

**AN APPRAISAL OF POLITICAL TRANSITION IN AFRICA: THE QUESTION OF
TENURE ELONGATION.**

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ABSTRACT

This work examines the sit-tight syndrome of African leaders who have no respect for national constitution, preferring to remain in power indefinitely inspite of tenure limitation by the constitution. The study adopted leadership theory as its theoretical framework and findings show that probe for wrong doings, misconception of democracy for monarchy, strong authoritarian instinct, lack of accountability and transparency, cheap access to state resources and intolerance of opposition are some of the causes of tenure elongation in Africa which has spelt negative implications for democracy and development. The work recommends building of strong institution, independent of the judiciary, respect for the rule of law and constitution establishment of constitutional courts in AU to regulate tenure common language and common market establishment.

KEYWORDS: Appraisal, Political, Transition, Africa, Question, Tenure, Elongation.

INTRODUCTION

Recent history of Africa is replete with leaders who are obsessed with power, constantly engaging in manipulating democratic institutions (legislature, executive & judiciary) in order to suppress opposition and hang onto power. Some African leaders assume office on a sober note but, in due course, assume that they are indispensable. They deploy their manipulative skills, including oratory power, persuasion and playing on the sentiments of the people in order to perpetrate themselves in power (Gaubá, 2007). With monarchical instincts, a typical African leader believes that once he is appointed, selected, or elected to political office, particularly at the apex of the polity, he is to rule or hold such office for life, whether elections were conducted at intervals or not. In effect, the general impression or mentality of an African was disposed towards perpetual rulership which would terminate only at death of the incumbent. In order to perpetuate themselves in office, African leaders Tinker with the constitution, use crude methods of intimidating opposition, use freely state funds and security apparatus, manipulate the legislature and the judiciary, call for and manipulate referendum to support their stay in power, incite ethnic tension and conflict to divert attention of the people and disrespect rule of law and court orders. In Nigeria, for instance, President Obasanjo plotted for tenure elongation towards the expiration of his second term in office in 2007, but failed because the 1999 constitution limits the presidential term of office to a minimum of four years and a maximum of eight years. The Senate and the House of Representatives, both stand dissolved at the expiration of the period of four years commencing from the date of the first seating of the Assembly. Typical African leaders engage in all manners of manipulations to perpetuate themselves in power are often haunted by fear of probe for wrong doings, misconception of democracy for monarchy which was the prevalent mode of leadership recruitment style in the pre-colonial and even the first

few years of post-colonial era when kings wielded absolute powers over their subjects, strong authoritarian self-serving leaders with messianic instincts for self-succession, fear of marginalization and suppression, weak political institutions but strong personalities, resentment against opposition, lack of accountability and transparency and fear of prosecution, ethnic cleansing and emergency situation, civil war/strifes, disease or conflict or national calamities.

The supreme law of the land prescribes that once a person has been elected to the office of the President for two terms of four years each, he is forever barred from holding the office again. Any president who exceeds or attempts to exceed two terms is bound to set a dangerous precedent of becoming an institution himself, attracting loyalties of personal nature, his authority will be all-pervading, a cult of personality is built around him, generating belief in his infallibility and indispensability (Nwabueze, 1984). Given this sit-tight leadership instinct, what are the factors that promotes this leadership style in Africa; what are the effects of this on democracy, what does this portend to the welfare of the people and what are the measures to be adopted to ensure that leaders conform to their constitutional limits? This study is premised on the presumption that inspite of the prescriptions of the national constitution, electoral and extant laws, political transition process in Africa is often marred in crises and bitter experiences.

This work adopts burns (1978) leadership typologies of transformational and transactional leadership styles. Leadership here entails one's ability to unite people in pursuits of common objectives/goals through persuasion, influence and cooperation rather than intimidation, power dominance, social superiority or imposition (Okafor, 2006).

According to J. M. Burns, transformational leader is a person who stimulates and inspires the followers to achieve outcome that is beneficial to the generality of the people, recognizes the needs of the followers, and his ever ready to provide such needs. A transformational leader enhances motivation and moral of the followers, he is proactive. Transactional leadership on the other hand, believes in what he stands to gain from the followers, for instance, vote for money and loyalty and support in exchange for provision of amenities, does not believe in change but in the maintenance of status quo. The transactional leadership is reminiscent of Africa leaders who assume position and are initially friendly to the people, but suddenly because of the paraphernalia of the office, plot against his own people whenever they may draw his attention to his non-performance.

Consequently, authoritarian instincts in most African leadership is un-reservedly strong and since 1990 about 24 African leaders had initiated moves to stay in office beyond constitutionally defined terms. With this sit-tight impostor and messianic self-serving leaders intact, democracy in Africa faces serious threats (Odumeru & ogbonna, 2013).

The study adopted the descriptive/historical analysis and the materials for the work were generated from secondary sources such as books, magazines, newspaper which contents were critically scrutinized with a view to discerning some missing gaps and filling same. The study will be of immense benefit and serve as guide to policy makers, national leaders and politicians in Africa as well as to scholars in academic and research institutions.

TENURE ELONGATION IN AFRICA

African history is replete with leaders who are or were obsessed with power constantly engaging in manipulating democratic institutions, (Legislative, Executive and Judiciary), to suppress opposition and hang onto power in perpetuity. The continent parades the highest number of presidential monarchies. Of the 10 longest ruling non-monarchs in the world as of 2020, 6 are from Africa, and the top most spot on that roll is held by Cameroonian President Paul Biya who has been in office for more than 44 years and is not prepared to leave office. Others are Teodoro Obiang Nguema of Equatorial Guinea 40 years, Dennis Sassan Nguesso of Congo 35 years, Yoweri Museveni of Uganda 34 years, Idris Derby of Chad 29 years, Isaias Afewerki of Eritrea 26 years. Beyond the top 10, there are Paul Kagame of Rwanda 25 years, Hage Geinob of Namibia 19 years, Faure Gnassingbe of Togo 14 years, Pierre Nkuruziza of Burundi 14 years, Ibrahim Bouba Car Keita of Mali 12 years. In 2001 President Lansana Conte of Guinea organized a referendum that scrapped term limit. In 2005 President Idris Derby of Chad held a referendum to delete Article 61 (2) of the constitution which restricted the President to two terms, Mamadou Tandja of Niger abolished term limits through referendum even though Article 49 of the Nation's constitution expressly forbade it. In Burkina Faso, President Blaise Compaore who had already served two terms argued in 2005 that the term limit restriction in Article 37 of the Constitution could not apply retroactively to limit him. He won tenure elongation for another 2 terms and in 2014, tried to abolish term limit but this led to riot and street protest/upheaval which forced him out of the office to exile. Meanwhile some military adventures led by Gen. Gilbert Diendere tried to cash in on the situation by toppling the country's interim government but the coup was resisted by the people, ECOWAS and African Union.

In Senegal, Abdoulaye Wade in 2012 argued that the term limit in his country's constitution could not apply retroactively to his first term in office. Nguesso, 71 has ruled Congo for 25 years, called national referendum to discuss extension and scraping two term limit, announced referendum to change constitution to allow him run for 3rd term. The uprising that hit the Arab world and North Africa led to the deposition of sit-tight President Sine Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia 20 years on the thrones, Hosni Mubarak spent about 31 years on the saddle before being forced out.

In Togo, Gnassingbe Eyadema who ruled for 38 years run Togo as a personal estate. Edwando do Santos of Angola ruled for 38 years (1979) and changed Constitution to rule till 2022 and Alassane Ouattara of Ivory Coast 12 years. In 2010, at least 3,000 persons were killed in Cote d'ivoire before Ouattara was able to assume office because Laurent Gbagbo, then the incumbent, refused to vacate office after an electoral defeat. Now after two full terms as prescribed by the constitution. Robert Mugabe ruled Zimbabwe for 39 years before forced out in 2017 (ugwu, 2013).

Table 1 Tenure Elongation in Africa 2020

S/N	Country	President/ Head of State	Date of Birth	Assumption of Office	Tear of Exit	No. of Yrs. Spent	Means of Exit
1	Equatorial Guinea	Teodore Obiang Nguema Mbasogo	5/6/42	1979	In power	41	
2	Cameroon	Paul Biya	12/3/33	1982	In power	39	
3	Zimbabwe	Robert Mugabe	21/2/80 - 21/2/24	1980	Forced out in 2018	39	
4	Uganda	Yoweri Museuni	16/9/44	1986	In power	34	
5	Sudan	Omar Al- Bashir	1/1/44	1989	Forced out in 2019	31	
6	Chad	Idris Derby	18/6/52	1990	Died in power 2023	30	
7	Burundi	Pierre Nkuruziza	18/12/64	1994	June, 2020 by death	26	
8	Eritrea	Isaias Afewerki	2/2/46	1993	In power	27	
9	Rep. of Congo	Dennis Sassou Agueso	27/11/43	1997	In power	24	
10	Rwanda	Paul Kagami	23/10/57	2000	In power	20	
11	DRC	Joseph Kabila	4/6/71	2001	In power	19	
12	Togo	Faure Gnassingbe	6/6/06	2005	Still in power	15	
13	Burkina Faso	Blaise Campalore	31/5/45	1957	Forced out in 2014	28	
14	Gambia	Yahaya Jameh	25/5/65	1994	Forced out in 2017	23	
15	Jose Edeando dos Sambo	M. Angola	28/8/42	1979	Forced out of office 2017	38	

EFFECTS OF UNCONSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP SUCCESSION PLAN IN AFRICA

This propensity to personalize rule and to perpetuate it indefinitely is a disastrous factor in the politics of African countries. It has undermined the quality of democracy on the continent, and exposed government to disaffection and acts of subversion, often culminating in its forcible overthrow by the military, with all the attendant instability and the disruption in the country's normal democratic evolution. It has deprived the countries of the benefit of change in leadership for change may either prevent or check sterility and complacency by enabling a fresh vitality and a fresh approach to be brought to bear upon the problems of government (Nwanbueze, 1984). Consequently,

unconstitutional tenure elongation is threat to democracy and leadership and leads to ineptitude, weak institutions, apathy by the citizens, poor governance, corruption, endemic poverty and disease, dwindling economic fortunes, instability and absence of national cohesion.

African leaders have often criticized the limiting of the president to two terms of four years each on the following grounds;

- I. That such would stifle zeal and make the president indifferent to his duty.
- II. That a president, knowing he would be barred from the office for ever after, might be tempted to exploit for personal advantage the opportunities of the office while they lasted.
- III. That an ambitious president might be tempted to try to prolong his term by perverse means.
- IV. That it would deprive the country of the advantage of the president's previous experience in the office.

That it would lead to a lack of continuity in policy and consequently to instability in administration. But indefinite eligibility is best or wrought with a number of oddities as earlier outlined above.

It has been accepted that, tenure elongation could bring violence in the societies which rely on coercion to maintain order in lieu of providing adequate patterns or value satisfying action (Gur, 1970).

Respect for the rule of law ensures stability in any nation because without security there can be no development, for as noted by McNamara (1968) development means economic, social and political progress. It means reasonable standard of living and reasonable in this context requires continual redemption; for what is reasonable in an earlier stage of development will become unreasonable at a later stage. Most African leaders came to power to execute the constitution of the country and to be limited to specific time period but would want to remain perpetually in power without effecting meaningful development to enhance the living standard of the people. In today's world, development has taken a new dimension. According to Rodney (1986), development involves increased skills and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and natural wellbeing increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relations. For Africa to witness social political and economic development, the leaders should always apply self-restraints and place the interest of their people at heart at all times. Development does not consists in perpetual eligibility but with better health care delivery, long-life span, expectancy, better nutrition, abundance supply of food and energy, good shelter, more and better schools, improve political participation by the people in the political process, poverty reduction, employment generation. If all these have declined from high levels then, beyond doubt, there is no development for the country concerned. If one or two of these central issues have been growing worse, especially if all these are involved, it will be strange to call the result development even if per capita income is double (Seers, 1963). This informs why most African countries under perpetual leaders suffer from civil war, political instability and incessant violence in the system.

The World Bank has noted that this negative development retard development which gives rise to virtuous and vicious circles. Where development succeeds, countries become progressively safer from violent conflict, making subsequent development easier. Where development fails, countries are at high risk of being caught in conflict trap in which war wrecks the economy and increases the risk of further war. (World Bank, 2023). Generally, illegal tenure elongation in Africa has engendered bitterness, corruption, ethnic tension and rivalry, marginalization, acrimony, oppression, religious intolerance, open confrontation, poverty, disease, civil strife and war, and plunder of the commonwealth by a few elite. These are common features today in African political landscape.

There are usually frequent forceful change of government through coup, poverty is in the increase and the gap between the rich and the poor becomes wider on daily basis, leaders are ethnically based, drawing support mainly from their ethnic groups, larger ethnic groups dominate and oppress the minority ethnic groups, loyalty is not to the nation, but to powerful individuals and their ethnic groups. The governing elites believe in divide and rule tactic and live ostentatiously, spending and embezzling public fund at will. African countries lack both internal and external unity. The francophone nations prefer France to fellow Anglophone African Countries. Giving rise to France has impoverished her colonies to bad governance, unemployment, insurgency, violence, kidnapping, armed robbery, drug & human trafficking and proliferation of small arms and light weapons circulating in all parts of Africa today and retard economic development. Thus democracy which strives on tolerance of opposing views, justice, freedom of association and participation in the political process is seriously bastardized in Africa. Instead of free, fair and credible elections, Africa is noted for all manners of election malfeasance, ranging from rigging, impersonation of candidates, impunity, ballot box and paper snatching, falsification of results and announcement of discredited and corrupt politicians as leaders. It is doubtful if the perpetuity of many of these leaders in power has resulted in meaningful development strides for their countries. Worse is that some have had to brutally muscle through the rewriting of their respective country's constitutions to accommodate their regular hold on power. Sit-tight leaders have turned Africa into a waste land and brought mockery to the continent. The world ridicules Africa and its leaders in their obsession with staying in power for life. It was due to this ugly trend in democracy in Africa that President Muhammadu Buhari (2020) advised the leaders of the Economic Community of West African State (ECOWAS) to spare their countries political upheavals by keeping to constitutional limits of tenure, and also respect the law and ensure free and fair elections in their countries. President Buhari pointed out that the attempts to elongate tenure tend to generate crises and political tension in the region, that the challenges facing the sub-region are enormous and these range from socio-economic matters to security issues, which are in themselves difficult enough. When therefore, another political turmoil is added in the form of tenure elongation, he went on, the result is always a brew of violence and economic disruption which often turns to economic and political disaster.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

At independence in the early 1960's, leadership recruitment in emergent independent states of Africa was through, except few states such as Nigeria, one-party authoritarian model. The new states believe that it was only through single party system that the countries would be able to mobilize and integrate the various internal ethnic diversities into national ethos. Due to inherent weakness, couple with systemic corruption and nepotism, and the inability to inculcate a sense of national unity and bring about development, most civil one party democracies in Africa were swept away by the military who made incursion into politics in Africa. The military leadership recruitment and transition was through coup 'd tat that enthroned power seekers or autocratic life president or head of state who did not only rule with impunity but also plundered the wealth of these nations and further under-developed their countries and people. Today, however, military coup is no longer fashionable and most African countries are democratizing their political institutions, providing limit to power and tenure, even though, most leaders are not bothered by these constitutional restraints as they use the resources of the state to bribe their ascension and continued stay in power and manipulate the legislature to have their way. This has given rise to instability, corruption, poverty and disease, gross

disrespect for the constitution and rule of law, human rights abuse, impoverishing the people and further under-developing African countries.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This work therefore, recommends the followings as panacea for indefinite eligibility to political office at the apex of the nation in Africa.

- African countries are noted for strong leaders but very weak political institutions. There is the need then to build strong institutions that would drive democratic process.
- The justice system should be overhauled and the judiciary should enjoy substantial independence to enable it dispense justice without fear or favour.
- African leaders should do more to encourage partnership and peer review with a view to evolving a common practice code for leaders.
- There should be aggressive determination and commitment on the part of African leaders to be amended to the rule of law and respect for court decisions.
- African countries should establish constitutional courts to adjudicate on matters bordering on exercising power beyond prescribed limits, deal with all forms of constitutional infringement and litigations concerning elections.
- African leaders should be made to always keep in mind that African problems can only be settle by Africans. Some African countries, particularly the French speaking, should realize that their destiny is not in France but in Africa and take concrete steps from being continually used by Paris to destabilize Africa economically and politically.
- Africa should consider, beside the common market that is in the offing, adoption of a common language for Africa to assist in the integration process.

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