

Constitutionalism and Leadership Renewal in the African National Congress: Lessons for Other African States

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Abstract

This chapter places South Africa's smooth leadership renewal in the broader debates on political transition and democratic consolidation in Africa. Unique to other revolutionary political parties across the continent, the ANC preceding presidents have exhibited significant respect for the party and national constitution and step down whenever such calls are constitutionally sanctioned. Nelson Mandela voluntarily relinquished power and constitutional provisions were successfully evoked to induce the resignation of his two successors, Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma respectively. Considering experiences obtained in other African countries with regard to leadership renewal, the ANC's experience can be viewed as a success story, despite some cracks which also appear in the ANC constitution and the tendency of the party to embrace a political culture exhibited by other revolutionary parties in the region. Leadership renewal has been a nightmare for many post-independent African countries. In some parts of the continent, the legitimacy crisis over leadership metamorphosed into a socio-economic and political crisis with devastating effects on the well-being of the citizens. It is from this backdrop that this chapter examines the contribution of leadership renewal to constitutionalism and the promotion of democracy in South Africa. The chapter further examines the lessons that can be learnt by other revolutionary parties from the South African experience in order to democratise political transitions and avert potential conflicts associated with political transitions in the region. This is notwithstanding the fact that, while the ANC has demonstrated a strong adherence to constitutionalism, it is also overwhelmed by its failure to address a number of socio-economic challenges that continue to afflict the country and the generality of its citizens. The findings relied upon secondary data.

Keywords: African nation congress, Democratic consolidation, Constitutionalism, Leadership renewal, Political transition