is based on extensive fieldwork in both countries, which notably included 146 semi-structured interviews in capital cities and opposition strongholds.

By unpacking what opposition parties are formed around, how they are organised and how they operate, I analyse the complex dynamics driving opposition parties' ability to endure and to coalesce in order to effectively challenge the incumbent and influence regime trajectories. The analysis shows that even 'weak' opposition parties can play a part in challenging the incumbent's control over institutions.

My dissertation contributes to a new wave of empirical research on (opposition) parties in Africa (e.g. Souaré 2010; Bob-Milliar 2012b; Kelly 2014; Beardsworth 2018). It identifies new sources of a party's organisational identity, defined as their 'core', and analyses how this informs a party's survival chances. It investigates both internal organisational processes and external mobilisation strategies used to engage the regime, and concludes that opposition parties perform key functions within a hybrid regime, and therefore contribute to a non-linear democratisation process.