For things to remain the same, how many things have to change? Elite continuity and change after leadership changes

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Abstract

After leadership changes, how do new leaders recast the composition of their surrounding elites to ensure support and secure their tenure? Using original data on African cabinets, this article contributes to the debate on leaders' survival with new theoretical inputs and empirical evidence about senior level changes new leaders introduce after assuming office to ensure a longer and more stable tenure. The article concentrates primarily on leaders emerged from an under-theorized and yet frequent type of leadership change, which is neither violent nor electoral, such as after a predecessor's resignation. Because these leaders lack the authority generally granted, albeit through different means, by electoral and violent takeovers, the article builds on regime cycle frameworks to develop a sequential interpretation of elite management for such hybrid types which is distinct from both violence-born and electoral regimes. The comparative analysis of two recent such cases in Ethiopia and Zimbabwe empirically illustrates how the timing and sequencing of post-change elite management eventually affect leadership stability over time. These findings ultimately reinforce the view that the survival debate needs to dilute its focus on leaders as the organizing principles of regimes, and instead concentrate on wider senior elite coalitions.

Keywords: Africa; cabinets; co-option; elites; leadership change; political regimes; reshuffles; survival

Introduction

During periods of leadership change, when uncertainty exists around the reliability and loyalty of the patronage networks built by the outgoing rulers,[1] the management of the elites who outlive the previous ruler is critical to the survival of the new leader,[2] who is "first among equals" upon assuming office with initially little control over those elites who had amassed great power.[3] To secure their tenure over that of elite factions, new leaders seek to surround themselves with "loyal friends" [4] and maintain the senior elite coalition in line through various elite management tactics over time.[5]

This article concentrates on this specific point in time for leaders' survival – the period right after a leadership change – to investigate how the composition of the senior level of elites shifts after a leadership change; why new leaders sometimes choose to preserve previous regimes' elites to remain in power; and what effect this generates on leadership stability. It starts off by acknowledging that different types of leadership change require distinct sequences of elite management tactics tried by the new leader. Disruptive changes such as coups and electoral alternations empower the new leader to employ tactics that are different from intra-party electoral successions. Both also differ from hybrid non-violent, non-electoral leadership changes in which new leaders take power after the sudden resignation or natural death of their predecessors. While coups and electoral changes receive regular scholarly attention, the latter hybrid type remains under-researched despite its frequency. These types are especially common across African states,[6] where they predominantly happen with party continuity: nearly 25% of all leadership changes in the past twenty years across African states were indeed of such same-party non-electoral peaceful types. Previous research found that same-party leadership transitions create more continuity than other forms of leadership change because dependencies between elites are more institutionalized and designed to solve commitment

problems.[7] Yet, little is it known about how this type's challenging hybrid nature affects in practice the relation between leaders and elites with an effect on the stability of the new leadership over time.

The main contribution of the article is thus to provide new theoretical insights and empirical evidence primarily on the dynamics engendered by this hybrid type of leadership change. As these leadership changes are often abrupt, but not violent, and intra-party but not subject to an election, the article explains that this type's post-change elite management between the senior elites and the new ruler is insidious and requires a distinct sequence of tactics from any other type to secure stability within the top ranks. Leaders are initially weak, even more so in these contexts as they take over without the legitimation and information obtained through an electoral process nor the violence-based authority granted by coups. There is a wait-and-see period where new leaders and old elites are poised to react to new power distributions. In such circumstances where the senior elites have ushered in a new leader, higher continuity rates are expected. But as new leaders determine whom they can rely on for loyalty and support, and whose loyalty costs supersede their utility, higher change rates in senior elite composition should be expected in the longer term. The sequence and timing of these elite management tactics are thus pivotal for the stability of the transition.

The rest of the article proceeds as follows: the first part reviews the literature on how African leaders have adopted political institutions, often short of democratising, and sustained their rule by using the powers of formal appointments. It then focuses on a specific point in time this literature paid less attention to, that of leadership changes, and addresses how different leadership change scenarios affect a new leader's elite management tactics. In this, it concentrates on the under-theorized and yet frequent hybrid type of leadership change where leaders change neither violently nor electorally, mostly within

the same party regime. Against this theoretical background, first it verifies the effective different nature of the hybrid type from the others in the empirical patterns of post-change elite management, using cabinet change rates in 37 African countries which experienced leadership changes in 2000-2022. Then, two cases of this hybrid type are compared to evaluate the effects of hybrid leaders' elite management tactics on the stability of their new leaderships: Abiy Ahmed's Ethiopia and Emmerson Mnangagwa's Zimbabwe. Despite both using formal institutional positions to redistribute power across elites and support their consolidation efforts, these tactics led to distinct outcomes. The differences in timing and intensity of elite removals, promotions, and demotions are found to have affected the stability of the new leaderships.

Leaders, leadership changes, and political elites

Research on political regimes has long focused on how leaders use institutions to control the state and the political space, so as to lessen threats from potentially rival elites and stabilize their regimes.[8] While parties and elections traditionally garnered most attention in this debate, more recent scholarship has broadened the focus on other formal institutions.[9] Given the growing levels of formalization across the region, Africa-related research contributed substantially to this debate. From the early 1990s, across Africa, leaders have increasingly used various formal institutions including cabinet, military appointments, and civil service jobs to integrate elites into their regimes, raising questions among scholars about their actual purposes.[10] The adoption of formal institutions by autocratic states can be a vehicle for democratic progress, as their presence can constrain personalist practices and facilitate inclusive representation,[11] but most scholars eventually questioned their ability to fundamentally alter the inner authoritarian practices these regimes use to exercise authority.[12]

Within this functionalist interpretation, rather than usher in a new era of regime transparency and change, these measures are largely intended to increase the political survival of long-standing regimes in the region.[13] Cabinets are one of the major observable arenas where formal positions and access to state resources are used to this end.[14] They can formalize a regime's informal patronage network to a loyal, and mutually beneficial, elite circle which is necessary to survive both internal and external threats. Between the two, internal threats from rival elites within the regime have been found to be the most substantial threats to leaders' survival, especially in non-democracies.[15] As a result, the relations of the leader with elites, rather than mass or public challenges, remains ultimately decisive to understand the future trajectory of most African political regimes.

In looking into these formal institutions, however, the shortage of elite data has long prevented extensive investigations of the relations between leaders and elites. When scholars did investigate leaders' elite management tactics, including through cabinet analysis, the focus was predominantly on the use of these tactics during a leader's tenure rather than after a leadership change. The role of leadership changes itself was therefore overlooked, either due to similar data unavailability or by design.[16] The recent publication of two datasets on these matters, the African Cabinet and Political Elite Data Project (ACPED)[17] and the African Leadership Change dataset (ALC)[18] unlocked the empirical analysis of the linkages between elite dynamics and leadership changes in Africa. From these data, we can discern how the different types of leadership changes influence the way rulers try to consolidate their newly-acquired power through promotions, removals, demotions. While some of these changes regularly receive close scrutiny, most notably electoral victories and coups, this is hardly the case for hybrid types of non-violent non-electoral leadership changes occurring after the resignation or death of the previous ruler.

Elite continuity and change after leadership changes: theoretical framework

Drawing on the ALC dataset's categories, leadership changes occur in three major ways: non-electoral violent changes such as coups, insurgent takeovers, and foreign imposition; non-electoral peaceful changes such as when the incumbent resigns or naturally dies; electoral changes such as electoral alternation or electoral succession.[19] These changes can either take place between two figures of the same incumbent party (so with the continuation of the ruling party) or not. Over the past 22 years, between January 2000 and January 2022, 44 countries in Africa went through leadership changes for a total of 156 changes.[20] Nearly half of these leadership changes took place without changing the ruling party, while the other half were violent changes, electoral alternations, or peaceful changes all with party change. Within the group of same-party leadership changes, 47% took place peacefully but outside elections (representing 22% of all leadership changes) whereas the remaining part (53% of same-party changes, 25% of all changes) took place within an electoral process whereby the party structure managed the power succession from the incumbent to the incomer.

As the circumstances in which leadership changes occur can vary, so too can the elite change rates after the leadership change. This argument stems from acknowledging that the type of leadership change influences the elite management tactics the new leaders can adopt after assuming office to enhance the stability of their new leadership. While the literature has already formed some theoretical expectations about elite change and continuity following coups and elections, hybrid cases of non-violent, non-electoral changes have remained theoretically and empirically under-researched. The following paragraphs present theoretical explanations for each, providing a more elaborated argument for the latter type.

First, it is useful to consider leadership changes born out of violent events and electoral alternations as a single type because they both share a disruptive onset. During violent events such as coups, because the most basic goal is to unseat the sitting executive,[21] the literature expects coup-makers systematically purge key regime institutions rather than just remove the leader without changing other members of the group in power (an outdated practice which is found to belong to the Cold War period).[22] At most, today's high-ranking cabinet members who can exceptionally be preserved are generally technocrats.[23] In a similar albeit non-violent fashion, during electoral alternations the winning party elites are by definition expected to be promoted in total replacement of the losing party when there is no overlap between the new and old parties.[24] As a result, in both situations, the literature expects the new rulers have the authority and capacity to proceed with total or near-total elite change rates in the immediate post-leadership period. In the longer term, the dissimilar violent nature of theirs is eventually expected to emerge: differently from electoral alternation regimes, the regimes born out of non-electoral violent changes are expected to sustain elite changes with more frequent reshuffles or removals over time because of the lack of information provided by elections about the loyalty of these elites.[25]

To the other extreme are the theoretical expectations the literature developed regarding leadership changes through electoral successions. Happening between the ruling party's incumbent and its designated successor, these types typically involve agreed-upon changes by the party's central committee, often months in advance of the elections.[26] The lengthy and peaceful nature of this leadership change and the legitimation obtained through the (internal or general) ballot box are not very dissimilar from those of incumbent re-elections and so can be argued this type dissuades rival elites from using violence against the leader, at least in the short term when any potential challenger would fail to

form an effective rival coalition. Because of such lower capacity, the threat posed to the leader in the short term is minor, with the result the new leader does not need to use its election-based authority to change dramatically the party's winning coalition.[27]

Differently from the previous types, no substantive theoretical expectations can be drawn from the existing literature about hybrid non-violent non-electoral leadership changes in which a new leader emerges from the ruling party after the previous ruler's sudden resignation or natural death. At these times of uncertainty, the new leader inherits a regime which lacks the legitimation and information elections generally provide about who has sustained loyalty and support in the country's subnational areas.[28] Especially when this hybrid change happens within the same party regime, the new leader is surrounded by elites who accumulated much power and outlasted the leadership change but whose loyalty requires testing.

Given this challenging context, the article suggests a sequential interpretation of post-change elite management tactics drawing on previous works on regime cycle frameworks and their hypothesis that the form of contestation between senior elites and the leader varies at different stages, thus requiring changing strategies over time in order to try to survive in office.[29] We hypothesize that, after these hybrid leadership change types, in order to stabilize its rule, the new ruler is expected to balance the integration of previous regime elites and the promotion of new ones, with a modest change rate in the first post-leadership change months, more in line with intra-party electoral successions. This moderation is grounded on the lack of an electoral victory or of a violent event which undermines the new leader's capacity to reshuffle its cabinet in the immediate post-leadership change phase. Only at a later stage, when the leader has weathered the initial period of weakness or has earned electoral legitimation, higher elite change rates are expected in order to remove elites no more useful to cooperate with. Regarding the effects on

leadership stability, we can therefore expect that those who overestimate the authority they inherit in the immediate post-leadership change phase by evading an initial accommodation stage in which the most authoritative group of highly networked individuals is preserved, eventually fail to prevent allied rival factions from attempting to remove the leader or seize more power, destabilizing their tenure.

By grounding new leaders' power consolidation into a sequence of phases and tactics employed against senior elites after assuming office, we understand a new aspect of how new leaders try to survive in office when they initially lack the authority and information that is convenient to reorganize those elites. Alignment is the aggregated tactics of co-option, accommodation, and manipulation to ensure loyalty and support. Who requires alignment at the senior level changes as the priorities of the regime and leader shift over time. This is most evident in the tactics of post-leadership change elite management. If a leader remains unaligned, or cannot co-opt and accommodate, they will continue to be weak relative to other elites and likely removed in short order. If they do not change tactics to manage senior elites' loyalty, they will miss opportunities to secure their tenure over that of elite factions.

Cabinet change rates across different leadership change types

Against this theoretical background, the article first verifies the empirical validity of these theoretical expectations by retracing the empirical patterns of elite management carried out in the past two decades across Africa after different leadership change types through the analysis of cabinet change rates. The objective is to show the under-theorized hybrid type this article focuses on is different from the others not only theoretically but also empirically. Then, it focuses on this hybrid non-violent, non-electoral type of leadership

change to apply the above-mentioned observations on the timing of elite management and their impact on leadership stability to two recent such cases.

Starting from the first empirical task, the following paragraphs look at the cabinet change rates across all the leadership change types using the new disaggregated data offered by the African Cabinet and Political Elite Data Project (ACPED), which compiles detailed information on 37 African states' cabinet appointments and ministerial characteristics on a monthly scale over the past twenty years, and combining them with the above-mentioned African Leadership Change dataset (ALC) which provides the relevant political context for all the leadership changes which took place in African countries since their independence to present time.

Combining the ALC data with the available ACPED data, Table 1 displays the different magnitudes of elite change after distinct leadership change types. On average, in the immediate post-leadership change phase (i.e. within the first 5 months), violent changes and electoral alternations, as theoretically expected, present the highest cabinet change rates, whereas below-average change rates occur from electoral successions and non-electoral non-violent changes. In the longer term, calculating the cumulative number of changes made in the period between the 5^{th} and 36^{th} months (i.e. a proxy for non-immediate elite changes), the elite dynamics of non-electoral non-violent types move away substantially from those of the electoral types, as the former present the highest cabinet change numbers (followed by the hybrid type) while the latter the lowest. Such empirical patterns support our theoretical expectations: because post-hybrid-change leaders lack both the capacity and the legitimation to change the senior elites as they wish, they structure their elite management tactics in different stages, adopting a sequence of tactics that is more similar to the electoral succession configuration in the early period but closer to disruptive changes in later stages.

	ALL TYPES	ELECTORAL SUCCESSION	ELECTORAL ALTERNATION	NON-ELECTORAL VIOLENT	NON-ELECTORAL PEACEFUL (SAME PARTY)
Average change within 5 months	86%	84%	**93%**	**107%**	53%
Average change within 36 months	201%	187%	**209%**	**328%**	169%
Δ 5-36 months	115%	103%	115%	**221%**	**116%**

Table 1. Average cabinet change rates (calculated monthly as the sum of dismissals, resignations, and reshuffles over the previous month's total cabinet size) per leadership change type at different post-leadership change stages (5 and 36 months) for 37 African countries which underwent leadership changes between January 2000 and January 2022. NB: *Non-Electoral Peaceful (different party)* omitted due to insufficient data. Above-average types in bold.

Figure 1 visualizes these patterns over time for every post-leadership change cabinet in Africa over 2000-2022, highlighting some examples for each. An example of violent change is Madagascar 2005 (Andry Rajoelina's coup against Marc Ravalomanana), with a complete overhaul of cabinet positions in the first two months following the coup. A similar 100% change rate was scored by Ghana 2000's electoral alternation when John Kufuor from the opposition NPP defeated the incumbent party NDC's candidate John Atta-Mills, who was Jerry Rawlings' Vice-President. On the contrary, Mozambique 2015 offers an example of electoral succession where Filipe Nyusi's cabinet change rates in the first 5 and 36 months after succeeding FRELIMO's colleague Armando Guebuza were among the lowest across all the sample, with fewer than 20 new cabinet entries introduced over the first three years after he assumed office. Finally, two cases of the hybrid intra-party, non-violent, non-electoral changes are Ethiopia 2018 and Zimbabwe 2017, displaying a similarly high preservation of pre-leadership change elites in the initial months, followed by a more sustained cabinet change rate in the subsequent phases.

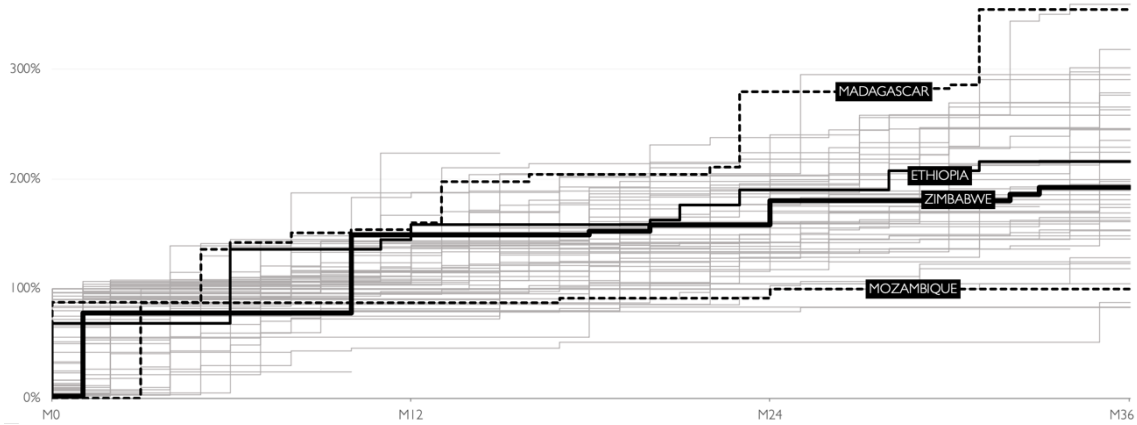

Figure 1. Step chart displaying the cumulative cabinet change rates over the first 36 months for each leadership change which took place between January 2000 and January 2022 in 37 African countries.

To understand how this sequencing eventually affects leadership stability in hybrid types, the remainder of the article compares the selected cases of Ethiopia and Zimbabwe and evaluates the effect the timing of their elite management tactics has had on the stability of the new leaders.

Elite continuity and change in Abiy Ahmed's Ethiopia and Emmerson Mnangagwa's Zimbabwe[30]

Both Ethiopia and Zimbabwe are representative of the leadership change type in which the incumbent officially resigned at times of widespread protests and was replaced by another member of the ruling party without bloodshed and with parliamentary endorsement. In Ethiopia, the elevation of Abiy Ahmed to Prime Minister in April 2018 took place after the resignation of Hailemariam Desalegn in February 2018 and three years of mass protests which exposed many weaknesses of the ruling EPRDF's ethno-federal system of governance.[31] Violent repression, a tactic frequently employed in previous demonstrations too, and a protracted state of emergency exacerbated the divide within the ruling coalition so much that its Amhara and Oromo components pushed forward a non-violent intra-party leadership change in favour of Abiy Ahmed, made eligible for the Prime Ministry just five weeks before the nomination.[32]

In November 2017, Robert Mugabe, Zimbabwe's leader of thirty-seven years was persuaded to resign after a six-day standoff in which then-chief of security forces Constantine Chiwenga and other senior elites threatened a parliamentary vote on the President. His successor, Emmerson Mnangagwa, was a long-term elite from within Mugabe's regime, who had served in multiple senior positions, ultimately as Vice-President. From the latter position, he was fired just nine days before the standoff began, worsening an already tense situation characterized by the growing factionalism in the ruling party pitting Mugabe's against Mnangagwa's supporters.[33]

Phase of co-option and continuity

As leaders who inherited weak regimes, devoid of popular legitimation (see protests across Ethiopia in 2015-18) and affected by growing internal fragmentation (see factional tensions inside Zimbabwe's ZANU-PF), Abiy and Mnangagwa had to balance, on the one hand, political changes needed to rebuild domestic and international legitimacy into the system after previous contestation with, on the other hand, a sense of continuity needed to deter conspiracies from within the political elite structure which outlived them. As a result, while they both distanced themselves from corrupt elements of the previous regime and reduced the cabinet size (-22% in Zimbabwe and -43% in Ethiopia in 6 months – see Figure 2), at the same time their first cabinets registered below-average change rates.

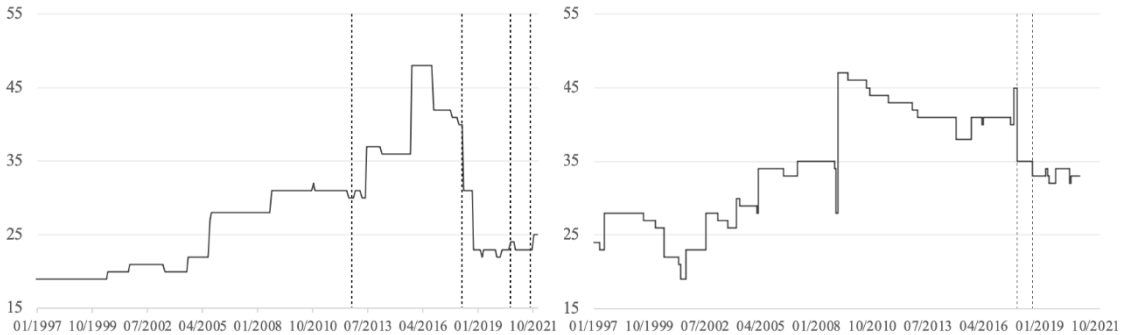

Figure 2. Ethiopia's (left) and Zimbabwe's (right) monthly changes in cabinet size (1997-2021). Vertical lines in the Ethiopia chart refer to Hailemariam Desalegn's (1) and Abiy Ahmed's (2) appointments as Prime Ministers, the outbreak of the Tigray war (3) and the inauguration of the post-2021 election cabinet (4). In the Zimbabwe chart, they refer to Mnangagwa's appointment as President (1) and the 2018 election (2).

In Zimbabwe, half of the previous regime elites (i.e. Mugabe-loyalists) in the broader executive (cabinet, deputy ministers, and ministers of state) were maintained, either in the same position or in a different one. For sub-national positions, Mugabe-loyalist senior elites were kept from select provinces in which Mnangagwa was deeply unpopular (i.e. in Matabeleland and Mashonaland provinces), and from opposition strongholds such as Harare. Eventually, those who left the cabinet in this initial phase were only overt coup-plotters who either fled the country or were expelled (i.e. Saviour Kasukuwere who actively plotted against the Mnangagwa faction), and weak Mugabe elites who could be immediately arrested and charged with corruption. Those in the latter category were mostly elites with limited experience or who did not have strong cabinet positions. The exception to this were the Ministers of Defence and Justice, both powerful and with strong links within the intelligence and defence networks, but either unsupportive of any party faction (the former) or newcomers to politics (the latter). Because the army played a major role in Mugabe's resignation, the few promotions in the first post-change cabinet consisted of military-affiliated individuals, who increased in number.

In a similar fashion to how the context of the leadership change influenced Mnangagwa's first cabinet, the EPRDF's failures of 2015-2018 held important lessons in Abiy's considerations about his first power reorganization. The EPRDF's final years were a cautionary tale of what repression, politicized ethnicity, and a dominant minority's largely exclusivist rule could lead to. Learning from them and attempting to remedy the challenge of ethnic diversity and fair share of power and resources that had caused the EPRDF and its leading group (the Tigray People's Liberation Front, TPLF) much trouble,

Abiy's drive to consolidate power was initially largely based on broad ethnic inclusion and political co-option (also reflected in Abiy's *medemer* discourse, 'coming together' in Amharic), as well as popular legitimacy. A look at Abiy's first cabinet data confirms that, following his elevation as Prime Minister, the continuity rate of elites was similar to that of Zimbabwe. Yet, despite significant continuity, Abiy also took much bolder decisions about promotions and demotions.

Abiy immediately offered a significant increase of key executive and security positions to two formerly marginalized (and very large) ethno-regional groups that guided the 2015-2018 protests. In Abiy's first cabinet reconfiguration, Amhara representation in the cabinet increased from a five-year average of 25% to 33%, for the first time above the expected proportion based on the group's demographic size, while the Oromo elite did not see a significant change in the overall cabinet representation (which remained on average around 29%), but was granted a broader share in the cabinet's inner circle and in top security ranks, increasing to above 50% in both.[34] During the TPLF-led EPRDF rule, senior positions in the cabinet and in the security apparatus, as well as the allocation of investments and public goods,[35] used to be disproportionately in favour of the TPLF and their co-ethnics instead.

Besides the strengthening of the Oromo and Amhara cabinet representation with intended spill-over effects on their (young) support bases who were rewarded with land, real estate proprieties, funds for commercial activities, as well as political positions in local administrative centres,[36] Abiy maintained in the cabinet also less powerful regional elites which the previous regime already engaged with as affiliates, now institutionally promoted as full partners. This was intended to boost Abiy's legitimacy across all the ethnic groups and those averse to identity politics (mostly Pan-Ethiopianist residents in multi-ethnic urban centres), but also to create a strong bulwark against the TPLF, whose

marginalization was expected to entail risks given their decades-old access to resources, and to minimize the power of new strongest coalition partners, namely the Oromo and Amhara elites.

Differently from Mnangagwa, the stronger sentiment against the previous regime across the country persuaded him to proceed faster in the side-lining of the TPLF-allied elites in the very immediate post-change phase.[37] The representation of TPLF elites dropped dramatically both in the security sector and in the cabinet (-60% in Abiy's first cabinet, as shown in Figure 3a; those who were preserved were demoted to positions outside the inner circle, for the first time proportional to their demographics, then TPLF-affiliated Tigrayans disappeared entirely after December 2019 when the TPLF refused to join the Prosperity Party).[38] Within just two months after taking power, Abiy even discharged two of the most powerful and longest-serving TPLF securocrats in the country, the army chief of staff Samora Yunis and the intelligence chief Getachew Assefa. Other similar measures followed in the next few months,[39] targeting army generals and commanders in a major reform of the upper ranks of the army that, until then, had been overwhelmingly dominated by ethnic Tigrayans linked to the TPLF (77% of general and commander positions, 90% of the highest rank command chiefs[40]). Finally, Abiy dissolved the EPRDF itself, deemed as too much associated with the TPLF faction, and regrouped all the previous member and allied parties (except for the TPLF) into the Prosperity Party.

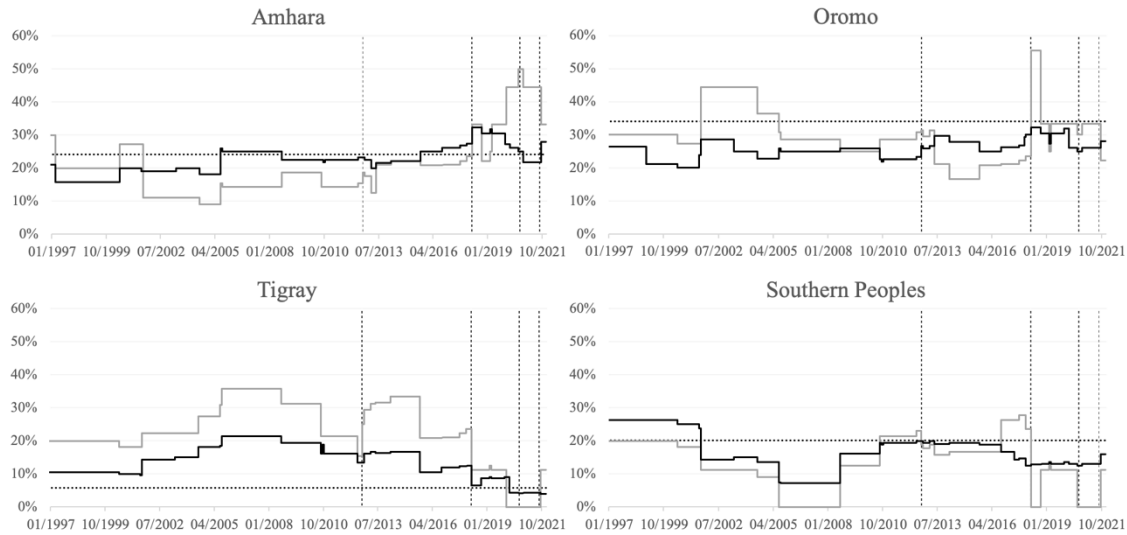

Figure 3a. Changes in Oromo, Amhara, Tigrayan, and Southern (SNNP) representation (EPRDF's major constituent groups) in cabinet (black) and inner circle (grey line) positions, compared to their population share (horizontal dotted line). Vertical lines are the same as Figure 2.

Counterbalancing

The different trajectories followed by Ethiopia's and Zimbabwe's new leaders become all the more apparent in the subsequent phases of power consolidation, starting from the timing of the first post-change elections. First, Zimbabwe headed to elections sooner (in July 2018, 8 months after the leadership change) than Ethiopia (June 2021, more than three years after Abiy's takeover after a delay due to the pandemic). The longer transitional period between the first cabinet and the election in Ethiopia urged Abiy to resort to additional and more intense elite management practices in the form of frequent reshuffles to control and counterbalance the behaviour of the preserved elites, whereas Zimbabwe maintained nearly "still waters" until the elections.[41]

Although frequent changes may generate resentment among discarded elites,[42] between April 2018 and the June 2021 elections Abiy was required to reshuffle the cabinet seven times. Additionally, Abiy also resorted to the tactics of duplicating positions. An example was the creation of a Ministry of Peace (given to an ethnic minority) next to the powerful Ministry of Defence (given to Lemma Megersa, the former chair of OPDO

who made possible Abiy's selection) to counterbalance a popular but potentially rival figure such as Lemma. Abiy's duplications were few though, and so they did not result in major increases in the cabinet size.[43]

The frequency of reshuffles and the dissolution of the EPRDF and its replacement with the Prosperity Party in December 2019 marked a shift towards more forced consolidation in the remaining part of the transitional period, in which he further narrowed down the space left to the old regime loyalists who showed increasing recalcitrance to Abiy's power reorganization (mostly TPLF, but also non-TPLF ethnonationalists) but also counterbalanced the newly empowered elites such as the Oromos and Amharas who were given the highest levels of representation in key inner circle posts and thus easy access to resources they could use to challenge the leadership.

It may be argued such an intense use of counterbalancing tactics by Abiy was not planned from the outset. Originally, the transitional period in Ethiopia was supposed to be shorter. Elections were first scheduled for Spring 2020, but were later postponed to August 2020, then to an indefinite date because of the pandemic. Eventually, they were held in June 2021, one month after the post-pandemic original schedule was compromised by logistical issues compounded by the ongoing Tigray war. Indeed, the breakout of the civil war in Tigray in November 2020 created new realities on the ground and across elites that demanded, in the immediate and long term, a much more profound reorganization of power than the one underway in the first phase of the transition. To a certain extent, the war itself eventually had a similar function to that of elections, providing information about the alignment of local elites. This helps explain why certain elite management tactics that are expected to take place after elections were eventually anticipated by some months.

Narrowing the elite spectrum after elections: an assessment of consolidation efforts

Elections (and wars) provide information for the leaders about the loyalty and competence of local elites.[44] On that basis, new leaders can assess which old elites are still useful to cooperate because of their local networks, which allies remain, and which new elites ought to be co-opted because of their success in drawing in voters or security providers from the party structure and even beyond. This may include opposition elites, as the concession of resources and positions can help fragment the opposition front and prevent their concerted activity against the regime.[45] Overall, these dynamics should lead to the narrowing of the spectrum of the core elites, rewarding only those who proved to deserve so, as weak allies or rivals who had been kept on board to facilitate a stable transition are eventually dropped. Yet, it may also imply a return to bigger cabinet sizes, in case the first consolidation phase did not go as planned and more elites of the selected spectrum need to be rewarded than previously planned.

Mnangagwa's post-election cabinet was appointed in September 2018. At this point, the regime was well established and had won an election. Building on this formal legitimation and on the information produced by the election process regarding the capabilities and performance of the elites, Mnangagwa could proceed with the removal of the previous regime elites that ceased to be useful after the elections and with the inclusion of new entrants who had never sat in Parliament before but had drawn many votes in the elections, as well as few peripheral elites with strong connections to the new leader.[46] Most of these new entries were allocated new deputy ministry positions which duplicated existing ministerial positions to balance out potential challengers, but also to check some of the inexperienced newcomers. Mnangagwa also maintained a significant military presence in the cabinet but, as a coup-proofing measure, most were allies of him (i.e. at the Defence, Muchinguri replaced Chiwenga who only maintained the Vice Presidency;

Ncube was put in charge of the new secretive portfolio in control of intelligence networks).

Most importantly, Mnangagwa finally removed some Mugabe allies and G40 elites who were maintained in the transitional cabinet as well as at the provincial level. At the executive level, there was also a re-balancing of the geographical representation of elites. The provinces which were the bastion of Mnangagwa's support (Masvingo and Midlands) saw their number of elites increase, just like those associated with "neutral" Joice Mujuru's Gamatox faction, to the detriment of G40 elites who were dropped. Lower-level G40 elites who had not been removed in the post-election overhaul would be dismissed for corruption in the coming months and used as symbols of the new regime's cleaner governance. But G40 and old Mugabe elites were not the only elites who were dropped after the elections. So were some allies who either performed poorly and lost their parliamentary seat at the elections, such as Chinamasa and Mutsvangwa, or who were too old (Masuku).

As a consequence of this more decisive reorganization of the elites, also the ethnic balancing within the executive shifted further away from Mugabe's, who had leaned heavily on his own clan, the Zezuru (a sub-group of the Shona ethnic group[47]). In Mnangagwa's first cabinet, the Zezuru lost some key cabinet positions but were still overrepresented (see Figure 3b). After the election, instead, they maintained the Vice-Presidency with Chiwenga but overall their representation shrank below 25%, whereas the representation of Mnangagwa's own clan, the Karanga (another Shona sub-group), increased to 30% and has since remained around those levels.

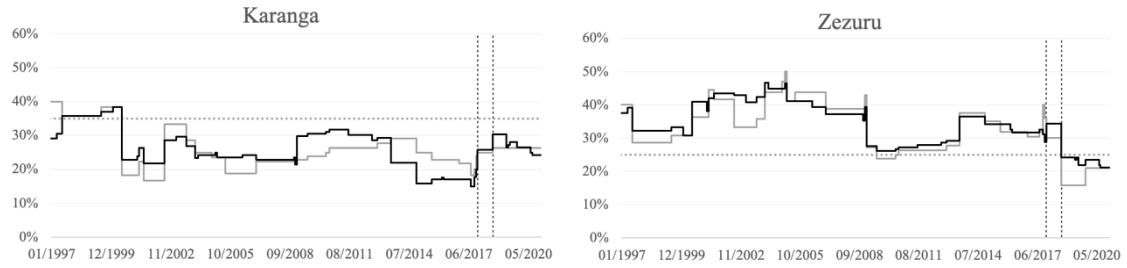

Figure 3b. Changes in Karanga and Zezuru representation in cabinet (black) and inner circle (grey line) positions, compared to their population share (horizontal dotted line). Vertical lines are the same as Figure 2.

In Ethiopia, this phase took place later because of a longer transitional phase than Zimbabwe towards elections, but was nonetheless set in motion before the elections because of the war in Tigray. The war itself, instigated by the very former ruling group Abiy replaced, was the starkest evidence that the new leader's elite management was not accomplishing the desired aim of stabilizing his tenure. Because a war, like an election, provides a leader with useful information about the strength of each single elite, Abiy used such evidence to begin reorganizing the elite spectrum in the cabinet and in the military leadership upon the outbreak of the war in November 2020, with the promotion of key radical Amhara elites as exemplified by the former Amhara regional president Temesgen Tiruneh's abrupt appointment as chief of the intelligence. The post-2021 election cabinet was therefore a culmination of a process which started nearly one year before. That cabinet, unveiled in October 2021, was characterized by the marginalization of some minority groups to facilitate the increase of representation of those groups (mostly Amhara) supporting Abiy's policies.[48] It included for the first time also three opposition parties: the ethno-nationalist Oromo OLF, ethno-nationalist Amhara NaMa, and Pan-Ethiopianist Ezema, all rewarded for their support in the Tigray war. However, the very inclusion of ethno-nationalist Oromo and Amhara elites in the cabinet, against his original pan-Ethiopian plans, was additional evidence of the suboptimal results Abiy's process of power consolidation had over time.

Contrasting the two cases, we find in fact that the timing and sequencing of post-leadership change elite management tactics, especially the early exclusion of strong elites when the new leader still had weak authority over them, had an impact on the stability of the new leaderships, contributing to the success or failure of their consolidation processes. The immediate post-change period was especially critical. Abiy's abrupt major removals of the old elites and over-representation of the two largest formerly-marginalized groups made him vulnerable to conspiracies from both those who were hastily removed and those who were suddenly turned into the most powerful elites of the new regime. The haste of the demotion, when not outright removal, of many previous regime elites, when they still had access to large resources accumulated over nearly thirty years of rule, fuelled their resistance and challenge against the new leadership. On the contrary, the empirical analysis showed much more continuity in Mnangagwa's first cabinet, more aligned with the article's theoretical expectations. He proceeded with major removals of Mugabe allies only after he regained authority over them through the test of the elections, which provided information about their loyalty and support. Abiy thought he had earned enough legitimation by creating a more inclusive coalition and relaunching the international image of the country with the re-integration of former terrorist groups and the peace with Eritrea. Yet, this failed to keep his most powerful rival elites, the TPLF, under check. The mounting political tensions between the Abiy regime and the TPLF elite eventually culminated in the Tigray civil war (starting in November 2020) which pushed the ongoing consolidation process into a state of flux. On the one hand, no alternative political front which had the capabilities and the willingness to challenge Abiy and the Prosperity Party's hold on power emerged in Ethiopia, as the TPLF elites remained powerful but quite isolated. Yet, on the other hand, the war resulted in a weaker state, characterized by more authority and legitimation than previously planned going to the peripheries and their

mostly Amhara and Oromo elites rather than being coordinated in the centre. Eventually, Abiy's hastier removals of previous regime elites negatively affected the stability of his transition whereas Mnangagwa's preservation of a higher number of previous elites until elections ensured a more effective outcome.

Conclusion

This article aimed to investigate how new leaders manage elites in order to remain in office. It began by acknowledging that the context in which the leadership change takes place influences the elite management tactics employed by the new leader after assuming office. A new leader can take power with a violent event, through an election, or after the incumbent's sudden resignation or natural death. The article provided theoretical explanations and empirical evidence of the different elite management tactics new leaders employ depending on the mode they took power, focusing in particular on the largely understudied latter type. This type is challenging because of the hybrid nature in which the new leader is neither as unconstrained as after disruptive events nor can enjoy the information of a long-planned electoral succession.

Looking at two recent such cases, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe, the article turned to the evidence provided by their cabinet data to assess the effect of new leaders' integration or separation of old-regime elites. The analysis of the two cases confirmed that after a leadership change the threats to the leader are multiple and diverse, but the most present threat is that from the inner circle. This is even more so when the new leader's takeover takes place after the resignation of the previous ruler, with no electoral legitimation or authority over previous regime elites who hold great power. New leaders are weak compared to them. For that reason, in order to stabilize his tenure, in the early period the new ruler is expected to maintain a higher proportion of previous regime elites in the cabinet,

similar to same-party electoral successions, but in subsequent stages resorts to major changes just like after violent leadership change types. The sequence and timing of these tactics was found to be crucial for the survival quality of the new leadership, as Abiy's hastier removals of the old elites made its transitional mandate more vulnerable to both ousted elites and over-represented newcomers.

Beyond the Ethiopian and Zimbabwean cases, the elite dynamics of power consolidation under the new leaders Abiy and Mnangagwa can inform processes of learning and adaptation elsewhere in the region. Future research could therefore explore if and how they affected other neighbouring countries' own internal dynamics. Future research could also benefit from examining in more detail how these regimes managed the international environment, and from taking a closer look at the role other exogenous factors such as bad economic performance related to pandemics or globalized conflicts could play in domestic consolidation processes, [49] as much as the Tigray civil war did in Ethiopia.

Notes

1 Baturo, “When Incumbents do not Run”.

2 Geddes, “What do we Know”; Arriola, “Patronage and Political Stability”; Svolik, “The Politics of Authoritarian Rule”.

3 Svolik, “Power Sharing”.

4 Magaloni, “Credible Power-Sharing”.

5 Bueno de Mesquita et al., *The Logic of Political Survival*; Haber, “Authoritarian Government”; Gandhi and Przeworski, “Authoritarian Institutions”; Gerschewski, “The Three Pillars”.

6 Carbone and Pellegata, *Political Leadership in Africa.*

7 Geddes, “What do we Know”; Magaloni, “Credible Power-Sharing”.

8 Geddes, “What do we Know”; Gandhi and Przeworski, “Cooperation, Cooptation and Rebellion”; Magaloni, “Credible Power-Sharing”.

9 Hassan, “New Insights”.

10 Bratton and van de Walle, “Neopatrimonial Regimes”; Posner and Young, “The Institutionalization of Political Power”; Arriola, “Patronage and Political Stability”; Cheeseman, *Institutions and Democracy in Africa.*

11 Lindberg, “The Surprising Significance”; North et al., *Violence and Social Orders.*

12 Ottaway, “Democracy Challenged”; Gandhi and Przeworski, “Authoritarian Institutions”; Magaloni, “Credible Power-Sharing”; Boix and Svolik, “The Foundations of Authoritarian Government”; Bleck and De Walle, *Electoral Politics*; Meng, *Constraining Dictatorship.*

13 Arriola, “Patronage and Political Stability”; Svolik, “The Politics of Authoritarian Rule”; Francois et al., “How is Power Shared”; Geddes et al., *How Dictatorships Work*; Carboni and Raleigh, “Regime Cycles”.

14 Goldsmith, "Donors, Dictators and Democrats"; van de Walle, *African Economies*; Arriola, "Patronage and Political Stability"; Kroeger, "Dominant Party Rule"; Raleigh and Wigmore-Shepherd, "Elite Coalitions".

15 Svolik, "Power Sharing"; Lindemann, "Inclusive Elite Bargains"; Roessler, "The Enemy Within".

16 Camerlo and Pérez-Liñán, "Minister Turnover"; Quiroz-Flores and Smith, "Leader Survival and Cabinet Change"; Martinez-Gallardo, "Designing Cabinets"; Woldense, "The Ruler's Game of Musical Chairs"; Kroeger, "Dominant Party Rule", 88.

17 Raleigh and Wigmore-Shepherd, "Elite Coalitions".

18 Carbone and Pellegata, *Political Leadership in Africa.*

19 Ibid., 67.

20 ALC data until 2019. The period between January 2020 and January 2022 was integrated by the author drawing from the 2022 update of WhoGov data. See Nyrup and Bramwell, "Who Governs?".

21 Powell and Thyne, "Global Instances of Coups", 252.

22 Derpanopoulos et al., "Are Coups Good for Democracy?".

23 De Rohan Chabot, "Olivia Rouamba".

24 Horowitz et al., "Government turnover".

25 Geddes et al., "Autocratic Breakdown"; Goldring and Matthews, "To Purge or Not to Purge?"; Haber, "Authoritarian Government"; Powell, "Determinants".

26 Nuvunga, "Mozambique's 2014 Elections".

27 Fleming, "Why Change a Winning Team?".

28 Choi and Raleigh, "The Geography of Regime Support".

29 Hale, "Regime Cycles"; Carboni and Raleigh, "Regime Cycles".

30 The data on elites and cabinet changes used in this section are drawn from ACPED and concisely sum up very complex processes that cannot be further expanded due to

space constraints. Related considerations on changes occurred in Ethiopia's state and parastatal institutions can be found in Meester et al., "A Clash of Nationalisms" while, for additional notes on Zimbabwe's key elites and ZANU-PF factions mentioned in the article (i.e. on the G40, Joice Mujuru, and other key elites), see Stevenson, *Zimbabwe after Mugabe* and Helliker and Murisa, "Zimbabwe: Continuities and Changes".

31 Bach, "Abyotawi Democracy"; Opalo and Smith, "Ideology and succession politics".

32 Fisher and Gebrewahd, "Game Over?".

33 Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Ruhanya, "Introduction: Transition in Zimbabwe".

34 Building on ACPED's definition, the inner circle includes the most powerful seats such as the President, Prime Minister, its Deputy, ministers of Defence, Finance, Foreign Affairs, Justice, Energy, Mines, Revenue, and all the advisors to the PM. The top security leadership includes the ten highest ranking security posts, which are the ENDF Chief of Staff, its Deputy, the Chief of Ground Forces, the Chief of Air Forces, the head of NISS, the head on INSA, the head of Federal Police, the National Security Advisor, the Minister of Defence, and the Minister of Peace. Regarding the security ranks, instead, no official data of the army's high command after Abiy's TPLF purges is available but, after mid 2019, the only high-ranking Tigrayan remaining in charge of security in the Abiy regime was Mola Hailemariam, a former TPLF officer who turned into an Abiy supporter. The ten highest security positions were overwhelmingly allocated to Oromo and Amhara loyalists (as of June 2021: 5 Oromos; 3 Amharas; 1 Agew, 1 Tigrayan by author's count). Rotation was frequent also in the security sector, with each post changing at least once a year on average, but the ethnic balance did not.

35 Kanth and Geiger, "What Studies".

36 Sew, "Ethiopia's Oromo Youth".

37 According to Afrobarometer's Round 8 surveys data (2019-2020), 68% Ethiopians approved Abiy's performance and 87% trusted him at the end of his first year of mandate,

up from the 57% and 72% approval rates Hailemariam Desalegn obtained in 2013, one year after replacing Meles Zenawi. Mnangagwa, instead, struggled more than Abiy in improving his image across the public, as trust and performance evaluations by Zimbabweans worsened compared to late Mugabe's. See Afrobarometer's rounds 5 and 8.

38 Consistent with his strategy of ethnic inclusion, Abiy maintained few non-TPLF Tigrayans in the subsequent cabinets. The last 'transitional' cabinet before the 2021 elections still included Liya Tadesse, a Tigrayan born in Addis Ababa, and Abraham Belay, a Tigrayan who was named president of the Tigray branch of the Prosperity Party and later head of the Tigray Provisional Administration.

39 Woldie, "Ethiopia".

40 Adeto, "Conflict Complexity in Ethiopia".

41 Helliker and Murisa, "Zimbabwe: Continuities and Changes".

42 Bove and Rivera, "Elite Co-Optation".

43 This differentiated Abiy's modus operandi from his predecessor Hailemariam Desalegn (Prime Minister 2012-2018), who on the contrary frequently used to increase the size of the cabinet in an attempt to co-opt Oromos and Amharas, but never by sharing inner cabinet positions with them.

44 Gerschewski, "The Three Pillars".

45 Lust-Okar, "Divided They Rule"; Arriola et al., "Democratic Subversion".

46 Magaisa, "Zimbabwe: An Opportunity Lost."

47 Ranger, "Missionaries, Migrants and the Manyika". See Rich Dorman, *Understanding Zimbabwe,* chapters 1 and 2, for a more elaborated account of Zimbabwe's ethnic politics.

48 Meester et al., "A Clash of Nationalisms".

49 Reuter and Gandhi, "Economic Performance".

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Appendix

The data on African leadership changes (ALC) and political elites (ACPED) are publicly available. See:

- Carbone, Giovanni, and Alessandro Pellegata. *Political Leadership in Africa. Leaders and Development South of the Sahara*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.
- Raleigh, Clionadh, and Daniel Wigmore-Shepherd. "Elite Coalitions and Power Balance across African Regimes: Introducing the African Cabinet and Political Elite Data Project (ACPED)." *Ethnopolitics 21,* no. 1 (2020): 22-47.

A visual summary of the elite data on Ethiopia and Zimbabwe is displayed in Figures A1 and A2 below.

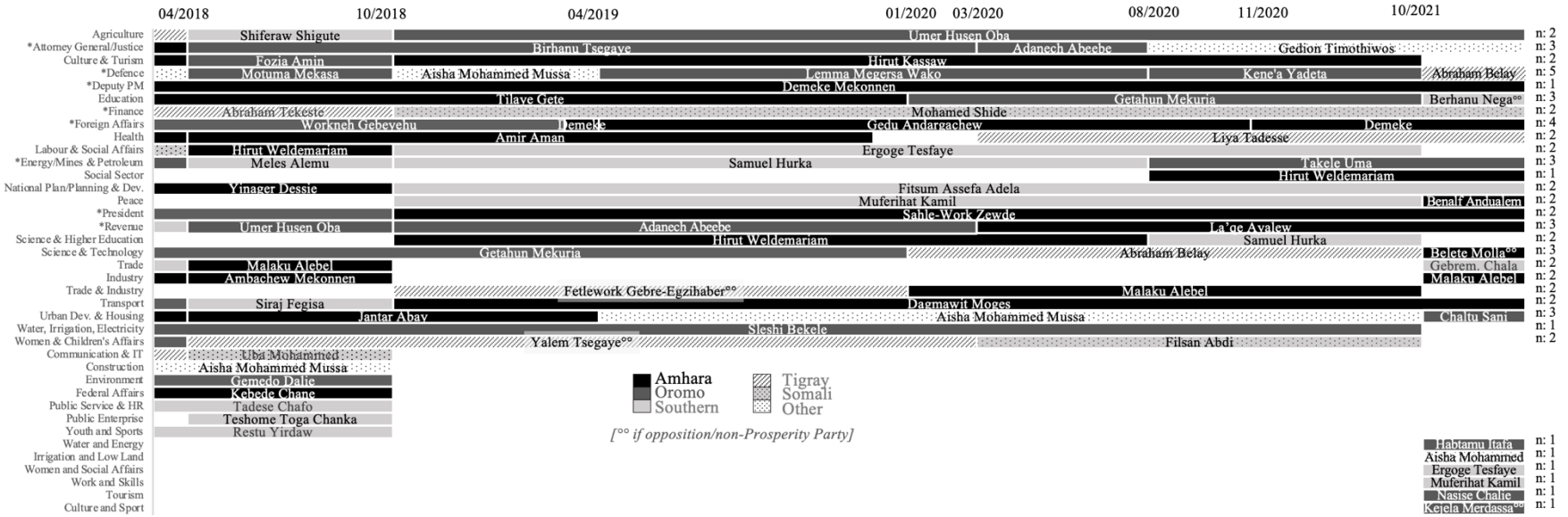

Figure A1. Abiy Ahmed's cabinet turnover and ethno-regional affiliations (04/2018-12/2021). On the left, inner circle posts are identified with *. Source: ACPED (2018-2020) and author's update (2021).

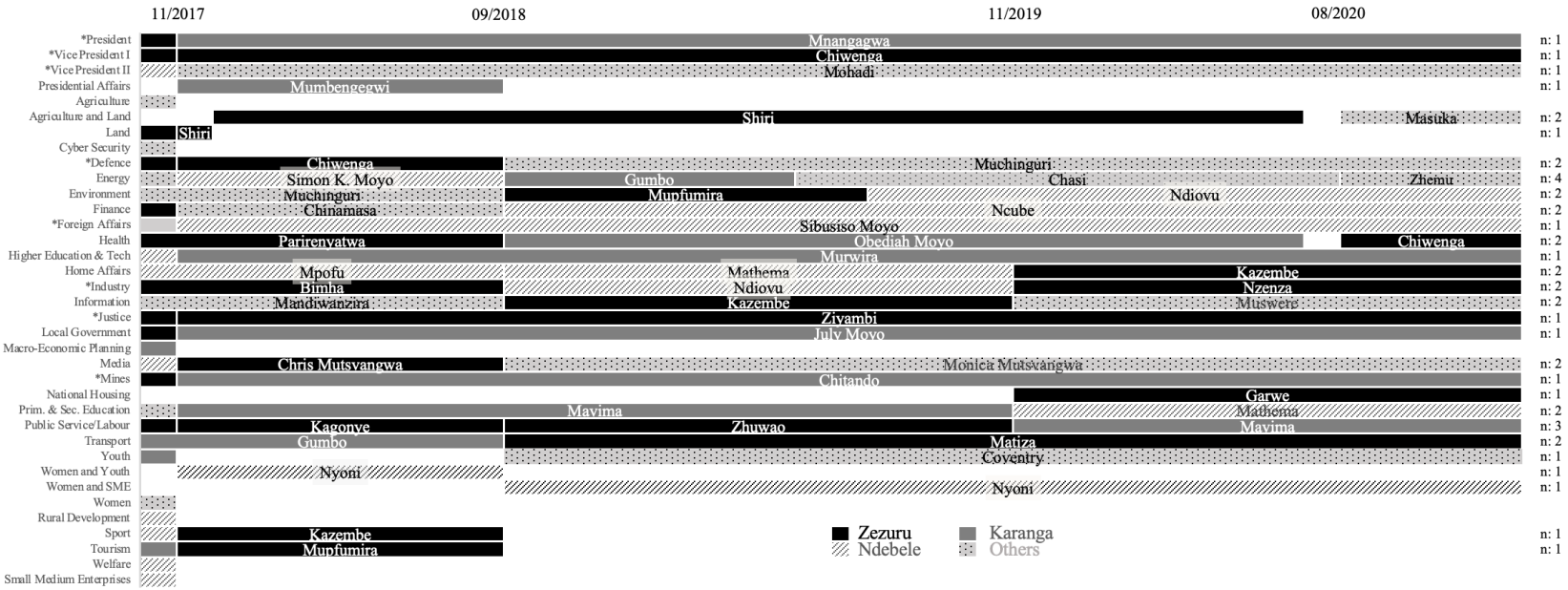

Figure A2. Emmerson Mnangagwa's cabinet turnover and ethnic affiliations (11/2017-12/2020). On the left, inner circle posts are identified with *. Source: ACPED.