Autocratic Constitutions and Leadership Succession: Evidence from Africa

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Abstract:

Under what conditions can dictatorships undergo peaceful leadership transitions? This article argues that constitutional rules play a critical role in regulating authoritarian succession. However, certain types of rules are more successful in promoting peaceful transitions. Constitutional rules that identify a clear line of succession are effective in regulating the transfer of power by establishing predictability about the actors who are expected to come into office. Conversely, term limits are much less effective in facilitating peaceful transitions because they do not empower specific elites by designating an heir apparent. I show evidence of this argument using original data on constitutional rules and the appointment of informal successors in 46 African countries from 1960-2010. Regimes that have formal succession rules written into the constitution and leaders who designate a clear successor are significantly more likely to undergo peaceful leadership transitions – regardless of whether the regime has a ruling party.

1. Introduction

Under what conditions can autocratic regimes undergo successful leadership transitions? The problem of transferring power has long been identified as one of the key challenges of continued authoritarian rule. Herz (1957) famously observed that by grooming a successor, dictators create a "crown-prince problem", where the designation of an alternative center of power makes them vulnerable to being deposed prematurely by their own chosen successor. On the other hand, making no plans for succession can also be destabilizing for autocratic leaders, as the absence of an institutionalized lineage of power can also increase the likelihood of coups as elites vie for an unclaimed throne. Indeed, many dictators seem to fall prey to this dilemma, as the majority of autocratic leaders from 1946-2008 have been deposed via non-constitutional means (Svolik 2012).

Despite the centrality of the problem of succession to authoritarian survival, the mechanisms that facilitate peaceful leadership transitions are not well understood for modern autocracies. In this article I argue that constitutional rules play a critical role in regulating the process of authoritarian succession. Importantly, however, certain *types* of rules are more successful in promoting leadership succession. Constitutional rules that identify *a clear line of succession* are the most effective in regulating the transfer of power. Such policies establish certainty and predictability about the actors who are expected to come into office, providing these elites with a stake in maintaining the existing regime in order to reap rewards from the succession order. Term limits, on the other hand, are much less effective in facilitating peaceful leadership transitions because they do not *empower* specific elites in the way that succession policies do by designating an heir apparent. Because term limits do not identify an alternative leader that elites can

coordinate around, term limits do not resolve the collective action problem elites face in holding the incumbent accountable.

I show evidence of this argument using original data on constitutional rules outlining succession rules, term limits, and the presence of a de facto successor in 46 African countries from 1960-2010. Sub-Saharan Africa is a rich context in which to examine this puzzle because it is a region that is often plagued by coups and violent leader deposals, yet many African leaders have also experienced peaceful transfers of power. Moreover, virtually every country in Africa was authoritarian for decades after independence, and there is much variation in the content of state constitutions across countries and over time.

I find that regimes with constitutions that outline specific succession procedures and leaders who designate a clear successor are significantly more likely to undergo peaceful leadership successions – regardless of whether the regime has a long-standing ruling party. On the other hand, constitutional term limits have weaker and inconsistent effects on the likelihood of having a peaceful leadership succession on regime durability. To address potential endogeneity concerns, I run a set of regressions using inherited constitutional rules and obtain similar results. Altogether my findings suggest that planning for leadership succession in African autocracies is a stabilizing force for continued autocratic rule, though some measures are more effective than others.

These findings have several important implications. First, I show that constitutional rules can matter greatly for the peaceful transmission of power – *even in African autocracies*. The existing scholarship on leadership succession in Sub-Saharan Africa has generally held a pessimistic view about the prospect of peaceful or

constitutional transitions, especially in the decades prior to democratization in the early 1990s. Coups have long been considered the modal type of leadership change in Africa, and this was particularly true during the Cold War era (Decalo 1976, McGowan 2003). An early article on leadership transitions in Africa by Sylla (1982) even referred to the challenge of succession as the "Gordian Knot of African Politics." In their influential volume on autocratic politics in Africa, Jackson and Rosberg (1982) predicted that leadership succession will continue to be resolved by informal (and often violent) power politics, rather than institutionalized rules. By contrast, this article demonstrates that not all leadership transitions that take place within autocracies in Sub-Saharan Africa are unregulated or driven solely by violence. Rather than serving as empty parchment institutions, constitutional rules can play an important role in structuring and regulating the transmission of executive authority, even during the most authoritarian decades of rule.

This article also makes an important contribution to general theories of leadership succession in dictatorships. Much of the existing literature on autocratic leadership transitions have focused almost exclusively on pre-twentieth century European monarchies and the role of hereditary succession (Herb 1999; Kurrild-Klitgaard 2000; Kokkonen and Sundell 2014; Tullock 1987, Wang 2017). Other studies argue that ruling parties can serve as institutional solutions for the problem of succession (Brownlee 2007; Geddes 1999; Magaloni 2008). By contrast, I show that hereditary succession is incredibly rare in modern dictatorships, and that the presence of a ruling party is not a strong predictor of peaceful leadership succession. This article is in agreement with Frantz and Stein (2016) who argue instead that institutionalized succession rules protect

autocrats from coups, though this article departs from their study in two important ways. First, I show that succession planning is key, not only in preventing coups, but also in ushering in the designated successor peacefully. Ensuring nonviolent incumbent exit is only half of the (metaphorical) battle: in many instances, the leader dies peacefully while in office, only to result in violent conflict over the future of the presidency. This article shows that when a regime has a constitutional procedure for succession and a designated successor, these types of conflict are less likely to occur, even in the aftermath of a peaceful leader death. Second, by using original data that allows me to disaggregate between various *types* of constitutional rules, I highlight the fact that there is important variation in the effectiveness of different kinds of constitutional rules regarding succession. On this dimension, this article also contributes to a nascent literature on authoritarian constitutions (Albertus and Menaldo 2012; Ginsburg and Simpser 2014). Scholarship on authoritarian institutions has only recently begun examining autocratic constitutions, and existing studies have not yet focused on understanding variation within these documents. As this article shows, not all autocratic constitutions are equally effective and these differences in content can drive variation in key regime outcomes.

2. Institutional Solutions for Transferring Power

Every dictator eventually dies. The problem of how to extend executive authority to another elite is a concern not only to others in the regime, but also to the dictator herself. As Herz (1957) so aptly summarizes: "It also colors, in anticipation, so to speak, the entire situation during the dictator's life and rule. To the dictator it poses a problem and constitutes a danger. To his aids it is a temptation. To the bystander, within and

without, it is fascination" (20). He famously observed that by grooming a successor, dictators create a ``crown-prince problem'', where the mere designation of an alternative center of power makes them vulnerable to being deposed prematurely by their own chosen successor.

On one hand, if an autocratic leader does not name a successor, then a coordination problem emerges among regime elites because it is not clear who the de facto successor should be. As a result, elites may be incentivized to preemptively try to take power through coercion in anticipation of an eventual conflict over succession (Kokkonen and Sundell 2014). Indeed, many dictators seem to fall prey to this dilemma, as the majority of autocratic leaders from 1946-2008 have been deposed via non-constitutional means Svolik (2012). In fact, elites may themselves also support the institutionalization of succession policies because it buffers the regime from destabilizing forces (Frantz and Stein 2016).

On the other hand, by naming a successor, the ruler voluntarily shifts the center of power away from herself, putting her at risk of being deposed by her own appointee. As a result, dictators are sometimes quite wary of naming formal successors. In fact, scholars of African politics often note the frequency with which leaders rotate elites who occupy top positions in government, preventing any potential challenger from amassing too much influence (Dickie and Rake 1973; Hassan 2017; Jackson and Rosberg 1982; Roessler 2016).

Despite this double-edged sword, peaceful transitions of power do occur in autocracies. A limited number of studies explaining the conditions under which peaceful succession is likely to occur have focused primarily on institutional solutions such as

primogeniture in monarchies and the role of ruling parties. Early studies of leadership succession by Tullock (1987) focused on importance of hereditary succession and primogeniture, and his theories have since been extended and tested on pre-twentieth century European monarchies (Kurrild-Klitgaard 2000; Kokkonen and Sundell 2014). Although this mechanism is well established in studies focusing on early modern European, the vast majority of authoritarian regime today are not monarchies. In fact, only seven percent of all autocratic regimes from 1946-2010 are coded as monarchies, and out of those monarchies only two remain in power today (Geddes, Wright, Franz 2014). Even in modern dictatorships, hereditary succession is strikingly rare. Less than three percent of power transfers (whether peaceful or not) occur between family members, and this percentage is consistent within the African continent (author coding using the Archigos dataset).

Studies of modern autocracies suggest that ruling parties may play an important role in facilitating leadership succession. Parties help to mitigate and manage elite conflict, providing an arena for politicians to compete for power and resources (Brownlee 2007a, Geddes 1999, Magaloni 2008) and provide a mechanism for elite power-sharing (Boix and Svolik 2013, Svolik 2012). Through these mechanisms, ruling parties can help facilitate non-hereditary leadership transitions (Brownlee 2007b). Yet, some recent scholarship has called into question the effectiveness of the average ruling party, as many parties are quite weak and likely incapable of ushering through a successful transition (Lucardi 2017, Meng 2017). As I show in the empirical section of this paper, I do not find a significant relationship between the presence of a ruling party and peaceful succession,

and this result remains consistent both within the African region and in a global sample of autocracies.

3.1. Constitutional Rules and Leadership Succession

If hereditary succession and ruling parties do not necessarily promote peaceful leadership succession in modern autocracies, then what types of institutional arrangements do? I argue that regimes with constitutional rules specifying the process of leadership turnover are more likely to undergo peaceful transitions compared with those without such formal rules. The importance of constitutions in supporting autocratic rule has been discussed in recent literature, and the general consensus is that autocratic constitutions often play an important role in supporting regime stability (Albertus and Menaldo 2012; Ginsburg and Simpser 2014).

Constitutional rules can matter greatly because they are publicly observable, therefore elites can condition their behavior and credibly threaten to punish autocratic leaders who violate existing rules. Autocratic constitutions are most helpful when they can serve as "focal points" for elites by reducing ambiguity around a clear set of rules and enforcement behavior (Albertus and Menaldo 2012; Hadfield and Weingast 2013).[1] In fact, Ginsburg and Simpser (2014) argue that constitutional documents may even be *especially* helpful in autocracies because the creation of clear and observable rules eases coordination problems and creates a self-enforcing system – one that can operate in the absence of a strong judicial system because deviations may be punished using force. In

[1] This argument is also related to Fearon's (2011) concept of "self-enforcing democracy" whereby elections provide citizens with a commonly understood set of rules and procedures that allow them to credibly protest if the leader violates election principles.

this way, formal institutions can also serve to "tie the leader's hands" and help make autocratic commitments credible, precisely because creating constitutional rules makes leaders vulnerable to being deposed if they violate the terms (North and Weingast 1989; Myerson 2008a).

Building on these accounts, I argue that constitutional rules that specify the procedure of succession promote peaceful transitions in autocracies. In particular, I argue that three main mechanisms drive this relationship. First, constitutional succession rules provide certainty and clarity surrounding the chain of command. Designated successors have an incentive to protect the incumbent and existing regime, since preserving the status quo is the best guarantee that they will become the next incumbent. Once named, successors can also start to build their own alliances, in anticipation of the leadership transition. Therefore, a clear line of succession protects the regime from other potential elite challengers.

The transition in Kenya from President Jomo Kenyatta to Vice President Daniel arap Moi illustrates this mechanism well. Kenya's first presidential transition occurred peacefully in 1978, upon the death of Jomo Kenyatta, the country's first president after independence, although the struggle over the succession process occurred in the final years of Kenyatta's presidency. Kenyatta, a highly influential figure in the country's struggle for self-determination, took office upon independence in 1964. In 1967, he named Daniel arap Moi as his Vice President – a position that Moi served for 11 years leading up to the transition. Notably, Moi was not a member of Kenyatta's Kikuyu ethnic group – a power-sharing mechanism by design. Cabinet positions were often utilized as implicit contracts to maintain support across various ethnic groups and factions, and

Kenyatta always appointed non-Kikuyus as Vice President (Arriola 2009; Karimi and Ochieng 1980; Widner 1992).

The Kenyan constitution, which has been in effect since independence in 1963, includes specific instructions for succession. Chapter II, Part I, Section 6 reads:

> (1) If the office of President becomes vacant by reason of the death or resignation of the President…an election of a President shall be held within the period of ninety days immediately following the occurrence of the vacancy.
> (2) While the office of the President is vacant, the functions of that office shall be exercised –
> a. By the Vice President

Members of the Kikuyu faction within the government did not want Moi to ascend to the Presidency because they feared that they would lose valuable resources and influential positions that they enjoyed under the Kenyatta presidency. Furthermore, they feared that the constitutional succession rules solidified Moi's role as successor to the presidency. In the case of Kenyatta's death, Moi would quickly use his role as interim president to consolidate power within 90 days to confirm his new role (Karimi and Ochieng 1980, 15).

In September of 1976, the Kikuyu faction, now calling themselves the "Change-the-Constitution" group, proposed that the constitutional succession rule be changed so that the speaker of the National Assembly (a position within the faction's control) would be the interim president, rather than the Vice President. They called a meeting to discuss these constitutional changes, and 20 MPs attended. Moi and his supporters immediately responded by obtaining signatures from 98 MPs (including 10 cabinet ministers) who opposed the proposed rule change. Importantly, this document showed that the Change-the-Constitution group did not have a parliamentary majority needed to pass a

constitutional change. (Karimi and Ochieng 1980, 19-25; Tamarkin 1979, 24; Widner 1992, 115-116).

The Attorney General, who was a Moi supporter, further issued a warning: "It is a criminal offence for any person to encompass, imagine, devise, or intend the death or deposition of the President." As a final nail in the coffin, Kenyatta himself made a statement supporting the Attorney General's earlier warning, despite the fact that many members of the Change-the-Constitution group were from Kenyatta's own family[2] (Tamarkin 1974, 24; Widner 1992, 166-117).

Of course, the constitutional rule was likely not the only factor that led to the ascension of Moi to the presidency. Kenyatta's influence played a role in supporting Moi's claims to the office, and the Change-the-Constitution group lacked the support of a majority in the parliament. However, the presence of formal succession rules acted as a critical barrier against attempts by other elites to dethrone the appointed successor. As Tamarkin (1979) effectively summarizes: "The anti-Moi group suffered a severe setback in its first attempt to assert itself. If they thought of pursuing their struggle they would have to do it against the backdrop of a grim political reality and with a *debilitating constitutional constraint*" (24, emphasis added).

A second benefit of formal succession rules is that such procedures transform conflict over succession from a single-shot game after the leader's death into a dynamic process in which actors, such as Moi and the Change-the-Constitution group, can

[2] Two of the leaders of the Change-the-Constitution movement were Dr. Njoroge Mungai, Kenyatta's nephew and personal doctor, and Mbiyu Koinange, his brother-in-law.

compete for power and influence peacefully within the political arena prior to the incumbent's departure from office.

In fact, upon Kenyatta's death, as it became clear that Moi would indeed serve as the next president, former members of the Change-the-Constitution group all publically proclaimed their loyalty to Moi. Mbiyu Koinange, a long-time cabinet minister who had served Kenyatta since 1964, had been a participant of the Change-the-Constitution group. Upon Moi quick ascension to the presidency after Kenyatta's death, Koinange made a public loyalty pledge to Moi, stating "there is no truth whatsoever in the rumours spreading abroad that I or any other respectable politician I know of in this stable land of ours will be opposing the President" (as quoted in Karimi and Ochieng 1980, 3). Koinange actually remained a cabinet minister the first year of the Moi presidency (although he was given a less prestigious portfolio), before being removed from the cabinet the following year.

A third benefit of constitutional succession rules is that they prevent incumbents from reneging on promises made to their designated successors. The 2012 transition from President Bingu wa Mutharika to his Vice President Joyce Banda in Malawi illustrates this mechanism. Like Kenya, the Mawali constitution includes a provision that states: "Whenever there is a vacancy in the office of President, the First Vice-President shall assume that office for the reminder of the term" (Section 83(3)). Though Mutharika initially promised to support Banda as his successor, he reneged on this pledge and instead began to endorse his younger brother, Peter Mutharika, as the next incumbent.[3]

[3] Mutharika could not simply remove Banda as Vice President because the Malawi constitution mandates that the Vice President can only be removed by impeachment (Dionne and Dulani 2012).

Upon Mutharika's death in 2012, factions supporting Peter Mutharika tried to contest Banda's ascension to the presidency. These attempts ultimately failed, as the courts and military supported the existing constitutional succession plans (Cammack 2012; Dionne and Dulani 2012).

The first presidential transfer of power in Cameroon also provides an example of this mechanism, where constitutional rules prevented the incumbent from reneging on the existing succession order. Under the founding president, Ahmadou Ahidjo, the constitution of Cameroon included a provision that stated: "Provisions are made for the continuity of office in the case of the President's resignation and for the Prime Minister to act as interim President should the President die or be permanently incapacitated." Ahidjo appointed Paul Biya as his Prime Minister in 1975.[4] In 1982, after being in power for 22 years, Ahidjo – citing health concerns – voluntarily retired from the presidency and passed power down to his appointed successor, Biya. As Prime Minister, Biya maintained an image of a technocrat and made it clear that he had no ambitions to compete with Ahidjo (Mbaku and Takougang 2004). After acceding to the presidency, however, Biya made a number of administrative and policy changes that diminished the influence of Ahidjo's allies, in favor of his own power base. This included multiple cabinet reshuffles in which most of Ahidjo's appointees were replaced (Azevedo 1987). Ahidjo began to accuse Biya of having tricked him into resigning from the presidency. In 1984, members of the palace guard who were loyal to Ahidjo attempted a coup.[5] This coup failed, in part because of tactical mistakes and also because the coup plotters failed

[4] Biya had served as Secretary General of the Presidency for seven years prior to his appointment as Prime Minister.
[5] It is widely believed that Adhijo had orchestrated the coup.

to gain support of key members of the armed forces.[6] Though the constitutional succession provision was likely not the only reason Biya was able to retain power in light of the failed coup attempt, the existence of a formal succession order conferred legality and legitimacy to his claim to the presidency (Hughes and May 1982).

In sum, the creation of formal constitutional succession rules promotes peaceful leadership transitions by protecting the existing regime against outside challenges, in addition to keeping incumbents accountable to their successors. Scholars note that such constitutional procedures now play an important role in regulating the transfer of power in newly democratic African countries in the post-Cold War era (Dionne and Dulani 2012, Posner and Young 2007, Posner and Young 2018). Yet I show that these mechanisms also play an important role in the transfer of power before the wave of democratization in the 1990s – even during the most authoritarian decades of rule.

3.2. Disaggregating Autocratic Constitutions

Although autocratic constitutions may be an important source of regime stability, I argue that not all constitutional rules are equally effective in constraining leaders and solving the problem of leadership succession. In fact, there is important variation *within* constitutions – certain types of rules matter more and other types matter less. This argument builds on existing studies of comparative constitutions, which highlights

[6] Randal, Jonathan. "Tales of Ex-Leader's Role in Revolt Stun Cameroon." *Washington Post,* April 15, 1984. < http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/07/19/AR2006071901340_pf.html>. Lewis, Paul. "Cameroon Radio Says An Attempted Coup has Failed." *New York Times*, April 7, 1984. < http://www.nytimes.com/1984/04/07/world/cameroon-radio-says-an-attempted-coup-has-failed.html?pagewanted=all>

variation in which different kinds of constitutional rights are enforced (Chilton and Versteeg 2015, forthcoming, Melton 2014).

While I hypothesize that the implementation of constitutional rules specifying procedures for succession play an important role in promoting peaceful transitions, I predict that the presence of term limits will have a much weaker effect. Existing scholarship on leadership succession procedures in modern autocracies suggest that term limits can be an important type of rule that regulates the transfer of executive power by specifying when the incumbent must leave office. Term limits specify a finite length of time in which the leader will hold office and may incentivize de facto successors to wait for the leader to voluntarily leave office, rather than trying to stage a coup prematurely.

However, term limits do not *empower* other elites in the same way that succession rules do because term limits do not specify *who* the successor will be. Returning to the example of Kenya, the constitutional rule that was implemented under Kenyatta specified that the person in the vice-presidential role is to be the de fact successor in the event of the death of the leader. Under this particular constitutional rule, Moi and his supporters had a lot to lose in the event that this particular rule was violated. Succession policies create certainty and establish predictability about the actors who are expected to come into office and benefit from the existing regime. Not only do such policies empower specific elites, they also incentivize these elites to protect the existing regime in order to reap the benefits of the existing succession order.

Term limits, on the other hand, do not identify a clear alternative leader that other elites can coordinate around. When term limits are violated by incumbents – which often occurs in autocracies – it is not clear *who* exactly is being hurt the most, unless a specific

elite has been designated as a de facto successor. In sum, constitutional term limits do not help solve coordination problems as effectively as succession procedures because term limits do not identify a specific individual that elites can coordinate around.

4. Designating Informal Successors

Beyond formal constitutional rules, I also argue that the stable appointment of a vice president or prime minister can also promote peaceful transitions by signaling *who* the designated successor should be. Within the context of Sub-Saharan Africa, vice presidents and prime ministers have long been understood to be the heir apparent of the president. Vice presidents and prime ministers are commonly designated as the interim president in the event of the death or incapacitation of the president. In many cases, the interim president is even allowed to serve out the rest of the former incumbent's term. As Hughes and May (1988) note, this provides an interim president with "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" (14). Even when the constitution does not specify the succession order, these top cabinet positions are generally been perceived to be a stepping-stone to the presidency.

Leon M'Ba, the first president of Gabon, for instance, appointed a loyal second in command, Omar Bongo, to the vice presidency as his heir apparent. As Jackson and Rosberg (1982) argue, "it is probably true that Bongo's own political skills served him well during the transitional period, but this does not gainsay the fact that he was M'Ba's personally selected [heir] and that he benefitted from the approval and legitimacy that such selection bestowed" (72).

The implication of this argument is that succession planning does not necessarily have to take place only on paper. Appointing an heir apparent, similar to the creation of constitutional succession rules, empowers a specific elite and incentivizes the successor to preserve the existing regime. Therefore, if my argument about individual elites as focal points is correct, then we should expect that the appointment of de factor successors should also promote peaceful transitions.

To sum, these arguments about constitutional succession policies, term limits, and de facto successors produce the following three testable hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: Leaders that have a constitutional rule specifying the procedures for succession are more likely to have peaceful transfers of power.

Hypothesis 2: Leaders who have term limits are not more likely to have peaceful transfers of power than those who do not.

Hypothesis 3: Leaders who appoint de facto successors are more likely to have peaceful transfers of power.

5. Endogenous Institutions: When do leaders create succession policies?

A concern that often arises when one tries to identify the effects of institutions occurs when the policies themselves are not randomly assigned. In the context of this article, readers may be concerned that the underlying dynamics motivating elites to create succession policies in the first place is driving transition outcomes, rather than the institutions themselves. This article takes several approaches to address this concern. This section tackles the question theoretically and the empirical section runs an additional set of models using inherited constitutional rules to address endogeneity concerns.

Under what conditions do leaders create succession policies? We can roughly break down the question into two possible scenarios: strong leaders create succession policies or weak leaders create succession policies. On one hand, it is possible that leaders who are extremely strong and anticipate having a peaceful transition are the only actors who feel secure enough to create explicit succession policies. If this is the case, then the relationship between succession policies and peaceful transitions is simply a reflection of the regime's stability and not the independent effect of institutions on leadership transitions.

However, a leader who is *already* secure and anticipates a smooth succession has no reason to create succession policies since a peaceful transition is possible *without* institutions. In fact, existing studies of endogenous institutional creation argues that it is *weak* leaders who create power-sharing institutions in order to buy support from other elites (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006; Boix and Svolik 2013; Gandhi 2008; Meng 2017). Strong leaders who do not face a credible threat of removal can remain in power whether they create institutions or not.

We should therefore expect incumbents who are *most likely* to experience *violent* transitions to create succession policies. In fact, this logic also answers the question: if planning for succession promotes regime durability, then why don't all dictators plan for succession? Leaders who feel quite secure in their positions are less likely to formalize succession procedures because such incumbents are not at risk of being deposed, even if they do not designate a line of succession. Though succession procedures are indeed endogenous creations, these policies are created by leaders who are inherently the *least* likely to have peaceful transitions. The strategic logic of institutional creation thus

alleviates concerns that the observed effects of institutions are merely reflections of underlying power dynamics, rather than the effect of succession planning.

There is a second related concern that if succession planning is an endogenous decision, then we should *not* expect to see the effect of institutions on regime outcomes (Pepinsky 2013). Here I argue that succession policies *should* have observable effects on transition outcomes because these policies affect not only the leader but also the designated successor. While leaders may choose to plan for succession in order to prevent other elites from preemptively staging a coup, designated successors benefit inadvertently from this strategic planning. The particular outcome of leadership succession therefore differs from other aspects of regime stability, such as the length of the ruler's tenure, which directly affects the leader who implemented the policy. In other words, smooth leadership transitions are often partially an *unintended consequence* of strategic institutionalization by leaders.

6. Data and Descriptive Statistics

I conduct empirical tests of my arguments using original data on constitutional rules on a sample that includes all authoritarian leadership transitions in Sub-Saharan Africa from 1960 to 2010.[7]

6.1. Dependent Variable

[7] Because my theory focuses on *authoritarian* leadership transitions, I drop country-years that are coded as democracy for at least a ten-year period by Cheibub et. al. (2010). Since most African states have been and continue to be authoritarian, only 11 countries after 1991 exit the sample.

The primary outcome of interest is whether the leadership transition was peaceful, therefore the unit of analysis is leadership transition, rather than leader. The main dependent variable, ***peace transition,*** is a dummy variable that takes a value of one if the leadership transition is peaceful. I use the following rules to identify peaceful leadership transitions. First, I require that a leader must have an immediate successor following their departure from office. To evaluate this, I use the "start date" and "end date" variables available from Archigos. Second, I require that the method of exit for the incumbent and method of entry for the successor both be coded as "regular" by Archigos.[8] In other words, in order for the transition to be coded as peaceful, the incumbent cannot have been deposed through a coup or civil war. The successor must take office immediately following the departure of the previous incumbent, and the successor cannot come to power using military force or foreign imposition.

An example of a peaceful leadership succession is when power was transferred from Jomo Kenyatta to Daniel arap Moi in Kenya. Kenyatta died on August 22, 1978 and Moi took office that day – both are coded as regular entry in Archigos. Another example of a peaceful transition is subsequently when power was transferred from Ahmadou Ahidjo to Paul Biya in Cameroon. Ahidjo retired due to ill health on November 6, 1982 and Biya took office that same day. On the other hand, from 1960 through 1970, Benin

[8] Archigos breaks down leader exit into the following main categories: assassination, popular protest, removed by military, removed by other government actors, removed by rebels, removed through threat of foreign force, regular, still in office. I consider all exit codes other than assassination, regular, and still in office as an instance of "irregular" leader exit. I exclude assassination from my list of irregular leader exits because Archigos codes assassination attempts only by unsupported individuals. U.S. presidents, for instance, have been assassinated but were peacefully succeeded by their vice presidents. For leader entry, Archigos uses the following categories: foreign imposition, irregular, regular, unknown. I only consider cases coded as "regular" as peaceful entry.

experienced six leadership changes – all of which were driven by coups. Finally, a number of incumbents were in power through the end of the dataset in 2010, and I exclude such observations from the analysis in this section. Ali Bongo Ondimba of Gabon is such an example.

6.2. Independent Variables

My main argument is that constitutional rules specifying succession procedures and the presence of a designated successor play an important role in facilitating peaceful leadership transitions. To test this argument, I collect data on constitutional succession rules and term limits in 46 African countries between 1960-2010.[9]

For succession rules, I created a time-series dummy variable that takes a value of one for the years in which each country in my dataset had a constitutional rule specifying procedures for replacing the president in the case of death or incapacitation. These procedures specify who would be the interim successor in the case of the departure or death of the president. The Botswana constitution, for instance, includes the following provision in the constitution: "In the event of the death or resignation of the President, the Vice-President will automatically assume the Presidency." Cases that score a zero for this variable either do not have a rule specifically addressing succession. Importantly, I only consider succession rules that were in place in the years leading up to the leadership transition. If, for example, a leader had succession rules at the start of her tenure, then eliminated them before existing office, then these rules would not have been in place to

[9] The data for this article was hand coded using the Europa World Year Book over a period of twelve months with a team of seven research assistants. To ensure accuracy, the variables were coded twice and, when available, crosschecked using the Comparative Constitutions Project.

facilitate the transition. Therefore, the variable, ***succession rules,*** records the number of years during the leader's tenure leading up to the transition for which constitutional succession rules were in place.

In addition to succession rules, I evaluate whether having term limits promotes peaceful transfers of power. The variable, ***term limits,*** records the number of years during the leader's tenure leading up to the transition for which the constitutional term limits were in place. The constitution of the Democratic Republic of Congo, for instance, from 1978-1996 included a clause stating: "The President of the Republic is elected for a seven-year term, renewable once only."

Finally, I also evaluate whether designating a de facto successor has an effect on the likelihood of peaceful transitions. In Sub-Saharan Africa, vice presidents and prime ministers are commonly known to be the informal heir apparent. In fact, 41 percent of autocratic successors previously held the vice president or prime minister position before becoming the incumbent (Meng 2017). However, I also take into account the stability of this cabinet position. African leaders routinely practiced the "revolving door" policy of constantly rotating important cabinet ministers in order to prevent any one person from amassing too much power (Dickie and Rake 1973; Jackson and Rosberg 1982). In coding this variable, I focus only on vice president and prime minister appointments that are *stable*.

An example is helpful here. Consider Seretse Khama, who was the first president of Botswana from 1966 to 1980. Quett Masire was appointed as the vice president throughout Khama's entire tenure, and in fact succeeded Khama to become the next president. In this case, Masire had a stable vice president for 14 years during his tenure.

On the other hand, Idriss Deby, who has been the president of Chad since 1991, has been rotating his vice presidents practically on a yearly basis since taking power. From 1991 to 2005, Deby named 10 different vice presidents. There have only been five years for which the vice presidency was held by the same person as the previous year during Deby's tenure.

As an indicator of stability I create a dummy variable that takes a value of 1 if the person in the vice president or prime minister position is the same person as the year before. The variable, ***Stable VP/PM,*** records the number of years of the incumbent's tenure in which the vice president or prime minister is the same person as the previous year.

In addition to my main hypotheses about succession planning, I also create variables to test existing arguments surrounding hereditary succession and ruling parties. I utilize the family ties ("fties") variable in Archigos, which identifies the familial relationship between leaders. The variable, ***Family ties***, is a dummy variable that takes a value of 1 if the transfer of power occurs between two family members. I include blood ties and ties via marriage and do not exclude irregular transfers of power.

For data on ruling parties, I merge the time-series version of my dataset on transitions with the Institutions dataset from Svolik (2012). Using the "lpname" party variable from Svolik, I create the variable, ***Ruling party***, which documents the number of years the leader had a ruling party prior to the leadership transition.

Two additional controls include the percentage of years for which the incumbent had a constitution in place (***Constitution***) in order to separate out the effect of simply having a constitution from having specific succession policies and term limits in place.

The variable, ***Years in power***, denotes the number of years the leader was in office. For many model specifications, I also include a number of country-level control variables, such as GDP per capita or ethnic fractionalization scores.[10]

6.3 Descriptive Statistics

The resulting data includes 106 leadership transitions that occurred between 1960 and 2010 in Sub-Saharan Africa. Out of these transitions, 41 were peaceful and 65 were not.[11] As documented by the literature on authoritarian rule, smooth leadership transitions do not occur easily – only 39 percent of the transitions in this sample were peaceful.

A number of interesting descriptive findings emerge from the data. The first striking observation is that *hereditary succession in Sub-Saharan Africa is surprisingly rare*. Only *four* percent of power transfers (whether peaceful or not) occur between family members.[12] Out of these 9 cases, 4 were peaceful,[13] and 4 were not,[14] and one leader is still in power. This finding is similar to patterns of hereditary succession in the global sample of all authoritarian regimes. Out of all autocratic leadership transitions that occurred between 1946 and 2016, power was handed between family members less than *three* percent of the time (calculated using the Archigos dataset).

[10] These control variables are calculated as the mean value of the variable for the leader's tenure.
[11] 19 leaders were still in power as of 2010, I exclude these leaders from the analysis.
[12] It is useful to recall that I am using a broad definition of the term "family" – I include relatives who are related by marriage, in addition to blood relations.
[13] For instance, in 1999, Ismail Omar Guelleh came to power as the president of Djibouti, following his uncle Hassan Gouled Aptidon, who had been the first president of Djibouti from 1977 to 1999. Guelleh was the handpicked successor of Aptidon and took over when his uncle retired.
[14] For example, in 1966, Jean-Bedel Bokassa seized power from David Dacko in the Central African Republic in a military coup. Bokassa was Dacko's uncle.

Even family "dynasties" occur very infrequently – in my sample of African leaders, only six percent of leaders have any family ties with earlier incumbents.[15] Once again, this statistic mirrors general patterns of family dynasties found in the global sample of all autocratic leaders. Summary statistics of all variables are reported in Appendix Table 1.

7. Empirical Analysis

The baseline estimating equation is a logit model predicting peaceful transitions for each leadership transition i in country j, and it is represented as the following:

$$\Pr\left(Peaceful\ leadership\ transition_{ij} = 1\right) = f(\beta X_{ij} + \gamma W_{ij} + \epsilon)$$

where X_{ij} is a vector of transition-specific variables (such as the presence of constitutional succession rules or the appointment of a defacto successor) as well as leader-specific variables (such as time in office). W_{ij} is a vector of country-specific controls at the time of the transition (such as GDP per capita and an ethnic fractionalization score). Standard errors are clustered at the country level for all model specifications.

Table 1 reports results of the logit analysis. The presence of constitutional rules specifying succession procedures are positively associated with peaceful transitions, and this effect is robust across various model specifications. The presence of a de facto successor (measured by the stability of the Vice President/ Prime Minister position) is also significantly associated with peaceful transitions across all model specifications,

[15] By family "dynasty" I am referring to leaders who have a familial connection with an earlier incumbent, but did not immediately come into office following the family member. For instance, Ian Khama, the current president of Botswana, came into office in 2008. His father, Sereste Khama, left office in 1980.

Table 1 Logit Analysis

DV: peaceful transition	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Successor rules	0.159**	0.159**	0.149*	
	(0.054)	(0.055)	(0.059)	
Stable VP/PM	0.257**	0.267**	0.245*	
	(0.086)	(0.103)	(0.117)	
Term limits	0.123*	0.123*	0.100	
	(0.055)	(0.058)	(0.070)	
Constitution	-0.093	-0.100	-0.145	0.120
	(0.115)	(0.125)	(0.141)	(0.088)
Ruling party		0.042	0.030	-0.004
		(0.091)	(0.088)	(0.053)
GDP per capita			0.906*	
			(0.423)	
Oil production			-0.060	
			(0.502)	
Population			0.319	
			(0.225)	
Ethnic frac			0.423	
			(1.264)	
Cold War			-0.911	
			(0.623)	
British			-0.103	
			(0.763)	
French			-0.388	
			(0.821)	
Years in power	0.005	-0.007	0.066	-0.047
	(0.092)	(0.099)	(0.108)	(0.089)
Constant	-1.842***	-1.806**	-5.518*	-1.019*
	(0.556)	(0.570)	(2.502)	(0.421)
Observations	106	106	101	106
Pseudo R-squared	0.286	0.289	0.400	0.0598

Robust standard errors clustered by country in parentheses
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

suggesting that informal institutions can play an important role in regulating power. The size of these effects is not trivial.[16] As the number of years a leader has a constitutional successor policy increases from zero to 35, the predicted probability of a peaceful transition jumps from .3 to almost 1. The size of the effect of a stable vice president or prime minister is similar in magnitude. The effects of term limits are much more inconsistent. For the first two model specifications, term limits appear to be positively associated with peaceful transitions, but this effect is not robust to the addition to controls in model (3).

Importantly, the presence of a ruling party is does not appear to have a significant effect on the likelihood of a peaceful transition in any of the model specifications in Table 1. In fact, the ruling party variable is *never* significant in any subsequent models or robustness checks. Model (4) includes only the Ruling party variable (in addition to Constitution and Years in power as controls), and the party variable continues to be insignificant. Because there are so few cases of familial transfers of power, I exclude this variable from the main analysis, although when included, it is never significant.

One potential concern is that parties may be especially weak in Sub-Saharan Africa – particularly during the early decades immediately following independence. To show that the absence of a party effect is not simply an artifact of weak parties in Africa, I analyze a global sample of leadership transitions from 1946-2008 and find that the presence of a ruling party does not increase the likelihood of a peaceful leadership transition. In fact, I also find that a hereditary transfer of power also does not have a

[16] Appendix Figure 1 presents graphs of the marginal effect of constitutional succession rules, term limits, and the presence of a de facto successor on the likelihood of a peaceful transition.

significant effect on the global sample of leadership changes. Appendix Table 2 reports these results.

Inherited Constitutional Rules

Next, to address concerns about endogenous institutional creation, I run a set of models using *inherited* constitutional rules. Since institutions are created by leaders, the reader may be concerned that the relationship between constitutional rules and peaceful succession is endogenous. To deal with this concern, I consider cases where the leader inherited formal rules about succession, rather than creating them.

I create new variables reflecting whether a leader had inherited constitutional succession rules and term limits. These variables take a value of 1 only if the constitutional rule was *already in place* when the leader came into power. In Malawi, for example, succession policies were created after Hastings Banda had already been in office for twelve years – he therefore did not inherit succession policies. The president who succeeded Banda, Bakili Muluzi, however, did inherit succession policies – therefore under this coding scheme, this variable takes a value of one for Muluzi but not for Banda. Results from the analysis using inherited constitutional rules are reported in Table 2.[17] The results remain consistent. Succession rules that are inherited by incumbents are significantly associated with peaceful transfers of power, while term

[17] For this set of regressions, I analyzed inherited successor rules and inherited term limits in separate regressions because of the way these variables were coded. If, for example, a leader created constitutional succession policies, then these observations would be dropped from the sample. For that particular case, however, term limits may or may not have already existed in the constitution. Running both variables at once would create an inaccurate reflection of the existence of inherited term limits. I also drop all

Table 2 Logit Analysis: Inherited Constitutional Rules

DV: peaceful transition	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Inherited successor rules	0.229**	0.264*		
	(0.088)	(0.118)		
Inherited term limits			0.240	0.470*
			(0.128)	(0.195)
Constitution	0.011	-0.070	0.017	-0.034
	(0.097)	(0.138)	(0.092)	(0.123)
Ruling party		0.001		-0.045
		(0.101)		(0.108)
GDP per capita		0.307		0.126
		(0.269)		(0.280)
Oil production		0.429		0.565*
		(0.253)		(0.267)
Population		0.353		0.382
		(0.219)		(0.228)
Ethnic frac		0.058		0.597
		(1.463)		(1.669)
British		0.754		0.435
		(0.707)		(0.745)
French		0.031		0.241
		(0.733)		(0.834)
Years in power	0.034	0.113	0.029	0.118
	(0.089)	(0.092)	(0.087)	(0.081)
Constant	-1.398**	-5.752*	-1.366**	-6.415**
	(0.458)	(2.355)	(0.475)	(2.448)
Observations	67	64	68	65
Pseudo R-squared	0.137	0.272	0.124	0.310

Robust standard errors clustered by country in parentheses
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

founding presidents from this analysis, since many constitutional rules were created under the first leader.

limits seem to have an inconsistent effect. [18]

These findings also remain consistent over a number of robustness checks. First, I rerun the analysis on a subset of the data that excludes units that do *not* have constitutions (in order words, only units that have constitutions for the entire period are included in this analysis). The results, reported in Appendix Table 3, remain consistent. The presence of formal succession rules continue to be significantly associated with peaceful transfers of power, as well as the appointment of a stable vice president or prime minister.

Second to ensure that my results are not purely being driven by institutions that were created after the end of the Cold War in 1990, I split the sample into two time periods. Models (1) and (2), reported in Appendix Table 4, include leaders who were in power during the Cold War period, from 1960-1990. Models (3) and (4) include leaders who were in power after the end of the Cold War, from 1991-2010. The presence of constitutional successor rules continues to be significant during both time periods, suggesting that these rules had an effect on transitions of power even during the most authoritarian decades.

Survival Analysis

Finally, I conduct survival analysis to see whether having rules regulating the transition of power promotes regime stability, namely by preventing preemptive coups.

[18] Another possible strategy, following existing studies, could have been to focus on natural or sudden leader deaths (for instance, see Olken and Jones 2005). However within the Africa sample this strategy is not feasible because there are not enough cases for empirical testing. Of all African leaders in my sample, 8 were assassinated and 15 died of natural causes. Moreover, elites frequently plan for succession in anticipation of the death of an aging leader. Therefore the institutional configuration upon the death of a leader is often not random.

For this analysis, I create a dependent variable, ***Violent leader deposal***, which takes a value of 1 if the leader's exit from office was coded as "Irregular" by the Archigos dataset. Coups constitute the vast majority of "Irregular" leader exits. I use a Cox proportional hazard model and report hazard ratios. Since the dependent variable is violent leader deposal, hazard ratios that are *less* than 1 indicate a lower risk of being forcibly deposed, while hazard ratios that are greater than 1 indicate a higher risk of being forcibly deposed.

Table 3 reports results from the survival analysis. I find that leaders who have constitutional succession procedures and designate a de facto successor are significantly less likely to be violently deposed, though term limits continue to be insignificant. These results are in line with other studies that find that institutionalized succession procedures protect regimes against coup attempts (Frantz and Stein 2016) as well as the outbreak of civil wars rooted in succession conflict (Kokkonen and Sundell 2017). Succession policies add an additional layer of protection for the incumbent and existing regime: the designated heir. By naming a successor, the incumbent aligns the successor's interests with his own: they both do not want the existing regime to end or the status quo to be challenged. As a result, elite challengers or would-be coup plotters have to contend with two major defenders of the status quo.

Conclusion

This article examined the conditions under which peaceful leadership successions can occur in autocracies. Using data on autocratic transitions in Sub-Saharan Africa, I show that formal succession planning can play an important role in regulating the

Table 3 Survival Analysis

DV: Violent leader deposal	(1)	(2)
Successor rules	0.936*	0.941*
	(0.032)	(0.034)
Stable VP/PM	0.858***	0.862***
	(0.038)	(0.043)
Term limits	0.956	0.960
	(0.036)	(0.041)
Constitution	0.899***	0.899***
	(0.024)	(0.028)
Ruling party		0.977
		(0.036)
GDP per capita		0.836
		(0.173)
Oil production		1.190
		(0.306)
Population		0.807*
		(0.098)
Ethnic frac		1.006
		(0.505)
Observations	206	193
Pseudo R-squared	0.167	0.171

Robust standard errors in parentheses, and hazard ratios are reported. Hazard rations that are *less* than 1 indicate a lower risk of being forcibly deposed. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10

peaceful transition of power. I find that regimes that have formal succession rules written into the constitution and leaders who designate a clear successor are significantly more likely to undergo multiple leadership successions – regardless of whether the regime has a long-standing ruling party. The creation of succession rules and existence of a de facto successor also seem to promote autocratic survival as well. Conversely, the creation of term limits appears to have a much weaker and inconsistent effect on peaceful transitions. The results suggest that rather than introducing the crown prince problem, planning for leadership succession in African autocracies seems to be a stabilizing force for continued

autocratic rule. Importantly, I show that these measures can be effective, even within Sub-Saharan Africa, where institutions are commonly portrayed to be weak and ineffectual.

A natural question that follows from this study is why the crown prince problem does *not* materialize when a successor is appointed. To gain traction on this topic, future studies should consider the characteristics of the person who is appointed as the de facto successor. It is likely that presidents may purposely designate vice presidents who they believe have less influence than them. They might certainly appoint successors who they think are unable to unilaterally depose them. This was certainly true in the case of Kenya. When Moi was vice president, he was not perceived to be a particularly shrewd politician, and in fact elites would sometimes make "Moi jokes" behind his back (Bienen and van de Walle 1991, 6). Under these circumstances, the designated appointee would be incentivized to wait patiently for the incumbent to die or retire, rather than try to capture power preemptively through a coup.

In addition, future studies can also collect data on constitutional rules and cabinet appointments from other regions of the world. Scholarship on authoritarian institutions has only recently begun studying the effects of constitutions on autocratic stability, and this study demonstrated the importance of disaggregating constitutional rules. By further examining the content of autocratic constitutions, scholars can continue to understand the conditions under which institutions shape regime outcomes in dictatorships.

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APPENDIX

Appendix Table 1. Summary Statistics

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Peaceful transition	106	.386	.489	0	1
Succession rules	106	2.79	5.08	0	24
Stable VP/PM	106	3.73	5.23	0	35
Term limits	106	1.95	3.88	0	22
Constitution	106	6.84	7.87	0	41
Family ties	106	.043	.205	0	1
Party years	106	4.37	4.37	0	27
GDP per capita	101	1.29	1.61	.160	11.1
Oil production	101	.250	1.13	0	11.8
Population	101	8.71	1.17	6.16	11.6
Ethnic frac	101	.664	.240	.035	.925
Years in power	106	8.50	8.20	1	41

Appendix Table 2 Logit Analysis (Global Sample)

DV: Peaceful transitions	(1)	(2)	(3)
Family ties	0.778	0.824	1.811
	(0.560)	(0.535)	(0.969)
Ruling party	0.008	0.011	-0.027
	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.044)
Constant	-2.936***	-3.130***	-3.147**
	(0.720)	(0.675)	(1.183)
Observations	456	456	347
Pseudo R-squared	0.0613	0.0946	0.148
Country FE	No	No	Yes
Region controls	No	Yes	No

Robust standard errors clustered by country in parentheses
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

This sample includes all leadership transitions that have occurred in all dictatorships in the world (as defined by Cheibub et al). The family ties variable was retrieved from the Archigos dataset, and the ruling party variable was retrieved from Svolik (2012).

Appendix Table 3. Robustness Check: Only units with constitutions

DV: peaceful transition	(1)	(2)
Successor rules	0.177**	0.175*
	(0.066)	(0.075)
Stable VP/PM	0.251**	0.199*
	(0.095)	(0.093)
Term limits	0.098	0.114
	(0.057)	(0.077)
Ruling party		0.005
		(0.072)
GDP per capita		1.189*
		(0.560)
Oil production		-0.386
		(0.437)
Population		0.276
		(0.227)
Ethnic frac		0.382
		(1.981)
Years in power	-0.078	
	(0.061)	
Constant	-1.846*	-6.620*
	(0.839)	(2.599)
Observations	65	62
Pseudo R-squared	0.303	0.436

Note: Units without constitutions for the entire period are excluded from this analysis.
Robust standard errors clustered by country in parentheses
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Appendix Table 4. Robustness Check: Time trends

	Cold War		Post Cold War	
DV: peaceful transition	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Successor rules	0.112	0.148*	0.165	0.189**
	(0.076)	(0.071)	(0.085)	(0.068)
Stable VP/PM	0.215*	0.215	0.297	0.257
	(0.101)	(0.164)	(0.191)	(0.176)
Term limits	0.073	0.016	0.136	0.407
	(0.064)	(0.058)	(0.100)	(0.323)
Constitution	-0.116	-0.241	-0.097	-0.144
	(0.160)	(0.155)	(0.214)	(0.262)
Ruling party		0.012		0.177
		(0.106)		(0.130)
GDP per capita		0.564		1.224
		(0.326)		(1.121)
Oil production		0.304		1.209
		(0.400)		(1.208)
Population		0.990		0.320
		(0.667)		(0.408)
Ethnic frac		-0.085		-0.547
		(1.890)		(1.499)
British		1.549		-2.020
		(1.649)		(1.334)
French		-0.095		-0.710
		(1.420)		(1.472)
Years in power	0.036	0.193	-0.021	0.091
	(0.130)	(0.150)	(0.149)	(0.203)
Constant	-0.895	-11.523	-2.328**	-6.863
	(0.612)	(6.619)	(0.762)	(3.813)
Observations	47	44	59	57
Pseudo R-squared	0.158	0.339	0.323	0.505

Robust standard errors clustered by country in parentheses
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Appendix Figure 1 Marginal Effects