Succession Politics and Power-sharing in Nigeria

Nkwachukwu ORJI

Institute for Development Studies, University of Nigeria (Enugu Campus), Nsukka, NIGERIA.

Abstract

This article examines the relationship between succession politics and power sharing. It argues that existing literature on the subject overlook recent and significant developments, especially the push for peaceful political succession in Africa through the process of power sharing. While acknowledging that succession politics is a major source of conflicts in Africa, especially within the context of ethnic diversity, economic underdevelopment, and strong ethno-political rivalry, the article contends that a major feature of succession politics in Nigeria is the search for orderly regime change. This search has culminated in the establishment of power-sharing arrangements. While power-sharing appears critical in eliminating political uncertainty and moderating the behaviour of political actors, it has fueled succession related conflicts by eliminating the competitiveness that leads to alternation of power among political parties. This, in turn, has facilitated one-party dominance and imposition of successors by incumbents and other political "godfathers".
Key words: Diversity; Ethnic Politics, Nigeria; Power sharing; Succession Politics;

Introduction

This article examines the nexus between succession politics and power sharing. Drawing from the case study of Nigeria, it examines the role of succession politics in shaping the evolution of power-sharing arrangements as well as the impact of the implementation of power sharing on the dynamics of succession politics. The methodological approach adopted in this study involves in-depth case study, tracing of process mechanisms, and a re-description of history based on review of published literature, government documents, and media reports. The article extends the existing literature on political succession in Africa, which focuses overwhelmingly on violent and/or unconstitutional change of governments, by considering the interactions, debates and peaceful political exchanges that occur during election seasons. It argues that existing literature overlooks recent and significant developments, especially the push for peaceful political succession through the process of power sharing. While acknowledging that succession politics could be a major source of conflicts in Africa, especially within the context of ethnic diversity, economic underdevelopment, and contentious politics, this article contends that an emerging feature of succession politics in some African countries is the search for orderly regime change. This search reflects in the establishment of power-sharing arrangements in countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Burundi, and Sierra Leone.

    This article is divided into five sections. After this brief introductory section, I will discuss succession politics in Nigeria. This will provide the background against which we

can understand the evolution of power sharing. The third section will examine the role of succession politics in the evolution of power sharing in Nigeria. It will highlight the challenges that Nigeria confronts while attempting to achieve peaceful political succession and how efforts by political actors to address these challenges have given rise to the emergence of power-sharing arrangements. The fourth section explores the effects of power-sharing on succession politics, noting especially the role of power-sharing, on one hand, in moderating struggles over political succession, and on the other hand, in triggering fresh conflicts over political succession by encouraging one-party dominance and imposition of successors. The article will end in the fifth section with a conclusion.

Succession Politics in Nigeria
Political succession, as Alan Brier (1987, 135) notes, is 'the ways in which political power passes, or is transferred, from one individual government or regime, to another'. In a narrower sense, it refers to orderly arrangements for the transfer of tenure of important offices within a state, which make allowance at the same time for change and for continuity. The politics of political succession is, thus, primarily concerned with the struggles over the processes of transfer of power, or changes of tenure of important state offices. In other words, succession politics is about the struggle to determine the outcome of the succession process in terms of who becomes a new leader.

Three issues have dominated succession politics in Nigeria, namely self-succession bids, handpicking and imposition of successors by incumbent rulers, and pressures for inter-ethnic power-shift. Self-succession denotes a situation where a leader attempts to succeed him/herself by manipulating or amending the rules or procedures guiding transfer of power. Nigeria has experienced two major forms of self-succession bids. The first involves attempts at transforming military dictatorships into democratic regimes with the leader trying to civilianize, while the second has to do with attempts by a democratically elected president to extend the term of office via constitutional amendment (Mohammed 2008, 74).

The earliest attempt at self-succession in Nigeria was by General Yakubu Gowon. Gowon emerged as Nigeria's leader following the July 1966 coup that toppled the country's first military administration. In line with the traditional perception of military intervention in Nigerian politics as temporary, Gowon offered to return the country to democratic rule in 1976 (Obi 2000, 73). However, on 1 October 1974, General Gowon announced an indefinite postponement of his government's political exit programme. This announcement exasperated civil society groups, the political class, and the military, and provided part of the justification for his overthrow on 29 July 1975.

Like Gowon, General Ibrahim Babangida also embarked on self-succession bid. Although Babangida promised to return Nigeria to democratic rule after he seized power in a military coup that ousted General Muhammadu Buhari, he deliberately scuttled his regime's transition to civil rule program, a program that gulped enormous resources. Constant alteration of the transition calendar, banning and un-banning of politicians, interference in the activities of political parties, and annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential election marked General Babangida's transition programme (Diamond et. al. 1997; Ihonvbere and Shaw 1998).

The regime of General Sani Abacha presents the third case of self-succession bid in Nigeria. General Abacha took over power on 19 November 1993, after the resignation of Ernest Shonekan to whom General Babangida had handed over power as he made his exit on 26 August 1993. General Abacha rejected Babangida's inconclusive transition programme and initiated a fresh programme. However, in early-1998, General Abacha, through groups such as Youths Earnestly Ask for Abacha (YEAA) and the National Council for Youth Associations in Nigeria (NACYAN), mounted a strong, albeit, covert campaign to run for the presidency later in 1998 (Gwarzo 2003; Ikelegbe 2001). One scholar noted that General Abacha had planned to impose himself as the sole candidate of the five registered parties (as at then) and to call for a national referendum to confirm his presidency, ensuring that no one challenged him (Obi 2000, 78). Incidentally, General Abacha's self-succession bid was terminated by his sudden demise on 8 June 1998.

President Olusegun Obasanjo made the most recent attempt at self-succession in Nigeria. Obasanjo rose to power having won the 1999 presidential election conducted by General Abacha's successor General Abdulsalami Abubakar. President Obasanjo also secured a second term following his victory at the 2003 presidential election. However, in early 2005, there was a move by Obasanjo's supporters to amend the constitution in order to extend presidential and gubernatorial term limits from two to three terms. Although President Obasanjo did not openly endorse this campaign, yet his failure to publicly denounce the campaign forced many to interpret the move as his attempt to remain in office. According to Ibrahim (2007, 9), President Obasanjo, in fact, pursued a third term agenda – this he did through bribing of federal legislators to support the move as well as the use of security agents and party machine to intimidate opponents of the self-succession plan. These measures notwithstanding, the Senate decisively rejected the Bill proposing tenure elongation on 16 May 2006.

Four strategies are common in the cases of self-succession bid highlighted above.[1] The first, which is associated notably with General Babangida, involves attempts at manipulating the political process. This played out particularly in the way the Babangida regime manipulated the process leading to formation of political parties. In 1989, the Babangida regime restricted the number of political parties that would exist in Nigeria to only two and went ahead to establish the two parties - the National Republican Convention (NRC) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) - by fiat, rejecting legitimate requests for registration as parties by several political groups and associations. The regime not only supervised the erection of administrative and programmatic infrastructure for the two parties, but also financed the two parties beginning from October 1989 to December 1990 (Akinola 1989). This gave General Babangida the advantage to control the political parties through measures such as dissolution of the executive committees of the parties and constitution of caretaker committees in their place, cancellation of the parties' primary elections, as well as banning some categories of politicians ("old breed politicians") from

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[1] Only the first strategy manifested during the administration of General Gowon because General Mohammed toppled the administration soon after Gowon announced the suspension of his regime's transition program.

joining the parties (Akinterinwa 1997). These measures raised suspicion that General Babangida was paving the way for his self-succession.

The second strategy entails suppression of the opposition. General Sani Abacha is notable for his brutal repression of civil society groups opposed to his regime and/or his self-succession plan (Egwaikhide and Isumonah 2001; Soyinka 1994). General Abacha tried to neutralize all political strongholds in Nigeria, including the highly revered throne of Sultan of Sokoto in a bid to stay-tight in power.[2] Suppression of opposition is also an important aspect of President Obasanjo's self-succession bid. The most prominent casualty of Obasanjo's repression tactics was the Alliance for Democracy (AD), a party that denied Obasanjo of Yoruba votes during the 1999 presidential election. President Obasanjo paralyzed the AD by weakening the *Afenifere*, a Yoruba cultural group that formed the backbone of the party. First, Obasanjo co-opted a key member of *Afenifere* – Bola Ige into the inner core of his government. Through Ige, a rival group – the Yoruba Council of Elders (YCE) that opposed *Afenifere's* Yoruba nationalist ideology was established. Finally, Obasanjo instigated fragmentation of the AD by sponsoring a splinter group within the AD. The intra-party crisis in AD worked against the party's fortunes during the 2003 general elections - the party lost all but one of the six Yoruba states it held previously. By the time of the 2007 election, the AD had completely imploded. This situation elevated Obasanjo to the centre stage of Yoruba politics during 2007 election, and strengthened his self-succession bid (Adindu 2003).

The adoption of time-buying state reforms is the third strategy. The regimes of Generals Babangida and Abacha, for instance, created new states on three occasions,[3] established long-drawn constitution amendment processes,[4] and set up and dismantled several institutions and programs. Some scholars have suggested that these reforms were time-buying measures adopted by both Babangida and Abacha to elongate their stay in power (Kraxberger 2004). President Obasanjo also engaged in time-buying reforms. Based on the reforms he campaigned for the continuity of his administration beyond the stipulated two terms (Gillies 2007).

The last strategy discernible from the cases of attempted self-succession in Nigeria involves co-opting loyal members of the political class and undermining those perceived as disloyal. President Obasanjo's attempt to hijack and control the leadership of Nigeria's ruling party – the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) – is in this direction. Soon after his inauguration in 1999, President Obasanjo embarked on attempts to take control of the PDP to facilitate his self-succession bid. To this end, President Obasanjo sought to co-opt those members of the political class perceived to be loyal. In November 2000, President Obasanjo arm-twisted the PDP national convention and imposed his loyalist, Barnabas Gemade as the party's Chairman.[5] Obasanjo removed Gemade after he became defiant, and replaced

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[2] The Sultanate stool was first "defied" when General Babangida imposed his friend, Ibrahim Dasuki, on the Caliphate without regard to the age long tradition of selection of the Sultan by the kingmakers. Then, General Abacha dealt a more severe blow on the throne when he removed and exiled Sultan Ibrahim Dasuki.

[3] These occasions were in 1989, 1991, and 1996.

[4] These processes resulted in the 1989 Constitution and 1995 draft Constitution.

[5] Although Sunday Awonyi is acknowledged as a more popular candidate.

him with Audu Ogbeh. In January 2005, after Audu Ogbeh criticized President Obasanjo for failing to mitigate the violent conflict in Anambra State and other parts of Nigeria, Obasanjo forced Audu Ogbeh to resign. He appointed a presidential loyalist Ahmadu Ali to replace Ogbeh (Mohammed 2008: 129-138). Eventually, President Obasanjo used Ahmadu Ali to mastermind his third term plot.

Besides self-succession bids, succession politics in Nigeria is characterized by hand picking and imposition of successors by incumbent leaders. A classic example is President Obasanjo's hand picking and imposition of Umaru Musa Yar'dua as Nigeria's president during the 2007 election. Until May 2006 when President Obasanjo's third term bid failed, there were no serious presidential aspirants in Nigeria, except Vice President Atiku Abubakar. An attempt by northern critics of Obasanjo to persuade Vice-President Abubakar to vie for presidency in 2003 created a deep rift between President Obasanjo and Vice-President Abubakar. As the 2007 election approached, President Obasanjo showed a determination to block Atiku's chances to succeed him. To this end, President Obasanjo began a quick search for successor and in December 2006, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua emerged as the favored candidate.

The unofficial principle of rotational presidency, which requires that Obasanjo's successor should hail from the North, facilitated the choice of Yar'Adua. This factor led to the elimination of other popular candidates from the South such as Peter Odili and Donald Duke. Again, Yar'Adua's image as an honest and incorruptible leader who performed creditably as the Governor of Katsina State as well as the clean bill he received from anti-corruption agency – the EFCC facilitated his endorsement. One scholar pointed out that Obasanjo's selection of Yar'Adua, who was relatively clean from corruption, was to justify the President's use of the EFCC to intimidate his opponents (Aluko 2008). Some argue that President Obasanjo's selection of Yar'Adua owed largely to his perception of the latter as a weak and pliant personality who may be susceptible to manipulations (Adeyemo 2006[a]: 58). Others see the choice of Yar'Adua by Obasanjo as a political calculation aimed at neutralizing the presidential ambition of Vice President Atiku Abubakar (Adeyemo 2006[b], 26). Finally, some see the selection of Umaru Yar'Adua as a ploy by Obasanjo to split the Peoples Democratic Movement (PDM), a political group, which played a major role in his ascension to power and which is headed by Atiku Abubakar after the demise of its founder Shehu Musa Yar'Adua.[6] The split, in their opinion, was aimed at weakening the political camp inherited by Vice President Abubakar to the disadvantage of the Vice President.

As soon as President Obasanjo settled for Umaru Yar'Adua as his successor, he adopted four measures to impose his candidate on the PDP and the nation. Firstly, through some PDP leaders, President Obasanjo persuaded other presidential aspirants to withdraw from the race. Obasanjo scared most aspirants off the presidential race by "employing blackmail, deceit and arm-twisting", thus paving the way for the emergence of Umar Yar'Adua (Adeyemo 2006[a], 18). Ahmed Makarfi, former Governor of Kaduna State, was the first aspirant to step down for Yar'Adua. On the day of the PDP primaries, nearly all the

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[6] Shehu Musa Yar'Adua was the elder brother of Umaru Musa Yar'Adua. He died in 1995 while being detained by General Sani Abacha on allegations of involvement in attempted coup.

presidential aspirants had withdrawn from the race courtesy of pressures from President Obasanjo.

The second measure involves the use security agencies such as the EFCC to intimidate presidential aspirants who refused to step down for Yar'Adua. According to one reporter, "few days before the primaries, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, EFCC, was used against perceived formidable presidential aspirants. They were harassed and intimidated by the EFCC at the behest of 'powers from above' in order to rubbish them and scuttle their chances of emerging victorious at the convention" (Onyekwere 2006, 18). At various times, the police would "detain opposition supporters and candidates, ransack the offices and campaign headquarters of opposition parties [as well as candidates], and deny permits for major opposition rallies and meetings" (Suberu 2007, 98). Peter Odili, former Governor of Rivers State, was among those that were allegedly intimidated and put down through the EFCC.

Thirdly, using the PDP national executive committee, President Obasanjo ensured that the PDP National Convention that nominated Yar'Adua was a zero-election convention. This means that the party selected Yar'Adua as its "consensus candidate" without competitive election. This approach was adopted to forestall the risk that some within the party may mobilize against the plans to impose Yar'Adua. The PDP leadership completely averted the risk of a possible contest between Yar'Adua and other aspirants when it announced the endorsement of Yar'Adua as the party's flag bearer. One reporter that observed the nomination process noted:

> It was a game of intrigues at… [the] National Convention of the People's Democratic Party, PDP, held in Abuja. The process that led to the emergence of the presidential flag bearer was characterized by manipulations and power play. In the end, the convention was virtually a coronation ceremony for the aspirant anointed by Aso Rock (Onyekwere 2006, 16).

Finally, with the connivance of the electoral body – Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and security agencies, President Obasanjo watched over the blatant rigging of the April 2007 presidential election. Considering that Yar'Adua did not possess the credentials to win the presidential race, Obasanjo approached the election as a "do-or-die" affair. The President used the machinery of the state to manipulate the polls in favor of Yar'Adua.

Apart from self-succession bids and imposition of successors, the struggle for ethno-regional power-shift have dominated succession politics in Nigeria. The demands for power-shift draw from the structure of Nigerian politics. Nigerian politics have developed along a tripartite trajectory (Ibrahim 1999, 13). The first is the bipolar divide between the Northern and Southern Nigeria at the beginning of the colonial period. The second is the tripolar arrangement that followed the division of Nigeria into three regions dominated by the three largest ethnic groups in 1946. The third trajectory captures the multipolar character of Nigerian politics, which developed beginning from 1967 when the place of the minority ethnic groups in the country was particularly recognized. The creation of states in 1967 accorded the minority groups the territorial space within which to assert

themselves in Nigerian politics. Contemporary Nigeria has five ethno-regional blocs – the North, Yoruba, Igbo, Niger Delta, and Middle Belt (Orji 2009, Madunagu 1994, 19). Although the bipolar and/or tripolar character of Nigerian politics have tended to overshadow the country's multipolarity in the past, contemporary Nigerian politics follow the multipolar lines. Consequently, succession politics and, in particular, the politics of power-shift have been dominated by demands by the country's multiple ethno-regional blocs.

Since the colonial days, fears of ethnic marginalization and domination are the main elements of Nigerian politics (Ibelema 2000, Coleman 1958). As a result, the Nigerian political elite devised various arrangements, including zoning and the federal character principle, to allay the fears of domination and ensure that there is some sense of equity in the distribution of state power and other resources (Orji 2008). Particularly interesting is the practice whereby Northern and Southern elites share the most important political positions in Nigeria.[7] These arrangements, however, have not prevented the North from dominating most regimes, both civilian and military. Notice in Table 1 below that 66.7 percent of Nigerian heads of state between 1960 and 2021 have been Northerners; only 33.3 percent were Southerners. The gap is even wider when one considers the length of time the heads of state spent in office. The heads of state from the North spent 520 months in office, representing 71.4 percent of the period 1960-2021 while the heads of state from the South spent 208 months in office or 28.6 percent of the duration. Considering this fact, there is a deep-seated concern among the southern elite of a Northern conspiracy to keep the southerners out of power. This fear is the backdrop against which the Southern elites are pressing for the institutionalization of power-sharing arrangements as procedure for leadership succession. It is in the context of this struggle over leadership succession that the practice of power sharing has evolved in Nigeria.

Table 1: NUMBER OF HEADS OF STATE/GOVERNMENT BY REGION AND LENGTH OF TIME IN OFFICE (OCT. 1960-MAY 2021)

Ethno-regional Groups	No. of Heads of State/Govt.	%	No. of Months in Office	%
North	7	46.6	305	41.8
Middle Belt	3	20	215	29.5
Igbo	1	6.6	6	0.8
Yoruba	3	20	142	19.5
Niger Delta	1	6.6	60	8.2
North	**10**	**66.7**	**520**	**71.4**

[7] For example, Nnamdi Azikiwe (South) led the independence government as the Head of State and Tafawa Balewa (North) as the Prime Minister. There were also the governments of Gen Murtala Mohammed (North) and Gen Olusegun Obasanjo (South) 1975-1976; Gen Olusegun Obasanjo (South) and Gen Shehu Musa Yar'Adua (North) 1976-1979; Shehu Shagari (North) and Alex Ekwueme (South) 1979-1983. This pattern has continued till the present era, with Umaru Yar'Adua (North) as President and Goodluck Jonathan (South) Vice President May 2007-May 2010; Goodluck Jonathan (South) President and Mohammed Namadi Sambo (North) Vice President May 2010-May 2015; Muhammadu Buhari (North) President and Oluyemi Oluleke Osinbajo (South) Vice President May 2015 till date.

| South | 5 | 33.3 | 208 | 28.6 |
| Total | 15 | 100 | 728 | 100 |

Source: Adapted from Nwala (1997, 153)

Succession Politics and Evolution of Power-sharing in Nigeria

Power sharing refers to the process of providing "every significant identity group or segment in a society representation and decision-making abilities on common issues and a degree of autonomy over issues of importance to the group" (Sisk 1996, 5). The evolution of power-sharing in Nigeria is linked to struggles over leadership succession engendered by the style of British colonial administration, the structural flaws in Nigeria's territorial set up, as well as the sense of insecurity shared by different ethno-regional groups in the country. These issues laid the foundation for inter-group contention over political succession and created the need for a negotiated consensus on mode of transfer and distribution of power.

The mode of British penetration and occupation of Nigeria is instrumental in shaping the style of British colonial administration and the emergence of flawed territorial structure in Nigeria. The British penetrated Nigeria through three complex routes (Oyovbaire 1983, Osuntokun 1979). Firstly, the British officials captured Lagos and from there, they extended into the Yoruba hinterland. Secondly, there was penetration through the lower areas of the River Niger into the hinterland of the Southeast. Thirdly, the British completed their penetration into Nigeria when through the Royal Niger Company they moved into Northern Nigeria, and secured a trade monopoly. The differences in the nature of resistance met by the occupation forces, the types of local institutions they saw, and physical state of the communities they occupied produced a variegated view of Nigeria in the eyes of the colonialists. As a result, the colonial authorities approached each group in Nigeria as a separate unit, dissociated geographically, socially, economically and politically from other groups. This was the origin of decentralist administrative style, which has led to the partitioning of Nigeria into two protectorates, then three regions, and later several states.

During the early period of colonial rule, there was a debate on the structure of Nigeria - whether the country should be unitary or federal (Nwabughuogu 1996). The colonial authorities opted for a federal structure because they perceived Nigeria as culturally diverse and complex. However, the federal structure inherited from the colonial authorities was seriously flawed (Sklar 1965). In the first place, there is a wide geographical and demographical imbalance between the Northern Region and the two Southern regions. On the other hand, there is serious inequity in the level of educational and human capital development between Northern and Southern Nigeria. To worsen matters, the post-colonial Nigerian state was born with fractured and fragile institutions, and a near absence of a unified sense of Nigerian identity. The efficacy of a federal system, as noted by Adam Smith (2005: 132), depends on the extent to which the process of decentralization of authority juxtaposes with the establishment of a strong central state to control fissiparous tendencies. Due to the absence of a strong state to protect the rights and interests of ethnic/regional group in Nigeria, a deep-seated fear of ethnic domination developed, triggering a vicious inter-group struggle for power in the 1950s (Mackintosh

1965, 21-25; Post and Vickers 1973). This struggle stalled the development of Nigerian federal state.

Nigeria's weak state is bereft of the capacity to regulate inter-group competition for power. The tendency of ethno-regional groups to capture and manipulate the state in order to achieve narrow interests intensified the quest for power by various groups. This led to a zero-sum perception of politics – where others view one group's apparent political gain as a potential loss. Under this circumstance, each group canvassed for extreme decentralization and, in some cases, secession as a political safeguard (Tamuno, 1970). In this direction, each ethno-regional group strived as much as possible on one hand to gain autonomy from federal control, and on the other hand, to control the federal government. This situation plunged Nigeria into a civil war between 1967 and 1970.

The soul-searching that followed the civil war reflected in the quest for consensus on new ways of governing Nigeria to ensure political stability, orderly political succession, and equitable distribution of state power and other resources among various groups. Beginning from the 1970s, the Nigerian elite emphasized and expanded the practice of power sharing which began during the colonial era. The political elite adopted power sharing as a measure to remedy the structural flaws in Nigerian federation, allay fears of ethnic/regional domination, and facilitate orderly political succession. Since the 1970s, successive governments have extended power sharing beyond the question of office distribution, to revenue redistribution as well as formation and distribution of federal units. Since this article focuses on political succession, I will concentrate on office distribution.

The principles of federal character and zoning determine office distribution in Nigeria. The principle of federal character is a constitutional arrangement, which holds that:

> The composition of the Government of the Federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or in any of its agencies.[8]

On the other hand, zoning is an informal arrangement, which denotes the aggregation of states and ethnic groups into smaller number of regional blocs for allocating positions (Suberu 1988, 433). The practice of zoning seeks to validate a pattern whereby the ethno-regional origin of top political officeholders including the president, alternates from one election or set of elections to another (Akinola 1996, 1). Since the late 1990s, the concept of power-shift has emerged alongside the notion of rotation of offices as an expression of the South's opposition to Northern domination of executive power.

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[8] Section 14(3), *The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* (Lagos: Federal Government Press, 1979).

Although the practice of zoning is controversial, generations of Nigerian political elites have continued to apply the concept in their political calculations.[9] The principle of zoning received a remarkable attention during the Second Republic (1979-1983) following its relatively rigorous implementation by the ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN) (Akinola 1988, 441-445; Suberu and Diamond 2002). The political elite also emphasized zoning during the Third Republic and since the Fourth Republic[10] (Badejo 1997, 185). In 1999, all the three registered political parties in Nigeria zoned their presidential tickets to the South. This was a reaction to the calls for power-shift to the South (Chigbo 1999, 8-15). In 2007, there was a reciprocal zoning of the presidency to the North. The demise of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua three years after assuming office obstructed the zoning arrangement, as power was transferred to his Vice, Goodluck Jonathan, in accordance with the Constitution. Jonathan's decision to contest for the 2011 presidential election, after completing Yar'Adua's term, further thwarted the zoning arrangement. In 2015, power returned to the North following the victory of Muhammadu Buhari in the presidential polls. Buhari was reelected in 2019. Many expect that power will return to the South in 2023 when President Buhari will complete his second term. In the final analysis, power sharing emerged as a measure to make the process of leadership change predictable and to minimize tensions caused by succession politics.

The Impact of Power-sharing on Succession Politics in Nigeria
The implementation of power sharing affects succession politics in Nigeria in two major ways. On a positive note, the greater attention paid to power sharing since the 1970s has helped to contain the divisive struggles associated with succession politics in Nigeria. The present democratic dispensation in Nigeria (which began in 1999) is very illustrative. Despite the flaws that marred all the elections conducted since 1999, Nigeria has managed to avoid the kind of electoral dispute that engulfed Kenya in January 2008 (for an insightful analysis of Nigerian elections since 1999, see Oshodi 2007, Kew 2004). This is because, among other things, the practice of power sharing has helped the country to reduce the significance of ethnicity in succession politics (Orji 2010). The practice of power sharing has wedged the possibility of outright inter-group dispute over election outcome and tempered the tendency of the losers to mobilize violence on ethno-regional basis.

Regardless of its positive role in conflict management, power sharing has several negative effects on succession politics. In the first place, power sharing tends to eliminate the competitiveness that leads to alternation of power among political parties, thereby facilitating one-party dominance and imposition of successors by incumbents and other

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[9] Despite the fact that regionalism is particularly unpopular in the North, leaders nationwide have come to an informal understanding that the most important political offices must be distributed as evenly as possible across the five cultural zones in Nigeria.

[10] Politicians keenly contested the question of whether a Southerner or Northerner would be the president within the two registered political parties – the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC). At the end, the NRC zoned their presidential ticket to the North while the SDP nominated a Southerner as its flag bearer.

political "godfathers"[11] (see Human Rights Watch 2007, 33; Ibeanu 2007, 9; Omobowale and Olutayo 2007; Sklar, Onwudiwe, and Kew 2006). Power-sharing promotes godfatherism because it provides the basis for an individual or a small coterie of elites to control power on behalf of a locality, state, ethnic or regional group – such individuals often prefer "consensus" rather than competition, they usually hijack local/national party organization and exploit government machinery for private gain. Although power sharing facilitates the multiethnic coalitions that sustain contemporary Nigeria politics, it has failed to support Nigeria's democratization, particularly the diffusion of power from top to bottom. There is a growing distance between the political elite and the masses. This has resulted to lack of public accountability, imposition of successors, and succession related violence.[12]

Conclusion

This article examined the relationship between succession politics and power sharing. It argues that the existing literature have neglected the link between succession politics and power sharing, a relationship which is vital to understanding contemporary African politics. The article contends that on one hand succession politics is instrumental to the evolution of power sharing in Nigeria, while on the other hand, power sharing has tended to shape the tempo of succession politics both negatively and positively.

To help situate succession politics in Nigeria, this article distinguished three issues that dominate succession politics in the country. The first is the issue of self-succession bids; the second issue relates to hand picking and imposition of successors by incumbents and other political godfathers, while the third issue concerns the struggle for power shift among ethno-regional groups in Nigeria. These issues constitute a tremendous challenge to democratization and political stability in Nigeria, and form the basis for the conception and implementation of power sharing in the country.

Considering the explosive nature of succession politics in Nigeria, this article suggests that power sharing has played a positive role in containing the divisive struggles associated with succession politics in Nigeria. However, it observed that power sharing has some negative effects on succession politics. Power sharing has fueled succession related conflicts due to its tendency to eliminate the competitiveness that leads to alternation of power among political parties. This has facilitated one-party dominance and imposition of successors by incumbents and other political "godfathers".

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[11] In Nigeria, political godfathers are wealthy and powerful individuals who have the resources to finance political campaign of their preferred candidates as well as the ability to deploy violence and corruption to manipulate national, state or local political systems in support of the politicians they sponsor. Political godfathers control territorial districts, including states and localities, and use patronage and force to maintain dominance over the area.

[12] Despite the fact that the elites have exhibited increasing capacity to negotiate compromise solutions to their differences, disagreements among them often trigger ethno-religious conflicts, which are fueled by widespread poverty and frustration.

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Biographical Note

Nkwachukwu ORJI is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Development Studies, University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus. Between 2017 and 2022, he served as a Resident Electoral Commissioner with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Since then, he has combined his research work with field activity in various aspects of election management. His research focuses on elections, democratization, conflict, and peace-building.