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The politics of fear and the securitization of African elections

Sarah Jenkins

University of East Anglia

Introduction

Since the third wave of democracy swept across the African continent in the early 1990s, multiparty elections have become the norm. However, despite this widespread embrace of electoral processes, polls are increasingly being held amidst climates of fear and threats of ensuing violence, even in contexts without a strong history of contentious elections. For example, the typically peaceful electoral environment of Malawi was marked by fear in 2014, as the ruling party accused the opposition of planning post-election violence and employing “terror and intimidation tactics”;¹ a pre-election survey carried out prior to the 2016 elections in Ghana, revealed that 54 per cent of the population feared violence would be used in the polls;² and two years before the 2019 elections in Botswana, the police were already equipping themselves with specialised anti-riot vehicles in the wake of government warnings that the country was at risk of becoming “embroiled in political violence that we never thought possible.”³ As a Kenyan interviewee surmises, “In Africa, elections make people fear a lot.”⁴

Why do elections across sub-Saharan Africa generate such high levels of fear, even in historically peaceful contexts? How are these climates of fear being constructed? By whom? For what purpose? And with what implications? This paper draws upon the cases of Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia to address these questions, and argues that fears around elections are, in part, a political construction; the result of strategic efforts – largely by incumbent regimes⁵ – to frame the polls as a threat to peace and security. By utilising security logics, incumbents seek to intimidate and constrain the opposition, and justify tactics that will

tilt the electoral playing field. Thus, through the politics of fear and the securitization of elections, incumbent regimes can manipulate and gain advantage in the polls under the guise of a 'legitimate' protection of peace and order. Given the centrality of elections as a source of both domestic and international legitimacy in the hybrid regimes of sub-Saharan Africa,⁶ such tactics risk not only undermining the integrity of the polls, but also, in the long run, the authority and stability of the state.

Electoral manipulation and the construction of legitimizing discourses

There remains little consensus within the literature on what constitutes electoral manipulation. Some suggest that an act is only fraudulent if it breaks the law.⁷ However, this concentration on illegality obscures the ways in which "the law itself is bent for partisan and electoral purposes."⁸ Others argue that integrity is based on the degree to which voters regard the process as legitimate and binding.⁹ Whilst culturally embedded understandings of malpractice are important, this approach understates the extent to which perceptions can be shaped and manipulated. Indeed, as shall be argued here, the discursive construction of threat is intended to legitimize manipulation in the eyes of some political actors. A third means of conceptualizing electoral manipulation is the "democratic theory definition"¹⁰, whereby the integrity of the polls is assessed by the degree to which it deviates from democratic ideals. This approach emphasizes the requirement for citizens "to enjoy 'unimpaired opportunities' to 'formulate' their political preferences, to 'signify' them to one another, and to have them 'weighed equally' in public decision making";¹¹ that is, for citizens to develop, express, and act upon their political preferences with freedom and equality. This paper supports this perspective and explores how acts of manipulation can restrict democratic freedoms that are essential to free and fair elections.

A wide range of tactics have been identified as being part of the “menu of manipulation”¹² in electoral competition, including ballot stuffing, vote-buying, manipulation of the voter register, reporting false results, and the use of violence. Electoral malpractice, in all its forms, carries potentially heavy costs for those associated with it; not only tangible financial costs, but also reputational or legitimacy costs. Losses in domestic legitimacy undermines political authority, and poses potential threats to law and order. A loss of legitimacy in the international arena, on the other hand, can negatively impact trade, foreign direct investment, and the receipt of democracy-contingent benefits. Consequently, leaders must take care in their selection of manipulation tactics in order to find the delicate balance between electoral success and the need for legitimacy.¹³ The general consensus within existing scholarship is that leaders will make every effort to choose more clandestine practices rather than highly visible strategies of manipulation. By doing so, they reduce the risks of being caught. However, the importance of secrecy should be interrogated further, as “electoral manipulation appears to be quite often perpetrated blatantly.”¹⁴ I suggest that it is the avoidance of unequivocal *condemnation*, not necessarily the avoidance of *detection*, that is of fundamental importance. If manipulation that takes place in plain sight, and that violates “the spirit [rather than] the letter of democratic institutions”¹⁵, can be covered in a veil of legitimacy – however thin – it can serve to palliate criticism and evade complete denunciation of the process. This paper argues, then, that the construction and use of security discourses to construct a climate of fear during electoral contests, can provide a legitimizing platform for strategic forms of manipulation that, whilst not invisible, nevertheless serve to maintain general adherence to the process, and to evade strong and widespread condemnation.

Attention to the role of discourse has so far been largely neglected in wider studies of electoral malpractice.¹⁶ However, there have been some important insights emerging out of the Kenyan context. Following the disastrous elections of 2007 and the ensuing violence, the

Kenyan political and electoral system came under close scrutiny. When the country went to the polls again in 2013, following wide-ranging reforms, the comparatively peaceful conclusion of the process was lauded a success by many. However, a number of commentators have identified the presence of a troubling peace narrative throughout the process, highlighting the ways in which this prioritisation of stability and order over justice and a free and fair election served to favour the party closely connected to the incumbent regime.¹⁷ Whilst the intensity of this ‘peaceocracy’¹⁸ has emerged out of very specific circumstances in Kenya, it nevertheless illustrates the extent to which discourses can legitimize actions that serve the interests of some actors over others. This paper builds upon this idea and seeks to illustrate the ways in which securitization discourses more broadly are used strategically by elite actors to construct a climate of fear and to justify tactics of manipulation.

Securitization theory and African elections

Securitization theory, as developed by the Copenhagen School, has three key components: Firstly, security is seen to be the product of speech acts, whereby securitizing actors frame a particular issue as an existential threat and bring it into being as such: “Something is a security problem when the elites declare it to be so.”¹⁹ Secondly, these securitizing moves must be accepted by a sanctioning audience.²⁰ And finally, extraordinary measures – practices outside the realm of ‘normal’ politics – are consequently justified in countering the threat. Thus, for securitization to have successfully occurred there must be the identification of “an existential threat requiring emergency action or special measures and the acceptance of that designation by a significant audience.”²¹ Securitization theory has been used primarily to understand the strategic use of security in liberal democracies, and has consequently been criticised for being constrained by a ‘Westphalian straitjacket.’²²

However, it is increasingly being applied to more diverse contexts, including authoritarian, illiberal, and hybrid regimes.²³ While it can provide a very useful framework for understanding how security operates in such contexts, for the concept to travel effectively, some of its components need to be reconsidered or clarified. Of key relevance to the study of elections in sub-Saharan Africa are the issues of differentiating ‘emergency measures’ from ‘normal politics’, and identifying the audience and their role.

The Copenhagen School insists that measures used to address an identified threat must fall outside the realm of ‘normal politics’ if an issue is to be considered successfully securitized. Some scholars have questioned this focus on exceptionalism even in the Western context, concluding that, “emergency measures do not always characterize security situations.”²⁴ The emphasis on exception is even more problematic in hybrid systems, where the division between normal and ‘special’ politics is not as clear. Nevertheless, all societies have certain rules and norms and even the most authoritarian leaders must legitimize actions that might challenge or subvert these rules.²⁵ In the context of African elections, securitization can be said to have been employed when ‘security’ is invoked as a justification for the partisan use of laws and institutions, and any other action that deviates from the ideals of free and fair elections.

The second issue relates to the most under-theorised aspect of securitization theory: the audience.²⁶ While often deemed to be of central importance – given that legitimacy cannot simply be imposed, but rather must be argued²⁷ – the ‘audience’ is frequently quite weakly articulated. Following a number of scholars,²⁸ this paper adopts the position that there are in fact multiple, parallel audiences, and that securitizing moves are utilized to serve a range of political purposes. Whilst some speech acts are intended to justify deviations from democratic ideals, others are used as a means of intimidation and deterrence.²⁹ In the context of African elections, there are three parallel audiences: international actors,³⁰ incumbent

supporters and undecided voters, and the opposition. For international actors, undecided voters, and citizens sympathetic to the incumbent, securitizing moves are predominantly aimed at gaining moral support – or at the very least, tolerance – for actions that may deviate from key democratic ideals. For the opposition and their supporters, however, securitizing moves are also intended to intimidate, deter, and control behaviour. As such, unwavering acceptance of the security designation is not the intended outcome for all audiences.

Finally, audiences are not passive recipients of speech acts who simply accept or reject securitizing moves in a linear process. Rather, they are active agents in the construction of threat. Different audiences will engage with securitizing moves in different ways, and their various interactions can serve as feedback loops that can either amplify or inhibit securitization discourses. Indeed, threat is constructed in “an iterative fashion” whereby “repeated interactions” between securitizing actors and audiences serve to shape and reshape the security narrative.³¹ This paper, then, recognises the importance of the audience, but problematizes the simplified accept/reject binary often depicted as the marker of the success or failure of securitization efforts. The securitization of elections can be considered at least partially successful when it provides just enough of a cover of legitimacy to secure adherence to the electoral process and to dissuade unequivocal condemnation and rejection either by domestic or international actors. That is to say, that the tactics of manipulation are, at the very least, minimally tolerated.³²

Cases and methods

The paper employs a most different cases strategy, drawing upon the 2015 elections in mainland Tanzania, and the 2016 polls in Uganda and Zambia. These cases, though similar in many important ways,³³ nevertheless exhibit considerable variation in terms of their regime type, their experience of political violence, and their relationship with Western governments

and donors. These are important areas of divergence as they represent factors that we might reasonably expect to affect the appeal and resonance of security logics and the politics of fear.

It is now widely recognised that many third wave countries remain stuck in a ‘grey zone’ between authoritarianism and democracy.³⁴ Even within this grey zone, however, there is considerable variation, with some countries teetering on the edges of authoritarianism and others embracing significant democratic features. Freedom House’s *Freedom in the World*, and the Economist Intelligence Unit’s (EIU) *Democracy Index* were used to identify three cases that sit at very different points on this continuum between democracy and authoritarianism. Prior to the 2016 elections, Zambia was classified by the EIU as a ‘flawed democracy’; elections were deemed to be relatively free and fair, and the country had witnessed two peaceful transfers of power since its return to multiparty politics. Tanzania, on the other hand, was classified as a hybrid regime before the 2015 polls; multiparty elections have consistently been marked by fraud and malpractice, and the hegemony of the ruling CCM party has never really been challenged. Uganda in 2016 was positioned even further towards the authoritarian end of the spectrum, and whilst still classified as a ‘hybrid regime’, the country had recently seen its status downgraded from ‘partly free’ to ‘not free’ by Freedom House. Museveni and his NRM party have monopolised power since the 1980s, utilized coercion and repression in elections, and have ‘increasingly display[ed] authoritarian tendencies.’³⁵ These variations are significant, as we might expect more authoritarian regimes to employ different legitimation strategies from more democratic systems.

The second important difference is the prior experience of political and election-related violence; indeed, the resonance and appeal of securitization efforts are more surprising in contexts with relatively peaceful political histories. Uganda has witnessed a turbulent political history, and since independence has endured the brutal and repressive regimes of

Milton Obote (1962-1971, and 1979-1985) and Idi Amin (1971-1975), as well as a five year civil war (1980-1985). Elections, since the return to multiparty politics in 2005 have witnessed high levels of intimidation, state repression, and blatant violence, ‘painting a picture of a country at war with itself.’³⁶ In Zambia, whilst elections in the 1990s appeared to pass relatively peacefully, more recent polls have witnessed an upsurge in election-related violence as clashes between political cadres have become more prominent features of electoral campaigns. Nevertheless, prior to 2016, these remained relatively localised. Tanzania, on the other hand, has been politically stable since independence, and whilst semi-autonomous Zanzibar has witnessed episodes of electoral violence, on the mainland there has been no significant conflict around elections.

The final dimension of difference concerns the relationship of each country with Western governments and donors. We might reasonably expect more aid-dependent countries to be more concerned with convincing Western audiences of their democratic credentials. Both Tanzania and Uganda are heavily reliant on foreign assistance, with aid contributing to 36% and 46% of government spending respectively in 2015.³⁷ That being said, however, Uganda’s access to aid is arguably far less vulnerable, given its position as an indispensable ally in the global war on terror, and Museveni can potentially ‘afford to win elections by undemocratic means’ with far less of a risk of significant cuts to aid.³⁸ Conversely, Zambia’s reliance on aid from traditional partners has become dramatically less important in recent years,³⁹ and in 2015 it accounted for only 16.2% of government spending. Thus, these three cases demonstrate significant variance in terms of the relationships they share with international actors.

While these cases are not wholly representative of sub-Saharan Africa, the comparison demonstrates the prominence of securitization in very different contexts. The analysis is based upon examination of newspaper articles, human rights documents, and election

observer reports. Leading and online-accessible English language newspapers – both independent and state-sponsored – were selected in all three cases, and any article mentioning the respective elections, campaigns, parties, or candidates published between the twelve months prior to the polls and the three months after, was examined.⁴⁰ Human rights reports on the respective polls, alongside publically accessible election observer reports were also draw upon, with the Tanzanian case being supplemented by observation and in-depth interviews that were carried out with residents of Dar es Salaam during the 2015 election campaigns.

The construction of elections as a threat to peace and stability

There were four key dimensions of threat construction in the Tanzanian, Ugandan and Zambian elections: i) direct assertions that the elections pose a threat to peace; ii) pervasive peace messaging; iii) the framing of the opposition as the source of threat; and iv) warnings that the state is prepared to deal with perpetrators of violence.

The initial phase of the securitization process involves explicit declarations that the upcoming polls could prove a threat to peace and stability. Such assertions begin to situate the polls within the security arena, and in all three cases, key figures within the state apparatus led these securitizing moves. In both Tanzania and Zambia, securitizing actors played upon existing narratives of these countries as beacons of stability, asserting that there were “palpable signs of breach of peace”⁴¹, and that the elections risked plunging their respective countries into the chaos witnessed by neighbouring states. In Uganda, even with its longer history of political violence, figures within the state apparatus similarly reinforced this narrative with “often exaggerated talk envisaging violence”⁴², and claims of “advanced plans” for activities that, “will be the immediate spark to a chain of violent riots across the country.”⁴³ Thus, in all three cases, prominent state actors explicitly sought to construct the

upcoming elections as a threat to peace and stability, creating, as one Ugandan analyst notes, “wide concern in every public forum that some blood could be shed.”⁴⁴ Whilst incumbent regimes are the most prominent actors in this dimension of securitization, these moves can also be reinforced by other stakeholders, including business leaders, international media, and others, who echo these sentiments and inadvertently contribute to the discourse that “any election in Africa can only degenerate into violence.”⁴⁵

Climates of fear are also perpetuated more indirectly, through pervasive peace messaging at all levels of political agency.⁴⁶ These peace narratives have become diffused throughout society, and the three cases saw traditional leaders, religious figures, musicians, journalists, radio hosts, international actors, human rights organisations, and many others in civil society, continuously propagate them through public statements, billboards, songs, radio shows, workshops, national prayers, marches, and peace accords to name but a few. This ‘peaceocracy’ serves to prioritize security and order over free and fair elections.⁴⁷ As one analyst writes: “in the cacophony of this shrill call for peace...the narrative seems to be moving away from...the necessity for a free, fair and credible election.”⁴⁸ Thus, through their active engagement in peace messaging, the targeted audiences of securitization can themselves become complicit within the process.

Security logics are also often underpinned by ‘us against them’ dichotomies,⁴⁹ and the securitization of elections typically involves the active construction of the opposition as the source of threat. Incumbent parties draw a stark comparison between themselves as the party of civility and the opposition as hooligans and thugs intent on chaos. In Uganda, the NRM achieved this juxtaposition by drawing explicitly upon the embedded narrative that it had ushered in an era of relative political stability and brought an end to the violent dictatorships of the country’s past. Similarly, in Tanzania, the narrative that giving power to the opposition would herald an era of instability and violence has been a part of the political landscape for

decades,⁵⁰ and the 2015 campaigns saw the ruling party continue to play into that rhetoric. As one interviewee states, “They use threatening words, like, ‘If you choose the opposition the country will descend into chaos.’”⁵¹ In Zambia, the campaign period also witnessed an unrelenting narrative of President Lungu as “leading the crusade against political violence”⁵², whilst the UPND party was characterised as a “danger to society.”⁵³ Thus, in all three cases, incumbent regimes revitalized existing narratives of themselves as providers of stability and stoked fears of insecurity under opposition leadership. At the same time, these narratives serve to depoliticize and delegitimize the opposition, casting them as little more than thugs and goons intent only on violence and disruption; “a nefarious lot whose criminal intentions must be contained.”⁵⁴

Opposition campaign activities that are openly critical of the incumbent regime, or that seek to expose the sinister intentions of security discourses, often only provide further credence to incumbent claims. For example, in both Tanzania and Zambia, criticism of the incumbent regime was frequently framed as evidence of an intention to destabilise the country. In the latter case, the Secretary-General of the Patriotic Front (PF) asserted that Hakainde Hichilema’s “derogatory remarks against President Lungu...clearly show that the opposition leader does not believe in peace.”⁵⁵ In Uganda, this reframing of opposition activity was particularly pronounced. The ‘defiance campaign’ slogan of the opposition FDC party - described as resistance to unlawful acts, decisions or orders⁵⁶ – was “convert[ed]...into the sounding of war drums” as securitizing actors branded it a clear message that unfavourable results should be (violently) rejected.⁵⁷ Opposition figures often try to counter these attempts to delegitimize their campaigns by looking to shift the narrative away from an emphasis on stability towards a prioritisation of justice. In all three cases, opposition figures consistently accused the incumbent of intending to defraud the election, and they frequently questioned the measures put in place in the name of security. The

response by incumbents to such efforts, however, was remarkably consistent: the questioning of the security discourse was simply reframed as yet further evidence of the oppositions' intent to use violence to gain power. Thus, attempts to query, question, and counter the securitization agenda often have the unintended consequence of amplifying it, and providing further credence to the peaceful incumbent/violent opposition dichotomy.

The final dimension of this process is the use of securitization to intimidate and to deter any questioning of the integrity of the polls. When security logics are used for this purpose, the language of the speech act shifts from explaining the need for a particular action, to warning that certain activities will not be tolerated. In both Zambia and Tanzania, state officials repeatedly warned citizens against causing 'trouble' on or after election day, asserting that the "police will not hesitate to take measures against [them]"⁵⁸, thus criminalizing any form of democratic protest. In Uganda, the rhetoric reached such extreme levels that citizens were warned that 'troublemakers' would be shot dead. Thus, securitizing moves that adopt this 'warning' framework, are aimed at intimidating the opposition and deterring questioning of the process, since anything the government deems to be 'causing trouble' will be dealt with firmly, and perhaps, fatally.

Manipulation in the name of security

Securitization discourses, then, provide the platform for forms of manipulation that skew the electoral playing field. This section analyses the various tactics that were employed in the name of security in the three case studies, suggesting that the security framework facilitated the 'militarization' of elections, and justified restrictions upon the freedoms of assembly and expression, key democratic rights crucial to the conduct of free and fair elections.

The militarization of elections

One of the most visible characteristics of the elections in all three cases – even in the historically more peaceful contexts of Zambia and Tanzania – was a militarized atmosphere, apparent in the extensive presence of heavily armed security actors throughout the electoral period. Images of police officers “riding in vehicles like rebel soldiers...brandishing AK-47 rifles” in Zambia;⁵⁹ of armoured vehicles and water cannon vans “roaming the streets” in Tanzania;⁶⁰ and of “soldiers in fatigues and military police in red berets”⁶¹ in Uganda, all served as highly visible performances of the state’s ability, capacity, and willingness to maintain peace at any cost. Indeed, invocations of security language by incumbents, alongside the over-emphasis on peace from across civil society, made this ‘militarization’ of the electoral process not only seem necessary, but to many even desirable. As Vokes and Wilkins argue in relation to Uganda, these heavy-handed security activities are often welcomed and interpreted by citizens as a sign of a leader strong enough to “hold the country together.”⁶²

However, this security presence, whilst ostensibly to ensure peace, is also – and in fact, primarily – utilized to intimidate the opposition and constrain their activities. Across many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the police and other security forces have historically operated as partisan instruments of the state, and they continue to utilize excessive force in their pursuit of regime protection. Indeed, in many contexts where electoral violence has occurred, security forces have been responsible for vast proportions of it. In Tanzania, Zambia, and Uganda, security forces were unevenly deployed to opposition strongholds and events, leading one Tanzanian analyst to retort, “Since when did the police start defining security threat as opposition activities?”⁶³ Indeed, this “latent physical presence of security personnel” can have “an affective intimidation power in its own right.”⁶⁴ In all three cases, the militarized environment heightened fears amongst opposition supporters, constraining

their engagement in the electoral process. In Tanzania, for example, almost all interviewees who were supportive of the opposition expressed the notion that “the police being here will create fear”,⁶⁵ and in Zambia, the armed police presence was seen by some to be “causing terror among innocent citizens.”⁶⁶ Thus, the militarization of the electoral environment acts as a symbolic performance of the state’s capacity for violence, and serves to create a climate of fear and intimidation, particularly targeted towards opposition supporters, even in the absence of any physical force. Söderberg Kovacs and Bjarnesen refer to this as part of the “everyday politics of electoral violence”, where, on the surface elections appear to be “free of systematic malpractice”, but widespread experiences of violence and insecurity on the ground can tilt the playing field substantially.⁶⁷ Indeed, such an environment can stifle political debate and expression, and deter active participation by opposition supporters. As one human rights report concludes, “such heavy deployment often scares voters away from the polls”⁶⁸ whilst another asserts that climates of fear “hinder the ability of citizens to participate fully in a secure environment in the democratic process.”⁶⁹

Freedom of assembly: Disrupting the opposition

During electoral campaigns, freedoms of assembly and movement are essential to free and fair elections. They allow for the dissemination of information and ideas that enable voters to make an informed decision, whilst the right to peaceful demonstration is a key mechanism through which citizens can hold governments to account. In all three cases, securitization discourses were utilized to legitimize restrictions upon these freedoms in the eyes of incumbent supporters, undecided voters, and international actors, as opposition campaigns were disrupted and candidates’ access to the electorate constrained through the partisan application of existing policing legislation, arbitrary arrests and detentions, and the prohibition of demonstrations and political gatherings at critical junctures.

The partisan application of existing policing legislation – the colonial era Public Order Act (POA) (1955) in Zambia, the Police Act (2002) in Tanzania, and the more recent Public Order and Management Act (POMA) (2013) in Uganda – was one of the key measures utilised to frustrate opposition activities during the campaigns. These pieces of legislation – whilst each encompassing their own peculiarities – essentially require political parties to notify the police in advance of any meetings or campaign rallies, and they empower the police to limit such gatherings under the pretext of protecting public order. In all three cases, the police were accused of denying permits for opposition campaign rallies, cancelling them at short notice, or disbanding those they branded unlawful – often through the use of excessive force. In Zambia and Tanzania, the freedom of movement for opposition candidates was also curtailed through the grounding of opposition flights during the campaigns in the name of security. As the UPND candidate Hakainde Hichilema complained:

During the campaign period, our permits and permissions have been resisted, denied or cancelled at the last minute on numerous occasions in a blatant attempt to obstruct us and try to stop our campaigns. This has created an uneven playing field in which we are clearly being disadvantaged.⁷⁰

When criticised for this partisan and overly broad application of the law, however, the Inspector General of Police simply asserted that the POA is there to protect people and “therefore stakeholders must respect its provisions.”⁷¹

Arrest and detention of opposition candidates was also a common means through which to restrict their exposure to the electorate. Zambia and Tanzania saw a number of candidates arrested for public order offences and breaches of peace during their respective campaign periods, but this tactic was taken to extremes in the Ugandan elections, with numerous candidates being ‘preventatively arrested’ for their *potential* to undermine peace and security. The opposition leader, Kizza Besigye, was arrested and detained 11 times within a 15-day period in the lead-up to the elections, and was subsequently held under house arrest for over a month following the polls, preventing him from challenging the election

results. The police claimed that his arrests were a preventative measure, asserting that his defiance campaign was indicative of a potential threat to public order and peace.⁷²

Finally, wider scale bans on campaigns and demonstrations further restricted the oppositions' access to the electorate and delegitimized any protest regarding the integrity of the elections. The Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) issued a 10-day ban on all campaigns in the opposition strongholds of Lusaka and Namwala in what was regarded by many to be a "disproportionate response" to violent incidents in the campaigns.⁷³ Whilst all parties were supposedly subject to this ban, it effectively favoured the incumbent, as the ECZ reportedly turned a blind eye to incumbent breaches,⁷⁴ and, unlike the opposition, they were still able to reach the electorate through their control of the media. In Uganda and Tanzania, efforts to subvert opposition movement also extended into the post-election period, as the police sought to suppress peaceful protest over the conduct of the elections. In the former case, all FDC "demonstrations, processions, other public meetings, media campaigns or pronouncements,"⁷⁵ were prohibited, whilst Tanzania saw a blanket ban on all political rallies and demonstrations following the polling day in the name of ensuring peace.

In all three cases, where police deemed an event to be 'unlawful', excessive force was often used to disperse crowds, with water cannons, tear-gas, rubber bullets, and on occasion live ammunition being used. Thus, through the selective and partisan application of existing legislation, alongside the implementation of more 'extraordinary measures' such as preventative arrests, suspending campaigns or enacting blanket bans on demonstrations, the oppositions' freedom of assembly was significantly constrained. Through these measures, the incumbent regime not only prevented candidates from fully engaging with the electorate, but also denied citizens the right to peaceful demonstration and protest over the conduct of the polls, all the time utilizing security discourses to legitimize these acts to other domestic and international actors.

Freedom of expression: Silencing criticism and debate

The right to free expression is another key political liberty central to the conduct of credible elections. It ensures that citizens are able to access information regarding candidates and engage in vibrant political debate about key issues and government performance. Restricting free expression and constraining critical voices ensures that incumbents can maintain some element of control over the electoral narrative, and can deter support for opposition candidates. In the three cases, this was variously achieved by silencing critics through arrest and detention; creating an uneven media platform; and surveilling and controlling social media sites.

During the electoral periods under study, the respective incumbent regimes remained sensitive to public criticism and sought to silence dissenting voices through arrest and detention. During the Zambian campaigns, candidates, journalists and other civil society figures were harassed for their critical positions, as the government became “quick to prosecute critics on the pretext of incitement of public disorder.”⁷⁶ One opposition leader, for example, was arrested for purportedly ‘defaming’ President Lungu by accusing him of wasting taxpayer money at a holiday resort,⁷⁷ whilst a musician was charged with “conduct likely to cause a breach of peace” following the release of a satirical song about the President.⁷⁸ The campaigns in Tanzania similarly saw opposition candidates subjected to accusations of ‘sedition’ and inciting public disorder, and on numerous occasions police took action against those deemed to have made ‘false’ or ‘misleading’ statements against the government.⁷⁹ Indeed, Cross quotes one senior Tanzanian police officer as stating, “If you insult the president, it is a matter of security.”⁸⁰ Similarly, in Uganda one journalist lamented that negative views of the government, “is taken...to mean causing violence”⁸¹ as opposition candidates were subjected to preventative arrests. These arrests and detentions of critical

voices in society were intended not only to frustrate opposition candidates, but also to promote self-censorship amongst journalists and other critical elements in society.⁸² Indeed, evidence indicates that in all three cases these actors engaged in self-censorship and at times avoided key campaign issues in lieu of ‘safer,’ less political topics.⁸³

Incumbent regimes also engaged in more active measures to censor and control the media environment, citing security concerns to justify banning broadcasts, censoring particular stories, and limiting the opposition’s access to media exposure. In Zambia, for example, radio programs hosting opposition candidates were raided by the police on a number of occasions under the guise of security concerns⁸⁴, and in the immediate aftermath of the elections, the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) suspended the operating licences of three privately-owned media stations on the grounds that they posed an unspecified risk to national peace and security. Similarly, in Uganda, the police issued a blanket ban on any live coverage of Besigye’s house arrest, claiming that it incited violence,⁸⁵ whilst the Tanzania Communication Regulatory Agency issued a directive that no common Tanzanian could air their views on a live political programme in order to control “inflammatory utterances which are likely to cause chaos.”⁸⁶

The final means of silencing dissent was through the repression of social media activities. Social media is increasingly becoming a space for campaigning and citizen debate during elections, and this has been met with new attempts to police such communications, “often justified as necessary to ensure peace.”⁸⁷ Whilst in Zambia the curtailment of social media activity was not prominent, in both Tanzania and Uganda, such efforts became key moments of the respective electoral periods. In Tanzania, the passing of two controversial bills earlier in 2015 – the Cybercrimes Act and the Statistics Act which each prohibit the dissemination of false, deceptive, misleading or inaccurate information – provided the incumbent with legislative channels through which to control online political debate and

communication. Throughout the electoral period, a number of highly publicised arrests were made under these pieces of legislation, in the name of preserving security.⁸⁸ Additionally, in the immediate aftermath of the polls, the police raided opposition party offices and the data centre of a domestic observer group, seizing equipment and arresting large numbers of people on the charge of publishing false information. These incidents served to instil fear amongst the electorate, and to stifle political debate as people engaged in self-censorship. As one activist states, “With these laws critics have been silenced somehow.”⁸⁹ In Uganda, whilst there were some isolated arrests for inciting hatred online, social media remained relatively free during the campaign period. However, on polling day, key platforms, including WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter were shut down entirely by the Uganda Communications Commission, citing an unspecified threat to public order and safety.⁹⁰ Thus, the government once again utilised a preventative approach, restricting access to key channels of information and debate at a critical point of the election process.

The freedom of expression is crucial to a free and fair election. Where critical voices are silenced – either directly or through sufficient intimidation to encourage self-censorship – the incumbent regime can control the narrative and ensure that it is presented in a predominantly positive light, legitimizing this through the language of security.

Conclusion

All political regimes seek to legitimize their rule. In the semi-democratic and hybrid regimes of sub-Saharan Africa, where popular support for democracy remains high,⁹¹ and where a democratic image is often important for international relationships and funding, elections are a fundamental tool of regime legitimation. As such, incumbents are faced with an ever-increasing challenge of balancing the desire to win with the need for legitimacy. This paper has argued that incumbent regimes are turning to securitization discourses and the

politics of fear to provide a cover of legitimacy for practices of electoral manipulation. By constructing the elections as a threat, elites are able to legitimize intimidation and repression of the opposition and a significantly skewed playing field in the eyes of key stakeholders. In the three cases under study, this manifested in a militarization of the electoral environment, the restriction of opposition candidates' exposure to the electorate, and the silencing of critical voices. And whilst not achieving unquestioning acceptance of all measures employed, these securitization efforts were nevertheless met with some level of success. There is clear evidence of fear, intimidation, and self-censorship amongst opposition supporters, but general adherence to the electoral process was maintained, widespread protests and demonstrations contained, and denunciation of the polls evaded. Moreover, all three elections were subsequently endorsed by a significant majority of the population as free and fair – 80 per cent in Tanzania, and 60 per cent in both Zambia and Uganda.⁹² Internationally, the Tanzanian and Zambian polls were awarded the seal of approval from observers and Western governments, and whilst the reaction to the Ugandan elections was more critical, they still did not elicit unequivocal denunciation of the process. Indeed the EU mission “pulled their punches” when publically asked if the elections were free and fair.⁹³

The securitization of elections should be placed in a broader context of authoritarian and illiberal leaders adopting and adapting security logics to suit their own agendas.⁹⁴ As long as Western governments put security above all else, and set a low bar for the standard of elections, leaders of such regimes will continue to use securitization as a tool of regime maintenance, not only in sub-Saharan Africa, but in fledging democracies and hybrid regimes around the world.

¹ ‘Two killed in Malawi campaign violence’, *Reuters*, 17 March 2014.

² Ghana Centre for Democratic Development, *Ghana's 2016 Elections*.

³ Reuben Pitse, ‘Police preparing for 2019 election violence – claims’, *The Sunday Standard*, 25 September 2017.

⁴ Interview with Kikuyu youth, Mathare, Kenya, 7 July 2015.

⁵ This is not to say that opposition candidates do not also manipulate elections. However, incumbents – by virtue of their position and connections – can typically draw on a wider range of tactics and they are in a far more powerful position to construct and utilize securitization discourses. See Cheeseman and Klaus, *How to rig an election* for a discussion of the strategies commonly employed by the opposition.

⁶ Brown, 'Well what can you expect', p. 517.

⁷ Lehoucq, 'Electoral fraud' 235.

⁸ Simpser, *Why governments and parties manipulate elections*, 33.

⁹ Elklit and Reynolds, 'Judging elections', 189.

¹⁰ Birch, *Electoral Malpractice*, 13.

¹¹ Schedler, 'Elections without democracy', 40.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Birch, *Electoral malpractice*, 56.

¹⁴ Simpser, *Why governments and parties manipulate elections*, 66

¹⁵ Beaulieu and Hyde, 'In the shadow of democracy promotion', 403.

¹⁶ Sjöstedt et al.'s examination of threat construction by warlord democrats in post-conflict contexts is an exception, though it does not focus on the use of such narratives as a tactic of manipulation. See Sjöstedt et al., 'Demagogues of hate'

¹⁷ See, Cheeseman, Lynch and Willis, 'Democracy and its discontents'; Brown and Raddatz, 'Dire consequences or empty threats?'; Elder, Strigent and Claes, *Elections and violent conflict in Kenya*; Maweu, "'Peace propaganda"?'

¹⁸ Lynch, Cheeseman and Willis, 'From peace campaigns to peaceocracy.'

¹⁹ Waever, 'Securitization and Desecuritization', 54.

²⁰ Wilkinson, 'The Copenhagen School on tour', 9.

²¹ Buzan, Waever and de Wilde, *Security*, 27.

²² Wilkinson, 'The Copenhagen school on tour', 5.

²³ See Mabon and Kapur, *Securitisations in the non-West*; Caballero-Anthony, Emmers and Acharya, *Non-traditional security in Asia*; Sjöstedt et al., 'Demagogues of hate.'

²⁴ Balzacq, Léonard, and Ruzicka, "'Securitization" revisited', 507.

²⁵ Vuori, 'Illocutionary logic', 68-69.

²⁶ McDonald, 'Securitization', 564.

²⁷ Waever, 'Securitization and desecuritization.'

²⁸ Balzacq, 'The three faces of securitization'; Salter, 'Securitization and desecuritization'; Leonard and Kaunert, 'Reconceptualizing the audience.'

²⁹ Vuori, 'Illocutionary logic', 76.

³⁰ By international actors, I refer here to Western donors, election observers, and the governments they represent. These actors are intimately connected in the assessment of electoral processes.

³¹ Cote, 'Agents without agency', 546.

³² Stritzel, 'Towards a theory of securitization', 361.

³³ Colonial power, electoral system, and timing of the elections are three key variables that are held constant by the selection of these cases.

³⁴ Carothers, 'The end of the transition paradigm.'

³⁵ Khisa, 'Shrinking democratic space?', p. 344.

³⁶ Ibid. p. 347.

³⁷ Data for all three case studies available at

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/DT.ODA.ODAT.XP.ZS?end=2017&locations=TZ-UG-ZM&start=2015&view=map&year=2015> [Accessed 30 January 2020].

³⁸ Abrahamsen and Bareebe, 'Uganda's 2016 elections', p. 760-761.

³⁹ Kragelund, 'Donors go home.'

⁴⁰ It should be noted that press freedom is restricted to an extent in all three cases, but this is particularly pronounced in the case of Zambia, where access to independent media sources was more challenging. Despite this issue of 'neutrality', however, an examination of these sources is still enlightening as to prominence of securitization discourses during elections.

⁴¹ Syriacus Buguzi, 'Women and the young will decide TZ's future today', *The Citizen*, 25 October 2015.

⁴² Nicolas Sengoba, 'Why the message of hope is vital for the 2016 election', *The Daily Monitor*, November 10 2015.

⁴³ 'Elections will be peaceful', *The Daily Monitor*, February 1 2016.

⁴⁴ Frederic Musisi, 'Why are campaigns taking a violent turn?' *The Daily Monitor*, 27 December 2015.

⁴⁵ Obed K. Katureebe, 'Watch out for politicians who use media to incite violence', *The Daily Monitor*, 6 February 2016.

⁴⁶ See Lynch, Cheeseman, and Willis, 'From peace campaigns to peaceocracy' for a discussion of this phenomenon in Ghana, Kenya and Uganda.

⁴⁷ See Lynch et al. 'From peace campaigns to peaceocracy.'

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- ⁴⁸ ‘Preach peace but fix causes of conflict’, *The Daily Monitor*, 7 February 2016.
- ⁴⁹ Abrahamsen, ‘Blair’s Africa’, 60
- ⁵⁰ Paget, ‘Tanzania: Shrinking space’, 162
- ⁵¹ Interview with middle aged man, Mbezi Juu, Dar es Salaam, 20th October 2015.
- ⁵² Charles Chisala, ‘Futility of violence in modern politics’, *The Daily Mail*, March 8 2016.
- ⁵³ ‘UPND danger to society’, *The Daily Mail*, August 3 2016.
- ⁵⁴ ‘Please stop beating those war drums...’, *The Daily Monitor*, January 28 2016.
- ⁵⁵ Steven Mvula, ‘Stop insults’, *The Daily Mail*, May 9 2016.
- ⁵⁶ ‘Don’t drag UPDF into election process’, *The Daily Mail*, December 19 2016.
- ⁵⁷ Obed K. Katureee, ‘Watch out for politicians who use media to incite violence’, *The Daily Monitor*, 6 February 2016
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- ⁵⁹ ‘Police ops should not cause terror,’ Letter to the editor, *The Daily Mail*, March 8 2016.
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- ⁶¹ Josh Kron, ‘Yoweri Museveni, Uganda’s President wins a widely criticized election’, *The New York Times*, February 20 2016.
- ⁶² Vokes and Wilkins, ‘Party, patronage and coercion’, 594.
- ⁶³ Peter Saramba, ‘Missing the point: Dearth of professionalism in the police is worrying’, *The Citizen*, 22 June 2016.
- ⁶⁴ Vokes and Wilkins, ‘Party, patronage and coercion’, 593.
- ⁶⁵ Interview with male resident, Mbezi Juu, Dar es Salaam, 19 October 2015.
- ⁶⁶ ‘Police ops should not cause terror,’ Letter to the editor, *The Daily Mail*, March 8 2016.
- ⁶⁷ Söderberg Kovacs and Bjarnesen, *Violence in African Elections*, p. 2-3.
- ⁶⁸ FHRI, ‘Human rights and elections’, 11.
- ⁶⁹ The Carter Centre, ‘Final report Zambia’, 34.
- ⁷⁰ Hakainde Hichilema, ‘HH says that UPND will go ahead with their final Chawama Rally, regardless of police advice’, *Lusaka Times*, August 5 2016.
- ⁷¹ Kelvi Mbebe, ‘Public Order Act applied fairly’, *Daily Mail*, February 8 2016.
- ⁷² ‘Opposition rights to contest poll outcome – Rights watchdog’, *The Daily Monitor*, February 28 2016. See also EISA, ‘Election observer mission report.’
- ⁷³ EUEOM, ‘Final report’, 5.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid. 19.
- ⁷⁵ United States Department of State, ‘Country report: Uganda’, 17.
- ⁷⁶ United States Department of State, ‘Country report: Zambia’, section 2a.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid.
- ⁷⁸ Freedom house, ‘Freedom in the world 2016 – Zambia.’
- ⁷⁹ Cross, ‘Cybercrime’, 197-198.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid. 202.
- ⁸¹ Quoted in Human Rights Watch, ‘Keep the people uninformed’, 25.
- ⁸² Cross, ‘Cybercrimes’, 198-199.
- ⁸³ Ibid. 25.
- ⁸⁴ United States Department of State, ‘Country report: Zambia’, section 2a.
- ⁸⁵ Anthony Wesaka, ‘Media practitioners, rights activists condemn police brutality on journalists’, *The Daily Monitor*, March 4 2016.
- ⁸⁶ Peter Nyanje, ‘My own take on this: TCRA should rescind this oppressive directive’, *The Citizen*, September 16 2015.
- ⁸⁷ Cross, ‘Cybercrimes’, 195.
- ⁸⁸ See CIPESA, ‘State of internet freedom’, 10 for two examples.
- ⁸⁹ Quoted in Hannah McNeish, ‘Tanzania accused of making laws on the hoof in “Kafkaesque” curb on free speech’, *The Guardian*, July 8 2015.
- ⁹⁰ Frederic Musisi, ‘UCC shutdown of social media backfires’, *The Daily Monitor*, February 19 2016.
- ⁹¹ Bratton and Bhoojedhur, 2019, ‘Africans want open elections.’
- ⁹² Ibid. p. 11.
- ⁹³ Cheeseman et al. ‘How election monitors are failing.’
- ⁹⁴ See Fisher and Anderson, ‘Authoritarianism and securitization’, for a discussion of the securitization of development in Africa for example.

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