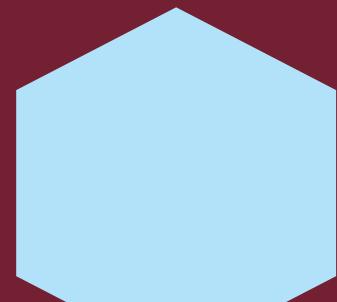


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Neo-patrimonialism and Securitization in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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Abstract

This study examines the intricate relationship between neo-patrimonial political culture and securitization processes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (D.R.C.). Drawing on securitization theory adapted for African contexts and neo-patrimonial governance frameworks, this analysis demonstrates how political elites in the D.R.C. instrumentalize security threats to maintain power, extract resources, and preserve patronage networks. The research reveals that securitization in the D.R.C. operates through personalized threat construction, selective security provision, and the co-optation of both state and non-state security actors. Unlike the institutionalized securitization processes found in liberal democratic states, the D.R.C.'s approach is characterized by ad hoc responses, narrow circles of securitizing actors, and emergency measures that serve elite interests rather than national security objectives.¹ This study contributes to understanding how neo-patrimonial systems shape security governance in post-colonial African states and offers insights into the persistence of conflict and instability in the Great Lakes region.

Keywords

neo-patrimonialism, securitization, Democratic Republic of the Congo, political culture, security governance, state formation

1. C. Kaunert, E. Ezeokafor, *Securitization Outside the West: West African Security Reconceptualised*, 1st ed., Routledge 2022.

Introduction

The Democratic Republic of the Congo stands as one of Africa's most paradoxical states – a country blessed with immense natural wealth yet cursed with persistent instability, formal institutions that coexist with deeply personalized rule, and international recognition alongside chronic governance failures. The paradox becomes comprehensible when examined through the lens of neo-patrimonial governance and its intersection with securitization processes. The country's political trajectory since independence has been marked by the systematic instrumentalization of security concerns to serve elite interests, creating a governance system where emergency measures have become normalized features of everyday rule. This study investigates how neo-patrimonial political structures shape securitization processes in the D.R.C., and conversely, how securitization practices reinforce and reproduce neo-patrimonial governance patterns. The analysis is grounded in securitization theory, notably developed by the Copenhagen School, which treats security as a speech act that constructs an issue as an existential threat demanding extraordinary measures beyond normal politics.² In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, securitization explains how violence, displacement, resource exploitation, and challenges to governance are framed as security problems that legitimize emergency interventions and external efforts.³

Methodological Framework

This research employs a qualitative case study approach focused on the Democratic Republic of the Congo as a critical case of neo-patrimonial securitization in post-colonial Africa. The study utilizes discourse analysis to examine how political elites construct and deploy security narratives, combined with process tracing to map the causal mechanisms linking neo-patrimonial governance structures to securitization practices.⁴ The temporal scope ranges from the Mobutu era (1965–1997) through the contemporary period to 2024, allowing for longitudinal analysis of continuity and change in governance patterns. The empirical material draws from multiple sources including academic literature, policy documents, international organization reports (U.N., African Union, International Crisis Group), and primary documents related to security sector governance in the D.R.C. The selection criteria prioritize materials that provide insight into: (1) elite discourse and threat construction, (2) institutional arrangements for security provision, (3) resource allocation patterns in security sectors, and (4) relationships between formal state structures and informal patronage networks. This methodological approach enables systematic examination of how securitization operates within neo-patrimonial contexts, contributing to both theoretical refinement and empirical understanding

2. B. Buzan, O. Wæver, J. de Wilde, *Security: A new framework for analysis*, Lynne Rienner Publishers 1998.

3. C. Kaunert, E. Ezeokafor, *Securitization Outside the...*, op. cit.; H. Derradj, A. Madouni, *The securitisation of development in Africa: causes, mechanism, and consequences*, "National Security and The Future", 2022, Vol. 23, No. 3, pp. 49–82, DOI: 10.37458/nstf.23.3.3.

4. D. Beach, R.B. Pedersen, *Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines*, 2nd ed., University of Michigan Press 2019.

of African security governance. The nexus between securitization and neo-patrimonial governance is central to understanding contemporary African politics: security framings can reinforce patronage by creating opportunities for actors to fuse state power with personal networks under the banner of emergency measures.⁵ Securitized discourses around minerals, displacement, and insurgent threats interact with clientelist practices, shaping how resources are allocated, who controls them, and how accountability is pursued or evaded within a dual (formal-bureaucratic and informal-patronage) state structure.⁶ This study builds on recent scholarship that has begun to theorize the relationship between securitization and neo-patrimonialism in African contexts,⁷ while extending the analysis to examine specific mechanisms through which these processes interact. By focusing on the D.R.C., this research illuminates patterns that may be applicable to other post-colonial states where formal institutions mask deeply personalized power structures.

Research Objectives

This study pursues three interconnected objectives that guide the analytical framework and empirical investigation: to analyze the mechanisms through which neo-patrimonial governance structures shape securitization processes in the D.R.C., examining how personalized power networks influence threat construction, security discourse, and the designation of referent objects requiring protection; to investigate how securitization practices reinforce and reproduce neo-patrimonial political arrangements, exploring the ways in which emergency measures, exceptional politics, and security sector governance serve to maintain patronage networks and elite power; and to assess the implications of neo-patrimonial securitization for state-building, conflict dynamics, and governance outcomes in post-colonial African contexts, contributing to broader theoretical understanding of security governance in hybrid political systems.

Research Questions

The study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How do neo-patrimonial governance structures influence the construction and deployment of security threats in the Democratic Republic of the Congo?

RQ2: Through what mechanisms does securitization serve to maintain and reproduce patronage networks and personalized rule in the D.R.C.?

RQ3: What are the distinctive characteristics of securitization processes in neo-patrimonial contexts compared to institutionalized democratic states?

RQ4: How do the interactions between formal security institutions and informal patronage networks shape security provision and conflict dynamics in the D.R.C.?

Working Hypotheses

Based on existing theoretical frameworks and preliminary empirical observation, this study tests the following working hypotheses:

H1: Securitization in neo-patrimonial contexts operates through personalized elite networks rather than institutionalized bureaucratic processes, resulting in selective and particularistic security provision that serves patronage interests.

H2: Political elites in the D.R.C. strategically instrumentalize security threats to justify extraordinary measures that bypass formal institutional constraints, enabling resource extraction and the consolidation of personal power.

H3: The co-optation of both state and non-state security actors into patronage networks creates hybrid security governance arrangements that perpetuate instability while maintaining elite control.

H4: Securitization discourses in the D.R.C. serve dual functions: legitimizing elite rule domestically while attracting international resources and support, thereby reinforcing neo-patrimonial structures through external engagement.

Theoretical Framework

Securitization Theory

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, securitization explains how violence, displacement, resource exploitation, and challenges to governance are framed as security problems that legitimize emergency interventions and external efforts.⁸ This framing is particularly salient in the eastern D.R.C., where displacement, armed conflict, and mineral extraction are embedded in security narratives that justify militarized and humanitarian responses.⁹ The nexus between securitization and neo-patrimonial governance is central to understanding contemporary African politics: security framings can reinforce patronage by creating opportunities for actors to fuse state power with personal networks under the banner of emergency measures.¹⁰ Securitized discourses around minerals, displacement, and insurgent threats interact with clientelist practices, shaping how resources are allocated, who controls them, and how accountability is pursued or evaded within a dual (formal-bureaucratic and informal-patronage) state structure.¹¹ With its vast mineral wealth and its role as a theater for regional power competition,¹² the relationship between neo-patrimonialism and securitization in the D.R.C. is particularly significant given the country's strategic importance. The country's governance structure exemplifies what scholars term a "shadow state," where informal networks of power operate alongside and often supersede formal institutions, creating unique conditions for how security threats are constructed, legitimized, and addressed.¹³ The D.R.C. reflects the deeply embedded nature of these neo-patrimonial securitization dynamics, which leads to the persistence of conflict and governance challenges in the country.

Neo-patrimonialism in Post-colonial Africa: Conceptual Foundations and Empirical Manifestations

Neo-patrimonialism represents a hybrid form of governance that combines elements of legal-rational bureaucratic authority with patrimonial rule based on personal relationships and clientelist networks.¹⁴ This concept emerged from efforts to understand why many post-colonial African states maintained formal institutional structures while operating through deeply personalized relationships and informal networks. Where authority derives entirely from personal loyalty to a ruler, neo-patrimonialism maintains the formal structures and procedures of modern bureaucratic states while operating through informal networks of patronage and personal loyalty.¹⁵ In the African con-

8. Ibidem.

9. S. Autesserre, *The frontlines of peace: An insider's guide to changing the world*, Oxford University Press 2021; J.K. Stearns, *The war that doesn't say its name: The unending conflict in Congo*, Princeton University Press 2021.

10. C. Kaunert, E. Ezeokafor, *Securitization Outside the..., op. cit.*

11. T. Kelsall, *Rethinking the relationship..., op. cit.*, pp. 76–87; P. Englebert, *State legitimacy and..., op. cit.*

12. C. Young, *The postcolonial state in Africa: Fifty years of independence, 1960–2010*, University of Wisconsin Press 2012; R. Lemarchand, *The dynamics of violence in Central Africa*, University of Pennsylvania Press 2009.

13. T. Turner, *The Congo wars: Conflict, myth and reality*, Zed Books 2007; M. Nest, F. Grignon, E.F. Kisangani, *The Democratic Republic of Congo: Economic dimensions of war and peace*, Lynne Rienner Publishers 2006.

14. D.C. Bach, M. Gazibo (eds.), *Neopatrimonialism in Africa and beyond*, Routledge 2011; M. Bratton, N. van de Walle, *Democratic experiments in Africa: Regime transitions in comparative perspective*, Cambridge University Press 1997.

15. G. Erdmann, U. Engel, *Neopatrimonialism Reconsidered: Critical Review and Elaboration of an Elusive Concept*, "Commonwealth & Comparative Poli-

text, these systems demonstrate remarkable adaptability, surviving regime changes, economic crises, and international reform efforts by adapting their strategies and reconfiguring their membership while preserving fundamental patterns of resource extraction and distribution. The D.R.C. exemplifies this pattern through its history of personalized rule, from Mobutu Sese Seko's kleptocratic regime to governance challenges under successive administrations up to and including the present day.¹⁶

Securitization Theory: From Copenhagen to Kinshasa

Traditional securitization theory, developed primarily from European experience, focuses on speech acts by authorized actors who successfully convince relevant audiences that certain issues constitute an existential threat requiring emergency measures.¹⁷ The Copenhagen School framework emphasizes that security is socially constructed through speech acts. In many African contexts, including the D.R.C., the boundaries between securitizing actors and audiences are often blurred, political authority is fragmented and contested, and democratic accountability mechanisms are weak or absent. These conditions create different dynamics for how securitization processes unfold and what effects they produce, emphasizing how neo-patrimonial governance structures shape the process of threat construction and emergency response.¹⁸ This instrumentalization of security concerns reflects the broader logic of neo-patrimonial governance, where public resources and authority are systematically deployed to serve private interests. This dynamic creates incentives for securitizing actors to maintain access to resources that can be distributed through patronage networks, which may in turn require continued involvement in extractive activities that generate the very insecurity they claim to be addressing.

The Securitization-neo-patrimonialism Nexus: Theoretical Innovation and Empirical Implications

The intersection of securitization processes and neo-patrimonial governance creates what Christian Kaunert and Edwin Ezeokafor¹⁹ term the "securitization-neo-patrimonialism nexus" – a dynamic relationship where security framings and patronage politics mutually reinforce each other. This nexus operates through several mechanisms that distinguish it from securitization processes in liberal democratic contexts and creates distinctive patterns of governance with profound implica-

tics", 2007, Vol. 45, Issue 1, pp. 95–119, DOI: 10.1080/14662040601135813; J.F. Médard, *The Underdeveloped State in Africa: Political Clientelism or Neo-Patrimonialism?*, in: *Private Patronage and Public Power: Political Clientelism and the Modern State*, ed. Ch. Clapham, Karthala 1982, pp. 162–191.

16. M.G. Schatzberg, *The dialectics of oppression in Zaire*, Indiana University Press 1988; C. Young, T. Turner, *The rise and decline of the Zairian state*, University of Wisconsin Press 1985.

17. B. Buzan, O. Wæver, J. de Wilde, *Security: A new...*, op. cit.; O. Wæver, *Securitization and Desecuritization*, in: *On Security*, ed. R.D. Lipschutz, Columbia University Press 1995, pp. 46–86.

18. C. Kaunert, E. Ezeokafor, *Securitization Outside the...*, op. cit.

19. Ibidem.

tions for understanding contemporary African politics. First, threat construction in neo-patrimonial systems is inherently personalized, with security challenges framed in terms of threats to particular leaders or patronage networks rather than abstract national interests.²⁰ Second, emergency responses frequently involve the selective provision of security, where protection becomes a resource distributed through patronage networks rather than a public good provided equally to all citizens.²¹ This selective approach creates incentives for communities and individuals to seek inclusion in patronage networks as a means of accessing protection, reinforcing the logic of neo-patrimonial governance while undermining alternative forms of political organization based on citizenship rights or democratic accountability. Third, the co-optation of security actors becomes a central strategy for maintaining neo-patrimonial rule, with both state and non-state armed groups incorporated into patronage networks through resource sharing and political accommodation.²² This co-optation serves multiple functions: it reduces potential security threats to ruling elites by converting potential opponents into clients.

The Micro-mechanisms of Neo-patrimonial Governance

Understanding how neo-patrimonialism operates in practice requires attention to the micro-mechanisms through which patronage networks function and reproduce themselves. In the D.R.C. context, several key mechanisms deserve particular attention for their role in sustaining neo-patrimonial governance and shaping securitization processes. Brokerage represents one of the most important micro-mechanisms of neo-patrimonial governance. Political and economic brokers, known locally as *incontournables* (unavoidables), serve as intermediaries between different levels of patronage networks and different spheres of activity.²³ Their success depends on their ability to maintain relationships across different networks and to adapt to changing political and security conditions. This adaptability makes them valuable allies for political elites seeking to maintain control over resource extraction but also creates potential sources of instability when broker networks are disrupted or reconfigured. Evidence suggests that the centrality of brokerage in neo-patrimonial systems also creates vulnerabilities, as the removal or co-optation of key brokers can significantly alter power relationships and resource flows. Regulatory layering represents another crucial micro-mechanism through which neo-patrimonial governance operates and reproduces itself. Neo-patrimonial systems typically create multiple overlapping layers of regulation and authority that can be selectively activated or ignored depending on political circumstances.²⁴ In the D.R.C., mining activi-

20. M.G. Schatzberg, *Political legitimacy in Middle Africa: Father, family, food*, Indiana University Press 2001; W. Reno, *Warlord politics and African states*, Lynne Rienner Publishers 1998.
21. A. Giustozzi, *Empires of mud: Wars and warlords in Afghanistan*, Columbia University Press 2009; V. Volkov, *Violent entrepreneurs: The use of force in the making of Russian capitalism*, Cornell University Press 2002.
22. D. Hoffman, *The war machines: Young men and violence in Sierra Leone and Liberia*, Duke University Press 2011; H. Vigh, *Navigating terrains of war: Youth and soldiering in Guinea-Bissau*, Berghahn Books 2006.
23. C. Vogel, J. Musamba, *Brokers of crisis: the everyday uncertainty of Eastern Congo's mineral négociants*, "The Journal of Modern African Studies", 2017, Vol. 55, No. 4, pp. 567–592; C. Vogel, *Contested statehood, security dilemmas and militia politics: the rise and transformation of Raïa Mutomboki in Eastern DRC*, in: *L'Afrique des Grands Lacs: Annuaire 2013–2014*, eds. F. Reyntjens, S. Vandeginste, M. Verpoorten, L'Harmattan 2014, pp. 299–324.
24. K. Hoffmann, K. Vlassenroot, G. Marchais, *Taxation, stateness and armed groups: Public authority and resource extraction in eastern Congo*, "Development and Change", 2016, Vol. 47, Issue 6, pp. 1434–1456; F. Reyntjens, *Political governance in*

ties may be subject to formal state regulations, customary law administered by traditional authorities, informal agreements with armed groups, and international certification requirements, among others. This flexibility serves the interests of powerful actors who can navigate multiple regulatory frameworks but creates uncertainty and vulnerability for weaker actors who lack the resources or connections to manage complex regulatory environments.

Colonial Legacies and the Foundations of Extractive Governance

The contemporary governance challenges in the D.R.C. cannot be understood without reference to the colonial legacy of the Belgian Congo, which established patterns of extractive governance and administrative weakness that continue to shape political dynamics.²⁵ The Belgian colonial system was characterized by extreme centralization, minimal investment in indigenous administrative capacity, and the subordination of all governance functions to resource extraction. Unlike other colonial systems, the Belgian system was designed purely as an extraction mechanism with minimal concern for long-term institutional development, leading to the emergence of informal networks of power and authority.²⁶ This colonial legacy created what scholars term “institutional voids” – spaces where formal governance structures were either absent or ineffective. These voids were not simply gaps to be filled by post-colonial development, but rather spaces where alternative forms of organization and authority could emerge. This orientation created incentives for political competition focused on gaining access to extraction opportunities rather than on building accountable governance or promoting broad-based development. These securitization moves serve multiple functions: justifying the deployment of military forces that can facilitate resource extraction by connected elites, legitimizing emergency spending that bypasses normal accountability mechanisms, and deflecting attention from governance failures by focusing on external threats.

post-genocide Rwanda, Cambridge University Press 2014.

25. J. Vansina, *Being colonized: The Kuba experience in rural Congo, 1880-1960*, University of Wisconsin Press 2010; A. Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghosts: A story of greed, terror, and heroism in colonial Africa*, Houghton Mifflin 1998.

26. C. Young, *Politics in the Congo: Decolonization and independence*, Princeton University Press 1965; R. Lemarchand, *Political awakening in the Belgian Congo*, University of California Press 1964.

Methodology

Research Methods

This study employs a multi-method qualitative research design, combining three complementary analytical approaches:

Case Study Analysis

The Democratic Republic of the Congo serves as a critical case for examining neo-patrimonial securitization in post-colonial Africa. The case study method enables in-depth investigation of complex causal processes and contextual factors²⁷ that shape the relationship between governance structures and security practices. The D.R.C. represents an extreme case of neo-patrimonial governance intersecting with chronic insecurity, making it particularly valuable for theory development and testing. The case study spans several time periods: The Mobutu Era (1965–1997): Establishment of archetypal neo-patrimonial rule; Transition and Conflict Period (1997–2006): State collapse and reconstitution; Post-Transition Period (2006–2024): Institutionalization of hybrid governance. This longitudinal approach enables analysis of continuity and change in securitization practices across different political configurations.

Process Tracing

Process tracing methodology is employed to map causal mechanisms linking neo-patrimonial governance structures to securitization outcomes.²⁸ This involves identifying key decision points and elite actions, tracing the flow of resources through formal and informal channels, documenting the formation and evolution of patronage networks, and analyzing the consequences of securitization measures for governance arrangements. Process tracing enables the study to move beyond correlation to establish causal relationships between governance structures and security practices.

The study draws on multiple categories of empirical material, selected according to specific criteria designed to ensure relevance, reliability, and analytical usefulness:

27. R.K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Designs and Methods*, 6th ed., SAGE Publications 2017.

28. D. Beach, R.B. Pedersen, *Process Tracing Methods...*, op. cit.

Empirical Material and Data Sources

Primary Sources

Official government documents, including security sector reform plans, national security strategies, and presidential speeches and declarations (2000–2024); legislative materials such as parliamentary debates on security matters and budget allocations for defense and security sectors; and international organization reports, including United Nations Group of Experts reports on the D.R.C., UN peacekeeping mission (MONUSCO) documents, and African Union assessments.

Secondary Sources

Academic literature, including peer-reviewed journal articles and monographs on D.R.C. politics, neo-patrimonialism, and securitization theory; policy and research institution reports, including International Crisis Group analyses, Rift Valley Institute studies, and Human Rights Watch documentation; and news media and investigative journalism, including coverage of security incidents, elite politics, and resource extraction, focusing on established international and regional outlets.

Selection Criteria Temporal Coverage: Materials spanning 1965–2024, with particular emphasis on the post-2000 period for which more comprehensive documentation is available.

Geographic Focus: National-level governance and security policies, with specific attention to the eastern D.R.C. provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri where securitization dynamics are most pronounced.

Thematic Relevance: Materials must address one or more of the following: (a) security threat construction and discourse, (b) patronage networks and elite politics, (c) security sector organization and resource allocation, (d) relationships between formal institutions and informal practices.

Source Credibility: Preference for materials from established academic publishers, recognized international organizations, and reputable research institutions with demonstrated expertise in D.R.C. affairs.

Language: Materials in English and French, reflecting the linguistic contexts of both academic scholarship and D.R.C. governance.

Analytical Framework

The analysis integrates securitization theory with neo-patrimonial governance frameworks to develop a comprehensive understanding of security politics in the D.R.C. The Copenhagen School's securitization theory provides the foundation for analyzing how issues become constructed as security threats through speech acts.²⁹ This framework is adapted to account for African political contexts, where securitization occurs through personalized elite networks rather than institutionalized bureaucratic processes.³⁰ Neo-patrimonial theory, drawing on Weber's concept of patrimonialism and its application to post-colonial African states,³¹ provides analytical tools for understanding how personalized rule coexists with formal-legal institutions. The integration of these frameworks enables examination of how securitization practices both reflect and reinforce neo-patrimonial governance arrangements.

Limitations and Scope Conditions

This study acknowledges several methodological limitations:

Data availability: Limited access to internal elite decision-making processes and informal patronage arrangements necessitates reliance on indirect evidence and expert assessments.

Generalizability: While the D.R.C. case offers valuable insights, findings may not be directly transferable to all neo-patrimonial contexts, particularly those with different colonial histories or resource endowments.

Temporal constraints: The rapidly evolving nature of D.R.C. politics means that recent developments may not yet be fully documented in scholarly literature.

29. B. Buzan, O. Wæver, J. de Wilde, *Security: A new...,* op. cit.

30. C. Kaunert, E. Ezeokafor, *Securitization Outside the...,* op. cit.

31. M. Bratton, N. van de Walle, *Democratic experiments in...,* op. cit.; J.F. Médard, *The Underdeveloped State...,* op. cit., pp. 162–191.

Language limitations: Exclusive focus on English and French sources may miss important materials in other languages widely spoken in the D.R.C. Despite these limitations, the study's multi-method approach and diverse source base enable a robust analysis of the relationship between neo-patrimonial governance and securitization in the D.R.C.

Analysis

The Mobutu Era: Institutionalizing Neo-patrimonialism

Mobutu Sese Seko's regime (1965–1997) represents the most systematic attempt to institutionalize neo-patrimonial governance in post-colonial Africa. Rather than simply capturing existing institutions, Mobutu deliberately dismantled formal bureaucratic capacity and created parallel networks of personal loyalty and resource distribution.³² The regime's survival strategy relied heavily on what can be understood as proto-securitization processes, with various internal and external threats used to justify emergency measures that concentrated power and resources in Mobutu's hands.³³ Mobutu could position himself as a crucial ally against communist influence in central Africa while using external threats to justify domestic repression and resource concentration. When international pressure for democratization increased in the 1990s, the regime responded by creating formal democratic institutions while ensuring that real power remained concentrated in informal networks. This adaptation strategy, sometimes termed "virtual democracy," allowed the regime to maintain international legitimacy while preserving essential features of neo-patrimonial rule. The Mobutu era also established patterns of relationships between state and non-state armed actors that continue to influence contemporary security governance. Rather than maintaining a monopoly on the legitimate use of force, the regime frequently relied on militia groups and private security forces to maintain control, particularly in peripheral areas. These arrangements created precedents for the incorporation of non-state armed actors into governance systems that continue to characterize contemporary security provision in the D.R.C. The economic policies of the Mobutu regime, particularly the nationalization of foreign-owned assets in the 1970s followed by their redistribution to regime allies, established patterns of economic management that prioritized political loyalty over technical competence or economic efficiency, patterns that have proven difficult to reverse in subsequent periods.

32. W.J. Leslie, *The World Bank and structural transformation in developing countries: The case of Zaire*, Lynne Rienner Publishers 1993; T.M. Callaghy, *The state as lame Leviathan: The patrimonial administrative state in Africa*, in: *The African state in transition*, ed. Z. Ergas, Palgrave Macmillan 1987, pp. 87–116.

33. G. Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila: A People's History*, Zed Books 2002; H.F. Weiss, *Political Protest in Congo: The Parti Solidaire Africain during the Independence Struggle*, Princeton University Press 1967.

Post-Mobutu Transitions: Adaptation and Continuity

The fall of Mobutu in 1997 and subsequent political transitions have failed to fundamentally alter the neo-patrimonial character of Congolese governance, despite formal democratization processes and international reform efforts.³⁴ Instead, new elites have adapted existing patronage networks to changing political circumstances while maintaining core patterns of personalized rule and resource extraction. This continuity demonstrates the resilience of neo-patrimonial systems and their capacity to survive dramatic political changes by reconfiguring their membership and strategies while preserving their fundamental characteristics. The Laurent-Désiré Kabila regime (1997–2001) initially promised radical transformation but quickly reverted to neo-patrimonial practices. Kabila's reliance on foreign military support, particularly from Rwanda and Uganda, created new opportunities for resource extraction and patronage distribution while maintaining the basic structure of personalized rule. Evidence suggests that the regime's inability to establish effective control over the entire territory led to the emergence of multiple competing authority structures, each of which developed its own patronage networks and resource extraction mechanisms. This fragmentation created opportunities for various actors to establish autonomous power bases but also made coordination and policy implementation extremely difficult.³⁵ The assassination of Laurent-Désiré Kabila and the succession of his son Joseph marked the beginning of a more developed neo-patrimonial system that combined formal democratic procedures with informal patronage networks. Under Joseph Kabila's presidency (2001–2019), the D.R.C. experienced what appeared to be significant institutional development, including constitutional reform, multiparty elections, and decentralization programs.³⁶ However, these formal changes masked the persistence and adaptation of neo-patrimonial practices, with new institutions serving primarily as venues for elite competition and resource distribution rather than effective governance, for example, creating new opportunities for patronage distribution at the provincial level while often weakening accountability mechanisms. Provincial authorities gained control over significant resources and regulatory powers, but these were often used to build local patronage networks rather than improve service delivery or promote development. The Kabila era also demonstrated how neo-patrimonial systems can adapt to changing international contexts, particularly the increased emphasis on good governance and anti-corruption measures by international donors. The regime became skilled at creating formal compliance with international standards while ensuring that informal networks continued to function effectively.

34. G. Prunier, *Africa's world war: Congo, the Rwandan genocide, and the making of a continental catastrophe*, Oxford University Press 2009; J.F. Clark (ed.), *The African stakes of the Congo War*, Palgrave Macmillan 2002.

35. L.E. Seay, *What's wrong with Dodd-Frank 1502? Conflict minerals, civilian livelihoods, and the unintended consequences of western advocacy*, Center for Global Development Working Paper, No. 284, 2012.

36. D.M. Tull, *Peacekeeping in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Waging peace and fighting war*, "International Peacekeeping", 2009, Vol. 16, Issue 2, pp. 215–230, DOI: [10.1080/13533310802685729](https://doi.org/10.1080/13533310802685729); K. Vlassenroot, T. Raeymaekers, *Conflict and social transformation in eastern DR Congo*, Academia Press 2004.

Contemporary Governance under Félix Tshisekedi: New Elites, Persistent Patterns

The election of Félix Tshisekedi in 2019 represented another potential turning point in Congolese politics, with promises of democratic renewal and institutional reform.³⁷ Tshisekedi's victory was particularly significant because it represented the first peaceful transfer of power between different political factions since independence. This suggested possible progress toward more institutionalized forms of political competition; however, early evidence suggested a continued reliance on neo-patrimonial governance patterns, albeit with different elite configurations and patronage networks,³⁸ particularly in the eastern provinces where armed groups, mineral extraction networks, and traditional authorities operate largely independent of central state control.

When Tshisekedi was elected president, Kabila's Common Front for Congo retained power in the National Assembly, the Senate, and most provincial governorships. Uncomfortable with this power-sharing arrangement, Tshisekedi broke free from this alliance in October 2020.³⁹ He appointed three new judges to the Constitutional Court and formed a new parliamentary majority by creating the Sacred Union, a new voting bloc in both houses. Furthermore, he moved to eliminate the last vestiges of Kabila's power at the provincial level by inciting provincial assemblies to revoke sitting governors who were not members of his new coalition.⁴⁰ These measures assured Tshisekedi's total control of the levers of power, establishing his own patronage network.

Elite Threat Construction: The Politics of Insecurity

Securitization in the D.R.C. is characterized by highly personalized threat construction processes, where political elites frame challenges in terms of threats to their personal authority and patronage networks rather than abstract national security concerns,⁴¹ with the distinction between private and public interests systematically blurred. A conflict between armed groups in the eastern provinces, for example, may be securitized by national political elites as a threat to territorial integrity, by provincial authorities as a threat to local stability, by international actors as a humanitarian crisis, and by local strongmen as an opportunity to expand their influence. Each of these securitization moves involves different threat narratives. The multiplicity of securitization processes creates opportunities for various actors to advance their interests while also creating potential for conflict and

37. *Report on the 2018 elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, The Carter Center 2019, <https://www.carter-center.org>, (access 05.11.2025).

38. G. Piccolino, *Peacebuilding and statebuilding in post-2011 Côte d'Ivoire: A victor's peace?*, "African Affairs", 2018, Vol. 117, Issue 468, pp. 485–508, DOI: [10.1093/afraf/ady020](https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/ady020).

39. M. Gavin, *Power-sharing Agreement Breaks Down in DRC*, Council on Foreign Relations 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/power-sharing-agreement-breaks-down-drc>, (access 05.11.2025).

40. *DR Congo's Tshisekedi In Full Control of New Government*, Voice of America 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/africa/dr-congos-tshisekedi-full-control-new-government/6204506.html>, (access 05.11.2025).

41. T. Raegmaekers, *Violent capitalism and hybrid identity in the eastern Congo: Power to the margins*, Cambridge University Press 2014; K. Vlassenroot, *South Kivu: Identity, territory, and power in the eastern Congo*, Rift Valley Institute Usalama Project 2013.

confusion when different securitization narratives contradict each other or propose incompatible responses. Political elites in the D.R.C. have consistently used securitization narratives to justify extraordinary measures that serve their political survival needs. These narratives typically focus on several recurring themes: external threats from neighboring countries, internal rebellion by armed groups, ethnic conflicts that threaten national unity, and economic challenges posed by corruption or resource theft by political opponents,⁴² allowing domestic elites to deflect attention from internal governance failures while justifying military expenditures and emergency measures.⁴³ External threat narratives often emphasize the role of neighboring countries in supporting armed groups or exploiting Congolese resources. These narratives draw on genuine grievances about external interference, particularly the involvement of Rwanda and Uganda in supporting various armed groups, but they are deployed selectively and strategically to serve domestic political purposes. The emphasis on external threats also allows domestic elites to position themselves as defenders of national sovereignty while obscuring their own involvement in cross-border networks of resource extraction and political collaboration.⁴⁴ Internal threat narratives typically focus on ethnic conflicts or armed group activities. The framing of internal conflicts in ethnic terms serves multiple functions: it deflects attention from the political and economic dimensions of conflicts, justifies interventions that may primarily serve elite interests, and creates opportunities for divide-and-rule strategies that prevent the emergence of broad-based opposition coalitions. The ethnicization of political conflicts can also create self-fulfilling prophecies, where the repeated invocation of ethnic divisions eventually contributes to their hardening and institutionalization.⁴⁵

Selective Security Provision: Protection as Patronage

One of the defining characteristics of securitization in neo-patrimonial contexts is the selective provision of security. In the D.R.C., this selectivity is evident in the geographic distribution of security forces, the allocation of protection resources, and the differential treatment of various armed groups. Government security forces are typically concentrated in areas of strategic importance to ruling elites – major cities, mining regions, and transportation corridors – while peripheral areas receive minimal protection.⁴⁶ This distribution pattern reflects the priorities of neo-patrimonial governance, where security provision serves to protect key resources and allies rather than ensure general public safety, as a military presence can be used to control access to mining sites, regulate trade routes, and intimidate potential competitors. The concentration of security forces in economically

42. G. Mathys, K. Büscher, *Urbanizing Kitchanga: spatial trajectories of the politics of refuge in North Kivu, Eastern Congo*, "Journal of Eastern African Studies", 2018, Vol. 12, Issue 2, pp. 232–253, DOI: [10.1080/17531055.2018.1452547](https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2018.1452547); J.K. Stearns, F. Borello, *Bad Karma: Accountability for Rwandan Crimes in the Congo*, in: *Remaking Rwanda: State Building and Human Rights After Mass Violence*, eds. L. Waldorf, S. Straus, University of Wisconsin Press 2011, pp. 152–169.

43. B. Büscher, M. Ramutsindela, *Green violence: Rhino poaching and the war to save Southern Africa's peace parks*, "African Affairs", 2016, Vol. 115, Issue 458, pp. 1–22, DOI: [10.1093/afraf/adv058](https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adv058).

44. G. Marchais, et al., *Social origins of militias: The extraordinary rise of "outraged citizens"*, NBER Working Paper No. 28714, 2021, DOI: [10.3386/w28714](https://doi.org/10.3386/w28714).

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46. P. Schouten, *Security in Action: How John Dewey Can Help Us Follow the Production of Security Assemblages*, in: *Reassembling International Theory: Assemblage Thinking and International Relations*, eds. M. Acuto, S. Curtis, Palgrave Macmillan 2014, pp. 83–90.

important areas also facilitates the extraction of resources by connected elites. The selective nature of security provision is also evident in the government's relationships with various armed groups operating in the eastern D.R.C. Groups that can be incorporated into patronage networks through resource sharing or political accommodation receive different treatment than those that pose direct challenges to elite interests.⁴⁷ This differential approach creates incentives for armed groups to seek accommodation with ruling elites rather than pursue genuine security sector reform or political transformation. The provision of security to civilian populations follows similar patterns. This selectivity creates dependencies that serve the interests of neo-patrimonial governance by ensuring that protected communities remain loyal to their protectors while vulnerable communities are reminded of their need for elite patronage. International actors have often inadvertently reinforced these patterns of selective security provision through their own intervention strategies. Humanitarian organizations, peacekeeping forces, and development agencies typically concentrate their activities in areas that are accessible and strategically important, which often coincide with areas that are already prioritized by domestic elites.⁴⁸ This convergence can reinforce existing patterns of inclusion and exclusion while legitimizing the selective provision of security by domestic actors. The result is a security environment where protection is contingent on political loyalty and economic value rather than citizenship or human rights. This contingency creates incentives for communities and individuals to seek inclusion in patronage networks as a means of accessing protection, reinforcing the logic of neo-patrimonial governance while undermining alternative forms of political organization based on citizenship rights or democratic accountability.

Co-optation of Security Actors: Building Hybrid Networks

The co-optation of security actors represents a central strategy for maintaining neo-patrimonial rule in the D.R.C., with both state and non-state armed groups incorporated into patronage networks through various mechanisms. This co-optation reduces potential security threats to ruling elites by converting potential opponents into clients. State security forces in the D.R.C. operate through complex networks of personal loyalty and resource sharing that often supersede formal command structures.⁴⁹ Military commanders frequently maintain independent resource bases through involvement in mining, trade, or taxation activities, creating incentives for loyalty to particular leaders rather than institutional hierarchies. These arrangements allow commanders to maintain their forces and reward their subordinates independently of official military budgets, which are often

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48. P. Albrecht, *Hybridization, intervention and authority: Security beyond conflict in Sierra Leone*, Routledge 2019.

49. F. de Boeck, *Garimpeiro worlds: Digging, dying and 'hunting' for diamonds in Angola*, "Review of African Political Economy", 2001, Vol. 28, Issue 90, pp. 549–562, DOI: [10.1080/03056240108704565](https://doi.org/10.1080/03056240108704565); P. le Billon, *The political ecology of war: Natural resources and armed conflicts*, "Political Geography", 2001, Vol. 20, Issue 5, pp. 561–584, DOI: [10.1016/S0962-6298\(01\)00015-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0962-6298(01)00015-4).

inadequate or unreliable. They also create incentives for commanders to prioritize economic activities over military duties and to resist reforms that might threaten their resource access. The result is a security sector that is fragmented, poorly disciplined, and often more concerned with economic extraction than with providing security to the population. Evidence suggests that the integration of non-state armed groups into state security forces has been a recurring feature of Congolese politics, with various programs designed to incorporate rebel fighters into the national army.⁵⁰ However, these integration processes have often been problematic, creating new sources of instability rather than resolving existing conflicts. The failure of integration programs reflects the underlying logic of neo-patrimonial governance. Successful integration requires not just the formal incorporation of fighters into military structures, but the reconfiguration of patronage networks and resource flows that sustain these groups. Non-state armed groups are incorporated into patronage networks through various mechanisms beyond formal integration programs, including informal agreements, resource-sharing arrangements, and selective cooperation in particular operations.⁵¹ The result is a complex web of relationships where the boundaries between state and non-state actors become blurred, making it difficult to establish clear lines of accountability or to implement coherent security policies.

Case Studies of Securitization Episodes

To understand how securitization processes operate in practice in the D.R.C., it is useful to examine specific episodes where security concerns were constructed and deployed to achieve particular political and economic objectives. The M23 insurgency (2012–2013) provides a clear example of how securitization processes can be manipulated by various actors to serve their interests.⁵² Evidence suggests that the rebellion was framed differently by different actors: the Congolese government portrayed it as external aggression sponsored by Rwanda, the rebels themselves claimed to be fighting against ethnic discrimination and poor governance, and international actors focused on the humanitarian consequences of the conflict. Each of these framings justified different types of response and created different opportunities for resource extraction and political maneuvering. The government's emphasis on external aggression justified military expenditures and emergency measures while deflecting attention from internal governance failures. The rebels' focus on ethnic grievances helped mobilize local support while obscuring their involvement in resource extraction and their connections to regional networks. International humanitarian framings justified increased aid flows and peacekeeping interventions while potentially legitimizing some of the very dynam-

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51. M.L. Ross, *What do we know about natural resources and civil war?*, "Journal of Peace Research", 2004, Vol. 41, Issue 3, pp. 337–356, DOI: 10.1177/0022343304043773; P. Collier, A. Hoeffer, *Greed and grievance in civil war*, "Oxford Economic Papers", 2004, Vol. 56, Issue 4, pp. 563–595.

52. J.K. Stearns, *The war that...*, op. cit.

ics they were intended to address. The conflict also demonstrated how securitization processes can become self-reinforcing, as each actor's securitization moves prompted responses from others that escalated the conflict rather than resolving it, which in turn created new opportunities for various actors to access resources and build patronage networks. The government's military response to the rebellion created a humanitarian crisis that justified international intervention. Another instructive case is the conflict in the Kasai region (2016–2017), which illustrates how local grievances can be securitized and escalated through the intervention of various actors with different interests.⁵³ What began as a dispute between a traditional authority and the central government over the appointment of a customary chief escalated into a broader conflict that resulted in thousands of deaths and massive displacement. The escalation occurred through a series of securitization moves by different actors, each of whom framed the conflict in ways that served their particular interests, justifying military intervention and emergency measures. The central government portrayed the conflict as a threat to territorial integrity and constitutional order. Local political entrepreneurs used ethnic and regional identities to mobilize support while positioning themselves as defenders of local interests against central government oppression. International actors focused on the humanitarian dimensions of the conflict, which justified increased aid flows and international attention but may have inadvertently created incentives for various actors to maintain or escalate the conflict to access these resources. The case demonstrates how securitization processes can transform local conflicts into broader crises that serve the interests of various actors while imposing enormous costs on affected populations, where economic and political interests are systematically intertwined.⁵⁴

The Mineral-security Nexus: Understanding Extractive Governance

The relationship between resource extraction and security governance in the D.R.C. reflects the broader dynamics of neo-patrimonial rule. The country's vast mineral wealth – including gold, diamonds, coltan, cobalt, and other strategic minerals – provides both opportunities and incentives for the instrumentalization of security concerns. Rather than viewing resource extraction and conflict as separate phenomena that happen to coincide, it is more accurate to understand them as mutually constitutive processes, where security governance serves extractive interests and resource extraction provides the means for maintaining particular forms of security governance. Armed groups, state security forces, and political elites have developed complex networks of resource extraction that operate under the guise of security provision.⁵⁵ These networks involve multiple actors across

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54. D. Keen, *Greed and grievance in civil war*, "International Affairs", 2012, Vol. 88, Issue 4, pp. 757–777, DOI: [10.1111/j.1468-2346.2012.01100.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2012.01100.x); C. Cramer, *Civil war is not a stupid thing: Accounting for violence in developing countries*, Hurst & Company 2006.

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different levels of governance. The term “conflict economy” captures the way that economic activities become organized around and dependent upon continued conflict, creating incentives for key actors to maintain rather than resolve instability. The securitization of resource-rich areas serves multiple functions within this political economy. It justifies the deployment of security forces that can facilitate extraction activities by providing protection for mining operations, controlling access to mining sites, and regulating the movement of minerals and equipment,⁵⁶ allowing extraction activities to proceed without the environmental assessments, community consultations, or revenue-sharing arrangements that might otherwise be required. It legitimizes emergency measures that suspend normal regulatory oversight and provides narratives that deflect international criticism by framing extraction activities as necessary for maintaining security rather than as sources of elite enrichment.⁵⁷ Understanding this dynamic requires moving beyond conventional analyses that treat resource extraction and conflict as separate phenomena that can be addressed through technical solutions. It requires recognizing that the organization of resource extraction around security concerns serves particular political functions that may be more important to key actors than the efficient or sustainable extraction of resources. Artisanal mining sites are often controlled by complex networks that include traditional authorities, armed groups, state officials, and international buyers. These networks provide access to mining sites, protection from various forms of predation, and connections to markets, but they also create dependencies and vulnerabilities that limit miners’ autonomy and bargaining power. The deployment of military forces to mining areas, the implementation of certification schemes designed to prevent “conflict minerals” from entering international markets, and the establishment of trading centers intended to formalize mineral trade⁵⁸ end up serving the same purpose. While these measures are often justified in terms of improving security and governance, they frequently serve to strengthen existing power relationships rather than transform them. Military deployments to mining areas, for example, may reduce some forms of violence but often create new opportunities for rent extraction by military commanders and their allies. Certification schemes may create formal compliance with international standards while leaving informal extraction networks largely intact, which do not necessarily improve conditions for miners or increase transparency in mineral markets. Trading centers may also concentrate mineral trade in locations that are easier for various authorities to tax and control. Despite the challenges posed by neo-patrimonial securitization, many communities in the D.R.C. have developed remarkable resilience and adaptive capacity.⁵⁹ Understanding these sources of resilience is important for developing policies that can build on existing strengths while addressing structural constraints that limit community autonomy and well-being. Chiefs, elders, and religious leaders often play crucial roles in maintaining social cohesion and

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57. J.M. Weinstein, *Inside rebellion: The politics of insurgent violence*, Cambridge University Press 2007; M. Humphreys, J.M. Weinstein, *Handling and manhandling civilians in civil war*, “American Political Science Review”, 2006, Vol. 100, Issue 3, pp. 429–447, DOI: [10.1017/S0003055406062289](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055406062289).

58. C. Vogel, *Contested statehood, security*..., op. cit., pp. 299–324.

59. A. Hills, *Somalia works: Police development as state-building*, “African Affairs”, 2014, Vol. 113, No. 450, pp. 88–107; B. Baker, *Security in post-conflict Africa: The role of nonstate policing*, CRC Press 2010.

resolving conflicts at the local level.⁶⁰ However, their effectiveness may be constrained by their need to navigate relationships with state authorities, armed groups, and international actors that have different interests and expectations. The result is that traditional authorities may find themselves in complex positions where they must balance competing demands while trying to serve their communities' interests. Community-based organizations, including churches, women's groups, and youth associations, provide important sources of social support and collective action,⁶¹ including conflict resolution, economic development, and service provision. These organizations often develop innovative strategies for addressing local challenges. The development of local economic networks and informal institutions demonstrates communities' capacity to create alternative forms of organization that can provide livelihoods and social support. Religious institutions play particularly important roles in many communities, providing not only spiritual guidance but also social services, conflict resolution mechanisms, and alternative sources of authority.⁶² However, religious institutions may also be subject to co-optation by political elites or may themselves become sources of division when they are associated with particular ethnic or political groups. Understanding the complex roles that religious institutions play in local governance is important for developing strategies that can support their positive contributions while addressing potential sources of conflict. The environmental consequences of resource extraction in the D.R.C. represent another dimension of the securitization-neo-patrimonialism nexus that is often overlooked in political analyses. Mineral deposits and water resources are subject to various forms of exploitation that have significant environmental and social consequences, but these consequences are rarely framed in security terms or addressed through governance mechanisms. Deforestation, soil degradation, water pollution, and biodiversity loss all have significant impacts on local communities and may contribute to conflicts over resources and livelihoods. However, these environmental challenges are often treated as technical problems rather than political issues, and they are rarely integrated into broader analyses of conflict and governance. The securitization of environmental issues, when it occurs, often serves elite interests rather than addressing genuine environmental challenges, to legitimize the involvement of international actors in resource management, or to deflect attention from more fundamental questions about resource ownership and control.

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61. U. Schneckener, *Spoilers or governance actors? Engaging armed non-state groups in areas of limited statehood*, SFB-Governance Working Paper Series, No. 21, Research Center (SFB) 700, 2009; R. Abrahamsen, M.C. Williams, *Securing the city: Private security companies and non-state authority in global governance*, "International Relations", 2007, Vol. 21, Issue 2, pp. 237–253, DOI: [10.1177/0047117807077006](https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117807077006).

62. M.E. De'Nyok, *The Impacts of State Instability on Services Delivery in Post-Conflict South Sudan*, "Open Journal of Political Science", 2025, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 146–187, DOI: [10.4236/ojps.2025.151011](https://doi.org/10.4236/ojps.2025.151011); M. Iñiguez de Heredia, *Everyday resistance, peacebuilding and state-making: Insights from 'Africa's World War'*, Manchester University Press 2017.

The Persistence of Conflict: Structural and Proximate Causes

The intersection of neo-patrimonialism and securitization helps explain the persistence of conflict and instability in the D.R.C. despite numerous peace agreements. The structural characteristics of neo-patrimonial governance create incentives for continued conflict that are difficult to address through conventional peacebuilding approaches. Understanding these incentives is crucial for developing more effective strategies for conflict resolution and prevention. Neo-patrimonial elites benefit from controlled levels of instability that justify emergency measures, enable resource extraction, and maintain patronage networks,⁶³ increasing demands for accountability and institutional reform, and potentially empowering alternative sources of authority. The securitization processes that emerge from neo-patrimonial governance also contribute to conflict persistence by creating cycles of threat construction and emergency response that become self-reinforcing.⁶⁴ Each security crisis provides opportunities for elite enrichment and network consolidation, creating incentives for the creation or manipulation of future crises with periodic escalations that serve particular political and economic functions. The result is a pattern where conflicts may be managed rather than resolved. However, the persistence of conflict does not mean that change is impossible or that all actors benefit from continued instability.⁶⁵ Many actors, including ordinary citizens, some business interests, and even some political elites, may prefer greater stability and predictability. Understanding the conditions under which these preferences can be mobilized and organized is crucial for identifying opportunities for positive change. The role of external actors in either reinforcing or challenging these dynamics is also important. More carefully designed interventions that address underlying political and economic structures may create opportunities for positive transformation.

Discussion

This study has examined the intricate relationship between neo-patrimonial governance and securitization processes in the Democratic Republic of Congo, demonstrating how these phenomena mutually constitute and reinforce one another in ways that profoundly shape security governance, state-building, and conflict dynamics. The analysis provides clear answers to the research questions posed in the introduction while contributing to the broader theoretical understanding of security politics in post-colonial African contexts.

Addressing the Research Questions

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RQ1: How do neo-patrimonial governance structures influence the construction and deployment of security threats in the Democratic Republic of Congo?

The evidence demonstrates that neo-patrimonial governance structures fundamentally shape securitization processes through three primary mechanisms. First, threat construction occurs through personalized elite networks rather than institutionalized bureaucratic procedures, resulting in security discourses that reflect patronage interests rather than objective threat assessments. Political elites selectively frame certain issues – particularly those affecting their power base or access to resources – as existential threats while downplaying or ignoring other security challenges. Second, the deployment of security responses follows clientelist logic, with protection and security resources allocated based on loyalty to patron-client networks rather than universal citizenship rights or strategic security priorities. Third, the personalization of security governance enables elites to maintain ambiguity about threat sources and security solutions, creating space for manipulation and instrumentalization that serves their political and economic interests.

RQ2: Through what mechanisms does securitization serve to maintain and reproduce patronage networks and personalized rule in the D.R.C.?

Securitization reinforces neo-patrimonial governance through multiple interconnected mechanisms. The declaration of security emergencies justifies extraordinary measures that bypass formal institutional constraints, enabling elites to concentrate power and evade accountability. Security sector resources – including military budgets, peacekeeping revenues, and international security assistance – become sources of patronage that elites distribute through informal networks to maintain loyalty and political support. The co-optation of both state security forces and non-state armed groups into patronage structures creates hybrid security governance arrangements in which formal and informal authority overlap, with security actors owing primary allegiance to individual patrons rather than state institutions. Additionally, the perpetuation of controlled insecurity serves elite interests by justifying continued emergency rule, attracting international resources, and creating opportunities for resource extraction in conflict-affected regions.

RQ3: What are the distinctive characteristics of securitization processes in neo-patrimonial contexts compared to institutionalized democratic states?

The analysis reveals fundamental differences between securitization in neo-patrimonial and democratic contexts. In the D.R.C., securitization operates through narrow circles of elite actors rather than broad-based political debate and institutional deliberation. The audience for securitizing speech acts consists primarily of patron-client networks and international actors rather than domestic publics with meaningful political agency. Emergency measures become normalized and permanent rather than temporary and exceptional, transforming securitization from a crisis response mechanism into a routine governance strategy. Security provision is particularistic and selective rather than universal, with protection allocated based on political loyalty rather than citizenship rights. Finally, the relationship between securitizing discourse and material security provision is often inverted, with security rhetoric serving to legitimate insecurity and resource extraction rather than genuinely addressing threats to populations.

RQ4: How do the interactions between formal security institutions and informal patronage networks shape security provision and conflict dynamics in the D.R.C.?

The intersection of formal institutions and informal networks creates distinctive patterns of security governance and conflict. Formal security institutions – military, police, and intelligence services – exist as legal-bureaucratic structures but operate according to neo-patrimonial logic, with official hierarchies overlaid by patronage relationships that determine actual command and control. This duality enables elites to present themselves as legitimate state authorities to international audiences while governing through personalized networks domestically. The co-optation of non-state armed groups through integration processes that preserve their autonomous power bases creates hybrid security governance, where state and non-state actors collaborate in both providing and undermining security. These arrangements perpetuate conflict by creating incentives for armed actors to maintain controlled instability that justifies their existence and resource access while preventing the consolidation of effective state security institutions that might challenge elite interests.

Testing the Hypotheses

The empirical analysis provides strong support for the working hypotheses formulated in the methodology section:

H1 is confirmed: Securitization in the D.R.C. operates through personalized elite networks, with security provision allocated according to patronage logic rather than universal principles or institutionalized procedures.

H2 is confirmed: Political elites systematically instrumentalize security threats to justify extraordinary measures that bypass institutional constraints, enabling resource extraction and power consolidation.

H3 is confirmed: The co-optation of state and non-state security actors into patronage networks creates hybrid governance arrangements that perpetuate instability while maintaining elite control.

H4 is confirmed: Securitization discourses serve dual functions, legitimizing elite rule domestically while attracting international resources, thereby reinforcing neo-patrimonial structures through external engagement.

Theoretical and Empirical Contributions

This study makes several contributions to scholarship on securitization, neo-patrimonialism, and African security governance. Theoretically, it demonstrates that securitization theory requires adaptation when applied to neo-patrimonial contexts, as the Copenhagen School framework's assumptions about institutionalized politics, public deliberation, and temporary emergency measures do not hold in personalized governance systems. The analysis develops a framework for understanding "neo-patrimonial securitization" as a distinctive mode of security governance characterized by personalized threat construction, clientelist security provision, and the instrumentalization of emergency measures for patronage maintenance. Empirically, the study provides detailed analysis of how securitization operates in the D.R.C. across multiple domains – from conflict minerals and armed group management to international peacekeeping and humanitarian intervention. It reveals the sophisticated political logic underlying apparently dysfunctional governance arrangements, showing how elite strategies that appear irrational from institutional perspectives make sense within neo-

patrimonial rationality. The analysis also illuminates the unintended consequences of international interventions that fail to account for neo-patrimonial dynamics, often inadvertently reinforcing the very governance patterns they seek to transform.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings have significant implications for international engagement with the D.R.C. and similar contexts. Security sector reform initiatives that focus exclusively on formal institutional capacity-building without addressing underlying patronage structures are unlikely to achieve sustainable results. International security assistance and peacekeeping resources may inadvertently strengthen neo-patrimonial governance by providing new sources of patronage for elite networks. Conflict resolution efforts that treat armed groups as security threats to be eliminated rather than as products of governance systems may perpetuate cycles of violence and instability. More promising approaches would recognize neo-patrimonial realities while working to gradually shift incentive structures toward more inclusive and accountable governance. This includes supporting transparency mechanisms that make patronage relationships visible and subject to scrutiny; strengthening horizontal accountability institutions that can constrain executive power; promoting inclusive political settlements that reduce winner-take-all dynamics; and conditioning international support on measurable progress toward depersonalizing security governance.

Future Research Directions

This study opens several avenues for future research. Comparative analysis examining neo-patrimonial securitization across different African contexts would help identify scope conditions and variations in how these processes operate. Longitudinal studies tracking changes in securitization practices over time could illuminate possibilities for transformation and the conditions under which neo-patrimonial governance patterns might be disrupted. Research examining the micro-level experiences of populations subject to neo-patrimonial securitization would complement this elite-focused analysis by revealing how ordinary citizens navigate and resist these governance arrangements. Additionally, further theoretical work is needed to develop more sophisticated frameworks for analyzing security governance in hybrid political systems that combine formal institutions with

informal networks. The relationship between neo-patrimonialism and other governance patterns – including legal-rational bureaucracy, traditional authority, and democratic accountability – requires more nuanced conceptualization than current frameworks provide.

Conclusion

The Democratic Republic of Congo's experience with neo-patrimonial securitization reveals fundamental tensions in post-colonial state-building. The coexistence of formal sovereignty with deeply personalized rule, international recognition with chronic instability, and security institutions with endemic insecurity reflects not simply state failure but a distinctive mode of governance with its own logic and reproduction mechanisms. Understanding this reality is essential for both scholarly analysis and practical engagement with the D.R.C. and similar contexts. The persistence of neo-patrimonial securitization despite decades of international intervention and reform efforts suggests that transformation requires more than technical capacity-building or institutional design. It demands fundamental shifts in political incentive structures, power relations, and the social contracts between rulers and the ruled. While such transformation is difficult and long-term, recognizing the sophisticated political logic underlying current arrangements is a necessary first step toward imagining and pursuing alternative governance possibilities. Ultimately, the D.R.C. case demonstrates that security governance cannot be separated from broader questions of political order, state formation, and the legacies of colonialism and Cold War intervention. Addressing the country's security challenges requires grappling with these deeper structural issues rather than treating symptoms while ignoring underlying causes. This study contributes to that understanding by illuminating how neo-patrimonial governance and securitization processes interact to shape political outcomes in one of Africa's most complex and consequential states.

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