

Electoral Politics and the Crises of Governance in Africa

From Kenya, Rwanda to Angola and South Africa, parties struggle to control state apparatuses amid continuing dominance of regional economies by western states

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Global Research, August 13, 2017

Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [History](#), [Oil and Energy](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

President Uhuru Kenyatta was declared victorious in his bid for a second term as leader of the largest economy in East Africa. The Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) Chairman Wafula Chebukati made the announcement after presenting the tallied votes to the public on August 11 in Nairobi.

Kenyatta, 55, the son of the former British colony's founding President Jomo Kenyatta, repositioned himself politically during 2016 when he formed the Jubilee Party. His campaign was run on emphasizing the need to restructure the Kenyan political system by turning over more authority to people within the counties and elected members of parliament.

The incumbent leader championed the annual five percent rate of growth in Kenya and held out the promise of sustainable development through the vast discoveries of oil and prospects for natural gas exploitation. Within a regional framework, Tanzania, Uganda, Mozambique as well as Kenya have been the source of substantial investments in the energy sector.

With specific reference to petroleum resources in Kenya, the Oxford Business Group reported in 2013 that:

"Tullow and Africa Oil, which are joint partners in the exploration of the East Africa Rift Basin, announced in late September that drilling revealed oil in the Auwerwer and Upper Lokone sandstone reservoirs, bringing their total discoveries in Kenya to an estimated 300m barrels. The companies had previously announced a major discovery in Turkana after beginning exploration in late 2012. Tullow and Africa Oil have exploration licenses for 12 blocks and have identified 10 additional leads and prospects. They plan to drill 12 wells over the next year." (oxfordbusinessgroup.com, Nov. 4, 2013)

This same article went on to say:

"The Turkana discovery has led to major international interest in Kenya's remaining oil exploration licenses, including from France's Total, China National Offshore Oil Corporation, ExxonMobil and Chevron, though no other companies have yet announced commercially viable discoveries. Kenya has 46 blocks, of which 44 are licensed to 23 exploration companies. The government plans to create and offer seven new blocks in the near future."

Despite these much lauded advances in economic potential, the Kenyan political scene is sharply divided between supporters of the president and his archrival Raila Odinga. Following the lead of Kenyatta, Odinga formed the National Super Alliance (NASA) coalition bringing together several parties into an umbrella with the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) which the politician leads.

Raila, the son of another prominent independence-era political figure and vice-president in the First Republic formed in 1964 by Jomo Kenyatta, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, often projects an air of entitlement to the presidency of Kenya. President Kenyatta and Vice-President Odinga split in 1966 after disagreements over Kenya's relationship with the United States. At this time in the 1960s, Odinga was considered to the left of Kenyatta favoring a closer alliance with the socialist countries of the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China.

In 2007, a contested election sparked violent reprisals leaving over 1,000 people dead and hundreds of thousands dislocated. Mediation efforts by the African Union (AU) and other state entities on the continent brought about the formation of a unity government in 2008 with Mwai Kibaki as president and Odinga taking the position of prime minister.

Later in 2013, Odinga attempted once again to win the presidency by claiming that he would improve relations with the West. This time Kenyatta ran a formidable race coming out on top in defiance of the wishes of the U.S. and Britain. Odinga rejected the election outcome in 2013 taking his claims of massive voter fraud to the Kenyan Supreme Court where it failed to overturn the popular vote.

Washington and London warned of grave consequences if Kenyans voted for Kenyatta four years ago. Both the president and Vice-President William Ruto were under investigation by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the Netherlands for ostensibly playing a role in the internecine conflict during 2007-2008. The deadly clashes pitting supporters of Kibaki against Odinga voters appeared to reveal an inter-nationality oppositional character since each candidate was associated with the Kikuyu (Kenyatta) and Luo (Odinga) groups.

The ICC pursuit of both Kenyatta and Ruto were dropped under the weight of the absurdity of the charges brought against these sitting leaders. This desire to detain, prosecute and imprison Kenyatta and Ruto further alienated many African leaders from the ICC which has demonstrated their pre-occupation with the continent. During the 50th anniversary summit of the AU held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 2013, discussions began over whether member-states would unilaterally withdraw from the Rome Statue which established the ICC. These plans have not materialized due to the political and economic pressures exerted by the western imperialist states and their allies in Africa.

One glaring progressive trend which emerged from the Kenyan elections was the victories of 22 women members of parliament along with 3 female governors, the first in the country's history.

An article published in the Daily Nation on August 11, noted:

"A record 22 women had by Thursday (August 10) decisively won constituency seats in Tuesday's (August 8) General Election, an increase from the 2013 number. And in some areas, a woman as being elected to a seat that has been the domain of men. But although the women set for the 12th Parliament are still few, they increased by six from the 16 elected in the last elections. The Jubilee Party has the majority of the women MPs-elect with 13, followed by

Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) with five and one each from Kanu, Party of Reforms and Democracy, as well as Wiper Democratic Movement and an independent candidate.”

As it relates to the county governors, the Evening Standard emphasized on August 10 that: “It is history in the making for Kenya as we are set for our first female governors. Previously, all the 47 governors were male. The three strong women fought tooth and nail to secure the county’s top job. This is also good news for gender equality. Kenya is set to have its first female county bosses. It indeed is a milestone for equality considering we had no female governor(s) in the last government.”

Rwanda: The Ruling Party Wins in a Landslide

President Paul Kagame of the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) won over 98 percent of the vote in the August 4 national elections. The only party certified to challenge the president who has ruled the Central and East African state since it seized power in 1994 after the genocidal war, was the Democratic Greens led by Frank Habineza coming in a far distant second.

An estimated 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were slaughtered over a period of three months as the-then Rwandan military backed by a militia known as the Interahamwe sought to eliminate their opponents. The RPF began as an armed movement with close ties to neighboring Uganda in 1987. Kagame served in the Ugandan National Resistance Movement led by the current President Yoweri Museveni who has been in power for more than three decades. The Rwandan leader received training in U.S. military colleges and maintained close ties to the Pentagon serving as an ally in Washington’s foreign policy imperatives in East and Central Africa.



Rwanda is known for having the largest participation of women internationally within its parliamentary structure, some 61 percent. In addition, 50 percent of the Supreme Court justices are women as well as a significant number of cabinet ministers.

Nonetheless, the legacy of collaboration with the U.S. hampers its ability to exercise genuine sovereignty and an independent foreign policy. However, in recent years, Kigali’s relationships with nations it was previously at war against in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) during its occupation in partnership with Uganda between 1998-2003, seems to have improved. In 1998, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) military commission headed then by the Republic of Zimbabwe authorized the deployment of troops

from Harare, Angola and Namibia in defense of the government of the late former DRC President Laurent Kabila halting this Washington-backed attempt to seize control of the enormous mineral-rich central African state.

RPF rule has stabilized the country to the extent that the United Nations recently announced that Rwandan nationals living in other African states should return home. Zimbabwe, which played a central role in halting the takeover of the DRC nearly two decades ago, recently requested that Rwandans living in this Southern African nation return to their country.

Angolan President to Step Down Amid Oil Glut

The former Portuguese colony of Angola will elect a new head-of-state after President Jose Eduardo dos Santos leaves office. President Dos Santos inherited the position when the founder of modern-day Angola, Dr. Agostino Neto, died in office during 1979. Neto was a co-founder of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), which won and consolidated independence for the country with the assistance of fraternal African governments along with hundreds of thousands of volunteers from the Republic of Cuba during 1975-1989.

Angolan independence was achieved through a protracted armed struggle from 1961 to 1975 when the U.S. and the-then racist apartheid regime in South Africa funded and coordinated two counter-revolutionary organizations in a failed attempt to create a neo-colonial outpost in this oil-rich state, one of the leading producers of petroleum on the continent. Since 2014, the U.S.-engineered overproduction of oil has created burgeoning economic crises in Angola as well as many other states around Africa and the world.

Angolan Defense Minister Joao Lourenco is designated to run for the presidency on behalf of the MPLA on August 23. The MPLA dominates the legislative body inside the country with 175 seats far outstripping its closest competitor UNITA which occupies only 32. UNITA, supported by the U.S. and the apartheid regime, waged a decades-long civil war against the MPLA government.

In 2002, UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi was killed by the Angolan military effectively ending the war leaving the opposition party with its only option of returning to electoral politics.

The challenges facing Angola are symptomatic of Africa as a whole. Continuing dependency on the viability and accessibility of western capitalist markets for the distribution of its most lucrative resources comes with an automatic degree of vulnerability. Africa's only real option for sustainability is the development of an intra-continental trade policy which will not be realized absent of economic and political integration.

South Africa and the Obstructionist Opposition Fuels Economic Uncertainty

Since the fall of the settler-colonial regime of the National Party from power in the first multi-party non-racial democratic elections of April 1994, the African National Congress (ANC) has dominated South African politics. As the most industrialized state on the continent, the Republic of South Africa is undergoing a severe economic recession.

The situation in South Africa must be viewed within the broader political and economic context of the plight of the emerging nation-states across the region and globally. Rising unemployment, the persistence of poverty and the failure to redistribute national wealth provides the opposition forces with a mechanism to destabilize the government.



Jacob Zuma

President Jacob Zuma, the outgoing leader of the ANC who is winding down his tenure as head-of-state, has been subjected to numerous attempts aimed at removing him from office. Another no-confidence vote against Zuma did not succeed on August 8 as the overwhelming majority of ANC MPs rejected the obvious regime-change scheme.

In December, the ANC will hold its 54th National Conference to choose a new leader to both head the party and the ticket for the presidency and national assembly seats in 2019. However, not satisfied with its failure to remove the president, the two largest opposition parties, the right-wing Democratic Alliance (DA) and the putative ultra-left Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) are now seeking to introduce a legislative motion to dissolve parliament and hold snap elections.

What is striking about these efforts is that neither of these two parties advances any real alternative policy orientation to the rule of the ANC. Although the EFF claims to advocate the nationalization of land and mineral resources, its principal objective is the bringing down of the ANC government making it a natural ally of the pro-colonial DA.

Perhaps the gravest danger to the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) is the worsening divisions within the ANC and the strained relations between the leadership of the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the ruling party. Complicating the situation even further are differences inside the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) over its posture towards Zuma and his staunch supporters inside the ruling party. Memberships in all three of these entities overlap which does not facilitate the efficient operations of any of them.

At the recently-held SACP 14th National Congress in July, the party decided to remain as a key component of the Tripartite Alliance, being the ANC, COSATU, the South African National Civic Organizations (SANCO) and the Communist Party. Although pressure from provincial structures of the SACP to run candidates in their own name in 2019, it is not clear how much success would be achieved in light of the still vast majority support for the ANC throughout the country.

Conclusion: Multi-party Politics and the Need for African Unification

These four states discussed in this essay: Kenya, Rwanda, Angola and South Africa, typify the crises of governance and political economy within AU member-states. As long as internal divisions plague African governments and political parties, the overall struggle against imperialist domination will be thwarted.

The social aspirations of African workers, farmers and youth cannot be fully achieved absent of the merging of states, political parties, trade unions, peasant and mass organizations. Although there has been significant economic growth in Africa since the beginning of the present century, the recent period marked by the decline in commodity prices, the drop in currency values and the reemergence of the debt crisis which enhanced dependency on the world capitalist system during the post-independence period, could easily overwhelm the continent stifling the capacity to realize genuine development and regional sovereignty.

As thousands of Africans flee their countries every month seeking refuge as migrants in the European Union (EU) states, along with the inability to halt internecine conflict in nations such as South Sudan, the DRC, Egypt, Nigeria and Somalia, provides avenues for intervention by the Pentagon, various western intelligence agencies and NATO. The presence of untold numbers of troops from the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) across the continent under such conditions of social instability, economic uncertainty and political divisions, will only serve to maintain neo-colonialism.

African leaders both within and outside of state structures should place continental unity and socialist economic planning at the top of their agendas. The broader deployment of U.S. troops can only further reverse the historical movement towards Pan-Africanism and Socialism in the 21st century.

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