Effects of Party System Fluidity on Legislative Oversight and Good Governance Indicators in Sub-Saharan African

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Abstract

How fluidity of political party systems affects legislative oversight and worldwide governance indicators? Based on the analyses of 47 Sub-Saharan African countries, this article seeks to explore the correlation between Legislative Oversight and Worldwide Governance Indicators as well as the effects of Party System Fluidity on WGI and legislative oversight. Needless to mention, that the effects of party systems fluidity on governance indicators and legislative oversight have received little systematic scholarly attention. To fill the gap in the existing literature, the article explores how in/stability of party systems affects governance indicators and legislative oversight capacity in Sub-Saharan African countries. Analyzing the data on 47 Sub-Saharan African countries we find that legislative oversight has a strong positive relationship with Worldwide Governance Indicators, however, instability of political party systems expressed in high party systems fluidity has a negative relationship with legislative oversight as well as all six dimensions of WGI. These findings reaffirm that the stability of political party systems is a crucial factor that is essential for the development of democratic institutions and further evolvement of mechanisms of democratic control of Parliaments over the work of national Governments. The article is structured in the following way: The first part analyzes how academic scholarship defines legislative oversight and party system fluidity. The second part presents our data analysis methods. In conclusion, the paper discusses the key findings of the research, namely the effects of party systems fluidity on legislative oversight and WGI, in the context of Sub-Saharan African countries.

Keywords: Legislative Oversight; Party Systems Fluidity; Worldwide Governance Indicators

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INTRODUCTION

Can we assume that national Parliaments, in particular in developing countries use legislative oversight tools to control the work of governments? Academic scholarship draws attention to the problem of declining trust in the institution of political parties worldwide. Reasons of such sowing distrust to political parties might be different: e.g. high dependence of political parties from the state (both legally and financially) rather than from the society (Van Biezen & Kopecky, 2007, p.248), the development of new technologies that make direct communication between citizens and the state authorities easier, therefore the institute of political parties is seen as a rather archaic institution. In addition, corruption scandals (Transparency International, 2019) and doubts that political party representatives lobbying for the interests of political elites and large scale bussiness rather than of citizens also further to a decrease in trust to the very idea of parliamentarism and parliamentarian democracy. In the context of developing countries such as Sub-Saharan African countries additional concern is related to the emergence of ethnic-based political parties which in the context of multiethnic societies lead to the emergence of ethnic-based societal cleavages. As the researcher, Kimathi (2010) pointed out, ethnicity, not ideology, determines party loyalty, party affiliation and ultimately party and political dominance. The ruling class has been able to manipulate ethnicity in such a way as to present its political fortunes as synonymous with those of its ethnic group (Kimathi, 2010).

Therefore, political parties serve as an instrument for promotion of interests of those ethnic groups belonging to the “ruling class”, while the interests of other ethnic groups might be underrepresented. All these factors, such as corruption scandals involving political parties representatives, ethnic fractionalization and underrepresentativeness of interests of certain (ethnic) groups within the population lead to the loss of credibility to the institute of political parties in eyes of the electorate.

Despite all these negative factors, the Parliament remains the key actor to which the power of holding Governments accountable is granted. Instruments of democratic control of the Parliament over the work of national Governments are quite comprehensive and include different legislative oversight tools such as: “committee hearings, hearing in plenary sessions of the parliament, the creation of a commission of inquiry, questions, the ombudsman, auditors general, and the public account committees”(Pelizzo & Stapenhurst, 2004). Therefore, despite all doubts and suspicion, the role of national Parliaments and their legislative oversight capacities should not be underestimated.

However reasonable questions may arise as to what extent Parliaments in Sub-Saharan African countries are using legislative oversight tools? Academic scholarship defines different factors that might affect oversight effectiveness, except political (forms of the government, the level of democracy), economic (the level of income) (Pelizzo & Stapenhurst, 2004; Pelizzo & Stapenhurst, 2013), also cultural (or contextual) factors such as shared norms, values, traditions, moral (Sartori, 2005) may exert influence on legislative oversight effectiveness. Based on this understanding of the importance of contextual factors we hypothesize that in/instability of party systems or using (Nwokora & Pelizzo, 2015) terminology party systems “fluidity” impacts both on legislative oversight as well as on governance indicators.

However, before dwelling our attention on the exploration of these relationships, it is essential to analyze the question of how academic scholarship defines legislative oversight as well as party sys-
systems fluidity.

Literature Review

How academic scholarship defines legislative oversight?. In Functionalist Theory of Oversight (2015) the researchers Kinyondo, Pelizzo and Umar define legislative oversight as an instrument, through which the overseer (Parliament) seeks explanation and information from the overseen (Government); through which the overseen describes, explains and ultimately accounts for its actions and decisions to the overseer”(Kinyondo et.al, 2015).

Therefore, legislative oversight is seen not just as a control mechanism but also as a communication tool between the Parliament and the Government. In their earlier study Pelizzo and Stapenhusrt (2004) Tools of Legislative Oversight as well study dated (2012) on Parliamentary Oversight Tools provide quite a comprehensive overview capturing not just different legislative oversight tools but in addition, the analysis of factors that might affect legislative oversight capacity and its effectiveness, such as the form of governance (parliamentarian, presidential, semi-presidential; and the level of democracy) as well as economic factors as the levels of income.

The researchers differentiating various typologies of legislative oversight tools such as ex-ante and ex-post as well as internal and external oversight tools. Namely, while introducing the time dimension, ex-ante legislative oversight tools could be considered as instruments used by the Parliament before: “the government enacts specific policies”(Pelizzo & Stapenhurst, 2004). At this initial stage, the Parliament uses oversight tools before specific policies implementation in order to get clarification from the Government concerning different aspects of these policies. Such ex-ante legislative oversight tools include: committee hearings, questions (in oral and written forms) addressed to the Government etc. while ex-post oversight tools are those instruments of control used by the Parliament when certain policies are already in the process of their implementation or are already being implemented, such oversight tools include public account committees and the ombudsman, anti-corruption agencies, etc.

Scholars, in addition, classify the same legislative oversight tools to internal and external oversight tools, depending on whether these tools: “established inside or outside of the Parliament” (Pelizzo & Stapenhurst, 2004). Following this logic, internal oversight tools comprise of: “committees and special commissions of inquiry, review of appointments and power to censure/impeach/dismiss, chamber proceedings: questions and interpellation and plenary, debates” (Pelizzo & Stapenhurst, 2012), while external tools encompass special institutions of external control created outside of the Parliament as Anti-corruption agencies, Ombuds offices, etc.

In these early works, the researchers focused mainly on the dependence of oversight capacities from various political and economic factors. Pelizzo & Stapenhurst (2004; 2012) have found that oversight capacity (the number of legislative oversight tools) depends on the form of the government as well as the level of democracy and the level of income of those countries. In their work dated back 2004, the researchers found that: “parliamentarian systems are better equipped –in terms of oversight tools– than legislatures in either presidential or semi-presidential systems” (Pelizzo & Stapenhurst, 2004).

However, just the form of the government and the number of oversight tools cannot explain why some countries more advanced in using legislative oversight tools rather than others. For instance, Gabon and Mali possess seven oversight tools while Angola just three
(Pelizzo & Stapenhurst, 2004), all these three sub-Saharan African countries have a semi-presidential form of the government. Thus, this fact signifies that not just the form of the government but other factors might affect oversight capacity and oversight effectiveness.

According to the researchers, the level of democracy impacts oversight potential. The authors found that: “Non-democratic countries have an average of only 5 oversight tools, while democratic 6.41” (Pelizzo & Stapenhurst, 2004). At the same time, Pelizzo and Stapenhurst admit that there is no clear unidirectional causality between the dependent (legislative oversight) and independent variable (the level of democracy), therefore it is hard to bypass the problem of reverse causality. As one may argue a greater number of oversight tools can appear and function in more democratic rather than in non-democratic countries as the environment to nurture potential of legislative oversight is absent in the latter.

Not solely political but also economic factors could affect legislative capacity, namely the level of income. The researchers pointed out: “In fact, the Parliaments in low-income countries have on average a much smaller number of oversight tools at their disposal rather than their counterparts in both middle and high-income countries” (Pelizzo & Stapenhurst, 2004).

Understanding all caveats and problems related to reverse causality, the researchers in their latter studies go beyond this and emphasize that not just a form of the government or the level of democracy but also other factors e.g. most importantly availability/or absence of the political will explains why some Sub-Saharan African countries are more effective in using legislative oversight tools than others.

However, how to measure legislative oversight effectiveness? In 2015 researchers Pelizzo, Kinyondo and Umar published the article entitled A Functionalist Theory of Oversight where they profoundly analyzed the question of how to measure oversight effectiveness and emphasized that: “to more adequately understanding oversight effectiveness a multidimensional approach is more appropriate rather than the unidimensional ones adopted in previous studies” (Kinyondo et.al, 2015)

The researchers argue not just political, economic but also other aspects are crucial, hence not the number of oversight tools (legislative capacity) but rather the context in which communication between the overseer and overseen is taking place is important. In this regards not only formal legal provisions like Constitution, legal acts but also informal institutions such as shared values, morals, traditions are of great importance.

Therefore the combination of political, economic and cultural (contextual) factors might exert influence on legislative oversight effectiveness as well as political party systems development.

While emphasizing that contextual factors are important we would like to suggest that party systems fluidity may also exert influence on legislative oversight. However, let us first consider how academic scholarship defines party systems as well as party systems fluidity (or instability of party systems).

We have mentioned earlier that legislative oversight effectiveness depends on contextual factors between overseer and overseen, e.g. values they share. Political parties could also be considered as institutions formed on shared values. For instance, Leisersoff argues that: “parties can be observed as organizational groups, as idea groups, and as social groups” (Sartori, 2005). The same could be said about party systems. According to Sartori that the organizational network of parties goes far beyond the party itself, for it includes all the space that a party is able to occupy de facto, and no matter under which form, in whatever setting” (Sartori, 2005).
Giovanni Sartori in his pioneering work in the field on Parties and Party Systems (1976) goes beyond Duverger's (1954) consideration of "anatomic structure" of political parties and drew attention to the political party systems change (Sartori, 2005).

Needless to mention, that Duverger (1954) while focusing on political parties organizational structure, less attention paid to the party systems or contextual environment in which parties emerge and function. Duverger was more interested in studies of inner structure of political parties and suggests different typologies of political parties as parties societies i.e. associational parties of the loose Gesellschaft type: community like parties of the Gemeinschaft type, and devotee parties of the Bund type” (Sartori, 2005). Party systems Duverger categorized, “on the basis of the number of political parties and identifies one party, two and multiple party systems” (Pelizzo & Nwokora, 2016).

Sartori goes beyond Duvergers numeric typologies in the classification of party systems and emphasized that party systems can be classified not by a number of parties but rather based on the number of "relevant" parties. Sartori suggested seven types of political party systems: those with one relevant party: such as one party, hegemonic party and predominant party; with two relevant parties which form two-party systems: and those having more than two relevant political parties, which in their turn also could be classified as moderate pluralist party systems (having between 3-5 political parties) and polarized pluralist party systems (with more than five political parties) (Pelizzo & Nwokora, 2016).

An additional important aspect in Sartori’s works (2005) is the introduction of the time dimension in political party system studies, the researcher underlined the significance of studies of: “historical patterns from which political parties originated” (Sartori, 2005).

This idea of including the time dimension in the party system studies served as fertile ground for the emergence of recent studies on party systems dynamics and elaboration of Indexes measuring party systems volatility and fluidity (Pedersen, 1979; Pelizzo & Nwokora, 2015).

Developed by Pedersen (1979) the volatility index computes: “the net change in parties vote or seat totals between election” (Pelizzo & Nwokora, 2016). However present index of volatility has certain limitations, as units of analysis, it considers political parties but not party systems and: “the Index is calculated across all parties, not just for relevant parties. Thus, a party system can be moderately or highly volatile, although the vote returns of relevant parties remain stable”(Nwokora & Pelizzo, 2017).

In 2015 the researchers Pelizzo and Nwokora elaborated on the Index of Party systems fluidity which encompasses such components as Frequency, Scope, and Variety of Party System change. Through the calculation of the Frequency=Number of Party System Changes/Number of Elections; Scope= Distance between the two most different types; as well as Variety= number of Different Type Changes this index allows to capture the dynamics of party systems change over the time as well as “stability of polity party systems” (Pelizzo & Nwokora, 2018).

The novelty and significance of the Index of Party systems fluidity is that it addresses gaps and limitations of previous studies aimed to capture the dynamics of party system change. Following Sartori’s logic the time dimension plays also a crucial role, as the Index allows to capture the dynamics of party system change. Therefore it can be considered as a useful analytical tool for party system change studies and also for comparative public policy studies. Namely measuring frequency, scope, and variety of party system changes: “during the historic period
T1 through to T10” it is possible to calculate how countries A and B underwent different types of changes, e.g. let say country A underwent one type system change from: “the hegemonic type to two-partyism at T3, while country B underwent two changes from moderate pluralism to polarized pluralism at T3, and from polarized pluralism back to moderate pluralism at T6” (Nwokora & Pelizzo, 2017).

Thus, considering not parties but party systems as units of analysis the Index of fluidity (Nwokora & Pelizzo, 2015) allows to capture party system changes as well as to conduct cross-country comparative analysis covering different time-frames, countries and regions.

Thinking about party systems they are usually perceived as some static entities however, fluidity index allows to explore the dynamics in party systems changes, this is in particular important in the context of developing countries where just before the election may appear different parties which after elections could stop functioning or are not that active as during the elections. One additional advantage of this index as it computes not the number of parties but the party system change based on consideration in changes using Sartori terminology of the number of relevant parties.

While coming to the conclusion that party systems stability is essential for good governance, Pelizzo (2018) in his recent work entitled The Determinants of Party System Change in Sub-Saharan Africa explores in addition what are the factors affecting party system change. The study findings are: “ethnic fragmentation, urbanization, and development have no detectable impact on the stability of party systems, but poverty can greatly undermine the stability of party systems”(Pelizzo, 2018).

Based on findings of Pelizzo & Stapenhust on legislative oversight and Index of party System Fluidity (Pelizzo & Nwokora, 2015) this work seeks to contribute to the existing literature by exploring the questions: how Legislative oversight affects Worldwide Governance Indicators as well as how Party Systems Fluidity affects Legislative Oversight and WGI, in the context of Sub-Saharan African countries.

**RESEARCH METHODS**

For this research, we used Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) dataset. “IPU is a global organization of national parliaments with 179 member Parliaments. The IPU open database platform Pauline is a unique open database platform, which allows us to study and to compare data on national parliaments” (IPU: 2019) This database comprises a broad range of data related to legislative oversight. In order to answer the first research question how legislative oversight affects Worldwide Governance Indicators, we take IPU data on 47 Sub-Saharan African countries such as the number of written questions asked per year, the number of written questions answered by the government per year, after we calculated the percentage of written questions answered by the government per year.

The IPU database gives a possibility for scholars to explore the dynamics and changes in the data over time (for instance, as for some countries the data for 2012 were missing we take the available data for some of Sub-Saharan African countries for 2008, 2010, 2011 and 2013). Advantage of the IPU database that the data comes directly from national Parliaments which makes IPU database a very helpful data source for the studying of the work of national parliaments globally, regionally or locally. In addition we used Worldwide Governance Indicators for each 47 Sub-Saharan African countries in all six dimensions of WGI, namely Control of Corruption, Voice and Accountability, Political Stability, Rule of Law, Government Effectiveness and Regulatory Quality (for 2012).
To explore the second and third research questions of this paper on the relationship between party systems fluidity and WGI as well as the fluidity and legislative oversight Index of Fluidity scores for each of 47 Sub-Saharan African countries were used, these data on scores of each of 47 Sub-Saharan African countries were kindly provided by Riccardo Pelizzo.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

At the beginning, we have pointed out that this paper seeks to explore the relationship between 1) legislative oversight and WGI; 2) Party Systems Fluidity and Legislative Oversight and 3) Fluidity and WGI. Our analysis reveals a strong positive correlation between Legislative Oversight and Worldwide Governance Indicators, meaning that the increase in legislative oversight leads to increase of coefficients in each of six dimensions of governance indicators. These results signify that legislative oversight is an essential condition for government effectiveness.

We hypothesized that party systems' fluidity might impact the legislative oversight. The results of our regression model show that there is a negative correlation between fluidity and legislative oversight, namely, the higher is party systems fluidity (instability) the lower falls the coefficients on legislative oversight. This finding suggests that just an increase in number of political parties presented in the Parliament does not lead to increase of legislative oversight effectiveness. In opposite, the high number of political parties may lead to constant clashes and disputes and instability of the system. For instance, the researcher Amuvo emphasizes that during the general elections in 2007, Nigeria had no fewer than 50 political parties, many of them very small and with no pretentions of being able to fulfill the constitutional requirements, Parties are hardly present, let alone active on the ground. Members, on their part, are largely fictitious entities” (Lawson: 2010).

Therefore, the general belief that a greater number of political parties lead to democratic development sound rather naïve. The study findings suggest that stability of party systems is an essential pre-condition for legislative oversight effectiveness.

Our final regression has statistically significant results showing a negative relationship between party system fluidity and WGI, which signifies that an increase in party systems fluidity leads to the decrease in all six WGI dimensions. These findings may serve as an additional contribution to Pelizzo and Nwokora (2018) findings that: “unstable party systems undermine the quality of democracy... (therefore) stable party systems are desirable, but some forms of system change are also beneficial to democratic quality.” (Pelizzo&Nwokora, 2018).

Summarizing our finding needless to mention that in/stability of political party systems is quite an ambiguous notion. However, the Index of party systems fluidity elaborated by Nwokora & Pelizzo recently in 2015 may serve as a useful analytic tool for capturing the dynamics of party system changes in different countries of the world. Certainly, legislative oversight and overall government effectiveness depend on many factors, except the stability of party systems also from other political, economic and cultural factors. Summurizing, it is possible to agree with Giovanni Sartori that yet, party era does not begin as long as parties only exist for the notables, as a mere façade; it begins when the party becomes a stabilized group which notable groups can no longer dissolve and abandon at their pressure” (Sartori, 2005).

Therefore, Duvergers “an atomistic nuclear” approach in studying parties and party systems as well as Sartori’s “Parteiraum” (party space) approach of viewing party systems as: “space of de-facto of the interaction of political parties” (Sartori, 2005) both are justified.
Our IPU dataset analysis have shown that Parliamentarians rarely address the Government and do not use the oversight capacity fully therefore many studies both qualitative and quantitative needs to be done to fill the exiting gap the literature in order to define those factors (political, economic and cultural) that hinder legislative oversight effectiveness in Sub-Saharan African countries. At the same time, it is also possible again to draw the attention of scholars to Index of party system fluidity which allows the researchers to analyze the dynamics of party system change of different countries at different historical timeframes. Therefore, we believe it is possible to expect comparative studies capturing party system changes using the index of fluidity in the near future.

CONCLUSION

The article is structured in the following way, the first part analyzes how academic scholarship defines legislative oversight and party system fluidity. The second part presents our data analysis methods. In conclusion, the paper discusses the key findings of the research, namely the effects of party systems fluidity on legislative oversight and WGI, in the context of Sub-Saharan African countries. These findings reaffirm that the stability of political party systems is a crucial factor that is essential for the development of democratic institutions and further evolvement of mechanisms of democratic control of Parliaments over the work of national Governments.

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Table 1. Correlations. Legislative Oversight and Worldwide Governance Indicators (sig.)
Source: Processed by the Author (2020)

|                  | Control of Corruption | Voice and Accountability | Political Stability | Rule of Law | Government Effectiveness | Regulatory Quality |
|------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|-------------|--------------------------|--------------------|
| Number of written questions | .301 (.113) | .429* (.020) | .219 (.254) | .372* (.047) | .478** (.009) | .423* (.022) |
| Number of written questions answered | .246 (.189) | .403* (.027) | .229 (.224) | .352 (.057) | .416* (.022) | .416 (.022) |
| % of written questions answered | .280 (.149) | .059 (.764) | .385* (.043) | .333 (.083) | .378* (.047) | .247 (.205) |

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
Questions asked, questions answered and % of questions are positively and significantly related to the various indicators of governance.

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Table 2. Correlations. Fluidity and Legislative Oversight (sig.)
Source: Processed by the Author (2020)

|                           | Number of written questions asked | Number of written questions answered | Percentage of written questions answered |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Fluidity                  | -.276 (148)                       | -.308 (.098)                         | -.400* (.035)                            |

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3. Fluidity and Worldwide Governance Indicators (sig.)
Source: Processed by the Author (2020)

| fluidity | Control of corruption | Voice and accountability | Political stability | Rule of law | Government effectiveness | Regulatory quality |
|----------|-----------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|-------------|--------------------------|--------------------|
| Fluidity | 1.0                   | -.384** (.008)           | -.296* (.046)       | -.425** (.003) | -.351* (.017)          | -.465** (.001) |
|          |                       |                          |                     |             |                          | -.363 (.013)     |

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

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
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