

The Politics of Succession in Black Africa

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The 'crisis' of political succession in Black Africa

The orderly or 'regular' (to use Blondel's term¹) transfer of political power from one substantive ruler to another is generally regarded as a major test of the stability and legitimacy of a political system and its successful handling is viewed as evidence of 'maturity' on the part of a political community. Though admittedly not easy to define, 'regular' succession of national political leadership involves adherence to some kind of rules or procedures of transfer, or should 'at least accord with the spirit of the procedures which were previously devised'.² Even where pressure may be applied, if such pressure is 'acceptable' then the succession may be considered legitimate.

The absence of accepted 'rules or procedures of transfer' in many new Third World countries, and the reportedly high incidence of personalist or 'charismatic' regimes in Black Africa, explain the pessimistic outlook of scholars towards orderly succession in the subcontinent. Transfer of power has come to be regarded more as a 'crisis' of stability and survival than a 'test' of political maturity. The death, resignation or advancing years of African rulers have become the occasions of violent rivalry over who shall succeed.

Blondel has shown that 'irregular' succession, most frequently in the form of military coups, is statistically highest in Third World countries, proportionately higher in countries which have passed through the early years of independent statehood, and on the increase in sub-Saharan Africa.³ Rustow, reviewing Third World states in general two decades ago, observed that 'charismatic' regimes are particularly vulnerable: 'a charismatic leader whose appeal remains purely personal and magical and who, with great fortune, sails from success to success in his lifetime will inexorably founder on the succession problem.'⁴ In his more recent survey of Third World countries, Clapham shares this anxiety about a successful transfer of power in 'autocratic' and 'prophetic' states when

¹ J Blondel, *World Leaders*, London and Beverly Hills: Sage, 1980, pp 83–5.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, pp 89–92.

⁴ D Rustow, *A World of Nations: Problems of Political Modernization*, Washington DC: Brookings Institute, 1967, p 168.

he states that 'the critical problem faced by a personalist regime is that of succession.'⁵

Writing specifically about political leadership in sub-Saharan Africa, several other scholars echo this 'crisis' interpretation of the succession issue. Sylla, for instance, states that 'the central concern of recent political development in Africa is . . . the succession of the charismatic leader.'⁶ Indeed he sub-titles his article on the subject 'the Gordian knot of African politics.' Cartwright, in his survey of political leadership in Africa, predicts succession problems for a 'coercive' leader because:

he can hardly allow a potential challenger to build up strength while he still rules. Any designated successor [consequently] has to be a nonentity who poses no threat to him; but such an individual would have a difficult time surviving in a coercive system. The other possibilities are for a great deal of intrigue and in-fighting at the time of the leader's death . . .⁷

Although not dealing exclusively or in great detail with the issue of political succession in their book *Personal Rule in Black Africa*, Jackson and Rosberg provide the best discussion on the subject, offering general comments about the processes of leadership change as well as looking in greater detail at several examples of succession.⁸ Their overall conclusion shares the dismal prognosis of these other scholars. While conceding that peaceful transfers of power may occur when constitutional procedures or the wishes of a departing ruler in respect of his successor are observed, it is far more likely that the succession will be more a process of 'intrigue and maneuver' which does 'not augur well for an orderly constitutional succession . . . as power politics rather than institutionalized conventions and procedures may have to resolve the succession issue'.⁹ Their explanation for this is similar to Cartwright's and derives from the nature of personal rulership:

in established personal regimes succession or the prospect of succession is likely to be a serious political issue because the regime is tied to the ruler. When he loses his ability to rule or passes from the political scene, his regime is jeopardised . . . Succession or its prospect can therefore provoke a climate of apprehension and even crisis.¹⁰

⁵ C Clapham, *Third World Politics: An Introduction*, London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1985, p 76.

⁶ L Sylla, 'Succession of the charismatic ruler: the Gordian knot of African politics', *Daedalus* (3) Spring 1982, p 11.

⁷ J Cartwright, *Political Leadership in Africa*, London and Canberra: Croom Helm, 1983, p 297.

⁸ R H Jackson and C G Rosberg, *Personal Rule in Black Africa*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1982, contain a number of trenchant reflections on the question of succession: see in particular pp 48, 58, 67-73, 144-5, 181, 267, 286.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp 58, 69.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p 67.

Three of the four ruler types they identify in contemporary Black Africa—‘autocrat’, ‘prophet’ (Rustow and Sylla’s ‘charismatic’ leaders) and ‘tyrant’, which between them account for a great many of the continent’s leaders, are regarded as being particularly exposed to the possibility of succession crisis. According to Decalo, ‘Personalist dictators’, which equate with Jackson and Rosberg’s ‘tyrant’ sub-type, ‘create a vast societal void within which they often enact their personal fantasies and whims, a vacuum that is particularly destabilising for successor regimes.’¹¹

Table 1: ‘Orderly’ succession in Black Africa

Angola	1979
Botswana	1980
Cameroon	1982
Congo	1977
Gabon	1967
Ghana	1969, 1979
Kenya	1978
Liberia	1971
Mauritania	1979
Mauritius	1982
Mozambique	1986
Nigeria	1976, 1979
Senegal	1981
Somalia	1967
Sierra Leone	1963, 1968, 1985
Swaziland	1982
Tanzania	1985

We have excluded North Africa from our remit but note four successful successions in essentially personalist regimes: Morocco, Algeria and Egypt.

The above extracts indicate the apprehension and pessimism felt among scholars about the ability of personalist regimes to handle succession issues in an orderly manner. To these could be added the numerous despondent and alarmist semi-academic and journalistic articles of the ‘What will happen to Côte d’Ivoire after Houphouët-Boigny?’ ilk. Our own survey of leadership changes in Black

¹¹ S Decalo, ‘African personal dictatorships’, *Journal of Modern African Studies* 23 (2) 1985, p 212.

Africa over the past twenty years compels us to challenge these gloomy prognostications (see Tables 1 and 2).

The data suggest that the capacity for orderly transfer of power within personalist regimes has been under-estimated or obscured by the wave of

Table 2: Circumstances accounting for succession

Death of ruler	10	1963	Sierra Leone: Prime Minister Milton Margai
		1967	Gabon: President Leon M'Ba
		1971	Liberia: President W V S Tubman
		1976	Nigeria: General M Mohammed
		1977	Congo: President Marien Ngouabi
		1978	Kenya: President Jomo Kenyatta
		1979	Angola: President Agostinho Neto
		1980	Botswana: President Seretse Khama
		1982	Swaziland: King Sobhuza II
		1986	Mozambique: President Samora Machel
Retirement of ruler	4	1981	Senegal: President Léopold Senghor
		1982	Cameroon: President Ahmadou Ahidjo
		1985	Tanzania: President Julius Nyerere
		1985	Sierra Leone: President Siaka Stevens
Through election	7		
Following military withdrawal	4	1968	Sierra Leone: Siaka Stevens became Prime Minister*
		1969	Ghana: Kofi Busia became Prime Minister
		1979	Ghana: Hilla Limann elected President
		1979	Nigeria: Shehu Shagari elected President
General election	1	1982	Mauritius: Aneerod Jugnauth became Prime Minister
National Assembly election	1	1967	Somalia: election of President Abdirashid Shermarke
Military Council	1	1979	Mauritania: Military Committee for National Salvation (CMSN) elected Lt Col Mohamed Louly as Chairman

* (Military) National Interim Council accepted recommendation of Civilian Rule Committee that Stevens and the APC had won the disputed general elections of March 1967.

We have excluded the two transfers of power in Upper Volta (Burkina Faso) in 1970 and 1978 because, although general elections took place and civilian prime ministers were appointed, General Lamizana stayed on as President in 1970 and won the Presidential election in 1978. Also excluded is the peaceful but 'irregular' transfer of power in Nigeria in 1975 when General Yakubu Gowon was replaced by General Murtala Mohammed.

military intervention. There is no denying that 'irregular' or violent leadership changes greatly outnumber peaceful transfer; we calculate there have been approximately fifty-three changes of the former kind in the years 1965–87. At the same time though, we estimate that there were also *twenty-one leadership changes of an essentially peaceful nature, with the majority of these occurring in what would be regarded as personalist political systems*. Several of these took place following the death (violent and unanticipated in three cases—Congo, Nigeria (1976) and Mozambique) of the effective ruler, a situation regarded as being particularly stressful in the literature reviewed above. Only in two instances, Somalia (1969) and Guinea (1985), did the demise of a ruler result in a rapid seizure of power by the military, an outcome frequently predicted in the literature.

In most of these instances the selection and installation of a new ruler proceeded with remarkable harmony; but even where the succession was contested it proved possible to work out a peaceful transfer of power. We recognise that in some countries, Sierra Leone and Cameroon come most readily to mind, dissatisfaction with the choice of successor or a breakdown in the coalition of individuals which effected the transfer of leadership resulted in plotting and even an armed rebellion. In a few other cases, Ghana and Nigeria for instance, a new round of military intervention brought down the regime as a whole, not merely the ruler. Yet these form only a minority, perhaps six of the twenty-one cases surveyed.

We concede that determining successful succession does raise problems of a conceptual kind. Some 'rule of thumb' evaluations must suffice here. *Political longevity* of new rulers (see Table 3), might reasonably be regarded as one index of successful transfer. But how long must a successor remain in power before the transfer process can be deemed successful? And does eventual 'irregular' change of leader disqualify an original successful transfer of power? Take, for instance, the case of William Tolbert of Liberia. His accession to office in 1971, following the death of President William Tubman, was a notably successful process. Nine years later, though, Tolbert was murdered in the course of a military coup. Are we then to argue that the succession of 1971 was unsuccessful because of events nearly a decade later? We would claim that the subsequent overthrow of a ruler, unless it related directly to the succession issue, cannot be cited as evidence of unsuccessful transfer; particularly if there is a lapse of many years between the two events.

Table 3 shows that, even among the shortest-surviving successors, all save one of those subsequently overthrown survived at least two years and a majority of our examples remain in power today. Even if the only acceptable measure of success is narrowly defined as the ability to remain in office until removed by natural/accidental death or voluntary resignation, we would still have a growing list of successes from Leon M'Ba of Gabon in 1967 to Samora Machel in 1986.

Table 3: Duration of succession

Failed to gain succession	1	Yhombi-Opango (Congo)	
No longer in power	9		
1-4 years	7	Ould Salek (Mauritania)	1 year
		Shermarke (Somalia)	2 years
		Liman (Ghana)	2 years
		Busia (Ghana)	3 years
		Obasanjo (Nigeria)	3 years
		Shagari (Nigeria)	4 years
		Margai (Sierra Leone)	4 years
5 or more years	2	Tolbert (Liberia)	9 years
		Stevens (Sierra Leone)	17 years
Still in power	11		
Less than 1 year		Chissano (Mozambique)	1986
2-5 years		Mwinyi (Tanzania)	1985
		Momoh (Sierra Leone)	1985
		Biya (Cameroon)	1982
		Jugnauth (Mauritius)	1982
		Makhosetive/Mswati III (Swaziland)	1982
Over 5 years		Diouf (Senegal)	1981
		Masire (Botswana)	1980
		Dos Santos (Angola)	1979
		Moi (Kenya)	1978
		Bongo (Gabon)	1967

Success could also be assessed in terms of *acceptance among those individuals and groups that may be deemed 'power brokers'*, even if the general public is allowed no full part in the selection process. Some new rulers did assume office following competitive national elections; but many more obtained a popular mandate in a more qualified form, following prior selection and uncontested election within a single-party system or military council. In as much as these selection processes won the broad acceptance of élite groups close to the centre of power, and at

worst the indifferent acquiescence of the masses, then surely they must be accepted as successful transfers of power?

The *absence or avoidance of violent conflict over the succession*, so widely feared in authoritarian-personalist regimes, must also be regarded as a successful test of leadership transfer. We note that in a few instances violence did break out subsequently over the choice of successor, e.g. the insurrection in Cameroon instigated by supporters of former President Ahidjo in April 1984; and that covert coercion may have played a part in the accession to power of some other individuals, but generally speaking, 'intrigue and maneuver' operated within constitutional bounds to provide new leaders.

The ability of a new ruler to ward off subsequent violent challenges to his authority must also be recognised as a measure of the success of the transfer of power. Several of our examples have successfully survived such threats, among them Siaka Stevens and his successor J S Momoh of Sierra Leone, Paul Biya of Cameroon, and Daniel arap Moi of Kenya. But more important is the larger number of successors whose *accession has not been unlawfully challenged*. While it might be too premature to regard these as unqualified examples of successful institutionalisation of the succession process, they must be put alongside the more familiar and better-publicised cases of 'irregular' seizure of power in Black Africa.

In view of this growing number of enduring as well as peaceful political successions we feel justified in examining further, albeit in a tentative and exploratory manner, how these have come about. The existing literature on the subject of political succession is limited in extent as well as being pessimistic in tone. No comprehensive survey has been undertaken, though individual successions have been examined and some writers—Jackson and Rosberg, Clapham and Sylla—offer a limited cross-national discussion. Several cases of successful transfer have escaped scholarly attention altogether and a cut-off date in the early 1980s excludes the most recent examples.¹² In the remainder of this study we try to bring together and extend the limited body of explanatory and empirical sources and identify what we feel to be the most important factors accounting for 'orderly' succession.

¹² We find Jackson and Rosberg's restriction of political succession to situations of personal rulership, and their exclusion of leadership transfer through democratic election or the restoration of civilian government after a military one, too limiting and tending to exaggerate the supposed incidence of succession failure. Neither can we accept or comprehend why a change from military to civilian leadership produces *only* a change of regime rather than of rulers. Jackson and Rosberg, *Personal Rule*, pp 67–8. Other comparative discussions of succession issues are found in Clapham, *Third World Politics*, pp 76–7; Sylla, 'Succession of the charismatic ruler', pp 11–28; L Anise, 'Trends in leadership succession and regime change in African politics since independence', *African Studies*

Towards an explanation of 'orderly' succession

From our survey of the limited general literature on political succession and a review of the twenty-one case-studies, a number of factors, by no means exhaustive, are identified as contributing to successful political succession. These are considered below.

Economic development and political succession

The relationship between economic affluence and political stability is a familiar and much-disputed subject among scholars of the Third World. Blondel's global survey¹³ finds a correlation between national prosperity and 'regular' transfer of power, with Africa and much of the Third World combining a low level of economic development with a high incidence of 'irregular' political succession. World Bank classification of African economies¹⁴ offers some support for this proposition: only five of our seventeen countries experiencing orderly succession are placed in the 'low-income' category (Mauritania, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Tanzania), while the rest are deemed 'middle-income' economies. We would not wish to attach too much importance to this correlation between relative national affluence and orderly succession, though. Economic data from developing countries are notoriously unreliable and their classification arbitrary. Distribution of national wealth is probably of greater importance than its absolute magnitude as far as political legitimacy is concerned. Besides, as Blondel rightly points out, and as our own data corroborates, the existence of so many

Review 17 (3) December 1974, pp 507–24; H Odota, 'Voluntary retirement by presidents in Africa: lessons from Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Cameroun and Senegal', *Africa Quarterly*, 23 (3–4), pp 51–64; though they do not add a great deal to Jackson and Rosberg's discussion. *Case-study references*: apart from references to individual countries in the above sources see (by year and country entry where appropriate): *Africa South of the Sahara*, London: Europa Publications; *Africa Contemporary Record*, New York and London: Africana Publishing Corporation; *Africa Research Bulletin* [Political Series], London; *Africa Confidential*, London, 20 August 1971 (Liberia); 25 August 1978; 20 October 1978 (Kenya); 3 October 1979 (Angola); 25 February 1981 (Senegal); 12 November 1986 (Mozambique); R J Kessler, 'Senghor's foreign policy: preparation for transition', *Africa Report*, March–April 1980; V T Le Vine, 'The politics of presidential succession', (Cameroon) *Africa Report*, May–June 1983; M Kanto, 'Le dauphin constitutionnel dans les regimes politiques africains. Le cas du Cameroun et du Senegal', *Penant*, 781–2, Août–Décembre 1983; T D Bakary, 'Côte d'Ivoire: logiques du recrutement politique et eventuels changement a la tête de l'Etat', *Le Mois en Afrique*, 237–8, oct–nov 1985; *West Africa*, 9 April 1984; J Karimi and P Ochieng, *The Kenyatta Succession*, (Transafrica, 1980); J Cartwright, *Politics in Sierra Leone: 1947–1967*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970.

¹³ Blondel, *World Leaders*, pp 89–92.

¹⁴ *Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Agenda for Development*, Washington DC: The World Bank, p 176.

exceptions to this perceived relationship in Africa and elsewhere obliges us to look for additional explanations.

Societal cleavages and political succession

Blondel also finds a correlation between high levels of national and social integration, particularly in respect of the absence of communal cleavages, and 'regular' succession,¹⁵ with older-established nation-states scoring better than the embryonic national communities of the Third World. While there can be no denying that communalism has contributed to political instability in many parts of the world, a number of plural societies have coped successfully with the problem of succession. Blondel cites several examples, such as India or Malaysia, while all save two of our seventeen successful African cases (Somalia, arguably, and Swaziland; ironically, in the latter country a bitter struggle over the succession took place—see below) are plural societies. Consequently, low levels of national integration and the persistence of communal allegiances need not constitute insuperable barriers to the orderly transfer of power. Conversely, it would be incorrect to attribute all 'regular' transfers of power in Africa to the baleful influence of communalism.

Communalism cannot be divorced from the political process in Africa, so, not surprisingly, it has featured in several succession disputes. Masire and Moi have shown that belonging to minority tribes need not prevent a candidate from gaining the succession.¹⁶ In Liberia, on the other hand, Tolbert could not have replaced Tubman without being from the politically ascendant Americo-Liberian community.¹⁷ In Sierra Leone part of Momoh's attraction was his portrayal as a 'trans-tribal' leader, acceptable to all key groups because of his mixed social background.¹⁸

Class- or economic-based divisions in society may not always threaten stability during a succession. It can be argued that in Liberia and Kenya fears of an under-class helped keep the political élite together during the transition period.¹⁹

¹⁵ Blondel, *World Leaders*, pp 89–92.

¹⁶ *Africa Contemporary Record*, 1980–81, B659–60; Jackson and Rosberg, *Personal Rule*, pp 107–111; Karimi and Ochieng, *The Kenyatta Succession*.

¹⁷ C Clapham, *Liberia and Sierra Leone*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp 53–4; Jackson and Rosberg, *Personal Rule*, pp 115, 117; *Africa Confidential* (London) 20 August 1971.

¹⁸ *West Africa* (London) 29 July 1985.

¹⁹ Jackson and Rosberg, *Personal Rule*, pp 107–11, 115.

Regime type and political succession

Blondel, thirdly, establishes a positive relationship between successful transfer of power and the nature of political regimes.²⁰ Can similar relationships be found in our African sample?

Table 4: Regime type

<i>Before succession</i>		<i>After succession</i>
Single party Executive presidency	8	No change (Somalia; Liberia; Kenya; Angola; Cameroon; Tanzania; Sierra Leone 1985; Mozambique)
Multi-party Executive presidential	3	1 became single party/executive presidential (Gabon 1968) 2 no change (Botswana; Senegal)
Hereditary monarchy	1	No change (Swaziland)
Multi-party/prime ministerial	2	No change (Mauritius; Sierra Leone 1963)
Military/military dominant	7	2 became multi-party/executive presidential (Ghana 1979, Nigeria 1979) 2 became multi-party/prime ministerial (Sierra Leone 1968; Ghana) 3 No change (Congo; Mauritania; Nigeria 1976)

Blondel's data show that *absolute presidencies* are most likely to produce 'irregular' forms of political succession, i.e. coups. The literature on authoritarian personal rule cited above also subscribes to the view that orderly change is most difficult to achieve under this form of rule. Yet a majority of our twenty-one examples are of 'regular' succession in authoritarian presidential regimes. A case can be made that some of these were more collectivist-authoritarian rather than outright personalist states: Nigeria (1976) and Congo were under the control of military juntas while Angola and Mozambique were governed by radical-collegiate regimes, a point we will return to later; but the others were headed, undoubtedly, by rulers who possessed a high degree of personal power. In two instances (Congo and Nigeria 1976), orderly succession took place despite the assassination of the head of state in unsuccessful coup attempts. In 'autocratic' regimes such as Kenya and

²⁰ Blondel, *World Leaders*, pp 89-97.

Cameroon, where succession, according to Jackson and Rosberg, is more likely to 'usher in an unstable political world which will be governed, if governed at all, by inexperienced clients of the old ruler or by former conspirators-political amateurs,'²¹ new leaders took over in a remarkably orderly manner and survived later challenges to their position.

In contrast, Blondel finds 'the succession procedure [in absolutist monarchies] is comparatively simple, and rapid . . .'²² However, we share Jackson and Rosberg's *caveat* that intense struggle may occur between rival royal claimants and their supporters. They correctly predicted that in Swaziland, our sole example of a Traditional Monarchy, 'succession may give rise to as much factional intrigue and maneuvering as the succession in non-traditional personally-dominated states.'²³ Although Prince Makhosetive was able to succeed his aged father, King Sobhuza II, his accession was preceded by a long and complex struggle between rival factions of the royal family headed by his kinsman Prince Mfanasilibi and a commoner champion of the ousted group, Dr Sishay Nxumalo; the effects of which are still felt in Swaziland today.²⁴

No special requirements are needed for the departure of a government leader under a *prime ministerial* system. Prime ministers may remain in office indefinitely provided they continue to command parliamentary and party support, but they are obliged to seek a popular mandate at periodic intervals. Only two countries in our survey belong to this category: Sierra Leone (1963) and Mauritius, and as their experience has been diametrically different no firm conclusion can be arrived at as to the difficulty or otherwise of political succession under this system.

In the case of Sierra Leone, because there was no designated successor to Sir Milton Margai on his death in April 1963, it was left to the Governor-General, Sir Henry Lightfoot-Boston, to summon a new prime minister from among the remaining leaders of the Sierra Leone People's Party. This permitted the kind of intra-party feuding associated with succession in authoritarian personalist regimes. Albert Margai, Sir Milton's brother, proved fastest off the mark and the most adroit of the contenders. The day after his brother's death Albert and his supporters were able to persuade the Governor-General to accept him as new prime minister. Over the next few days rival aspirants were either won over or

²¹ Jackson and Rosberg, *Personal Rule*, p 181.

²² Blondel, *World Leaders*, p 85.

²³ Jackson and Rosberg, *Personal Rule*, p 72.

²⁴ *Africa Contemporary Record*, 1982-83, B838-43; 1983-84, B856; 1984-85, B838-42.

neutralised and Albert was confirmed in the succession. But the way he handled the affair, and his unpopularity within sections of his own party, as well in the country at large, prevented him from emulating his brother's successful record. His corrupt and increasingly authoritarian rule contributed to his party's defeat in general elections held in March 1967. Albert's subsequent attempts to remain in office unconstitutionally provoked a military coup and he was deposed.²⁵

The situation in Mauritius was quite different. Prime Minister Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, having suffered annihilation at the polls in June 1982, readily conceded office to the opposition coalition of the Mouvement Militant Mauricien and Parti Socialiste Mauricien. The smooth transfer of power in Mauritius has been attributed to such factors as the internalisation of parliamentary values by the island's unusually well-educated and politically sophisticated citizens and the complex balance of power between the various communally based political parties. The scale of Ramgoolam's defeat—his Mauritius Labour Party failed to win a single seat—may also have contributed to the decision to go.²⁶

According to our survey, the least successful form of political succession is that under a *military regime*. In six of the seven instances, the successor failed to survive more than four years, though one of these, General Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, relinquished power voluntarily in 1979. The case of General Joachim Yhombi-Opango in the Congo Republic is different from the others too, in that there was no regime change and he came to power as interim head of state, following the assassination of President Marien Ngouabi in March 1977. Two years later he was forced to resign and replaced by Colonel Denis Sassou-Nguesso, a long-time rival and leader of the militant faction in the military-led Parti Congolais du Travail.²⁷ Neither was there a regime change in Mauritania in July 1979 when Lt Col Haidalla seized power from Lt Col Louly, Chairman of the CMSN. Louly's demise resulted as much from his failure to resolve the Western Sahara issue as from Haidalla's rivalry.²⁸

Siaka Stevens's experience in Sierra Leone is also a little different. As noted, he was put into power by the leaders of a lower ranks

²⁵ Cartwright, *Politics in Sierra Leone*, Part Five.

²⁶ *Africa Contemporary Record*, 1982–83, B223–31; M Minogue, 'Mauritius', in C Clarke and T Payne (eds), *Politics, Security and Development in Small States*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1987, pp 133–5.

²⁷ Sylla, 'Succession of the charismatic ruler' p 20; *Africa South of the Sahara*, 1987, p 385.

²⁸ *Africa South of the Sahara*, 1982–83, p 673.

counter-coup in Sierra Leone in April 1968, because his party, the All People's Congress, was deemed to have won the general elections of 1967. From such uncertain beginnings Stevens steadily entrenched himself and remained in office until his retirement in November 1985.

The three other instances have more in common. In Ghana in 1969 and 1979, and in Nigeria in 1979, the military handed over power to civilians only after the introduction of widely debated new constitutions and the holding of fresh and reasonably fair national elections. While the first stage of political succession, the immediate transfer of power under orderly conditions, was accomplished satisfactorily, none of the new leaders—Busia, Limann and Shagari—was able to consolidate his position and within four years all three were overthrown in new military coups. While their collapse may be attributed primarily to their administrations' shortcomings rather than to the succession process, in the case of Shagari widespread belief that the 1984 elections that returned him to power were rigged undermined his legitimacy.²⁹

Constitutional mechanisms

We have in mind here what Jackson and Rosberg call the 'institutional method' of succession: constitutional rules, procedures and conventions. An order of succession may be written into a country's constitution to ensure continuity of leadership following the sudden loss of a ruler and to reduce the possibility of destabilisation as a result of feuding among rival aspirants. It is frequently the case in contemporary Africa that inconvenient constitutions are dispensed with, but there is some empirical evidence to show that, perhaps more from concern for the survival of a political élite as a whole, or as part of their political manoeuvrings, rather than from respect for the rule of law, rival contestants and factions may choose to abide by certain constitutional arrangements.³⁰

The offices of Vice-President or Prime Minister are usually the ones that allow for automatic succession to the national leadership—in virtually every case, the Presidency. In some instances, the Vice-President may only serve as Acting President until elections are held to decide on a new leader. This was the case in Botswana and Kenya with Vice-Presidents Quett Masire and Daniel arap Moi. In the Congo, the interim leader, Yhombi-Opango, was not confirmed in his post and was eased out by a rival. Elsewhere, as in some francophone African

²⁹ *Africa South of the Sahara*, 1987, pp 480–1 (Busia); 484–5 (Limann); and 771–2 (Shagari).

³⁰ Jackson and Rosberg, *Personal Rule*, pp 267, 286.

states, where there is no office of Vice-President or Prime Minister, the President of the National Assembly acts as interim head of state. The mere existence of an order of succession does not guarantee a smooth transition of power, of course, but it does seem that in Botswana, Cameroon, Gabon, Kenya, Liberia, Senegal and Tanzania, the fact that the new Presidents previously were constitutionally next in line strengthened their bargaining position as well as conferring legality on their claims.

In several instances, e.g. Cameroon, Gabon, Liberia, Senegal and Tanzania, the new head of state is allowed to serve out the remaining period of office of his predecessor, which offers an enormous advantage in consolidating his power. His constitutional authority places immediate patronage in his hands and this is used to reward allies and waverers and eliminate rivals.

As virtually all Black African countries have republican constitutions, the mechanism of dynastic succession has seldom been used at the level of national leadership (though it features prominently at regional and local level, as in the appointment of emirs and other traditional rulers). We have seen its use in Swaziland, and General Bokassa also appointed his son 'Crown Prince' during the short-lived Central African Empire, before a military coup in 1979 brought the 'dynasty' to an abrupt end. Despite the familial nature of personalist rule in Black Africa no 'republican dynasties' akin to those of Asia or Latin America (India, Taiwan, Argentina, Nicaragua, etc) have emerged. A number of rulers have practised nepotism, but though sons occupied prominent political or public office in Botswana, Kenya and Liberia, none succeeded his father. It is true that Albert Margai became Prime Minister of Sierra Leone following his half-brother's death, but consanguinity was only one of a number of factors leading to his appointment.

Designation of a successor

Another technique much favoured by personal rulers contemplating retirement is 'personal designation', to use Jackson and Rosberg's term; what is referred to as a 'dauphin constitutionnel' in francophone Africa.³¹ A favoured lieutenant is selected and given increased power over a period of time, usually ending up as constitutional successor as well as political heir. In Botswana, Cameroon, Gabon, Senegal and Tanzania, the constitution was changed to allow the heir apparent to become next in line as Prime Minister or Vice-President (in the

³¹ Jackson and Rosberg, *Personal Rule*, pp 70-1; Kanto, 'Le dauphin constitutionnel'.

Tanzanian case, the heir apparent, Edward Sokoine, was killed in a car accident before President Nyerere resigned, but Ali Hassan Mwinyi was selected as his replacement).

It has been observed in some of the sources cited above that the more 'autocratic' the ruler, the less he trusts his underlings and so fears to name a successor, with consequent problems for the succession. The absence of an heir apparent in Côte d'Ivoire or Malawi is usually attributed to this. Yet President Ahmadou Ahidjo, usually classed as an 'autocrat', decided in 1979 to change the Cameroon constitution to allow Paul Biya, the Prime Minister, to succeed him. Age, infirmity, weariness of office, a desire to ensure a safe retirement, are all factors which may lead a ruler, previously jealous of his power, to select a reliable successor.³² In Sierra Leone, President Siaka Stevens kept his lieutenants guessing for a number of years, as part of his strategy of survival, but eventually indicated his preference for the head of the armed forces, General JS Momoh, partly because he felt the latter would best be able to protect him in his retirement.³³

The absence of a designated successor in Guinea at the time of the death of President Sekou Touré may have contributed to the 'irregular' succession of the military. Lansane Beavogui was only the interim head of state and the division within the Touré 'political family' on a choice of successor encouraged the army to move first.³⁴

In the instances of military/militarised regimes—Congo, Nigeria (1976) and Mauritania—it is less certain if military rank, rather than political skills, accounted for the succession. It does seem that General Obasanjo's position as Chief-of-Staff under General Mohammed lent substance to his claim to succeed his murdered predecessor.

Time factor

How important is the time factor in contributing to a smooth succession? Does a lengthy settling-in period strengthen an heir apparent's chances? Conversely, does the abrupt end of a political reign damage the prospects of a smooth transition? Designated successors, it would appear from our survey, do gain, not only from a secular 'apostolic succession', but from the opportunity to gain administrative and political experience over a number of years prior to actual succession. William Tolbert was Vice-President of Liberia for

³² Le Vine, 'The politics of presidential succession'.

³³ *West Africa*, *op. cit.*

³⁴ *West Africa*, 9 April 1984.

twenty-nine years and Abdou Diouf Prime Minister of Senegal for a decade before President Senghor resigned. The other political heirs mentioned above also shared power with their predecessors for several years. Provided that the departing leader himself enjoyed a measure of popular or élite support, then a lengthy identification of his intended successor with his regime stands in the latter's stead. In the case of what have been called African 'tyrants', a favoured lieutenant is in danger of falling with his patron. Members of the Touré 'political family' were discredited by their part in the brutal reign of Sekou Touré and were lucky to escape with their lives after the sudden death of the Guinean President in 1984. On the other hand, Lt.-Col. Teodoro Nguema of Equatorial Guinea, though long associated with the reign of terror of his kinsman, Macias Nguema, skilfully changed sides in 1979 and presented himself as the liberator of his fellow-countrymen!

It could be argued, conversely, that the drawn-out death of a ruler encourages political manoeuvring by ambitious lieutenants, particularly in the absence of a named successor, as was the case in Kenya.³⁵ As early as 1976 rival factions centred on Dr Njoroge Mungai, the ailing ruler's physician, and Vice-President Moi began to plot the succession. Perhaps the naming of a successor is a more crucial factor than the mere length of time involved in ensuring the transition.

The sudden or traumatic death of a powerful ruler might suggest a period of anarchy or uncertainty. Yet our African case studies indicate otherwise. The assassination of General Murtala Mohammed of Nigeria in February 1976 and of President Marien Ngouabi of the Congo in March 1977 did not lead to the overthrow of the Supreme Military Council or the PTC (a similar peaceful transfer was effected in Egypt following President Anwar Sadat's assassination).

Leaving aside these instances, which affected regimes which came to power by 'irregular' means, peaceful succession was obtained in Angola and Mozambique, following the deaths of national leaders who were founding members of the regimes. There may have been some intimation of Agostinho Neto's death in 1979 but Samora Machel's violent demise was totally unexpected and came at a critical time in Mozambique's history. Despite (or perhaps because of?) the additional distractions of civil war and foreign intervention, and the absence of a clear chain of succession, new and acceptable leaders were rapidly chosen. President Tubman's unexpected death in London in July 1971 likewise did not prevent William Tolbert succeeding him, and the only drama was

³⁵ See sources cited in footnote 16.

finding the Vice-President within the twenty-four-hour time limit stipulated in the constitution, by which he had to be sworn in as new head of state.

Role of the party

The successful experience of change-over of leadership in Angola and Mozambique probably owed something to the nature of the ruling party.³⁶ A unified, well-organised and popular ruling party provides stability and legitimacy for the succession. The MPLA (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola), though it had passed through a period of severe internal crisis following the attempted coup by the Nito Alves faction in May 1977, was sufficiently united by late 1979 to allow Eduardo dos Santos to be accepted as the new leader. Likewise, FRELIMO (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique), perhaps at the nadir of its political fortune at the time of Machel's controversial and untimely death, did not disintegrate: instead, as in Angola, the party's Central Committee was sufficiently disciplined to arrange for the proper selection of a new leader. Party unity and discipline played a part in avoiding open conflict in the other cases as well. In the instances of Sierra Leone (1963) and Kenya, the ruling parties were divided by personal rivalries and factionalism, but even here differences were temporarily put aside to ensure the regime's survival.

In Guinea, the sole party, the PDG (Parti Démocratique de Guinée), had atrophied over the years and was fatally divided following Touré's death.³⁷ The former leader's obsession with plots among his entourage had discouraged the emergence of a successor, and Beavogui's candidature was fiercely contested within the ruling clique. Lacking moral authority because of its involvement in the corruption and repression of the past, and hopelessly divided in the days following its leader's death, the PDG was easily cast aside by the army. Indeed, the new military leadership justified its intervention partly on the grounds that the country was in danger of civil war because of the intensity of intra-party feuding. Neither could the Somali Youth League maintain its authority in the period after the assassination of President Abdirashid Shermarke in October 1969. Weakened by intense factional conflict and the increasingly authoritarian style of rule of the dead President and

³⁶ Sylla, 'Succession of the charismatic ruler', p 20; *Africa Confidential*, 3 October 1979; November 12 1986.

³⁷ *West Africa*, *op. cit.*

Prime Minister Mohamed Egal, the army stepped in before the latter could arrange the election of a new President acceptable to him.³⁸

Ideology and the transfer of power

Some of our case-studies suggest that ideology has a part to play in ensuring a tranquil succession. The acceptance of a common set of political beliefs unites the political élite with the rank-and-file of society, giving a wider legitimacy to the regime and its chosen leaders, and helps overcome personal rivalries among potential successors. It is not unreasonable to contend that the existence of a Marxist-Leninist ideology in Angola and Mozambique helped the succession process and the legitimisation of the new rulers. Both dos Santos and Chissano, on their appointment, stressed their identification with the political ideals of the ruling parties and the policies of their predecessors. Mwinyi also proclaimed his devotion to the socialist objectives of CCM (Chama Cha Mapinduzi) in Tanzania.³⁹

A similar identification with the political beliefs of the ex-ruler has been observed in Senegal and Kenya. In the former case, as in Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Cameroon (for a period of time only), where the retired leader continues to occupy an important position in the ruling party after retiring, one might expect a greater degree of ideological continuity; but even the memory of dead leaders is evoked to reinforce the claims of their successors. For instance, in Kenya, Moi consciously claimed to be following in the 'footsteps' (*nyayo*) of Kenyatta.

At the same time, and particularly where the previous leader had incurred a degree of unpopularity, the new ruler may adopt a Janus-like posture, appealing to memories of his predecessor, while at the same time posing as a reformer. We see this with Moi. While seemingly pursuing Kenyatta's footprints, he declared a war on the corruption and abuses perpetrated under the late 'Mzee'. This was meant both to endear him to the people and to get rid of officials closely identified with the opposition 'KANU A' faction of Dr Mungai. Siaka Stevens also used populist ideology to help consolidate his leadership in Sierra Leone from 1968, and, in turn, we find his successor, Joseph Momoh, claiming to distance himself from the failures of Stevens.⁴⁰ Quett Masire and Abdou Diouf in Botswana and Senegal have also suggested a more progressive

³⁸ *Africa Contemporary Record* 1969–70, B174–7.

³⁹ *Africa Research Bulletin*, 15 December 1985; *Africa Contemporary Record* 1984–85, B367–8; 1985–86, B420–1.

⁴⁰ *Africa Contemporary Record*, 1985–86, B163.

outlook. In the case of Masire a more independent and critical line toward South Africa was adopted as well.

Role of external patrons

Given the widespread depiction of new African countries in the scholarly literature, particularly radical scholarship, as enfeebled client states, one might expect external pressure to be applied, particularly during succession, 'crises'. Is there any evidence of this from our case-studies? In as much as it is possible to identify it, external influence does not seem to have played a perceptible part in the choice of new rulers. In the francophone countries examined, it will be assumed that the new leaders would need French backing, but there is no direct evidence that this was a condition of their appointment. On the contrary, as we have tried to show, internal political forces are the major determinants in the selection of successors. Indeed, in one or two cases, it might be argued, the choice of successor did not favour the assumed external patron. Masire's more forthright attitude toward South Africa has been alluded to, yet Botswana has been portrayed as an economic 'client' of Pretoria. Dos Santos' appointment might equally be viewed as less than ideal for the USSR, Angola's political patron. Even before his election, when he was in charge of economic planning, he was identified with the 'pragmatic' wing of the party, which favoured a more liberal policy in economic matters, rather than strict adherence to Soviet-style centralised planning.⁴¹

Elections and succession

In most of our case-studies some form of election has been held to validate a choice of successor. Where this has not taken place, for example in Gabon in 1967, Liberia in 1971 or Senegal in 1981 (where Diouf was criticised for not obtaining a popular mandate), the new ruler sought, indeed was obliged to obtain, electoral approbation once his predecessor's term of office expired. In our other examples, and these constitute the overwhelming majority, new rulers have obtained a formal mandate from one or several of the following: i) the central committee or national executive committee of the ruling party, e.g. Angola, Botswana, Kenya, Sierra Leone (Momoh) and Tanzania; ii) party delegates at party meetings or national conventions, e.g. Sierra Leone (Momoh) and Tanzania; iii) parliament, e.g. Botswana and Kenya; or iv) the electorate as a whole, e.g. Ghana and Nigeria. All those rulers who remain in office

⁴¹ *Africa Confidential*, 3 October 1979.

today (with the exception of the Swazi monarch) underwent some form of formal party or public selection. It does seem that such vetting procedures help to institutionalise the process of succession by creating a legal-administrative framework for handling inter-élite rivalries and providing a modicum of popular backing for the new rulers, if only within the restrictions of choice imposed by single-party regimes. At the same time, it must be admitted, they have not prevented the military from returning to power in some countries.

Political/administrative competence and experience

What is significant, though, is that *all* the successful changes in leadership involved individuals with considerable political and administrative experience. Most had several or many years' experience of holding major political office—Vice-Presidential or Prime Ministerial; others had extensive administrative experience in government ministries or in a party executive. One, in addition, had considerable military experience. Practical experience of this kind enables would-be rulers to build up networks of contacts and clients; to obtain a thorough grasp of the internal workings of state and party machinery; and gives them a varying degree of public saliency and acceptability. No successful candidate was a political unknown or a hidden power broker. Political skills are particularly important when the succession is disputed or no individual has been named as successor. Margai in Sierra Leone, and Moi in Kenya, in particular, proved extremely adroit at exploiting their professional experience to divide the opposition and ensure their candidature. Political competence also enables the new ruler to consolidate his power by the judicious use of official patronage and sanctions, to reward and punish friends and enemies respectively.

Conclusion

Our survey of Black African states strengthens our belief that an unexpectedly large number of African countries and regimes have the capacity to resolve the testing issue of leadership succession without recourse to factional upheaval or military intervention. Personal and factional 'intrigue and maneuvering' cannot be avoided but these case-studies have shown that they frequently take place within a framework of rules of political conduct and need not necessarily be destructive. The alternative would be the seizure of power by the strongest—the military commanders of the new states. Yet, as we have

shown, only in Guinea and Somalia did the soldiers take over in the immediate wake of a leader's demise. Complex bargaining took place, in some cases the threat of coercion against obstinate rivals strengthened a successor's hand, but just as frequently the transfer of power was managed in accordance with constitutional procedures, however conditionally such agreements were adhered to by national 'power brokers'. Thus the *first* stage of succession—the selection and installation of a new ruler—has been achieved with a degree of success greater than that conceded. The key factor in achieving successful transfer we identify as the possession by the new ruler of official standing, political connections and *nous*, and administrative skills from previous public office-holding; but we also recognise the importance of 'personal designation'; the role of political institutions and constitutional mechanisms, and of ideology, in varying combination, in helping to ensure a smooth change-over. Whereas the first of these factors may belong more to the politically uncertain realm of 'power politics', the others suggest a measure of 'institutionalisation', in terms of the acceptance of procedures for resolving the leadership issue. It is the self-interested and gradual adherence to such constitutional ground-rules by leadership groups, and their perceived advantage over less predictable alternative forms of action, which may allow over time the extension of the constitutional transfer of power.⁴²

New African rulers have met with considerable, though less uniform success, in the *second* stage of political succession—the consolidation of power. As indicated, a number of new rulers, but still only a small minority of our cases, failed to remain in office, but a much larger group were able to survive. Of these, eleven remain in power today; others resigned, and of those overthrown their survival rate varied considerably. Arguably, their demise owed more to general regime weaknesses and policy failures than to narrower disputes over succession. This ability to consolidate power and build up support by new rulers, Jackson and Rosberg's underrated 'conspirators/political amateurs', must be seen as encouraging and a move in the direction of a *third* stage of succession, a self-perpetuating process of leadership change within what Huntington terms 'political institutionalization'—the acceptance of and adherence to valued and stable procedures and organisations.⁴³ While such 'third generational'

⁴² Jackson and Rosberg, *Personal Rule*, p 286.

⁴³ S P Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968, p 12.

orderly transfer of leadership is yet to take place in the still new states of Black Africa, our findings encourage us to speculate that other personalist states in Africa, such as Malawi, Côte d'Ivoire or Zambia, might well survive the passing of their rulers without upheaval and that peaceful transfers of power could occur again in those countries surveyed.