

## TENURE ELONGATION AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN AFRICA: LESSONS FROM THE 2021 COUPD'ETAT IN GUINEA

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### **Abstract**

Unlike the practice in developed democracies, where the tenure of office specified by the constitution is upheld, leadership in African states has been characterised by manipulation in order to elongate its stay. This study investigated how tenure elongation has threatened democratic consolidation in African states, focusing on the lessons drawn from the 2021 coup d'état in Guinea. It adopted the descriptive method and made use of secondary data sources while rational choice theory was used as framework of analysis. It observed that African politics is characterised by sit-tight syndrome. Drawing examples from a handful of African states like Cameroon, Uganda and Zimbabwe, the study identified selfish interests, corruption and power intoxication as the major factors encouraging tenure elongation. The study averred that the efforts of the opposition, the media, civil society organizations and non-state actors like the AU and ECOWAS in condemning and opposing tenure elongation have yielded limited results. The study concluded that sit-tight syndrome of Guinean leadership has adverse effect on the democratic consolidation in Guinea. The paper recommended that Guinean media advocacy should strongly be directed towards condemning tenure elongation; civil society organisations should organise several fora to enlighten Guinean citizenry on the dangers which tenure elongation portends for democratic consolidation; Guineans in the diaspora should lobby the international community to resist any Guinean leadership which attempts elongation of tenure of office; Also, non-state actors like the AU and the ECOWAS, and other world bodies should place stiff sanctions on Guinean leadership which violates such democratic constitutionalism.

**Keywords:** Constitutionalism, Democracy, Democratic Consolidation, Coup D'état, Tenure elongation.

### **Introduction**

Tenure elongation in African states has been associated with the history of leadership recruitment and struggle right from the inception of independence till date. African leaders have been known to be very autocratic and dictatorial even when they were elected through the ballot box. In some cases, the president meddles with the legislative and judicial processes thereby reducing these

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institutions to his mere appendages and government tools to harass, intimidate and suppress the opposition and to enable the president remain in power for as long as he desires (Ibrahim, 2017).

The sustenance of democratic governance has been a major challenge in Africa since the attainment of independence in the early 1960s and concern of international donor agencies and political analysts. Though African democracy has shown some improvements, with the conduct of periodic and more regular elections in some African states, many nations are still characterised by corruption, autocracy and non-compliance with democratic ethos. In such states, the incumbent leadership intimidates the opposition and exploits the power of incumbency and state apparatuses to tilt the electoral contest in its favour. In some other climes, especially in Eastern and Central African nations, constitutional manipulation appears to be the new found tool, which the incumbents employ to evade term limits. This, they do, by amending the relevant provisions of their nation's constitution to achieve tenure elongation (Abdulateef & Modestus, 2017).

The prevalence of this phenomenon has continuously ignited many conflicts in Africa. Oche (2006) argued that though conflicts are perceived to be inherent aspects of human relations, whether at the group, national or international level, and the pervasiveness of conflicts in Africa in contemporary times has assumed the dimension of a plague that is arguably the greatest impediment to any meaningful development in Africa today. Available records indicate that most of the conflict situations that evolved in Africa such as the case of Cote D'Ivoire and Gambia under Koudou Laurent Gbagbo and Yahya Jammeh respectively have been instigated by tenure elongation. These conflicts have resulted in the loss of lives, widespread displacement of people and a wide array of human rights abuses. Today, tenure elongation associated conflicts still account for about 70 percent of peacekeeping operations of the United Nations in Africa. For instance, in places like Somalia, Sudan's Darfur region and Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, the toll of tenure elongation associated conflicts has been devastating. Abiodun, Nwannennaya, Ochei and Ayo-Adeyekun (2018) contend that political insecurity, displacement of people, and destruction of properties have been the consequences of this phenomenon.

Guinea, a country in West African sub-region, is one of those states that are bedeviled by tenure elongation, which has not only threatened democratic consolidation of that country but equally portends danger for the sustenance of democracy in the West Africa sub-region and the possible spread of coup in a contagious manner. This study therefore, examines tenure elongation in Guinea by x-raying the implications it portends for democratic consolidation in that country, stressing the lessons to be learnt by other countries in the sub-region from the 2021 coup d'état in Guinea. To address this disquiet, the paper is divided into seven sections. The first section examined conceptual issues and theoretical explorations while the second section attempted an overview of tenure elongation in African states. Section three reviewed the factors precipitating tenure elongation in Africa. Section four gave a geo-political brief of Guinea while section five described tenure elongation in Guinea. Section

six evaluated the connection between tenure elongation, 2021 coup d'état and democratic consolidation in Guinea and section seven offers the conclusion and the recommendations.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

#### **Tenure Elongation**

The term, tenure elongation, like many other concepts in the Social and Management Sciences has been bedeviled by lack of universally accepted definition. Consequently, many divergent views abound in literature regarding the concept. Ordinarily, tenure elongation occurs when an elected president or head of government refuses to relinquish power at the expiration of his/her tenure of office. However, Uhara's (2013) defines tenure elongation as the willful reluctance on the part of a political leader to relinquish power. For Kunuji (2017), tenure elongation in Africa has a long and troubling history. It is characterised by a willful reluctance on the part of political leaders to relinquish power. It is a virulent antithesis of constitutionalism, which is still very much a significant feature of Africa's political culture because the sanctity of the ballot box is yet to be fully grasped by political actors. In short, democracy as an important element of constitutionalism is perhaps, still an illusion in Africa (Kunuji, 2017). This phenomenon is very undemocratic and is not peculiar to Africa alone as it could be seen in some countries like Cuba in Latin America.

The explication above was the case in Libya under Muammer Gaddafi from 1968 to 2011. It was also the same narrative under Mobutu Seseseko of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) from 1965 to 1997; Mathieu Kerekou of Benin Republic from 1972 to 2006; Felix Houphouet Boigny of Cote d'Ivoire from 1960 to 1993; and Gnassingbe Eyadema of Togo from 1967 to 2005. Other leaders in that category include Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe from 1980 to 2017, while Theodoro Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea and Paul Biya of Cameroon are still sitting presidents having been in power since 1979 and 1982 respectively. In all the cases exemplified above, power has been retained against the will of the citizenry (Kunuji, 2017). In the context of this study, tenure elongation means the practice whereby the term limit stated in the constitution of the affected country is manipulatively exceeded by the incumbent president who deliberately uses intrigues or conspiracies to prolong or elongate his tenure of office as against constitutional requirements and popular practice or choice. Suffice to say that due to the dynamics of power equation of national politics and system of government, it is only a president that could demonstrate tenure elongation.

#### **Democratic Consolidation**

While scholars like O'Donnell (1996) regard democratic consolidation as an illusory concept that fails to offer any new insight into the process of democratisation, others perceive it as being descriptive of an identifiable phase in the process of transition from authoritarian to democratic systems, which is critical to the establishment of a stable, institutionalised and lasting democracy (Linz & Stepan 1996). This work adopts the latter perception. Linz and Stepan

argue that democratic consolidation can only be said to take place after a transition to democracy has taken place. They define a consolidated democracy as a political regime in which democracy, as a complex system of institutions, rules and patterned incentives and disincentives, has become, in a phrase, 'the only game in town'.

The idea of perceiving democratic consolidation as being consonant with 'the only game in town' is itself predicated on a trifocal operationalisation comprising behavioural, attitudinal, and constitutional dimensions. In behavioural terms, a democratic regime can be regarded as consolidated when no significant actor (national, social, political, economic, institutional) will attempt to achieve its objectives either through the creation of a non-democratic regime or by attempting to break off from the existing democratic community. In attitudinal terms, a democracy is consolidated when the overwhelming majority of public opinion is consistently supportive of democratic procedures, processes and institutions as being the only appropriate method of conducting governance and public affairs. In constitutional terms, a democracy can be said to be consolidated when government and non-governmental actors become subject and habituated to the resolution of conflict within the bounds of the specific laws, procedures, and institutions sanctioned by the new democratic process (Linz & Stepan 1996).

Thus, in order to regard democracy as being consolidated, it must develop behavioural, attitudinal and constitutional dispositions and qualities that are completely supportive of the democratic way of life. The emphasis on human dispositions in the forms of attitude, behaviour and the willingness to uphold the dictates of the constitution, which is more or less coterminous with upholding the rule of law and the corresponding de-emphasis of the structural and institutional dimensions of democracy, highlights the centrality of the human factor in consolidating democracy. In other words, democratisation and the consolidation of democracy go beyond the elaborate formalities of fashioning constitutions and establishing institutions. As a process, democratic consolidation lays emphasis on the development and cultivation of the critical behavioural and attitudinal underpinnings that are necessary foundations for a viable democratic system.

However, a better grasp and understanding of the concept of democratic consolidation and governance is obtained when consideration is given to possible alternative scenarios. Schedler argues that the alternatives to the processes of completing transition, as well as deepening and consolidating democracy lie in the possibility of democratic breakdown and democratic erosion (Schedler, 1998). The concept of democratic breakdown, one with which Nigerians are all too familiar, denotes dysfunctionality and failure of the democratic system leading to the supplanting of the system through a coup d'état or any other antidemocratic process that culminates in the establishment or restoration of an authoritarian system. Seen in this light, therefore, a major goal of democratic consolidation is to avoid a breakdown of democracy.

### Theoretical Framework

The rational choice theory, which is also known as rational action theory, or choice theory is used for understanding and often modelling socio-economic activities or actions and individual behaviour. Rational choice theory is a philosophical construct espoused by Cesare Bonesana-Beccaria, a renowned Italian criminologist. Becker (1976) posited that the rational choice theory was popularised by a 1992 Nobel Memorial Prize Laureate in Economics Science, Gary Becker, who was one of the first to apply rational actor models more widely. Further contributions were made by Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), an English scholar. However, Akpuh (2017); Sweet and Groarke (2010); and Lyman and Potter (2007) concurred to the fact that the postulations of these scholars could be gleaned from the works of such thinkers as Denis Diderot and François-Marie Arouet. Elster (1989) stated the essence of rational choice theory by expressing the notion that when faced with several courses of action, people usually do what they think is likely going to offer them the best overall outcome

Rational choice is said to have developed as part of the behavioural revolution in American political science of the 1950s and 1960s, which attempted to investigate how individuals behaved, using empirical methods. This approach has gradually become an evolving approach in political science, especially in the United States. Anthony Downs (1957) was credited to be the first scholar to apply rational choice theory to the study of electoral behaviour, party competition and studies of elections. The rational choice theory begins, firstly, from the viewpoint of the individual, as opposed to viewing several individuals interacting together, social situations, or groups. The emphasis on the individual interest is always the starting point of the theory, perceiving the individual as the foundation unit of the theory. In the words of Abell (2000, pp. 223-244), "it is only individuals who ultimately take actions and social actions ... individual actions and social actions are optimally chosen" and "individuals' actions and social actions are entirely concerned with their own welfare".

The rational choice is premised on the main assumption that human beings are rational beings who choose from a set of options based on its cost and benefits calculations. The 'rationality' implied by the rational choice theory adopts a more specific definition, which simply means that an individual acts as if balancing costs against benefits to arrive at action that maximises personal advantage (Friedman, 1953) Hence, they pragmatically chose what is best for them in terms of maximum rewards and refrain from that option whose reward will be minimal. This position is epitomised in the following assumptions:

- i. Humans are self-interested and self-calculating rational beings, who are capable of selecting from a wide range of choices when the need arises;
- ii. The utility of choice made is of paramount importance to the actor. In other words, criminal elements weigh their risks and benefits (costs and benefits) before engaging in a course of actions, be it good or bad;
- iii. Miscreants would naturally prefer to accept and maximise to the optimal the reward accruable from their actions than pain;

- iv. The rationality of the theory lies in the fact that the commission of a crime or a course of action will be abandoned if the pain (risk) is higher than the gains there from; and
- v. Humans are usually emotionally inclined to commit crimes for economic, psychological, physical, social, and political reasons;
- vi. Awareness of the implication(s) of a crime may not successfully debar a person or group from executing it, especially when the criminal minded person or group is convinced that his or her criminal talents and or the resources of the group or syndicate they are affiliated to can help evade detection (Akpuh, 2017; Lyman & Potter, 2007).

The rational choice theory has been commended as the prototype for a more deductive approach to political analysis. Becker (1976) has described the rational choice model as “a unified framework for understanding all human behaviour”. Prominent strength of the rational choice theory lies in its assumption of self-regarding utility function, which when combined with the rational optimisation model allows rational choice theories to treat variations in choices among actors and by an actor over time as entirely a function of their structural position.

Though the assumptions in the explication above may hold sway for all sorts of crime and categories of criminals, Akpuh (2017) contends that they cannot explain why people like suicide bombers and others act irrationally, that is, without paying attention to the possible life consequences of their actions. In other words, suicide bombers have failed to take into cognisance that no matter the quantum of gains accruable from suicide bombing, the fact remains that they will not be alive to reap the benefits of their action. What benefit therefore, will they derive from their action when their lives would have been terminated?

The rational choice theory is a growing paradigm in Political Science and that is often applied to many areas in the discipline, especially, voting behaviour, political party competition- party primaries and election studies, among others. These views of application have been subjected to increased arguments in the following classic literature; *Social Choice and Individual Values* by Kenneth Arrow (1951), *An Economic Theory of Democracy* by Anthony Down (1957), *The Logic of Collective Action* by Mancur Olson (1965).

In spite of the frailties inherent in the theory, it is still applied to explain certain political actions and activities. In party politics for instance, competitions among party contestants are always rife and every candidate will always engage in activities that will ultimately lead to the realisation of his interests. From the nomination of candidature to the campaign tact and strategies, up until the conduct of the election and behaviour of voters, all these activities seem to be manipulated by the contending aspirants, either by physical or psychological methods, to bring about the achievement of their interest. This is why election becomes a do-or-die affair in African nations, which must be won at all costs while the leadership will do everything possible to perpetuate elongation of tenure.

### **Overview of Tenure Elongation in African States**

West Africa is regarded as the fastest growing sub-regional economy in the continent with a projected growth rate of 7.4 percent in 2014 (John & Adriana, 2015). Yet, between 2018 till date, West Africa has also been enveloped in armed conflicts with leaders seizing and elongating power through unconstitutional means. The endemic problem of sit-tight syndrome perpetuated by some leaders in Africa, especially in the West African sub-region, is by no means novel. Leaders of countries like Angola, Burundi, Algeria, Cameroon, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Liberia, Rwanda, Sudan, Togo, Uganda and Zimbabwe have stayed in office for more than ten years against the time stipulated by the provisions of the constitution (Odoziobodo & Nnaji, 2017).

It could be argued that the seed of tenure elongation is perceived as being inherent in the traditional African political tradition and governance, long before the coming of the Europeans. This notion is somewhat encapsulated in the philosophy of patrimonialism, which is a form of governance in which all powers flow directly from the leader and there is no dichotomy between public and private spheres of influence (Pitcher, Moran, & Johnson, 2009). It is therefore, autocratic and oligarchic in character. In pre-colonial Africa, for example, leaders emerged in succession to their fathers or other relations; hence, the prevalence of absolute monarchy where there is no limit to the tenure of the leader but could only be dictated by destiny- death (Abiodun et al, 2018). This form of governance is autocratic and oligarchic in character. It appears that this practice has surreptitiously been incorporated into modern government by some African leaders.

By the 1980s, most of the countries in Africa have attained independence, some like Algeria, Zimbabwe, Angola and Namibia through fierce armed struggle while others like Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra-Leone got theirs through dialogue and constitutional means. Stepping into the leadership shoes of the colonial masters after the attainment of political independence, most of the African nationalists were not readily concerned with building strong institutions of democracy and good governance. Rather they preferred to bask in the excitement of being in power and thus schemed on how to remain in office perpetually (Abiodun et al, 2018; Odoziobodo & Nnaji, 2017). The phenomenon of tenure elongation in Africa today is being examined on the basis of this development.

Taking a look at political and electoral practices in Africa, it is observed that African leaders have displayed an unguarded quest for tenure perpetuation. This practice is against the principle of periodic ballot system, which brought them to power and the constitutional provision that stipulates the required tenure of office. This tendency has over the years created a vicious circle threatening the peace of African States. Evidently, the past decades, have disappointingly witnessed the demise of nine heads of states or presidents while in office and thirteen others, who were forced to step down after coup or popular uprising (Ibrahim, 2017). Also, through somewhat manipulated elections, leaders of 15 countries have remained the same over the past 10

years. Such countries include Angola, Burundi, Algeria, Cameroon, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo and Congo. Others are Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Liberia, Rwanda, Sudan, Togo, Uganda and Zimbabwe. Aside Liberia's Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, fourteen of the leaders took office before 2006 (Ibrahim, 2017).

The rundown of some African countries whose leadership have not changed within the last ten years and above is presented thus: Cameroon's case has been more worrisome. Paul Biya, aged 84, has been in power since 1982. Before that, he had spent his entire political career in the service of President Ahmadou Ahidjo, before being elevated to the post of the Prime Minister in 1975 after Ahidjo's resignation from office. After assuming leadership, he accused his predecessor of organising a coup against him in 1983, forcing the former president to flee the country. After the country's parliament passed a controversial amendment to the constitution in April, 2008 enabling Biya to run for a third term, the octogenarian won a new seven-year term in the October 2011 election, in a vote that observers said was marred by irregularities (Abolurin, 2012).

In the narrative of Uganda, Yoweri Museveni became Uganda's president in 1986, and was involved in rebellions that toppled Ugandan leaders Idi Amin and Milton Obote. Having spent five presidential terms in office (1986 till date), Museveni claims Uganda is one of the most democratic countries in the world. In 2005, the constitution was amended to allow him to extend his tenure in office. Museveni was re-elected in 2016 in an election overshadowed by arrests of politicians, glaring abuse of rights and allegations of rigging. Police were reported to have carried out multiple arrests of opposition activists, including his closest rival, Kizza Besigye. In an apparent show of power, he made a surprising cabinet appointment in June 2016, by naming his wife and first lady, Janet Kataaha Museveni, Minister of Education and Sports. Also, he has recently utilised the machinery of constitutional amendment to ensure the removal of the age barrier, which could have disallowed him from vying for president in 2021 (Abiodun et al, 2018).

In Zimbabwe, the late Robert Mugabe, was considered the world's oldest national ruler. He had been President of Zimbabwe since 1987, after he led the country as Prime Minister from 1980 to 1987. Despite growing concerns over his frailty and deteriorating health condition, he showed no sign of quitting politics. He was eventually forced out of power by the military forces that ensured that he resigned in 2017 (Abiodun et al, 2018).

In a nutshell, a more inclusive list of some African leaders that elongated their tenure in office is illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1: List of Some African Leaders Who Elongated their Tenure in Office**

S/N	Name of Country	Name of President	Time in Office	Number of Years Served
1.	Sudan	Omar Al-Bashir	1989 – 2019	30 years
2.	Cameroon	Paul Biya	1982 till date	39 years
3.	Gambia	Yahya Jammeh	1996 – 2017	20 years
4.	Chad	Idriss Deby	1990 – 2021	30 years
5.	Uganda	Yoweri Tibuhaburwa Kaguta Museveni	1986 till date	36 years
6.	Libya	Muhammar Gaddafi	1969 – 2011	42 years
7.	Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	Mobutu Seseseko Joseph Kabila	1965 – 1997 2001 – 2019	26 years 18 years
8.	Rwanda	Juvenal Habyarimana Paul Kagame	1973 – 1994 2000 till date	21 years 22 years
9.	Zimbabwe	Robert Mugabe	1980 – 2017	30 years
10.	Angola	Jose Eduardo dos Santos	1979 – 2017	38 years
11.	Benin Republic	Mathieu Kerekou	1972 - 1990; 1996 – 2006	25 years
12.	Cote d'Ivoire	Felix HouphouetBoigny	1960 – 1993	33 years
13.	Equatorial Guinea	Francisco Macias Nguema Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo	1968 – 1979 1979 till date	11 years 43 years
14.	Togo	Gnassingbe Eyadema Faure Gnassingbe	1967 – 2005 2005 till date	38 years 17 years

**Source:** Compiled by authors, (2022)

### Factors Responsible for Tenure Elongation in Africa

Scholars like Aboidun et al (2018), Olukoju (2016) and Niworu (2008) have advanced a combination of factors for the phenomenon of sit-tight syndrome or tenure elongation in African politics. Prominent among these factors is the issue of power intoxication. Perhaps one major distinctive feature of leadership is power and the danger of power is its intoxicating nature. Like wine, the more you sip it, the more you desire. This is the reason why the term “power drunk” is used to describe leaders who abuse their office or position. Lord Acton an English historian, politician and writer, attested to this notion when he remarked that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

In Africa, it is evident that nearly all the presidents and heads of government become power-drunk while in office. A classical example of leaders in this category is the ousted Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe. Power intoxication leads to a situation whereby leaders would rule indecently, autocratically and eventually become despotic (Abiodun, 2016). African history is thus replete with leaders who are infatuated with raw power. Even when they are elected through the democratic process, they still tend to undermine and manipulate some critical democratic institutions such as the electoral body, the judiciary; legislature and the executive arms of government to enable them satisfy their vested interests.

Another contributory factor responsible for tenure elongation is corruption, which is regarded as the abuse of public office for private gain and it is most evident in countries where leaders have a sit tight attitude to governance, Crabtree (2017) posits that the main indices of corruption are theft or embezzlement of public funds, giving bribes particularly for electoral support

or support of the mass media, acceptance of bribes such as backhanders for awarding government contracts to companies and independent contractors, giving positions of power to family and friends, extortion, graft and nepotism.

Some African leaders like Presidents Bongo of Gabon, Biya of Cameroon, Chiluba of Zambia, Muluzi of Malawi, Moi of Kenya, Mugabe of Zimbabwe and others have used their political position to embezzle state's economic resources, a process which often results in the mass pauperisation of their subjects and the deepening of their dependence on the patrimonial favours of the ruler (Khalil, 2005). More often than not, the leaders also use the foreign aids and grants offered by international organisations for their own personal interests, that is, at the expense of their citizens (BBC News, 2017).

The fear of the unknown or arrest after leaving office, possibly on account of human rights abuse or looting of public treasury is one of the reasons for tenure elongation among African leaders. In the course of governance, many African leaders have stepped on many toes: brutalised the citizenry, harassed and tortured the opposition and committed a lot of human rights abuses, which create fear in their minds about possible prosecution after leaving office. This is why African Union leaders in a Summit of the Heads of African States and Governments in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 2013 resolved tacitly on immunity for any sitting African Heads of state. Citing the cases of both President Uhuru of Kenya and Omar Al Bashir of Sudan facing ICC cases, the leaders complained that the World Court has not been fair to them. They therefore, unanimously passed a resolution that no sitting African Head of State should appear before an international court (Timawus, 2013; BBC News, 2017).

Lack of leadership education with the exhibition of African mentality is a contributory factor precipitating tenure elongation. Some scholars like Frankema (2021) and Addae-Karankye (2014) are of the view that Africa is not poor. Rather, they averred that the fundamental issue is that of leadership challenge. They emphasised that for any society to prosper, it should have an endogenous system of identifying, training and recruiting its future leaders. Given the fact of the do-or-die political nature of African nations, quality education is usually secondary to the processes of electing a leader. This shortcoming gives room for the money bags and less credible candidates to access the seat of power with ease. Thus, the foregoing scenario affirms the claim that African leaders are illiterates and are yet to learn or imbibe the culture of modern governance in its entirety. This does not however, denote the absence of formal education; but rather, the absence of sound political education, which guarantees a just and credible leadership which is devoid of self-centredness (Frankema, 2021).

The willingness to sustain and ensure that government policies come into fruition, in some instances, accounts for tenure elongation. A number of participants in the 1992 Namibia workshop pointed out that the concepts of democracy and governance are interrelated, but were not the same (Godsons, 2015). They indicated that good governance entails the efficient and effective reciprocity between rulers and the ruled, that is, it is binding on government to be responsive to the yearnings of the populace. Some leaders like Ahmed

Sekou Toure and Olusegun Obasanjo strived hard to elongate their tenures in their belief to sustain the good democratic principles and legacies already laid. In Nigeria for instance, between 1999 and 2007, various efforts of good governance were made by the then former President Olusegun Obasanjo. Such efforts included the various poverty alleviation programmes, introduction of Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM), foreign debts cancellation and his anti-corruption initiatives. In view of these, Obasanjo strived hard to initiate a third term rule in Nigeria though this attempt was thwarted by the National Assembly" (Godsons, 2015, p. 32) and was also vehemently resisted by the various interest groups both locally and internationally.

### **A Geo-political Brief of Guinea**

Guinea as a country, attained political independence from France in 1958, has a population of about 12.93 million and is located on the west coast of West Africa. It is located at 7° et 13" North latitude 8° et 15" West longitude, with 300 km coastline (O'Toole, 2021; Acaps, 2015). It shares its borders with six other countries namely Guinea-Bissau, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Senegal, Mali and Sierra Leone.

The country occupies an area of 245,857 km<sup>2</sup> and is geographically divided into four distinct natural regions: Maritime Guinea, with an area of approximately 47,513 km<sup>2</sup>, has 300 km of coastline and covers a wide area of 100 to 150 km of coastal strip, which includes formations of mangroves, a set of continental lowlands, and plateaus formed of foothills on the west side of the Fouta Djallon region. The region is crossed by many rivers. The Middle Guinea, which covers about 52,939 km<sup>2</sup>, is the most mountainous region of the country. There is the Upper Guinea, which has an area of 99,426 km<sup>2</sup> with an average altitude of 500 meters. It is characterised by subdued topography, resulting in a dense network of rivers and abundance of floodplains. Lastly, the Forest Guinea, at 45,958 km<sup>2</sup>, has a rugged terrain, which rises to 1,752 meters at the level of the Mount Nimba. As its name suggests, this region is abundantly covered by forest and has a climate characterized by a long rainy season (O'Toole, 2021; Acaps, 2015).

Administratively, the country is divided into seven regions namely Boke, Kindia, Labe, Mamou, Faranah, Kankan and Nzerekore, including one special administrative zone, Conakry, which consists of the greater urban area of the capital. The regions are subdivided into 33 prefectures, which are further divided into communes or sub-prefectures with 303 rural and 38 urban communes, five of which make up the city of Conakry (O'Toole, 2021; Acaps, 2015).

There are three major ethnic nationalities in Guinea, which are the Peul (Fulani), which constitutes the largest ethnic group, making up forty per cent of Guinea's population. The Malinke comprises thirty per cent, while the Soussou forms twenty per cent. The remaining ethnic groupings consist of different communities inhabiting the Forest region. Guinea's four geographical regions largely correspond to the main ethno-linguistic groups. The Peul mainly inhabit the Fouta Djallon mountain plateau in Mid-Guinea, the Malinke are

concentrated in Upper Guinea, in the Niger plains while the Soussou are the dominant population along the coast in Maritime Guinea, including in Conakry. There is no dominant group in Forest Guinea, the forested highlands in the southeast, which are inhabited by numerous minority groups who originally moved there to escape Malinke domination. The strong sense of identity among Guinea's ethnic groups has turned into increasing ethnic tensions since elections in 2010 (Sakor & Soko, 2020).

### **Overview of Tenure Elongation in Guinea**

An examination of political narratives of Guinea reveals that tenure of office of the leadership is often characterised by series of constitutional manipulation that is calculated towards entrenching sit-tightism in politics and hence elongation of tenure of office. This phenomenon is usually reinforced with autocratic and despotic proclivity. From the attainment of political independence in 1958 and the coming to power of Ahmed Sekou Toure (1958-1984), down to Lansana Conté (1984-2008) and the regime of Alpha Conde (2010-2021), Guinean leadership since independence, has striven to elongate tenure of office. In all the cases, the Guinean population has protested to its chagrin. Each time the people rose against such move, government's response had been deadly demonstrating authoritarian disposition, especially under Lansana Conté (Manridue-Gil, 2013).

Suffice to say that the struggle for the independence of Guinea was spearheaded by Ahmed Sékou Touré, who was a trade unionist and militant anti-colonialist. After the break with France, Guinea's fledgling government received significant technical and economic assistance from the Soviet Union and other Eastern Bloc countries (Abdullateef & Modestus, 2017). Touré's government was strongly nationalist and espoused a non-ethnic, unified Guinean identity. The Bureau Politique National, the country's highest decision-making body, included members of each of Guinea's major ethnic groupings. However, some government programmes disproportionately affected certain regions. For example, the "demystification" campaign of the mid-1960, which sought to eradicate "backwards" cultural practices, mainly targeted the diverse ethnic groups of Guinea's Southeastern Forest region, while in 1976 the regime specifically targeted members of the Fulbe (Peulh) ethnic group after Touré announced that he had discovered a Fulbe "plot" to destabilise the country. Overall, state-sponsored repression affected Guineans of all ethnicities, including members of Touré's own Malinké ethnic group (Boucher, 2020).

The first two decades of Touré's presidency were marked by increasingly repressive practices as Touré claimed that France and other neo-colonial powers were engaged in a "permanent plot" to undermine the "Guinean Revolution." The government regularly denounced various anti-government schemes purportedly led by counter-revolutionary Guineans and conducted regular purges of the civilian and military bureaucracies. Several thousand Guineans are believed to have disappeared in government detention under Touré, though precise figures are not available (Amnesty International, 1982). As many as a third of Guinea's population (some two million people) fled the country during

the Touré era, though many left for predominantly economic, rather than explicitly political, reasons (Bah, et al, 1989). Sékou Touré died as a result of heart surgery operation in the United States in March 1984, leaving no clear successor and a government with little popular support.

In early April, a military junta calling itself the Military Committee of National Recovery (Conseil Militaire de Redressement National, CMRN) took power in a bloodless coup. Colonel (later General) Lansana Conté, a senior officer and former member of the French colonial military emerged as the leader of the CMRN. The coup leaders suspended the constitution, disbanded Touré's ruling party (executing several of its formerly most powerful members), banned all political activities, and ruled by decree. However, the CMRN also relaxed the level of repression and initiated a few improvements in human rights, including shutting down of the prison block at Camp Boiro, a notorious military base in Conakry that served as a detention centre for Guineans accused by Touré of anti-government activities (Boucher, 2020).

In July 1985, while attending a regional conference, Conté faced a coup attempt by a rival CMRN member, Diarra Traoré, an ethnic Malinké who had served as Vice President following the coup but who had later been demoted. The putsch was suppressed by pro-Conté troops, purges of putative anti-Conté military elements were made, including military trials and executions of accused coup participants. Vigilante attacks on ordinary Malinkés were carried out while their businesses were equally looted. These acts, which were publicly praised by Conté were not only seen as lessening the influence of Malinkés within the military and state institutions, but also heightened ethnic divisions and tension in Guinea and politicised ethnic identity among the President's fellow Soussou people (Abdullateef & Modestus, 2017).

The president ruled by decree for nearly a decade. In December 1990, a new constitution, drafted by a transitional CMRN legislative body, was approved by popular referendum. Though it foresaw a five-year transition to elections, the constitution gave the president wide-ranging decision-making and governance powers. It also created the basis for a highly personalised regime built around the presidency, manned by officials drawn from across Guinea's ethnic groups but drawing heavily from the President's Soussou ethnic grouping. In 1991, Conté dissolved the CMRN, replacing it with a Transitional National Recovery Commission, which promulgated laws based on the constitution and was charged with overseeing a transition to electoral democracy (Abiodun et al, 2018).

In 1992, Conté legalised multi-party politics, but political activities were placed under strict state regulation. Guinea's first presidential election, held in December 1993, was won by Conté, who garnered 52% of the vote. Conté won re-election in December 1998 and 2003. Guinea has held two multi-party legislative elections, in 1995 and in 2002. Conté's ruling Party of Unity and Progress (PUP) won both, taking 76 and 91 of the 114 seats in each respective election. Legislative elections, which were due to take place again in 2007, were repeatedly delayed, leaving the National Assembly with an expired mandate (Sakor & Soko, 2020). Most of the elections held under Conté were characterised

by reports of irregularities and manipulation favourable to the incumbent leadership and the PUP. Varying, though often extensive, levels of political unrest, election violence, state harassment and detention of opposition leaders, and coercive suppression of opposition political activities were common trends.

For example, in 1998, the main opposition leader, Alpha Condé, was imprisoned following the vote. In 2001, a PUP-sponsored referendum aimed at extending Conté's time in office was passed by alleged 98% vote margin, amid low turnout and an opposition boycott, anti-referendum protests, a crackdown by security forces on opposition parties, and strong international criticism of the government action. It extended the presidential term from five to seven years and removed term and presidential candidate age limits, among other measures thus extending Conté tenure. The action was regarded as the height of political and electoral manipulation by analysts and political observers of Guinea's political process (Abdullateef & Modestus, 2017).

In December 2003, Conté, who did not campaign because of his ill health, was re-elected with a reported 96.63% of the vote with only nominal opposition, following the Guinean Supreme Court's disqualification of six presidential candidates from the race on technical grounds and in the face of an election boycott by key opposition parties. The European Union reportedly refused to support the conduct of the election or deploy election observers because of doubts over the transparency of the election (IFES, 2021). In 2004, the Federation of Human Rights Leagues (FIDH, in French) issued a report, titled "Guinea: A virtual democracy with an uncertain future," which sharply criticised the government's regular suppression of political freedoms and targeting of opposition groups (Soumah, 2006). The political permutations of Conté soon brought regional instability that was to hinder democratic consolidation in Guinea.

Meanwhile, Conté presided over weakening central state structures. In its waning years, Conté's government was reportedly divided into factions controlling different areas of the government, economy, military, and even nominal opposition and civil society groups. NGOs and international media portrayed a country whose leader was unable "to control the day-to-day operations of government (International Crisis Group, 2005). Concerns over factionalisation in the administration and military heightened with reports that President Conté, who declined to institutionalise his succession and who did not often appear in public, was terminally ill, precipitating in 2003, the International Crisis Group warning that Guinea was at serious risk of a civil war or military coup (International Crisis Group, 2003).

Alpha Condé had been a long-time opponent of the authoritarian regimes before he came to power as the opposition candidate in 2010, riding a wave of hope. He was re-elected in 2015 for a second and constitutionally last mandate. Before the end of this term, however, he oversaw an amendment to the constitution, driven by his political party (Rassemblement du peuple de Guinée, RPG, in power at the time), which would allow him to run for another two terms. The opposition described the move as a 'constitutional coup d'état'. It was endorsed in early 2020, capturing 90% of the votes in a national referendum

that was boycotted by the opposition and held without international observers. Voters' turnout was estimated at 61% of the registered voters. Condé won the subsequent October 2020 elections with 60% of the votes, but his re-election was marred by violent protests and repression. Several people were killed and many others imprisoned. Condé was increasingly seen as an authoritarian ruler. The persistence of widespread poverty, corruption scandals, and tax and oil price hikes contributed to popular dissatisfaction (Sakor & Soko, 2020).

### **Tenure Elongation, 2021 Coup D'état and Democratic Consolidation in Guinea**

Elongation of tenure of office has crept into political lexicon of Guinea since the attainment of political independence under Ahmed Sekou Toure (1958-1984), down to Lansana Conté era (1984-2008) and continued under the regime of Alpha Conde (2010-2021). The flagrant manipulation of the constitution and the subsequent manoeuvre of the election by Alpha Conde brought a lot of heat to the polity. Apart from the fact that the opposition rejected the election outcome, the international community was not happy with the development in Guinea (Africanews, 2020; France24, 2020). Instead of consolidating the democratic process, Alpha Conde's attitude to democratic principles, institutions and culture were glaringly disappointing and constitute a threat to democratic consolidation.

The persistent elongation of tenure by Guinean leadership has brought disillusionment to the Guinean population, turning the leadership to a leper requiring just a push over from anybody in order to bring political relief and sanity to the nation. This was the opportunity exploited by the Guinean military to oust Alpha Conde's regime. The leader of the 5 September, 2021 coup, which ousted Alpha Conde is Mamady Doumbouya. Having been trained at a French military academy and served as a former member of the French Légion Étrangère, he returned to Guinea in 2018 to head the special force.

The Guinean military took advantage of this situation and banking on the national psyche and euphoria staged a coup to oust Conde's regime. The coup was staged peacefully, without any fatalities, unopposed by the civil population and welcomed by the opposition and its supporters, who were tired of constitutional manipulation and rigging of election designed to achieve tenure elongation of the leadership (Aina & Nyei, 2022). The coup leaders announced the dissolution of the constitution and the government, imposed a curfew and closed the country's borders. Possibly with a view to gaining wider acceptance and currying legitimacy, they released political prisoners and promised to form a national union government within weeks (European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS), 2021).

It is worthy of mentioning that from inception of politics after political independence in 1958, Ahmed Sekou Toure through elongation of tenure, started to entrench himself in power till 1984 when he died, while Lansana Conte who seized power through a coup after Ahmed Sekou's death, remained in power till the first multiparty presidential election of 1993, which was won by him. He went ahead to hold a referendum in 2001 to extend presidential

term in his favour and went to contest the third presidential election in 2003, which he equally won. In January 2007, a general strike was called by unions to protest Conte's autocratic rule. The government responded using the police to repulse the people and in the process several protesters were killed while many were seriously injured. In the process, the various leaderships manipulated the ethnic differences for advantage thus creating disunity among the culturally segmented societies - the Malinkés, the Peul (Fulani), the Soussou, among others, in Guinea.

Suffice to point out here that in the midst of this crisis, Conte died in 2008 and the military seized power. This development spurred the people to protest against military takeover in 2009 while the military fired them, killing 157 people and injuring 1200. The presidential election conducted in 2010 by the appointed transitory government was eventually won by Alpha Conde amidst ethnic tension and violence. He also strived to elongate his tenure in office by manipulating the constitution to achieve his vested interest. Within the process of political and democratic development of Guinea, elongation of tenure surreptitiously crept into its political lexicon and becomes an integral feature of its politics, pitching the government against the opposition and the populace, as well as one ethnic group against the others.

It is pertinent to note that by implication, these developments portend great danger for democratic consolidation. Each time a leadership emerged in Guinea, there had always been the predisposition to elongate its tenure and favour its ethnic nationality at the expense of the others thus hitting up the polity and threatening democratic consolidation of Guinea instead of advancing its ethos. More often, the military, who are supposed to subsume to the control of civil government are at times called upon to defend the vested interest of the leadership (Abokwara, 2020).

A key lesson drawn from the foregoing scenarios in the Federal Republic of Guinea is that the coups in themselves are a critical means of complications and contractions in an already heated and violent polity. For instance, such leader as Alpha Conde who gained political power under the guise of being seemingly a saviour of his people could not divest himself from the corrupt practices of amending the nation's constitution through a referendum for personal gains. Invariably, his government and person became infested with the authoritarian tendencies for which his people rejected his predecessor.

The core lessons from the foregoing situation, the September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021 coup is that instead of allowing democracy to be nurtured within the context of its challenges, allowing the democratic institutions to falter and grow, learn from its mistakes, get transformed and reformed over time, the military incursion readily weakens the process of democratic consolidation. This therefore, implies that Africans and her peoples (political class) are yet to fully grasp the workings of democracy and the need for constitutionalism as guide to public administration. Though it was a peaceful coup without bloodshed, its acceptance by well-meaning peoples of the nation in whatever manner, could not legitimise military incursion into civil rule.

In a nutshell, though the argument could be made that bad leadership and corrupt practices of the democratically elected government of Guinea had reached its heights and thus a decline was inevitable, the military push remains an aberration, which should be considered antithetical to democratic consolidation in Guinea. It is therefore, expedient for other countries to learn from Guinean experience and understand that for democracy to be insulated from military coups and sustained, leadership should respect and abide by democratic principles, ethos and practices. It should equally dissuade itself from making attempts to alter or amend the provisions of the constitution, or rig elections in order to perpetuate itself in power. Conversely, leadership should acknowledge that military coup could not advance the tenets of democracy or promote its consolidation in whatever form, hence the political class should jealously promote, enhance and consolidate democracy in their utterances, behaviour and actions in order to keep the military permanently in their barracks.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

It is worth concluding that the syndrome of tenure elongation in African politics does not augur well for the consolidation of democracy in Africa. Instead of eulogising perpetrators, who plunder the continent's common heritage and wealth, Africans should condemn the phenomenon. This is therefore, a clarion call to all Africans both at home and in the diaspora to rise up as a collectivity and strive to eradicate this mentality since its effect will usually spread like wild fire to other nations in the continent. The nurturing of true democracy in Africa is therefore, a necessity and Guinean leaders, in particular, must be dissuaded from holding on to power at all costs. In order to stop the drift towards perverting constitutionalism in democratic processes with a view to institutionalising tenure elongation in Guinean leadership, the following recommendations are canvassed:

- i. Guinean media advocacy should be used to condemn tenure elongation, while non-governmental organisations in conjunction with such media advocacy should sensitise and mobilise Guinean civil society to confront the action;
- ii. Civil society organisations should organise several fora to educate and enlighten the Guinean citizenry on the dangers which leadership tenure elongation portends, especially for democratic consolidation and development;
- iii. Guineans in the diaspora should lobby the international community to resist any Guinean leadership, which attempts clandestine adjustment of the constitution for elongation of tenure of office;
- iv. Also, international organisations like the AU and the ECOWAS, and other world bodies like the United Nations should place stiff sanctions on Guinean leadership which violates such democratic constitutionalism.

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