

# THE ORIGINS OF DOMINANT PARTIES

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### **Abstract**

Why do some ruling parties last in power for decades despite facing regular, contested elections? Well-known examples include the PRI in Mexico, the LDP in Japan, the PAP in Singapore, and the ANC in South Africa. The existence of these long-lived “dominant parties” raises normative concerns: can we really call these regimes democratic if there is never, or rarely, ruling party turnover? They also present a theoretical puzzle: if opposition parties are able to contest elections that decide who rules, why do they consistently fail to win? In this paper, I approach these questions by focusing on variation in ruling party duration. Drawing on a combination of quantitative and qualitative evidence, I show that “dominant” parties are typically the first to hold office in a new regime, and often have played a central role in founding it. As a consequence, these ruling parties frequently start out with enormous electoral advantages over their competitors in the party system, including a strong party “brand,” a disciplined and well-resourced party organization, and the ability to shape and manipulate the rules of competition. These advantages allow them to endure in power by winning consecutive elections for a generation or more. Only with the erosion of these advantages do elections become more competitive, and does the risk of ruling party defeat increase. Once dominant parties are defeated, subsequent partisan competition becomes much more even, and regular rotation in power becomes the norm. Thus, one-party dominance is best thought of as a kind of temporary “adolescence” on the way to fully consolidated democracy.

“Democracy is a system in which parties lose elections.”

– Adam Przeworski (1991: 10)

“[D]emocracy predicated on the ability to ‘throw the rascals out’ is far less convincing when it exists only in the abstract than when it is backed up by periodic examples of rascals actually flying through doors.”

– T.J. Pempel (1990: 7).

## Introduction

In this paper, I focus on the central puzzle of one-party dominance<sup>1</sup>: the extraordinary longevity of the ruling party in a regime with genuine electoral competition. In dominant party systems, ruling party turnover does not occur even with generational change in the electorate, the rise of new political “wedge issues,” or increasing dissatisfaction with the incumbent’s performance. No other feature is so strikingly at odds with our expectation of how electoral politics should work: when incumbents become unpopular, they should lose power. The persistence of these parties in elected office raises both normative and causal concerns.

On the normative side, the existence of long-lived ruling parties calls into question the most fundamental mechanism through which citizens hold governments accountable—elections that incumbents lose. If we take the central features of democracy to be uncertainty at election time and alternation of rival parties in power, then dominant party systems fall short of full democracy (Przeworski et al. 2000: 23-28). This “Przeworskian” view of democracy implies that we should be especially concerned about the longevity of ruling parties such as the SWAPO in

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<sup>1</sup> Definitions of one-party dominance vary widely. There are at least six separate criteria that have been used to identify dominant parties: (1) the party consistently wins a “large share” of votes and seats, whether that be a plurality (Duverger 1954, Pempel 1990), a majority (Ware 1996, Blondel 1972, Sartori 1976, Reuter 2010), or a supermajority (McDonald 1971, van de Walle and Butler 1999, Coleman 1960); (2) the ruling party endures in power for an “extraordinary” period of time (Blondel 1972, Greene 2007, Cox 1997) or number of elections (Sartori 1976, Bogaards 2004); (3) a party is dominant because of its superior bargaining position in coalition formation (Van Deeman 1989, Van Roozendaal 1992, Abedi and Schneider 2006, Bouček 1998), or (4) because of its consistent agenda-setting power (Pempel 1990, O’Leary 1994); (5) dominance describes a unique kind of political *regime*, in which the ruling party is deeply intertwined with the state (Tucker 1961, Arian and Barnes 1974, Pempel 1990, Giliomee and Simpkins 1999, Magaloni 2006, Slater and Smith 2010); (6) dominance is rather a feature of the *party system*, in which a large ruling party repeatedly competes against multiple smaller opposition parties (Pinard 1967, Blondel 1972, Sartori 1976, Ware 1996, Anckar 1997, Jackson and Jackson 2009).

Namibia PAP (in power since independence in 1990), the ANC in South Africa (in power since the end of apartheid in 1994), and the Botswana Democratic Party (in power since independence in 1966). Without electoral defeats, we cannot be sure the incumbents in these cases would voluntarily and peacefully cede power were they to lose at the ballot box, or instead go the way of the Mugabe regime in Zimbabwe and resort to brute force to retain office (cf. du Toit 1999). Nor is it clear that elections serve to keep leaders in these cases responsive and accountable to the people at whose pleasure they ostensibly serve. As T.J. Pempel has memorably put the issue, “democracy predicated on the ability to ‘throw the rascals out’ is far less convincing when it exists only in the abstract than when it is backed up by periodic examples of rascals actually flying through the doors” (1990: 7). In dominant party systems, the same rascals keep winning.

Long ruling party duration raises causal questions as well. One-party dominance is puzzling in light of current theories about political parties, party systems, and voting behavior, which lead us to expect contested elections to produce regular rotation of parties in power (Pempel 1990: 5-6). The tough business of governing inevitably requires incumbents to make difficult tradeoffs that violate campaign promises and lead to the disillusionment of groups of erstwhile supporters (Mueller 1970). Thus, regardless of how popular and effective governments may be when they enter office, they all eventually face tough decisions that drain their popularity. The near-ubiquitous economic business cycles and political scandals that damage ruling party standing should also erode support and predispose a growing share of the electorate to consider voting for alternatives (Maeda 2009). Ambition theory also leads us to expect constant efforts by opposition politicians to seek out and raise wedge issues capable of breaking apart a ruling party’s electoral coalition, attracting enough votes to deliver them into power (Prewitt 1970; Carmines and Stimson 1981, 1986, 1989; Schlesinger 1991; Schofield and Sened 2006; Hillygus and Shields 2008). And when demographic shifts and economic growth transform the shape of the electorate, we expect new political cleavages to arise that disrupt and reshape the party system, as activists and political elites highlight new issues and advance new policy ideas and

approaches (Sundquist 1973; Clubb et al. 1980; MacDonald and Rabinowitz 1987; Inglehart and Abramson 1994; Layman and Carmines 1997; Miller and Schofield 2003).

In short, the regular re-election of incumbent parties over multiple decades appears to be a perverse deviation from the natural pattern of competition for elected office. Improving our understanding of the sources of one-party dominance, then, requires that we examine the processes by which they come to power, maintain their grasp on power, and, eventually, lose power.

### *The Argument in Brief*

In what follows, I focus on the first of these three questions: *how long-lived ruling parties come to power*. Drawing on an original dataset of nearly 800 unique periods of party rule in 143 states, I identify a subset of exceptionally long-lived, “dominant” ruling parties. By comparing these with the shorter-lived cases, I am able to identify a strong correlate of ruling party survival: being a first incumbent. Most of the longest-lived ruling parties, it turns out, were the first parties to hold office in new, electorally contested regimes, and they often played a key role in the regime’s founding. Moreover, the results of the first election are strongly predictive of subsequent survival patterns: the median survival time is about 40 percent longer for parties that hold a large vote- or seat-share lead over their nearest competitors, and it is more than twice as long for parties that win single-party majorities in all branches of government,

I then trace the sources of this variation in initial electoral performance. At the beginning of the regime, the best-performing first incumbent parties tend to enjoy three kinds of systematic advantages over potential competitors in the party system: a strong party “brand,” a disciplined and well-resourced party organization, and the ability to shape and manipulate the rules of competition. These relative partisan advantages frequently persist over time, helping them to win consecutive elections for a generation or more.

Only with the erosion of these advantages do elections become more competitive, and does the risk of ruling party defeat increase. Once dominant parties are defeated, subsequent partisan competition is much more even, and regular rotation in power becomes the norm. Thus, one-party dominance can be characterized as a kind of “party system adolescence”—as other parties emerge to compete with the incumbent, its chances of survival decline.

### **Conceptual and Methodological Issues in the Study of Dominant Party Duration**

I operationalize “dominance” as simply “extraordinary” periods of one-party control of the chief executive office. This approach admittedly simplifies a rich and multi-dimensional concept into a single measure, time in power, and captures only part of what is interesting about dominant parties. Yet it has the considerable advantage of framing the research question in a way that can bring the full power of quantitative analysis to bear. And it also directs our attention toward several thorny methodological issues that inhibit a more general understanding of dominant party persistence.

#### *The Outcome of Interest: Ruling Party Duration in Electorally Contested Regimes*

First, if the central puzzle of dominance is long duration in power, as I have argued, then it makes a great deal of sense to study it using a survival analysis framework. That is, explaining dominant party survival requires understanding “not only *if* something happens, but also *when* something happens” (Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 2004:1). To take a prominent real-world example, it requires not only understanding why the PRI in Mexico lost power in 2000, but also why it did *not* lose during the previous 50 years. Rather than trying to identify, measure, and account for movement between discrete states of the world (“dominant” vs. “non-dominant”), a more natural way to model the underlying data-generating process is as the accumulation of

hazards over time. The operative research question then becomes: *what factors affect the rate at which ruling parties lose power?* And the “causes of dominance” that we seek to identify are those that systematically lower hazard rates and lengthen expected ruling party survival time.

A medical analogy is especially useful here. Much like patients diagnosed with cancer, ruling parties suffer from the “disease of incumbency”: they are susceptible to “death” from a variety of factors, including electoral defeat but also no confidence votes, the death or resignation and replacement of the person of the chief executive, and impeachment. The “dominant” parties of interest to us are like patients diagnosed with a normally deadly cancer who have far outperformed their initial prognosis. Even if some of those patients subsequently die—perhaps from old age, getting hit by a bus, or even the sudden metastasis of a formerly benign tumor—understanding how they lasted as long as they did is potentially more revealing about the underlying process than focusing on the immediate cause of death. Thus, the more promising approach in this research area is thinking of causality in probabilistic terms rather than deterministic ones, and modeling the dependent variable as a measure of time rather than a state of the world.

#### *The Universe of Cases: Ruling Parties in Electorally-Contested Regimes*

Second, once we move into a survival analysis world, we need to take care to avoid selecting on the dependent variable. Previous work on one-party dominance has tended to compare long-lived ruling parties to one another. But including only cases of “successful”—i.e. long-lived—ruling parties in the analysis eliminates most of the available information and precludes the testing of rival explanations about ruling party duration. In other words, if we want to know why dominant parties occur in some times and places and not others, then we need to look at the instances in which dominance *does not occur* as well as the instances in which it does.

But which parties, exactly, are the examples of “failed dominance”? That is, how do we define the *universe of cases* from which dominant parties emerge? The motivational question of

dominance offers us some guidance: dominant parties are puzzling because they combine regular electoral competition with an absence of ruling party turnover. Thus, we need to observe ruling parties that hold power in regimes featuring regular electoral contestation as the primary means to win and retain power. This set of cases clearly includes established democracies. But it also includes non-democracies—indeed, many dominant parties straddle the line between the two, precisely because of the absence of ruling party turnover (cf. Przeworski et al. 2000: 23-28). The set does *not* include closed autocracies where elections are not held, or where only ruling party candidates are allowed to run, or where unelected leaders hold ultimate authority despite the presence of some elected officials in government. Nor does it include unstable regimes where elected officials are unable to exercise effective power—perhaps because they are frequently overthrown, or because the state is too weak to enforce basic security in large swaths of its own territory.

In sum, the universe of possible cases in which one-party dominance could occur roughly corresponds to the union of democracies and electoral autocracies—what, for the sake of brevity, I term *electorally contested regimes*, or ECRs (cf. Levitsky and Way 2002, 2010; Schedler 2006). In order to draw valid inferences about what leads to long-lived ruling parties, then, we need to identify *all ruling parties* that held power in these two regime types, whether or not they became dominant.

The distinction between electoral and closed autocracies is a particularly important one, as it separates those regimes in which dominant parties are possible from those in which they are not. Yet it is not one commonly made in existing quantitative research, which has focused most of its energy on deciding which regimes are democratic, rather than which ones are electorally contested. Moreover, the electoral-vs.-closed autocracy distinction is especially difficult to draw when political conditions change over time in the same state but the incumbent retains power, as in many of the dominant party cases. The transition from closed to competitive autocracy in Mexico, for instance, has no obvious break point; one could make a reasonable case for an



election as early as 1946, when the incumbent party first won less than 90 percent of the (official) vote for president, or as late as 1988, when its vote share fell below 70 percent for the first time.<sup>2</sup>

Fortunately for this exercise, Mexico turns out to be rather exceptional; in most cases it is clear when a regime first started to hold meaningful, contested, multi-party elections, and thus we can determine with a high degree of confidence when a regime switched from closed to electoral autocracy.

### *Dominance as a Party System Phenomenon*

The third methodological issue is about where to focus our search for explanations of ruling party duration. Here, I will suggest that one-party dominance is best understood as a *party system* phenomenon, rather than a regime or party phenomenon. Remember once again the central puzzle: elections that ruling parties never lose. This outcome is only puzzling if *there are other parties* to whom the incumbent *could* lose. If the ruling party runs unopposed in each election, then there is nothing to explain. In other words, thinking about dominance at the party system level forces us to try to understand not only the incumbent party, and the regime that it may well have shaped to its electoral advantage, but also the competitors to that incumbent and how they respond to that electoral environment. And only when we begin to account for why opposition parties consistently fail to win can we build toward an explanation of extraordinary one-party duration in executive office.

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<sup>2</sup> The Electorally Contested Regimes Dataset (ECRD) described in the next section uses a 90 percent vote threshold for “meaningful” election, so includes Mexico beginning in 1946.

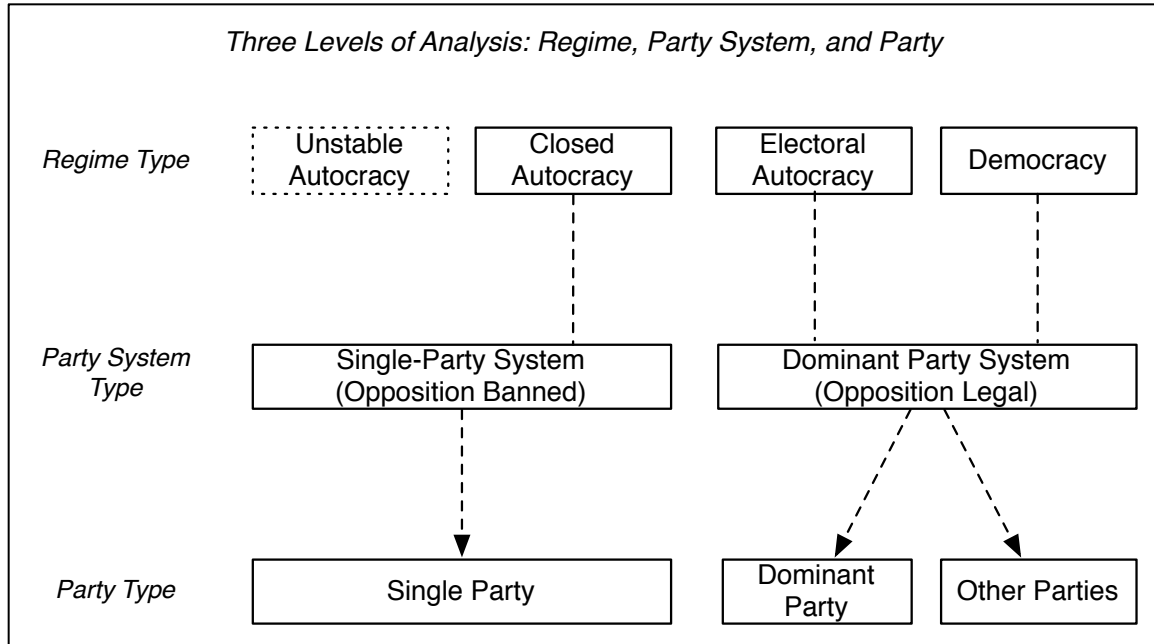


FIGURE 1. THREE LEVELS OF ANALYSIS: REGIME, PARTY SYSTEM, AND PARTY

Finally, an aside about terminology: I reserve the term “regime” to describe a state’s system of de facto rules and resource allocations through which political actors are selected and exercise authority. In this usage, regimes are at a higher level of analysis than party systems: dominant parties can occur only in electorally contested regimes. The term “dominant party regime” blurs this crucial distinction between party system and regime, so I avoid it here.<sup>3</sup> As Figure 1 shows, the dominant party itself is in a subordinate position in this conceptual schema: when they occur, dominant parties are one of several *parties* that make up one type of *party system* that may occur in an electorally contested *regime*.

<sup>3</sup> I avoid using “hegemonic party regime” for the same reason.

**Who’s Dominant?: Data Sources and Descriptive Statistics**

For data on the duration of partisan control of the executive, as well as a handful of important potential covariates of ruling party survival, I employ the Electorally Contested Regimes Dataset (ECRD). ECRD contains observations of all unique periods of partisan control of the chief executive office in every electorally contested regime (democracies + electoral autocracies) that existed in the world between January 1950 and December 2012.<sup>4</sup> Table 1 presents the regional patterns of ruling party survival recorded in this dataset.

**Table 1. Ruling Party Observations by Region**

<i>Region</i>	<i>Number of parties</i>	<i>Median<sup>1</sup> Duration (months)</i>	<i>Minimum Duration</i>	<i>Maximum Duration</i>	<i>Number Censored</i>	<i>% Censored</i>
Sub-Saharan Africa	66	115.5	3	555	35	53.0%
South Asia	32	50.5	1	355	6	18.8%
East Asia	22	52.5	2	464	6	27.3%
Southeast Asia	23	67	11	568	8	34.8%
Pacific Islands / Oceania	119	36	1	296	15	12.6%
Middle East / North Africa	25	52	3	349	5	20.0%
Latin America	102	59.5	1	652	22	21.6%
Caribbean and non-Iberic America	79	96	4	292	17	21.5%
Eastern Europe	88	33	1	103	12	13.6%
Western Europe	210	44	1	500	25	11.9%
Post-Soviet	22	49.5	2	252	8	36.4%
Total	788	48	1	652	159	20.2%

<sup>1</sup>Calculated from the Kaplan-Meier estimate of the survivor function.

<sup>4</sup> A full description of the dataset, along with detailed coding rules and codebook, is available at my personal website: [www.kharistempleman.com](http://www.kharistempleman.com). ECRD will be available for public release in May 2014.

In total the dataset contains observations on 788 separate ruling parties that held power in 164 regimes in 141 different states. Of those parties, 652 (82.7%) exited the dataset with their defeat, leaving 159 right-censored observations—parties that exited without being defeated in elections. Among these censored observations, 34 (21.4%) ended with a regime change (coup, suspension of elections, or other disruption<sup>5</sup>), while the remaining 125 (78.6%) were still in power at the end of the observation period. In other words, only 4.3 percent (34 of 788) of the ruling parties in the dataset had their reign ended by a change in regime, which should bolster confidence that the regimes included in the analysis are in fact stable and extra-constitutional turnover is rare.

The estimated median duration across all regions was 48 months (four years), although there are meaningful differences between regions: the median ruling party in Sub-Saharan Africa lasted 115.5 months, or nearly 10 years at risk of electoral defeat, while that in Eastern Europe lasted only 33 months, or less than three years, even though most ECRs in both regions were established in the early 1990s as part of the Third Wave of democratization. A plurality (27%) of all ruling parties in the dataset were in Western Europe, reflecting the long democratic history and experience with partisan rotation of most countries in this region. The longest-lived party in the sample was the PRI in Mexico, which endured a total of 652 months at risk, followed by the National Party in apartheid-era South Africa at 555 months; at the minimum, 12 parties lasted only a single month in office. Notably, the longest-lived ruling parties appear widely distributed around the world; of the top ten, four are in Western Europe, one is in Latin America, two are in Sub-Saharan Africa, one is in East Asia, and two are in Southeast Asia. Long-lived one-party rule is clearly a global phenomenon by this measure.

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<sup>5</sup> Two regimes ended with a substantial change in the constitutional order, although the subsequent regime was also an ECR. In France, the semi-presidential Fifth Republic replaced the parliamentary Fourth Republic in January 1959. In South Africa, the apartheid system ended and a government elected from a single national electorate was seated in May 1994. The ruling party duration is right-censored in these cases.

These data also allow us to systematically identify the subset of ruling parties that lasted an “extraordinary” period of time in power. The key word is “extraordinary”—how should we differentiate those ruling parties that are well and truly exceptionally long-lived from those that are merely ordinary? The term requires that we choose some kind of threshold to make this determination. Rather than choosing a cutoff that just feels “about right,” these data allow us to make this determination more objectively. Figure 2 shows the Kaplan-Meier estimate of the survivor function, which predicts the percentage of all ruling parties expected to remain in office through any given number of months. By this estimate, at 219 months (18 years 3 months) only 10 percent of all ruling parties remain in power, while at 349 months (29 years 1 month) only five percent are still alive.

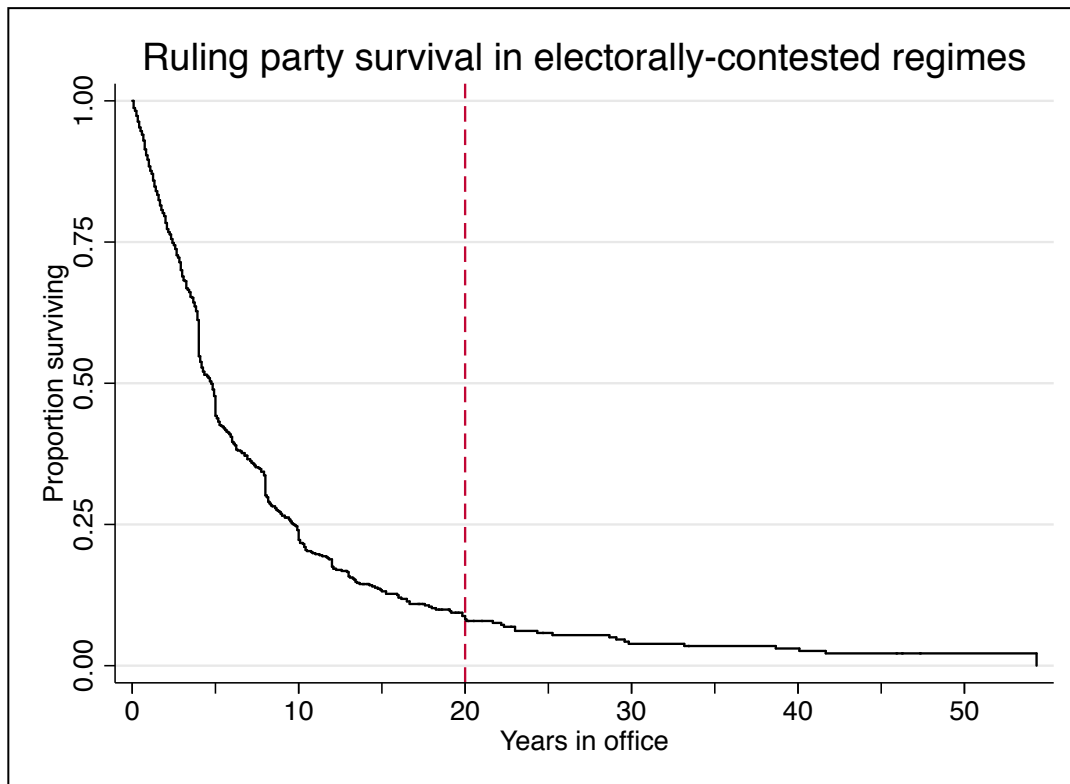


FIGURE 2. LESS THAN 10 PERCENT OF RULING PARTIES SURVIVE MORE THAN 20 YEARS IN OFFICE

We could use either of these cutoffs, or something completely different, to identify the “extraordinary” ruling parties from the ordinary ones. I employ a 20-year cutoff, however, because it has the advantage of approximating the end of four consecutive terms in office in a five-year-term regime, and five consecutive terms in a four-year-term one. Thus, 20 years has a substantive as well as statistical meaning: it is a natural “break point” at which we expect many incumbents in both presidential and parliamentary regimes to have to face the electorate.

It is worth emphasizing here as well that the choice of threshold matters only for descriptive purposes—for identifying the “dominant” parties in the sample. When we move to causal inference, the use of duration as the dependent variable frees us from having to rely on this or other cutoffs to define our outcome of interest. All ruling parties in the sample will provide some information about what affects survival, not just those that survive to at least 20 years.

#### *Dominant Parties: A Closer Look*

Having established a universe of cases and selected a longevity threshold, we can now identify the longest-lived ruling parties in electorally-contested regimes. Table 2 lists the 30 ruling parties<sup>6</sup> that lasted at least 20 consecutive years in office in an ECR between 1950<sup>7</sup> and 2012. Among these are incumbent parties in a number of the most prominent electoral authoritarian regimes of the last two decades, including those in Mexico, Malaysia, Singapore, Botswana, and Russia. They also include long-lived ruling parties in several developed democracies, including Austria, Canada, Israel, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, and Sweden. Given

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<sup>6</sup> I make no claim to exclusivity here: there may be other parties that can justifiably be called “dominant” despite not meeting this threshold. Nevertheless, the lack of a consistent definition of dominance means that different studies have produced remarkably disparate candidates for dominant parties. For instance, it is hard to think of two countries whose political institutions and traditions are more different than Britain and China, yet both have been said to have “dominant party systems” in separate studies in the last few years (Margetts and Smyth 1994, Boucek 1998; cf. Friedman 2008). Indeed, one wonders about the analytical utility of a term used to describe the party systems in both one of the world’s oldest democracies and its most prominent single-party autocracy. Part of the reason for the focus on duration here is to avoid altogether the vagueness and conceptual limitations of “one-party dominance.”

<sup>7</sup> In cases where the party began in power before January 1950, the earlier period is included in the sample.

how commonly these party systems have been called “dominant,” their appearance here is expected.

But there are also a few surprises. In Western Europe, continuous one-party control of the prime minister’s office lasted for over 20 years in Belgium, and twice in Liechtenstein—cases which have received little attention in this literature. Ruling parties in Luxembourg (1945-1974), West Germany (1949-1969), and Austria (1945-1970; 1970-2000) also qualify under my definition; these cases are sometimes excluded because the major opposition parties were included in the ruling coalition for part of those periods (e.g. Di Palma 1990: 162-3). A bit further afield, 20-year periods of one-party rule have occurred in Australia, Antigua and Barbuda, Guyana, Namibia, Samoa, and Trinidad and Tobago—cases that have not figured heavily in the rather Eurocentric literature on dominant party systems in democracies.

The list of parties in Table 2 is just as notable for who is not included as who is. A number of prominent “dominant” parties do not make the cut, including the CPP in Cambodia, FRELIMO in Mozambique, ANC in South Africa, CCM in Tanzania, and KMT in Taiwan. Some of these cases do not appear here because, while they endured in power for more than 20 years, there were actually *at risk of electoral defeat* for much less than that. One can see this difference clearly in Table 3, which lists the set of all autocratic parties that managed to retain power for at least 20 years and did so for at least the last part of their tenure by winning multi-party contested elections.

**Table 2. Ruling Parties Lasting > 20 Years in Electorally-Contested Regimes, 1950-2012**

<i>Country</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>Start Month</i>	<i>End Month</i>	<i>Tenure (Months)</i>
Antigua and Barbuda	LP	Nov-81	Mar-04	268
Australia	LP+CP	Dec-49	Dec-72	276
Austria (I)	OVP	Dec-45	Apr-70	292
Austria (II)	SPO	Apr-70	Feb-00	358
Belgium	CVP	Apr-74	Jul-99	303
Botswana	BDP	Sep-66	-	483*
Cameroon	CDMP	Oct-92	-	242*
Canada	LP	Oct-35	Jun-57	260
Gambia	PPP	Feb-65	Jul-94	353
Germany, West <sup>1</sup>	CDU+CSU	Sep-49	Oct-69	241
Guyana	PPP	Oct-92	Dec-12	242*
India	INC	Aug-47	Mar-77	355
Israel	Mapai/Labor	May-48	Jun-77	349
Italy <sup>1</sup>	DC	Apr-48	Jun-81	426
Japan	LP/LDP	Dec-54	Aug-93	464
Liechtenstein (I)	FBP	Jul-28	Mar-70	500
Liechtenstein (II)	VU	Apr-78	Apr-01	276
Luxembourg (I) <sup>1</sup>	CSV	Oct-45	Jun-74	344
Luxembourg (II) <sup>2</sup>	CSV	Jul-79	-	329*
Malaysia	UMNO/BN	Aug-65	-	496*
Mexico	PRI	Jul-46	Dec-00	653
Namibia	SWAPO	Mar-90	Dec-12	273*
Russia	Yeltsin/UR	Dec-91	Dec-12	252*
Samoa	HRPP	Apr-88	Dec-12	296*
Senegal	PS	Feb-78	Apr-00	266
Singapore	PAP	Aug-65	-	496*
South Africa	NP	Jun-48	May-94	551
Sweden	SAP	Sep-36	Oct-76	481
Trinidad and Tobago	PNM	Aug-62	Dec-86	292
Zimbabwe <sup>3</sup>	ZANU-PF	Apr-80	-	320*

\* Incumbent still in power; tenure calculated through December 2006

<sup>1</sup>Count begins with first election after WWII

<sup>2</sup>The CSV lost power in Dec. 2013, surviving a total of 341 months.

<sup>3</sup>Personalist incumbent: Robert Mugabe the sole leader of ZANU-PF since independence



**Table 3. Other Autocratic Incumbents Lasting > 20 yrs: Tenure in Power vs. Duration at Electoral Risk**

<i>Country</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>Start Month</i>	<i>Month Exec at Risk<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>End Month</i>	<i>Total Tenure (Months)</i>	<i>At Risk Tenure<sup>2</sup></i>
Albania	SPA	Jan-46	Mar-91	Apr-92	555	13
Burkina Faso <sup>1</sup>	Compaore/CDP	Oct-87	Nov-98	-	302*	169
Bulgaria	BSP	Nov-46	Jun-90	Dec-90	529	6
Ivory Coast	PDCI	Aug-60	Oct-90	Dec-99 <sup>3</sup>	472	110
Cameroon	CPDM	Jan-60	Oct-92	-	635*	242*
Djibouti	RPP	Jun-77	May-93	-	426*	235*
Ethiopia	EPRDF	May-91	May-95	-	259*	211*
Gabon	Bongo/PDG	Mar-68	Dec-93	-	537*	228*
Guinea	PUP	Apr-84	Dec-93	Dec-08 <sup>3</sup>	296	180
Kenya	KANU	Dec-63	Dec-92	Dec-02	468	120
Mexico	PRI	Dec-24	Jul-46	Nov-00	911	652
Mongolia	MPRP	Sep-21	Jul-90	Jul-96	898	72
Mozambique	FRELIMO	Sep-74	Oct-94	-	459*	218*
Paraguay	PC	Aug-47	May-93	Aug-08	732	183
Senegal	PS	Aug-60	Feb-78	Apr-00	476	266
Seychelles	SPPF	Jun-77	Jul-93	-	426	233*
Chad <sup>1</sup>	Deby/MPS	Dec-90	Jun-96	-	264*	198*
Tanzania	CCM	Apr-64	Nov-95	-	584*	206*
Turkey	RPP	Oct-23	Jul-46	May-50	319	46
Taiwan	KMT	Dec-49	Mar-96	May-00	605	50

\* Ruling party still in power; tenure calculated through December 2012

<sup>1</sup>Personalist incumbent: no leader turnover

<sup>2</sup>Counted in formerly closed autocracies from month 1st multi-party election held for the chief executive

<sup>3</sup>Ended with regime change

For instance, Tanzania's CCM has held power at the central government level since April 1964, but it only faced an opposition challenger for the first time in the November 1995 presidential election. Thus, while the CCM may be a dominant party under some definitions, it has been even hypothetically at risk of losing the presidency in an election for less than 20 of the 50 years it has held office as of this writing. For the same reason, long-time ruling parties in Djibouti, Kenya, Mongolia, Mozambique, Paraguay, Seychelles, Taiwan, and Turkey are not included in the list of dominant parties in Table 2: they did not survive (or had not as of December 2012) at least 20 years at risk of electoral defeat.

Some of the inconsistency in the literature about which countries have dominant party systems stems from a failure to distinguish between these two ways of counting ruling party duration. A good illustration is in the case of Taiwan. Taiwan's KMT is often called a dominant party<sup>8</sup> because it combined long duration in power (50 years) with wins in regular, contested elections for local offices. Crucially, however, these elections were only held for *offices below the central government level*; until 1992, the large majority of members in the national legislature were effectively lifetime appointees, and the president was popularly elected for the first time only in 1996. Indeed, compared to other first incumbents in ECRs, the KMT is most remarkable for how *short* its time in power was: it lost the presidency a mere four years after the first direct election for that office. Viewed this way, what needs to be explained in Taiwan is not why the ruling party lasted so long but why it lost so quickly! Similarly, ruling parties in Kenya, Paraguay, Mongolia, and Turkey lasted decades in power, but did so for most of that time by forbidding meaningful opposition contestation rather than by stringing together regular victories in contested elections. As the ruling parties in closed autocracies, they were impressively long-lived. But as ruling parties in new ECRs, they managed to squander a formidable set of electoral advantages in a relatively short period of time.

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<sup>8</sup> E.g. Giliomee and Simpkins (1999); Magaloni (2006); Greene (2007); Friedman and Wong (2008).

In addition, some parties are excluded from Table 2 because of right-censoring of the data: in December 2012 they had not crossed the 20-year threshold for time in office at risk of electoral defeat. As of this writing several of these parties remain in power and have either surpassed or look set to cross this threshold by the end of December 2014. These parties are listed in Table 4. In Djibouti, Gabon, Mozambique, and Seychelles, the ruling parties survived a transition into an electorally-contested regime and have not yet been defeated. In South Africa, the ANC has survived in the post-apartheid democratic regime since it was established; it will pass the 20-year threshold in May 2014. Belarus is an outlier in this group: its leader, Lukashenko, has maintained a tight grip on the state since winning the first post-Soviet election in 1994; he has no formal party organization supporting him in power, and the regime itself barely qualifies as electorally contested.

**Table 4. Other Current Ruling Parties Lasting >18 Years at Risk of Electoral Defeat as of Dec 2012**

<i>Country</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>Start Month</i>	<i>End Month</i>	<i>Tenure At Risk (Months)</i>
Belarus	Lukashenko	Jul-94	-	221*
Djibouti	RPP	May-93	-	235*
Gabon	PDG	Dec-93	-	228*
Mozambique	FRELIMO	Oct-94	-	218*
Seychelles	SPPF	Jul-93	-	233*
South Africa (II)	ANC	May-94	-	223*

\* Incumbent still in power; tenure calculated through Dec 2012

If we add these five “dominant parties to be” to the 30 cases in Table 2, there are 35 unique dominant parties in the sample. In all of these cases, the ruling party controlled the chief executive of the regime, or appears likely to, for at least 20 consecutive years while at risk of

defeat in a contested, multi-party election. Identifying this set of cases gives a fuller picture of the phenomenon of long-lived one-party rule: it is now clear that it occurs both in regimes that are clearly democratic, such as Canada, Luxembourg, and Sweden, and clearly autocratic, such as Cameroon, Russia, and Zimbabwe. This collection of cases also allows us to generate ideas about the possible origins of one-party dominance, a task I turn to next.

### **The Origins of Dominant Parties: Three Paths to Power**

Having specified a universe of ruling party cases and identified the set of longest-lived, “dominant” parties, we can now turn to a consideration of the *origins* of these parties. One feature that appears to set many of these parties apart from the shorter-lived ones is the typical path to power. In Table 5, I have reorganized the set of dominant parties by the type of regime in which they began their time in office. Dominant parties tended to come to power in one of three ways. The first group (11 cases in total) came to power in regimes that already held regular, contested, multi-party elections for office. Ruling parties in Austria<sup>9</sup>, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Japan, Liechtenstein (twice), Luxembourg, Samoa, South Africa (the apartheid-era National Party), and Sweden were previously in opposition before taking power and stringing together several consecutive electoral victories. All of these regimes except South Africa and possibly Samoa were consolidated democracies: during these ruling parties’ tenure, the likelihood of restrictions on press freedoms or campaigning, politically-motivated arrests of opposition candidates, or the suspension of elections appeared quite remote.

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<sup>9</sup> The SPO in Austria is a partial exception, as it was the junior partner in a “grand coalition” with the ruling OVP for the entire postwar period until 1966.

**Table 5. Long-Lived Ruling Party Origins by Regime Type, 1950-2012**

<i>Country</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>Start Month</i>	<i>End Month</i>	<i>Tenure At Risk (Months)</i>
<i>Established Electorally-Contested Regime</i>				
Austria	SPO	Apr-70	Feb-00	358
Australia	LP+CP	Dec-49	Dec-72	276
Belgium	CVP	Apr-74	Jul-99	303
Canada	LP	Oct-35	Jun-57	260
Japan	LP/LDP	Dec-54	Aug-93	464
Liechtenstein (I)	FBP	Jul-28	Mar-70	500
Liechtenstein (II)	VU	Apr-78	Apr-01	276
Luxembourg (II)	CSV	Jul-79	-	329*
Samoa	HRPP	Apr-88	-	296*
South Africa (I)	NP	Jun-48	May-94	551
Sweden	SAP	Sep-36	Oct-76	481
<i>New Electorally-Contested Regime</i>				
Belarus <sup>2</sup>	Lukashenko	Jul-94	-	221*
Antigua and Barbuda	LP	Nov-81	Mar-04	268
Austria	OVP	Dec-45	Apr-70	292
Botswana	BDP	Sep-66	-	555*
Gambia	PPP	Feb-65	Jul-94	353
Germany, West	CDU+CSU	Sep-49	Oct-69	241
Guyana	PPP/Civic	Oct-92	-	242*
India	INC	Aug-47	Mar-77	355
Israel	ILP	May-48	Jun-77	349
Italy	DC	Apr-48	Jun-81	398
Luxembourg (I)	CSV	Oct-45	Jun-74	344
Malaysia	UMNO/BN	Aug-65	-	568*
Namibia	SWAPO	Mar-90	-	273*
Russia	Yeltsin/UR	Dec-91	-	252*
Singapore	PAP	Aug-65	-	568*
South Africa (II) <sup>2</sup>	ANC	May-94	-	223*
Trinidad and Tobago	PNM	Aug-62	Dec-86	292
Zimbabwe <sup>1</sup>	Mugabe/ZANU-PF	Apr-80	-	320*
<i>Incumbents in Previous Closed Autocracy</i>				
Cameroon	CPDM	Oct-92	-	242*
Djibouti <sup>2</sup>	RPP	May-93	-	235*
Gabon <sup>2</sup>	Bongo/PDG	Dec-93	-	228*

Mexico	PRI	Jul-46	Dec-00	653
Senegal	PS	Feb-78	Apr-00	266
Mozambique <sup>2</sup>	FRELIMO	Oct-94	-	218*
Seychelles <sup>2</sup>	SPPF	Jul-93	-	233*

\* Incumbent still in power; tenure calculated through December 2012

<sup>1</sup>Personalist incumbent; no leader turnover

<sup>2</sup>Party will surpass 20 years in office by Dec. 2014

Parties in the second group (18 cases) came to power at the same time that the regime began, and in most cases played a crucial role in founding it as well. In Antigua and Barbuda, Botswana, Gambia, India, Israel, Namibia, Trinidad and Tobago, and Zimbabwe, the first incumbent parties led the push for independence, then won the first post-independence elections and retained power for at least 20 years; the ANC in South Africa has followed this pattern as well. In Malaysia, UNMO oversaw the merger of Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore with Malaya to create the Malaysian Federation, and in Singapore the PAP presided over that city's subsequent establishment as an independent state. In Austria, Luxembourg, West Germany and Italy, the ruling parties were the first to hold office when full sovereignty was restored to those countries after World War II. In Russia, an unbroken line of executive control stretches from United Russia back to the tenure of Boris Yeltsin, who oversaw the creation of the Russian Federation out of the Soviet Union and was its first president. A similar period of rule exists in Belarus, beginning with the first multi-party election establishing the regime and bringing Lukashenko to power in 1994. And in Guyana the opposition coalition under the Progressive People's Party won the first elections in a new regime, defeating an autocrat who was attempting to retain power.

Parties in the third group (7 cases) began as the incumbent parties in closed autocracies, introduced multi-party elections on their own watch, and then competed in and won those elections. In Cameroon, Djibouti, Gabon, Mozambique, and Seychelles the incumbent autocratic parties presided over a transition from closed to electoral authoritarianism and have either passed or look likely to pass the 20-year threshold for time at risk of electoral defeat. Ruling parties in

Mexico and Senegal also survived a transition to contested elections and lasted more than 20 years in electoral autocracies, although both have now been defeated.

*Emergent vs First-Mover Dominant Parties*

The different paths these parties took to end up as dominant in their respective party systems suggests an important difference between the first group and the others. The first set of parties, which we might call “emergent” dominant parties, by and large clawed their way toward the top of an established party system, dislodging rivals and incumbents, then strung together an impressive series of electoral victories to remain there. In contrast, the other parties, which we might call “first mover” dominant parties, all began the multi-party era at the apex of the party system—indeed, in many cases, as the only party on the scene—then retained enough electoral support to prevent any upstart competitor from displacing them in power.

Note that this distinction between dominant parties is not the one usually drawn between those in authoritarian versus democratic regimes, or between parties in the industrialized West versus the developing world. Rather, the key distinction is *whether the party was in power when the regime began*. There is good reason to expect the processes that produce dominant party systems to be fundamentally different for the two sets of cases: emergent dominant parties begin in opposition and gradually build lasting advantages over competitors in the party system, whereas first-mover dominant parties begin the electorally-contested period in power and retain pre-existing advantages.

What is particularly striking about the list of parties in Table 4 is the number that can fairly be characterized as first movers. About 70 percent (25 of 36) dominant parties either presided over a transition to multi-party elections or took office in those first elections. Moreover, there are several cases in the set of “emergent” dominant parties that could arguably be classified as first-movers as well. In Japan, for instance, the LDP started its long run in power a little over three years after sovereignty was restored to Japan in April 1952; the two previous

prime ministers had been either from the Liberal Party or Democratic Party, which merged in November 1955 to form the LDP. In Samoa, the Human Rights Protection Party was the first organized political party to emerge on the political scene. Although it began in opposition to the government of prime minister Tupuola Efi in May 1979, it became the ruling party by 1982, and except for a brief period in 1986-87, all Samoan prime ministers since have belonged to it. And the SPO in Austria was hardly a stranger to power when it took office in 1970: it had been part of the post-war ruling coalition with the OVP for all but four years. Thus, it is not an exaggeration to say that *most long-lived ruling parties begin as the first incumbents in new electorally-contested regimes*.

This pattern suggests that first incumbent parties in general, not just the “dominant parties” listed in Table 2, may do systematically better than others at retaining power for a long time in ECRs. To know for sure, however, whether being first is a significant advantage, we need to compare the estimated survival function of the full set of first movers to that of the non-first movers in the dataset, shown in Figure 3.



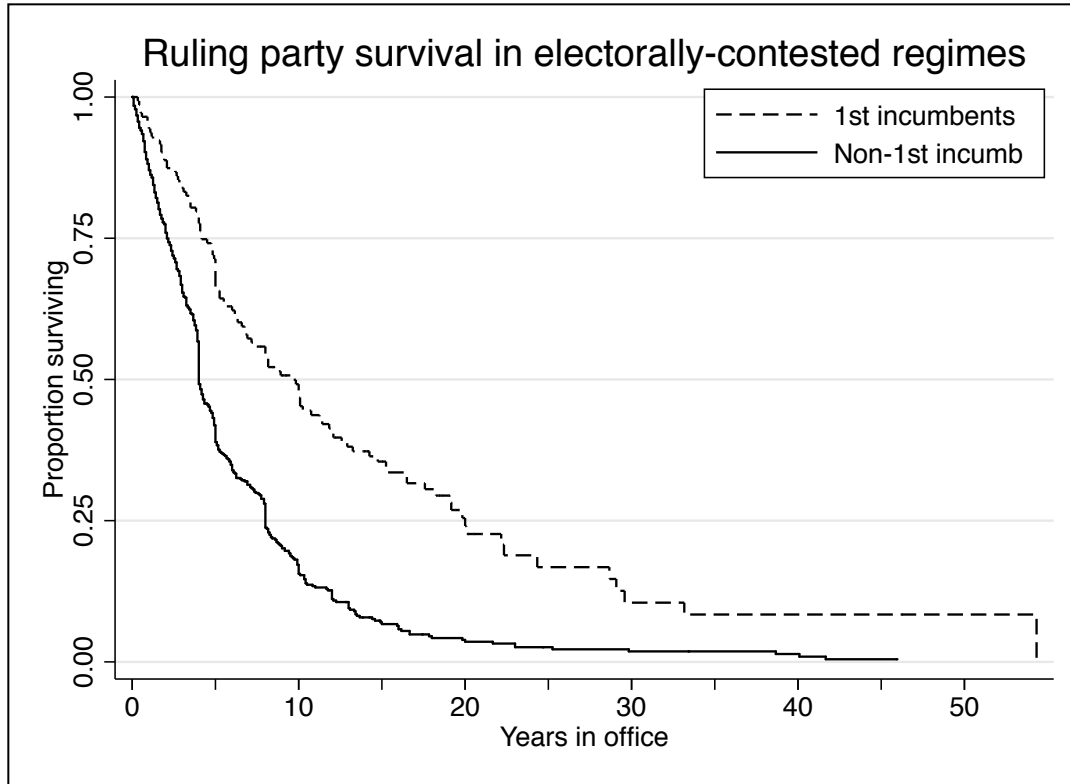


FIGURE 3. 1ST INCUMBENT PARTIES HAVE BETTER SURVIVAL RATES

The data confirm this hunch: as expected, among all 788 ruling party cases, the first incumbents have better survival rates. The median first incumbent lasted an estimated 132 months in office, while the median non-first incumbent lasted only 60, or less than half as long, and this difference existed at every point in time, from the first month onward. Clearly, holding office at the beginning of the regime sharply boosts expected incumbent survival times. Moreover, almost a quarter of first incumbents lasted more than 20 years in office, while only about five percent of non-first incumbents did. Thus, *long-lived “dominant” parties are most likely to emerge at the beginning of new regimes*. Once an electorally-contested regime has experienced at least one party turnover, the chances of a ruling party lasting to 20 years in office falls by a factor of five (25 percent to 5 percent)!

The argument that long-lived ruling parties originate in tandem with the regime in which they hold power is not new. Huntington effectively argued as much over 40 years ago, asserting

that “one-party systems are always the product of nationalist or revolutionary movements from below which had to fight for power” (1968: 418). Slater and Smith (2010) have more recently challenged this claim by arguing that *counter*-revolutionary rather than revolutionary or nationalist movements are the most likely to produce long-lived ruling parties, but even they link dominant party origins to those of the regime itself. Similar arguments have been made about the origins of dominant parties in the developed world. Pempel, for instance, asserted that dominant parties there all began in a “mobilizational crisis, that is, a major reorientation of the political dispositions of key economic groups,” driven by war, the formation of a new state, or economic turmoil (1990: 341), and Di Palma viewed one-party dominance as one of several possible outcomes of a transition to democracy, albeit a rare one (1990: 162-64). To my knowledge, however, no one has previously estimated the frequency with which dominant parties emerge at the beginning of regimes, or how much more likely they are to appear in new versus pre-existing regimes.<sup>10</sup> For that reason alone, then, these data considerably improve our understanding of dominant party system origins.

Nevertheless, the finding that dominant parties are most likely in newly-founded regimes leaves us with two outstanding questions. First, *why* are dominant party systems most likely to emerge at the beginning of regimes, rather than at other times? And second, *which* first incumbents are most likely to become dominant parties? After all, a full three-quarters of first incumbents do *not* manage to endure past 20 years in office, so even within this group, dominant parties are somewhat unusual. In the next section, I will argue that part of the answer to both questions has to do with the variation in the initial *partisan advantage* enjoyed by these first incumbents.

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<sup>10</sup> Reuter (2010a: 337-371) does estimate the frequency with which dominant parties are formed, but for a fundamentally different set of cases: he includes ruling parties formed in single-party regimes as well as multi-party ones, and he excludes all democracies. His working definition of “dominant party” is also quite different from mine. He requires only that the ruling party control the executive and a majority of seats in a given year, without specifying a longevity threshold. Ruling parties can thus be “dominant” under his definition even if they hold power for only a single year.

### **First-Mover Advantage in Party Systems**

A useful analogy for thinking about party system origins and change is that of a consumer market. Consider some contrasting examples of how competition in new consumer markets can begin. The market for a drug protected by a patent is one: prohibitions on new entry into the market monopolized by a single firm are removed all at once, competition floods in, and the former monopolist tries to hang on to as much market share as it can. Another is when a monopoly ends through the break-up of the firm. The telecommunications market in the United States in the 1980s is a good example of this pattern—a court order led the monopolist AT&T to be split into several regional companies, the so-called “Baby Bells.” A third pattern is when a firm develops products for a completely new market, as Microsoft did with its Windows operating system in the 1980s, building an effective monopoly and then retaining most of its market share in the face of later entry by competitors. The rise and fall of Eastman Kodak’s control of the market for film shows a similar history. A fourth pattern is when there are several firms that together form an oligopoly; deregulation or cartel-busting then leads to new firm entry and mergers, as in the U.S. airline industry after 1978.

These examples suggest a possible explanation for how markets with no legal restrictions on entry can nevertheless remain dominated by a single firm. More than in the other cases, the Microsofts and Kodaks of the world enjoyed a *first-mover advantage*—a long-lasting lead in market share gained by being the first firm to enter (Lieberman and Montgomery 1988; Mueller 1997). This initial lead over competitors can endure as a consequence both of demand-side and supply-side factors.

On the demand side, firms may benefit from being first to the market when there exist high uncertainties about the quality of new products, as for instance with automobiles, so that

later entries are viewed by consumers as much riskier than earlier, more proven entries. First-mover advantages also tend to persist for goods that have strong buyer inertia due to habit formation, in which the customer learns about the product by consuming it rather than by receiving information from experts or impartial observers. Colgate, for example, was the first company to sell toothpaste in squeezable tubes over a century ago, and has been a leading toothpaste brand in the United States ever since.

On the supply side, first-mover advantages are likely to accrue in industries in which there are high set-up and sunk costs; large economies of scale, which if they take time to capture, give the initial entrant more time to expand and benefit from these economies while later entrants start up; and large learning-by-doing benefits, in which the process of creating the new product is complicated and initial entrants gain large advantages by being further up the learning curve than later entrants (Mueller 1997). An industry that satisfies all three requirements is commercial airliner production, where the huge capital investments and complicated development of new models of jets have limited their production in the United States to a single company, Boeing.

Although the analogy is not perfect, the first-mover advantage concept ports well to the political context, and it provides a useful way to think about why some, but not all, first incumbents begin with a leading position in the party system. We can think of vote share as roughly equivalent to market share: as firms seek to sell their products to more consumers than their competitors, so political parties seek to win more votes than theirs. Thus, the central indicator of first-mover advantage in party systems is *electoral performance in the first election*. Parties with a large first-mover advantage win a complete victory in the first elections in the new ECR, and thereby secure political power.

#### *Measuring Initial Partisan Advantage: Electoral Performance in the First Elections*

We can measure electoral performance in at least three ways, corresponding to three different ideas about what should best indicate the winning party's partisan advantage. One is to

look at the *vote shares* of each party in the first election, comparing the shares of the winning party and its nearest competitor, and using this as an indicator of the size of the partisan advantage. For instance, in 1994, the ANC won 62.6 percent of the vote in the election that brought it to power; its nearest competitor, the former ruling National Party, received only 20.4 percent, for a vote share difference of 40.2 percent. The enormous gap between the ANC and its competitors has been at least this large in every election since; this lead in the electorate is a big reason why most commentators expect the ANC to be re-elected comfortably in 2014, despite rising unhappiness with the party among many of its erstwhile supporters. We can examine this initial “vote gap” to see how well it predicts a ruling party’s survival chances. For this indicator, I use a measure from ECRD, the aggregate district-level vote share of each party in the first election to the lower house.

A second way is to do the same with the difference in *seat shares*. In many of the dominant party cases, the incumbents’ majorities were “manufactured” by the electoral system: majoritarian electoral system, and occasionally gross malapportionment, brought dominant parties to power and kept them there, even when the popular vote favored a competitor. For instance, in the first post-independence election in India in 1951, the Indian Congress Party won nearly three-quarters (364/489) of the seats in the parliament with only 44 percent of the popular vote. For the next 25 years Congress continued to enjoy comfortable majorities despite winning well under half the vote in each election. Thus, an alternative approach is to examine whether a “seat gap” in the first election is a better predictor of ruling party survival than vote share. For this indicator, I use ECRD’s aggregate lower house seat share.

A third approach is to identify those parties that win *majority control* of all the elected branches of government. Because the regime itself is new, its institutions may be especially weak or malleable, and a party winning complete control over it is likely to be able to bend them to its long-term electoral advantage. For this indicator, I use a dichotomous measure from ECRD indicating whether the first ruling party wins full control of the institutions of state in the first

election. In parliamentary regimes, this means winning a majority of seats (and in both houses of parliament if bicameral). In presidential regimes, it means winning both the presidency and a majority in the legislature (and in both houses if bicameral). In semi-presidential regimes, where the president is directly elected but the prime minister is accountable primarily to the legislature, the first incumbent must win both the presidency and a majority in the legislature to be “advantaged.” This measure is an admittedly simple one, but it has the virtues of consistency and generality while still capturing the central idea behind the concept: that large electoral advantages at the beginning of the regime should lead to full political control after the first elections.

**Table 6. Partisan Advantage Variables - Descriptive Statistics**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Obs</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Dev.</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
LH Vote Dif	687	0.052	0.186	-0.865	0.827
LH Seat Dif	723	0.121	0.271	-0.857	1
Maj Control	789	0.103	0.304	0	1

Table 6 shows the descriptive statistics for these three alternative measures of partisan advantage. Note that due to data availability, only the third measure, *majority control*, is available for all cases. Seat and especially vote share are either not relevant (in the case of non-partisan executives) or impossible to locate for every election, especially early ones and those in obscure island microstates. To calculate the effect of a “large” vote differential, I compare the subset of ruling parties that took office with a lead in the lower house popular vote of at least 1 standard deviation above the mean, or about 0.25, to the rest. I do the same for seat differential, which at one standard deviation above the mean is about 0.4. The survivor functions for these three measures—vote share differential, seat share differential, and majority control, are shown in Figures 4, 5, and 6, respectively.

Note that the partisan advantage I have posited for these cases should not necessarily show up as a strong effect in the survival estimates of first incumbents: duration is a consequence as well of the causal processes that unfold *after* competition begins, and I have not specified what I think those processes are or how they will play out. In fact, some of the “dominant” parties in Table 2 began with a surprisingly weak electoral performance given their subsequent lifespan in office. For instance, one might expect Mapai in Israel to have won a majority in the first Israel elections, since it controlled the prime minister’s office for the first 30 years of the regime; yet it held only 46 of 120 seats (38.3%) in the first Knesset. The CDU/CSU in Germany barely held a plurality (34.6%) of seats in the first term of the Bundestag in 1949, yet controlled the chancellor’s office for the next 20 years. And the RDPC (later CPDM) in Cameroon fell two seats short of a majority in the 1992 elections and had to take on a coalition partner; its presidential candidate squeaked out reelection with a 40 percent plurality when the opposition split the vote between at least three other candidates.

Despite these examples, however, we should still expect those ruling parties that perform better in the first elections to have a greater median survival time than those which do not. There should still be *some* discernable effect on overall patterns of survival, even if it is weakened by subsequent developments in the political system that I have not modeled. And in fact, this is what we find, as Figures 4-5 show: advantaged first incumbents, measured either as vote or seat share differential, do indeed survive longer on average than their non-advantaged 1<sup>st</sup> incumbent counterparts. More surprising, perhaps, is that non-advantaged first incumbents survive significantly longer than do non-first advantaged incumbents. In other words, *it is better to be the first incumbent than to win by a big margin.*

Why might this be? One possibility is that the first party to take office disproportionately benefits from the ability to appoint the civil service, the judiciary, leaders of the military and police, and other important institutions of the state. Thus, even a narrow victory in the first election can be made to persist for a long time in the electorate under the right conditions.

Another interpretation is that the vote and seat difference measure used here—1 s.d. above the mean—is too blunt an instrument and is obscuring much of the important variation. A 0.25 vote difference is actually quite large in some contexts: the KMT in Taiwan, for instance, has never enjoyed a lead that large in any legislative election since it became an ECR, yet it has retained a clear partisan advantage that under generic conditions makes its candidates the favorites in national races over the opposition. If this is the case, then a multivariate model is probably a more appropriate way to evaluate this effect. (I save that investigation for future work.)

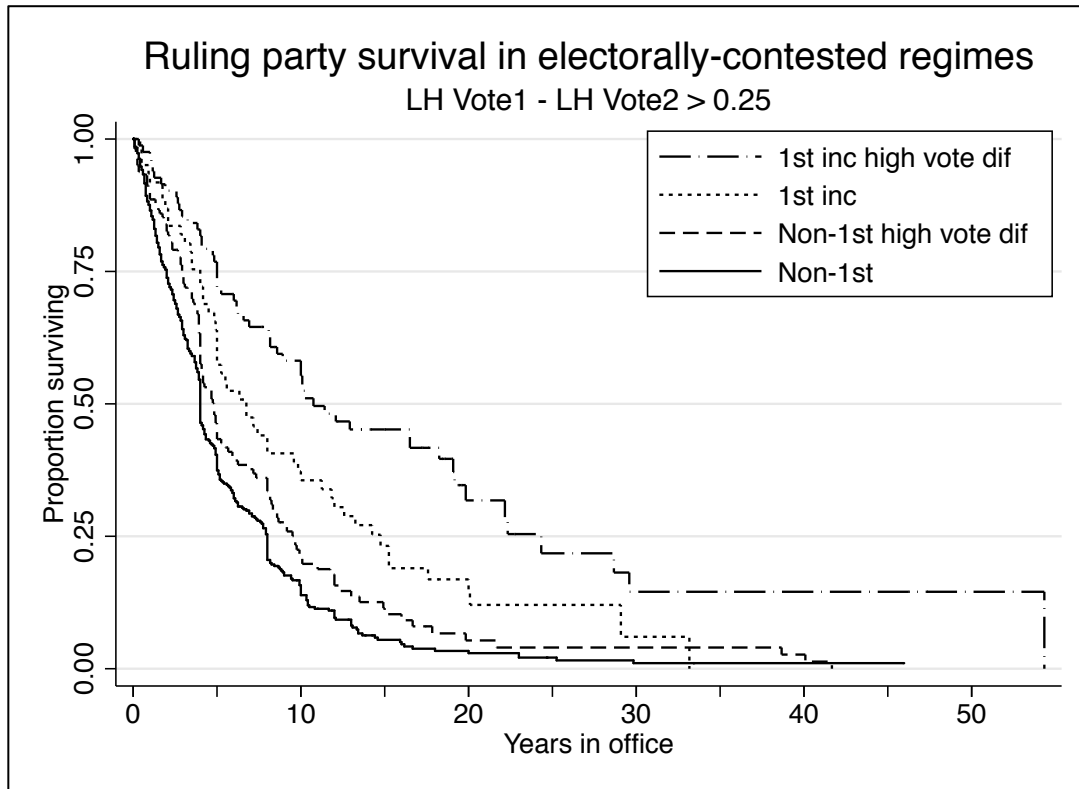


FIGURE 4. 1ST INCUMBENTS WITH LARGE VOTE ADVANTAGE HAVE BETTER SURVIVAL RATES



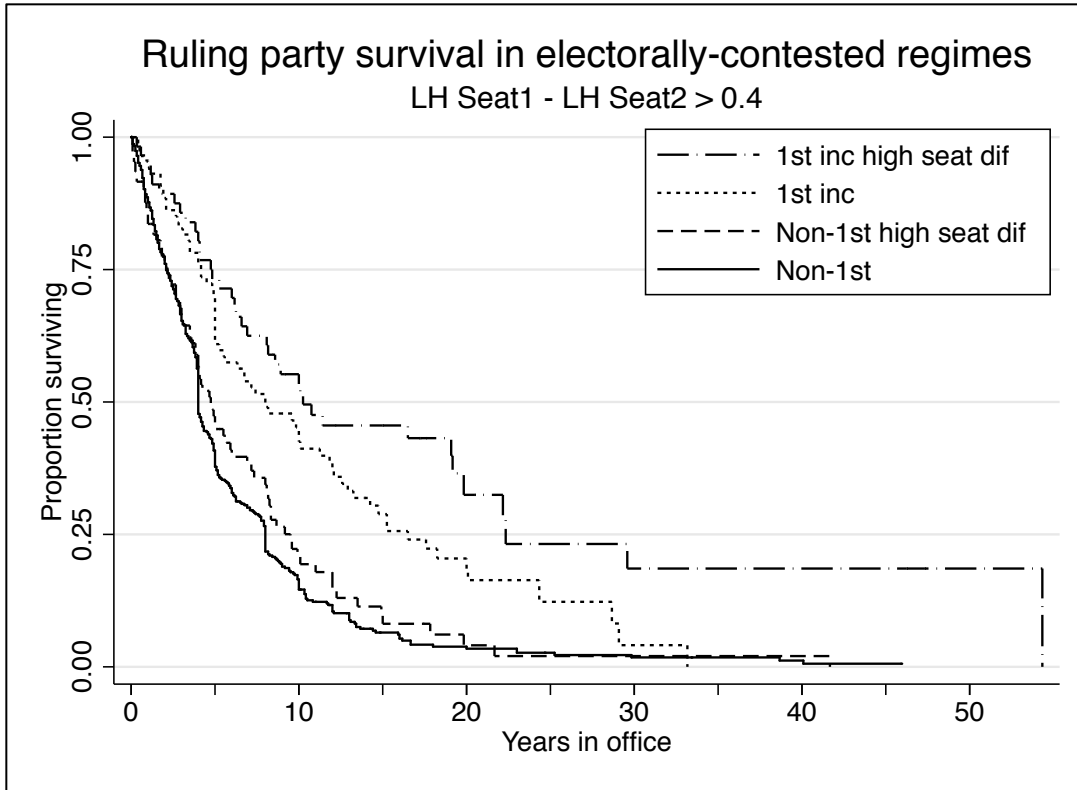


FIGURE 5. 1<sup>ST</sup> INCUMBENTS WITH LARGE SEAT ADVANTAGE HAVE BETTER SURVIVAL RATES

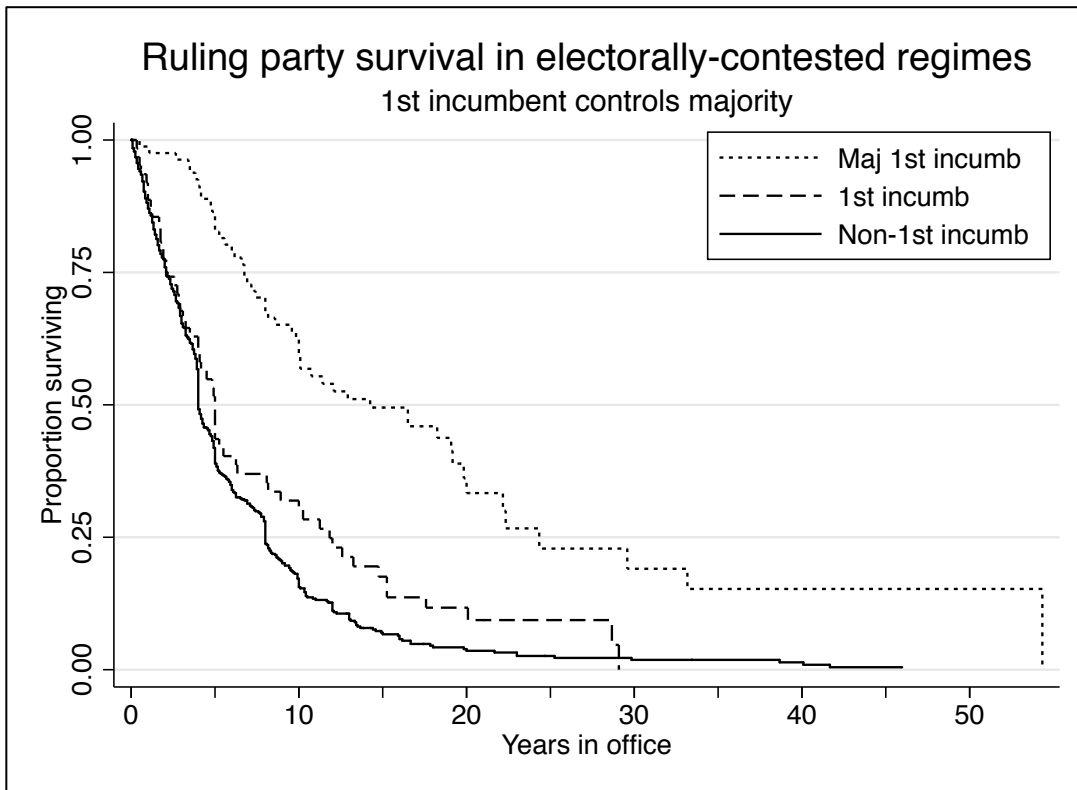


FIGURE 6. 1<sup>ST</sup> INCUMBENT SURVIVAL ADVANTAGE CORRELATED WITH SINGLE-PARTY MAJORITY

A second surprise is that the greatest survival benefit to a first incumbent comes from *majority control* rather than a large lead in votes or seats. In fact, in Figure 6 it is striking that almost all of the higher survival rate of first incumbents seems to be due to the “advantaged” parties: when we break this group out separately, the survival function for the other first movers looks remarkably similar to that of the non-first movers. This simple dichotomous measure of first-mover advantage appears to capture an important initial difference between ruling parties that has long-lasting implications for their survival: controlling all the institutions of state, again, matters a great deal. Thus, here we have more evidence here for the claim that long-lived one party rule is most likely to occur at the beginning of regimes—that is, that dominant parties are disproportionately likely to emerge from the set of first incumbents.

### **The Sources of Initial Partisan Advantage: A Qualitative Review of the Cases**

As the previous section showed, the majority of dominant parties that have existed over the last 60 years were first incumbents: they took or retained power in electorally contested regimes that were newly established. Thus, one answer to the question “why dominance?” is simply that most dominant parties enjoyed an especially strong partisan advantage over their competitors at the beginning of their tenure, and it took decades for this electoral lead to decay.

This answer is hardly satisfying, however, because it simply pushes the question one step further back in the causal chain: we still want to know *why* those ruling parties which endured a long time enjoyed a large initial partisan advantage. That is, to say something more profound about the causes of dominance, we need not only to observe that a first-mover advantage exists, but also to explain where it comes from. And to develop such an explanation, we need a sense of

what drives variation in founding election outcomes *within* the full set of first incumbents, both long- and short-lived.

To answer this question, I undertook a qualitative examination of all 143 first incumbents in the sample. Drawing on the same sources I consulted to construct the Electorally Contested Regimes Dataset<sup>11</sup>, I looked at the patterns of electoral competition in the first elections after the regime was founded and compared first incumbents that endured past 20 years in office with the rest. The key characteristics I focused on in this endeavor included:

- whether there was an incumbent running in the first election, and whether the incumbent won or lost;
- the vote share of the winning party or candidate relative to its (his/her) competitors;
- the vote share of parties in elections to other offices held around the same time;
- the electoral bases of party support, as described in the case materials;
- the origins, organization and previous history, if any, of the winning candidate's party;
- the conditions under which the election was held, including signs of fraud, intimidation, vote-buying, restrictions on the press, harassment of opposition campaigns and organizations, etc.;
- the main issues that appeared to drive voting behavior in the first elections.

A consideration of the full set of first incumbent cases highlights three potent sources of partisan advantage. Those ruling parties that ended up “advantaged” in the first elections, either in terms of vote or seat differential or majority control, tended to have (1) a strong *party brand* that ensured a large group of loyal partisans in the electorate, (2) an institutionalized *party organization* that enabled the party to maximize its candidates' chances of winning elections, and (3) *control over the formation of the new regime* which shaped and constrained subsequent

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<sup>11</sup> For more information on ECRD, see my personal website for more information: [www.kharistempleman.com](http://www.kharistempleman.com).

partisan competition for power. These three factors in turn affected the size of the first incumbent's victory, measured both in terms of vote and seat shares, in the first elections of the new regime. I elaborate on each of these below.

*Advantage 1: Party Brand*

The first, “demand-side” advantage was at the level of mass politics and typically occurred as a result of the expansion of the electorate. Some first incumbents enjoyed a strong party brand that made them favored over other opponents at the advent of multi-party competition. Parties that led their countries to independence or otherwise played a central role in establishing the new regime, in particular, often benefitted from a tremendous amount of popularity and goodwill among the electorate—what we might term a “halo effect” (Pempel 1990: 344). A good example is the support enjoyed by African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa at the end of apartheid: the party had a terrifically positive image among black voters, such that voting for the ANC in effect meant voting not merely for a new leader but for black self-determination. As a consequence, the ANC won 62.6 percent of the popular vote in the April 1994 election in South Africa, the first after the end of apartheid; the nearest competitor, the incumbent National Party, won only 20.4 percent. Such overwhelming support for the founding party was also apparent at the advent of the regime in many of the other dominant party cases, including the BDP in Botswana, the PPP in Gambia, UMNO in Malaysia, SWAPO in Namibia, PAP in Singapore, and ZANU (later ZANU-PF) in Zimbabwe.

Such popularity obviously made it difficult for other parties to win the first elections in the new regime—as Pempel puts it, “[a] party perceived as a national savior is hard to oppose” (1990: 344). But it also may have served to convert initial ruling party support into advantages that endured for a generation or more, long after the initial halo effect had faded. For one, in many post-colonial states, there was little or no previous tradition of mass electoral politics, meaning that most voters had weak or nonexistent partisan ties. As a large literature has

demonstrated, partisanship at the individual level tends to be quite robust over time once established, and it strongly influences vote choice (e.g. Campbell et al. 1960; Richardson 1991; Holmberg 1994; Schickler and Green 1997; Toka 1998; Weisberg and Greene 2003; Dalton and Weldon 2007; Mainwaring and Zoco 2007). Thus, by being the first ruling party on the scene and playing a central role in creating the new regime, the first incumbents in some of these cases effectively “locked in” a large chunk of the electorate as loyal partisan supporters for decades afterwards.

In addition, in subsequent elections the first incumbent’s partisan label could serve as a coordination device for both candidates and voters: potential candidates knew that the party’s endorsement could deliver a large bloc of votes and wanted to run under its label, and voters knew that the party’s candidates would be viable contestants for office, so its nominees became the beneficiaries of strategic voting (Aldrich 1995: 48-50). This electoral advantage tended to endure as long as there was no opposition party brand that was equally effective at signaling viability to both candidates and voters—in some cases for decades after the regime was founded.

### *Advantage 2: Party Organization and Resources*

The second, “supply-side” advantage was at the level of political elites and occurred as a consequence of the need to compete for and win votes in elections for the first time. Parties improved their candidates’ chances of winning office in two critical ways: by exploiting economies of scale in electoral campaigns, and by controlling nominations.

On the first, parties that were effectively able to increase the value of their brand above and beyond the personal appeal of their nominees had a leg up in electoral competition as well. The party’s pre-existing network of supporters and members could be mobilized to work on behalf of all its candidates. Furthermore, many pre-existing incumbents enjoyed large resource advantages over their competitors: money, media access, and experienced personnel all increased the party’s chances of winning races.

On the second, party nominations were scarce: there were more potential candidates than there were nominations to go around. The party most consistently able to resolve this competition efficiently—that is, selecting the most appealing candidate while still keeping those passed over from defecting and running renegade campaigns—was at an advantage over others in elections. These decisions were usually contentious: after all, they were the critical step in determining which aspiring politicians actually obtained office and the power and perks that came with it. Having an established set of procedures for choosing nominees that was respected and obeyed by the losers was of significant electoral benefit to a party. And parties that had already been in existence for a while were more likely to have these procedures worked out than were those formed for the express purpose of contesting the first election.

The organizational and resource advantages enjoyed by the incumbent party were readily apparent at the beginning of most of the dominant party systems. For instance, the Indian National Congress was by far the largest mass political organization in the country at independence, and it had party branches in almost every parliamentary constituency, making it the only party that could effectively conduct a national campaign for office. It also had a pre-existing leadership with clearly-defined mechanisms for nominating candidates and solving intra-party disputes (Morris-Jones 1967).

The dominant parties that emerged out of closed autocracies also possessed large organizational and resource advantages at the beginning of the contested regime. In the first elections, these parties could draw on the allegiance of most of the country's political and economic elites, pre-established organizational networks for turning out and rewarding supporters and punishing opponents, and privileged access to the patronage and coercive capacity of the state to deliver votes for their candidates. Parties that fit this characterization include the CPDM in Cameroon, RPP in Djibouti, PRI in Mexico, FRELIMO in Mozambique, PS in Senegal, SPPF in Seychelles, and CCM in Tanzania.

*Advantage 3: Control over Formation of the New Regime*

A third advantage enjoyed by most of the first incumbents that became dominant parties was the ability to shape the institutions of the new regime to their benefit. In the typical new ECR, the practices under which the first elections were held were potentially quite malleable: in many cases there were no binding precedents for the kind of electoral system in use, the access of all parties to the media, the role of money in campaigns, the types of issues that were and were not allowed to be discussed, and so forth. The first incumbents that oversaw the establishment of the regime usually influenced the design of rules under which they then competed—in some cases, even, shaped them with a free hand. Furthermore, these rules were often enforced by state personnel chosen by the incumbent party itself, and who as a consequence were likely to enforce them selectively in ways that most benefitted the incumbent. In many cases the judiciary systematically ruled in favor of incumbent party candidates and against opposition ones, and the legal system selectively prosecuted opposition figures for violating campaign laws while ignoring infractions by incumbent party candidates. The military and security services also tended to be especially pro-incumbent, and so the coercive capacity of the state could often be mobilized for partisan ends as well. In addition, members of the civil service in many cases disproportionately owed their employment to the first incumbent party. And workers at state-owned enterprises were frequently pressured to support the incumbent because their employment credibly depended on remaining loyal to the ruling party.

A good example of a first incumbent using its preeminent position in the regime to shape competition to its own advantage is in Mexico. The PRI used electoral reform to hamper coordination among opposition parties in legislative races and to ensure that it always had a working majority in Congress (Diaz-Cayeros and Magaloni 2001). The party's influence over public-sector employment allowed it to condition state jobs on continued support at the ballot box for a large fraction of the electorate, and its extensive party organization and enormous membership provided it with a way to deliver state-supplied material benefits to supporters and

deny them to opponents (Magaloni 2006; Greene 2007). In addition, the PRI's effective control over the electoral commission allowed the party to engage in fraud when necessary, and prevent judicial decisions that harmed party interests (Domingo 2000; Eisenstadt 2004; Magaloni 2006). Similar advantages appear to have been enjoyed by virtually all of the other ruling parties in closed autocracies that initially survived the transition to electoral contestation, including in Cameroon, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Senegal, Seychelles, Taiwan, and Tanzania.

## **Conclusion**

In this study, I identified a subset of exceptionally long-lived, “dominant” ruling parties that held power in electorally contested regimes. By comparing these with the duration in power all other ruling party cases, I am able to identify a strong correlate of ruling party survival: being a first incumbent. Most of the longest-lived ruling parties, it turns out, were the first parties to hold office in new, electorally contested regimes, and they often played a key role in the regime's founding. Moreover, the results of the first election are strongly predictive of subsequent survival patterns: the median survival time is about 40 percent longer for parties that hold a large vote- or seat-share lead over their nearest competitors, and it is more than twice as long for parties that win single-party majorities in all branches of government.

I then traced the sources of this variation in initial electoral performance. At the beginning of the regime, the best-performing first incumbent parties tend to enjoy three kinds of systematic advantages over potential competitors in the party system: a strong party “brand,” a disciplined and well-resourced party organization, and the ability to shape and manipulate the rules of competition. These relative partisan advantages frequently persist over time, helping them to win consecutive elections for a generation or more. Only with the erosion of these advantages do elections become more competitive, and does the risk of ruling party defeat



increase. Once dominant parties are defeated, subsequent partisan competition is much more even, and regular rotation in power becomes the norm. Thus, one-party dominance can be characterized as a kind of “party system adolescence”—as other parties emerge to compete with the incumbent, its chances of survival decline.

This conclusion might seem patently obvious in hindsight: parties that do well in the first elections are more likely to do well in subsequent ones. But it is not self-evidently true that the advantages that produce the initial victory should endure for a generation or more. In fact, one can make a reasonable argument for the converse: the downside of majority control is that you have no one to blame when things go awry. Moreover, there are good reasons to think voter expectations will be unreasonably high at the beginning of most regimes, with the consequence that the first incumbents inevitably get blamed when the idealism of opposition meets the reality of governing. One need only look at Eastern Europe to see this effect in action: the initial euphoria over the end of communism quickly faded as the transition to market-based economies and democratic politics proved anything but smooth. Expecting a rapid convergence to western European standards of living, voters instead got shock therapy, economic slumps, and massive unemployment (Kolodko 2000). The anti-communist leaders who took power in most of these regimes got blamed, fairly or not, for much of the severe economic and social dislocation that occurred during the early stages of the transition, and in many cases were enthusiastically booted out of office as soon as they had to face the voters again (Grzymala-Busse 2002). The circumstances may be less extreme in most of the other first-mover cases, but the same dynamic is at play: winning everything in a new regime is a double-edged sword, and it is not obvious why the benefits of being the first in power should in general outweigh the costs.

In sum, the most likely path for a party to become dominant is to win convincingly in the first election in a new regime, and to take power with no effective checks on its rule. But it is much less clear why the advantages these ruling parties initially enjoy should continue to sustain them in power for a generation or more. In order to fully understand dominant party survival,

then, we need to look not only at initial conditions—the “origins” in the title of this paper—but also changing conditions over time. Temporally dependent variables such as economic shocks, demographic changes, and international crises are all likely to affect ruling party survival. That question is one that could be fruitfully explored in future research.

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