

SUCCESSION POLITICS AS A THREAT TO PEACE AND SECURITY IN AFRICA: THE CASE FOR CONSTITUTIONALISM AND DEMOCRATIZATION

Daniel John Pundu, (Ph.D)

1. Introduction

Succession politics is understood to mean the process of changing leadership and includes the vacating of power by the old ruler, the choice of the new, and his or her legitimation. Periods of succession are often tense for all regimes; even periods of succession are often tense for all regimes, even where there are established procedures and easy legitimation. Succession times are considerably more risky and precarious for tyrannical, authoritarian and dictatorial regimes. The discussion of succession presents a contested and topical issue in Africa. Political succession has shown that leaders in African countries manipulate and exploit state apparatus for their interests at the expense of promoting an efficient, effective and responsive government characterized by peace, stability, democracy and the growth of the political economy.¹ This view is compounded by muzzling dissent, cumulating in strong personalities and weak institutions. The argument of strong personalities and weak political institutions has wide application in Africa, since some leaders view political leadership as a solo project rather than a collective political process. Thus, passing the baton unto the next leader has been a challenge resulting in the personalization of governments and political parties by leaders. Political and administrative organs are crucial components for the effective functioning and development of nations since there is a direct correlation between the configuration of the political architecture and the functionality of the administrative apparatus of the state. The political dynamics of a state influence changes in the administrative leadership, since the political architecture determines the turnover of administrative staff. This is why regular transfer of power is the major test of stability in a nation's political system. In many African countries leaders have shown a consistent trajectory of amending state constitutions so as to prolong their stay in power.

Crucially, leadership succession in African politics has been one of the major sources of conflict in Africa. This problem stems from both political party levels and systemic levels. Political parties serve as the main instruments of mass mobilization for political participation and for democratization. In addition, many African political parties suffer from democratic weaknesses just like the State that make succession politics conflictive. The conflict resulting from succession politics acquires ethnic, class and elitist nature as it degenerates into violence. This violence and systemic disturbance due to succession conflicts ultimately threaten the peace and stability in Africa. However, all is not lost; the succession posture is not completely murky in Africa, as several countries offer good examples of peaceful and orderly leadership change. These include, most importantly, Tanzania, Nigeria, South Africa, Botswana, Mauritius, Senegal, Mozambique, and Ghana.² Despite the few good examples of routine regime change, it is clear that incumbent leaders in many African countries have seized power from both political parties and governments. The result is a stifling of leadership renewal and reconfiguration of governance structures resulting in the collapse of administrative units and statutory state organs. This article explains how succession politics can be a menace to peace and security. It argues for

¹ Afro barometer (2015)

² Habisso, T. 'Politics of succession: coping when leaders die', African Renewal, (2011).

constitutionalism and democratization as remedies to succession crises in Africa. The article is organized in five parts. The first part covers an introduction. Part two covers a brief historical account of succession politics in Africa. Part three discusses the drivers of succession politics. Part four offers some concluding remarks. Part five offers some policy recommendations.

2. History of Succession Politics

Historically, the term succession was applied to monarchies, signifying the substitution and replacement of one sovereign by another.³ They further aver that in hereditary monarchies there tend to be less frequent clashes over the authentic or legitimate heir or beneficiary. In most monarchical regimes, traditional authority was recognized as legitimate by virtue of tradition, custom, and the veneration of previous generations.⁴ Under this form of political system, laws and customs are handed down from earlier generations to validate the existing political structure,⁵ and the transmission of authority is normally heritable in monarchies. Thus, there are few if any succession problems since there is a solitary succession framework that is usually followed after the death of the monarch. The progressive bureaucratic state has embraced a legally-sanctioned rational succession procedure in which authority is derived from a system of rules that is agreed to by the population. In this rational procedure, states become progressively bureaucratic, monarchs either become figureheads or disappear, and government shifts to political parties and party coalitions.⁶ Most modern states have shifted from the traditional/monarchical succession framework to that of legal-rational succession. The succession problem in Africa, however, seems to be characterized by the postcolonial state coupled with political power as a means to accumulate riches.⁷ This results in the gradual attrition of the constitutive and regulative rules, institutional processes and mechanism for succession leading to political volatility, illegitimate governments and conflict. Among others, most of the succession conflicts witnessed today in African countries are caused by voracious hunger for political power. For example in Kenya, conflict over succession has largely been constitutionally driven, that is, candidates have accepted the legitimacy of the constitution and the provisions which regulate succession. Secondly, political murder and assassination have intimidated potential successors narrowing the range and scope of conflict over succession. Thirdly, conflict regarding succession has been predominantly issue-driven, that is, Section 2(A), licensing of political rallies and constitution reforms has meant that conflict is contained within the existing political framework. Finally, all political conflicts in Kenya has been elite dominated, as stake holders in the Kenyan state the competing elites are willing to contain conflict so as not to threaten stability and peace.

³ Hughes, A & May, R 'The politics of succession in Black Africa', *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 1–22 (1998)

⁴ Hughes, A & May, R 'The politics of succession in Black Africa', *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 1–22 (1998)

⁵ Nwosu, BU. 'Tracks of the third wave: democracy theory, democratization and the dilemma of political succession in Africa', *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 39, no 131, pp. 11–25 (2012)

⁶ Govea, RM & Holm, JD 'Crisis, violence and political succession in Africa', *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 129–148 (1998)

⁷ Igbuzor, O 2010, *Electoral violence in Nigeria*, Action Aid, Asaba (2010)

3. Drivers of Succession Politics in Africa

▪ Personality Politics

Many political parties in Africa in practice centrally consolidate power in the person of the party leader (and/or chairman). This entity is always on the political frontline and uses this position to personalize power and almost the party. Political parties have instead turned subjects of arbitrary abuse by party leaders if not sinews of total power for party leaders. They are therefore driven by interests of party leaders and not founding values, principles and ideologies thereby losing their institutional character.⁸ It is from these political interests, patrimonial relations are often built.

Party leaders have unbridled influence on the political parties to the extent that party membership, delegates and officials only play a cheerleading role that builds party leaders into powerful political totems. This helps them to develop loyalty structures from the party down to the local support bases. Party leaders become unquestionable and those who contend with party leaders' positions and style are perceived enemies of the party and, in case of the ruling party, enemies of government. This almost politically deifies party leaders and absolves them from internal party competition that necessitates espousal of political succession principles.

President Jomo Kenyatta enjoyed torrential party support due to his charisma and liberation legacy during his chairmanship of Kenya African National Union (KANU).⁹ The question of his succession in the party was therefore muted until his death. This led to factionalism that embarked on vicious power struggle to replace Kenyatta within the party arousing tensions across the country and among political elites. In Uganda, National Resistance Movement (NRM) has been under President Yoweri Museveni's total influence since 1986. Zimbabwe African National Union- Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) was under total influence of President Robert Mugabe since the country's independence in 1980 until his military-aided ouster in 2017. Tanzania's Chama cha Mapinduzi was under President Julius Nyerere from 1961 until 1985 when he retired. During their hold onto power within their respective political parties, the question of political leadership succession was and is not tolerated.

Lack of internal party democracy arouses resentment and splintering which then clutters democratic space with a multitude of parties. For example in 2004 in Malawi, National Democratic Alliance (NDA) broke away from United Democratic Front (UDF), Republican Party broke away from Malawi Congress Party (MCP) and three more new parties emerged, giving the ruling party victory in the presidential poll over many splinter parties.¹⁰ This failed basic standards of democratic competition and goals. This proliferation of political parties obfuscates political discourse, detaching many political parties from the society they seek to represent.¹¹ This can lead to political entropy. Most of these parties are ethno-regional which

⁸Peter, M. C., & Kopsieker, F. Political Succession in East Africa; In Search of a Limited Leadership. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Kenya Office (2006)

⁹Mwaura, N. C. Political Succession and Related Conflicts in Kenya. A paper prepared for the USAID Conference on Conflict Resolution in the Greater Horn of Africa held at Methodist Guest House, Nairobi, (1997).

¹⁰ Chiroro, B. (2006). The Dilemma of Opposition Political Parties in Southern Africa. *Journal of African Elections*, Vol 5 No 1 (2016)

¹¹ Ibid

perpetuates ethnic conflict around resource and power distribution in African countries. Regional and ethnic mobilization of these parties also disintegrates African nations into ethnic enclaves, further Balkanizing a country.

- **One Party-Rule Hangover**

Many post-independence African ruling political parties through tact and might consolidated power ultimately creating single-party states across Africa. Mali, South Africa, Senegal, Namibia, Tanzania, Zambia and Kenya among others became single party states. The ruling elites justified though never adequately, the development, as rooted in African political philosophy. Ruling parties centralized power and even banned other political parties, as happened in Kenya in 1969 when Kenya People's Union (KPU) was banned and Kenya was made a one party (KANU) state by law in 1982. They fused party structures with government machinery and party manifestos (and decisions) with public policy blurring the line between party and government. This ensured that they wield total power. This wielding of total power and lock-down on other political parties created more political conflicts across Africa, as elites fought off one party tyranny. In Kenya, politics turned tumultuous since the banning of other parties in 1969 and even more turbulent since 1982, as opposition elites led the clamor for multi-party democracy against a repressive regime. However, single party rule has been long sustained by patterns of patron-client relationship that ruling parties form with politicians and the population. Politicians sell their loyalty for trappings of power to the ruling party while the population pledges their allegiance to the same in exchange for 'development.' Rebel politicians and rebel regions are therefore treated to marginalization, deprivation and coercion till they oblige to structured clientelism. Meanwhile, inequitable distribution of resources would provoke the struggle for equity by deprived regions. The tendency of ruling parties with centralized power to abuse state machinery and resources for party politics is rampant in Africa. This can be seen in rigged elections, arbitrary arrest and prosecution of opposition leaders, crackdown on media and civil society, and limitation of civil liberties and freedoms. Currently for example, Ethiopia is facing unrests due to repressive Ethiopia People's Revolutionary Democratic Front's rule which now has imposed a second State of Emergency barely few months apart.

- **Constitutional Failures**

Constitutional failures happen at both political party and systemic levels.

- (a) Political Party Level

Political parties in post-independence Africa adopted good constitutions but gradual consolidation of power in the person of the party leader eroded this democratic achievement. Political parties, their membership and executive bodies could no longer check the powers, excesses and arbitrariness of the party leader. Other political parties, especially opposition parties, were small and weak with ad hoc structures leaving party leaders as the lifeline of those parties. However, some political parties had prohibitive clauses in their constitutions that protected the party leader from competition. In Kenya in 2013, this prohibitive clause is what led to the break-up of Orange Democratic Movement when the deputy party leader, Musalia Mudavadi, vainly complained against the clause protecting Raila Odinga's position as the party

leader and his automatic candidacy in presidential elections.¹² Till now, Raila Odinga is the party leader and has been since its formation sometime in 2005 and the question of succession is silent in the party. Party leaders have, by virtue of their immense influence on their parties, by-passed party procedures and constitutions to appoint or anoint successors. This creates political disputes within parties, tensions among supporters and even dealt those parties final blows. In Kenya in 2002, when KANU's party leader and chairman, outgoing president Moi, belatedly anointed Uhuru Kenyatta his successor, factions grew in the party leading to mass exodus of politicians who joined the opposition. The party lost the elections of 2002 and has since been relegated in Kenyan politics. In February 2018, Movement for Democratic Change (MDC)'s party leader Morgan Tsvangirai passed. He had however anointed Nelson Chamisa to take over as party leader by-passing party procedures and constitution. This created a big storm in Zimbabwe's main opposition party, threatening its very existence or continuity, as factions opposed to Chamisa strongly emerged. A faction led by Thokozani Khupe has for example propped her claim to the party's leadership by virtue of her election as vice party leader by relevant party body before the party leader's demise. This may cost the party next elections (if it survives the crisis), given the crisis is untimely as elections are due in July of 2018. There is also possibility of splintering into several political parties.

(b) Systemic Level

Here, constitutional failures happen due to (i) hostile constitutional amendments,(ii) amendment attempts to extend term limits for incumbents, (iii) constitutional lacunae that fails to limit presidential terms and,(iv) amendments (or provisions) that give absolute power to incumbents.

In Togo, President Eyadema died in office in 2005, having been the longest serving African president at the time. The military imposed his son Faure as the successor citing a dangerous power vacuum. Later the parliament amended the constitution to cement his position. This has taken Togo through political conflict among elites, ethnic conflict and unrests that threaten its stability (Banjo, 2005). In Kenya, the parliament passed a law that made the country a one party State, outlawing formation of other political parties. This lasted from 1982 till 1991, having given the incumbent of the ruling party undue advantage over his competitors. This however spawned clamor for multiparty democracy led by civil society and politicians, receiving repressive regime reaction. There have also been disruptive attempts by some African parliaments to extend the term limits of incumbent presidents. These have led to serious political conflict and even popular rebellion against parliament and the president, as seen in Burkina Faso. President Campaore was overthrown by the people in 2014 and parliament burnt down when he sought to extend term limits through parliament. Lack of term limits among other reasons inspired armed resistance to Milton Obote-led government by Yoweri Museveni when it was clear that Obote was staying in power. The permanence of Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia's tenure also inspired rebellion against him in 1974. Julius Nyerere of Tanzania wished to resign of his own accord in 1980, but CCM and the people urged him not to, citing unavailability of a suitable successor and non-existence of succession formula. Still, successor unavailability is just a political excuse to remain in power. These are just few out of many examples to indicate disregard for the constitutionalism to justify power extension for supposedly political stability.

¹² Momanyi, B. Mudavadi finally ditches ODM as presidential race hots up. Capital News. <https://www.capitalfm.co.ke/news/2012/04/mudavadi-finally-ditches-odm-presidential-race-hots-up/> (2012)

Shortly after independence in Kenya, KANU embarked on power consolidation in a way that centralized power in the presidency through constitutional amendments. The issue of succession could therefore not be definite in the existence of the vice president because he was not permanent and could be sacked by the president anytime. The Chief Justice could not as allowed by the constitution determine the president's incapacity and recommend his impeachment because he himself could be appointed and sacked by the president anytime. Parliament could also not successfully move a motion-of-no-confidence and impeach the president, because he was protected by his parliamentary majority.

This left the question of succession to the president's discretion which was obviously unpredictable, causing political tension. An aggressive move led by Njoroge Mungai's 'Change-the-Constitution' team to have the Speaker of the National Assembly take over *ad interim* in transition was also successfully fought by President Kenyatta and an opposing faction led by Kibaki-Njonjo-Moi in 1976. Kenyatta died in office leaving Moi as the heir to the throne with serious legitimacy damage, leading to his authoritarian style that took Kenya through turbulent 24 years of liberation struggle, from 1978 to 2002.

▪ **Electoral Failures**

Elections (regular, free and fair) serve as means of selection for the replacement or succession of political elites in democratic countries. However, many elections in Africa are characterized by malpractices such as rigging, intimidation of both voters and opponents and voter bribery. This leads to high numbers of election petitions and a high frequency of presidential election petitions in Africa. It however leads to politico-ethnic violence due to the political nature of African politics, which causes serious instabilities in African countries and continental Africa especially around election cycles. This again happens at both political party (party primaries) and systemic levels (general elections). At political party level, 2017 primaries in Kenya were marred by violence amid malpractice claims and clashes between selected party favorites and popular candidates across many political parties.¹³ This was but part of a pattern of electoral violence in Kenya. At the highest level (general elections), in Kenya in December 2007, the announcement of Mwai Kibaki as winner of presidential elections led to clashes that claimed more than 1,100 people, displaced more than 600,000 people and caused massive destruction of property. This was due to alleged rigging of the elections by the incumbent, Mwai Kibaki ('Kenya since post-election violence,' 2017). Many of Kenyan elections have faced credibility questions and led to violence almost every election cycle. In August 2017 again; the opposition led by Raila Odinga filed a petition against the election of President Uhuru Kenyatta which resulted in nullification of the election on grounds of electoral irregularities, illegalities and unconstitutionality.¹⁴ In 2016, President Museveni of Uganda was controversially re-elected causing violence due to serious allegations of electoral fraud (Uganda's Museveni re-elected,' 2016). Then same happened in Zimbabwe in 2008 pitting incumbent President Robert Mugabe against Morgan Tsvangirai. Many other African countries face electoral failures that caused violent conflicts and instability.

¹³ Otondi, T. S. Kenya's History of Election Violence is threatening to repeat itself (2017)

¹⁴ De freytas-tamura, K. Kenya Supreme Court Nullifies Presidential Election. New York (2017)

- **Reluctance to Hand over Power**

The caliber of most African nationalists was engrossed in power accumulation and consolidation at the expense of development and redesigning of governance structures/institutions. Ascendance to power meant perpetuation of neo-patrimonial system and patronage politics. African politics 'is increasingly patrimonial and benefits oriented'. In patrimonial contexts, control is cohesive or compacted in one individual who applies it for his subjective gain, and faithful supporters are rewarded. These cohorts or political supporters are obligatory to mobilize political help for the incumbent and alluded to conclusions made by the patron'. A case in point is the manipulation of land reform by Zanu-PF to entice war veterans to become the vanguard of the party; they in turn campaigned for Zanu-PF as a sign of loyalty. In the same context, the academics strongly agree that political business in Africa is influenced by cartels controlling those with the levers of power. Furthermore, the cartels are well linked and protected and this is made easier by their ability to seize major state institutions, including those charged with oversight – the police and anti corruption courts. As a matter of fact, political systems in Africa are characterized by well-webbed cartels enjoying the protection of the political elites. The cartels thrive within an intently knit system of close connections. The cartels are awarded tenders in major sectors of the economy namely agriculture, fuel sector, mining and energy. The network is difficult to prosecute since the connections enjoy the protection of the powerful. On the other hand, the cartels support the political elites' political programs, for instance funding constituency development programs and other personal goodies. This fuels succession crises, since the cartels will oftentimes protect the systems that benefit them, and would wish them to remain in power. Tersely, experience has shown that in most post-independence states where political power is tailored, and that politics is a form of industry as political positions offer easy access to amassing prospects and state resources. Accordingly, political succession is difficult and complex, because violence, patronage, the rendition of patriotic history, the capture of bureaucracy and social-laxity have been major attributes propelling and sustaining centralism and non-succession.

- **Bequest of Traditional Succession Models**

In pre-colonial Africa, succession was guaranteed and appointment issues were handled by spirit mediums in line with the different systems pertaining to each culture and tribe during the pre-colonial era like in the American systems, where each battalion has its own chaplain. Africa[n] tradition had two major models of succession, namely the collateral system (which rotates among family and primogeniture (a chief begets a chief). Some scholars have argued that succession models in modern Africa were cut and pasted from a traditional perspective by politicians to suit their egocentric perceptions. Political leaders in Africa seem to view themselves as the only sacred specie that can rule in perpetuity. The current succession frameworks in Africa are reminiscent of the traditional succession framework. In consequence, when modern legal rotational succession models were translated in Africa, the continent struggled to adapt since the models were alien to Africa's political culture. The modern models weaken the revolutionary spirit and Africa's development route, since development dictatorship guarantees continuity and stability.

4. Conclusion

The aim of this article was to explain how succession politics can be a threat to peace and security in Africa. It has been established that succession politics has been one of the major causes of political conflicts in Africa. It is fairly concluded that succession politics are a creation of historical, political, traditional and societal factors that molded political systems, governance structures and succession patterns in post-independence Africa. It is undoubtedly clear that the politics of succession create disputes, struggles for power due to perceived or real power vacuum and even unrests that threaten the stability of African countries. Moreover, national and regional security is also seriously undermined by politics of succession which have always been problematic in Africa. For Africa to stabilize and ensure the right environment for development and growth, embracing constitutionalism and democratization is critical for promoting freedoms, fairness and justice in political practice. The adoption of a collusive model anchored in a patrimonial system resulted in a small clique controlling the apparatus and institutions of the state for personal gain. The bureaucracy has been captured and used for rent-seeking purposes.

5. Recommendations

Based on the above, the following recommendations are given for resolving succession crises:-

- African governments, political parties and civil societies should be on the lead on democratization of political space to limit conflict.
- Constitutionalism should be promoted and observed by all institutions of governance in African countries.
- Presidential terms should be limited and succession procedures made clear in party constitutions and constitutions of African republics.
- Institutional reforms touching on separation of powers, institutional independence and competence should be embraced. Political practice should also be liberally institutionalized at political party and systemic levels.
- Peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms should be institutionalized and promoted in dispute resolution in Africa.
- Free, fair and credible elections should be promoted so as to build trust in democratic processes and stabilize transitions

References

- Afro barometer on electoral issues in African countries (2015)
- De freytas-tamura, K. Kenya Supreme Court Nullifies Presidential Election. New York (2017)
- Govea, RM & Holm, JD ‘Crisis, violence and political succession in Africa’, *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 129–148 (1998)
- Habisso, T. ‘Politics of succession: coping when leaders die’, *African Renewal*, (2011)
- Hughes, A & May, R ‘The politics of succession in Black Africa’, *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 1–22 (1998)
- Igbuzor, O 2010, Electoral violence in Nigeria, Action Aid, Asaba (2010)
- Momanyi, B. Mudavadi finally ditches ODM as presidential race hots up. *Capital News* (2012)
- Nwosu, BU. ‘Tracks of the third wave: democracy theory, democratization and the dilemma of political succession in Africa’, *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 39, no 131, (2012)
- Otondi, T. S. Kenya’s History of Election Violence is threatening to repeat itself (2017)

