Understanding the Uneven Playing Field

The Multifaceted Role of Unfair Electoral Competition in a Non-Democratic Regime

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Abstract

If you are running as an opposition candidate in an election in a non-democratic regime, you know that you are running against a candidate who has better access to the state than you. As a result, you are likely to have less resources at your disposal than your opponent, you are likely to receive less attention from the media, and if you need the assistance of supposedly independent arbiters such as the Electoral Management Body (EMB) or the court system, you are less likely to receive that help. All else being equal, you are at a disadvantage. You are competing on an uneven playing field. The opposition candidate understands would understand this, but a researcher would not be able to tell him why or what he can do about it. We still do not systematically understand what variations of unevenness exist, what drives this variation, what consequences it has, or what can be done to alleviate it. This has been the focus of this thesis project.

Minimally competitive but somewhat unfree and radically unfair electoral competitions has become increasingly common since the end of the Cold War, both as a result of authoritarian regimes being forced or volunteered to adopt multiparty elections (Schedler 2006; Levitsky and Way 2010) and more recently as democracies have started backsliding but preserved elections as the institutional path to power (Bermeo 2016). This thesis project contributes to the debate about the role of institutions in non-democracies in general and elections in particular by increasing our understanding of the role of the uneven playing field in non-democracies. It does so by creating a general framework for empirical analysis of the playing field, and applying various aspects of the framework to the analysis of a particular regime: the National Resistance Movement (NRM) regime in Uganda. Through a series of articles, the project uses original data collected over six different fieldworks to describe what kind of variation in the playing field we find both across and within electoral cycles under NRM rule,

as well as how subtle and non-visible practices such as self-censorship in the media are critical for understanding the playing field.

The design of the thesis is premised on recent reviews of the growing literature on election in non-democracies, which all highlight the lack of analyses based on small-to-medium-N studies that are built on general frameworks but nevertheless allow for contextualized and rich empirical descriptions of variations in non-democratic elections (Brancati 2014: 323; Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009: 417; Haggard and Kaufman 2016: 127; Morse 2012: 189). The first set of contributions is conceptual. The basis of the thesis is a general framework constructed for analyzing the contested concept of the playing field. The playing field is defined as the balance between incumbent and opposition in access to resources, media and the law, and the different dimensions of the playing field are operationalized. This disaggregated but general understanding of the playing field allows for context-specific analysis that nevertheless addresses issues that are universal across countries and regimes. The project also addresses conceptual issues tied to complex concepts such as self-censorship and incumbent power retentions strategy.

The second set of contributions is methodological and empirical. First, the project discusses the methodological challenges of collecting data on the playing field in a non-democracy, and highlights the advantages of spending time in the field over longer periods and using interpretive techniques such as word association games. Second, the project utilizes the framework to present empirical mappings of the playing field in Uganda as described above, highlighting how the framework can be used to measure the playing field across time and space within a single regime. Third, the project uses this variation to probe causal questions the focus on both the causes and consequences of the uneven playing field. With regards to

the consequences, it finds that formalization of unfair political competitions can consolidate an authoritarian regime in power that faces dissent from within the regime, but that the costs of doing so might potentially undermine the regime in the long run. However, both the analysis at the national level in Zambia and the analysis at sub-national level in Uganda highlight that the opposition does not necessarily win and incumbent lose when the playing field is at its most even.

With regards to the causes, the thesis highlights that variation in the strategy employed by the incumbent over time affects the tilt of the playing field by affecting the space available to mobilize on and the commercialization of politics. It also highlights that the playing field in the 2016 elections were significantly less uneven in areas where actors outside the regime such as opposition parties or media organizations were present and able to counteract the state-sponsored advantage of the NRM. Finally, it shows that non-observable practices such as self-censorship need to be accounted for when evaluating the playing field. Overall, the thesis shows that the complexity of the playing field deserves more attention than a simple verdict of even or uneven, and that the application of a general framework that allows us to drill deep and scale back up is a good point of departure for systematically doing so.

List of thesis articles

I Helle, S.E. (2016). Defining the playing field. *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft, 10*(1), 47–78.

II Helle, S.E. *Brag, Brawl, or Bribe? Incumbent strategy and the uneven electoral playing field in Uganda* (unpublished manuscript).

III Helle, S.E. *(Un)Fair? Where? Within-country variation in the playing field in the 2016 Ugandan elections* (unpublished manuscript).

IV Helle, S.E. *There are no stories worth your life: Understanding self-censorship discourses in the hybrid regime of Uganda* (unpublished manuscript).

V Helle, S.E. and Rakner, L. The Impact of Elections: The Case of Uganda. In Gerschewski, J. and Merkel, W. *Crisis in Autocratic Regimes*. (Book accepted for publication by Lynne Riener).

Contents

"Democracy means the people support you. If they don't support you, you don't win. That's all."

- President Museveni on first ever Presidential election debate live on Ugandan TV[1]

1. Introduction

Everyone who has ever competed in any sport knows the feeling of injustice when you feel that your opponent is being treated favourably. That your opponent has access to better equipment than you do or that the referee is consistently ruling any marginal decisions in his or her favour. And though you perform better and work harder than your opponent, you are still not able to defeat him, as a result of the unfairness. You are competing on an uneven playing field.

Now imagine that what we are talking about is not a football match, and that this is not just a feeling but actual reality. Not something that takes 90 minutes to finish, and not something that you can distance yourself from after you have taken a shower. Rather, it is something that defines you and the society surrounding you every day. This is the situation facing many opposition politicians in non-democratic countries around the world today. If you are competing as an opposition candidate in a non-democratic regime, you know that you are running against a candidate who has better access to the state than you. As a result, you are likely to have fewer resources at your disposal than your opponent, you are likely to receive less attention from the media, and if you need the assistance of supposedly independent arbiters such as the Electoral Management Body (EMB) or the court system, you are less likely to receive that help or impartial treatment. All else being equal, you are at a disadvantage. You are competing on an uneven playing field. But how do we know this? What is the electoral playing field, and how do we measure it? What factors contribute to the

[1] Quoted in Craig (2016): "A First: Uganda's Museveni takes part in Presidential Debate". Voice of America, 13. February 2016.
[2] Quoted in Munene (2001: 24).
[3] For subscribers to this concept of justice, see Cohen (2009), Dworkin (2000) and Sen (1992).

playing field changing? And what consequences does the playing field have for political competition and regime survival? These questions form the core of this research project and dissertation. The questions are analysed through a range of methodological approaches over time and across space. Empirically, the study focuses on the rule of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) in Uganda in addition to a shadow case of the playing field under the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) rule in Zambia.

Background: The growth of competitive non-democratic regimes

In 1989, Francis Fukuyama famously predicted *the end of history* and the victory of the western liberal democratic ideology (Fukuyama 1989). While he got many things wrong, he correctly predicted the spread of one component of the western liberal democratic system: that of competitive elections. Over the past twenty years the proportion of countries in the world which are holding elections that are competitive to a degree has grown immensely. According to the Database of Political Institutions (DPI) (Beck et al. 2001), in 1989 only about 50% of the countries in the world held presidential or parliamentary elections where the opposition were allowed to field candidates and challenge the ruler to a degree (in presidential elections) or win seats (in parliamentary elections). By 2015 the percentage was close to 90. While it is theoretically possible, by 2017 we still have not seen a genuine democratic nation-state that does not hold at least minimally competitive elections. To put it differently – competitive elections seem to be a necessary condition for democracy.

However, minimally competitive elections are by no means sufficient for democracy. Even though the number of democracies increased in the 1990s and early 2000s, by 2015 only 64% of the countries in the world were considered to pass the minimalist Freedom House definition of an electoral democracy, which lacks several characteristics of a liberal

democracy (Puddington & Roylance 2016: 28). This means that over 20% of the countries in the world hold at least minimally competitive elections in settings that do not even pass this controversial, minimalist threshold. Despite the continued spread of elections, the past ten years have seen a minor democratic withdrawal, and analysts claim to see signs of democratic decline and regression (Bermeo 2016; Diamond 2015; Puddington and Roylance 2016).

These empirical developments led to a shift in focus among scholars of regimes and regime transitions. After democratization and transitology had dominated in the 1990s and early 2000s, the focus of research became more pluralistic, and integrated studies of regimes in the "political gray zone" (Carothers 2002: 9) considered as "something less than electoral democracies" (Diamond 2002: 22). A research agenda on comparative authoritarianism, hybrid regimes and the function of institutions in non-democratic setting quickly emerged. In the past decade, a series of reviews have emerged trying to take stock, identify general findings and highlight what is needed to move forward. The consensus coming out of these debates suggests that institutions in general – and elections in particular – can be drivers in both processes of democratization *and* autocratization. Furthermore, the reviews indicate that in order to understand the role of elections in non-democracies better, we need to create analytical frameworks that allow us to compare critical issues and concepts across contexts without losing contextual details (Brancati 2014; Cassani 2014; Haggard and Kaufman 2016; Lindberg 2009; Morgenbesser 2014; Morse 2012; Schedler 2013). In addition, the empirical analyses need to adapt a more methodologically diverse approach in order to better appreciate and investigate the fundamentally different roles that institutions can play in different settings. Finally, our theories and conclusions also need to be contextually sensitive and provide more attention to conditions of scope.

Project focus and function of introduction

This project aims to contribute to debates about the role of institutions in general and elections in particular by focusing on the causes and consequences of an issue that is fundamental for understanding when elections contribute to democracy or not: electoral fairness. While elections today are often inclusive in the sense that there is universal suffrage and people are allowed to participate, the general level of contestability is lower and incumbents are often systematically favoured (Coppedge 2012: 25; Wahman 2014: 24–25). As Levitsky and Way (2002, 2010a, 2010b) have highlighted in their work on competitive authoritarianism, in case after case, electoral competition in non-democracies is plagued by the incumbent enjoying massive advantages in terms of funding, access to media and the partisan behaviour of supposedly impartial arbiters of power. To analyse this particular form of electoral fairness, the project focuses on the contested concept introduced through the sports metaphor above: the playing field. This concept, which in his thesis is defined as *the balance between incumbent and opposition in access to resources, media and the law*, is a frequently used metaphor for describing the level of fairness in electoral competitions between opposition and incumbent. It has become particularly common to refer to elections characterized by radical unfairness caused by large incumbency advantages as taking place on an "uneven playing field". However, the use and abuse of the playing field have in many ways suffered from the same ailments as the more general literature on elections in non-democratic settings: the concept has been poorly defined and operationalized, and the empirical application has been broad, non-specific and has avoided prodding the underlying issues.

This thesis aims to address these challenges. Following this introduction, a review of the existing literature on non-democratic elections is provided, focusing on strengths, weakness

and the role ascribed to the playing field. Section 3 discusses the methodological challenges of studying the playing field in a non-democracy encountered in the project, and presents an argument for why it is important to collect primary data in order to understand the contextual nature of the playing field. The final section of this introductory article ("kappe") places the main case of Uganda and the shadow case of Zambia within the case universe of non-democratic regimes in Sub-Saharan Africa and discusses the scope of the findings.

Contributions of articles

The focus, methods and findings of the different articles are presented in Table 1. The first contribution of the thesis is the general framework for measuring the playing field presented in the first article. It builds on Levitsky and Way's (2002; 2010a; 2010b) work and defines, conceptualizes and operationalizes the playing field as an analytical concept. The utility of the framework is that it can be used to measure the playing field both at the aggregate and at a disaggregate level, and that it can 'travel' across space and time. Given the essentially contested nature of the playing field, it is crucial to have a clear and common understanding of it before moving to empirical analysis. As the framework can serve as a platform for standardizing measurement of the playing field, this is arguably the most important contribution of this thesis project.

The project applies the framework in several different ways to test its utility and probe the playing field. First, it describes the playing field at the national level over time, using secondary sources in two country cases: Zambia and Uganda. The mapping shows that the playing field varies both over time and between regimes and illustrates how the general playing field can be applied comparatively. The mapping also highlights the advantage of

Table 1: Summary of individual articles in thesis

Study	*Title*	Purpose	Sample	Analytical Method	Cause/ Mechanism	Outcome	Main findings
I	*Defining the playing field*	Presenting the general framework for measuring playing field, show difference from Levitsky and Way's measure	Zambia over 5 electoral cycles	Exploratory process tracing	The playing field	The playing field	Playing field varies significantly over time, components affected by different issues, electoral turnover not when playing field was most even.
II	*Brawl, brag or bribe? Incumbent strategy and the uneven playing field in Uganda*	Measuring the playing field across time, identify if and how regime has tilted playing field	Uganda over 3 electoral cycles	Congruence case study	Incumbent power retention strategy	The playing field	Playing field got more uneven as a result of shift in incumbent strategy from coercion to co-optation.
III	*(Un)Fair? Where? Within-country variation in the playing field in the 2016 Ugandan elections*	Measuring the playing field across subnational space, testing effect of local capacity	Parliamentary constituencies in the 2016 election in Uganda	t-tests Multivariate Regression	Different kinds of local capacity and locality variables	Subnational playing field	Regime applies different strategies for different geographical areas. Opposition capacity seems to affect subnational playing field.
IV	*Understanding self-censorship discourses in the hybrid regime of Uganda*	Identify low visibility practices that affects access to media	Media practitioners in Uganda	Discourse analysis, Comparative Case Analysis	Contextual conditions fostering uncertainty	Self-censorship discourses	Self-censorship is a necessary tool for many Ugandan journalists, especially in areas characterized by isolation and information scarcity.
V	*The Impact of Elections: The Case of Uganda*	Identifying how formalization of power has contributed to regime in Uganda	Uganda over 5 electoral cycles	Process tracing	Formalization of unfair electoral competition	Regime survival	Formalization of political competition has been used as a tool to prevent internal challengers from campaigning as insiders.

Source: Thesis articles

using a disaggregated and continuous framework for measuring the playing field, as the different subcomponents shift at different times, indicating that there are different issues affecting them. The Zambian case furthermore highlights the importance of separating the measurement of the playing field from the effect it has, as the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) did not lose power when the playing field was at its most even. In fact, the article on the sub-national playing field in Uganda also highlights that the link between the uneven playing field and election outcomes might not be as direct and linear as often assumed.

While the general mappings of the playing field are useful for improving our understanding of general shifts in the playing field at the national level, the analysis also highlights that the complexity that they describe is not best investigated in a comparison across countries based on secondary sources. To further investigate how the different components are linked and what the causes and consequences are, the analysis of the playing field delves deeper into the case of elections under the NRM regime in Uganda. Uganda under NRM rule is a particularly interesting case for developing theory about the role of unfair competition in non-democracies, as it is a case where it is ascribed high importance. As section 4 shows, it can be seen as a typical hegemonic authoritarian regime where we would expect the playing field to be uneven. After coming to power in 1986, President Museveni and his NRM regime have gradually introduced and formalized political competition over time, bringing the playing field to prominence as arguably the most problematic issue with regard to the quality of democracy in the country. Both electoral monitoring reports and academic studies have lamented the uneven playing field facing the opposition in every national electoral contest since they were reintroduced in 1996 (EUEOM 2011, 2016; Izama and Wilkerson 2011; Muhumuza 1997, 2009; Perrot et al. 2014; Vokes and Wilkins 2016). However, despite this

ascribed importance, no holistic attempt has until now been made to describe, analyse and understand the playing field across time and space in Uganda.

The empirical analyses of the playing field in Uganda cover both variations over electoral cycles, and across space within the time frame of a single election. This variation is in turn used to theorize both about the causes and the consequences of the playing field. With regard to causes, the temporal analysis highlights that the NRM regime has used the control it gained over both the local and national state apparatus during its first twenty years in power to tilt the electoral playing field after multiparty competition was formalized in 2006. Both during the period of only local electoral competition and after the formalization of the no-party system of electoral competition after 1996, the NRM established control of the state apparatus and essentially used it as a partisan structure. This intertwined relationship has been maintained through various mechanisms after the state was formally separated from the NRM, and has contributed to a tilt in the playing field that has been difficult for the opposition to counteract.

The project also establishes the causal links between changes in incumbent power retention strategies and the playing field in Uganda. Through a congruence analysis, it identifies how a shift in strategy from the NRM after the 2006 elections made them rely less on high intensity coercion and more on co-optation practices. This in turn affected the playing field through closing the space that the opposition had to mobilize on and increasing the costs of political competition by commercializing politics. The analysis thus indicates that while a shift from more overt forms of repression might create more peaceful elections, the absence of over repression might actually be a sign of a less competitive election.

However, these general trends over time still hide significant variation across space within single electoral cycles. By using data from election observers on actual events that took place at the constituency level during the campaigns for the 2016 elections, this project shows that the playing field also needs to be understood as a local phenomenon with local variations and determinants. The data is used to measure the playing field on seven different components, and these show that while the NRM were systematically favoured in most constituencies, there was significant variation in the playing field, and in some of the constituencies the tilt was relatively modest. Analysis of different kinds of constituencies through preliminary t-test and regression analysis that indicates that the local playing field is not significantly affected by incumbent capacity, but rather by the organizational capacity of the opposition to counteract the advantages of the ruling party. In addition, the analysis highlights that the playing field was more even in the more economically affluent central region. The most important finding of the analysis is nevertheless that there seem to be different dynamics at play for different types of constituencies and for the different components of the playing field.

By comparing the discrepancies between the aggregated local playing field and the more general mapping of the playing field at the national level, one issue stands out: access to the media. The general mapping of the playing field highlights that access to the media, though not as uneven as access to resources, was still largely favouring the incumbent, yet the analysis of the local playing field found relatively few instances of the playing field being tilted to the extent that opposition parties and politicians were directly denied access to the media. The project explores this relationship further by analysing the role of a non-observable form of censorship: self-censorship. It finds that a substantial portion of practitioners out of a sample of 30 Ugandan journalists and editors has internalized and adopted a discourse that sees self-censorship as necessary or even positive for practicing journalism in Uganda. The

causes of discourse membership are explored further through a shadow case analysis of the contextual conditions of the individual subscribers. This analysis highlights that working outside the urban Kampala area is a necessary precondition for seeing self-censorship as necessary, and that this seems to be a result of the context, which induces feelings of isolation and information scarcity. The analysis further highlights that journalists are most likely to avoid controversial issues that deal with the power centers of Ugandan politics: the president and the military.

The final contribution of this project focuses on the consequences of electoral competition. The study, which features as a book chapter in an anthology on authoritarian regimes crisis, uses a process tracing of the gradual introduction of formal competition in Uganda to investigate the role of unfair electoral competition in consolidating the NRM regime in power. It highlights that the formalization of unfair competition has allowed Museveni and the ruling elite within NRM to ostracize potential challengers from the Movement, thereby denying them the opportunity to challenge them as regime insiders. Multiparty politics has thus made it easier for the NRM to manage intra-party rivalries, and therefore contributed to stabilizing the regime.

"Politics ... is not like football, deserving a level playing field. Here, you try that and you will be roasted." – Daniel Arap Moi, President of Kenya, 1978–2002[2]

2. Elections in non-democratic regimes

Despite the fact that non-democratic regimes have been the most common regime type throughout history, we know comparatively little about the politics of these regimes relative to democracies (Haber 2008: 693). As light-heartedly described by Svolik, modern political scientists would be much less able to offer productive advice to authoritarian leaders on how to preserve their power than they would to democratic counterparts, as the "contemporary scholarship on dictatorships has so far generated only a fragmented understanding of authoritarian politics" (Svolik 2012: 2). The literature on non-democratic institutions has however grown exponentially over the past fifteen years – rekindling interest in a research field that featured prominently within political science and sociology in the 1960s and '70s (Møller and Skaaning 2013: 8). However, after fifteen years of focus on authoritarian institutions, the discussion about the role of elections in non-democratic institutions is showing few signs of reaching a consensus. This section reviews this literature, and argues that part of the reason why there is so little consensus is that the literature has failed to bridge the gap between detailed, thick, case-based descriptions and probabilistic descriptions at higher levels of generalization. It then presents an argument for why a focus on the playing field can contribute by measuring the conditions for competition rather than the outcome of competition.

Understanding the role of elections as non-democratic institutions

Kaya and Bernhard (2013: 735) and Morgenbesser (2014) argue that currently there are two main approaches to studying elections in non-democracies. One view, which largely follows

[2] Quoted in Munene (2001: 24).

in the footsteps of the transitology and democratization paradigm of the 1990s, focuses on regime change. It postulates that nominally democratic institutions such as parties, legislatures, judiciaries and elections in non-democratic settings must be analysed from the position that they can potentially act in a democratic way, and that it is rather the authoritarian actions and ways that are being used that are preventing them from fulfilling their potential. As a natural consequence of this focus, the outcome of interest is often regime change. The other view, following the classical studies of autocracy by authors like Linz (2000) and Hermet et al. (1978), holds that we should not be surprised that these institutions are not used for democratic purposes, as their logic and purpose is fundamentally different in non-democratic regimes. In the following, the two views are described, followed by a discussion on how the issue of unfair competition and the playing field are treated in both.

Democratic elections with authoritarian practices

Most of the work that immediately followed Carothers' (2002) critique of the transitology paradigm kept a part of the fundamental philosophy of the paradigm intact: that many institutions should be considered as nominally democratic. A careful reading of Levitsky and Way (2002), Schedler (2002; 2006), Howard and Roessler (2006), Lindberg (2009), Magaloni (2006) and Gandhi and Przeworski (2007) reveals that most of the seminal works on the issue in the early period specifically talked about democratic procedures or institutions which were abused through authoritarian practices. The early movers of the literature thus focused on the effect of these institutions on regime change, which has become something of a controversy in subsequent debates.

This is especially so with regard to elections. Numerous articles and books have subsequently focused on if and when elections contribute to change, and what regimes typically follow. The

results are mixed. Lindberg (2006; 2009; 2013) has been one of the foremost advocates of the democratization by election hypothesis, finding that holding elections had an independent positive effect on the presence of liberties in Sub-Saharan Africa. His findings have later been supported by other work on the competitiveness of elections to distinguish between different sorts of regimes, arguing that those with more competitive elections are the most likely to democratize (Brownlee 2007; Epstein et al 2006; Hadenius and Teorell 2007). Others have found that elections can be tools of regime change and democratization, but that this depends on a number of other variables. These include attitudes among the electorate (Zavadskaya and Welzel 2015), opposition cohesion and tactics (Bunce and Wolchik 2010; Donno 2013; Gandhi and Reuter 2013; Howard and Roessler 2006), incumbent economic or organizational strength (Levitsky and Way 2010), state capacity (Seeberg 2014), financial autonomy of the business sector (Arriola 2013) and international factors (Donno 2013; Levitsky and Way 2010; Tolstrup 2015). Others have pointed out that while regimes with nominally democratic institutions such as competitive elections are more likely to face protests and break down; they are not necessarily more likely to democratize (Knutsen and Nygård 2015; Shirah 2016). This is contradicted by those who see more competitive authoritarian regimes as less likely to break down but more likely to democratize when they do (Donno 2013). A further intermediate category argues that elections in and by themselves show little effect in either direction (Bogaards 2013; Kaya and Bernhard 2013; Wahman 2013).

Elections as non-democratic tools

By the early 2010s, the focus had nevertheless shifted to explaining the cases where institutions and elections seemed to consolidate autocracy. These studies typically emphasized the non-democratic functions of these institutions identified by Linz (2000) and Hermet et al. (1978) decades earlier, and therefore focus on the role they serve for the

incumbent rather than the interplay between opposition and incumbent. In a 2009 review, Gandhi and Lust-Okar highlighted that the framework for studying elections under authoritarian rule has been adopted from studies of democratic elections. Instead, they argued that studies of autocratic elections should focus on the autocratic institutional functions, and especially the micro-level dynamics of authoritarian elections. They concluded that "until we explore these questions, we remain unable to understand fully the politics of authoritarianism and also, ironically, unable to determine the relationship between authoritarian elections and democratization" (Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009: 404). Subsequently a wealth of research has been focused on highlighting the role that elections play in consolidating authoritarian rule.

The literature has identified at least three different authoritarian purposes of elections. They serve as a tool of elite management, by allowing the incumbent to co-opt actors outside the regime (Gandhi 2008; Gerschewski 2013; Svolik 2008; Wright 2008), to ensure a fair distribution of resources among elites (Blaydes 2011; Lust-Okar 2006; Morgenbesser 2014), and maintain cohesion and avoid defections (Boix and Svolik 2013; Magaloni 2006). They serve informational purposes in that they supply the incumbent with information both on their own support, the strength of the opposition and the loyalty of those within the regime (Brownlee 2007; Malesky and Schuler 2011; Miller 2015; Schedler 2013). Finally, they serve as a legitimation tool for the regime, both with regard to the domestic and the international population (Gerschewski 2013; Morgenbesser 2014). This line of literature is thus particularly good at identifying the mechanisms through which elections stabilize authoritarian rule.

It has also brought to the fore some more fundamental critiques of studies of elections in authoritarian regimes. The most important one is arguably Pepinsky's (2014). He argues that social scientists are still struggling to solve the issue of the possible epiphenominality of

institutions. For institutions to have the effect that they are hypothesized to have in the literature, they must bind behaviour. However, since most studies assume that elections and other institutions in non-democracies are not performing the functions they are supposed to, they obviously are not binding behaviour. They must therefore be epiphenomenal to some underlying issues, such as incumbent interests or political economic variables. In Pepinsky's view, it is therefore not strange that cross-national research designs have largely failed to provide systematic evidence that institutions change outcomes independently of their own origins – whether these are the balance of power between ruling elites or social conflicts more generally. While the work on institutions has proved that theoretically, institutions should matter, and that there is a correlation between institutions and outcomes such as growth, poverty alleviation and democracy (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012; Svolik 2012), we do not know whether the correlation is a result of causation or a result of other endogenous causes.

We simply do not know for certain if and under which conditions institutions stop being epiphenomenal to elite interests or social conflicts and act to their purpose as institutions that restrain power. Morgenbesser (2014) similarly argues that we must stop treating the effects of elections as universal, and instead isolate their meaning in each individual case. On a related note, Brancati (2013: 322) argues that a problem with the literature so far is that it fails to distinguish between the reasons why regimes adopt certain institutions and the purpose that they serve, once adopted, and the consequences thereof. Arguably, Gandhi and Lust-Okar state it most explicitly when they say that we should stop making universal claims based on a subset of cases and instead focus on smaller variations to isolate effects (Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009: 407). In an attempted response to this sort of critique, Knutsen et al (2017) have recently highlighted that we need to distinguish between elections as events and institutions. By doing so and applying their logic to a cross-national dataset on elections and regime

breakdown, they find strong evidence that on average, elections expose non-democracies to risk in the short run, and some, but weaker evidence that the effect is the opposite in the long run: elections as institutions strengthen non-democracies. The research field is thus slowly starting to unwrap the grey box of elections and look at how the different components work separately in different contexts.

To sum up: The literature on elections in non-democracies faces two challenges. First, the different approaches are not talking to each other because the different strands are investigating different things; the literature based within regime change and democratization is focusing on isolating the overall effect of elections, whereas the literature seeing elections as survival tools of the incumbent is focusing on producing mechanistic evidence of when, how and why elections stabilize an authoritarian regime. I would argue that this challenge is not as large as portrayed by Pepinsky (2014) and Morgenbesser (2014). While they are right in pointing out that the assumption of the literature on regime change that elections are by nature vehicles of democratization, is an ontological point that does not necessarily matter if one simply view elections as an arena in which a competition/contest takes place between the incumbent and its opponent, and that this arena in turn is affected by underlying causes. This is the approach of this project. In essence, this project views an election as a frame that allows one to view the underlying relationship between the opposition and incumbent more broadly. Furthermore, Pepinsky's (2014) and Morgenbesser's (2014) critiques do not really address Schedler's (2002b; 2013) point that elections are by their nature difficult to control, and that it is difficult to know in advance if they are authoritarian vehicles or not. It therefore makes sense to study elections as a game played in an arena where the incumbent usually has an advantage as they have the power to control and manipulate elections through the "menu of manipulation" (Schedler 2002), but where the effect of this toolkit is not always clear *ex-ante*

and the opposition can still potentially win. From this point of view, both the literature on regime change through elections and the literature on authoritarian persistence through elections can teach valuable lessons. They just need to clarify that they are addressing different aspects of the contest.

The second and arguably more difficult challenge is the challenge of causal determinism versus probabilism. As the critique above highlights, the literature has up until now focused mostly on the average effects of elections, instead of determining when and where they matter. However, given the previous point that elections play fundamentally different roles in democracies and non-democracies, looking for average effects of the institution itself will almost by default create numerous anomalies and poorly explained events. The first step in solving this is thus to do as Knutsen et al. (2017) does, and separate elections as institutions from elections as events. However, the approach of Knutsen et al. still focuses on the elections themselves, rather than looking at elections as arenas where they serve shifting purposes. This makes sense if one is interested in finding the average effects of the different functions of elections, but not if one is interested in finding out how and why they play the role they do in concrete instances. If this is the goal, then thick, descriptive case studies of individual elections and their shifting role over time in one regime is needed in order to understand a causally complex phenomenon. As this project illustrates, elections are extremely heterogeneous institutions, and even within a single regime they vary over space and time. Identifying their forms and functions alone is a big task – and the point we need to depart from before we shift our focus to other cases and contexts.

The importance of electoral fairness

If elections are understood as a frame for studying competition between incumbent and opposition, freedom and fairness of elections become essential. As has been recently pointed out by scholars such as Coppedge (2012: 25), Levitsky and Way (2010) and Wahman (2014), competition in non-democracies is more often characterized by radical unfairness than it is by a lack of freedom per se. Both Schedler (2002a: 46) and Albaugh (2011) illustrate how authoritarian incumbents have a lot of ways in which they can affect electoral fairness at an arguably lower cost than the available tools that they can use to affect electoral freedom. This might be because electoral fairness is somewhat more ambiguous and hard to define than freedom.

However, a careful reading of most common democracy definitions shows the importance of fairness for democracy. According to most classic procedural definitions, elections are not competitive unless they provide citizens and candidates relatively equal opportunities to contest for votes through fair competition (Skaaning and Møller 2013: 32–33). Dahl's definition of polyarchy (1971) and democracy (1989) are arguably the two most used procedural definitions of democracy. In his work on polyarchy, Dahl posits that several aspects of fair political competition are necessary (but not sufficient) for democracy. These include the right of political leaders to compete for office, the right to alternative sources of information, and the right to participate in free and fair elections (Dahl 1971: 3). Competition and fairness feature in definitions of democracy as different as the minimalist definition of Schumpeter (1974 [1942]), which emphasizes that democracy is about competition for power, and egalitarian definitions of democracy postulate that there must be a relatively equal distribution of resources in society in order for political competition to be fair and democratic (Møller and Skaaning 2013: 33–34, but see Spinner-Halev [1995] for a critique of the

emphasis on equality in egalitarian democracy). The issue has attracted further attention as the group of countries in the world that portray themselves as, and are deemed, democracies have grown exponentially since the early 1990s, although the only thing that seems to be common among these regimes is that they hold "competitive elections" (Møller and Skaaning 2013: 8).

However, stating that an election must be "competitive" or "free and fair" does not really answer the question of *how* electoral competition becomes competitive or free and fair and *why* it is so. Morgenbesser (2014: 33) argues that the presence of a sufficiently fair electoral system allows for free and fair elections, and that this in turn is what separates a democratic from a non-democratic contest. While it is not entirely clear why it is the electoral system that is key for electoral fairness, it highlights the importance of separating cause from outcome when it comes to electoral fairness. One of the clearest advocates of studying competition as a matter distinct from democracy is Bartolini (1999; 2000). While acknowledging that contestability is a part of the definition of democracy, we should nevertheless empirically separate the two to identify when, how and why it is relevant for democracy. Specifically, he advocates thinking about what levels of competition are required for different forms of democratic mechanisms such as accountability and responsiveness. He argues that for accountability to be present, elections have to be at least contestable, whereas for responsiveness to be present, they need to be competitive (Bartolini 1999: 450). In other words, for democracy to be present, elections need to be at least contestable and preferably competitive. He finds that for elections to be contestable, they need electoral vulnerability of incumbents, which in turn is contingent on voters being able and willing to punish and reward different politicians. For this to be the case, the voters must have different options available to them (Bartolini 1999: 454). And in order for these different options to exist, barriers that prevent the formation of alternatives must not exist. Among such barriers is "the possibility of

accessing the resources necessary for an electoral race with the other (access to media, coverage of activities, public money for campaigning, etc.)" (Bartolini 1999: 457). These issues should thus be studied separately from their subsequent effect on competition.

The playing field as a way of studying electoral unfairness

The starting point of this thesis is that the concept of the electoral playing field offers the best analytical tools for addressing the fairness of political competition, precisely because it addresses the issues of access to resources and the media. The concept is a metaphor that has been used throughout history to describe causes of advantages and disadvantages in other competitions such as war and sport (Safire 2008: 387). As an analytical social science concept, it has emerged from discussions on distributive justice where it has been defined as a particular form of justice: "justice requires levelling the playing field by rendering everyone's opportunities equal in an appropriate sense, and then letting individual choices and their effects dictate further outcomes" (Arneson 2008: 16). It is thus fundamentally about equality of opportunity.[3] With regard to elections, the concept appeared as a frequently used linguistic image, as more and more countries started holding elections after the end of the Cold War (Bjornlund 2004, Elklit and Svensson 1997). One of the earliest instances of systematic use was with regards to the 1994 election in South Africa, where the concept was used to describe a situation where none of the parties that participated in the election had enjoyed an advantage due to unfair conditions, such as unequal access to the media (Elklit and Svensson 1997: 36). This kind of use subsequently exploded, and the concept was mainstreamed by democracy promotion agencies such as NDI and IFES.[4] It also started emerging in academic articles, and the term was frequently referenced in case studies of contested elections, particularly in

[3] For subscribers to this concept of justice, see Cohen (2009), Dworkin (2000) and Sen (1992).
[4] See, for example Goodwin-Gill (1998) and Merloe (1997).

African countries.[5] However, the usage remained arbitrary, as it was never properly defined what the playing field was, what it entailed or how it could be measured.

This changed somewhat after Levitsky and Way wrote their influential article on competitive authoritarianism in 2002. They introduce the concept of the uneven playing field, defined as access to resources, media and the state, and argue that it is one of three issues that fundamentally separate comparative authoritarian regimes from democracies (Levitsky and Way 2002: 53). Their view of the playing field has been substantiated through subsequent work (2010a, 2010b), and their measurement is presented in the appendix of their 2010 book. They are thus the first to operationalize and measure the uneven playing field systematically, defining it as:

> "an uneven playing field as one in which incumbent abuse of the state generates such disparities in access to resources, media, or state institutions that opposition parties' ability to organize and compete for national office is seriously impaired (Levitsky and Way 2010b: 57).

While this was a large step forward for a concept that previously had been used without being systematized, Levitsky and Way's conceptualization, operationalization and measurement still does not lend itself well to comparative, empirical analyses of unfair competition more broadly. This is because it is not Levitsky and Way's purpose with the concept. They use it to distinguish between democracy and non-democracy, in which it makes sense to create a dichotomous concept that subsumes a causal relationship within it. However, if the purpose is to map and document variation in the uneven playing field, then Levitsky and Way's measure

[5] See for example Ajulu (1998), Barnes (1994), Gyimah-Boadi (1994), Harris (1999), Jeffries (1994), Oquaye (1995), Saine (1997) and Steeves (1999).

Table 2: A framework for measuring the playing field: Attributes, components and indicators

Attribute	Component	Indicators
1. Access to resources	1. Internal funding	1. Do both the opposition and incumbent have fair opportunities to recruit fee-paying party members and establish party businesses and income schemes? If not, who is favoured and to what degree?
	2. Private funding	1. Are wealthy individuals and businesses allowed to contribute with funds and resources to the political party or candidate of their preference without fear of harassment or of facing harassment? If not, who is favoured and to what degree?
	3. Public funding	1. Are the criteria and disbursement for regular public funding of political parties between elections fair? If not, who is favoured and to what degree? 2. Are parties allocated public campaign funding fairly and in due time before the election? If not, who is favoured and to what degree?
	4. Illicit public funding	1. Are public funds used for partisan purposes in a non-legal fashion? If so, who is favoured and to what degree? 2. Are public resources (material, transportation, offices, and employees) used for partisan purposes and functions? If so, who is favoured and to what degree? 3. Are public appointments to the bureaucracy based on partisanship? If so, who is favoured and to what degree? 4. Are public programs implemented on a partisan basis? If so, who is favoured and to what degree?
	5. Foreign funding	1. Are political parties and candidates allowed to raise funds from foreign sources on an equitable basis? If not, who is favoured and to what degree? 2. Are political parties and candidates allowed to raise funds from the diaspora on an equitable basis? If not, who is favoured and to what degree?
2. Access to media	1. Private media	1. Is ownership of private media partisan based, and are private media free to publish what they want about both the opposition and the incumbent without censorship or fear of harassment? If not, who is favoured and to what degree?
	2. Public media	1. Is access to coverage in public media equal and coverage neutral between incumbent and opposition? If not, who is favoured and to what degree?
	3. Popular, communal and social media	1. Is access to communal media and popular media partisan-based? If so, who is favoured and to what degree? 2. Are all political actors allowed to access and use social media? If not, who is favoured and to what degree?
3. Access to law	1. EMB	1. Is the EMB neutral in terms of representation for incumbent and opposition, and does it accept and treat content and complaints fairly from both the incumbent and the opposition? If not who is favoured and to what degree?
	2. Courts	1. Are all political parties and candidates allowed to forward their complaints to the courts equally, and are complaints treated in an unbiased fashion and without undue influence by external parties? If not, who is favoured and to what degree?

Source: Copied from Helle (2016: 54)

suffers from conceptual redundancy, hides important variation and includes causal relationships that might be tested if one first measures the playing field separately and then test the casual relationship.[6]

This thesis therefore expands on Levitsky and Way's definition and clarifies the concept of the playing field. The concept is organized in a four-level hierarchy that enables disaggregation and difference making, something that is extremely important when focusing on multifaceted concepts (Coppedge 2012: 311–12). The playing field is defined as the balance between incumbent and opposition in access to resources, media and the law, and Table 2 presents the different attributes, components and indicators of the playing field. It is continuous in nature rather than the Levitsky and Way's dichotomous framework. The study of Zambia highlights that as a result dichotomization and inclusion of causal relationships within the concept, Levitsky and Way's framework picture the playing field as static when it is in fact relatively fluid. The framework can be used to measure the playing field across cases with general empirical evidence based on secondary sources, but its real strength is that it can also be used as a guide when collecting primary data. This project uses it for both, and shows that it can be used to investigate a number of issues both about the causes and consequences of the uneven playing field.

This approach differs markedly from the way that the issue of the playing field has been treated in the literature on non-democratic elections thus far. As is evident from Table 3, which highlights the studies where the playing field or unfair competition features most explicitly or implicitly, the concept has been used either to distinguish between fair and unfair elections or to separate democracy and autocracy. That is also why most of the studies on the

[6] For a more substantive debate of these issues, see thesis article I.

list focus on regime change. The playing field simply has not been interesting for anything but case selection, as long as it has been operationalized dichotomously. This is a pity, given that most of the studies from both sides of the literature actually show how variation exists in the playing field. The studies of regime change often show indirectly how this balance shifts as a result of opposition actions (i.e. Howard and Roessler 2006), while the literature on elections as autocratic tools often shows how incumbent actions affect the playing field over time (Magaloni 2006). However, since the playing field is either not conceptualized at all or as a dichotomy, variation across time and space is not given the attention it deserves. The only exception to date is the new framework by Bishop and Hoeffler (2016), that uses concrete events to measure how free and fair elections are, thus providing a more diverse picture. However, their definition of fairness as something that only deals with events that happen on Election Day flies in the face of common knowledge on electoral fairness that precisely highlights that it is something affected by events throughout the electoral cycle (Bjornlund 2004; Schedler 2002). It is therefore necessary to focus explicitly on the playing field, using a general framework that allows for more detailed and context-specific explanations. The next section shows how this thesis has done this by a using a multi-method design that focuses on several aspects of the playing field on a main case and a shadow case.

Table 3: Selection of studies of the role of elections in non-democracies that implicitly or explicitly focuses on the playing field or unfair competition, 2002-2016

Study	Research Question	Study type	Outcome of interest	Main explanation	Role of playing field
Schedler (2002)	How can incumbents control elections?	Review/ Comparative	Control of elections	Outcome of electoral and institutional game decides	*Explicit.* Unfair competition one of tactics used by incumbent in game.
Magaloni (2006)	How did the PRI regime in Mexico preserve its power?	Case study (multi method)	Regime stability	Elections used to mobilize citizens and prevent elite splits	*Implicit.* Shows how PRI regime used control of state to mobilize electorate and prevent fair competition during elections.
Howard & Roessler (2006)	What contributes to elections that lead to regime change in competitive authoritarian regimes?	Global (regression + case study)	Liberalizing electoral outcomes (shift in Polity/FH score in election year)	Elections can lead to change when opposition elites form strategic coalition	*Explicit.* Tilting the playing field is the stabilizing mechanism that authoritarians use to control elections; article identifies practices to combat it.
Lindberg (2006)	What role do elections play in processes of democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa?	Regional (large-*n* regression)	Democratization (Freedom House civil liberties increase)	Countries that hold *de jure* free and fair elections become more democratic *de facto* over time.	*Implicit.* Measures whether elections are free and fair based on qualitative judgments, and level of competition based on election outcomes
Bunce and Wolchik (2011)	Why do some authoritarian leaders lose power in semi-competitive elections in Eastern Europe?	Regional (medium-*n* comparative study)	Opposition victories in elections	Opposition strategic behavior, organization and coalition can foster victories if incumbent has lost public support	*Explicit.* Defines sample of cases. Tilting the playing field is stabilizing mechanism that needs to be combatted.
Levitsky & Way (2010)	What affects regime trajectory of competitive authoritarian regimes?	Global (large-*n* comparative study)	Regime stability or change (change/stability in playing field + other indicators)	Linkage to the west explains democratization through elections	*Explicit.* Used to separate between competitive authoritarian and democratic regimes
Donno (2013)	When do elections in authoritarian regimes lead to democracy?	Global (large-*n* regression)	Democratization (transition to Freedom House electoral democracy in year of election)	Competitive regimes more likely to lose and democratize if opposition coalition or foreign pressure	*Implicit.* Defining feature of an electoral authoritarian regime, and what separates democratic from non-democratic elections.
Gandhi and Reuter (2013)	When do opposition parties in non-democracies form electoral coalitions	Global (large-*n* regression)	Opposition coalition (historical data)	Presence of institutionalized opposition party and government harassment makes coalition more likely	*Implicit.* Playing field is term used to describe what separates democratic from autocratic contests.
Wahman (2014)	When do opposition victories lead to democratization?	Regional (small-*n* comparative study)	Democratization after opposition victory (uses Levitsky and Way's classification)	Institutionalized parties and party systems will lead to democratization when opposition wins power.	*Explicit.* Demise of uneven playing field outcome of interests. Explains why some regimes that come to power in elections maintain uneven playing field of regime they replaced.
Bishop and Hoeffler (2016)	What makes elections free and fair?	Global (large-*n* regression)	Free and fair elections (uses new measurement based on concrete events)	Shows correlation with number of variables (income, executive constraints, aid)	*Explicit.* First attempt to measure fairness alone, but employs very narrow definition (only events on election day)

Source: Author's summary of respective articles

3. Methodological lessons: multi-method research in a non-democracy

> *"One and a half hours, several phone calls back and forth between my driver and the head of security and at least five different wrong turns and dirt roads later, we started hearing the hallmark of a Ugandan campaign: a big sound system blasting out music and political appeals. Soon we saw four cars parked outside a large yard bordered by houses. The crowd in the yard counted over a hundred. Kids and youths standing at the edge started shouting 'mzungu'. The head of security appeared saying that the MP was busy, but I could join him now whilst others were speaking. I said that I preferred talking in private, but he said there would be no time. So, I left the car, and followed him inside the circle of people. A woman was holding a speech in a local language. I was led to the center of the circle where the MP was seated on a big wooden chair. A man got a chair for me and told me to sit next to the MP. I introduced myself and started asking him questions, simultaneously trying to ignore and soak up events around me. It was obvious that the locals found my presence amusing. The MP answered my questions in general terms while simultaneously answering questions from his associates as well. One of the associates was showing him numbers written down in a blue book, next to the words 'women' and 'youth'. Several numbers were crossed over, and new ones written down. The associate disappeared into the crowd. I went back to my questions but my time was up – it was the MP's turn to speak. We could talk more in the next village. Walking back to the car, I saw that most of the young men were crowding around a fellow youth who was holding some cash. The youths were holding his shirt as they collectively left the scene. Probably going to divide the spoils. I waited in the car until the motorcade left for the next village."*[7]

The above excerpt from the field notes from my fieldwork in Uganda in February 2016 highlights some of the practical and methodological challenges of collecting primary data on elections in a non-democratic regime in Sub-Saharan Africa. In essence, one is dealing with actors who are extremely busy, have either too little or too much incentive for sharing information, and who often either do not trust you or have talked to so many researchers and donors that they 'know' what to say and not. You are working in less than ideal circumstances

[7] From field notes after interview with MP running for re-election in Eastern Ugandan constituency, Feb. 2016.

in terms of time, language, facilities, and surroundings, and you will often spend a lot your time either waiting for people to show up or accepting that they will not show up at all. And, perhaps most importantly, by collecting data you risk becoming a tiny player in the ever going "electoral" and "regime"-games continuously played by the regime and the opposition in electoral non-democracies (Schedler 2013). It is hard to avoid becoming a part to the process that one is studying. A few weeks before the 2016 elections I sat in on a meeting where a disgruntled former NRM candidate whom I had never met before, met one of my opposition contacts and another notable opposition politician. I was introduced but otherwise not included in the conversation, though they talked English when they could have talked a local language. In the meeting, the former NRM candidate actively solicited support from my contact and his friend, and discussed the intricacies of the local NRM conflicts. After the discussion had ended, I realised that my presence as my contact's 'friend' might have affected his credibility in the negotiations – and that he was likely aware of it in advance. I thus affected a tiny portion of the thing I was studying.

The two stories also highlights the significant benefits of collecting primary data. By being in the field, one observes, hears and is told things that one would not otherwise have done – in this case I was able to observe a negotiation between local village leaders and an incumbent MP over the transfer of promised payments for "village development funds"[8], and a defection negotiation meeting – both things one seldom reads about and certainly cannot appreciate the meaning of from secondary sources. And by being in the field several times over a period of a couple of years, one gradually build up trust that allows access to places, events and conversations that one would not otherwise have gotten access to. I would not have been able to visit this MP during his campaign if I had not talked to other leaders in his party over a

[8] This was what people in the MP's retinue referred to it as later on.

period of time, as these leaders were the ones that recommended that I talk to him and vouched for me.

This section addresses what I consider to be the key methodological challenges and implications of my project. It focuses on the multi-method data collection and fieldwork as well as ethical considerations in doing so. It also touches on issues concerning the analytical methods used in the thesis article, and the limits to these, but it does not do so at length as this is also addressed in the articles. After first presenting the data collection efforts linked to this project, the rest of the chapter is structured around the particular challenges that hybrid regimes pose for data collection and analysis as identified by Goode (2010: 1056): personal security, informant security, access to information and informants, reliability, verifiability, validity and quality of data, and choice of analytical tools.

A multi-method approach

The methodological approach employed is founded in a methodological pragmatist position: there is no best method, and different methods often provide different pieces of the total puzzle we are interested in. It is therefore not surprising that the approach employed is multi-method. Mixed- or multi-method designs differ in many ways, but Greene et al. (1989: 259) highlight that most projects and studies that apply such an approach do it to achieve triangulation, complementarity, development, initiation or expansion.

Figure 1: Advantages and goals when doing multi-method research

- When *triangulating* one adds evidence from different sources to corroborate and strengthen your arguments.
- *Complementarity* is achieved when the results from one method are used to inform or elaborate on the results from another method.
- To achieve *development* one uses the results of one method to inform the application of another method.
- One can compare the results of studies using different methods to identify paradoxes, and interesting objects of enquiry to *initiate* further research.
- One can use different methods to study different components and thus *expand* the range of inquiry of the project/analysis.

Source: Adapted from Greene at al. (1989: 259)

The project reflects all these issues. Most of the thesis articles emphasize triangulation, and use data from a wealth of different sources. Triangulation is closely tied to the analytical method of process tracing, variants of which are applied in three of the thesis articles. As the strength of a process tracing analysis depends fully on the quality of the case-specific evidence provided, triangulation is crucial for these types of analysis (Gerring 2007: 173). Fieldwork, though not a prerequisite for triangulation, often strengthens it, as it provides access to new forms of data that otherwise would be difficult to access (Tansey 2007: 766). The project is based on a complementary logic as all the different thesis articles highlight relevant aspects of the playing field, and must be seen together in order to understand the development of the playing field under NRM rule in Uganda as a whole. The different articles were also initiated and developed partly as a result of empirical results and methodological weaknesses identified when working on different aspects of the playing field in different articles. The article on the sub-national playing field was for example initiated in order to refine the somewhat general mapping of the playing field in Uganda that could be done using secondary sources. The realization that access to media was not satisfactorily measured using

only observable instances of censorship triggered my interest in self-censorship. Finally, the construction of a general rather than case-specific framework for measuring the playing field was applied precisely because the idea is to expand on the findings of this project and test its conclusion on cases other than Uganda and the shadow case of Zambia.

Having presented the reasons for why the project is framed as a multi-method design, it might also be beneficial to clarify what it is not. First, it is not a unified mixed-method design, in the sense that it does not represent "research that involves collecting, analysing, and interpreting quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or in a series of studies that investigate the same underlying phenomenon" (Leech and Onwuegbuzie 2009: 267). While the project and all thesis articles deal with the phenomenon of the playing field, it does not investigate the same underlying phenomenon in the sense that there is no uniform causal relationship that is examined across articles. It treats the playing field both as a cause and an outcome, and investigates it at different levels and with different approaches. While several articles are mixed method in the sense that they employ both dataset and qualitative information, only the article on self-censorship applies several sets of analytical techniques within the same analysis. While the project integrates lessons, techniques and perspectives from both qualitative and quantitative methodology, it is not a mixed method study in the strict sense of the word.

Neither does the project use a mixed method design to identify and choose the specific cases for qualitative analysis, something that arguably is the most common usage of mixed methods in political science. In the aftermath of Lieberman's (2005) coinage of the term "nested analysis", a growing literature has explored the many ways in which mixed methods can be used in order to improve techniques for case selection in small-*n* studies (cf. Rohlfing 2008;

Rohlfing and Starke 2013; Seawright 2016; Seawright and Gerring 2008; Weller and Barnes 2016). Much of this literature advocates an integrated design where the research question is first investigated through a quantitative analysis and a qualitative case is chosen for further analysis based on the results of the quantitative analysis. Alternatively, one does not have to run the whole quantitative analysis but the mixed design should nevertheless account for what type of case one is selecting for intensive study before conducting the study. This project has not followed such an integrated mixed methods design, as the scope of the project made it necessary to prioritize between thick descriptions of the playing field in one case and thin descriptions of the playing field across a universe of cases. The former was chosen. However, the absence of an integrated mixed methods design for case selection does not mean that we should not try to be clear about what type of cases we investigate and how they fit into wider case universes. These issues are dealt with in Section 4, as the rest of this section focuses on describing the multi-method techniques employed in this thesis project.

Data collection and analysis in a non-democratic regime

In her review of the literature on institutions in non-democracies, Brancati argues that this literature "is unlikely to ever provide evidence for the effect of these institutions on par with the kind of evidence provided about institutions in advanced democracies, and no one should expect it to" (Brancati 2014: 324). However, she is equally right when saying that this does not mean that the literature is not important – it is necessary to make certain methodological compromises to gain knowledge on authoritarian regimes (Brancati 2014: 324). And these methodological compromises require adapting to the non-democratic setting we are operating in, and being methodologically innovative in order to do so (Goode 2010). The overarching methodological approach of this project reflects these issues. It has been methodologically

pragmatic, driven by the questions that I have sought to answer, and the restrictions imposed by the setting in which I have had to answer them.

Table 4: Overview of fieldworks in Uganda, 2010-2016

Period	Duration	Target informant group	No. formal interviews	Aim
Dec '10	2 weeks	Representatives from political parties, media, local experts, election administration (EC)	16	Gain understanding of access to resources in 2011 elections (past project but used data in thesis).
Dec '13	1 week	Meet former contacts in other political parties, experts, EC.	9	Reinterview past contacts about 2011 elections. Investigate post-election developments, prospects for 2016.
Dec '14	2 weeks	Gain initial contacts at State House and Judiciary. Additional contacts in NRM, media, civil society. Deepen ties with contacts in opposition parties.	12	Investigate internal developments in NRM and opposition. Initial inquiries for media/sub-national studies. Prepare/ gain permits for 2016 election.
Oct '15	2 weeks	Media practitioners, party representatives, candidates, EC, media authorities, Judiciary, Legal team of candidates.	13	Start of data collection on self-censorship. Follow up on NRM primaries/ start of campaign. Prepare for main fieldwork, recruit research assistant, evaluate observation missions.
Jan-Feb '16	5 weeks	Party officials and candidates, media practitioners, experts, other scholars, judges.	29	Observe elections. Follow candidates in campaign. Interview political party representatives, media, EC, judiciary, experts.
Sep '16	1 week	Political party representatives, EC, CSOs	5	Reinterview party contacts. Gain access to election observation data. Follow up on URN survey.

Source: Authors own summary based on field notes

All in all, this dissertation is a result of 13 weeks collecting primary and secondary data in Uganda, spread out over six different fieldwork tours ranging from December 2010 to October 2016. Table 4 highlights the different targets and aims of the fieldwork; 84 semi-structured key informant interviews have been carried out, recorded and transcribed. Several informants have been re-interviewed at different points in time from 2010 to 2016 in order to gauge changing opinions and preferences. Focus groups and word-association games have been used to investigate opinions on self-censorship. Numerous off-the-record conversations

and informal interviews have been held that have increased the general understanding of the political situation in Uganda. Both survey and register data has been collected, and datasets compiled. Three notebooks are filled with field notes and observations made through participant observation or in an interview setting. I have also gained access to secondary data that I would not been within reach if I had not spent a significant amount of time networking spread out over several stays in the country – the article on subnational variation in the playing field is based on electoral observer data that it took a me a long time to gain access to, as the organizations sitting on where reluctant to trust a non-associated researcher. Spending time in Uganda every year except 2012 during the 2011–2016 electoral cycle allowed me to interview and observe the same people and processes over time, and therefore gain an understanding of the playing field at different stages of the electoral cycle.

Table 5: Data and analytical methods in individual articles

Study	***Title***	**Empirical data used**	**Analytical method**
I	*Defining the playing field*	Secondary data from open and available secondary sources	Exploratory congruence study
II	*Brawl or bribe? Tracing the uneven electoral playing field in Uganda, 2006-2016*	Primary data from interviews, observations. Secondary data, both collected and from open and available sources	Congruence case study
III	*(Un)Fair? Where? Within-country variation in the playing field in the 2016 Ugandan elections*	Secondary data, confidential weekly reports from local election observation mission, altered to dataset observations. Primary data from interviews, observations.	T-test, Regression
IV	*Understanding self-censorship discourses in the hybrid regime of Uganda*	Primary data from interviews, focus groups, e-mail survey, observations. Secondary data, both collected and from open and available sources.	Discourse analysis, Comparative Case Analysis
V	*The Impact of Elections: The Case of Uganda*	Primary data from interviews, observations. Secondary data, both collected and from open and available sources	Process tracing

Source: Summary of thesis articles

Table 5 presents the methodological features of the five thesis articles. Only one does not use primary data collected during fieldwork, and that is because it focuses on the shadow case of

Zambia. Both of the articles on Uganda which use process tracing rely heavily on primary data from interviews and participant observation. They also rely on secondary data such as local reports that would have been difficult to identify and acquire if no fieldwork had been conducted.

The self-censorship article relies heavily on primary data collected during the October 2015 and January/February 2016 fieldwork, which includes over 20 interviews with media practitioners and an email survey of coordinators working for a content service. The inception and design of the article were also affected by several key informant interviews carried out during earlier fieldwork. The continued contact with this content provider and its journalist was key in establishing the trust required for the email survey to be allowed. The data collection process for this article also underscored Malekzadeh's (2016) and Goode's (2010: 1070) point about being creative when one collects data in authoritarian regimes. While I had planned to conduct word association games before entering the field, I got mixed results when I ran some preliminary trials. However, when I by chance started to write down some issues that I wanted the respondents to classify on paper notes, I noticed that having physical notes and being told to place them on a continuum made the respondents relate more to the questions, and open up about their thoughts surrounding the issue. I subsequently adopted the use of physical paper cards for the games.

The article on the subnational playing field uses interview material from many of the fieldwork tours, but is primarily based on a dataset acquired through a local monitoring mission. These data were considered quite sensitive by the organizations behind the monitoring mission, and they would only release them to me after I had interacted with them over time. And after I got access, there was still a considerable job in cleaning the data for

errors, something which would have been impossible if I could not liaison with the people who knew the data collection process. The data would thus have been impossible to acquire and make sense of without doing fieldwork. It is thus safe to say that this thesis project would not have made much headway without the extensive periods of time spent in the field. The layout of the data used in the different thesis articles is presented and discussed quite thoroughly in each article, but the process and challenges surrounding the collection and analysis are not. The rest of this subsection focuses on these challenges.

Security, access and ethical issues

Goode argues that one of the fundamental challenges of doing fieldwork in non-democratic regimes is security and safety issues. These types of challenges are particularly detrimental as they prevent scholars from seeking the field. As non-democracies have recently moved away from hybridity and become more closed, fieldwork becomes less common, as regimes are better able to deter or manage research (Goode 2010: 1062–63). Goode also argues that one should be extremely careful with regard to informants' safety, as they can face repercussions from simply being associated or seen with a researcher (Goode 2010: 1057). But Goode's article is based on his own experience working in Russia under Putin, which is a high-profile regime in control of a state with high capacity. The relationship might not hold in weaker states, particularly those who are aid-dependent and therefore depend on the goodwill of Western donors who typically react if academic freedom is limited. This is my experience in Uganda. Throughout my stays both in Kampala and in the more rural areas, I have never felt unsafe or threatened while collecting data.

In general, Ugandans are pretty open when it comes to discussing politics, especially if they find the researcher interested in soliciting their "expert" opinions. As is discussed in the thesis

article on self-censorship, the NRM-regime has put some emphasis on promoting nominal freedom of speech, and speaking to Western academics who only write for academic purposes is considered to be a relatively low-risk enterprise. The only types of informants that I found to be guarded were mid-level or local NRM leaders as well as civil servants appointed to positions where they were supposed to be seen as neutral. These were also the only groups that consistently asked me not to tape interviews and to be anonymised. However, as a precaution, I have chosen to remove all the names of my informants, instead supplying information on why they should be considered credible sources through their relative position and the time frame of the interview. As it is important to know about the position of the interview object in order to evaluate the credibility of his testimony, I try to distinguish between informants that hold high-level positions and those who are further down the chain of command, particularly in parties. As a general principle, the term high-level officials refer to individuals who are either decision-makers within the different parties at the national level or closely tied to the party leader. Nevertheless, all informants were targeted because they were perceived to have access to relevant information, so even the lower level party and state officials interviewed should have some credibility on the issues they are sharing information on. I have also tried to be as discreet as possible when setting up appointments, especially with regard to people who had expressed some level of scepticism when talking to me on the phone. Subsequently I always gained the consent of the respondent before contacting him or her in person.

While I have never felt threatened while accessing informants, getting access has nevertheless been a challenge. However, this has been linked not so much to the hybrid nature of Uganda, but more to a general challenge associated with conducting elite interviews: that elites typically are not very accessible for researchers (Goldstein 2002: 169). A large amount of my

fieldwork thus entailed endless phone calls to people who clearly had little time or desire to talk to me. Upon establishing contact, the next challenge was to get them to arrive at the appointed place at the appointed time. The safest bet was normally for me to come to them. The downside of this was that I most often had to wait for them while they were doing something else. While a single interview could last from 5 minutes to 3 hours, the wait for the interview was usually longer. Researchers doing fieldwork in non-democracies need to be aware that the enterprise is time-consuming, and strategies for gaining access must be thought out in advance.

While some of my informants, particularly those in the NRM, were reluctant to speak to me because they were sceptical about what I would use the information for, and whether it would put them in a bad light; there were equally many people on the other side of the spectrum who were difficult to reach for another reason. These were opposition politicians, civil society activists, media personalities and academics, who were so used to being contacted by Western academics who wanted to ask them general questions, that they either did not want to talk to me or wanted to know what was in it for them. While I do not have any systematic evidence for it, a plausible hypothesis for this is that this type of challenge features more prominently in poorer, aid-dependent non-democracies that seem to be relatively open for researchers. Uganda is definitely such a case – during my stay there for the 2016 elections, I encountered at least five separate teams of researchers from Western universities who were doing work on the elections. If all those teams were trying to reach the same people, it is not strange that they experience a form of 'interview fatigue'. This clustering of researchers who focus on the more aid-dependent and open authoritarian regimes could potentially lead to bias both in terms of research focus and results, and should be taken seriously (see also Goode and Ahram 2016; Koch 2013). The solution to both challenges nevertheless seems to be similar: to gain trust,

one needs to show interest in their opinion, but also that one can "match" them in terms of knowledge.

With regards to ethical considerations, there were several challenges that I either was aware of in advance or discovered during my fieldwork. The first of this was the above-mentioned anonymity and safety issue. The second challenge was information sharing. My experience was that in a situation characterized by information uncertainty as in Uganda, information was a sought-after good. When soliciting for interview appointments, a typical question I would get was whom I had gotten his or her contact information from, and what that person had told me about him or her. Except in a few cases where I had been explicitly told by my source of information that I could share this with the next respondent, I usually tried to dodge this question. If this was not possible, I would deny sharing the information. While this probably meant that I lost out on some interviews as the respondents might have been more willing to share information in a reciprocal relationship, I preferred to err on the side of caution.

The final ethical challenge relates to my position in the field as a white privileged researcher from a democratic Western country doing research in a relatively poor, authoritarian, aid-dependent African country. This position in the field created numerous challenges for me as a researcher that I was aware of but unable to do much about. First, some of my respondents obviously expected that I would provide them with something in return for their participation and information. This 'something' ranged from money, access to employment, scholarships and grants, to preferential evaluations of aid projects and subsequent further allocations of money. As this might affect not only their choice to speak to me but also the information they shared with me, I tried to correct this by being explicit about my project, who I was working for and that I could not help them in any material way whatsoever. The second, related

consequence is that I faced the assumption that since I am from a democratic country myself and interested in regime politics, I would have a natural inclination towards supporting the opposition and therefore be biased against the incumbent. This is actually somewhat true – it is hard to stay neutral in a situation where one observes an obvious injustice. Instead of hiding behind supposed neutrality, I would therefore rather acknowledge, if prodded by my respondents, that I personally thought that Uganda was not a democratic country, but rather a hybrid regime in which competition was not fair. This openness actually triggered many interesting responses, especially from my informants in the ruling party, and while it might have put some people off, my general sense is that I got more honest answers in return as a consequence. In a way, this approach mirrors the conclusion of Malejaqc and Mukhopadhyay, who argue that fieldwork in conflict-ridden or war-torn societies must be considered "its own form of foreign intervention" (2016: 101), because in order to gain meaningful data, one needs to join or form a "tribe" in the conflict.

Data accuracy and analytical techniques

The final ethical challenge fundamentally deals with one of the key concerns for scholars focusing on non-democracy: the accuracy, validity and reliability of the data one gets. While one should always be sceptical about employing individual perceptions and opinions as a single piece of evidence, this is particularly critical when dealing with issues where actors have strong incentives to hide their true preferences (Van Biezen and Kopecky 2007). This is especially so if one is focusing on issues that deal with key regime interests or survival (Goode 2010: 1057), which the playing field does. Scholars have started turning away from studying non-democratic regimes because of difficulties in accessing and trusting data – they leave the important and necessary questions because the data quality demands for fashionable methods are higher than can be met in authoritarian and hybrid settings (Goode 2010: 1055 –

qualified in Goode 2016). As the article on self-censorship illustrates, it is healthy to remain sceptical about relying too much on media sources, as these might be biased as a result of direct censorship or self-censorship. And one should be even more careful about trusting the information from public artefacts, as the regime might have clear incentives for skewing the public perception by appearing to be more democratic than they are. They should therefore be questioned and triangulated (Goode 2010: 1068–69). Gerring (2007: 173) highlights that the hallmark of qualitative work is its ability to ensure that "multiple types of evidence are employed for the verification of a single inference – bits and pieces of evidence that embody different units of analysis". While triangulation is typically associated with process-tracing (Beach and Pedersen 2014) and the use of interview data (Aberbach and Rockman 2002), I have tried to utilize the technique as much as possible to build solid empirical evidence, a practice which Brancati (2014: 323) encourages in her review.

In terms of analytical methods Goode argues for a methodologically diverse approach, but one that emphasizes interpretation of the data:

> "Rather than proceeding from the statistical analysis, the merging of formalization and narrative in the "analytic narratives" approach holds some promise. For instance, one might establish hypotheses about a regime's public response to events that threaten its legitimacy (such as the global financial crisis) based upon contending models of its operation." (Goode 2010: 1069)

While this thesis project has not advocated the formalized approach that Goode does, it has tried to emphasize an interpretivist view of data. As the overview of the articles in Table 5 shows, the analytical methods employed are diverse, but are in general more qualitatively

oriented and focused on causal explanation rather than causal effect. They are nevertheless multi-method oriented, and range from process tracing, to discourse analysis, simple correlations, cross-case comparisons of necessary and sufficient conditions, principal component analysis and *t*-tests/regression models. While qualitative methods are used to understand larger processes over time and identify the less visual and countable aspects of the uneven playing field, quantitative and cross-case methods are used to look at what can account for within-regime variation in the playing field. Causation is sought using techniques from across the ontological and methodological spectrum. Causal explanations are investigated using process tracing to trace causal mechanisms. Causal conditions are investigated using small-*n* comparisons that identify necessary and sufficient conditions. Causal relationships are investigated using probabilistic tools that identify statistically significant factors.

The analytical methods employed thus have an interpretative edge, but nevertheless seeks causation in a multitude of ways. The emphasis is on describing and explaining the concrete case of the playing field in Uganda to the best extent possible. However, given the general framework that this thesis is based on, the theories derived using the methodological tools for explanation described in this chapter should still be tested in other settings. The next section deals with what kind of cases that one should test the theories on and where we should expect them to hold.

4. The uneven playing field in Uganda in a comparative context

Any theory generation from a case study should as much as possible "speculate explicitly about the boundary conditions that limit the scope of their arguments." (Coppedge 2012: 318). In order to put the theoretical lessons learned form the case of Uganda and the shadow case of Zambia, we need to know what they are cases of how, and what cases they are similar to. We therefore need to know what type of cases the NRM regime in Uganda and the MMD regime in Zambia are. This section first presents a brief discussion on the challenges and possibilities of generalizing from small-*n* studies, before identifying the universe of cases that these findings are most likely to be applicable to, using a regime typology that combines hybrid regimes and diminished subtypes of autocracy. Uganda is classified within the universe of electoral authoritarian regimes in Sub-Saharan Africa as a relatively typical case of a hegemonic electoral regime, while the MMD regime in Zambia was classified as more deviant competitive case. Both cases can furthermore be considered as hybrid regimes. The theoretical lessons that this project gleans from the individual case-oriented articles of Uganda are thus most likely to be applicable for hegemonic electoral regimes.

*Generalizing from small-***n** *studies: when and how*

The degree to which it is possible to generalize from small-*n* studies where the focus is on explaining individual cases is contested. This is particularly so with regards to case studies: "an intensive study of a single case or a small number of cases" (Gerring and Cojocaru 2016: 3). The debate about the generalizability of case study findings is closely linked to the general debate on causation. Mahoney (2008) has argued that there are two broad approaches to making causal inference in the social science today. These are case-oriented and population-oriented. While the former prioritizes explaining causation in the particular case of interest, the latter prioritizes identifying causal patterns at the level of the population. The role

assigned to case studies varies significantly between the two approaches, largely as a result of their attachment to different ontological understandings.

Population-oriented causal inferences rely on a probabilistic ontological understanding. This means focusing on the likelihood of something happening at the population level. A failure to explain particular cases will be attributed to randomness and chance. This ontological point of view will naturally assign a very diminished role to small-*n* studies, as probabilities make little sense when dealing with only one or a few outcomes, as these will by default contain little to no difference-making evidence (Mahoney 2008: 415). According to this line of reasoning, case-centered research is therefore most often a second-best solution that should only be done in combination with larger-*n* research, or if it is practically impossible to engage in larger-*n* research (Gerring 2007; King, Keohane and Verba 1994: 211; Seawright 2016). While the conclusions of case-based research might be valuable in that they highlight different forms of evidence than large-*n* research, the observations and conclusions of such studies are more often than not seen as non-comparable (Gerring 2007: 184). The primary function of small-*n* studies in this type of reasoning is theory development: to build solid hypotheses that can be tested in a larger population (Collier et al. 2004; Gerring 2007). Case studies should therefore be conducted for "the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units" (Gerring 2004: 342). Our findings should be generalizable, but we should be careful when actually generalizing.

While case-oriented causal inference can rely on a probabilistic ontology, it is arguably best served relying on a deterministic ontology. A deterministic ontology would see any errors in identifying causal relationship at the individual level not as a result of randomness and chance, but rather as a result of limits to our theories, models, measurement and data (Beach

and Pedersen 2016: 22). Ontological determinism therefore emphasizes the importance of correctly identifying the causal relationship of each individual unit of analysis. Mahoney (2008) advocates a logical approach to causation that focuses on necessary and/or sufficient causes of individual cases. The focus here is thus on explaining the case first. While all subscribers to this approach share the goal of explaining cases first, there is some disagreement with regard to whether or not these explanations should be generalizable outside the cases actually explained. In general, there is skepticism about generalizing to wider populations, particularly if these populations are large. Case-based researchers most often try to create populations that are as similar as possible, in order to focus on causally homogenous cases. The result is often to err on the side of caution and stick with small, bounded populations (Beach and Pedersen 2016: 6).

While some subscribers to this line of research claim that it is necessary to move beyond a single case to identify causation, the project subscribes to a view which Beach and Pedersen (2016: 19) call "theory-centric research". Here the focus is on building theories based on case-centred causal explanations and attempting to generalize these theories beyond the bounds of the single case to test the limits of the theory's applicability. Every small-*n* study should thus attempt to infer from the studied case or cases to a small and causally homogenous population. The logic applied is that "we found a relationship in cases A, B, and C, and logically we should expect the same to hold in cases D, E, and F, given that their similarity means that we have no reason to expect different relationships in D, E, and F" (Beach and Pedersen 2016: 7). This means that we need to make sure about the relationship in cases A, B, and C, first, and then identify why we think that D, E, and F are similar enough to generalize to them. Mahoney argues that although this kind of bottom-up, expansive approach where one identifies causation at the individual level first and then extend it to the population

is intuitive; "the more common approach to achieve unification has been top-down: Scholars try to understand causation at the level of the individual cases using ideas that apply to the population level." (Mahoney 2008: 414). We should therefore also make sure that we base our case studies on frameworks that are as explicitly comparable as possible (Ruzzene 2012). In practice, the advice is an extension of points made by Gerring and Cojocaru (2016), Coppedge (2012: 318) and Rohlfing (2012: 304), who, despite ascribing to a more probabilistic ontological position than Mahoney and Beach and Pedersen, argue that when we are generalizing from case studies we should be as explicit about our scope conditions as possible. Identifying homogenous populations and scope conditions are thus key to testing the generalizability of the theoretical findings of this project. The rest of this section focuses on these challenges.

Identifying findings and populations

Given that this project does not investigate just one but several different causal relationships, identifying scope conditions and casually homogenous populations for the project as a whole becomes somewhat complex. As Table 1 in Section 1 highlights, all the articles in the thesis focus on different aspects of the playing field, but the cause and outcome of the different studies vary considerably. Table 6 below summarizes the different causal relationships, the findings, scope conditions and population that the articles address. With the exception of the first article, which focuses on presenting the playing field and showing variation from Levitsky and Way's measurement, the remaining articles all theorize about causal relationships. Most of the articles also specify the universe of cases that the theory addresses and the scope conditions that are applicable.

Table 6: Causal relationships, findings and scope conditions from thesis articles

Study	Title	Causal relationships investigated	Case specific findings w/ causal implications	Scope conditions/ Case population
I	*Defining the playing field*	Exploratory – no explicit causal claims.	*Different trends for different components of playing field. *Opposition did not win when playing field was at most even.	* Not explicit.
II	*Brawl or bribe? Tracing the uneven electoral playing field in Uganda, 2006–2016*	Incumbent electoral strategy -> more risk averse -> decrease in electoral violence but more uneven playing field	NRM saw costs of relying overtly on coercion, shifted to soft coercion and co-optation, led to decreasing violence but less competitive national elections.	*Non-democracies with at least minimally competitive elections where incumbent has control of state with capacity to affect election.
III	*(Un)Fair? Where? Within-country variation in the playing field in the 2016 Ugandan elections*	Local playing field -> national playing field Local capacity -> local electoral playing field	*Local electoral playing in 2016 elections in Uganda field shows significant variation vis-à-vis national average. *Presence of local organizational capacity of opposition affects playing field as it affects ability to counteract general incumbency advantages.	*Complexity indicates further analysis at local level. *Possibly playing field in parliamentary elections with similar electoral system in at least minimally competitive non-democracies.
IV	*Understanding self-censorship discourses in the hybrid regime of Uganda*	Contextual conditions -> uncertainty -> self-censorship discourses	Media practitioners who practice in settings characterized by isolation and information scarcity feel more uncertain and see self-censorship as necessary.	*Hybrid regimes where formal censorship regime is characterized by fluidity and selective implementation.
V	*The Impact of Elections: The Case of Uganda*	Formalization of multiparty competition -> tilting of the playing field -> consolidation of regime in power	Formalization of multiparty politics allowed NRM to ostracize internal opponents with low costs as they could better control them.	*Non-democratic regimes with control of state apparatus with capacity to affect elections. *Regimes that control transition to multiparty politics.

However, none of the articles systematically specify what cases belong to the universes and situate the case of Uganda within them. As is evident from the column on case universes in the table, the criterion used to delineate the population is regime type. More specifically, three out of five of these articles say that the theoretical lessons are potentially relevant for understanding at least minimally competitive non-democracies. The criterion used to identify

similarity is thus that the cases are similar in terms of the role and level of political competition. The article on self-censorship focuses on the role of uncertainty. Given that this is a fundamental trait of a so-called hybrid regime (Cassani 2014), it makes sense to apply the theory to cases that have the same fundamental procedural uncertainty attached to them as the NRM regime in Uganda does. In addition to regime type, two further conditions are mentioned in most of the articles and should be re-emphasized here. Given the importance ascribed to establishing causal homogeneity and the ambition to create mid-level theories, it makes sense to limit the scope of the generalizations both in space and across time. The theoretical lessons of this thesis are thus most likely to fit cases in Sub-Saharan Africa after the end of the Cold War. While non-democratic regimes allowing electoral competition are not new (Miller 2015b), the period after the end of the Cold War created a set of conditions that allowed this type of regime to flourish in a way not seen before (Hadenius and Teorell 2007; Levitsky and Way 2010). No region has been as affected by this development as Sub-Saharan Africa. While almost no regimes on the continent held regular multiparty elections in the mid-1980s, by the early 2000s, over 90% of all countries on the continent had held at least one multiparty contest (Rakner and van de Walle 2009). Despite this positive development and emergence of a relatively healthy group of democracies on the continent, the most common regime type was by 2010 electoral or competitive authoritarian (Lynch and Crawford 2011: 281). The section therefore now turns to identifying the population of non-democratic regimes across Sub-Saharan Africa after 1990.

Non-democratic regime typologies

If there is one thing the rise of non-democracies holding multiparty elections has sparked, it is a lively debate about how to correctly classify and label regimes. Early dissatisfaction with the ability of the existing typology of democracy, autocracy and totalitarian regimes to fit

empirical cases was discussed already by the mid-1990s (Collier and Levitsky 1997; Karl 1995; Schedler 1998). However, efforts to expand on existing typologies of regimes really took off in the aftermath of Carothers' call for the "end of the transition paradigm" (Carothers 2002: 9). Møller and Skaaning (2013: 45) argue that there are two main approaches to categorizing regime types today. One focuses on diminished subtypes of autocracy and democracy, and the other on differences in kind within these categories. Cassani (2014: 544) adds a third group, which adds an intermediate "hybrid" category between democracy and autocracy.

Diminished subtypes: Flaws or facets of decision-making procedures

Those who subscribe to the use of diminished subtypes to map regimes keep the basic distinction between democracy and autocracy, but use adjectives to qualify and separate regimes from their mother-type based on different traits or flaws (Cassani 2014: 543). Thus, a competitive authoritarian regime differs from a typical authoritarian regime (Levitsky and Way 2002) because it holds competitive, meaningful elections, but not to the degree that it becomes a democracy, because the electoral competition in these regimes does not take place on an even playing field (Levitsky and Way 2010b). Similarly, illiberal democracies are not normal democracies, because they deprive their citizens of basic liberal freedoms, but should nevertheless still be considered a form of democracy as they experience transfers of power between different societal factions (Zakaria 1997). This approach gained popularity in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and spawned a large number of new regime types: electoral authoritarian regimes (Schedler 2002), liberalized authoritarian regimes (Brumberg 2002) and hegemonic authoritarian regimes (Howard and Roessler 2006) on the authoritarian side of the spesctrum; and delegative democracies (O'Donnell 1994), defective democracies (Merkel 2004) and protected or limited democracies (Morlino 2009) on the democratic side.

This approach has been controversial. Morgenbesser (2014) criticizes those using diminished subtypes because they fail to take into account that elections in authoritarian regimes are not primarily a vehicle for deciding who wields power, but that their primary function, at least for the incumbent, is as a tool for wielding power: as a tool for legitimating the regime, for distributing patronage and for elite management. This critique particularly targets the authoritarian subtypes. Cassani on the other hand, follows Linz (2000: 34) in arguing that the users of the democratic subtypes are the greatest sinners, because they are essentially still trapped in the transition paradigm by treating authoritarian traits as imperfections that will at some point go away (Cassani 2014: 544). Perhaps more importantly though, he also points out that these subtypes are controversial and difficult to set the boundaries of, which often limits their applicability (Cassani 2014: 545, see also Bogaards 2009 and Bardall 2016).

Despite this criticism, using diminished subtypes that focus on the presence or level of political competition of a regime, such as electoral, hegemonic and competitive authoritarian regimes, remains popular. A significant portion of both studies focusing on regime change and autocratic stability use these subtypes (cf. Bunce and Wolchik 2011; Donno 2013; Howard and Roessler 2006; Miller 2015b; Levitsky and Way 2010; Schedler 2006; Wahman 2014). The advantage of these definitions is that they focus on elections as a mode of gaining power, and that they can be placed on a continuum in terms of how competitive they are. They are thus often used in analyses that deal with elections and with how regimes formally maintain or lose power.

Hybrid regimes as an intermediate regime type

A different approach has often been to label the many regimes that combine "democratic procedures with authoritarian practices" (Howard and Roessler 2006) as an intermediate regime form. This approach follows Karl (1995:73) who was the first to identify and use the

term ‘hybrid’ about regimes that occupied “some middle hybrid terrain” between democracy and autocracy. This caught on and has subsequently been further developed by others, either keeping the label ‘hybrid regime’ (Ekman 2009; Wigell 2008) or using other labels such semi-democracy/authoritarianism (Bowman et al. 2005; Ottaway 2003) and partial democracy (Epstein et al. 2006). However, while this category of regime labels avoids the problems with conceptual stretching associated with diminished subtypes, since it postulates that a hybrid regime is a different regime form vis-à-vis autocracy and democracy; there are as of yet few convincing arguments for what makes it distinct (Morlino 2009). And again, even among those who utilize the concept, researchers often disagree on what a hybrid regime is and subsequently fail to agree on the classification of controversial cases (Cassani 2014:547–48).

Authoritarian instances and subtypes: Forms of power exercise and implementation

The final way of classifying non-democracies is not concerned with how regimes use institutions or procedures that can be seen as authoritarian, but rather what kind of social group or institution forms the power basis of the regime. This line of reasoning typically follows the work of Juan Linz (2000 [1975]), who focuses on differences in four types of characteristics of authoritarian rule. Geddes (1999), Hadenius and Teorell (2007), Cheibub, Gandhi and Vreeland (2010) and Geddes, Wright and Frantz (2013) have subsequently refined the kinds of autocracies identified. While the measures typically disagree about what kinds matter,[9] all these measures follow the same logic in that they preserve the basic distinction between democracy and autocracy but argue that within these basic types of regimes we should distinguish different types based on who holds power and how that power is wielded.

[9] There is particular disagreement with regard to whether electoral regimes and personalist regimes should be seen as distinct kinds of autocracies, or whether they should be seen as general traits that vary between other kinds of autocracies.

Choosing the right approach: Focus on the object of interest

In a classical pragmatic argument, this thesis emphasizes that one should choose the typology which best fits the object of interest. All three typologies are valid, but serve different functions. While the diminished subtypes and hybrid regimes approaches mainly focus on how power is obtained and preserved, the difference-in-kind approach mainly focuses on who holds power and how it is exercised. In essence, the two typologies are focusing on what Slater (2009: 133–134) identifies as two different types of power: despotic power and infrastructural power. The former refers to the power to make decisions, while the latter refers to the power to enforce them. While studies of diminished subtypes and hybrid regimes often focus on how decisions are made, studies of kinds of autocracies often focus on how power is being exercised. Given that this thesis mainly focuses on how power is being made, it makes sense to primarily classify regimes based on the typologies in which this is the focus. This does not mean that Uganda and Zambia cannot also be classified in terms of differences in kind – Uganda does for example have a much more prominent military feature in how power is exercised than Zambia. However, in order to identify what type of cases these issues are with regards to the issue of the electoral playing field, it makes sense to stick with those typologies that focus most on electoral competition.

A coherent regime typology: Hybrid regimes and flawed subtypes

While the three approaches highlighted above are in some studies described as antagonistic to each other (Bogaards 2009; Cassani 2014; Morlino 2009), they do not necessarily have to be. In terms of the divide between the two types of regime typologies of interest here – diminished subtypes and hybrid regimes – one can adopt the approach of Diamond (2002), Howard and Roessler (2006) and Brownlee (2009), who all see hybrid regimes as a higher order concept that bridges the autocracy/democracy divide rather than as an exclusive regime

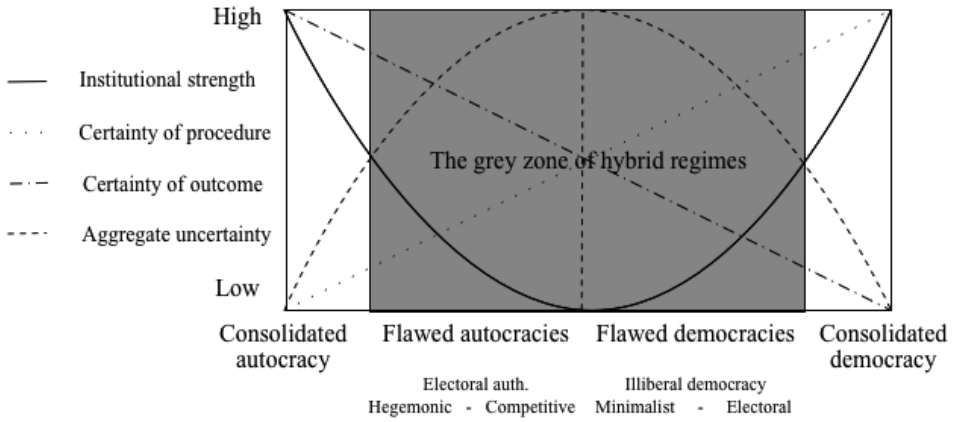
type. According to this line of thinking, each of the individual subtypes differs on particular issues, but share some fundamental traits that all make them hybrid. While the conventional wisdom here is that what they share is the combination of democratic procedures and/or institutions with authoritarian practices, this opens for the conceptual stretching criticism posed by Morgenbesser (2014) and Cassani (2014). Therefore, we should look for other common characteristics that are not linked to the role of the formal institutions in either democracies or autocracies.

I argue that what unites hybrid regimes is that they are characterized by uncertainty. Przeworski (1991) highlights that uncertainty can mean any of the following: "that actors do not know what can happen, that they know what is possible but not what is likely, or that they know what is possible and likely but not what will happen." (Przeworski 1991: 12). He argues that democracies are characterized by the last: *ex-ante* uncertainty, or uncertainty about outcomes but not about the procedures for reaching the outcome. Non-democracies are the opposite, as the outcome is certain but the procedures are not. Schedler (2013) has however highlighted the critical role that uncertainty also plays in non-democracies that hold elections. In his opinion, these regimes suffer from both institutional and informational uncertainty as they cannot in any reliable way gauge the preferences of their subjects. It is therefore almost impossible for non-democracies to totally eliminate outcome uncertainty either about the outcome or the procedures. If the institutions of a regime remain weak and their purpose contestable and ambiguous, uncertainty will be at its peak.

What follows is thus that in democracies, formal institutions work as a constraint on power in that they set the rules of the game and are binding for all actors. In an autocracy, the opposite is the case: formal institutions are epiphenomenal to the interests of key actors, and therefore

do not work as effective constraints on power, but rather enhance it. Both indicate strong institutions but for different reasons and with different consequences. In democracies, rules bind, whereas in closed autocracies, rules are bound. However, in the messy middle there are a host of regimes, where due to certain flaws or features one cannot know *ex ante* if the institutions constrain power or not. The defining feature of hybrid regimes is thus uncertainty, both about institutional processes and institutional outcomes. This uncertainty will vary, and be at its peak in the competitive authoritarian regimes and minimalist democracies where there are both uncertainties about the outcome and about the process. Figure 1 illustrates this way of thinking about regimes.

Figure 2: Conceptualizing a integrated typology of hybrid regimes, democracy and autocracy



Source: Author's own illustration

Within the grey zone of hybrid regimes, one will find the diminished subtypes that prevent institutions from having the binding effect that institutions have in their respective mother types. For example, illiberal democracies, electoral democracies and minimalist democracies can be seen as hybrid regimes because their violation of key civil liberties threatens individual rights and the principle of equality before the law, thus increasing uncertainty about the institutional process (Zakaria 1997; Møller and Skaaning 2013: 43). However, they remain democracies because they are on the right side of the figure: certainty about the procedure is

still higher than the certainty about the outcome. On the left side of the figure the relationship is inverse, here certainty about the outcome is still higher than certainty about the procedures. Thus, while the diminished subtypes of electoral authoritarian, hegemonic authoritarian and competitive authoritarian remain autocracies, the fact that they hold elections that open for competition also makes them hybrid, as the electoral institutions by default introduce a form of uncertainty (Schedler 2013). We can thus never be sure *ex ante* that elections as institutions will consolidate regimes. Uncertainty is higher the closer to the center one gets. This means that it is at its highest in competitive authoritarian and minimalist democratic regimes, where there is significant uncertainty both about outcome and process.

Identifying hybrid non-democracies in Sub-Saharan Africa

The typology introduced above is useful for identifying both types of regimes that this project is interested in: hybrid regimes, and (flawed) non-democracies that hold at least minimally competitive elections. But how does one identify *ex ante* procedural and outcome uncertainty in practice? The common approach to measuring both hybrid regimes and diminished subtypes has been to use mid-level scores on indices such as Freedom House and Polity IV. But as highlighted by Handlin (2017), these measures are too general and multifaceted to capture specific differences between subtypes. He argues that while the measures can be useful for establishing the general population of interest, they should be combined with more fine-grained measures that focus on specific institutional aspects in order to separate the borderline cases (Handlin 2017: 51–52). An example of such a data source is the National Elections Across Democracy and Autocracy (NELDA) dataset (Hyde and Marinov 2012)

The NELDA dataset codes all elections across regimes on a range of variables related to the quality of the elections both before and after elections. This is particularly useful for the task at hand, given that what is necessary is to situate cases with regards to *ex ante* procedural and

outcome uncertainty. NELDA contains two indicators that might plausibly be used to account for this. NELDA11 can be used to gauge certainty of procedure, as it answers the question "Before elections, are there significant concerns that elections will not be free and fair?" NELDA12 can be used to gauge certainty of outcome as it answers, "Was the incumbent or ruling party confident of victory before elections?" While it is slightly problematic that the indicators are dichotomous and that they only capture a relatively narrow interpretation of the two forms of certainty, they do offer a relatively novel way of identifying hybrid regimes in combination with Freedom House and Polity IV data. In the following I have first identified 25 different non-democratic regimes that have held at least two consecutive executive elections where a genuine opposition candidate has competed. To identify non-democracies, I have utilized Roessler and Howard's (2009) threshold: all countries with both an average Freedom House rating of 3 or higher and a Polity IV rating of 7 or lower during the period in power are rated as authoritarian regimes. I have then plotted the NELDA11 and NELDA12 scores for each election that took place and received a NELDA score when the 25 regimes were in power. Table 7 presents the results.

As is evident, elections in Sub-Saharan Africa vary considerably with regards to *ex ante* certainty about procedures and outcomes even within the group identified as non-democracies. Each type of combination was present in at least 10 elections. At the same time, the most common type of election was by far the type that arguably is least democratic: almost half of the elections took place where there was procedural uncertainty combined with certainty about the outcome. Most of the cases that were characterized by procedural uncertainties are fairly straightforward to categorize as authoritarian elections, as the incumbent clearly tried to affect the electoral outcome. However, there are several surprises among the cases in which NELDA data indicates that the procedures were relatively certain

ex ante. Several fairly dominant regimes are located here, such as Tanzania and Mozambique. Here the issue might be that these regimes dominate the electoral landscape to such a degree that they do not need to implement uncertain procedures, or that the elections were simply more democratic. Another interesting aspect of Table 7 is the amount of variation between electoral cycles in the same countries. Only two regimes saw the same form of uncertainty across all elections measured, while the clear majority changed one, two or even three times during the period in question. The table therefore highlights the importance of studying each election separately, in order to understand the dynamics at play.

Table 7: Procedural and outcome certainty in elections in non-democracies in Sub-Saharan Africa, 1990-2012

Procedural uncertainty, Outcome uncertainty	**Procedural certainty, Outcome uncertainty**
Angola 2012 Cameroon 1992 DRC 2011 Kenya 2002 Malawi 2004, 2009 Nigeria 2007 Sierra Leone 2007 Togo 1998, 2005 ***Zambia 2001, 2011*** Zimbabwe 2008 Total: 13 elections	Gambia 2001, 2006 Ghana 1992, 2000 Lesotho 1993, 1998 Mozambique 2004, 2009 Nigeria 2011 Senegal 2000 Tanzania 2005, 2010 Togo 2010 ***Zambia 2006, 2008*** Total: 15 elections
Procedural uncertainty, Outcome certainty	**Procedural certainty, Outcome certainty**
Angola 2008 Cameroon 1997, 2004, 2011 CAR 1999, 2011 Chad 1996, 2006 Rep. Congo 2002, 2009 Ethiopia 1995, 2000, 2010 Gabon 1993, 1998, 2009 Gambia 1996, 2011 Ghana 1996 Guinea 1993, 1998 Kenya 1992, 1997 Malawi 1999 Nigeria 2003 Tanzania 2000 Togo 1993, 2003 **Uganda 1996, 2001, 2006, 2011** ***Zambia 1996*** Zimbabwe 1990, 2002 Total: 36 elections	Burkina Faso 2005, 2010 CAR 2005 Chad 2001 DRC 2006 Ethiopia 2005 Gabon 2005 Lesotho 2002 Mozambique 1994, 1999 Senegal 1993 Sierra Leone 2002, 2012 Tanzania 1995 Zimbabwe 1996 Total: 13 elections

Source: List compiled from NELDA11 and NELDA12 variables (Hyde and Marinov 2012).

Despite this reservation, the data does make it possible to classify regimes. Table 8 presents this regime classification of hybrid non-democratic regimes in Sub-Saharan Africa. Individual regimes are categorized on the two dimensions of interest: outcome uncertainty and institutional uncertainty. With regards to the former, regimes are classified as hegemonic, middle or competitive based on whether the incumbent expected to win *ex ante* in a majority, equal number, or minority of the elections. With regards to the latter, regimes are classified as following least authoritarian, middle or most authoritarian institutional logic based on whether elections were expected to be free and fair *ex ante* in a majority, equal or minority of the elections. Broadly speaking, regimes situated in the top right corner are expected to be the least authoritarian of the hybrid regimes, as they show aspects of both outcome uncertainty and procedural certainty. On the other hand, regimes in the bottom left corner are expected to be the closest to consolidated autocracies, as they show aspects of both outcome certainty and procedural uncertainty. The top left and bottom right corner are both deviants. In the top left there is outcome certainty despite relatively little abuse of authoritarian institutions. In the bottom right corner, there is outcome uncertainty despite high abuse of authoritarian institutions.

Table 8: Type of non-democratic hybrid electoral regimes in Sub-Saharan Africa, 1990-2016

	Hegemonic	**Middle**	**Competitive**
Least Authoritarian Institutions	Burkina Faso (05-14) Sierra Leone (02-12)	Mozambique, Senegal (->00), Tanzania	Ghana (92-00), Lesotho (93-03)
Middle	CAR (04-12)	Gambia (96-16), DRC (06->)	
Most Authoritarian Institutions	Cameroon, CAR (93-03), Chad (96-06), Rep. Congo (02->), Ethiopia (95->), Gabon, Guinea (93-02), Kenya (92-02), Uganda, Zimbabwe	Angola (08->)	Malawi (99->), Nigeria, Togo (93->), Zambia (96-11)

Source: List compiled from table 7 using NELDA data (Hyde and Marinov 2012).

With regards to the overarching topic of this thesis – the electoral playing field – the typology is highly relevant. As this project shows, access to resources, media and the law is likely contingent on and affects both the level of outcome certainty and the level of procedural uncertainty. It is therefore plausible to assume that the playing field will be at its most even in cases in the top right corner and at its most uneven in cases in the bottom left corner. With regards to the deviant positions, the bottom right corner would likely be cases where the incumbent tries to tilt the playing field in order to stay in power, but either fails to affect the playing field or the playing field in turn fails to affect the outcome. The analysis of Zambia in this thesis points towards the latter. The cases in the top left corner are those where the incumbent is so dominant that the playing field is uneven despite no active intervention in the election on behalf of the incumbent, or the incumbent might rely either on other forms of intervention, or even on mere sufficient popularity to stay in power. Regardless of which of these issues actually hold, the playing field is likely to differ both between different types of regime and between elections within regimes. It is therefore necessary to map each case thoroughly before generalizing, as has been done in this project.

Situating Uganda and Zambia as types of cases in the typology

The findings of this project all deal with the playing field as an overarching, descriptive concept. As the typology maps a case universe where it is plausible that the playing field varies between subtypes, it serves as a good point of departure for identifying what type of cases Uganda and Zambia are, and what type of cases they compare best to. In this sense, the typology can serve as a point of reference for identifying similar cases on which to test the theories. Gerring and Cojocaru (2016) highlight that case selection should be as explicit as possible whether conducting doing descriptive or causal studies, but that the type of case one selects should vary depending on the objective of your research. Since this project seeks to

both describe and explain multiple causal processes, it is hard to pinpoint exactly what type of cases Uganda and Zambia are. However, based on the typology presented above it is possible to argue that Uganda is what Gerring and Cojacaru (2016: 4) call a typical descriptive case and an outcome exploratory case, whereas Zambia can be considered both a diverse and deviant case.

Descriptive work is an important aspect of this thesis, and most of it focuses on Uganda. A typical descriptive case is one that focuses on the central tendency in terms of the object of interest (Gerring and Cojacaru 2016: 5). Uganda fits this characteristic with regards to the typology presented above. First, it is placed within the category that is most common both with regards to individual electoral uncertainty (Table 7) and regime type (Table 8). Furthermore, it is the only case within these categories in which all elections featured the same characteristics. We can therefore be relatively certain that Uganda is in fact a hegemonic regime where the incumbent uses institutions to preserve his stay in power. When focusing on typical cases, it is imperative that one chooses cases that typify things one says they are typical of, and not choose borderline cases. Uganda must be considered as a typical hegemonic authoritarian hybrid regime where one expects the playing field to be uneven. However, if one is interested in causal exploration, it is also possible to argue that Uganda is an outcome case, as it is the only hegemonic regime within the sample where all elections exhibited the same type of qualities. It thus exhibits extreme values (Gerring and Cojacaru 2016: 7).

Zambia is included in this thesis for two particular reasons. First, as is made clear in the first article in which the general framework is presented, Zambia is included in order to contrast the new operationalization and measurement of the playing field presented in this thesis with

the framework employed by Levitsky and Way (2010). As Levitsky and Way do not include Uganda as a case of competitive authoritarianism within the time frame of their study, I had to pick a different case to show the applicability and variation vis-à-vis their framework. The second function is to act as a contrast to the case of Uganda. As Table 7 and Table 8 above highlight, the Zambian case shares relatively few qualities with the Ugandan case, except for the fact that both incumbent regimes have tried to manipulate electoral institutions to their favour. The clearly authoritarian yet competitive MMD regime in Uganda must therefore be considered a deviant case, because it does not conform to the expected pattern (Gerring and Cojacaru 2016: 8). However, it can also be considered as a relatively diverse set of cases because there is significant variation across elections with regards to both procedural and electoral uncertainty.

The deviant and diverse case types typically differ significantly, as is also the case with Uganda and Zambia. As the mappings of the playing field conducted in the first and second thesis article highlight, the composition of the playing field shows similar trends in both cases, despite these differences. The cases can thus also be seen as most different systems (Gerring and Cojacaru 2016: 9) in that they differ on many causes but nevertheless share a similar type of outcome in terms of the composition of the playing field. However, with regards to the consequences of the playing field they differ: while the first article on the playing field in Zambia highlights that the MMD lost power despite tilting the playing field in the 2011 elections, the first and final article on Uganda highlights that the uneven playing field has contributed to consolidating the regime in power. In this sense, they are most similar systems in that the playing field is relatively similar, but the outcome varies.

The following thesis articles thus theorize about the playing field in non-democracies and hybrid regimes in Sub-Saharan Africa based on case studies of the typical case of Uganda and the deviant and diverse shadow case of Zambia. More specifically, the lessons from the articles based on Uganda that are highlighted in Table 1 in the introduction are most likely to be applicable for cases that are also hegemonic and where there is little uncertainty about outcome and authoritarian use of institutions. However, as the shadow case of Zambia shows, the playing field might look relatively similar in more competitive regimes, but the causes and consequences will potentially differ.

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Defining the playing field

A framework for analysing fairness in access to resources, media and the law

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Abstract The playing field is a concept often used to describe level of fairness in electoral competition. With Levitsky and Way's definition of the playing field as a case in point, this paper takes a critical look at existing work on the playing field, arguing that current conceptualizations suffer from lacking conceptual logic, operationalization and measurement. A new and disaggregated framework that can serve as the basis for future research on the playing field is then proposed. This framework is applied to an illustrative case study on the development of the playing field in Zambia under MMD rule, thereby demonstrating that it is able to capture both the changing nature of the playing field and the differing mechanisms at play to a larger degree than the framework put forth by Levitsky and Way. The 2011 elections in Zambia also clearly highlight the importance of conceptually and empirically separating the slope of the playing field from its impact on both the opposition and electoral outcomes.

Keywords The playing field · Electoral competition · Regime typologies · Africa

1 Introduction

The past 25 years have seen a large increase in the number of regimes that hold multiparty elections but do not conform to international standards when it comes to the conduct of elections, access to political rights, and civil liberties (Carothers 2002; Hadenius and Teorell 2007). Nowhere in the world are these regimes as prevalent as Sub-Saharan Africa: "The reality across the sub-continent is clearly one of 'hybrid

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regimes'" (Lynch and Crawford 2011, p. 281). Despite the "routinisation of elections" (van de Walle 2003, p. 299) on the continent, the majority of these elections take place in contexts where incumbency advantages are extreme due to excessively strong executives (Rakner and van de Walle 2009, p. 112).

This trend has coincided with increasing use of the concept of the playing field to evaluate electoral quality. Often, and especially in less developed countries, election monitoring reports and the media claim that the lack of an even playing field compromised the quality of a given election because it prevented fair competition between the incumbent and the opposition (Levitsky and Way 2010b, p. 57; Merloe 1997; Schedler 2006, p. 1). General agreement exists among both scholars and election observers that a relatively even playing field between parties and candidates competing in an election is essential for fair competition (cf. Bjornlund 2004; Goodwin-Gill 1998). However, left unresolved are what the concept of the playing field entails within the context of electoral competition, which components are part of the concept, which indicators can measure its evenness and how these indicators should be aggregated. The result has been widespread use of a concept (especially in the media and election monitoring reports) without consensus on what this concept entails or how it should be measured and applied.

Levitsky and Way (2002, 2010a, 2010b) have changed this through their work on competitive authoritarianism. They argue that in addition to free and fair elections and civil liberties, an even playing field—defined as equal access to resources, media and the law—is essential for democracy, making the presence of an uneven playing field a hallmark of a competitive authoritarian regime (Levitsky and Way 2010a, p. 7, 2010b, p. 63). Their work has provided a clear purpose and analytical tools for this concept but as this paper will highlight, it falls short of actually measuring the playing field. Building on Levitsky and Way's work, this paper proposes a framework that can be used to anchor an analysis of the evenness of the playing field. After a brief review of existing work on the concept, a critique of Levitsky and Way's conceptualization and measurement is presented. Subsequently, an alternative, disaggregate framework for measuring the playing field is proposed and discussed before it is presented and applied in a study of the playing field under the competitive authoritarian Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) regime that held power in Zambia from 1991 until 2011.

The analysis highlights several advantages of this framework relative to that of Levitsky and Way: (1) The importance of separating the evenness of the playing field from its effects on political actors, as emphasized by the fact that the playing field was more even in the 2006 election when the MMD retained power compared to 2011, when it lost. (2) That a dichotomous measure of the playing field as either even or uneven as proposed by Levitsky and Way hides important variation between elections in Zambia. (3) Although changes in the evenness of the different attributes of the playing field are relatively synchronized, the initial analysis indicates that there are different dynamics driving these changes for each attribute, implying that a disaggregated framework is fruitful. The Zambian case thus illustrates that the framework proposed here leads to different conclusions and different avenues for future research than do existing studies of the playing field.

2 Understanding the playing field

The traditional use of the playing field as a concept can be found in discussions on distributive justice, especially concerning the important principle of equality of opportunity (e.g. Roemer 1998). The notion here is that "justice requires levelling the playing field by rendering everyone's opportunities equal in an appropriate sense, and then letting individual choices and their effects dictate further outcomes" (Arneson 2008, p. 16). Equality of opportunity thus focuses on the opportunity of individuals to make informed decisions through (1) eliminating initial inequalities not chosen by the individual, and (2) providing fair conditions for interaction. The focus on fair interaction is key to understanding the link between an even playing field and democratic electoral competition. As Bartolini (1999, 2000) notes, competition is a central aspect of democracy. However, for competition to be democratic it depends on *contestability*. Contestability focuses on the fairness of the political contest between political actors. One of the issues Bartolini highlights as imperative for fairness is "the possibility of accessing resources necessary for an electoral race with the other" (Bartolini 1999, p. 457). Thus in Bartolini's conceptualization of democracy, the playing field is a key issue.

Within the context of real life electoral contests, a "level playing field" has since the 1990s been used to denote a situation where no group participating in an election has a better chance at winning as a result of unfair conditions (Elklit and Svensson 1997, p. 36; see also Goodwin-Gill 1998; Merloe 1997; Gould and Jackson 1995). However, early work on the playing field was often focused strictly on a narrow, pre-election time period and on formal and legal factors, thus failing to be of significant analytical value.

Levitsky and Way correct many of the mistakes in early work on the playing field by giving the concept a clear purpose. They argue that the central point is whether or not the playing field is even. This, they contend, can be determined by identifying where "the opposition's ability to organize and compete in elections is seriously handicapped" (Levitsky and Way 2010b, p. 58) as a result of incumbency advantage throughout the electoral cycle (Levitsky and Way 2010a, p. 6). The authors then specify the advantages crucial for the playing field:

> We define an uneven playing field as one in which incumbent abuse of the state generates such disparities in access to resources, media, or state institutions that opposition parties' ability to organize and compete for national office is seriously impaired. (Levitsky and Way 2010b, p. 57)

Thus the playing field is fundamentally about incumbents' abuse of state power in order to generate relative differences in access to resources, media and the law[1] between the incumbent and opposition, both during and between elections. The attributes of this concept—access to resources, media and the law—are largely in tune with the wider literature on electoral competition under authoritarianism, which

[1] Levitsky and Way alternate between referring to this attribute as "access to state institutions" (Levitsky and Way 2010a, p. 368, 2010b, p. 57) and "access to the law" (Levitsky and Way 2010a, p. 12, 2010b, p. 60). This is linked to a discrepancy between conceptualization and measurement (see discussion below).

highlights access to resources, media and the law as central factors for understanding the fairness of political competition and subsequently the degree of control enjoyed by the incumbent (cf. Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009; Morgenbesser 2013; Morse 2012; Schedler 2013).[2] To measure the concept, Levitsky and Way (Levitsky and Way 2010a, p. 368) further operationalize it by creating an indicator per attribute (with subcomponents), adding that a violation of any indicator is sufficient to score the playing field as uneven. In terms of access to resources, an uneven playing field is present if the incumbent makes widespread use of public resources or uses public tools to limit or skew access to private-sector finance. Concerning access to media, the playing field is uneven if state-owned media is the primary source of news and biased towards the incumbent, or if private media is manipulated through various mechanisms. While these operationalizations are clear, the operationalization of the third attribute, access to law, is somewhat problematic. This problem is linked to the first of my three criticisms of Levitsky and Way's conceptualization of the playing field: the partly lacking *conceptual logic*. The other issues are *untested causal relationships* in the conceptualization and the *dichotomization* of a disaggregated concept. I will deal with each in turn below.

2.1 Conceptual logic: redundancy[3]

While the initial discussion of the attributes of the playing field seems to indicate that access to law refers to the relative neutrality of nominally independent dispute resolution institutions (Levitsky and Way 2010a, pp. 10–12), this is not reflected in Levitsky and Way's operationalization, where the indicator focuses on the politicization of state institutions in general (Levitsky and Way 2010a, p. 368). This creates a discrepancy between conceptualization and operationalization, making it difficult to know what Levitsky and Way really mean by access to the law. At the component/indicator level, Levitsky and Way state that access is uneven if "state institutions are widely politicised and deployed frequently by the incumbent" (Levitsky and Way 2010a, p. 368). This overlaps with both the indicators for resources and of media, as these are also fundamentally about incumbent abuse of public institutions to garner

[2] There are some who would disagree, however. In a recent analysis of the playing field in South Africa and Botswana, de Jager and Meintjes (de Jager and Meintjes 2013, p. 249) argue that Levitsky and Way's categories are not comprehensive enough, as the difference in the playing field between these two countries is fundamentally about the African National Congress's (ANC) liberation credentials in the South African case. What de Jager and Meintjes fail to specify, however, is whether the liberation credentials are an unfair advantage in and of themselves, or if it is the potential consequences (such as increased access to public finances) of the liberation credentials that could create an uneven playing field. This highlights the importance of separating the causes and effects of the playing field from the measurement of the concept, and underscores the importance of it being as minimalist as possible for the concept to have any analytical purpose (for a similar argument on measures of democracy, see Munck and Verkuilen 2002, p. 9).

[3] At the level of conceptualization where Levitsky and Way link the playing field to the issue of regime identification, they are guilty of another breach of conceptual logic as they have the playing field as a separate component at the same level as civil liberties, and free and fair elections and as a subcomponent of free and fair elections (l.evitsky and Way 2010a, pp. 366–368). This is an example of conflation (Munck and Verkuilen 2002, p. 13), which is a potentially serious problem not just in a logical but also in an empirical sense. However, since this article is primarily concerned with the playing field as a concept and not how the playing field is linked to the issue of regime, the issue will not be pursued further in this article.

advantages in terms of funding or attention. It is thus an example of *redundancy*: Access to law as defined by Levitsky and Way relates to the same issues of the overarching concept as the two other attributes within the concept (Munck and Verkuilen 2002, p. 13). The consequence is that there should be no instances that violate the criteria for access to resources or media but not access to the law. Yet Levitsky and Way identify several such instances, notably Benin, Botswana and Madagascar between 1990 and 1995, and Botswana in 2008 (Levitsky and Way 2010a, pp. 369–371). As the attribute is operationalized, it does not serve a clear purpose. Had the operationalization been more connected to supposedly neutral arbiters and their conduct, access to law would be clearly distinguishable from the other attributes.

2.2 Untested causal relationships: agency, cause and effect

As noted by Goertz (2006, pp. 54–55), the fact that causal relationships are often central components of concepts can potentially be problematic and they should therefore be both explicitly stated, theoretically well-founded and, if possible, empirically tested. Levitsky and Way include two causal relationships in their definition of the playing field. First, they state that the playing field is "uneven" if and only if "incumbent *abuse* of the state" generates disparities (Levitsky and Way 2010b, p. 57, emphasis added). Here they argue that for the playing field to be uneven, any disparities between incumbent and elite must be a result of incumbent *agency*: The incumbent must intentionally manipulate access to resources, media or the law. However, must unfair disparities always be the result of incumbent abuse? And how do we separate "abuse" from use? These questions should be addressed in greater detail.

I argue that while intent to abuse might be present in most cases, this is not necessarily so. The issue of patronage highlights this. According to Levitsky and Way's analysis, patronage-based machines were one of the most important aspects of the uneven playing field in many competitive authoritarian regimes in Sub-Saharan Africa (Levitsky and Way 2010a, Chap. 6). However, if the patronage networks were created as a side effect of policies intended to do otherwise—for example policies aimed at boosting employment—they would not qualify as contributing to an uneven playing field according to Levitsky and Way's definition. Botswana is a case in point. While the state-owned Debswana company's monopoly in the diamond industry undoubtedly contributed to an uneven playing field as illustrated by Levitsky and Way (2010a, pp. 255–256), it is hard to prove that the intent of establishing and running such a monopoly was and is to prevent the opposition from effectively mobilizing. The question of agency and intentionality should therefore be analysed and measured to the greatest extent possible, but not necessarily included in the definition and operationalization.

The second causal relationship mentioned and included in the definition is that the playing field is only uneven if the disparities created by incumbent abuse impede the opposition's ability to organize and compete (Levitsky and Way 2010a, p. 368). As it stands, Levitsky and Way's framework is not primarily intended for the purpose of understanding the playing field. Instead it is primarily used for operationalizing a cut-off point between different regime types based on precisely this point. However, while there might be merit to Levitsky and Way's causal claim, this should not in

any way rule out a more thorough focus on and measurement of the playing field *before* investigating its relative impact. If, as Levitsky and Way argue, an uneven playing field is an increasingly important "tool" for autocrats (Levitsky and Way 2010b, p. 57), then it is imperative to investigate the issues involved separately from their origin and especially their impact. Furthermore, it is important to investigate the causal claim and identify where and when the playing field prevents opposition mobilization. It is therefore necessary to separate cause and effect. Some existing studies highlight this. Opalo points out that the 2011 election in Zambia led to a turnover despite "the tilt that he [incumbent President Banda] and his party … had given to the electoral playing field by misusing state resources and vastly outspending the opposition" (Opalo 2012, p. 80). Similarly, while de Jager and Meintjes (2013) find that the playing field is uneven both in Botswana and South Africa, its composition is very different, which in turn has significant effects in terms of its impact on the opposition. Cause and effect should therefore be held as separate as possible.

2.3 Dichotomization: oversimplified measurement of a complex concept

Given that Levitsky and Way are primarily interested in the impact of the playing field for categorical purposes, a dichotomous measure makes sense as it provides a clear cut-off point. However, there are important arguments for a more differentiated measurement of the evenness of the playing field. While it is true that something is either even or uneven, there are clearly different degrees of unevenness, and with events involving people there is almost never perfect evenness. Levitsky and Way themselves acknowledge this as they discuss the "slope"[4] of the playing field (Levitsky and Way 2010b, p. 64). They furthermore describe a total dominance of the playing field in the early 1990s in Zimbabwe, but after the economic downturn in the late 1990s the playing field became much more even (Levitsky and Way 2010a, p. 241). Nevertheless, the playing field is coded as static throughout the entire period, thus hiding temporal variation. De Jager and Meintjes (2013) find the playing field uneven in both South Africa and Botswana, but describe significant variation in this unevenness. A more discriminating and disaggregated measure would therefore allow for more variation across both time and space.

A disaggregated concept furthermore makes it possible to look at the different aspects of the playing field separately or together, depending on the purpose. This does however necessitate an open approach regarding which data is used, who does the coding and what the coding decision is based on. Thus the coding process must be transparent and open, especially as coding decisions involved in measuring an abstract concept such as the playing field will entail some sort of subjective judgement. While such judgements are not inherently unwanted and are often necessary and even productive, they necessitate a very open approach in terms of how judgements are made (Schedler 2012). While Levitsky and Way provide a list of indicators (Levitsky and Way 2010a, p. 368), they are extremely hard to replicate, as they are very broad. They do not provide an explicit list of coders or sources of data. Instead,

[4] Levitsky and Way use the term "slope". To avoid confusion, this framework prefers to use "degrees" to highlight the categorical nature of the framework.

they base their decisions largely on secondary literature and expert opinions, without applying any standardized framework.[5] We are thus left to wonder why Zambia violates the criteria of access to media in 2008 whereas Benin and Mali do not, despite VonDoepp and Young (2013) identifying relatively free private media that all experienced harassment in the period in all three countries.

3 A new framework studying the playing field

Following the discussion above, the playing field is defined as the balance between incumbent and opposition in access to resources, media and the law. The proposed concept is organised as a four-level framework (Goertz 2006; Munck and Verkuilen 2002), with each level (concept—attribute—component—indicator)[6] organised in a hierarchical relationship as illustrated in Table 1. The framework roughly corresponds to Levitsky and Way's framework in two ways: (1) the overall attributes (column 1 in Table 1) discussed above, and (2) which actors that are relevant to study. Given that the playing field in this instance is related to electoral politics, it makes sense that what is relevant is the difference in access between the incumbent and opposition competing in elections.[7] While it might be slightly misleading to lump all opposition parties together, it is analytically useful as it provides a better understanding of the opportunity structure they face.

It is nevertheless important to do something that Levitsky and Way disregard as a result of their focus on the impact of the playing field: specify the different components (column 2 in Table 1) of the attributes of the playing field and clarify the respective indicators (column 3 in Table 1). The point of departure of the components of the framework is that access to resources, media or the state can come from different sources. This means that each component in the framework represents a different possible avenue of access. This focus on different sources allows for an understanding of which parts of the playing field are "closed" to the opposition, and which are open. Previous studies have highlighted that precisely the diversity of the "menu of manipulation" (Schedler 2002) and the interplay between different sources of resources is important to understand the electoral playing field between incumbent and opposition (e.g. Albaugh 2011; Arriola 2013; Lynch and Crawford 2011; Rakner and van de Walle 2009).

[5] The author has contacted Levitsky and Way to ask them about whether they kept any additional records of coding guides and/or overview of sources consulted, but their answer was that the information provided in the book (2010a) is what was used. See Bardall (2015) in this volume for a similar critique.

[6] In Goertz's (Goertz 2006, p. 6) framework, the corresponding levels of the framework are called basic level, secondary level, and indicator/data level. The latter can be seen as a combination of the component and indicator level.

[7] The framework is primarily designed to analyse electoral contests at the national level of politics. In systems with different elections for the executive and legislative, the playing field might plausibly be different in each race. In instances where it is possible to distinguish between these cases, it would be a worthwhile effort. In most cases it would be difficult to separate them though. While the framework is designed to analyse contests at the national level, most of the concepts and indicators could also serve as a point of departure for analysing the playing field in sub-national contests.

Table 1 Attributes, components, indicators and importance criteria for the playing field. (Source: author's own compilation)

Attribute	Component	Indicators
Access to resources	Internal funding	Do both the opposition and incumbent have fair opportunities to recruit fee-paying party members and establish party businesses and income schemes? If not, who is favoured and to what degree?
	Private funding	Are wealthy individuals and businesses allowed to contribute with funds and resources to the political party or candidate of their preference without fear of harassment or of facing harassment? If not, who is favoured and to what degree?
	Public funding	Are the criteria and disbursement for regular public funding of political parties between elections fair? If not, who is favoured and to what degree?
		Are parties allocated public campaign funding fairly and in due time before the election? If not, who is favoured and to what degree?
	Illicit public funding	Are public funds used for partisan purposes in a non-legal fashion? If so, who is favoured and to what degree?
		Are public resources (material, transportation, offices, and employees) used for partisan purposes and functions? If so, who is favoured and to what degree?
		Are public appointments to the bureaucracy based on partisanship? If so, who is favoured and to what degree?
		Are public programs implemented on a partisan basis? If so, who is favoured and to what degree?
	Foreign funding	Are political parties and candidates allowed to raise funds from foreign sources on an equitable basis? If not, who is favoured and to what degree?
		Are political parties and candidates allowed to raise funds from the diaspora on an equitable basis? If not, who is favoured and to what degree?
Access to media	Private media	Is ownership of private media partisan based, and are private media free to publish what they want about both the opposition and the incumbent without censorship or fear of harassment? If not, who is favoured and to what degree?
	Public media	Is access to coverage in public media equal and coverage neutral between incumbent and opposition? If not, who is favoured and to what degree?
	Popular, communal and social media	Is access to communal media and popular media partisan-based? If so, who is favoured and to what degree? Are all political actors allowed to access and use social media? If not, who is favoured and to what degree?
Access to law	EMB	Is the EMB neutral in terms of representation for incumbent and opposition, and does it accept and treat content and complaints fairly from both the incumbent and the opposition? If not who is favoured and to what degree?
	Courts	Are all political parties and candidates allowed to forward their complaints to the courts equally, and are complaints treated in an unbiased fashion and without undue influence by external parties? If not, who is favoured and to what degree?

The indicators that the coders should use to assess the evenness in access to the different components are posed as a set of questions. This is a common way of measuring elements related to complex, composite concepts with regard to electoral quality (e.g. Bland et al. 2013; Elklit and Reynolds 2005; Norris et al. 2013). The coder should code each indicator on a scale from −4 to +4, where −4 is a situation where the indicator totally favours the opposition, 0 symbolizes a relatively even opportunity for both incumbent and opposition, and +4 is a situation where access to the indicator totally favours the incumbent. The intermediate scores of −3, −2, −1, 1, 2,

and 3 refers to a high, moderate and low advantage for the opposition and incumbent respectively.[8] The indicators are then averaged at the component level. For the temporal scope of each unit, the coder should focus on the situation during a full electoral cycle.[9] This means that a score should be assigned based on the situation from the point in time when a national election ends (the result is official and all complaints are settled) and until the next national electoral cycle is complete (the results of a new national election is official and all complaints settled).[10]

However, the coder will not only have to assess the score of the component, but also its importance for the playing field. As highlighted by Bland et al., a common problem with measures that rely on a list of issues that should be assessed is that they often "do not provide a means of weighing the relative importance of each item on the list" (Bland et al. 2013, p. 360). Goertz (2006, p. 46) argues that the issue of weighting is especially crucial for concepts where the different attributes and components are potentially substitutable and vary across space and time, both of which I argue are true for the playing field. While adding an importance weight might seem similar to the impact criteria of Levitsky and Way, it is different because importance refers to whether and what importance the component has in the overall picture of the playing field rather than the impact it has on the competition between the incumbent and opposition. Each coder must therefore assign an "importance score" of 0 (no importance), 0.5 (low importance), 1 (medium importance), or 1.5 (high importance) based on how important the component is deemed to be for the playing field. This is a version of what Goertz (2006, p. 46) calls "weighting of necessary conditions". The component score will then be multiplied with the importance score of that component, thus eliminating the value of any component with little or no importance and increasing the value of any component with high importance. The importance-adjusted component-scores should then be added together and standardized at the component level.[11]

In the following, the components of each attribute are explained and discussed. The discussion of the framework is based on studies of electoral competition in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, I would argue that the attributes of the framework are universal in nature and can therefore serve as a point of departure for studies of the playing field from other locations as well.

3.1 Access to resources

Access to resources is extremely important in the Sub-Saharan African electoral game. Large geographic distances and poor infrastructure combined with a campaign culture of visiting as many people as possible and organising rallies demands large

[8] See Appendix 1 for more thorough instructions on coding, or contact author directly for more exhaustive information.

[9] In situations where executive and legislative elections are not held simultaneously, efforts should be made to measure the playing field separately.

[10] In terms of founding elections, the starting point of the electoral cycle will have to be decided on an individual basis.

[11] The components that are deemed as not important will be left out of the standardization exercise, as they should have no effect on the playing field.

quantities of both material and non-material resources (Saffu 2003, pp. 21–23). On average, incumbents in Africa tend to be well funded, especially in countries where the state plays an important economic role (Butler 2010; Saffu 2003; van de Walle 2003). And with a weak private sector and relatively few instances of institutionalized public funding, opposition parties tend on average to be underresourced (Arriola 2013; Rakner and van de Walle 2009; Randall and Svåsand 2002). Five broad categories of funding sources are particularly important for political parties in the Sub-Saharan African context: internal funding, private funding, public funding, illicit public funding, and foreign funding (Bryan and Baer 2005; Butler 2010; Helle 2011; Saffu 2003).

In terms of internal and private funding, the indicators selected focus on fundraising through small-scale membership contributions as well as wealthy individuals and businesses, all of which have an effect on the Sub-Saharan African context (Bryan and Baer 2005; Butler 2010; Saffu 2003). Despite this, there is still no denying that on average the most important source of revenue for political parties in Africa is the state (Saffu 2003, Bryan and Baer 2005). If there is legal public funding of parties or party campaigns, it is still not necessarily based on fair criteria and implementation (Bryan and Baer 2005; Helle 2011). The indicators on public funding therefore focus on this. In terms of illicit public funding, either abuse of public resources such as staff and infrastructure or direct money flows form public coffers to the ruling party or elite can contribute to an uneven playing field (Helle 2011; Prempeh 2008). Finally, the diaspora, foreign governments and business interests have been found to play a significant role in funding political parties in Sub-Saharan Africa (Bryan and Baer 2005; Burnell and Gerrits 2010; Helle 2011; Levitsky and Way 2010a, p. 249).

3.2 Access to media

In the last 10 years, online media and mobile technology have gradually expanded the variety of sources and availability of media in Sub-Saharan Africa (Wasserman 2011, p. 4). However, access is contingent on social status and place of residence, creating vast differences in the importance of various media sources (Hyden and Okigbo 2002; VonDoepp and Young 2013). Three broad categories of media are important: private, public, and PSC[12] media.

Private media varies significantly in importance and outreach, but has still played a central role in electoral struggles on the continent. Like private funding, access to private media can be uneven, either as a result of ownership structures (Andriantsoa et al. 2005) or through government pressure or harassment that might induce self-censorship and biased reporting (VonDoepp and Young 2013). In terms of public media, demands should be stricter. Public media should in theory represent the interests of the citizens of the state, and provide relatively equitable coverage for all political parties competing in an election. For the playing field to be coded as even in terms of public media, the opportunities of access should be equal both in terms of quantity and quality of coverage in all relevant media platforms. With other types of media, a combination of new technological innovations and public frustration with existing

[12] PSC refers to popular, social, and communal media.

media has fuelled an increasingly vibrant popular and communal media environment in many African countries that uses both new and old technology to reach out to people (Wassermann 2011). Opportunities to access and use alternative media such as communal radio stations, SMS campaigns and mobile services, as well as online and social media should therefore also be equal where relevant.

3.3 Access to law

As mentioned above, this framework focuses on the narrower notion of access to law as access to nominally independent arbiters that affect the playing field. The two prominent institutions here are electoral management bodies (EMBs) and courts. In the case of the former, these can be uneven in their direct or indirect dependence on government, or through skewed access (Bland et al. 2013; Elklit and Reynolds 2005; Lopez-Pintor 2000; Mozaffar 2002). EMBs must thus be neutral in composition, funding, and access; act on all legitimate input despite where the input originates from; and act as a neutral arbiter if conflicts arise.

In cases where the EMB is not the designed arbiter for complaints related to conduct of elections and thus the playing field, the court system usually is (Schedler and Mozaffar 2002, p. 16). Given that courts can be controlled through direct and indirect means (Ginsburg and Moustafa 2008, pp. 14–20; Gloppen et al. 2010), it is essential to develop indicators that investigate the fairness of access to the courts. All relevant parties should have equal possibilities to forward, advocate for and win their cases, and the courts should uphold their role in ensuring that the legal aspects of the playing field remain equal.

3.4 A small note on data

Given the specific nature of the indicators above, the demand on data quality is high. The framework is therefore best suited as a guide for primary data collection. A non-exhaustive list of data collection techniques and sources of data include interviews with key actors, stakeholders and experts; expert and media surveys; media publication data; party accounts; legal evaluations; and public documents and reports. Thorough primary data collection would allow for a triangulation of data to evaluate the composition of the playing field. This could potentially make the framework a valuable tool for election observation missions, political risk analysis and political economy analysis.

Using the framework to analyse the playing field by investigating secondary sources is more difficult, especially across time and space. This is because the framework asks for very specific information that may not be easily accessible. If secondary sources are used, it requires a very rigorous analysis of the variety of sources available. The coding is much more difficult because secondary sources invariably involve some form of subjective evaluation, and the differences found in access between the indicators might be as much about differences of opinion between the researchers as actual differences in access to different sources of the playing field. A triangulation exercise is therefore preferred because it is easier to code cases where plenty of information exists, and where this information is recent. Another option

would be to find indicators that function as proxies for the questions posed in the framework. For example, instead of making an overall assessment of access to private media, a researcher might use social network analysis to calculate the relative closeness of media owners to the incumbent or opposition.

Although there are clear challenges in using secondary data, it is a worthwhile effort, especially as a point of reference given that Levitsky and Way base their analysis on secondary sources. Thus in the following section, the framework is applied to one of Levitsky and Way's cases: Zambia after the MMD came to power in 1991.

4 (Re)coding Zambia under MMD rule

Levitsky and Way (Levitsky and Way 2010a, pp. 370–371) code the playing field in Zambia as static. It is uneven in terms of access to resources, media and the law both during the 1990–1995 period and in 2008. While acknowledging in their empirical analysis that changes did occur in access to the different aspects of the playing field (Levitsky and Way 2010a, pp. 288–291), this is not reflected in their measurement. By applying the framework presented above, a somewhat different scenario emerges. Tables 2–6 in Appendix 2 present the information, the coding decisions and the results of the coding exercise. The coding is based on a review of published literature, including Levitsky and Way's own sources that focus on political competition in Zambia. Empirical information from country reports on Zambia from Freedom House, the US Department of State's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, and election-monitoring reports have also been consulted.[13] They highlight clear variations over time in access to resources, media, and the law. Even at the aggregate level, there are changes for every electoral cycle with the exception of access to law from 2001 to 2006 and 2006 to 2008, and media from 2008 to 2011. The changes are described in Fig. 1. A score of 0 constitutes an even playing field, while scores above 0 can be seen as higher access for the incumbent relative to the opposition. A score of 3 would indicate that access largely favours the incumbent.

In Zambia the playing field has moved from providing the incumbent with a clear advantage in the 1996 election, to a much more even (though still unfair) contest in the post-Chiluba period from 2001 onwards. At the aggregate level the changes between electoral cycles have been relatively synchronized. However, while access to media and access to law have become increasingly even over time, access to resources has consistently favoured the incumbent to a large extent. The analysis of the Zambian case thus shows how the framework presented here offers a much more dynamic picture of the playing field than that of Levitsky and Way. It shows not only that the playing field is changing, but also which elements of the playing field are changing and at what level. While the playing field has indeed remained uneven and tilted towards the incumbent in all elections under MMD rule in Zambia, the degree of the tilt has varied considerably.

While it is not within the scope of this article to thoroughly investigate what is driving these changes, scores at the component and indicator level provide at least

[13] See the end of Appendix 2 for a full list of literature reviewed.

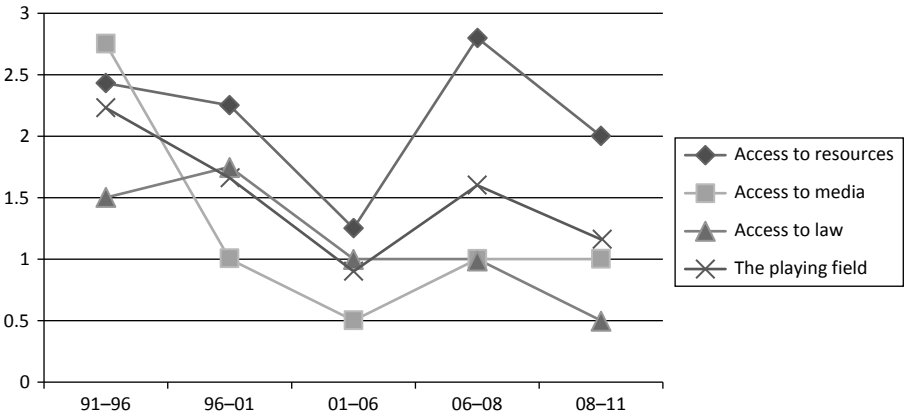

Fig. 1 Development of the playing field in Zambia at concept and aggregate levels, 1996–2008. (Source: Coding information and sources can be found in Appendix 2)

some clues that can form the basis for further research. Regarding access to media, it becomes clear that what changed from the 1996 election cycle onwards was not that access to public media became significantly more even, but that there were simply other alternative media channels for the opposition to access and that these became gradually more important. First the presence of private newspapers and community radio stations, and later private broadcasters and new media, made the continued bias of public broadcasters less significant. Thus, while Moyo (2010) might be right in labelling the MMD government "reluctant liberalizers", the fact that several private media outlets with significant outreach did emerge out of the liberalization process in Zambia (Willems 2013, p. 225), has contributed to a more even playing field. While some private outlets, notably *The Post* newspaper after 2006, were biased towards the opposition, most provided relatively balanced political coverage, demonstrating the positive role of neutral media outlets in balancing the playing field.

Access to law slowed over time, as the supposedly "neutral arbiters" (the EMB and the courts) became more substantively neutral. There are several potential reasons for this: increasing professionalization and capacity, a more benevolent incumbent, or that the level of electoral malpractice has decreased over time. These explanations nevertheless support Lindberg's (2009) hypothesis of the democratizing effect of elections over time, as institutions and actors gradually adopt more democratic practices through repetitious processes.[14]

As Fig. 1 shows, access to resources is the attribute of the playing field that remained tilted against the opposition throughout MMD rule. Even in the 2011 elections won by the opposition, the MMD had a massive resource advantage, largely as a result of its creative use of state resources (EUEOM 2011, p. 14). As Pitcher (Pitcher 2012, p. 118) highlights, the MMD abused state resources both for in-campaign and between-campaign purposes throughout its tenure. The lack of access to state funding for other parties meant that opposition parties had to rely on wealthy private indi-

[14] However, as noted by Bogaards (2013), the evidence regarding the overall effect of elections is far more varied than Lindberg's theory predicts.

viduals in order to compete with the financial muscle of the MMD. While available private sector funding never balanced the playing field, the presence of at least some independent private funding, both as a result of liberalization processes and wealthy individuals defecting from the ruling party in the 1990s, meant that the MMD did not succeed in closing access to resources completely (Pitcher 2012, pp. 116–125). This contrasts with Mozambique or Uganda, where the ruling regimes have been able to successfully control funding from private businesses as well as private media to a much larger extent (Helle 2011; Pitcher 2012). Again, this highlights the importance of understanding different sources of access to different aspects of the playing field.

These discussions show the merit of disaggregating a complex concept such as the playing field to understand not only what drives changes in the playing field at the aggregate level but also what drives the changes in its respective attributes. It is especially important given that the underlying causes of changes in the playing field might vary significantly between its different components.

The point about access to resources also highlights why it is so important to separate the playing field as a concept from the impact it has on the opposition. As Hess and Aidoo (Hess and Aidoo 2013, p. 138) have recently argued, in the 2011 elections the Patriotic Front (PF) actually managed to turn the resource advantage of the MMD into an electoral advantage, as the opposition could claim that the government was bought by foreign (mostly Chinese) interests and therefore did not have the best interests of Zambians in mind. Party Leader Michael Sata and the PF also actively encouraged voters to accept bribes offered by the MMD but to vote for the PF instead, as it would put more money in voters' pockets after the elections instead of offering government hand-outs in advance (Helle and Rakner 2012, pp. 10–11). While the abuse of state money clearly made access to resources uneven, the impact it had on the opposition was at the same time partly positive. This was, however, contingent on an intermediate factor: the tactics chosen by the opposition.

This leads to a final note regarding the mapping of the playing field in Zambia: The MMD did not lose power at the point in time when the playing field was most even. Though the differences were not large, the 2006 elections were in many ways fairer than the 2011 elections. However, while Levy Mwanawasa and the MMD won the election in 2006, Rupiah Banda lost in 2011. This corroborates the finding above that the impact of the playing field on not just the opposition but also the outcome of elections is contingent on or subservient to a number of other factors. Opposition parties can and do win when the playing field is uneven, as long as it is able to adapt to the circumstances. As highlighted by Schedler (Schedler 2013, pp. 369–370), the response of the opposition to the uneven playing field might be just as critical for understanding eventual regime change as underlying structural variables and the state of the playing field. It is therefore essential to see the nature of the playing field as simply one of many variables that affect the opposition's ability to mobilize and compete.

5 Studying the playing field: a way forward

The case of Zambia thus highlights three important issues regarding the concept of the playing field. First, the playing field should not be seen as static, as the level of unevenness shifts significantly between electoral cycles. Second, a disaggregated approach to measuring the playing field highlights that there may be different underlying drivers and mechanisms of change involved in the different attributes of the playing field. Third, the slope of the playing field is not necessarily a suitable indicator of the impact it has on the opposition or election outcomes.

The framework put forth and discussed in this paper thus presents a very different reality to the static presentation of the playing field in Zambia made by Levitsky and Way. It highlights the deficiencies of Levitsky and Way's definition and measurement, particularly with respect to the static nature of their measure and their failure to separate the playing field from its impact on the opposition. While the creation of a dichotomous measurement might have been necessary for Levitsky and Way's purpose, it might not serve as the best tool for understanding the playing field. Studies of the playing field or its attributes should thus use caution when applying Levitsky and Way's framework.

If the primary purpose of future studies is to understand the playing field itself, the framework presented here can provide a point of departure. It opens several new interesting avenues of research. First, efforts should be made to use this framework to investigate the causal claims inherent in Levitsky and Way's definition. How important is agency for the emergence or preservation of an uneven playing field? When does an uneven playing field prevent the opposition from mobilizing effectively? Second, further effort needs to focus on how different attributes of the concept act separately and collaboratively. Are the same underlying conditions driving changes in all attributes? Are some combinations of an uneven playing field more unfavourable for fair competition than others? Finally, efforts need to be focused on solving the "big" question: What drives changes in the overall playing field? How can we achieve true "contestability" (Bartolini 1999, p. 457) in a political system? And what level of fairness is fair enough? These are all questions that future applications of this framework should aim to address.

Appendix 1

Directions for how to assign scores on indicators

– 4 = Indicator completely favours the opposition. Opposition has total control over access to this source.
– 3 = Indicator largely favours the opposition. Opposition has good control over access to this source, but the incumbent also enjoys negligible access.
– 2 = Indicator favours the opposition to a medium degree. Opposition has a clear edge over the incumbent in access to this source, but the incumbent also has some access.

– 1 = Indicator slightly favours the opposition. Opposition has a slight edge over the incumbent with regards to access to this source, but the difference is small.
0 = An even playing field. Either both the opposition and the incumbent have little to no access, or access is equal.
1 = Indicator slightly favours the incumbent. Incumbent has a slight edge over the opposition in access to this source, but the difference is small.
2 = Indicator favours the incumbent to a medium degree. Incumbent has a clear edge over the opposition in access to this source, but the opposition also has some access.
3 = Indicator largely favours the incumbent. Incumbent has good control over access to this source, but the opposition also enjoys negligible access.
4 = Indicator completely favours the incumbent. Incumbent has total control over access to this source.

Directions for how to assign importance scores on components

0 = No importance for the playing field. Access to component is non-existent, either as a result of the issue not existing or none of the actors using it.
0.5 = Low importance for the playing field. Access to component is of limited importance for electoral competition.
1 = Medium importance for the playing field. Access to component is important, but is not imperative for electoral competition.
1.5 = High importance for the playing field. Access to the component is critical for electoral competition.

Appendix 2: Using the framework to for measuring the playing field in Zambia under MMD-rule, 1991–2008

Table 2 Indicators for the playing field in Zambia, 1991–1996

Indicator	Score	Basis of coding	Importance
RINTPAR	0	No reports found on denial of right to party membership, or abuse based on party membership. MMD only party competing with significant membership base (Lodge et al. 2002, p. 393). UNIP enjoyed small income from some party businesses established during one-party era, but most of this had been confiscated by state (Kabemba 2004, p. 15)	0
RPRIWEL	1	Wealthy businessmen most important sources of independent funding in Zambia (Lodge et al. 2002, p. 393). Associates of MMD government consistently favoured and business-community firmly behind MMD at the beginning of period. Privatization process favoured associates of ruling party, especially circle surrounding Chiluba who became very rich (van Donge 2008). Some fall-out as several high profile business allies of MMD and ministers left party and government to contest for elections for new parties. New parties largely dependent on personal wealth of party elite or independent businessmen (Ihonvbere 1995, pp. 13-15)	1.5

Table 2 (continued)

Indicator	Score	Basis of coding	Importance
RPUBPAR	–	No public funding of political parties	0
RPUBCAM	–	No campaign funding of political parties	
RILLFUN	3	Some abuse of public office to procure funds through corruption, especially at minister level, used in campaigns (Ihonvbere 1995, pp. 13–15; van Donge 2009). State funds used to conduct campaign and party activities (Le Bas 2011, p. 224; Pitcher 2012, p. 118)	1.5
RILLRES	2	Cabinet ministers and president used official transportation during campaigns (Lodge et al. 2002, p. 393; Rakner 2003, p. 106)	
RILLAPP	2	MMD increased size of government to accommodate supporters (Rakner 2003, p. 104). Patronage prevalent but corresponded with cuts in reach of state (Rakner 2003, pp. 184–185). Offices handed out based on party membership, not merit (Pitcher 2012, p. 118)	
RILLPOL	2	Relief food and heavily subsidized housing provided just before or during campaign (Lodge et al. 2002, p. 393). Fertilizer, maize and development fund handed out in rural areas (Rakner 2003, p. 109)	
RFORGOV	–	No information about importance	–
RFORDIA	–	No information about importance	
MPRIMED	0	Relatively few privately owned newspapers – three newspapers that where to some extent independent of MMD control. Had a relatively balanced cover, but favoured opposition candidates (Banda 1997, pp. 38–58) No significant private broadcasting (Chirwa 1997, p. 42). Legal framework contained threat of President closing media (Banda 1997, p. 11), while the constitution at the same time recognizes press freedom (Banda 1997, p. 17). Legal framework also compromises rights for journalists (Banda 1997, p. 17). MMD sources frequently consulted in reports (Banda 1997, pp. 38–58). An issue of *The Post* banned by the President in early 1996, and several editors arrested. Editors also threatened physically, and journalists harassed (Chirwa 1997, pp. 30–31; Rakner 2003, p. 110)	0.5
MPUBMED	3	Double the coverage for MMD in campaigns (Baylies and Szeftel 1997, p. 123). State owned papers covered MMD to a much larger extent than the opposition (Banda 1997, pp. 27–37). ZNBC broadcast coverage largely focused on Chiluba and MMD (Kasoma 2002, p. 19). Some critical content allowed against MMD on television, but had consequences for persons involved (Banda 1997, p. 5). Content covering opposition was negative or balanced, never positive, both in print and broadcast media (Banda 1997, pp. 27–37; Kasoma 2002, p. 19). Journalists were pressured to report positively about MMD (Phiri 1999, p. 58)	1.5
MPOPCOP	0	Although the opening up of the airwaves in the early 1990s allowed for communal radio, only limited, church-based radio stations emerged in this period (Kasoma 2002, pp. 21-22)	0
MPOPSOC	–	Not applicable in this period	
LEMBNEU	2	EMB appointed and controlled by ruling President, seen as illegitimate (Baylies and Szeftel 1997; Lodge et al. 2002, p. 382). Characterized by both low competence and some bias (Baylies and Szeftel 1997; Banda 1997, p. 2)	1

Table 2 (continued)

Indicator	Score	Basis of coding	Importance
LCOUNEU	1	President could dismiss judges based on incompetence (VonDoepp 2006, pp. 396–397), however, seldom effective, and records of judges appointed show little difference from long-serving judges (Gloppen 2003; VonDoepp 2005). Court much less likely to rule against state if important government actors such as President and Ministers were involved (VonDoepp 2006, p. 395), and generally ruled in favour of government (Gloppen 2003). However, courts did rule against government on important issues such as access to public space and media freedom (Gloppen 2003, pp. 119–120). Bowed to executive pressure on petitions on Presidential elections (Gloppen 2003, pp. 120–121). Ruled for press freedom in several instances, but did not declare controversial law unconstitutional (Chirwa 1997, pp. 34–35; Phiri 1999, p. 56)	1

Component and attribute scores

Internal party funding = not applicable Private funding = (1) × 1.5 = 1.5 Standardized = 1.5 Public funding = not applicable Illicit funding = (3 + 2 + 2 + 2) × 1.5 = 13.5 Standardized = 3.37 Foreign funding = not applicable	***Access to resources = (1.5 + 3.37)/2 = 2.43***
Private media = (0) × 0.5 = 0 Standardized = 0 Public media = (3) × 1.5 = 4.5 Standardized = 4.5 Com., pop. and social media = not applicable	***Access to media = (0 + 4.5)/2 = 2.75***
EMB = (2) × 1 = 2 Standardized = 2 Courts = (1) × 1 = 1 Standardized = 1	***Access to law = (2 + 1)/2 = 1.5***
	The playing field score = (2.43 + 2.75 + 1.5)/3 = 2.23

Table 3 Indicators for the playing field in Zambia, 1996–2001

Indicator	Score	Why	Importance
RINTPAR	0	Most parties competing in elections were relatively new. Exception MMD and UNIP, but membership fees constituted a small part of funding, and even these parties had relatively weak organizations (Rakner and Svåsand 2004, p. 59; Le Bas 2011, p. 227). Party cards cost more to produce than they cost for buyers to buy, and party business was negligible (Kabemba 2004, p. 15). Members and voters typically expected goods in return rather than to contribute (Pitcher 2012, p. 123). UNIP sold off party businesses to fund campaign (Momba 2004, p. 29)	0
RPRIWEL	0	Several opposition leaders were wealthy businessmen (Masoka, Mwila) who had contributed to funding MMD or former MMD-stalwarts (Tembo, Sata, Miyanda) who all brought significant funds to their parties (Burnell 2003, pp. 391–392; Erdmann and Simutanyi 2003, p. 36; Pitcher 2012, p. 123; Rakner 2003). MMD also supported by state-dependent businesses as well as internal party elites who had massively benefitted from privatization processes (Pitcher 2012, pp. 124–135; van Donge 2008). Government threatened those who made efforts to gather support and funding for opposition parties (BDHRL 2001, p. 6)	1.5
RPUBPAR	–	No public funding of political parties	–
RPUBCAM	–	No campaign funding for political parties	

Table 3 (continued)

Indicator	Score	Why	Importance
RILLFUN	4	State resources were used in presidential campaign for ruling party (BDHRL: 2002, p. 11; Carter Centre 2002, p. 28). Party and campaign activities also funded by state funds (Kabemba 2004, p. 16). Massive abuse of state resources (Gould 2006). President had own discretionary fund that could be used (lawfully outside campaign period) for purposes he wanted (Rakner and Svåsand 2004, p. 61)	1.5
RILLRES	4	MMD made use of civil servants, including lower level officials and newly created district officers (Burnell 2003, p. 394; Carter Centre 2002, pp. 27–28; Rakner 2003, pp. 113–115). Ministers, president and vice-president made use of state vehicles for transportation (Carter Centre 2002, p. 28). Party also used departmental staff and telecommunication facilities (Kabemba 2004, p. 27)	
RILLAPP	3	MMD had established civil servant positions that were given to party cadres who used them for party work (Burnell 2003, p. 394; Carter Centre 2002, p. 28). MMD used government appointments to build inclusive patronage alliance (Lindemann 2011)	
RILLPOL	1	MMD created favourable policies for those who supported them financially (Pitcher 2012, p. 124)	
RFORGOV	–	No reports about significance of contributions from foreign sources	0
RFORDIA	–	No reports about significance of contributions from the diaspora	
MPRIMED	–1	Private newspapers, TV stations and radio stations owned by individuals who were not in association with ruling party, many supported opposition (Carter Centre 2002, pp. 29–30). Private media covered all parties, but were markedly more critical of MMD (BDHRL: 2002, p. 8; Mwalongo 2002). Journalists from *The Post* arrested several times when publishing critical reports about regime (Rakner 2003, pp. 199–201). Independent newspapers, radio and TV stations that where consistently targeted and harassed throughout the period and in the build up to the elections (BDHRL 2001, pp. 8–9; Carter Centre 2001, pp. 29–30; FH 1999, 2001)	1
MPUBMED	3	A clear overrepresentation of MMD (Mwalongo 2002). Coverage of MMD was presented as news, whereas coverage of opposition was presented as adverts (Burnell 2003, p. 394; Carter Centre 2001, p. 29; Kabemba 2004, pp. 27–28). Public media prevented from critical reporting of ruling party—practices self-censorship (BDHRL 2002, p. 8; Phiri 1999, p. 58; Kabemba 2004, p. 28). Government media proclaimed MMD-victory while voting was still ongoing (Burnell 2003, p. 394). Presidential debate on day before voting cancelled by ZBC in favour of MMD-related program (van Donge 2008, p. 307). Government dominates broadcasting, and tightened control in run-up to election in 2001 (FH 2002)	1.5
MPOPCOP	–1	By early 2000s the three first independent communal radios were up and running. They were seen as opposition friendly, and communal radio stations that where critical of government were harassed and targeted by the government (Carter Centre 2002, p. 29; Kasoma 2002, p. 289)	0.5
MPOPSOC	–	*The Post* had established a small following of its online paper. State-owned newspapers also had an online presence, but the impact of politics was negligible (BDHRL 2001, p. 9, 2002, p. 8)	

Table 3 (continued)

Indicator	Score	Why	Importance
LEMBNEU	2	Funding and appointment of EMB controlled by government. (Carter Centre 2002, pp. 23–24). Delay of funds led to mismanagement and mistrust—clearly lacked independence. Poor performance in registration exercise (Tordoff and Young 2005, p. 416). It did however strive for more opposition access to media and other smaller issues. Widespread accusations of favouritism towards MMD—also confirmed by courts (BDHRL 2006, p. 7; Carter Centre 2002). Main problem was weakness of EMB, which benefitted ruling party (Kabemba 2004, pp. 33–35)	1
LCOUNEU	1	Executive and legislative had budgetary control of parliament (Gloppen 2003, p. 127). Some evidence of patronage in judiciary (VonDoepp 2005, pp. 292–294). President could dismiss judges based on incompetence and choose new candidates with aid of MMD-controlled parliament (Gloppen 2003, p. 125; VonDoepp 2006, pp. 396–397), however, given that it was end of his term it was less likely to be of consequence (VonDoepp 2005, p. 277). Furthermore, process is very difficult and has multiple veto points (both institutional and external pressure) (Von Doepp 2005, p. 288). Small pool of candidates to select from makes possibilities of appointing "favourable judges" limited (VonDoepp 2005, p. 289). Successful defeat of constitutional reforms that would curb judicial review function of judiciary (VonDoepp 2005, p. 287). Smear campaign by ruling party against the chief justice may have led to him becoming more lenient towards the president (Gloppen 2003, p. 121). Court much less likely to rule against state if important government actors such as the president and ministers are involved (VonDoepp 2006, p. 395). While courts generally favoured the ruling party, the supreme court ruled against the president in key electoral decisions regarding term limit issues, as well as on eligibility for citizenship for former President Kaunda, (VonDoepp 2005, p. 277, 283) and abuse of public resources for electoral purposes (Carter Centre 2002, p. 28). Courts often ruled in favour of opposition with regards to electoral petitions in the 2001 election, especially in parliamentary races, but while critical of performance of EMB as well as abuse of state resources and media, it did not find that irregularities in presidential election were critical for results (BDHRL 2006, p. 7; Gloppen 2003, pp. 120–121; FH 2006)	1.5

Component and attribute scores

Internal party funding = not applicable Private funding = (0)×1.5=0 Standardized = 0 Public funding = not applicable Illicit funding = (4+4+3+1)×1.5=18 Standardized =4.5 Foreign funding = not applicable	***Access to resources = (0+4.5)/2=<u>2.25</u>***
Private media = (−1)×1=−1 Standardized =−1 Public media = (3)×1.5 =4.5 Standardized =4.5 Com., pop. and social media= (−1)×0.5=−0.5 Standardized =−0.5	***Access to media = (−1+4.5–0.5)/3 =<u>1</u>***
EMB = (2)×1=2 Standardized =2 Courts = (1)×1.5=1.5 Standardized =1.5	***Access to law = (2+1.5)/2=1.75***
	The playing field score = (2.25+1+1.75)/3=<u>1.66</u>

Table 4 Indicators for the playing field in Zambia, 2001–2006

Indicator	Score	Why	Importance
RINTPAR	0	While most parties claimed large membership numbers in this period, members contribute little with regards to funding (Momba 2005, p. 28) Party cards cost more to produce than they cost for buyers to buy, and party business was negligible (Kabemba 2004, p. 15). Members and voters typically expected goods in return rather than to contribute (Pitcher 2012, p. 123). Most parties demand contributions from MPs salaries for campaigns of party, which is significant source of income for parties (Momba 2004, p. 29). MMD rebuilt some party structures in this period (Le Bas 2011, p. 229)	0.5
RPRIWEL	0	MMD continued to be supported by state-dependent businesses as well as internal party elites who had massively benefitted from privatization processes, as well as business sector dependent on government contracts. Also prevented opposition-linked businesses from competing on equal terms for access to public contracts and parastatals (Pitcher 2012, pp. 139–142; van Donge 2008). Parties largely dependent on candidates contributing funds to own campaigns, especially in opposition. Opposition linked to business community and former MMD stalwarts (Momba 2005, p. 28)	1.5
RPUBPAR	–	No public funding of political parties	–
RPUBCAM	–	No campaign funding for political parties	
RILLFUN	2	MMD loaned money from parastatals to fund campaigns (Pitcher 2012, pp. 139–140). Continuous reports about use of government funds for party purposes, but less clear evidence (BDHRL 2005, p. 11, 2006, p. 13). However, steps were taken to reduce abuse of office by MMD (COG 2006, p. 23; EUEOM 2006, pp. 18–19; Gould 2006). President had own discretionary fund that could be used (lawfully outside campaign period) for purposes he wanted (Rakner and Svåsand 2004, p. 61)	1.5
RILLRES	3	Continuous reports about use of government resources, particularly transportation and infrastructure, in elections (BDHRL 2005, p. 11, 2006, p. 13; EUEOM 2006, p. 19). Some attempts to limit abuse at minister level (Gould 2006)	
RILLAPP	2	MMD used government appointments to build inclusive patronage alliance (Lindemann 2013). Reports of state officials threatening to fire public employees who votes for opposition and hiring based on party membership (BDHRL 2007, p. 14; EUEOM 2006, pp. 18–19). Extensive use of parastatal system for political purposes (Pitcher 2012, pp. 139–140)	
RILLPOL	3	MMD created favourable policies for those who supported them financially and used fertilizer subsidies in the countryside (Pitcher 2012, pp. 138–142). Districts that voted for MMD got disproportional access to subsidized fertilizer (Mason and Ricker-Gilbert 2013, p. 89). MMD extensively used local development projects, health initiatives, housing and fertilizer policy selective for campaign purposes, particularly in countryside (BDHRL 2006, pp. 13–14; COG 2006, p. 23; EUEOM 2006, pp. 18–19; Larmer and Fraser 2007, p. 633). However, some of these initiatives must also be seen as general policy successes rather than simply election policies (Larmer and Fraser 2007, p. 634)	

Table 4 (continued)

Indicator	Score	Why	Importance
RFORGOV	0	Fundraising from abroad legal. UPND raised some funds from unspecified sources abroad, but hard to determine significance (Momba 2005, p. 29). Some general donor funded programs, and some programs with individual parties, but impact is considered small (Svåsand and Rakner 2011, pp. 1260–1264)	0
RFORDIA	–	No reports about significance of contributions from the diaspora	
MPRIMED	–1	Private media, both radio stations and print media, of increasing importance and routinely criticized government (BDHRL 2003, p. 8, 2004, p. 9, 2006, p. 8). But journalists were frequently harassed and charged with libel by government (BDHRL 2003, pp. 8–9, 2004, p. 9, 2005, pp. 8-9, 2006, pp. 9–10; FH 2006), although MMD-directed attacks on independent newspapers declined in period leading up to election (BDHRL 2007, p. 10; FH 2007). Gradually increasing number and significance of privately owned radio stations that produced government-critical content, but they were often threatened with revoked licenses if they ran stories critical of government (BDHRL 2004, p. 9, 2006, p. 9; Larmer and Fraser 2007, p. 627; FH 2007). Only private TV station closed by government in 2003—new alternatives reopened in 2005-2006 (BDHRL 2004, p. 10, 2006, p. 10, 2007, p. 9). *The Post* newspaper also critical about parts of the opposition (BDHRL 2007, p. 10; Larmer and Fraser 2007, p. 630)	1
MPUBMED	2	MMD and government continued to dominate public media, providing negligible neutral or positive coverage for opposition both between elections and during campaigns, especially with regards to broadcast media. Self-censorship was common (BDHRL 2003, pp. 8–9, 2004, pp. 9–10, 2005, p. 8, 2006, p. 8, 2007, pp. 8–9; COG 2006, pp. 24–25; FH 2005). Gave substantially more coverage to MMD during elections (BDHRL 2007, p. 8; FH 2007). Small increase in opposition access to sponsored programs and debates during campaigns (COG 2006, pp. 24–25; EUEOM 2006, pp. 21-22; FH 2007)	1.5
MPOPCOP	–1	At least three community-based radio stations broadcasted throughout the period, and they and other smaller channels increased outreach significantly. Although nominally independent and critical of government, they faced pressure from MMD officials and where often not allowed to publish political material (Banda 2006; BDHRL 2004, p. 9) Opposition benefited significantly from access to these and private radio stations to spread their appeal (Larmer and Fraser 2007, p. 627)	1
MPOPSOC	0	Government did not restrict access to the internet. Both government-owned media and privately owned media had presence (BDHRL 2004, p. 10, 2006, p. 11)	
LEMBNEU	1	EMB received praise for being less pro-government (FH 2007), better organized elections and increased transparency (EUEOM 2006, p. 12; COG 2006, p. 38; Larmer and Fraser 2007, p. 620), but given a lack of legal framework, capacity and bias it failed to act on resource abuse of MMD (BDHRL 2007, p. 14). It also failed to resolve election disputes in a satisfactory manner (EUEOM 2006, p. 9)	1

Table 4 (continued)

Indicator	Score	Why	Importance
LCOUNEU	1	Executive and legislative had budgetary control of judiciary, and president could dismiss judges based on incompetence and choose new candidates with aid of MMD-controlled parliament (Gloppen 2003, pp. 125–127). Some evidence of patronage and corruption in judiciary (BDHRL 2003, p. 7; VonDoepp 2005, pp. 292–294). In general the courts did not seem averse to ruling against the government on issues related to the playing field such as abuse of funds, and access to media (BDHRL 2003, p. 7, 2004, p. 7, 2005, p. 6, 2007, pp. 7–8). However, courts were much less likely to rule against state if important government actors such as president were involved and in cases where there were clear and decisive interests for ruling party (BDHRL 2004, p. 13, 2005, p. 6; VonDoepp 2006, p. 395). Courts protected opposition candidates on several instances during campaigns (BDHRL 2007, pp. 7–8)	1

Component and attribute scores

Internal party funding = (0)×0.5 = 0 Standardized = 0 Private funding = (0)×1.5 = 0 Standardized = 0 Public funding = not applicable Illicit funding = (2 + 3 + 2 + 3)×1.5 = 15 Standardized = 3.75 Foreign funding = not applicable	***Access to resources = (0 + 0 + 3.75)/3 = <u>1.25</u>***
Private media = (−1)×1 = −1 Standardized = −1 Public media = (2)×1.5 = 3 Standardized = 3 Com., pop. and social media = (−1 + 0)×1 = −1 Standardized −0.5	***Access to media = (− 1 + 3 − 0.5)/3 = <u>0.5</u>***
EMB = (1)×1 = 1 Standardized = 1 Courts = (1)×1 = 1 Standardized = 1	***Access to law = (1 + 1)/2 = 1***
	The playing field score = (1.25 + 0.5 + 1)/3 = <u>0.9</u>

Table 5 Indicators for the playing field in Zambia, 2006-2008

Indicator	Score	Why	Importance
RINTPAR	0	Most parties in Zambia top-down, little time to fundraise for campaign from members (Cheeseman and Hinfelaar 2010; Resnick 2012). Both PF and MMD had organization to offer handouts during campaign; other opposition parties struggled to have same national presence (Resnick 2012, p. 1366)	0
RPRIWEL	1	Banda backed by wealthy individuals with previous ties to MMD. PF and UPND also with wealthy internal and external supporters, but not to same extent (Cheeseman and Hinfelaar 2010, pp. 59–60; van Donge 2010, pp. 521–523)	1.5
RPUBPAR	–	No public funding of political parties	0
RPUBCAM	–	No campaign funding for political parties	

Table 5 (continued)

Indicator	Score	Why	Importance
RILLFUN	3	Reports about clear abuse of government funds, especially in presidential election (BDHRL 2008, p. 12, 2009, p. 11; FH 2009; FH 2010). Use of government resources in campaigns (Cheeseman and Hinfelaar 2010, p. 70). Audit reports highlighting embezzlement in the period (FH 2010)	1.5
RILLRES	3	Reports about use of government airplanes and hospital vehicles in MMD campaign (Cheeseman and Hinfelaar 2010, p. 70). Government vehicles used extensively in campaign (EISA 2010, p. 15)	
RILLAPP	2	MMD used government appointments to build inclusive patronage alliance (Lindemann 2013). Co-optation of local and traditional leaders (Cheeseman and Hinfelaar 2010, p. 70)	
RILLPOL	3	Reports about threats of selective use of government programs (BDHRL 2008, p. 12). Big increase in fertilizer subsidies in period before and after election (Mason et al. 2013). Food distributed by acting president in rural areas (EISA 2010, p. 16)	
RFORGOV	–	Some reports about Chinese companies and other mining companies supporting MMD, but not enough information (Rakner 2012; van Donge 2010, p. 523)	0
RFORDIA	–	No reports about significant funding from diaspora	
MPRIMED	–1	Privately owned newspapers and radio stations relatively free to publish and air what they wanted, and played a significant role in urban areas (FH 2009). Generally critical of government (BDHRL 2008, p. 8), and positive towards at least parts of opposition (EISA 2010, p. 15). Both international and local TV and radio stations present but with limited outreach, especially in countryside (BDHRL 2008, p. 8; Murthy and Muzzamil 2010). Several important private radio stations (BDHRL 2009, p. 8). Little harassment of private journalists in period between elections (BDHRL 2008, p. 9). Arrests in relation to opposition-friendly radio broadcasts (BDHRL 2009, p. 8). Clear attempts to bring private media in line or silence them during elections (FH 2009)	1
MPUBMED	3	Self-censorship and direct government influence in public media, which were still the most important media outlets in print and broadcast (BDHRL 2008, pp. 8–9, 2009, pp. 7–8; FH 2008). Explicit threats if they did not publish positive content on Bandah during MMD succession (BDHRL 2009, p. 8). Limited access for opposition to print and broadcast during campaigns (BDHRL 2009, p. 8; EISA 2010, p. 15)	1.5
MPOPCOP	–1	Community radio stations broadcasting as in previous period, but most of them mandated not to broadcast political content (Willems 2013, p. 225). Nevertheless several talk shows with political content and popular participation, and opened up space for opposition (Murthy and Muzzamil 2010, p. 31; Willems 2013)	1
MPOPSOC	0	Few restrictions on social media and internet use, but very limited outreach (BDHRL 2008, p. 9, 2009, p. 9, 2010, p. 11)	
LEMBNEU	1	Elections were relatively well run, but lack of updated voter registry probably favoured the MMD (BDHRL 2009, p. 11; Cheeseman and Hinfelaar 2009, p. 70; EISA 2010, p. 13). Generally favourable review of EC in monitoring report (EISA 2010). Little or no attempt to sort out unfairness in playing field and resources (EISA 2010)	1

Table 5 (continued)

Indicator	Score	Why	Importance
LCOUNEU	1	Some abuse of government positions to circumvent judicial procedures, but also several cases where court acted independently of government (BDHRL 2008, p. 7, 2009, p. 6; FH 2008). General increase in judicial independence and competence (FH 2009). Court dismissed petition by PF over election results (BDHRL 2010, p. 13)	1

The death of President Levy Mwanawasa on 19 August 2008 led to new presidential elections on 30 October 2008, which necessitated treatment of the 2006–2008 period as a new electoral cycle. However, given the relatively short timeframe between from the 2006 elections and the lack of parliamentary races, many aspects of the playing field are more likely to remain the same than during a normal electoral cycle. Some issues were of less relevance and importance because of either the short space for preparing for the contest or for the presidential nature of it. This must be taken into consideration when interpreting the results

Component and attribute scores

Internal party funding = not applicable Private funding = (1) × 1.5 = 1.5 Standardized = 1.5 Public funding = not applicable Illicit funding = (3 + 3 + 2 + 3) × 1.5 = 16.5 Standardized = 4.125 Foreign funding = not applicable	***Access to resources = (1.5 + 4.125)/2 = <u>2.8</u>***
Private media = (− 1) × 1 = 1 Standardized = 1 Public media = (3) × 1.5 = 4.5 Standardized = 4.5 Com., pop. and social media = (− 1 + 0) × 1 = − 1 Standardized = − 0.5	***Access to media = (− 1 + 4.5 − 0.5)/3 = <u>1</u>***
EMB = (1) × 1 = 1 Standardized = 1 Courts = (1) × 1 = 1 Standardized = 1	***Access to law = (1 + 1)/2 = 1***
	The playing field score = (2.8 + 1 + 1)/3 = 1.6

Table 6 Indicators for the playing field in Zambia, 2008-2011

Indicator	Score	Why	Importance
RINTPAR	0	Parties report that internal contributions and membership fees are a source of income, but opposition complains that it is not sufficient to maintain party organization (COG 2011, p. 17). Parties generally free to operate and fundraise without restrictions (BDHRL 2011, p. 13). Top-heavy parties and little membership participation (Simutanyi 2013, p. 17). PF control over local councils contributed to increased evenness in quality and size of party organizations (Simutanyi 2013, p. 22)	0.5
RPRIWEL	1	Top leadership in MMD, UPND and PF were at this time either wealthy businessmen or former leaders in government, contributing heavily to the party (Simutanyi 2013, p. 17). Private businessmen typically supported both incumbent and PF, as the election was expected to be close, but typically the MMD was supported to a larger degree (Media reports and interview)	1.5
RPUBPAR	–	No public funding of political parties	0
RPUBCAM	–	No campaign funding for political parties	

Table 6 (continued)

Indicator	Score	Why	Importance
RILLFUN	3	Misuse of government resources in by-elections throughout period (BDHRL 2010, p. 14, 2011, pp. 17–18). Advantage of incumbency exploited by president and MMD in election (BDHRL 2012, p. 13; COG 2011, p. 16; EUEOM 2011, p. 14). Contributed to the common perception that the MMD had the most financial leverage in electoral history in Zambia at the time (COG 2011, p. 17)	1.5
RILLRES	3	Use of state infrastructure and resources, including different forms of transportation for candidates and for supporters to attend rallies, both in by-elections throughout period and in national elections (BDHRL 2010, p. 14; BDHRL 2011, p. 18; COG 2011, p. 17; EUEOM 2011, p. 14)	
RILLAPP	3	Partisan behaviour of state employees. Provincial secretaries and district representatives campaigned on behalf of ruling party, showing their partisan loyalty (EUEOM 2011, p. 14). Growing sense of partisan and ethnic employment (Simutanyi 2013, p. 18)	
RILLPOL	3	President timed inauguration of new state projects to coincide with campaign period and used them for campaign purposes (EUEOM 2011, p. 14). Maize relief program used for partisan and campaign purposes (EUEOM 2011, p. 14)	
RFORGOV	1	China accused of supporting MMD, and Banda used inauguration of Chinese infrastructure projects for campaign purposes (Hess and Aidoo 2013, pp. 137–138). Sources in political parties also claimed Chinese state and non-state actors were contributing funds, both to incumbent and opposition (Rakner 2012, p. 10)	0
RFORDIA	–	No information found	
MPRIMED	0	Radio still most important media (especially in rural areas), followed by TV and print (EUEOM 2011, p. 16). Some attempts by government to influence private media (BDHRL 2010, p. 9, 2012, p. 9). Private media generally more critical of government, in turn threatened, charged and attacked by incumbent (BDHRL 2010, pp. 9–10, 2011, pp. 12–13, 2012, pp. 8–9). Private media editors quite frequently charged in court (BDHRL 2010, p. 10, 2011, p. 13) Active threats of license revocations (BDHRL 2010, p. 11, 2011, p. 14). One government-critical radio station closed for inciting violence (BDHRL 2012, p. 10). Journalist in private media subject to surveillance (BDHRL 2011, p. 11, 2012, pp. 8–9). Private broadcasting media favoured opposition slightly throughout campaigns, though also covered the incumbent (EUEOM 2011, pp. 16–17). Broadcast media relatively balanced (COG 2011, p. 20). Print media very partisan, either for MMD or PF. *The Post* very pro-PF (COG 2011, p. 20; EUEOM 2011, p. 17)	1.5
MPUBMED	3	Access to national broadcasters restricted for opposition (BDHRL 2010, p. 10, 2011, p. 13, 2012, pp. 8–9). Government controlled and influenced both directly and through self-censorship (BDHRL 2010, p. 10, 2011, pp. 12–13, 2012, pp. 9–10). ZNBC admitted censoring political content in public programs (Willems 2013, p. 228). State media dominated by MMD and the President, MMD received 37% of all campaign coverage relative to 4–8% by PF (EUEOM 2011, p. 16). ZNBC openly promoted MMD (COG 2011, p. 20; EUEOM 2011, p. 16). Opposition invited to debates, but declined due to perceived bias (EUEOM 2011, p. 16)	1.5

Table 6 (continued)

Indicator	Score	Why	Importance
MPOPCOP	0	Community radio stations of relevance as over 10 % of the population regularly listened to some of the major community stations (Murthy and Muzammil 2010, p. 31). Limited geographical coverage for single station and restrictions on political content, total government control over licensing (Willems 2013, p. 225)	0.5
MPOPSOC	0	In 2008, only about 5.5 % of all country inhabitants used internet (BDHRL 2010, p. 11). While not restricting access, the government monitored critical internet outlets and sometimes acted on this information (BDHRL 2010, p. 11). Social media gradually increased in importance with regard to communication between media and population (Willems 2013, p. 226). Editor of online newspapers investigated and charged (BDHRL 2011, p. 13). Towards end of period, reports that government monitoring was non-existent (BDHRL 2012, p. 10). All parties used mobile and internet technology in campaign (COG 2011, p. 16)	
LEMBNEU	0	EC's administration of election seen as "impartial" by EUEOM (EUEOM 2011, p. 9). While initially faced with criticism regarding its lack of impartiality, the EC implemented confidence-building measures in this period that were somewhat effective (EUEOM 2011, p. 10). Appointments still controlled by incumbent, but more debated (COG 2011, p. 11; EUEOM 2011, p. 10). Voter registry updated to the satisfaction of most players (EUEOM 2011, p. 11). EC failed to act on MMD's breach of code of conduct (COG 2011, p. 13). Professionalization of staff in this period, hiring based on merit (COG 2011, p. 14)	1
LCOUNEU	1	President appointed judges (BDHRL 2011, p. 10). Incumbent did not consistently respect judicial independence and officials used their offices to circumvent judicial proceedings (BDHRL 2010, p. 6, 2011, p. 9, 2012, p. 7) However, court did rule against government, including ruling for PF leader Sata (BDHRL 2010, pp. 6–7, 2011, p. 9). Court played relatively neutral role in complaints made during campaign, though perhaps with slight incumbent bias (EUEOM 2011, p. 19). Court was active in electoral petitions in aftermath of election (EUEOM 2011, p. 20). Court ruled in favour of then-opposition PF in many petitions after election (BDHRL 2013, pp. 13–14)	1

Component and attribute scores

Internal party funding = (0) × 1.5 = 0 Standardized = 0 Private funding = (1) × 1.5 = 1.5 Standardized = 1.5 Public funding = not applicable Illicit funding = (3 + 3 + 3 + 3) × 1.5 = 18 Standardized = 4.5 Foreign funding = not applicable	***Access to resources = (0 + 1.5 + 4.5)/3 = 2***
Private media = (− 1) × 1.5 = 1.5 Standardized = 0 Public media = (3) × 1.5 = 4.5 Standardized = 4.5 Com., pop. and social media = (0+0) × 1 = 0 Standardized = 0	***Access to media = (− 1.5 + 4.5 + 0)/3 = 1***
EMB = (0) × 1 = 0 Standardized = 0 Courts = (1) × 1 = 1 Standardized = 1	***Access to law = (0 + 1)/2 = 0.5***
	The playing field score = (2 + 1 + 0.5)/3 = 1.16

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