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**Political Competition and Electoral Competitiveness in Sub-Saharan Africa  
A Conceptual Critique With Data**

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MTCELL002

A minor dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of  
the degree of Master of Social Science in Democratic Governance

Faculty of the Humanities

University of Cape Town

2009

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Political Competition & Electoral Competitiveness in Sub-Saharan Africa  
A Conceptual Critique With Data

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*Abstract*

This paper makes the case that election results are a poor measure of political competition in Africa. This argument stems from a disconnect between the way political competition is conceptualized and then operationalized in a large portion of quantitative research on the subject. Building on the theoretical framework of contestation developed by Robert Dahl in *Polyarchy*, this study argues that election results are, at best, a measure of electoral competitiveness, which is a far cry from the defining features of Dahl's model.

Across a continent that is characterized by dominant parties and large electoral victories, vote shares provide little information about the openness and fairness of political competition in Africa. Furthermore, quantitative analysis in this study demonstrates that levels of competitiveness are not a valid proxy measure of political competition. As a result, inquiries into the nature of political competition within African countries should focus primarily on the openness and fairness of the political marketplace instead of after-the-fact election results.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### *Problem*

Over the last four decades, the theoretical framework developed by Robert Dahl in his seminal text, *Polyarchy*, has had a profound influence on the study of democracy and its spread worldwide. In Dahl's book, he provides a well-conceived view of the most basic components of electoral democracy. Albeit a limited conception, this framework has given researchers a meaningful starting point as they've sought to expand our knowledge of this important subject.

In particular, Dahl's work has made a considerable impact on research focused on democracy in Africa. For instance, many of these studies utilize Dahl's idea of contestation as an appropriate conceptualization of political competition.<sup>1</sup> The legal-institutional guarantees within Dahl's framework include the freedom of speech, freedom of organization, freedom of press and the existence of free and fair elections. Indeed, each of these dimensions is important for political competition because they guarantee a person's ability to develop and advocate for their beliefs in a public setting without the threat of recourse.

Many researchers, though, operationalize Dahl's idea of competition by using election results in their studies. Election results, however, are a measure of electoral competitiveness. Although competitiveness is an important aspect of competition, it is not a defining feature of Dahl's legal-institutional framework. Moreover, there is little reason to believe that election results, even as a proxy measure, provide reliable information about those legal-institutional guarantees. As a result, the correspondence between the way political competition is conceptualized and then operationalized in much of the literature on African democracy is in serious question.

The source of this operational error lies in a subtle assumption that equates the *ability* to compete with an *actual* competitive environment. This assumption rests in the belief that as room for debate and opposition opens up in liberalizing countries, the number of different actors vying for control of the government should increase and, *ipso facto*, create a more competitive political system. This argument, however, rests upon a logical fallacy. The ability to compete and the existence of a competitive environment are two concepts that vary independently of each other. Some liberalized countries are

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<sup>1</sup> For this study, the terms 'competition' and 'contestation' will be used interchangeably. Using both terms interchangeably is common throughout the existing research and even done by Robert Dahl in *Polyarchy*.

characterized by low levels of electoral competitiveness (for reasons such as historical legacy or political identity). This type of political environment, for example, is found in African countries such as Namibia, Botswana, and South Africa, where liberation parties still dominate the political marketplace. Alternatively, other countries are characterized by closed political regimes but still have (or, at least have the semblance of) high levels of competitiveness. Zimbabwe, for instance, has had a relatively closed political environment but still manages to produce elections results that reflect moderately high levels of electoral competitiveness. For these reasons, it is imperative that researchers recognize that the ability to compete and the actual level of competitiveness within a country may vary independently of each other.

Furthermore, the use of election results as a measure of competition creates a host of problems for cross-national comparisons. Take, for instance, the differences between two hypothetical soccer matches. In the first match, Team A defeats Team B by a score of 10 to 1. The competition was fair and unbiased, but the level of competitiveness (as determined by the game's result) was low. In the second hypothetical match, Team C defeats Team D with the same score, but the competition was biased (partial referee) and unfair (not all rules applied evenly). While the results of the two matches were the same, the rules and conditions under which the second match occurred were fundamentally different than the first. Thus, the question must be asked, what do election results tell us about a political competition if we don't consider the rules or conditions under which the games are actually being played?

The problematic nature of using election results to measure political competition can be seen in countries where dominant political parties win overwhelming proportions of the vote under free and fair circumstances. In the 2004 South African elections, for example, the African National Congress (ANC) garnered 70 percent of the vote in a race that was considered free and fair. In fact, the African Union characterized that election as a "benchmark" of quality for countries across the continent (African Union, 2004, p. 32). If political competition was operationalized by indicators of Dahl's legal-institutional guarantees, the results would have indeed shown a relatively free, fair, and open political marketplace. Because of the assumptions that link competition to election results, though, many existing measures indicated that political competition was somehow limited or biased because the ANC breached a 70 percent vote threshold. While the level of electoral competitiveness in South Africa was certainly low, election results provided

virtually no information regarding the freedom of speech, organization, press or the existence of a free and fair electoral process.

This critique presents an important question to researchers. What is the defining feature of political competition? Is it the *ability* to compete or is it *actual competitiveness*? Here, it might be useful to recall Sartori's (1979) distinction between *noncompetitive* and *subcompetitive* political environments. A subcompetitive environment is one where an incumbent candidate is uncontested but still faces the possibility of being voted out of office. Conversely, a noncompetitive environment is one where a candidate runs unopposed because the rules and conditions prevent competition. In other words, as Sartori writes, "...[A] monopoly *in* the market remains a far cry from a monopoly *without* a market – at least in politics" (Sartori, 1979, p. 219). Thus, the defining element of political competition is not how competitive a situation is, but whether the rules and conditions of a political marketplace allow for competitiveness.

Therefore, it becomes clear that political competition needs to be conceptualized and operationalized in a manner that does not confuse the ability to compete with actual competitiveness. For this study, political competition is defined as a game where ideas can be promoted in an open marketplace in an attempt to influence voters and government policy. The conceptualization of political competition is, thus, a marketplace of ideas defined by both the *de jure* rules (i.e. rules, regulations and laws) and *de facto* conditions (i.e. whether those rules are enforced and legally binding). From here, political competition is operationalized as the extent to which these rules and conditions "are openly available, publicly employed, and fully guaranteed" to the public (Dahl, 1971, p. 4).

With this standard of political competition, the degree to which election results actually reflect the ability to compete can then be put to empirical test. If the empirical relationship between the two concepts is found to be statistically discernable, election results may actually be said to provide a useful proxy measure of political competition. This conclusion could help to substantiate many observations reached in the quantitative literature about political competition in Africa. However, if the relationship is weak or nonexistent, the results would strongly suggest that election results are an inappropriate measure of competition. This conclusive result would push scholars to improve empirical measures of the rules and conditions of political competition existing within each country.

### *Research Questions*

- To what extent are concurrent levels of political competition and electoral competitiveness empirically associated?
- To what extent are levels of electoral competitiveness at a given point associated with prior levels of political competition?
- To what extent are levels of electoral competitiveness at a given point associated with subsequent levels of political competition?

### *Significance of Study*

Addressing the conceptual confusion and operational errors around political competition is timely and has relevant academic and practical implications. Academically, many scholars understand political competition to be an important, if not the central, component of democracy. However, the concept is often measured in an *ex post facto* manner that is inconsistent with its original conceptualization. This confusion clouds our understanding of the concept and adds to the vagueness of research on the subject. For cross-national comparisons, the use of election results creates a host of problems due to the vast disparities in the rules and conditions of political competition across time and space. Thus, refocusing the way that competition is operationalized will enhance the validity of our indicators and reframe our understanding of this important topic.

Practically, an increasing number of policy decisions by governments, NGO's and businesses use quantitative measurements of political competition, often based on election results, to guide foreign aid and global investment. Consequently, these result-driven measures may have a significant economic impact in Africa. By extension, this distortion may affect reported levels of democracy because many democracy indices use political competition as their fundamental component. Needless to say, the current state of research on this subject is untenable and not particularly advantageous for any group involved.

Additionally, this shift in focus is timely given that dominant parties and large electoral victories are a lasting political reality in many countries throughout Africa. Certainly, the fact that many of these parties operate within political systems that are 'unchecked' by opposition parties raises serious questions about their ability to consolidate power at the expense of an open political marketplace. But, while a considerable amount of qualitative literature criticizes dominant parties for doing these

very things, quantitative research using only election results cannot corroborate these claims. For these reasons, quantitative research on political competition needs to be operationalized in a way that focuses on the rules and conditions of the political marketplace.

### *State of Knowledge*

To provide an adequate overview of the error within the literature, this section is divided into three parts. The first part addresses Dahl's idea of contestation. As was previously mentioned, this theoretical foundation is the oft-cited way that the political competition is conceptualized in much of the existing research. The second part of this section cites the prominent literature that defines political competition vis-à-vis Dahl, yet proceeds to use election results as an indicator of the concept. Finally, the last section relates several of the criticisms that have already been laid against this approach, including arguments by Axel Hadenius and more recent work by Matthijs Boogards.

### *Conceptualization*

In 1971, Robert Dahl produced *Polyarchy*, which has had a profound influence on subsequent democracy research. Dahl, like many authors, started from the idea that "responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens" is the key characteristic of democracy (Dahl, 1971, p. 1). With this, Dahl theoretically developed eight legal-institutional guarantees needed for citizens to develop their preferences and to have those preferences respected by the government. Broadly speaking, these guarantees encompass the freedoms of speech, organization, press, and the existence of free and fair elections.

Within this framework, Dahl developed two separate dimensions – *contestation* and *inclusiveness* – that vary independently of one another. Contestation, he wrote, was the extent to which the framework's

#### **Dahl's Eight Institutional Guarantees**

- Freedom to form and join organizations
- Freedom of expression
- Right to vote
- Eligibility for public office
- Right of political leaders to compete for support
  - o Right of political leaders to compete for votes
- Alternative sources of information
- Free and fair elections
- Institutions for making government policies depend on votes and other expressions of preference

“institutional conditions are openly available, publicly employed, and fully guaranteed to at least some members of the political system” (Dahl, 1971, p. 4).

Contestation, Dahl noted, could be operationalized by creating a scale of the eight institutional guarantees that would allow a researcher to compare “the extent of permissible opposition, public contestation, or political competition” existing within a country (Dahl, 1971, p. 4). Indeed, this type of a scale provides a very useful starting point for any conceptualization of political competition. It is also worth noting that none of these institutional guarantees deal with election results.

### *Operationalization*

From this conceptualization of competition, it is not clear how Dahl justifies his own operational scale in Appendix A of *Polyarchy*. The scale, developed by Dahl, Richard Norling and Mary Frase Williams, skews his initial focus on legal-institutional guarantees by requiring the existence of competitiveness in the political system. Of Dahl’s ten components of competition, three require the use of election results for measurement. One variable, for example, attempts to decipher the competitiveness of electoral systems by utilizing data on seat shares and party bans. The second variable attempts to classify the party system by the vote share of the significant parties. And, the third variable tries to determine legislative effectiveness, whereby the existence of a dominant party signifies a “Largely Ineffective” legislature (Dahl, 1971, p. 240).

Unfortunately, this operationalization goes beyond Dahl’s own theoretically-derived set of legal-institutional guarantees by promoting the use of *ex post facto* election results. Indeed, there is virtually no theoretical reasoning within *Polyarchy* that would justify using indicators of competitiveness to measure the required freedoms and guarantees of political contestation. As a result, Dahl’s operational model strays from his very own conceptualization of the term.

Despite this critique of Dahl’s operational model, his conceptual work in *Polyarchy* has had a profound impact on democracy research. One of the earliest quantitative, cross-national researchers to utilize Dahl’s conceptual framework was Tatu Vanhanen. Vanhanen (1990, 1997, 2000, 2004) has produced a large volume of research that attempts to find a reliable and objective measure of democracy. Vanhanen constructs a model that is theoretically based upon the two dimensions of *Polyarchy*, which he aptly renames *competition* and *participation*. He writes, “It seems that Dahl’s two theoretical dimensions of democratization – public contestation and the right to participate – refer to

the most important characteristics of political systems differentiating more democratic ones from less democratic ones” (Vanhanen, 1990, p. 17). And, like Dahl, Vanhanen recognizes the importance of the political guarantees that allow for a free competition to take place. He writes, “The existence of legal competition indicates that people and their groups are free to organize themselves and to oppose the government. It also indicates the existence of some equality in the sense that different groups are equally free to compete for power” (Vanhanen, 1990, p. 17). The problem for Vanhanen is how to operationalize the two concepts.

To remedy this, Vanhanen writes that “satisfactory indicators can be found from electoral data” (Vanhanen, 1990, p.17). The degree of competition within a country, he rationalizes, can be measured by using the “smaller parties’ share of the votes” in parliamentary and presidential elections (Vanhanen, 1990, p. 17). And, participation can be measured by the “percentage of the population who actually voted” in those elections. These two indicators, which are commonplace throughout most of Vanhanen’s research, are purported to be an adequate measure of democracy.

Without question, Vanhanen’s desire to provide a less subjective approach to competition is admirable, but it comes at the expense of consistency between the conceptual and operational phases of his study. In most of Vanhanen’s work, he states that the theoretical development of his research is based on Dahl’s *Polyarchy*. But, what Vanhanen measured, *electoral competitiveness*, is a far cry from the freedoms and guarantees formulated in Dahl’s seminal text.

In another important study, Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub, and Limongi (2002) also cite Dahl’s idea of contestation in their important research. The purpose of their cross-national study was “to distinguish between (1) regimes that allow some, even if limited, regularized competition among conflicting visions and interests and (2) regimes in which some values or interests enjoy a monopoly by the threat or the actual use of force” (Przeworski, 2002, p. 14). To accomplish this, Przeworski and his colleagues attempt to measure competition through four rules. The first two rules state that, in order to be coded as a democracy, there must be an elected chief executive and an elected legislature. The third rule states that there must be more than one party and the fourth rule, which is actually the most important, states that an observed alternation in power must take place. In regard to the final rule, they believe alternation of power “is prima facia evidence of contestation” (Przeworski, 2002, p. 16). As such, Przeworski codes a country ‘authoritarian’ if the same party has held office for more than three consecutive terms.

While alternation may be prima facia evidence of contestation, the *lack* of alternation is not necessarily prima facia evidence of a *lack* of contestation. In countries like South Africa and Botswana, where there has been no turnover in power since the inception of multi-party democracy, the lack of alternation does not make the countries authoritarian. Przeworski rightfully acknowledges that their classification may be inaccurate, at least until an alternation occurs. Yet, the arbitrary nature of this rule and the reliance on retroactive coding provides crude insight, at best, into the nature of political competition existing within African countries.

Bratton and van de Walle's (1997) important work in *Democratic Experiments in Africa* is another prominent study that attempts to shed light on regime types by operationalizing Dahl's two elements of polyarchy. Like other researchers, though, Bratton and van de Walle forgo Dahl's legal-institutional guarantees of competition and, instead, rely on election outcomes, such as the winner's seat and vote share, to measure the concept (Bratton, 1997, pp. 68-72). This line of reasoning, for instance, leads the authors to criticize the lopsided results of African elections in the 1980's as evidence of "empty and largely symbolic exercises designed to legitimate the officeholder" (Bratton, 1997, p. 68). While many of these African elections may have been 'empty and largely symbolic', election results are no proof of this fact.

Another more recent example of this operational error can be seen in Staffan Lindberg's 2006 book, *Democracy and Elections in Africa*. Lindberg notes that, similar to many of the contemporary studies on democratization, his research "is understood along the same lines [as Dahl], as self-government requiring not only equality of political participation but also free political competition" (Lindberg, 2006, p. 32). From this conceptualization, Lindberg notes, "A decent level of electoral competition is central to the realization of self-government, which in representative democracy builds on the accountability and responsiveness of elected representatives" (Lindberg, 2006, p. 39). But, Lindberg goes on to write, "[The *winner's share of the votes*] measures the level of competition in executive elections" (Lindberg, 2006, p. 40). And, the *second party's share of the seats* "...is an alternative indicator of competition in legislative elections" (Lindberg, 2007, p. 12). Additionally, Lindberg notes that turnover of power is "perhaps the ultimate indicator of competition" (Lindberg, 2006, p. 40).

Again, it is important to focus our attention on the underlying assumption here. While first referencing the conceptual framework of Dahl, Lindberg operationalizes competition by using the level of competitiveness in the political system. For election

results to be an acceptable indicator of political competition, though, the latter needs to be based upon a conceptual framework that justifies such a use. Unfortunately, Dahl's legal-institutional guarantees are not a valid starting point for such an endeavor.

It is worth noting that Lindberg (2006, 2007) did recognize and partially account for the dubious nature of election results. While running his competition tests on African elections, Lindberg did control for the freeness and fairness of those elections. This is particularly noteworthy because Lindberg, albeit not in explicit terms, rightfully treats election results (competitiveness) as a variable of the political marketplace (competition). Although Lindberg only used the freeness and fairness of elections as a control, the logic behind it is important in exposing some of the *de jure* and *de facto* conditions of political competition.

### *Criticism*

The use of election results to measure political competition has been criticized before. Axel Hadenius, for example, dispelled the notion that election results can measure the degree of 'openness' in elections. He noted that the creation of an artificial threshold, often around 70 percent, across which a country is deemed to have biased or unfair competition is "unsatisfactory" (Hadenius, 1992, p. 43). He writes:

"There are examples from several countries where the opposition party obtained more than 30 per cent of the vote...despite major manipulations and inadequacies in the electoral procedure as a whole (...) Similarly, there are countries where the opposition failed to reach the said limit, notwithstanding that the elections were otherwise open and even essentially fair" (Hadenius, 1992, p. 43).

Kenneth Bollen (1990) noted that the existence of multiple parties does not guarantee political rights and liberties. He wrote, some "researchers believe that political democracies are systems that must have a particular type of party representation in the major legislative bodies and that shifts in political democracy can be judged by shifts in the party percentages" (Bollen, 1990, p. 13). Bollen criticises this logic by using Vanhanen's indicator of 'smaller parties' vote share' to highlight the error. "[A] shift from 30 percent to 40 percent," Bollen noted, "would be a 10 percent increase in "democracy" while political rights and political liberties might stay the same." In other words, Bollen is arguing that election results vary independently of the rules and conditions of the political marketplace.

A recent article by Elklit and Reynolds (2005) is a laudable attempt to shift the focus away from election results and study the quality of elections, instead. They attempt to set up a more nuanced framework and methodology for electoral observers to use in their evaluation of elections. They rightly note that electoral observers are often forced to determine election quality based upon political expediency, instead of seeking to fully understand the actual facts surrounding the election (Elklit & Reynolds, 2005, p. 147). The authors also find the rigidity of defining elections in a bi-modal, 'free and fair' way too simplistic (Elklit & Reynolds, 2005, p. 149). Their attempt to study the *quality* of elections seems to be more theoretically justifiable to a Dahl-like conceptualization of competition than the use of election results.

Yet, the sole focus on elections and election results still misses the mark with regard to evaluating political competition as a whole. In fact, it seems probable that dominant parties can competitively disadvantage opposition parties in the months or even years prior to an election. And, those grievances may fall on deaf ears or be of secondary importance once election observers are on the ground looking for 'freeness' and 'fairness' in the actual voting procedures. For these reasons, democracy researchers need to develop something like a "political competition report", akin to an electoral observer report, that covers the whole time period between elections.

No researcher, to my knowledge, has undertaken a quantitative study to evaluate the relationship between levels of political competition and levels of electoral competitiveness within African countries. Matthijs Bogaards (2007a, 2007b) used a similar line of criticism to test the relationship between democracy indices that use elections results and an index of democracy that did not. He noted that "[in] many [democracy] measures, election outcomes make a significant contribution to a country's overall rating, and in some, the outcomes are even decisive" (Bogaards, 2007b, 1211). Bogaards' results showed that election outcomes "are not consistently related to democracy and that the assumptions behind such a relationship are problematic" (Bogaards, 2007b, p. 1211).

This study, however, takes a more direct approach than Bogaards. From the outset, a very clear conceptual and operational distinction is made between election results and political competition. From this point, the paper specifically tests the ability of election results to act as a proxy measure competition. In doing so, a more robust and nuanced understanding of the relationship between the two concepts is ultimately achieved.

## Chapter Two: Research Design

### *Argument*

In this paper, I argue that the central component of political competition is an open and fair marketplace of ideas. This marketplace is defined by the *de jure* rules and *de facto* conditions that allow voters to promote their beliefs in a public setting without the threat of violence. Additionally, it ensures that no individual or group has unfettered control over the decision-making process within a government. While the decisions made within this political environment may not always be liberal or progressive, the important point is that a marketplace of ideas exists and that no one's views are systematically excluded.

As we have just seen, while this Dahl-like conceptualization of political competition is common throughout much of the existing research, contemporary studies routinely operationalize the concept by using measures of electoral competitiveness. As Chapter 1 indicated, competitiveness is an important aspect of political competition, but there is little justification in the literature for using election results to measure the concept. To address this error, this study develops an alternative measure of competition that is more consistent with Dahl's idea of contestation, and then tests the ability of election results to act as a proxy measure for the concept.

### *Hypotheses*

Using data on 293 elections in 47 African countries, I expect to find that:

- (1) Concurrent levels of political competition and levels of electoral competitiveness are not empirically associated.
- (2) Levels of electoral competitiveness are not associated with prior levels of political competition.
- (3) Levels of electoral competitiveness are not associated with subsequent levels of political competition.

### *Key Concepts & Measures*

#### *Political Competition*

Political competition is understood in this research as a game where ideas are able to be promoted in an open marketplace in an attempt to influence people and policy. This marketplace of ideas is defined by four dimensions that ensure free and open

contestation. These four dimensions are: *freedom of speech, freedom of organization, freedom of the press* and *free and fair elections*. The operational definition of political competition will be the extent to which the *de jure* rules and *de facto* conditions of these dimensions are “openly available, publicly employed, and fully guaranteed” to the public (Dahl, 1971, p. 4). And, appropriately, none of these measures focus on indicators of electoral competitiveness.

In reference to Dahl’s theory of polyarchy, the elements of this structure encompass both contestation and inclusiveness. In other words, these specific freedoms and guarantees have to be both (a) legally given to the public and (b) extended to all adults for an open marketplace of ideas to truly exist. This holds countries to a liberal standard, but it is necessary for a meaningful evaluation into the extent of political competition within countries that claim to be ruled “by the people”.

It is worth noting that defining competition in terms of a ‘market’ has drawbacks. The first major drawback is the assumption that a completely free market exists or can exist within a country. The sheer population size of modern nation-states, for instance, necessitates some level of entry barriers to prevent ‘everyone and their neighbor’ from having access to the floor of parliament or to the electoral ballot. Certain individuals, like children and convicted felons, may also be legally and rightfully excluded the right to vote in elections. While modest entry barriers are often considered practical and appropriate, ones that attempt to exclude people or groups based upon race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or opposing viewpoints are rightfully considered to be an unjust encroachment into the political marketplace.

### ***Dimensions of Political Competition: Definitions and Measures***

#### ***Freedom of Speech***

The freedom of speech is the right to express one’s own opinion without interference from others. This guarantee allows individuals to profess what they believe without coercion, intimidation or suppression. The freedom of speech is necessary in a political competition for several reasons. First, if democracy is going to truly be ‘rule by the people’, the people need to be able to make their opinions known. Excluding this right to a population, or even a portion of a population, has the effect of narrowing or closing down the marketplace of ideas. Second, the freedom of speech enables individuals to promote their views and confront ones that are dissimilar to their own. This can be seen as a process of public deliberation where views are often upheld,

discarded or amended as one's mind is challenged with conflicting ideas. Third, free speech enables a person to express satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the current government. In this way, politicians and other government officials are able to hear public criticism and act accordingly, which is vital for the responsiveness of government.

For the freedom of speech, the challenge is how to operationalize the concept. I believe an appropriate measure of the concept can be found within Freedom House's Civil Liberties Score, which "represents the freedom of expression and belief...without interference from the state" (Freedom House, 2008a).<sup>2</sup> The score measures, for example, the ability of people "to engage in private discussions, particularly of a political nature...without the fear of harassment or arrest by state authorities" (Freedom House, 2008a). The score also takes into account the extent of academic freedom existing within a country. For example, one of the Civil Liberty survey questions asks whether teachers and professors are "free to pursue academic activities of a political and quasi-political nature without the fear of physical violence or intimidation by state or non-state actors" (Freedom House, 2008a). Similar inquiries in this survey are also made on behalf of religious and cultural forms of expression.

Appropriately, this survey also has the necessary validity to cover both the rules and conditions of free speech within a country. As Freedom House notes, "The survey does not rate governments or government performance *per se*, but rather the real-world rights and social freedoms enjoyed by individuals.... Thus, the survey ratings generally reflect the interplay of a variety of actors, both governmental and nongovernmental" (Freedom House, 2008). The ability of this survey to capture both the *de jure* and *de facto* conditions of free speech is vitally important.

### *Freedom of the Press*

The freedom of the press is the right of traditional and modern media institutions, including newspapers, television, radio and internet blogs to report on and express opinions about relevant news topics. Press freedom plays an important role in modern societies, as new and traditional media are often the primary source of disseminating information to the public. Even more, the media has an important ability (and, some say, responsibility) to investigate and challenge authority. The resulting influence that the press can yield provides important governmental accountability to the people. Without

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<sup>2</sup> Please see Appendix A for a more robust explanation of the benefits and limitations of Freedom House measures.

this freedom, the state has the ability to frame (and blatantly hide) actions or policies that inherently benefit themselves.

Because the press often challenges the actions or policies of government officials, press freedom is regularly curtailed by those people seeking to control what information is provided to the public. The propaganda machines of China and North Korea, for instance, all too readily shows that real power often lies with the people who control the information flow within a society. In a democracy where that power is supposed to be held by the people, the independence of the media from the state is vital.

Freedom House's Press Freedom Survey has the necessary validity to be an appropriate measure of this concept. As Freedom House writes, their survey "seeks to encompass the varied ways in which pressure can be placed upon the flow of information and the ability of print, broadcast, and internet-based media to operate freely and without fear of repercussions" (Freedom House, 2008b). Press freedom is measured by Freedom House in three categories. The first category is the legal environment, which "encompasses an examination of both the laws and regulations that could influence media content and the government's inclination to use these laws and legal institutions to restrict the media's ability to operate" (Freedom House, 2008b). The second category this survey covers is the political environment, which evaluates the degree of political control over the content of news media. The third and final category is the economic environment, which includes an analysis of the "structure of media ownership; transparency and concentration of ownership; the costs of establishing media as well as of production and distribution; the selective withholding of advertising or subsidies by the state or other actors; the impact of corruption and bribery on content; and the extent to which the economic situation in a country impacts the development and sustainability of the media" (Freedom House, 2008b). As a result, this survey is an appropriate and holistic measure of the rules and conditions surrounding press freedom within a country.

### *Freedom of Organization*

The freedom of organization is the right of individuals to publicly and privately organize around their views in order to discuss, promote and defend those beliefs. The strength of this freedom is, ultimately, the 'power in numbers', as collective action is often more meaningful and persuasive than individual effort. Organizations, for example, can collectively stand up to injustice, expose corruption and call for change as a united group. In politics, for example, political parties give voters a platform to challenge

authority with alternative viewpoints and provide accountability to those in power. This type of action can effect change in government, business or other powerful organizations. Without this freedom, though, the ability for people to organize around their views in order to challenge those in power is severely limited.

In this study, the freedom of organization will be measured by Freedom House's Political Rights index. This score measures the extent of certain organizational freedoms within a country. For example, the survey asks several questions regarding the ability of people "to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice" and whether the political system is "open to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings" (Freedom House, 2008a). In particular, this question analyzes whether political parties face "undue legal or practical obstacles in their efforts to be formed and operate" or "discriminatory or onerous restrictions in holding meetings, rallies and other peaceful activities" (Freedom House, 2008a). In this way, the Political Rights score by Freedom House has the necessary conceptual and operational validity to be an appropriate measure of the *de jure* rules and *de facto* conditions that guarantee this freedom to a population.<sup>3</sup>

### *Free and Fair Elections*

Elections are an important feature of political competition because they represent the formal process by which ideas and opinions get debated and, ultimately, decided upon. The freeness and fairness of elections is the extent to which elections are unaffected by manipulation, transparent in their processes, and representative of the will of people. The integrity of this process is crucial as citizens need to have faith that the outcomes of elections are representative of their own views.

Elections, however, are often manipulated by politicians or political parties wishing to entrench themselves in power. In many countries, losing an election means jobs are lost and policies are discredited. The political and monetary stakes of many elections, especially in the poorer areas of the world, are often so high that electoral fraud is a common and unfortunate occurrence. Politicians seeking to retain power in the face of looming defeat have resorted to a dizzying array of tactics to ensure their own victory,

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<sup>3</sup> Again, please refer to Appendix A for a more thorough explanation into the advantages and disadvantages of using Freedom House measures. In particular, the discussion on disaggregating their data is relevant to this section, as the Freedom House Political Rights index is broad in its conception.

including intimidating voters, accepting illegal campaign contributions, controlling access to the news media and preventing political rallies.

While a concerted vein of political research has begun to analyze the quality of electoral processes, the best known measures of the freeness and fairness of elections are electoral observer reports. Using these reports and other primary sources, Staffan Lindberg has created an immensely important dataset that classifies several hundred African elections according to their apparent freeness and fairness. This dataset presents an invaluable tool for this study, as well as future cross-national studies of political competition.

### *Electoral Competitiveness*

For the purposes of this paper, electoral competitiveness will be defined as the effectiveness of political actors or parties to attract voters to their cause. Election results, if obtained under free and fair circumstances, provide a valuable ‘snapshot in time’ of the true competitiveness between political actors. In this manner, scholars have chosen to operationalize electoral competitiveness by using the *largest party's share of votes or seats*, the *second party's share of votes or seats*, and/or *the margin of victory between the two*.

Because many African countries only release part of their election results (i.e. seat shares instead of the actual vote totals), using just one of these indicators seriously reduces the number of cases within this study. This research attempts to bridge that gap by creating an *Effective N* for each observation. In other words, the actual vote share of the winning party or candidate is used whenever possible. However, when only seat shares are reported, this study uses the percentage of seats won by the winning party. While this method exposes the study to outliers where vote percentages are drastically different than seat percentages (i.e. the 1993 and 1998 elections in Lesotho), the overall correlation between the two concepts is unmistakably high (Pearson's  $r = .842$ ). Thus, using seat shares to boost the number of cases in this study is appropriate and still ensures a relatively valid and reliable indicator of electoral competitiveness.

### *Research Design*

This paper employs a cross-national and longitudinal research design, utilizing 293 observations of multiparty elections in 47 African countries since 1965. The unit of analysis for this study is the country-election year and the level of analysis is macro, as it

compares the characteristics of elections in numerous African countries across both time and space.

In Chapter 3, the variables of this study are individually examined and charted to provide the reader with a more nuanced understanding of the relevant concepts. This initial step is important for a contextualized understanding of political competition in Africa and how it has changed over the past four decades. This chapter also explores the nature of electoral competitiveness on the continent over the same time period. Once these variables have been properly examined, the paper then shifts focus back to the research questions at hand.

In Chapter 4, the three research questions of this study are tested in three respective sections. The first section determines the concurrent relationship between political competition and electoral competitiveness. The second section determines the relationship between electoral competitiveness and prior levels of competition within African countries. For this test, an average and a net change competition score are created for the years between the previous and the observed elections. The third section determines the relationship between electoral competitiveness and subsequent levels of political competition. This test is also run using both an average and net change score of political competition.

Looking at competition in this manner - as both an average and net change score - allows this study to draw on two different types of information. Establishing an average score allows for the real levels of political competition to be tested against election results. Alternatively, establishing a net change score allows researchers the ability to determine whether an 'opening up' or 'closing down' effect of political competition corresponds with different levels of recorded competitiveness. Both of these measures provide important information regarding the state of political competition existing within a country.

### *Creating Indices*

In this study, I measure political competition through four distinct indices. A reliability analysis within each test first determines whether a single index of political competition can be formed. When this is possible, these four variables are aggregated into a single index score. When these scores cannot be combined, though, the association between the four individual variables and competitiveness are measured separately.

*Research Design: Section #1*

*Q1: Are political competition and electoral competitiveness empirically associated with each other?*

*H1: Political competition and levels of competitiveness are not empirically associated with each other.*

This research question seeks to determine the concurrent relationship between political competition and electoral competitiveness. The hypothesis states that political competition, as defined and operationalized by the rules and conditions of the political marketplace, is not associated with levels of electoral competitiveness. The logic of this argument is that the winner's vote share may be too varied to adequately convey levels of political competition existing within a country at the time of an election.

*Design: Political Competition<sub>(T5)</sub> ⇒ Electoral Competitiveness<sub>(T5)</sub>*

Figure 2.1 Political Competition Score at Year of Observed Election

| <i>Year 1</i> | <i>Year 2</i> | <i>Year 3</i> | <i>Year 4</i> | <i>Year 5</i>     | <i>Year 6</i> | <i>Year 7</i> | <i>Year 8</i> | <i>Year 9</i> |
|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Election      |               |               |               | Observed Election |               |               |               | Election      |

*Research Design: Section #2*

*Q2: To what extent are levels of electoral competitiveness at a given point associated with prior levels of political competition?*

*H2: Levels of electoral competitiveness at a given point are not associated with prior levels of political competition.*

This research question tests the relationship between electoral competitiveness in an observed election and prior levels of political competition. The idea behind this question reflects the belief that, in the years preceding an election, the openness and fairness of political competition may directly affect the competitiveness of political

actors. The hypothesis, however, argues that these concepts are not empirically associated with each other.

As was briefly mentioned, political competition is analyzed in two distinct ways within this section. First, political competition is taken as an average score across the previous inter-election time period, which is generally 5 years. This allows levels of political competition to be compared to levels of competitiveness across time and space. Secondly, a net change score of political competition is taken for the same time period. This allows researchers to determine if an “opening up” or “closing down” effect of the political marketplace before an election has a significant impact on its results.

*Design 1: Political Competition (Average)<sub>((T2+T5)/2)</sub> ⇒ Electoral Competitiveness<sub>(T5)</sub>*

*Design 2: Political Competition (Net Change)<sub>(T5-T2)</sub> ⇒ Electoral Competitiveness<sub>(T5)</sub>*

Figure 2.2 Political Competition Score for Previous Inter-Election Time Period

| Year 1   | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5            | Year 6 | Year 7 | Year 8 | Year 9   |
|----------|--------|--------|--------|-------------------|--------|--------|--------|----------|
| Election |        |        |        | Observed Election |        |        |        | Election |

### *Research Design: Section #3*

*Q3: To what extent are levels of electoral competitiveness at a given point associated with subsequent levels of political competition?*

*H3: Levels of electoral competitiveness at a given point are not associated with subsequent levels of political competition.*

The final research question seeks to determine the relationship between electoral competitiveness in an observed election and the levels of political competition in the future inter-election period. The idea behind this question revolves around the possibility that levels of competitiveness, as determined by the outcome of an election, may be associated with the openness of political competition in the immediate future. Similar to the previous sections, the average and net change competition scores are again utilized.

*Design 1: Electoral Competitiveness<sub>(T5)</sub> ⇒ Political Competition (Average)<sub>((T6+T9)/2)</sub>*

*Design 2: Electoral Competitiveness<sub>(T5)</sub> ⇒ Political Competition (Net Change)<sub>(T9-T6)</sub>*

Figure 2.3 Political Competition Score Derived From Years 6 &amp; 9

| <i>Year 1</i> | <i>Year 2</i> | <i>Year 3</i> | <i>Year 4</i> | <i>Year 5</i>     | <i>Year 6</i> | <i>Year 7</i> | <i>Year 8</i> | <i>Year 9</i> |
|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Election      |               |               |               | Observed Election |               |               |               | Election      |

### *Case Selection*

It needs to be noted that there is a slight selection bias to this dataset as some countries have never released the results from all their elections. Examples of this can be seen in Swaziland ('93 and '98), Uganda ('01), and Central African Republic ('92). It is important to note that, within these countries at those particular times, the political marketplace was most often closed to significant political opposition. The unavoidable exclusion of these studies may influence the results of the correlation tests.

### *Criteria of Rejection or Acceptance*

In this study, standard correlation tests are used to determine whether a relationship exists between the level of openness in political competition and the level of electoral competitiveness. Given the nature of assumptions by some scholars that competitiveness accurately reflects the openness of political competition, this paper searches for strong, statistically discernable relationships between the two concepts. If the association proves to be statistically discernable and the correlation coefficient is reasonably strong ( $r < -.50$ ), the hypothesis will be rejected and election results will prove to be an acceptable proxy measure for political competition. If the correlation proves to be weak or non-existent, the hypothesis will be accepted and election results will prove to be an inappropriate measure of competition.

### Chapter Three: Political Competition Trends

When one talks about the wave of democratization that has swept across the African continent over the last several decades, the establishment of elections has played a prominent role in these political transitions. Elections, which are one important piece of the democracy puzzle, offer an instrument capable of holding political leaders accountable on a continent that has been abused by colonialist ambitions and power-obsessed revolutionaries. While these elections are welcomed and heralded as progress by democrats, an insular or narrow focus on the casting of ballots is insufficient for an exploration of political competition. Indeed, the freedoms and guarantees that allow for elections to occur in a meaningful way are vitally important to understand, as well.

In Chapter 1, an analogy was provided that presented two hypothetical soccer matches that ended with the same score. In the first match, the final score was 10 to 1 and the officiating was fair and objective. Because the rules were applied evenly, this score was an appropriate measure of the level of competitiveness between the two teams. In the second match, the score was also 10 to 1, but biased refereeing significantly impacted the game's result. This score was more of a reflection of partial refereeing than it was of the true level of competitiveness between the teams. Although both games in this analogy were (at least nominally) soccer matches, their 10 to 1 results are not comparable because of the disparate conditions surrounding the respective games.

When this analogy is extended to the comparison of elections results across time and space, a similar problem becomes evident. Elections are held under even more diverse rules and conditions than a typical soccer match. And, without examining this important contextual information and how it shapes election results, the reader is only provided with a superficial knowledge of what is actually happening in that country. As a result, researchers must be careful not assume that elections present an easy opportunity for cross-national comparison.

To analyze the rules and conditions of political competition across the continent of Africa, this chapter quantitatively examines the four fundamental components of this concept - freedom of speech, freedom of press, freedom of organization and the freeness and fairness of elections. In doing so, the overall trends of these dimensions are analyzed in order to obtain a more nuanced understanding of what has happened across the African continent over the past four decades. Establishing this information is vital for a more

informed exploration into the relationship between competition and competitiveness, which is addressed in Chapter 4.

### *ELECTORAL COMPETITIVENESS*

In the last three decades of the twentieth century, many political regimes across the continent of Africa were transformed by the inception of elections and multi-party politics. Using information gathered from Staffan Lindberg's electoral database (and often corroborated with online data from the African Election Database), this research was able to chart a remarkable number of African elections across both time and space. The results of these elections showed that dominant political parties, characterized by large electoral victories, continue to be a political reality within many countries across the region.

Yet, the reasons for these lopsided victories are varied. In some cases, dominant parties have won overwhelming victories under free and fair circumstances. These cases are often the result of political skill or continued solidarity with groups that struggled to overcome colonial or otherwise oppressive rule. In some cases, though, the lopsided victories are more attributable to the illiberal policies or actions that unfairly bias political competition. Examples of this include the manipulation of vote totals, harassment of opposition politicians, targeted political violence and censored media. Undoubtedly, this type of systemic bias affects the vote share that a certain candidate does or does not receive in an election.

When a significantly biased political environment exists, a common result is for opposition parties or candidates to boycott the election process altogether. In a sense, the political marketplace can become so unfair that many candidates feel their participation is futile. When this happens, the recorded level of competitiveness within a country can be greatly affected. If a significant number of candidates or parties choose not to participate in an election, the result will often be overwhelmingly in favor of the party that stayed in the race.

This type of political situation, where opposition parties choose not to participate, can be seen in the 1992 parliamentary elections in Ghana where the National Democratic Congress (NDC), led by Jerry Rawlings, won nearly 95 percent of the seats. This lopsided result was achieved because several of the main opposition parties boycotted the election due to conditions they claimed were fundamentally unjust and fraudulent. With

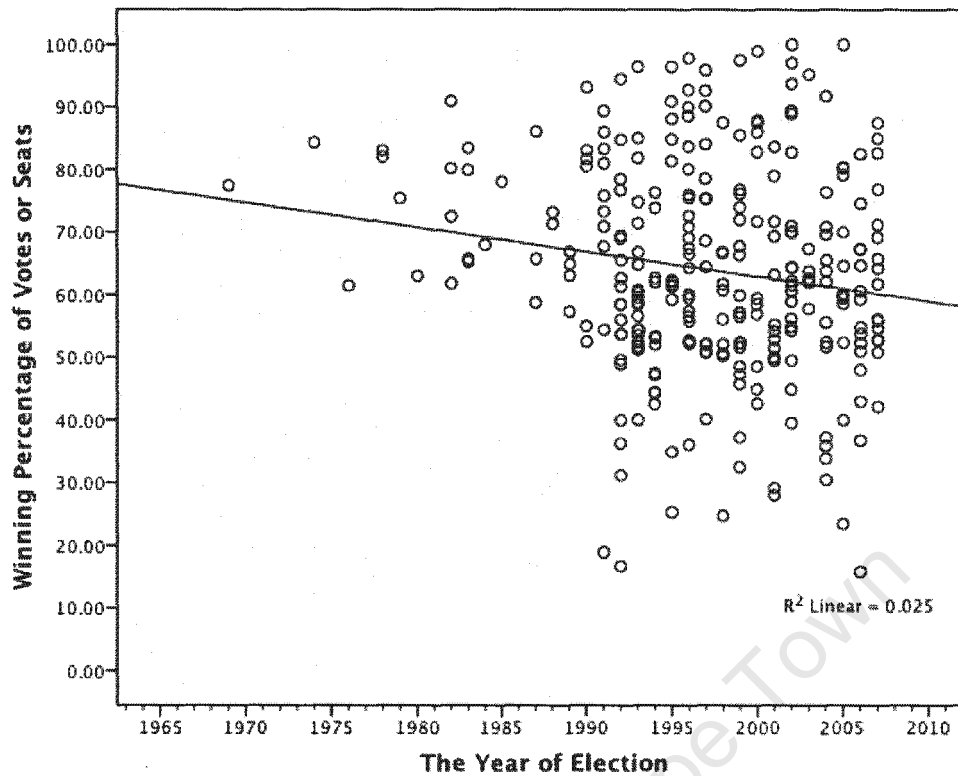
no significant opposition left in the race, the NDC went on to win a landslide electoral victory.

When addressing the variability of election results, though, the participation of political actors addresses only one side of the electoral equation. The other side involves the participation of citizens who cast their votes in these elections. Lindberg (2006) shows levels of participation often wane when people perceive no real choice in an election. Indeed, it seems logical that if one supports a candidate who stands no chance of winning, especially if the system is biased against that candidate, many people will regard the voting process as pointless. Lindberg's data provides clear and rational evidence that people vote in far fewer numbers when the formality of voting is merely a sham.

Fewer people voting, though, highlights a new dilemma for the measurement of electoral competitiveness. If Lindberg's conclusion is correct about people who recognize flawed elections, this might have a significant bearing upon the actual voting percentages. In other words, if people become more and more frustrated with unfair elections, the people who choose not to vote are likely to be disproportionately supporters of opposition candidates or parties. As a result, the winning candidate may receive larger and larger percentages of the vote because fewer opposition supporters actually go to the polling station. To the untrained eye, this situation would give the impression that a candidate is increasing their support within a population, even though the real number of their supporters may be staying constant or even declining.

Despite the variable nature of election results and the reality of dominant parties across the continent, evidence does suggest that African elections have become more competitive over the past several decades. Empirical evidence shows that winning parties and candidates are receiving smaller percentages of the overall vote (or seat) share in presidential and parliamentary elections. In the scatter plot (Figure 3.1), one can easily see the downward trend of winning vote shares in African elections over the last four decades.

Figure 3.1 Winning percentages of votes/seats over the last four decades.



It is important to acknowledge that the above graph does not separate presidential elections from parliamentary elections. Out of the 292 cases on the above scatter plot, 126 are presidential and 166 are parliamentary. When these are tested separately (Figure 3.2 and Figure 3.3), the research shows that legislative elections are, on average, slightly more competitive in Africa than presidential elections. But, more importantly, the graphs also confirm that both types of elections in Africa are becoming more competitive over time.

Figure 3.2 Winning Percentage in Presidential Elections Over the Last Four Decades

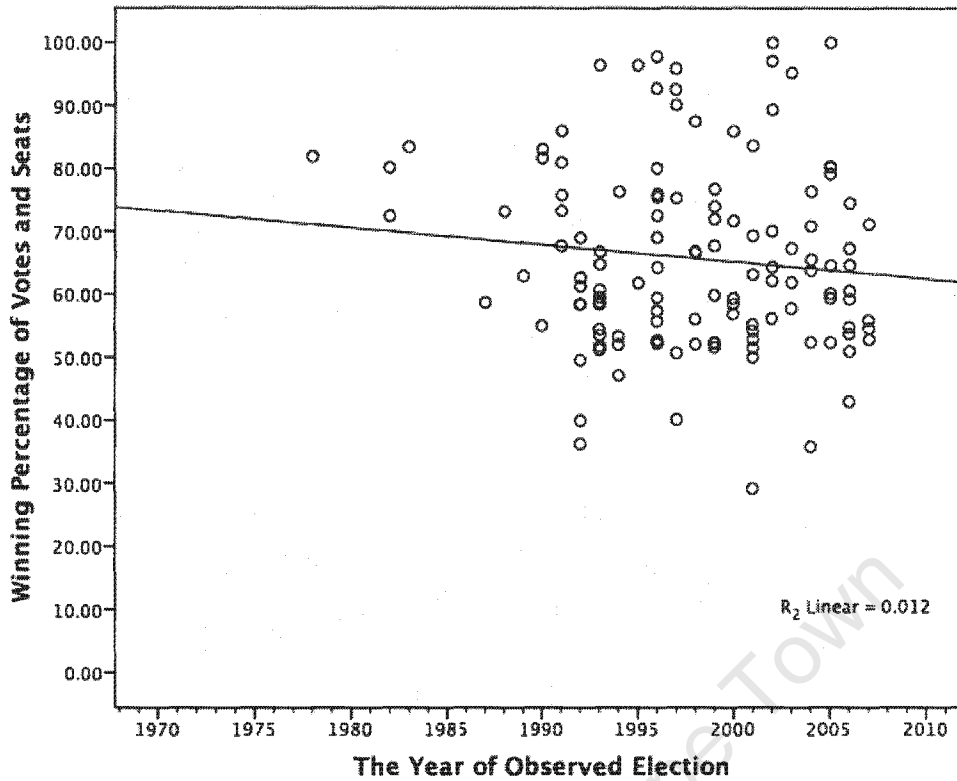
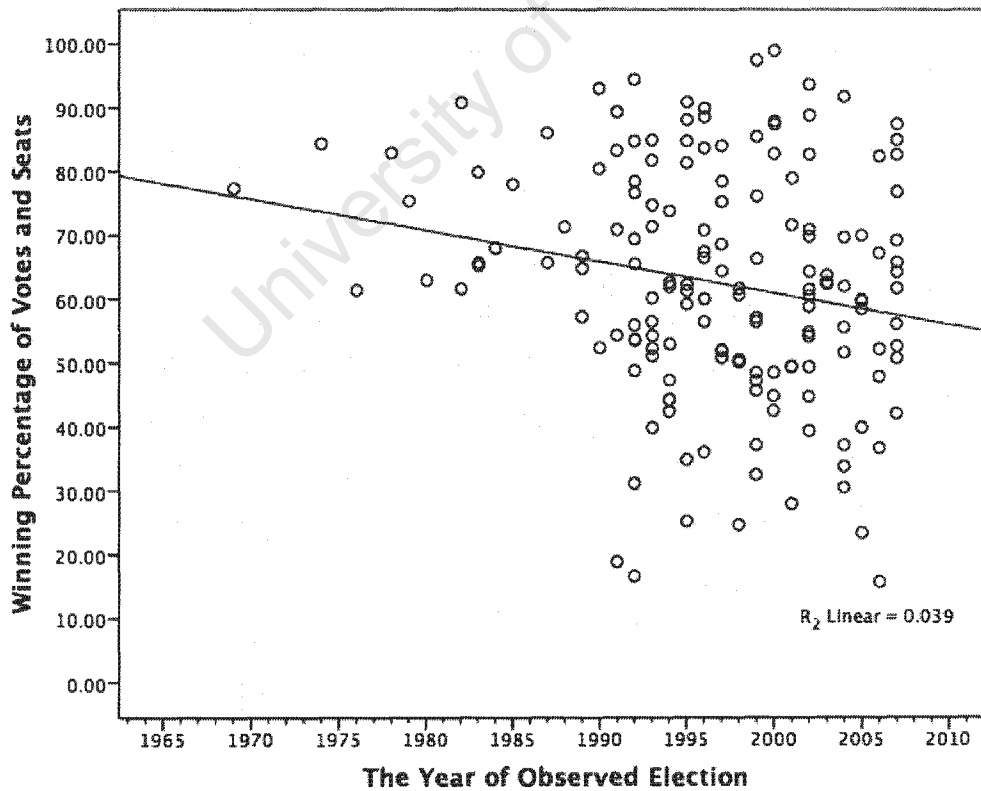


Figure 3.3 Winning Percentage in Parliamentary Elections Over the Last Four Decades



*FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS*

Until now, most of the research on political competition has focused on election results and what those numbers indicate about a country's political regime. In many studies, the existence of lopsided results is taken to mean that political competition is somehow flawed or biased. While political scientists may agree that a lack of electoral competitiveness is not an optimal situation for electoral democracy, this paper shifts the focus of competition away from those post-election numbers and, in large part, focuses on the quantity and quality of those electoral processes.

In doing so, one must first acknowledge the simple fact that elections are taking place, which, in many cases, is quite remarkable. The transition to democratic rule rarely happens peacefully and the impetus needed for this type of transition often comes at great human and financial cost. Even more, the struggle for democracy can last for centuries and entrench itself into the identity and culture of entire populations. The fact that democratic transitions are rarely quick makes the speed in which many transitions took place in Africa even more profound.

In an important piece of research in 1997, Bratton and van de Walle suggested that the number of elections across the African continent had peaked in 1993 and then started to decline. But, Staffan Lindberg (2006, 54) recently refuted this argument by noting their study was based on limited data and ended on a low-point in the natural fluctuation of electoral cycles. Lindberg wrote, "The frequency and number of elections held annually does vary, but at a more or less regular interval, and averaged out over time shows, if any change, a slight increase" (Lindberg, 2006, 69).

While the number of elections in Africa is steady, or even increasing, the democratic qualities of those elections are quite another thing. As was previously mentioned, elections take place under a wide range of rules and conditions that make it easier or more difficult for political candidates to promote and defend their views. For this to be accomplished, the electoral process needs to be free, fair and transparent in order for the contest to offer meaningful choices to the electorate.

For the free and fair election variable, this paper utilizes Lindberg's electoral database, which shows that more than half of the 232 African elections in his database were considered to be free and fair. Even more important, the number of those free and fair elections was shown to be stable or even slowly increasing over time (Lindberg, 2006, 69). Certainly, there is room for improvement in the number of fair elections taking place across the African continent, but this data presents clear and uplifting

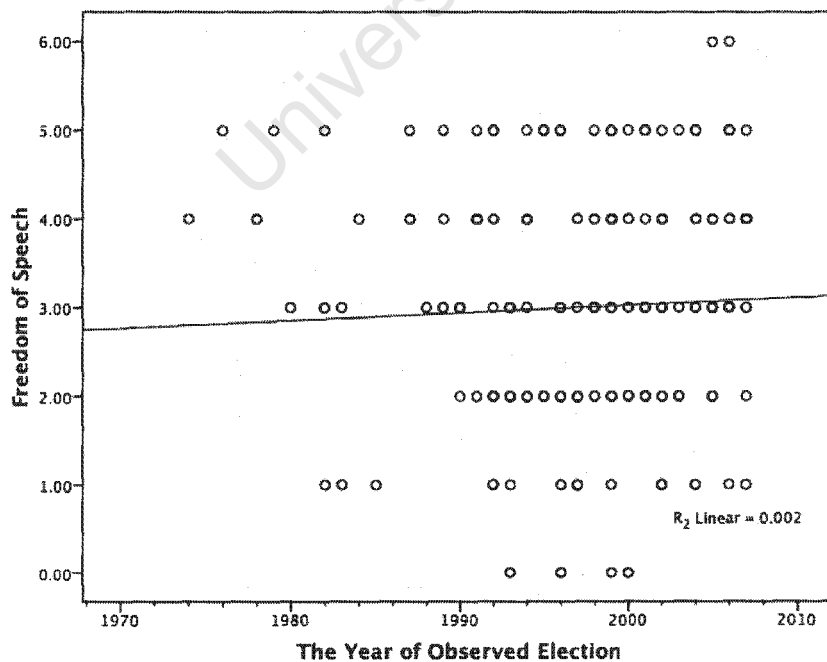
evidence that a positive culture of electoral competition has begun to take root. These results, along with other evidence that Lindberg presents, make a compelling case for the reinforcing power of democratic elections.

### *FREEDOM OF SPEECH*

In any country, the freedom of speech and expression is a vitally important part of political competition and is essential for a fair and open political process. When this freedom is guaranteed in a *de jure* and *de facto* manner, this freedom provides the rules and conditions necessary for alternative viewpoints to exist, for vigorous debate to occur, and for opinions to be openly championed. Free speech allows the space for ideas to compete for supremacy in the public's mind and protects against any one person claiming authority over the decision-making process.

Using Freedom House's Civil Liberties survey, one can chart the progress of free speech in Africa over the last several decades. In the scatter plot below, the recorded data provides some measured, but encouraging news about free speech across the African continent. As one will notice by the best-fit line in the chart below, there is a positive trend in the level of free speech over the last four decades. While the increase is certainly modest, the positive trend is nonetheless evident.

Figure 3.4 Freedom of Speech Since 1970



One country that has experienced a significant expansion of free speech over the past few decades has been Ghana. In December 1981, after Jerry Rawlings seized power through a second coup, his military junta suspended the constitution, banned political parties and severely limited free speech. His country was subsequently hit with a disastrous economic situation and Rawlings' government reluctantly sought foreign aid through the International Monetary Fund. This, in part, led to the establishment of new constitution guaranteeing multi-party competition and the basic freedoms of speech and expression. Now, nearly three decades later, Ghanaians enjoy one of the most open and free societies on the continent.

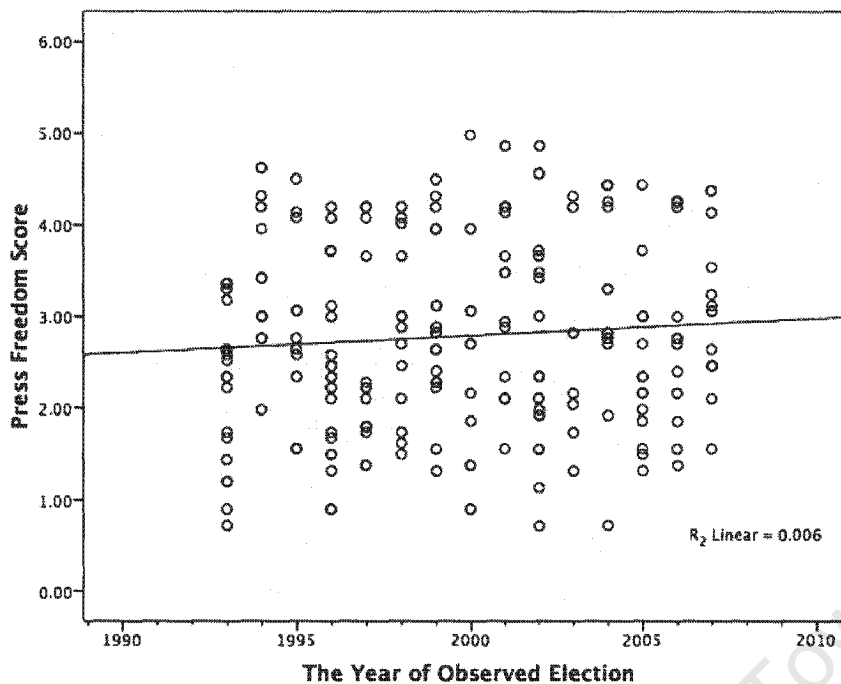
It is important to note that, in terms of free speech, Ghana is still one of the exceptions in Africa. All too often, free speech is curtailed under the thinly veiled guise of establishing "order" or bringing "security" to an area. Many of these actions merely allow politicians to maintain their hold on government office without significant opposition to their rule. But, while the data reminds us that the average African country only allows a moderate level of free speech, the positive trend across the continent is certainly heartening.

### *FREEDOM OF PRESS*

Press freedom is an essential ingredient to the existence of a free and fair political environment. The media's ability to investigate and then publish their findings about politicians and their policies provides an important element of accountability in the democratic system. This process, for example, is vital in making sure public funds are being used correctly and efficiently, the rule of law is being upheld, and the effects of legislation are being adequately explored. Press freedom guarantees, among many things, that the media can act as an important watchdog over the events taking place in the public sector.

Over the last several decades, many African countries have given journalists new space to report on and criticize political officials and their policies. In the graph below, based on data from Freedom House's Press Freedom survey, one can see the modest, but steady rise in press freedom scores across the African continent since the early 1990's. Although the data does not allow one to remark on the extent of press freedom before 1993, those scores would most likely be even lower as Africa's civil conflicts and authoritarian rulers still played prominent roles in the region.

Figure 3.5 Press Freedom Since 1993



One may argue that the primary reason for this opening of space for the media has been the advent and continuation of elections across the continent. As Lindberg notes, “Elections are one time when media entrepreneurs may test, stretch, and redefine the boundaries of both political and civil liberties and by doing so advance the democratic qualities by being the public forum for society” (Lindberg, 2006, 115). In other words, the media has the ability to challenge political figures during elections by asking questions to candidates, reporting on policies and their societal effects, and advocating for the grievances of people and groups within the country. A politician who wants to be elected or reelected cannot afford to ignore those issues.

The scrutiny that the media provides during these election periods, however, can also trigger a crackdown on the media. Often, this can take the form of newspapers being closed down, journalists being harassed and the Internet being censored. In 1997, during Kenya’s second election, the incumbent, Daniel arap Moi, “clamp[ed] down on opposition, the media, and civil society, thereby reducing the levels and degree of democracy in society” (Lindberg 2006, 107). When leaders, like arap Moi, are faced with the possibility of being voted out of office, the temptation to manipulate the media often proves irresistible.

At this point, though, two facts about press freedom in Africa are important to note. The first fact is that press freedom is an important aspect of democratization and

political competition. Without press freedom, there are few channels available to provide independent information and accountability to those in office. The second important point is that, although there is room for significant improvement, the respect for press freedom across the continent is increasing in a slow and steady manner. Taken together, these two points present an encouraging trend in the quest for more democratic and accountable governance in Africa.

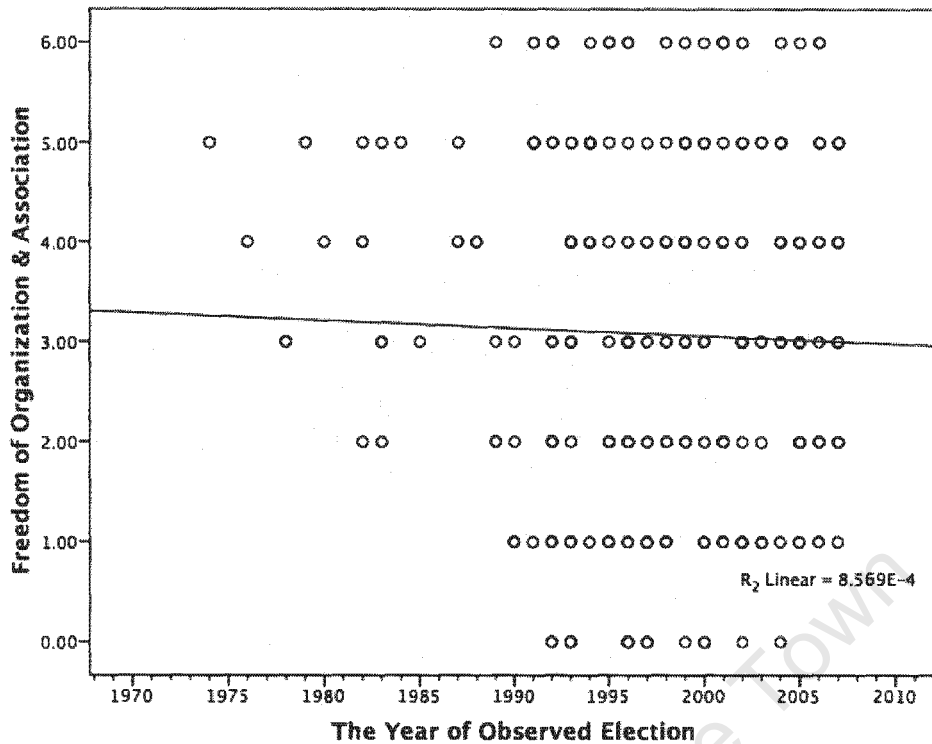
### *FREEDOM OF ORGANIZATION*

The freedom of organization is also essential to the proper functioning of modern democratic societies. This guarantee provides the political space needed for people to organize collectively around their views and advocate for those policies that best represent their opinions. This freedom protects the type of non-violent activity that directly challenges government officials and their policies, which is usually undertaken by groups such as political parties, non-governmental organizations, and other issue-based associations.

Similar to other political freedoms, though, the freedom of organization may also trigger a backlash from those who find themselves or their policies being opposed. A typical example of this is a leader curtailing the movement of a political candidate on the campaign trail. Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe, for instance, successfully curtailed the movement of Morgan Tsvangirai and other leaders of his opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), in the run-up to Zimbabwe's 2008 national election. Zimbabwe state police also detained people working at MDC campaign headquarters and ZANU-PF supporters harassed people attending MDC political rallies.

Based on the data from Freedom House's Political Rights score, associational freedom is showing a marginal, and slightly negative, trend across the continent in the last several decades. This negative trend is sobering information to democracy activists, especially when one considers that this trend has taken place over a time period when the number of elections has dramatically increased. At face value, it certainly does not bolster Lindberg's (2006, 2007) argument for the positive effect that continued elections have on political competition.

Figure 3.6 The Freedom of Association Since 1970



Some may use this data to paint a negative or pessimistic view of political competition across the continent. Those commentators would not be entirely wrong in their assessment. However, for a general inquiry into the nature of political competition across Africa, this data must be taken into consideration with the *increasing* levels of press freedom, free speech, and fair electoral processes. What this shows is that political competition is not a uni-dimensional concept and drawing conclusions based only on the freedom of organization is problematic. Only when looking at political competition as the “sum of its parts” is democracy research able to grasp a more nuanced understanding of political competition.

Unfortunately, in systematic, cross-national research on political competition, this type of nuance is rarely taken into account. All too often, election results are used as an easily obtainable statistic to “measure” political competition, despite a lack of consistency between conceptual and operational definitions. As this paper makes clear, though, electoral competitiveness and political competition are complex and distinct concepts. In fact, the power of election results to act as a proxy measure for political competition has never been put to an empirical test. In the next chapter, this paper evaluates the relationship between political competition and the level of electoral competitiveness across the African continent.

## Chapter Four: Research Findings

This chapter is divided into three sections that directly correspond to each of the three research questions in this study. The first question attempts to determine the relationship between electoral competitiveness and political competition at the year of an election. The results from this test help determine whether election results can be utilized as a reliable proxy measure of political competition. The second test analyzes the relationship between electoral competitiveness and the level of competition prior to that election. The results from this particular test help us understand how the openness of political competition before an election is related, if at all, to the competitiveness of political actors. The final question analyzes the relationship between levels of electoral competitiveness in an election and subsequent levels of political competition. The results from this test help determine whether competitiveness affects the openness of political competition after an election.

These results are conveyed to the reader in two distinct ways. First, the outcomes are shown in the form of statistics, which provide important quantitative evidence to help prove or disprove the hypotheses within this study. Secondly, the relationships are shown on simple scatter plots, which provide the opportunity to visually inspect the range of cases within the dataset. Together, the statistical findings and graphical spread of cases provide a firm foundation to analyze and interpret the findings of the specific tests in this chapter. In doing so, a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between competition and competitiveness is achieved.

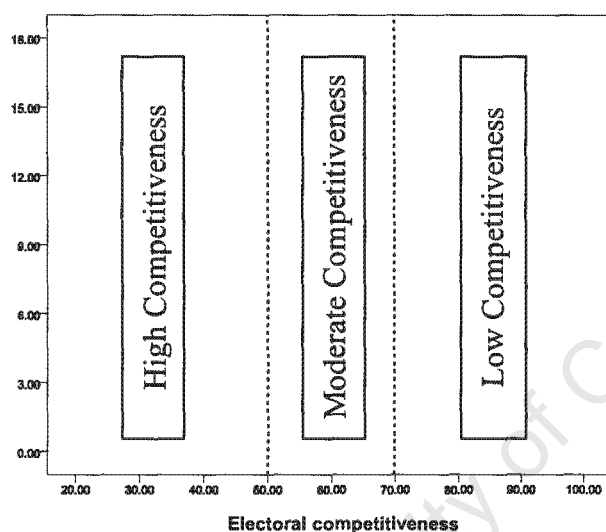
### *Correlation Analysis*

At this point, a brief explanation of the scatter plot graphs contained in this chapter is warranted. Essentially, there are three types of variables that are used throughout the course of this chapter – *electoral competitiveness*, *average political competition*, and *net change in political competition*. Depending on the particular test, these variables can be found on either the x- or y-axis of the scatter plot, which reflects the variable's assumed independent or dependent role. The variables are also broken down into sub-categories (e.g. *high*, *low*, *positive*, *negative*) for analytical purposes.

The most common variable within the study, electoral competitiveness, is measured by the percentage of vote won (or, if that information is unavailable, the seat share won) by the winning party or candidate. Because no winning party or individual

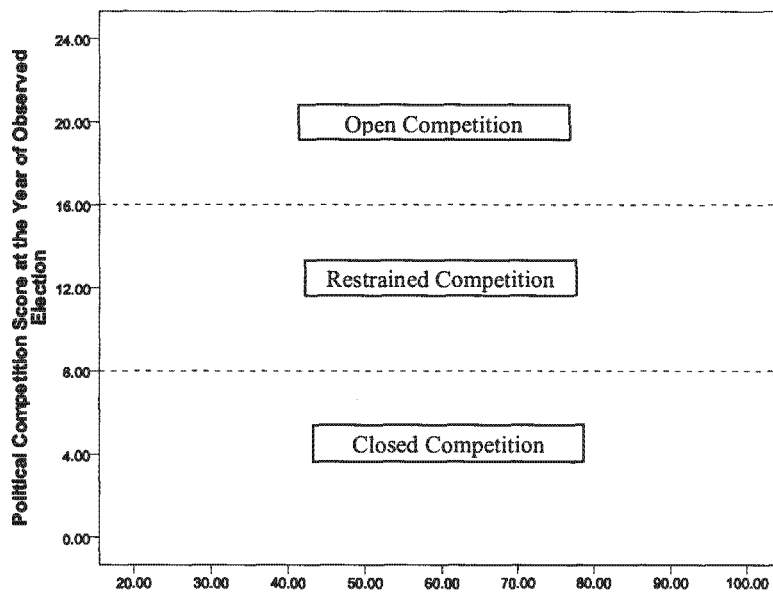
within this dataset has claimed victory in an election with less than 20 percent of the vote or seat share, the graphical range of this variable is bounded from 20 to 100 percent. For analytical purposes, this variable is divided into three different sub-categories (see Figure 4.1). When a party or candidate wins an election with 50 percent of the vote or less, the system is said to have levels of 'High Competitiveness'. When the winning vote share is between 50 and 70 percent, the system is regarded as having levels of "Moderate Competitiveness". Parties or candidates winning greater than 70 per cent of the vote indicate a system characterized by levels of "Low Competitiveness".

Figure 4.1 Sub-Categories of Electoral competitiveness



In regards to political competition, there are two primary variables in this study – *average* and *net change* scores. The *average political competition* variable is composed of four components ranging from 0 to 6 points each (for a total of 24 possible points). After verifying these scores can be aggregated into a competition index, the different elements are combined to create a theoretically-devised scale of competition ranging from 0 to 24. On this scale, 0 represents a completely closed political marketplace and 24 represents a completely open political marketplace. For analytical purposes, political competition is broken up into three equally spaced categories (see Figure 4.2). Levels of 'Closed Competition' are regarded as observations with scores between 0 and 8. Cases with 'Restrained Competition' are those with scores falling between 8 and 16. And, scores ranging from 16 and 24 are regarded as having levels of 'Open Competition'.

Figure 4.2 Sub-Categories of Political Competition



The second competition variable is the *net change* score, which records the positive or negative change in political competition during an inter-election time period. Although there is a theoretical possibility that a country could go from having a completely closed to a completely open political environment, or vice versa (in other words, a net change of +/-24), no country within this dataset has exhibited a change more than a +/-8 point in one election cycle. Therefore, the range for the *net change* scores within this chapter is from -8 to 8, with 0 being the midpoint. Any competition score on the positive side of this midline is classified as having a “Positive Change” during the time period in question. And, any score to the negative side of the midline is classified as having a “Negative Change”. Again, depending on the research question being addressed, this variable may be found on either the x- or y-axis (Figure 4.3a & 4.3b).

Figure 4.3a Sub-Categories of Net Change Political Competition Score

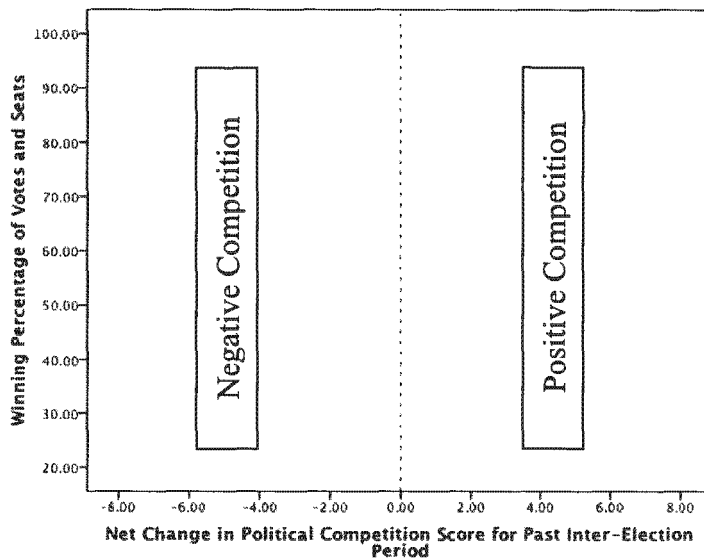
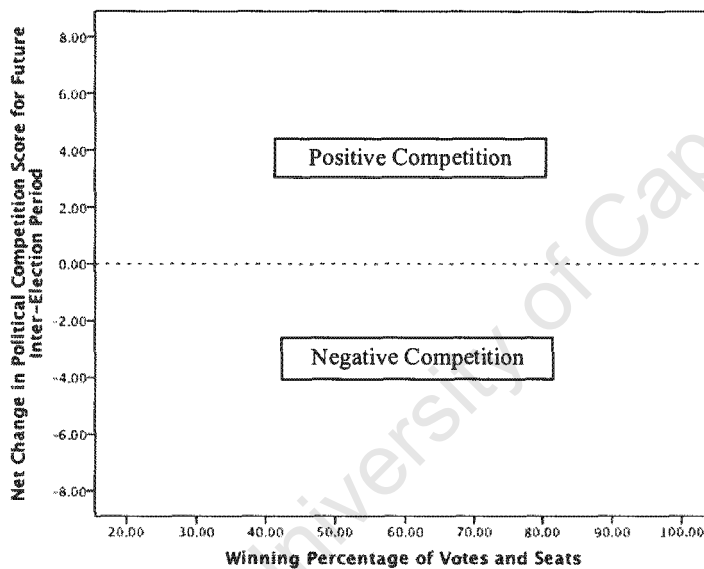


Figure 4.3b Sub-Categories of Net Change Political Competition Score



## Section #1

*Q1: Are concurrent levels of political competition and electoral competitiveness empirically associated?*

*H1: Political competition and levels of competitiveness are not empirically associated.*

*Design: Political Competition<sub>(TS)</sub> ⇒ Electoral Competitiveness<sub>(TS)</sub>*

This research question seeks to determine the relationship between political competition and electoral competitiveness at a specific point in time. This test is important in determining whether election results can be used as a proxy measure for a Dahl-like conceptualization of political competition. If there is a link between competitiveness and competition, election results may actually provide a suitable shortcut

for the measurement of the concept. Even more, this result could validate many of the conclusions about political competition already reached in the literature that are based upon indicators of electoral competitiveness.

Before this test can begin, though, one must first determine whether the measures of political competition can be combined into a reliable index score. As a result, a reliability analysis must be performed to determine whether the four variables of competition are measuring a latent, uni-dimensional concept. For this research question, the reliability test provides a Chronbach's Alpha statistic of .896. Because this score is sufficiently high (the threshold generally being greater than .70), one may conclude that the different measures of competition in this section are able to be combined into a single, reliable index of political competition.

To begin an evaluation into the relationship between competition and competitiveness, a simple bivariate correlation test is run between concurrent levels of the two measures at a specific point in time. Because the measures of competitiveness in this study are derived from election results, the specific (and most appropriate) point in time for this test is at the year of the observed election.

Figure 4.4 – Political Competition (Observed) and Winning Percentage of Votes and Seats

|   |                     | Political Competition<br>Score at the Year of<br>Observed Election | Winning Percentage<br>of Votes and Seats |
|---|---------------------|--|--|
| Political Competition Score at the<br>Year of Observed Election | Pearson Correlation | 1  | -.320**                                  |
|   | Sig. (2-tailed)     |  | .000                                     |
|   | N                   | 161  | 157                                      |
| Winning Percentage of Votes and<br>Seats                        | Pearson Correlation | -.320**  | 1  |
|   | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000   |  |
|   | N                   | 157  | 286                                      |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

If there was empirical evidence to support the assumption that the winning percentage of votes goes down when political competition opens up (or vice versa), one would expect a correlation coefficient close to -1. After running a bivariate correlation test, the result shows that the relationship between competition and competitiveness is statistically discernable. Yet, given the fact that this result is based on aggregated data

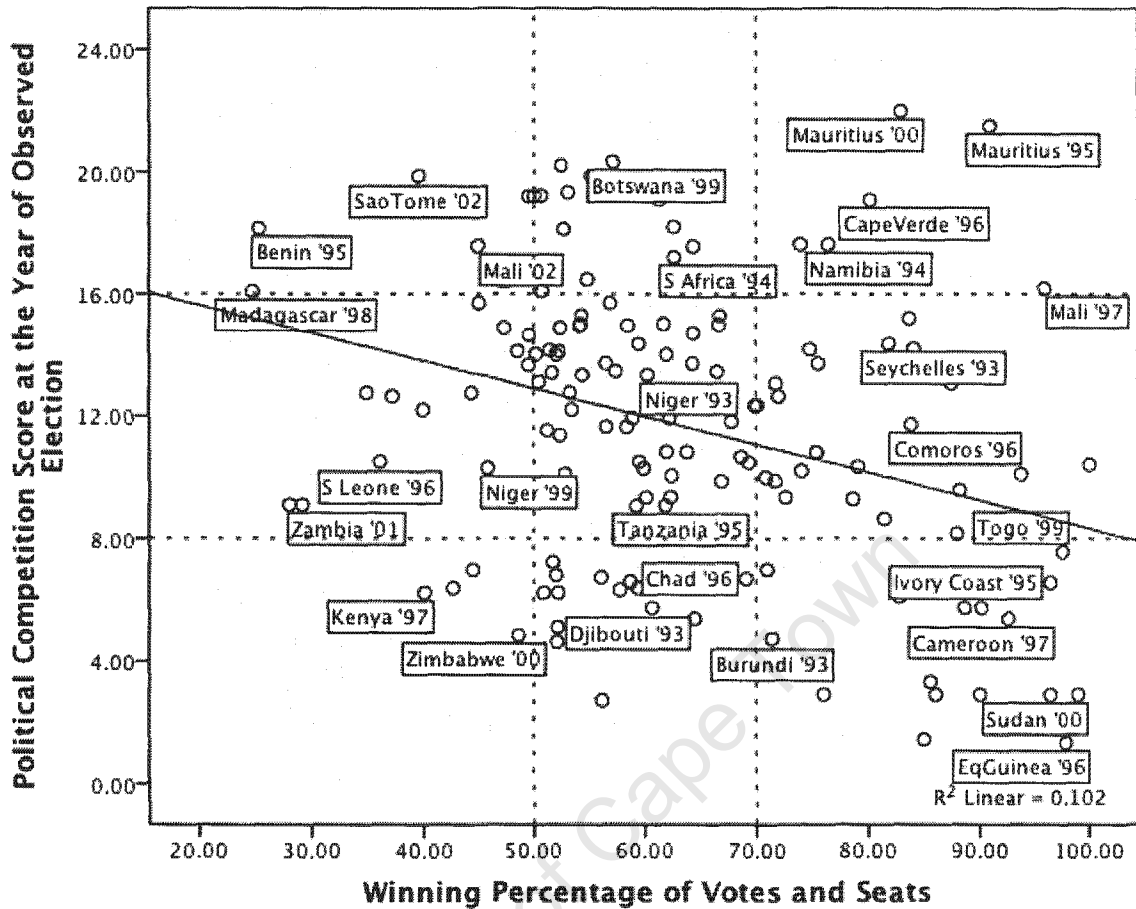
with an N of 157, the strength of that relationship is relatively weak (Pearson's  $r = -.320$ ,  $p = .000$ ). As a result, one may conclude that the two concepts are not strongly associated with each other. This result allows one to accept the hypothesis of this section and state that election results are not a good proxy measure of political competition.

At this point, too, it is important to acknowledge the limitations within the test that was just performed. Out of nearly 290 possible observations within the dataset, only 157 cases were initially included in the analysis. The reason for the omissions is that one of the variables within the index – Freedom House's Press Freedom Score – begins in only 1993. As a result, all multiparty elections in Africa that took place before this date are systematically excluded from the analysis. Indeed, this limitation has the potential of biasing the test in favor of the second or third round of elections in many countries. I am, however, disinclined to omit the variable from the original analysis because press freedom is such a fundamental component of political competition.

In order to be confident that the result in the above correlation test does not bias our understanding of the relationship between competition and competitiveness, I created a 3-variable index score that does not include the Freedom House Press Freedom score. This new index increases the number of observations in the test, without significantly decreasing the reliability or validity of the measure. A simple correlation test between the original index and the new 3-variable index proves a very strong relationship between the two constructs (Pearson's  $r = .991$ ,  $p = .000$ ). The strength of this score gives confidence that our results are not fundamentally altered by dropping the Press Freedom variable within the analysis.

From here, the 3-variable competition score and the electoral competitiveness score can be tested to determine the strength of their association with each other. While the 3-variable index of political competition is not as conceptually robust as the original index, it increases the range of cases that can be analyzed in this test. Interestingly, the result of this test shows that, if anything, the relationship between competition and competitiveness is even weaker (Pearson's  $r = -.244$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Thus, by taking the results of the 3-variable and 4-variable tests together, one may again conclude that election results are an inadequate proxy measure of political competition.

Figure 4.5 – Political Competition (Observed) and Winning Percentage of Vote &amp; Seats



A scatter plot of the relationship between electoral competitiveness and the 4-variable index of political competition provides visual confirmation of the weak correlation between these two concepts (Figure 4.5). The range of observations on this graph highlights the diversity of election results in relation to the openness of competition in Africa. While some cases follow the assumption that large vote shares indicate a closed political marketplace, or that smaller vote shares indicate more open competition, a significant number of cases in Africa defy that simple logic.

For an initial analysis and critique, the four corners of this graph present interesting case studies. Ultimately, the cases located within or near these corners are where the assumptions about election results and competition are either reinforced or refuted. For example, if one followed the logic that lopsided election results are representative of a closed political marketplace, there are certainly cases in this dataset that would corroborate such a claim. In the bottom-right quadrant of the graph, for instance, elections in Sudan, Burundi, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea and the Ivory Coast

provide clear evidence that overwhelmingly lop-sided election results may correspond to closed political marketplaces.

The 1996 presidential election in Equatorial Guinea, for example, produced a result that gave nearly 98 percent of the vote to President Obiang Nguema under widespread allegations of fraud and corruption. In order to consolidate power in the few months leading up to this election, President Nguema was reported to have arrested the leaders of many of the country's 13 small opposition parties. As a result of this type of political manipulation, the 1996 elections (and nearly every election since) has produced an unsurprising victory for Nguema that nears the 100 percent mark. As Lindberg notes, "[E]lections [in Equatorial Guinea] have been mockeries of the democratic process, and even mild criticism of the president and his rule is not allowed" (Lindberg, 2006, p. 95). In this regard, Equatorial Guinea is a prime example of a country where lopsided election results are clearly related to the manipulated political market within the country.

Alternatively, one might argue that a smaller vote share of the winning party or candidate indicates a more open political marketplace. This follows the logic that as barriers to entry within the political arena are removed, more and more people are likely to become politically active. Also, this increase in political activity might expand the number of parties or individuals contesting for political office. In its extreme form, this openness might also lead to a fragmented party system, which could stall the legislative process and make achieving any type of political progress quite difficult. But, regardless of whether extremely high levels of competitiveness are desirable or not, smaller vote shares by the winning party are certainly indicative of higher levels of electoral competitiveness.

In the top-left quadrant of Figure 4.5, there are several cases where smaller percentages of the winner's vote total have corresponded to relatively open political competition. Benin, Mali, São Tomé and Madagascar, for instance, have all had elections that are consistent with this premise. In particular, the 1995 parliamentary election in Benin is a good example of an election where the winning party obtains only a small share of the vote under relatively free and fair circumstances. In this election, the Parti de la Renaissance du Benin (Benin Renaissance Party) only won a plurality of assembly seats (around 25 percent) in an election characterized by extremely high levels of competitiveness. In fact, there were nearly 5,580 different candidates from 31 different political parties competing for a total of 83 seats (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1995). This

election, by almost all outward indicators, demonstrated exceptionally high levels of competitiveness in a political environment that was, by most accounts, free and fair.

There are, however, many countries in Africa that do not follow this type of negative linear relationship. In fact, there are a significant number of countries where lopsided election results are the norm, despite remarkably open levels of political competition. These cases defy the logic that overwhelming electoral victories are indicative of biased or closed competition. Observations of this type – such as past elections in South Africa, Namibia, Cape Verde, Mali and Mauritius – can be seen in the top-right quadrants of Figure 4.5.

In South Africa, for example, the ANC has garnered large vote totals in every parliamentary election since the inception of democracy within the country. In 1994, the ANC won with nearly 63 percent of the total vote and, in 1999, the ANC again won with over 66 percent. In the 2004 parliamentary elections, the ANC continued this dominating trend by winning nearly 70 percent of the total vote. Despite these landslide victories, though, the openness of political competition in South Africa has remained relatively high. South Africa, along with Namibia, Cape Verde, and others, provides some of the clearest evidence yet that lopsided election results, and even the sustainment of those majorities over time, is not always at the expense of open and fair competition.

Alternatively, there are intriguing cases where the winning party or candidate did not obtain an overwhelming majority of the vote, despite the fact that political competition was virtually closed for the opposition. In the abstract, this relationship seems nonsensical because one might rightly assume that the primary reason that politicians close down the political marketplace is to consolidate and strengthen their own hold on a government office. When political competition is not even possible – meaning the freedom of speech and organization are stifled, press freedom is muzzled, and the existence of free and fair elections is doubtful – the inability to garner an overwhelming election victory is actually quite baffling.

Nevertheless, there are a handful of cases in Africa where this situation is true. The 2000 parliamentary election in Zimbabwe is an exemplary case where fundamentally unfair competition did not translate into lopsided vote shares. In the days and weeks prior to the election, politically-motivated violence and intimidation was reported to be widespread and state-controlled media was anything but fair and impartial. Even with this well-documented manipulation of the political marketplace, election results still managed to produce evidence of high levels of electoral competitiveness existing within the

country. In fact, Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF party only won 48.6 percent of the vote, while Martin Tsvangirai's newly-formed Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) picked up an astonishing 47 percent. This case provides clear evidence that election results do not always adequately portray the nature of political competition within the country.

Overall, the results in Section One provide evidence that the association between competition and competitiveness is statistically discernable, but that the strength of that relationship is decidedly weak. In fact, it is too weak to conclude that election results are a viable proxy measure of political competition. Thus, this study concludes that competition and competitiveness are related, but discrete concepts. And, as a result, the hypothesis of this research question is accepted; election results are not a viable shortcut in the measurement of political competition.

A proper explanation of this graph, however, is not complete until one acknowledges the large number of cases that fall into the middle quadrant of the graph. While these cases may be indicative of the many African countries that are in transition between democratic and authoritarian rule, they are nonetheless significant because of the sheer number of cases within this area. Ultimately, these cases are not easily attributable to either side of the research question at hand and, without further analysis, the observations remain in an analytical "gray zone" that defy an easy explanation.

To help break through this cloudy analytical area, it is helpful to look at the state of competition within these countries before and after an observed election. This type of testing would allow the researcher to better understand the way competition affects (and is affected by) levels of electoral competitiveness. Thus, I now analyze competition from both sides of an election and determine if it has any further relationship with electoral competitiveness.

## **Section #2**

*Q2: To what extent are levels of electoral competitiveness at a given point associated with prior levels of political competition?*

*H2: Levels of electoral competitiveness at a given point are not associated with prior levels of political competition.*

*Design 1: Political Competition (Average)<sub>((T2+T5)/2)</sub> ⇒ Electoral Competitiveness<sub>(T5)</sub>*

*Design 2: Political Competition (Net Change)<sub>(T5-T2)</sub> ⇒ Electoral Competitiveness<sub>(T5)</sub>*

While the previous section focused on the level of competition and competitiveness *in the year of* an observed election, this section focuses on the level of competition *before* that election. The idea behind this approach is that the openness of political competition in the years prior to an election may have a significant bearing upon the levels of electoral competitiveness. This research question seeks to determine whether levels of political competition, or changes in those levels, affect the competitiveness of political actors in the upcoming election. While it does seem plausible that the openness of competition before an election may have an impact on the competitiveness of political actors, the hypothesis of this question argues against such a relationship.

Before I begin the tests, though, it is first necessary to determine whether an index can be created for an *Average Political Competition* score prior to an election. The result of a reliability analysis on the four variables of competition shows the Chronbach's Alpha statistic to be .893. This outcome is large enough (again, the threshold being greater than .70) to conclude that the variables are measuring a latent, uni-dimensional concept and are able to be combined into a single competition index. This allows for testing to proceed using a concise measure for an average political competition score.

Figure 4.6 – Average Political Competition Score (Prior) and Winning Percentage of Votes and Seats

|   |                     | Winning Percentage of<br>Votes and Seats | Average Political<br>Competition Score for<br>the Past Inter-Election<br>Period |
|---|---------------------|--|---|
| Winning Percentage of Votes and<br>Seats                                  | Pearson Correlation | 1  | -.327**   |
|   | Sig. (2-tailed)     |  | .002  |
|   | N                   | 286                                      | 91  |
| Average Political Competition Score<br>for the Past Inter-Election Period | Pearson Correlation | -.327**                                  | 1   |
|   | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .002                                     |   |
|   | N                   | 91                                       | 94  |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

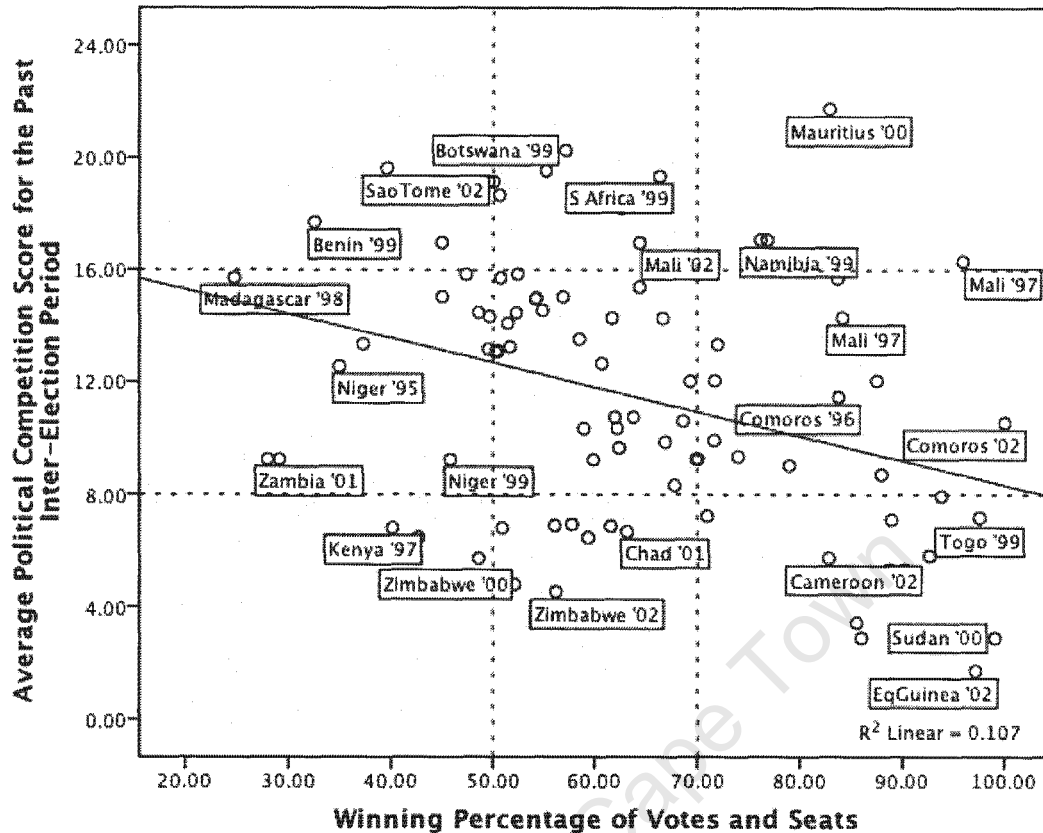
A correlation test between the two concepts shows that there is a statistically discernable, but weak relationship between prior levels of political competition and subsequent election results (Pearson's  $r = -.327$ ,  $p = .002$ ). While one might expect the level of competition existing before an election to have a significant impact on the

outcome of that contest, the result of this study show that the is particularly weak. Prior levels of political competition are not a reliable indicator of competitiveness in an election and, as a result, one should not assume that particular levels of competition are suggestive of certain levels of electoral competitiveness.

But, again, acknowledging the limitations involved with using Freedom House's Press Freedom Score within the index should be addressed. The inclusion of this variable bounds the country-year observations within the test to only those after 1993. Undoubtedly, this is the reason for the relatively small sample size and a cause for some concern as it may introduce bias into the dataset. By taking this variable out of the index, though, one can increase the number of observations within the test without a significant decrease in reliability or validity. The 4-variable and the new 3-variable index scores are strongly correlated (Pearson's  $r = .993$ ,  $p = .000$ ).

With the new 3-variable index score, another correlation test can be run between prior levels of political competition and the levels of competitiveness in an observed election. The result shows that the relationship between election results and competition is even weaker than the first test, despite the increased number of observations (Pearson's  $r = -.274$ ,  $p = .001$ ). As a result, this study shows that the relationship between election results and the level of openness prior to an election is empirically related, but not the same thing. The relationship is still too weak to conclude that competition has any significant bearing upon the level of competitiveness in upcoming elections. Consequently, the first hypothesis within this section is accepted.

Figure 4.7 – Average Political Competition (Prior) and Winning Percentage of Vote and Seats



In an attempt to better understand these findings, a scatter plot of these variables is particularly useful. Similar to the analysis in Section #1, the corners of the scatter plot are particularly insightful. In particular, the cases found in the top-left and bottom-right quadrants provide empirical support to the assertion that the level of political competition before an election might have a negative effect on competitiveness. In the bottom-right quadrant, for instance, one notices nearly a dozen observations that exhibit a relatively closed political marketplace before an election that produced a lopsided victory. As the graph shows, elections in Togo, Cameroon, Sudan and Equatorial Guinea are characterized by this type of political environment. Alternatively, in the top-left hand corner, there are cases where open political competition before an election is paired with small vote shares by the winning party or candidate. Observations within this quadrant, including the 2002 elections in São Tomé and the 1999 elections in Benin, have exhibited this type of open and competitive political environment.

Nevertheless, there are considerably more observations in this graph that do not follow such logic. The bottom-left and top-right quadrants hold cases that tell an altogether different story. In the top-right quadrant, for example, Mauritius, Mali, South Africa and Namibia have all had elections where the winning party or candidate has won

a large vote share despite competition being relatively open in the lead-up to the election. In these cases, the reason for such political dominance must be explained by factors other than the outright manipulation and control of the political marketplace (i.e. culture, history, and political identity).

The cases found in the bottom-left quadrant provide empirical evidence that restricted levels of competition before an election can lead to extremely close election results, as well. These cases, such as the Kenyan election in 1997 and the Zimbabwean election in 2000, provide an example of closed political competition before an election coupled with extremely high levels of electoral competitiveness. For many people, this type of situation would seem to go against reason in that, surely, the logic of closing a political marketplace would be to consolidate the power of a certain group or individual at the expense of others. In countries where political competition is effectively closed to the opposition, it does not entirely make sense that a political system would demonstrate high levels of competitiveness. In these instances, the linkage between competition and competitiveness is often counter-intuitive and needs to be explained by other outside factors (i.e. autocrats seeking to legitimize their rule by hiding behind a facade of competitiveness or the existence of a fair voting process despite an otherwise completely biased political environment).

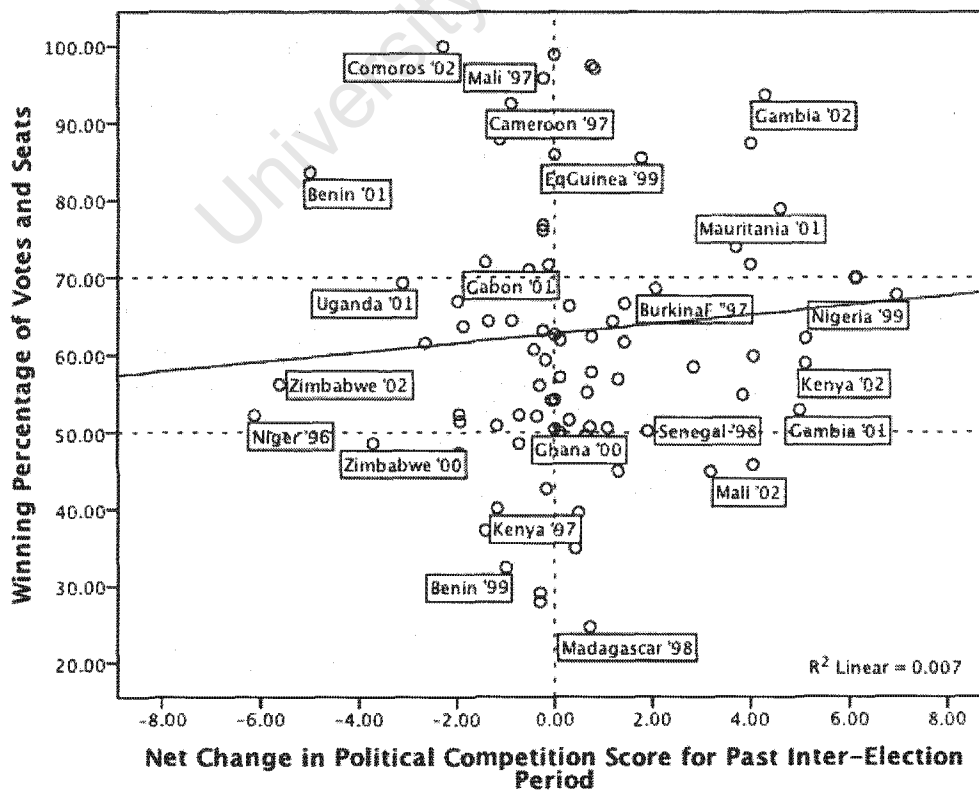
It is worth noting that this scatter plot looks very similar to the scatter plot in the first section (Figure 4.5) of this chapter. Many of the observations occupy the same areas on the graph, which is usually attributable to the fact that most countries do not change dramatically in the few years before an election. This, on a whole, is fairly unsurprising because political change is often a painstakingly slow process. To further analyze these cases, though, one might shift the focus away from political competition scores, *per se*, to the changes in these scores before an election. The results of this inquiry could offer additional insight into the relationship between competition and competitiveness.

Figure 4.8 – Net Change in Political Competition (Prior) and Winning Percentage of Votes and Seats

|   |                     | Winning Percentage of<br>Votes and Seats | Net Change in Political<br>Competition Score for<br>Past Inter-Election<br>Period |
|---|---------------------|--|---|
| Winning Percentage of Votes and Seats                                       | Pearson Correlation | 1  | .084  |
|   | Sig. (2-tailed)     |  | .427  |
|   | N                   | 286                                      | 91  |
| Net Change in Political Competition<br>Score for Past Inter-Election Period | Pearson Correlation | .084                                     | 1   |
|   | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .427                                     |   |
|   | N                   | 91                                       | 94  |

Accordingly, the second test in this section is focused on whether the change in political competition before an election affects the upcoming level of competitiveness of political actors. Testing the change in competition, as opposed to the actual level, allows one to observe the relationship in a different paradigm. After performing a correlation test, though, the results show that there is no statistically discernable relationship between the two concepts (see Figure 4.8). The changes in political competition before an election have no association with the actual vote share of the winning party or candidate.

Figure 4.9 - Net Change (Prior) in Political Competition and Winning Percentage of Votes or Seats



To properly interpret the net change graph in Figure 4.9, one needs to first note the variable location on each axis of the scatter plot. On the x-axis, the net change variable has a range from -8 to 8, with a vertical hashed line at 0 demarcating the midpoint. The cases to the left of this line (from -8 to 0) are said to have exhibited a “closing down” of political competition before an election. To the right of this line (from 0 to 8), observations are said to have had an “opening up” of political competition before an election. The measure of competitiveness, which has been located previously on the x-axis, simply moves to the y-axis and remains divided into three sub-categories to differentiate between open, restrained, and closed competition.

The bottom-right quadrant is characteristic of observations that, before an election, show positive changes in political competition leading to a small share of votes for the winning party. Elections in Ghana (2000), Mali (2002), and Madagascar (1998) are all representative of this type of political environment. On the other hand, the top-left quadrant is home to several observations that are characterized by negative changes in political competition scores before an election and a large vote share by the winning party. Benin (2001), Comoros (2002), and Cameroon (1997) are examples of this situation. These cases show us that, in some instances, large electoral victories might be preceded by a closing of the political marketplace. Or, alternatively, small margins of victory might be preceded by an opening of the political marketplace.

Despite those cases, the above graph provides no visual evidence of a linear relationship between the two concepts. In the top-right quadrant, for instance, there are nearly a dozen countries that have exhibited low levels of electoral competitiveness in elections despite having a political marketplace that has opened up before an election. In many regards, this does seem counter-intuitive because many people would expect that more open political competition would lead to a more competitive political environment. However, these cases in Equatorial Guinea (1999), Gambia (2002), and Mauritania (2001) actually disprove that conjecture. The opening up of political space within a country may also lead to a less competitive environment.

All in all, this test proves that the “opening up” and “closing down” of political competition before an election does not necessarily affect the electoral competitiveness of an election. From the empirical evidence, there is no observable trend showing that political competitiveness increases when political competition opens up. Nor is there a trend showing that competitiveness is decreased when the political marketplace closes down. With the decisive evidence that this testing provides, the second hypothesis of this

section is accepted. Levels of electoral competitiveness are not associated with prior changes in the openness of political competition before an election.

### *Section #3*

*Q3: To what extent are levels of electoral competitiveness at a given point associated with subsequent levels of political competition?*

*H3: Levels of electoral competitiveness at a given point are not associated with subsequent levels of political competition.*

*Design 1: Electoral Competitiveness<sub>(T5)</sub> ⇒ Political Competition (Average)<sub>((T6+T9)/2)</sub>*

*Design 2: Electoral Competitiveness<sub>(T5)</sub> ⇒ Political Competition (Net Change)<sub>(T9-T6)</sub>*

The third research question in this chapter seeks to understand whether levels of electoral competitiveness are related to the subsequent openness of political competition in the years immediately after an election. The tests within this section are important in determining whether election results are a valid indicator of future levels of political competition within a country. If so, election results may provide a valid shortcut in the measurement of political competition. The tests within this section investigate those claims, but my hypothesis, again, casts doubt on such assumptions.

Before this analysis can begin, though, it is again important to determine whether the four indicators of subsequent political competition can be aggregated into a single index score. The result of a reliability analysis shows the Chronbach's Alpha for these measures to be .896. This score provides confirmation that these variables are measuring an underlying, latent concept and can be merged to form a single index score. With this variable, analysis can begin on the ways that electoral competitiveness affects political competition after an election.

From here, it seems plausible that large victories by a winning party or candidate may lead to a type of regime that is politically unaccountable to the rule of law. If the power of these individuals or groups is challenged, this situation could lead to greater manipulation of the political marketplace in order to consolidate their hold on that power. If one were, then, to assume that vote shares and future levels of competition were inversely associated with each other – meaning that as the vote shares go up, the levels of openness in political competition goes down (or vice versa) – one might expect a correlation coefficient close to -1.

**Figure 4.10 Average Political Competition (Future) and Winning Percentage of Votes and Seats**

|  |                     | Winning Percentage<br>of Votes and Seats | Average Political<br>Competition Score<br>for the Future Inter-<br>Election Period |
|--|---------------------|--|--|
| Winning Percentage of Votes and<br>Seats                                       | Pearson Correlation | 1  | -.360**  |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed)     |  | .001   |
|  | N                   | 286                                      | 82   |
| Average Political Competition<br>Score for the Future Inter-Election<br>Period | Pearson Correlation | -.360**                                  | 1  |
|  | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .001                                     |  |
|  | N                   | 82                                       | 83   |

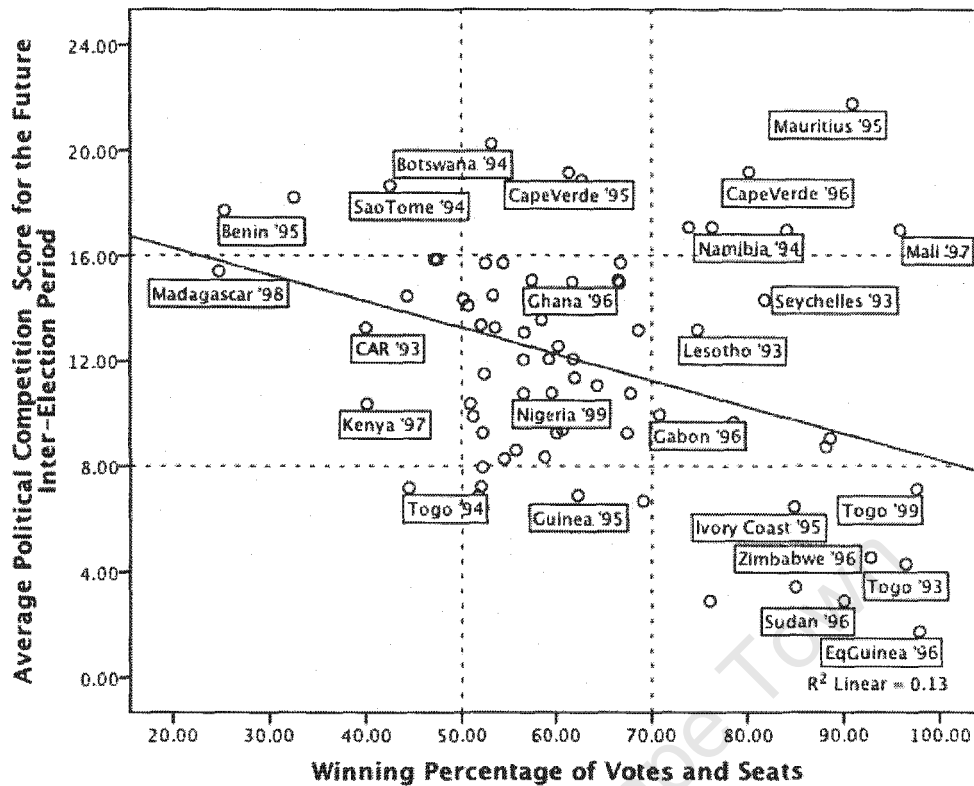
\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The result of this empirical test, however, shows that the relationship between the two concepts is statistically discernable, but the strength of that relationship is relatively weak (Pearson's  $r = -.360$ ,  $p = .001$ ). In other words, there is little statistical evidence to show that lower levels of competitiveness are associated with a closing down effect of political competition (or vice versa). While one might expect lopsided election results to help create a political climate that is more hostile towards opposition or dissent, this is not always the case.

Similar to the other sections within this chapter, this test suffers from a small N because of the inclusion of the Press Freedom variable within the index. To increase the number of observations within the sample, this variable can be removed from the index, without a significant loss of validity or reliability. In fact, the correlation between the original 4-variable index of political competition and a new 3-variable index is very strong (Pearson's  $r = .994$ ,  $p = .000$ ).

With this 3-variable index and a greater number of observations, another test of association can be run between electoral competitiveness and future competition. The result of this test shows that the relationship between competitiveness and future competition is statistically discernable, but actually weaker than the original test (Pearson's  $r = -.191$ ,  $p = .025$ ). This shows us that election results are a poor indicator of subsequent levels of political competition.

Figure 4.11 – Average Political Competition (Future) and Winning Percentage of Votes and Seats



One can also view the relationship between these two concepts graphically. The scatter plot above (Figure 4.11) shows the diverse spread of cases between electoral competitiveness and future competition scores. Again, one feature that continues to stand out is the large number of observations characterized by low levels of competitiveness, regardless of the level of competition. This shows that large electoral victories in Africa do not have a necessarily detrimental effect on the most important pillars of political competition.

In the top-right quadrant, one can observe cases that demonstrate large vote shares for the winner and a relatively open political marketplace after an election. For example, after Mali's 1997 elections, political competition stayed relatively open and available to political opposition within the country. In 1999, there were approximately 40 private newspapers and at least that number of private radio stations in the country. The U.S. State Department noted that Mali's government "does not censor print, broadcast or electronic media, which often offer editorials critical of the Government and opposition alike" (United States Department of State, 2000). Also, Mali's "Constitution [provided] for the freedom of association, and the Government [respected] this right in practice" (United States Department of State, 2000). The relatively liberal political marketplace existing within the country is remarkable given that the winner of the 1997 presidential

election, Alpha Oumar Konare, won with nearly 95 percentage of the vote. Other examples of this type of political situation can be seen in Namibia's 1994 elections and in Mauritius' 1995 elections.

However, it is commonly understood that large electoral victories are not particularly reliable indicators of healthy and vibrant democracies. In the bottom-right quadrant, for instance, one can observe African elections that are characterized by lopsided election results and closed political marketplaces after an election. Observations in Togo (1999), Sudan (1996), and Zimbabwe (1996) are all indicative of this environment, where autocratic leaders enjoy large electoral victories, but continue with their repressive policy.

It would be a mistake, though, to look only at those African leaders and parties that win large vote shares. There are, in fact, many countries that are not characterized by such lopsided electoral outcomes and have varied levels of political competition after an election. In the top-left quadrant, one can view elections in countries that were decided by narrow margins and were followed by extremely open levels of political competition. The 1994 elections in São Tomé and the 1995 elections in Benin are a good example of this scenario.

Also, in the bottom-left quadrant, one may notice several elections that are characterized by high levels of competitiveness and relatively closed political marketplaces after an election. The 1994 parliamentary election in Togo is a prime example of this scenario. The Togolese People's Rally (RPT) won 35 out of 78 seats (about 45%), which was the largest number of seats won by any party in the election. The first round of that voting process was relatively calm and peaceful, but the second round was characterized by voter intimidation and political violence. Despite having the outward indicators of a seemingly competitive political environment, the trend of manipulation, violence and intimidation by the state did not stop in the years after the election.

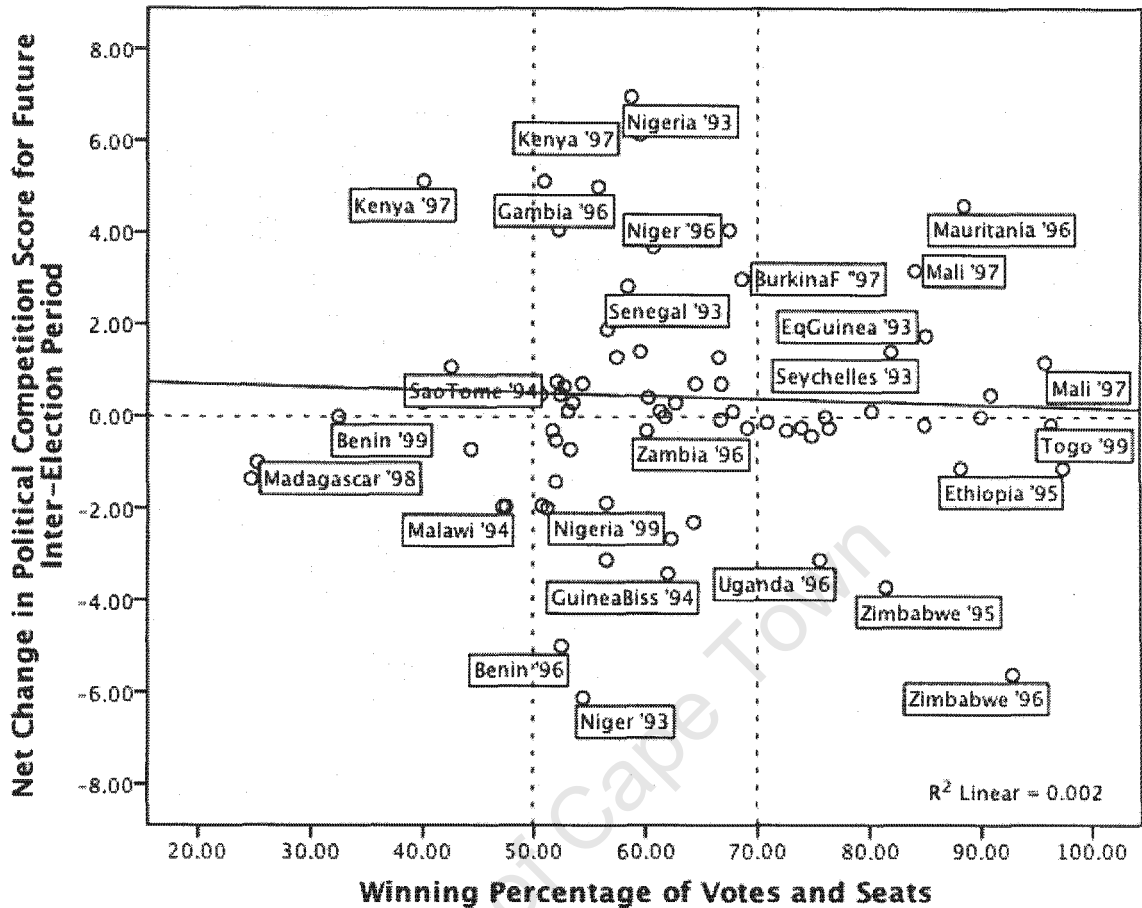
While this test was focused on the actual levels of political competition after an election, the final test in this chapter looks at the *changes* in those levels after an election. One might assume that larger victories lead to a subsequent "closing down" effect of political competition because there is less and less accountability in the system. If larger victories do lead to a closing down effect of political marketplace (or, if small electoral victories lead to an opening up effect), the results of a correlation test would be close to -1.

Figure 4.12 – Net Change (Future) in Political Competition and Percentage of Votes and Seats

|   |                     | Winning Percentage<br>of Votes and Seats | Net Change in<br>Political Competition<br>Score for Future Inter-<br>Election Period |
|---|---------------------|--|--|
| Winning Percentage of Votes and<br>Seats                                      | Pearson Correlation | 1  | -.043  |
|   | Sig. (2-tailed)     |  | .703   |
|   | N                   | 286                                      | 82   |
| Net Change in Political Competition<br>Score for Future Inter-Election Period | Pearson Correlation | -.043                                    | 1  |
|   | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .703                                     |  |
|   | N                   | 82                                       | 83   |

The result of this test, however, shows that the relationship between the two concepts is not statistically discernable. The winning percentage of votes seems to have no association with a future change in political competition scores. This result allows one to conclude that there is no association between the winner's vote total and a future opening or closing of the political marketplace.

Figure 4.13 – Net Change (Future) in Political Competition and Winning Percentage of Votes and Seats



One can visually interpret the relationship between these two concepts by the use of a simple scatter plot. The graph above is similar to the net change graph in Section #2 (Figure 4.8), although the x-axis and y-axis have been reversed to reflect the notion of independent and dependent variables. On the y-axis, the net change variable has a range between -8 and 8 (as no observations demonstrate a shift of more than +/- 8 points). Any observations falling above 0 are considered to have had a positive change in political competition after an election and any observations falling below 0 are considered to have had a negative change. The x-axis is the same competitiveness scale as seen in the other graphs. The variable has a range from 20 to 100 and is sub-divided into three analytical categories to reflect levels of 'high', 'restrained', or 'low' competitiveness.

This graph can be interpreted as showing that certain vote shares do not directly correspond to subsequent positive or negative changes in the openness of political competition. Although there may be some observations that support a so-called 'authoritarian drift' when parties or candidates start winning elections with overwhelming

margins of victory, there is also sufficient evidence to disprove the existence of an identifiable trend in that direction. For instance, there are nearly 7 observations on the graph that show political competition becoming more open and free after an election that registered extremely lopsided election results for the winner. This can be seen, for example, after the 1996 elections in Mauritania and the 1997 elections in Mali.

Additionally, there are observations where the political marketplace closes down after a highly competitive election. The political environment in Madagascar, after its 1998 election, and in Malawi, after its 1994 election, are indicative of this political environment. Malawi, for instance, had its founding democratic election in 1994 when the United Democratic Front (UDF) and its presidential candidate, Bakili Muluzi, entered into office after winning a relatively competitive election. However, problems ensued in the coming years with press freedom within the country and the autonomy of their electoral management board (Chr. Michelson Institute, 2005). These issues contributed to negative changes in political competition after the important 1994 election, despite having all the outward indicators of a competitive political regime.

Ultimately, though, the vote share of the winning party or candidate in an election offers no substantive proof that the political marketplace will open up or close down in the future. There is no statistically discernable relationship between these two concepts and the graphical evidence only reinforces this conclusion. Therefore, this section's hypothesis is accepted because the relationship between the concepts is not strong enough to conclude that one has a significant bearing upon the other.

## Chapter Five: Conclusion

Political competition is considered by many to be a central component of electoral democracy. In this regard, Robert Dahl's idea of contestation in *Polyarchy* has become a popular conceptualization of the term. In Dahl's work, he built a theoretical foundation of competition that guaranteed the freedoms of speech, press, organization and a fair electoral process. And, as a result, this widely cited framework has provided academics an important stepping-stone for further study on democratization throughout the world.

Many quantitative researchers, however, operationalize Dahl's concept in ways that bear little resemblance to his original framework. The most prominent error is one that links election results with the concept of political competition. The fundamental problem with this link is that it confuses the ability to compete with the existence of a competitive political system. In other words, election results provide information about the competitiveness of political candidates or parties, but those results provide little or no information about the freedoms and guarantees that allow for political competition to take place.

The research questions within this paper, however, sought to test the relationship between electoral competitiveness and political competition. If election results in Africa demonstrated a strong association with political competition, researchers would be able to use election results as an easy proxy measure. In many ways, this proxy measure could also help substantiate the conclusions of the existing research that uses election results to measure political competition. If, however, a weak or non-existent relationship existed between the concepts, this result would add scholarly weight to the needed shift within democracy research to the unique rules and conditions of political competition.

To answer these questions fully, though, it was first necessary to obtain a more robust understanding of the different elements of competition across time and space in Africa. In Chapter Three, this study took a nuanced look at the different elements of political competition over the last several decades. Overall, the evidence showed that the rules and conditions that define political competition are slowly, but steadily improving across the African continent. For every element of political competition, with the exception of the freedom of organization, the freedoms were steadily improving over time. Even more, evidence showed that elections across the continent have become more and more competitive over the last several decades.

In Chapter Four, this study subjected political competition scores and levels of electoral competitiveness to a range of systematic testing. With statistical analysis, this research showed that political competition and electoral competitiveness are analytically distinct, though empirically related concepts. In other words, the data reflects an intuition that one might shape the other, but the actual relationship is surprisingly weak. In fact, that relationship is too weak to conclude that election results are a viable proxy measure for political competition.

Unfortunately, election results are still being used in research to measure political competition within a country. Election results also continue to play a prominent role in many of the democracy indices used today. Undeniably, this error continues to skew our understanding of political competition, especially in Africa where dominant parties are a political reality within many countries. To be sure, the level of electoral competitiveness might be low in many of these countries, but election results shed little light on the fundamental components of political competition.

From here, quantitative research on political competition in Africa must shift its focus. This research must move away from easily obtainable election results to a more nuanced, more subjective framework. As was previously mentioned, Dahl's understanding of contestation in *Polyarchy* presents an excellent starting point because it focuses on the rules and conditions of a country's political marketplace. But greater efforts should be made to ensure that this framework is operationalized in a manner that is consistent with its conceptualization. As this is accomplished, inquiries into the nature of political competition, especially across the continent of Africa, will begin to yield more fruitful knowledge of this important subject.

## Appendix A: Freedom House

A significant portion of the quantitative data within this study was derived from Freedom House surveys. These scores were instrumental in establishing the political competition indices found within this research. Because of the prominence of these measures, a brief explanation of their advantages and limitations is warranted.

Freedom House is a non-profit institution that has ranked countries on two scales – Political Rights and Civil Liberties – in their annual *Freedom in the World* survey since 1972. Using their time-series data, this study measured political competition in Africa over four decades, as opposed to several years. These scores were instrumental in being able to track the trends of political competition across the continent throughout the so-called Third Wave of Democracy.

Arguably, the most important advantage to using Freedom House scores is that they do not use vote or seat shares for their analysis of a country's political environment. For this study, establishing a measure of political competition that was wholly independent of those election results was vitally important.

Also, Freedom House measures are inclusive enough to cover both the rules and conditions of political competition. As Freedom House notes, “[Our survey] does not equate constitutional or other legal guarantees of rights with on-the-ground fulfillment of these rights. While both laws and actual practices are factored into the ratings decision, greater emphasis is placed on the latter” (Freedom House, 2009). This is an important point because African leaders are more often criticized for neglecting the rules of political competition than for not having those laws and regulations in the first place.

There are significant limitations to using the Freedom House measures, too. The most prominent of these limitations is Freedom House's well-criticized refusal to release the scores for each of the different indicators that make up their composite survey scores. The ability to use the Freedom House sub-scores would greatly enhance our ability to exact the concept we are attempting to measure. Moreover, Freedom House provides virtually no information regarding how these indicators are weighted and then aggregated. The availability of this data would provide researchers the means to not only replicate these scores, but also be more precise in their measurement of these important concepts.

Unfortunately, there is no perfect index of political competition or democracy. Each has its pros and cons. But, the *Freedom in the World* survey by Freedom House is

one of the most respected databases available. It does a laudatory job in covering the important elements of political competition without overextending itself. While academics should continue to push Freedom House to be more transparent regarding its coding and methodology, the survey itself is a fantastic source for research on political competition throughout the continent of Africa.

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