



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Sit-Tight Governance and the Question of Democratic Sustainability in Africa

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ABSTRACT

Democracy is regarded as the best form of government for promoting development, but African leaders have distorted its implementation. This paper examines the trend of sit-tight government in Africa against this backdrop. The paper investigates the trend of post-independence African political leaders. African post-independence politics has been dominated by sit-tight leaders who came to power through election or coup d'état. The paper also investigates the mechanisms used by African sit-tight leaders to extend their office tenure. Coups appear to be the most common method of consolidating power. An attempted coup has occurred in 46 of 54 African countries. African has the most attempted and successful coups, with 214 attempted and 106 successful. Other methods they employ include constitutional suspension and amendment; godfathers also play an important role in the politics of some African countries. The trend of sit-tight governments can be reversed if international organizations such as the AU, ECOWAS, and the UN sanction African dictators and through revival of democratic consciousness among the citizenry.

INTRODUCTION

Most African countries transitioned from military rule and a single party system to pluralist politics in the early 1990s, resulting in the regularization of the multiparty system. The multiparty system enabled African countries to hold elections to choose presidents, prime ministers, and other political leaders. As the democratization process swept through most African countries in the 1980s and early 1990s, Africa embraced the democracy brought about by the multiparty system. Opposition forces were legalized, independent courts, free media, and civic associations were gradually allowed to emerge, and multiparty legislatures were formed. Despite the fact that democracy and multiparty systems have grown in popularity in Africa, the extent to which democracy is effective is being questioned, as many African leaders fail to adhere to the principle of democracy (Abiodun *et. al.*, 2018).

However, the over-stay of African leaders in power has not gone unnoticed, and the result has been conflict. African countries are plagued by so much conflict that they account for more than 70% of United Nations peacekeeping operations (Severus, 2019). African governments use various methods to extend their tenure in office, one of which is suppressing their opposition (Daudu, Osimen & Shuaibu, 2023). An example can be seen in the 2021 presidential election of Uganda, following the controversial election that took place on the 14th of January, 2021, which the US State Department qualified as "fundamentally flawed," Bobi Wine, the strongest opposition leader, was arrested during a peaceful protest against incumbent president Yoweri Museveni, who has spent more than 20 years in office (Chukwudi, Gberville, Abasilim & Imhonopi, 2019). Imposing term limits on political offices was first seen in ancient Rome, and this was done to check autocracy. Klaas (2015) made us

hold the notion that measures were taken in Rome and Athens following the events of tyranny that occurred during the reign of Peisistratos of Athens between the periods of 546 BC to 510 BC, during which many Athenians were forced into exile. Following Peisistratos' reign, an office limit was established to curb tyranny, and thus created the premise or origin of democracy. Most countries have made it a tradition to include term limits in their constitutions (Odoziobodo, 2019). Following the general democratization process in the last decade of the twentieth century, there is a lot of ambiguity and contradiction beneath the democratization process. It is debatable whether Africa's average level of democracy has improved significantly. Elections became more popular in the early 1990s, and more candidates ran for office. While pluralist politics became the norm following the aforementioned period, only a few countries met the internationally recognized standards of democratic rule.

The study's objectives are to examine how long African presidents have stayed in power, to examine the methods African leaders use to overstay their tenure in office despite constitutional provisions, the implications of tenure elongation are stated in the study, and recommendations on how to remedy tenure elongation are proffered in the study.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

The term "sit-tightism," like many others, has no universally accepted definition. Different scholars have different perspectives and definitions of the term "sit-tightism." Sit-tightism is defined as the wilful, deliberate, or suspension of a constitution or set of rules and regulations by an individual in order to remain in power for an extended period of time outside of a specific tenure of office as president or head of state of a country. Uharas' (2013) definition of sit-tightism is appropriate for the study. He defined sit-tightism as a government's deliberate refusal to relinquish political power or an incumbent government's unwillingness to hand over power. However sit-tightism in this study is a practice whereby a political leader is wilful to relinquish power and overstay their tenure in office which is against constitutional provisions by using some deliberate forceful measures such as constitutional coup, oppression and suppression of opposition and so many other methods in a situation where there is a stated constitutional term limits.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical study for the framework is based on power theory, also known as political realism. The theory of power is a theory in international relations, but it can be applied in a variety of fields and disciplines. Political realism depicts man as an egocentric being who distrusts others and sees them as a threat. Man sees the world as a wicked place where he must not collaborate with others. He must use every available means to consolidate as much power as possible; power is required to consolidate and expand power. In a community or society, power is the only agency a man has to get what he wants.

Theories of power trace their roots back to contemporary theorist of political realism Hans Morgenthau (1904-80) in the 15th century. He propounded a twin theory of power and greed which insight was gotten from the works of Machiavelli and Clausewitz who were early political realism theorists. The twin theory of power and greed postulated that international politics like any other politics is a struggle for power and man must do all in his might to consolidate, retain and sustain power, and power must not be dropped at any time or for whatsoever reason because power is always needed (Roskin, 1994).

Greene (1998) admonished that for power to be consolidated, man must have no enemies, and in situations where there are no enemies, man must create one for himself. He admonished that man's enemies should be crushed totally to prevent them from seeking revenge. Thus, acquiring the monopoly of economic and military power within a specific society is the essence of state power. Conceiving politics entails a valorisation of power and acceptance of the belief that might makes the realism perspective a war-prone way of thinking about politics (Asobie, 2007). It is the power-seeking and greedy mind-set of African leaders, who want to preserve a sit-tight attitude and assure political term elongation that generates political instability and violent wars in Africa. This is obvious in various African countries, including Zimbabwe, Gambia, Sudan, and Congo.

The theory of power is fitted for the study because it is about consolidation and acquisition of power beyond tenure limit. In the case of African leaders, they consolidate power by elongating their tenure

and they sustain power by controlling state institutions that are responsible for regulating the state such as electoral commission and financial crimes commission. African leaders want to cling to power knowing that other people always want to be in power, this makes them to be an ideal realist as postulated by the theory. The desire to hold on to power and the greedy nature of African leaders is why Africa records a high rate of violence and instability (Abiodun, et al 2018).

Political leaders in post-independence Africa

Sit-tightism was a very common occurrence in African countries after the independence of most African countries, the rate of sit-tightism in government reduced after a democratization wave in the early 90s in Africa. Nevertheless, sit-tightism is still very rampant in African till date despite the democratization process. The extent to which the democratization process has affected sit-tightism in Africa is discussed in the study.

More than 30 African countries have had direct or indirect presidential elections in the last decade to replace their leader. Fifty-four leaders have relinquished power; 9 leaders died in office, 15 relinquished power through coups or uprisings, and 15 have remained in power throughout the last ten years. Leaders who were able to keep power after independence became enormously wealthy and used power more coercively. These leaders utilized their control of state resources to develop extensive networks of clientele across ethnic lines. Robert Mugabe has ruled Zimbabwe for the past 26 years (Abiodun, et al. 2018).

Paul Biya of Cameroon for almost 24 years and Libya's Muammar Al-Qaddafi has also been ruling for decades. Egypt's Hosni Mubarak is ruling for almost 26 years, Burkina Faso's Blaise Compaore won a third successive five-year term in 2005 after 18 years as president and Uganda's Yoweri Museveni has been in power for 21 years (Jo-Ansie, 2007).

In 2005, Omar Bongo of Gabon won a next seven year term. Bongo, in power since 1967, is now Africa's longest serving head of state. In February 2005, Africa's longest serving leader, Gnassingbé Eyadéma, of Togo died, after being in power since 1967, Despite numerous assassination attempts and coup attempts, his soldiers honored him by staging a coup within hours of his death to install his son, Faure Gnassingbé, in power. Togo's government welcomed the move. Olusegun Obasanjo lost his quest to change the constitution to allow him to run for a third term in 2006. In the run-up to the proposed amendment's vote in the Nigerian National Assembly, officials were accused of using coercion and offering bribes to keep Obasanjo in office for a third term. Bakili Muluzi attempted constitutional reforms in Malawi to give him a third term in office. Muluzi's attempts backfired but he managed to have Bingu wa Mutharika ascend to power.

After a fall out with Muluzi and the party that brought him power, Mutharika formed his own political party. In Uganda, Yoweri Museveni was successful in his attempt to stay in power for a third five-year term (Jo-Ansie, 2007). In Southern Africa tiny Eswatini, formerly known as Swaziland, King Mswatin III is Africa's last absolute monarch. He ascended the throne in 1986. Ethiopia's late emperor Haile Selassie holds the record for the longest time in office. He spent 44 years in power and was toppled in 1974. Chad president died in office after at 68 after he was just re-elected for his term. African current longest serving leader Teodoro's Obiang Nguema of Equatorial Guinea still in power after 42 years, he was re-elected in 2016. Cameroonian President Paul Biya has been in office for over 39 years, he won his seventh election in 2018. Congo president Dennis Sassou Nguesso has been in power for over 36 and was re-elected for the fourth time on March 21, 2021. Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni has been in office since 1986 and was re-elected in January, 2021 in a very controversial with his main rival Bobi Wine claiming the election was rigged (Abiodun. et al, 2018).

Table 1: Longest Serving African leaders in power for 15 years or more

S/N	Name of President	Country	Years in Power	Duration of stay in power
1	Teodoro Nguma Mbasogo	Equatorial Guinea	43 years	Since 1979
2	Paul Biya	Cameroon	40 years	Since 1982
3	Yoweri Museveni	Uganda	36 years	Since 1986
4	Mswati III	Swaziland	36 years	Since 1986

5.	Denis Sassou Nguesso	Republic of Congo	37 years	1979 – 1992, 1997 – present
6.	Hastings Kamuzu Banda	Malawi	30 years	1964 - 1994
7.	Issias Afewerki	Eritrea	29 years	Since 1993
8.	Ismail Omar Guelleh	Djibouti	23 years	Since 1999
9.	Mohammed VI	Morocco	23 years	Since 1999
10.	Paul Kugame	Rwanda	22 years	Since 2000
11.	Faure Gnassingbe	Togo	17 years	Since 2005

Source: Author's Compilation, 2022.

Table 2: Former African Leaders that Spent 15 Years and Above in Power.

S/N	Name of President	Country	Years in Power	Duration of stay in power
1.	Muammer Gaddafi	Libya	42	1969-2011
2.	Jose Don Santos	Angola	37	1979 – 2017
3.	Gnassingbe Eyadema	Togo	37	1967 – 2005
4.	Idriss Deby	Chad	31	1990 – 2021
5.	Hastings Kamuzu Banda	Malawi	30	1964 - 1994
6.	Robert Mugabe	Zimbabwe	30	1987 – 2017
7.	Hosni Mubarak	Egypt	30	1981 – 2011
8.	Omar bashir	Sudan	30	1989 – 2019
9.	Blaise Campaore	Burkina Faso	27	1987 – 2014
10.	Ben Ali	Tunisia	24	1987 – 2011
11.	Yahya Jammeh	Gambia	22	1996 – 2017
12.	Leopold Sedar Senghor	Senegal	20	1960 -1980
13.	Absdelaziz Bouteflika	Algeria	20	1999 – 2019
14.	Abdou Diouf	Senegal	19	1981 – 2000
15.	Joseph Kabila	DR Congo	18	2001 – 2019
16.	Pierre Nkurunziza	Burundi	15	2005 – 2020

Source: Author's Compilation, 2022.

Mechanisms for Achieving Sit-Tightism in Africa

African government employment several ways to extent their tenure and consolidate power. They do this for their selfish interest and the detriment of their entire nation. The methods are discussed below.

Coup

Out of 54 countries in Africa, 45 countries have experienced at least a coup between the periods of 1950 to 2021, narrowing down to the number to countries who have recorded successful coups, 36 coups have resulted to successful power takeover. According to Powell and Thyne (2011), the why African countries have recorded several coup attempts more than other regions is because they have many conditions normally associated with coups. One of the conditions is terrorism and insurgencies; in situations where there are campaigns against terrorism and insurgencies in a country, incumbent leaders lose credibility and lack legitimacy in the eyes of their citizens and armed forces, and such country is predisposed to coup. Another condition associated with coup is low income. African countries with low income are also disproportionately more likely to see coups. Recently, coup has been increasingly limited to African countries with the lowest income in the world and recent wave of coups. Countries such as Mali, Chad, and Burkina Faso have a GDP less than \$20million which indicates a great disparity when compared with other African countries like Nigeria which has a GDP of over \$423 billion and South Africa with a GDP of over \$301billion.

Table 3: Total numbers of coups across all continents

Regions	Coup Attempts	Failed
Africa	214	108
Latin America	146	76

East Asia	49	22
Middle East	44	23
Europe	17	9
South Asia	16	6
Global	486	244

Source: Powell and Thyne; VOA research; 1950 – Jan 25, 2022.

Coup has been gradually fading away from Africa as its occurrence has been at the barest minimum. However, countries such as Sudan, Burkina Faso, Mali and Chad still experience factors that lead to coup.

Table 4: Coup per country in Africa since 1950

S/N	Countries	Successful coups	Total attempts
1	Sudan	6	17
2	Burundi	5	11
3	Ghana	5	10
4	Sierra Leone	5	10
5	Burkina Faso	8	9
6	Comoros	4	9
7	Benin	6	8
8	Nigeria	6	8
9	Mali	5	8
10	Guinea-Bissau	4	8
11	Togo	3	7
12	Rep of Congo	2	7
13	Niger	4	7
14	Chad	2	7
15	Mauritania	5	7
16	Guinea	3	6
17	Ethiopia	2	5
18	CAR	3	5
19	Uganda	3	5
20	Egypt	4	4
21	DRC	2	4
22	Algeria	2	4
23	Madagascar	1	4
24	Liberia	1	4
25	Lesotho	3	4
26	Ivory Coast	1	4
27	Somalia	1	3
28	Libya	1	3
29	Zambia	0	3
30	The Gambia	1	3
31	Gabon	0	2
32	Eq. Guinea	1	2
33	Morocco	0	2
35	Rwanda	2	2
36	São Tomé	1	2
37	Senegal	0	1
38	Mozambique	0	1
39	Angola	0	1
40	Seychelles	1	1
41	Kenya	0	1
42	Eswatini	1	1
43	Cameroon	0	1
44	Tunisia	1	1

45	Djibouti	0	1
46	Zimbabwe	1	1

Source: Powell and Thyne; VOA research; 1950 – Jan 25, 2022

Suspension of Constitutional Provisions

Suspension of a constitutional provision is a situation whereby someone or a group takes actions that are prohibited by the state constitution or result in the repeal of state laws. In the context of this study, the practice of incumbent leaders suspending constitutional provisions has been prevalent among African leaders, they do this in order to elongate their office tenure and amass wealth illicitly (Adibe, 2016). This is evident in election rigging, control of judicial bodies, control of an electoral commission, and other important state institutions. Suspension of a constitutional provision is a common occurrence in military regimes; however, many democratic states are still in the practice of suspension of constitutional provisions. This can be seen in the case of Gambia, when their president Yahya Jammeh refused to step down after losing the presidential election in 2016. This could have resulted into a bloody civil war before ECOWAS intervened and made him hand over power to the rightful winner Adama Barrow (Odoziobodo, 2019)

Constitutional amendment

Constitutional amendment is different from suspending a constitutional provision in that it involves changing the law. African presidents have a reputation for being reluctant to step down. African leaders amend the constitution to further their own narrow interests, such as lengthening tenure terms. The former president of the Congo, Omar Bongo, abolished the constitutional clause that limited the number of terms a president could hold office. This is an example of a constitutional amendment. This enabled him to maintain his position of authority for as long as possible; he served as president until his death. In the end, he served in office for 42 years (Abiodun, et al, 2018). Idriss Deby, the president of Chad, was elected to a third term after pushing for a referendum in August 2006 to increase the number of terms from two to three. Olusegun Obasanjo, a former president of Nigeria, also tried to increase the number of consecutive administrations to three, but his effort failed after it was reported that he may have bribed each member of the House of Assembly with up to US\$ 270 000 in order to secure a third term. Although Bakili Muluzi of Malawi failed in his bid to win a third five-year term after serving two terms, he was successful in elevating Bingu wa Mutharika to the position of power. Since 1986, Yoweri Museveni has served as president of Uganda. He amended the constitution to abolish term limit. He is still the incumbent president having spent 36 years in power (Abiodun, et al, 2018).

Political Godfatherism

This is corrupt political practice whereby an influential individual pick another person usually based on loyalty to attain a leadership position. The godfathers usually select people less influential than them to attain political positions (Daudu, Osimen,& Ameh, 2024). They use their largesse to establish a vast network across important people and institutions to influence political decisions and development. For instance, the dominance of a strong "godfather" at the top of a massive patronage network at the federal, state, and local levels in Nigeria is indicative of the personalised nature of the political arena. Intense competition between these godfathers determines political results, frequently at the expense of the general populace (Joe-Ansie, 2007).

Harassing and Intimidation of Opposition

Another strategy through which African leaders elongate their tenure is by intimidating their oppositions. Oppositions are in the practice of holding government accountable by their checking excesses and the wrong doing of a ruling government openly to the masses (Osimen, et al, 2024). Some African government try as much as possible to silent their oppositions by harassing and intimidating them. They suppress their oppositions through arbitrary arrest, detention, press gag and so many other methods that violate human rights (Osimen, Daudu, &Awogu-Maduagwu, 2023).

Uganda case is an example of a crude case of harassing and intimidating the opposition in December, 2017. Uganda passed an amendment act to eliminate age cap of 75 years for candidates that can contest for presidential election. Some parliamentarians who opposed the amendment act were sanctioned for "unruly behaviour". During the amendment process, elite military personnel were

sent to eject 25 parliamentarians from the chamber who were suspected to be oppositions in order to allow for unhindered passage of the amendment act (The Punch Editorial, 2018).

Implication of Tenure Elongation

High expectations surrounded the wave of democratization that occurred in Africa. People expected democracy to deliver them from the problem of poverty and corruption. The new democratic government who were supposed to elevate the state of African countries are responsible for further degrading the state of their countries. These leaders come to power to enrich themselves and their families and consolidate power at the expense of the masses and their nations (Obi, 2000; Oladoyin, et al, 2024).

Many countries in Africa have become accustomed to 'sit-tight' dictators. Sit-tight dictators do not get to be in power easily, they have repressed citizens, state institutions and their opposition to be able to elongate their tenure. In most cases sit-tightism does not come without resistance. In the process of suppressing resistance, there are loss of life and displacement of people. Even the state of African countries as a whole suffers the effect of these sit-tight leaders as political instability and bad economy. While it is generally acknowledged that democracy is the political style of the twenty-first century, the question of what democracy is worth in the absence of economic success remains an open issue. Without institutions to act as pillars, what function can democracy serve? One starts to wonder when Africa and other developing nations will make the right decisions, especially in light of the development of their economy and electoral systems. The experiences of Zimbabwe and the Gambia have demonstrated that electoral fraud can have extremely negative consequences and be destructive, and that it is likely to cause instability, bloodshed, and an instant erosion of a new government's credibility and legitimacy (Khalil, 2015).

Countries that experience political instability are associated with unemployment and insecurity. When a country is unable to create job opportunities for its citizens, it will not only limit the production and export potentials of the country but also increase crime rates in the country. Foreign investors are discouraged from investing in politically unstable states because such states are plagued with high crime rate, poor infrastructures, corruption instability in economic policies, slow or declining economic growth rate and insecurity. Osimen, Fulani, Chidozie, & Dada, (2024).

Countries that experience sit-tight leaders are mostly depressed. This is because leaders of such countries are not forward thinking about the progress of their countries; they are have new ideas or probably are intentionally oblivious to the problem of their nation. Unemployment rate is high, people are out of jobs; this creates social pressure and a state of political unrest. Inflation is always on the rise at a galloping or a hyper rate reducing the purchasing power of the people. (Abiodun, *et al.*, 2018). Zimbabwe was formerly known for producing and exporting large food supply became impoverished under the tenure of Robert Mugabe. He further worsened the situation by taking away foreign investment that were into agriculture and contributed largely to the success of the commerce of the country on the claims that "he is trying to reclaim their land from white settlers". The policy he made hurt the agricultural commercial sector of the country greatly in the foreign exchange and source of export. The sector was responsible for providing over 400,000 jobs in the country. Zimbabwe that used to be a major exporter of food products is now a country that is heavily dependent on food importation. The country recorded an inflation rate of 11.8 million percent during 1998 to 2008. Their official exchange rate rose from approximately 1(revalued) Zimbabwean dollar per US dollar in 2003 to 30,000 per US dollar in September 2007. The country is still in an impoverished state due to the effect of the inflation (Abiodun, et al., 2018).

Recommended Strategies for Preventing the Trend of Tenure Elongation by African Leaders

There is still enough room to curb and prevent the trend of sit-tight syndrome among African nations. Strategies listed below can used to prevent sit-tight syndrome

- 1. Adoption of strict policies by AU and ECOWAS against sit-tight leaders:** presidents who spearhead constitutional amendment to abolish term limits or remove age cap to contest for presidential office should be sanctioned. The practice of appointing leaders who perpetuate themselves in power as chairmen of AU such as Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, Alpha Conde of

chad, Paul Kagame of Rwanda and Teodoro Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea should be completely abolished. AU and ECOWAS should emulate the strict requirement of the EU (European Union). Members of the EU are required to have stable institutions that support democracy, must ensure human right, rule of law and respect the minorities. The requirement is what hindered Turkey hindered turkey from joining the EU in 1987 because they were lacking in the area of protection of human right. Proper saction of leaders who commit constitutional coup, military coup or refuses to relinquish power would reduce number of sit-tight leaders.

2. **Mass or Public Revolution:** African citizens under sit-tight government can protest in mass against their government. Political revolutions have significant effects on a nation, even though they might not immediately be successful in changing government structure or creating desired policies. Public revolution creates a symbolic movement that would not easily fade away and create a continual agitation for changing their government structures and policies. There is also a possibility that these sit-tight leaders might rethink for good democratic behaviour in their various states.
3. **Need for Effective Media and Public Opinions:** the media also has a major role to play in fighting sit-tight leaders. They can publicise excess of the government. The major problem in sit-tight government is that they have the habit of gagging the press to favour their tenure elongation plan. However, this is a computer age whereby everyone has a voice on social media space. Public opinion can be shared freely on the internet to limit repression of these bad leaders.
4. **Independent Judiciary, Non –Partisan Legislative Bodies and Independent Electoral System:** to ensure democracy, the rule of law and protection of human rights, the institutions listed above must be independent. The action of the judiciary should not be interfered with, so as to safeguard human rights under the rule of law. Judges must be able to make decisions and pass judgement without external political influence or pressure from the legislative or from the executive. The independence of the judiciary also prevent sit-tight leaders from using them as a tool to suppress their oppositions. The legislative should not be just a rubber stamp for the executive. They must be able to must scrutinise bills before passing them into laws and they should check the excesses of the executive. Independent electoral system should be devoid of external influence, they must be able to carry out their responsibilities without pressure from the government. To curb external interference in electoral commissions, financial autonomy should be given to the electoral commission, elections fund should not come directly from the government, and there should be provision of central electronic voter dataset. This will make rigging difficult by promoting transparency and effectiveness. This will curb illegal voting by non-registered voters. Technological changes in electoral process that will make rigging difficult should be adopted.

CONCLUSION

Sit-tight syndrome is a very common occurrence among African rulers during the post-independence era in most African countries. More than half of all the countries in Africa have experienced sit-tightism after the wave of democracy in Africa in 1990. Benefit supposed to ushered in with the democratisation process such as protection of human rights, rule of law and choice of selecting leaders by electorates were not enjoy by several African countries because of the selfish interest of leaders in power. The actions of the sit-tight leaders have caused Africa poor development. Tenure elongation is said to have a negative effect of development of a nation (Obi, 2000; Power, 2009). This is evident in the case of Zimbabwe and Cameroon. During the process of planning and strategizing by sit-tight leaders to maximise their tenure in power, they caused political upheavals will has led to civil war in some countries such as Congo and Libya, and also anti-government movements and factions within African countries. It is imperative that democracy should to be entrenched and consolidated in Africa. This can be possible if the recommendation listed in the study is followed.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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