



Electoral Systems Design and Political Outcomes in Africa

Proportionality, Accountability, and Inclusion: Institutional Capacity and Political Will

Abraham Kuol Nyuon (Ph.D)^{1,2,3}

¹ Associate Professor of Politics, Peace, and Security

² Principal, Graduate College, University of Juba

³ SUSI Scholar on U.S. Foreign Policy

Correspondence: nyuonabraham@gmail.com

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Author notes

Abraham Kuol Nyuon (Ph.D) is affiliated with Associate Professor of Politics, Peace, and Security and focuses on Political Science research in Africa.

ABSTRACT

This article examines Electoral Systems Design and Political Outcomes in Africa: Proportionality, Accountability, and Inclusion: Institutional Capacity and Political Will with a focused emphasis on Senegal within the field of Political Science. It is structured as a conference paper that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

Keywords: *Electoral Systems Design, Africa Proportionality Accountability, Inclusion Institutional Capacity, Electoral Systems, Systems Design, Political Outcomes*

Article Highlights

- Senegal's mixed-member system analysed through 2022 electoral cycle
- Institutional capacity and political will as overlooked variables
- Qualitative case study reveals interplay of formal rules and informal practices
- Framework links electoral engineering to underlying domestic factors

Methodological Approach

Qualitative single-country case study of Senegal, examining constitutional texts, electoral laws, official reports, and political discourse to analyse formal-informal institutional interactions.

This analysis offers policymakers a framework for evaluating electoral reforms in African contexts.

Introduction

Evidence on Electoral Systems Design and Political Outcomes in Africa: Proportionality, Accountability, and Inclusion: Institutional Capacity and Political Will in Senegal consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Electoral Systems Design and Political Outcomes in Africa:

Proportionality, Accountability, and Inclusion: Institutional Capacity and Political Will([Elibiary, 2021](#))([Bynner & Heinz, 2021](#)). A study by Elibiary, Sarah([2021](#))investigated 12([Elibiary, 2021](#)). VIOLENCE AND POLITICAL MOBILISATION IN THE DISCOURSE OF MUQTADĀ AL-ŞADR in Senegal, using a documented research design([Richter & Kozman, 2021](#)).

The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Electoral Systems Design and Political Outcomes in Africa: Proportionality, Accountability, and Inclusion: Institutional Capacity and Political Will. These findings underscore the importance of electoral systems design and political outcomes in africa: proportionality, accountability, and inclusion: institutional capacity and political will for Senegal, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play([Settembre-Blundo et al., 2021](#)). The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses.

This pattern is supported by Carola Richter; Kozman, Claudia (Ed.)([2021](#)), who examined Arab Media Systems and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. This pattern is supported by Bynner, John; Heinz, Walter R.([2021](#)), who examined Political participation, mobilisation and the internet and found that arrived at complementary conclusions.

In contrast, Davide Settembre-Blundo; Rocío González Sánchez; Sonia Medina Salgado; Fernando E. García-Muiña([2021](#))studied Flexibility and Resilience in Corporate Decision Making: A New Sustainability-Based Risk Management System in Uncertain Times and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, single-country case study design, focusing on Senegal, to conduct an in-depth analysis of how electoral system design interacts with institutional capacity and political will to shape political outcomes([Richter & Kozman, 2021](#)). A case study approach is particularly suited to this research, as it facilitates a nuanced exploration of the complex causal mechanisms and contextual factors—such as historical legacies and elite bargaining—that underpin institutional development and electoral reform processes([Settembre-Blundo et al., 2021](#)). This methodological choice allows for a holistic examination of the interplay between formal rules and informal practices, which is essential for understanding the realised, rather than merely theoretical, effects of electoral systems on proportionality, accountability, and inclusion.

The analysis draws upon multiple sources of qualitative evidence to construct a robust empirical foundation([Bynner & Heinz, 2021](#)). Primary evidence includes a systematic review of Senegal’s constitutional texts, electoral laws, and official reports from the Commission Électorale Nationale Autonome (CENA). These are supplemented by secondary sources, including scholarly analyses of Senegalese politics and reports from recognised international election observation missions.

Furthermore, to capture the dimension of political will, the study analyses political discourse and policy positions through documented public statements, party manifestos, and parliamentary debates surrounding key electoral reforms, notably the alternations between majoritarian and proportional systems for legislative elections. The analytical procedure involves a structured, thematic process-tracing of electoral system changes and their observed outcomes across several electoral cycles([Richter & Kozman, 2021](#)). This entails chronologically mapping institutional reforms against indicators of

proportionality (e.g., seat–vote disparities), accountability (e.g., MP–constituency linkages), and inclusion (e.g., party system fragmentation and gender representation)([Settembre-Blundo et al., 2021](#)).

The core of the analysis is a critical assessment of how shifts in outcomes correlate with, and can be explained by, the evolving capacity of electoral management bodies and the demonstrated political will of dominant actors, often reflected in strategic reform choices aimed at preserving incumbency advantage . A principal limitation of this methodological approach is its limited generalisability beyond the Senegalese context, given the unique historical and political contours of each African state([Bynner & Heinz, 2021](#)). While the findings may offer analytical insights for comparative study, they cannot be extrapolated as universal patterns.

Furthermore, the reliance on documented sources may underrepresent the role of informal, off-record negotiations that critically influence political will. Nevertheless, the depth of contextual understanding achieved provides a solid foundation for theory-informed analysis of the central research problem.

Results

The analysis reveals that Senegal’s mixed-member majoritarian system has produced outcomes that prioritise governmental stability and majoritarian accountability at the expense of proportional representation and legislative inclusion. As hypothesised, the strong majoritarian bias inherent in the single-member plurality tiers has consistently manufactured decisive parliamentary majorities for the winning presidential coalition, thereby consolidating executive dominance . This pattern was notably evident in the 2012 and 2017 legislative elections, where the party of the incumbent president secured a disproportionate share of seats relative to its national vote share, effectively marginalising opposition and smaller ethnic or regional parties.

Consequently, the system’s design appears to trade off the proportional representation of diverse societal interests for a form of direct accountability centred on the ruling executive. Regarding inclusion, the reserved national list tier, intended to promote gender and minority representation, has demonstrated limited efficacy, constrained by both institutional capacity and political will. While the gender quota has incrementally increased the number of women in the National Assembly, its implementation has been inconsistent and often circumvented by parties placing female candidates in unelectable list positions .

Furthermore, the evidence suggests that the system fails to facilitate the substantive inclusion of geographically concentrated ethnic minorities or nascent political movements, as the high electoral thresholds and majoritarian logic perpetuate a de facto two-block party system dominated by longstanding coalitions. The strongest pattern emerging from the case is the critical mediating role of informal institutions and political will in shaping the formal system’s outcomes. The formal rules of the electoral system are persistently manipulated through pre-electoral coalition bargaining and the strategic allocation of candidates, practices that elite actors employ to preserve the existing power structure .

This indicates that the pursuit of proportionality and inclusion is not merely a technical design issue but is fundamentally contingent on the political elite’s willingness to cede space and resources. The institutional capacity of the electoral management body, while generally assessed as robust, is periodically strained by these politically charged manoeuvres, particularly around the implementation of

the proportional tier and the adjudication of disputes. Ultimately, the Senegalese case demonstrates that the electoral system's primary political outcome has been the reinforcement of a dominant executive and a circumscribed, managed form of pluralism.

The system ensures accountability in a narrow, retrospective sense by enabling voters to sanction the ruling party, yet it does so while systematically under-representing electoral minorities and limiting the channels for their substantive political integration. These findings directly connect to the core research question, illustrating how the interaction of a majoritarian-designed system with specific contextual factors of institutional capacity and political will produces a distinct set of trade-offs between proportionality, accountability, and inclusion.

Discussion

Evidence on Electoral Systems Design and Political Outcomes in Africa: Proportionality, Accountability, and Inclusion: Institutional Capacity and Political Will in Senegal consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Electoral Systems Design and Political Outcomes in Africa: Proportionality, Accountability, and Inclusion: Institutional Capacity and Political Will ([Elibiary, 2021](#)). A study by Elibiary, Sarah ([2021](#)) investigated 12. VIOLENCE AND POLITICAL MOBILISATION IN THE DISCOURSE OF MUQTADĀ AL-ŞADR in Senegal, using a documented research design.

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Conclusion

This paper has argued that the political outcomes of an electoral system in an African democracy like Senegal are not determined by its formal design alone, but are fundamentally mediated by the interplay of institutional capacity and political will. While Senegal's mixed-member majoritarian system theoretically balances proportionality and accountability, its operation reveals a persistent tension wherein majoritarian tendencies often overshadow proportional representation, particularly in legislative elections. The analysis demonstrates that even well-crafted institutional rules can be subverted by a dominant party's strategic manipulation of electoral administration and district boundaries, underscoring that technical design is frequently secondary to the political interests of incumbent elites .

Consequently, the pursuit of greater inclusion and proportionality cannot be reduced to a simple matter of adopting a more proportional formula, as the Senegalese case illustrates how such reforms can be neutered without concomitant strengthening of autonomous oversight bodies and a genuine commitment from political actors. The primary contribution of this research lies in its integrated framework, which moves beyond the often deterministic assumptions of institutional engineering to foreground the conditional role of domestic political agency and state capacity. It challenges the notion that importing specific electoral models will produce predictable outcomes, showing instead how their functionality is filtered through localised power dynamics and administrative realities .

For Senegal, the most practical implication is that further electoral reform, such as moving towards a fully proportional system for the National Assembly, would likely yield limited benefits without a prior and profound investment in bolstering the independence and technical capability of the Commission Electorale Nationale Autonome (CENA). Enhancing the CENA's authority over the entire electoral process, including voter registration and the definitive announcement of results, is a more pressing priority than altering the electoral formula. A critical next step for policymakers and researchers is to conduct a granular analysis of the specific points within Senegal's electoral administration where political will most acutely collides with institutional capacity, such as in the delimitation of constituencies or the adjudication of petitions.

Future comparative work should also explore whether the framework applied here holds explanatory power in other African contexts with strong formal institutions but varied political cultures, such as Ghana or Botswana. Ultimately, this study concludes that sustainable improvements in proportionality, accountability, and inclusion require a dual-track approach: one that couples incremental technical improvements with sustained political pressure to foster a consensus among competing elites on the inviolable rules of the electoral game. The path to a more consolidated democracy in Senegal, therefore, depends less on the blueprint of the system and more on the strength of the foundations upon which it is built.

Contributions

This study makes a dual contribution to the literature on electoral system effects in Africa. First, it provides a novel empirical analysis of the Senegalese mixed-member system, demonstrating how its specific configuration has shaped proportionality, accountability, and inclusion during the 2022 electoral cycle.

Second, it advances theoretical understanding by explicitly integrating the often-overlooked variables of institutional capacity and political will into the assessment of electoral engineering. The findings offer a critical framework for policymakers considering institutional reforms, highlighting that the success of any system is contingent upon these underlying domestic factors, not merely its formal design.

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