

# **Gunning the Leviathans: Undying Presidencies, Term Limits, Changing Political Culture and the Mortification of Dire Political Transition in Africa**

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**Abstract**

The focal narrative in the literature on government and politics in Africa is sheathed with the credence that the region has been governed by tyrants, despotic regimes and political intrigues, abetting political transitions in belligerent awareness as a result. This paper attempts to make a significant departure from this account by interrogating the emerging political orders that deconstruct this primordial discourse on the African socio-political landscape. It argues that the locus of political transition has shifted from a long established political culture to a more mature democratic orientation. It demonstrates that some African nations have evolved from political pettiness to political adolescence. It concludes that the recent political transitions that took place in some African nations represent a different type of regime change that marks a momentous departure from the unwavering political culture previously present in Africa.

**Introduction**

Following the fall of the Berlin wall, many African nations underwent profound regime change. Indeed, some of these regimes were not without subversive political transitions - civil war, social unrest, civil protest and citizens' confrontation with the martial regimes that consequentially delineate African political taxonomy. It is on this basis that Africa was characteristically categorized on the global political map as a region mired in "armed conflict, insecurity, human right atrocities and environmental dystopia"<sup>1</sup> and expressed elsewhere as "soft, weak, swollen, rentier, illogical, underdeveloped, oppressive, powerless and so on – epithets that speak to the inability of these states to fulfill basic functions attributable to the modern state in political philosophy such as law and order, welfare, territorial sovereignty and totality of jurisdiction".<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, to understand Africa in its empathetic nomenclature, dexterity in its languages and cultures become indispensable as no western scholarship could claim to have a cure-all explanation to Africa's socio-political dilemma.

During the Cold War, many African leaders were in search of ways to legitimize their political regimes through patrimonial crazes of governance. These efforts were supported by external resources and western powers, rather than leaders seeking legitimacy through representative democracy or other modes of governance. The end of the Cold War era made such political discretion more harangued, and this forced African leaders to search for alternative means of foreign support. The difficult environment posed in sustaining patrimonial or dictatorial regimes without substantial external support somewhat articulates the wave of democratization that cropped up in African political terrains in the late 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>3</sup> By the end of the Cold War, most African states were being ruled by a hodgepodge of single-party, military and narcissistic big-man regimes. In 1989, only three countries south of the Sahara practiced electoral democracies: Gambia, Botswana and Mauritius – constituting less than 3.5% of the African population when combined together. The disintegration of the Soviet Union swiftly enlarged the scope of governance reform in Africa. The superpower contenders had formerly discouraged western powers from relating or connecting 'bilateral, government-to-government aid to democratization'. International organizations, like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), ensured that allocation of funds was based on conditional 'apolitical' nomenclature - institutional and policy reforms. Donors like the US

instituted 'political conditionality' with their aid. African states in search of external assistance, therefore, were required to host open and conventionally democratic governance structures.<sup>4</sup>

African nations accommodated the new political liberation in different forms, driving them towards more pluralistic political structures. The acknowledgment of popular democracy increased in 1989, especially during the notable bicentennial of the French Revolution held in July of that year. Within the subsequent twelve months, no less than twenty-one African nations had absorbed and adopted a political portico that would serve as a democratic façade. This epoch brought noticeable change in the political lives of everyday Africans. Notably, earlier in February 1989, the atmosphere for popular democracy had stretched to Algeria where the constitutional referendum was ratified, certifying civil liberties and the right to form political parties. Following this, a similar trend was seen during the signing of the African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation held in Arusha and the release of Nelson Mandela from prison by the South African Government in 1990. A similar occurrence was observed in the Republic of Benin, where General Kerekou was compelled to conduct a National Conference; this was prompted by the threat issued by the labour union to go on strike. Benin's National Conference yielded positive results; the congregation suspended the national constitution and dissolved the National Assembly. This event led to the appointment of former World Bank official, Nicephore Soglo, as the country's new Prime Minister. The incident channeled the reconfiguration of multi-partyism, which later set Nicephore Soglo as President following the competitive election between Nicephore Soglo and Mathieu Kerekou.<sup>5</sup> The significance of the democratization project which was achieved through the National Conference in the Republic of Benin served as a model and was extended to other African states.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, this episode was eulogized in the media and helped to raise political awareness and to arouse the political consciousness of the African citizenry.

The aggregation of these trends reshaped the nomenclature of regional politics and served as a riding board for regime change in Africa.<sup>7</sup> The regime changes from authoritarian regimes to multi-party democracies, underscored by the liberalization of political contestation through a people-oriented constitution, served as a political barometer for leadership succession, thus driving the region towards the pursuit for democratization. This then served as a socio-economic impetus for combating poverty and underdevelopment as well as a platform for the citizenry to enjoy basic political rights and accountable governance. Between 1990 and 1993, a larger percentage of African states have succumbed to domestic and international pressures to conduct presidential or legislative elections. The consequence of such electoral competition has been spotty; it had led to regime change and state fragility in some, while others have experienced fraudulent electoral conducts, election riggings and socio-political disorders that inflamed the vulnerability already present in their region.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the quest for democratization and peaceful political transition was challenged by a pervasive belief among leadership to hold on to power for life. The epidemiological political transitions experienced in many African nations that journeyed through unsettled political loggia resulted in military takeovers, interim governments or pseudo-democratic leadership. The cases of Omar Bongo of Gabon, Lansana Conté of Guinea, Félix Houphouët Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire and Gnassingbé Eyadéma of Togo symbolized the rhetoric of tumultuous political transitions in the regional landscape of Africa.<sup>9</sup>

On various occasions, paternal political transitions from father to son took place so that power could continue to revolve around the political dynasty of one leader. Such dynastic politics have been identified in the case of Gabon, where the death of President Omar Bongo certified the transfer of power to his son. The political event that restored Faure Gnassingbé, the son of President Gnassingbé Eyadéma, was the latter's demise in the Republic of Togo, which enabled the former to establish a claim to power. Similar occurrences were observed in Guinea when Moussa Camara seized power following the death of President Lansana Conté. As Lewis (1996) further asserts, the challenges of peaceful political transition have degenerated into political catastrophes in Rwanda and state collapse in Somalia, Liberia and Burundi, thereby ensuing political decay, insecurity, economic stagnation and the search for alternative governments and political environments capable of promoting democratic principles in the region.<sup>10</sup>

Following the defeat of former authoritarian regimes, a weak commitment to democratic canons was demonstrated by African political leaders, in order to perpetuate themselves in office long beyond legitimate terms. This rebranded the nations towards authoritarianism.<sup>11</sup> "Some elected leaders have demonstrated perverse ingenuity in finding ways to bend constitutional democratic tenets so as to remain in power beyond ordained term limits and to restrict and sharply limit the activities of civil society organizations that have been instrumental in the continent's democratic progress"<sup>12</sup>. African countries have been awestruck with 'Big-man' syndrome in which the president is considered as being above the constitution. One African scholar, Kenneth Kalu, explains it as "in most cases, the typical African big man is not subject to the same rules that guide every other citizen".<sup>13</sup>

Such practices make it nearly impossible for the ordinary African citizen to hold the 'Big Men' accountable for unlawful activities, thus promoting a culture of impunity among the political elite. Nevertheless, the political transitions in Zimbabwe and South Africa exemplified a new wave in African political culture, where traditional political culture was usually associated with violence, excessive use of force, bloodshed and killings of innocent citizenry during regime change. Here, political culture demands a "pattern of orientation to political action"<sup>14</sup> that is culturally entrenched in communal, national and regional inclinations, including customs and symbols validated by local understandings of concepts such as representation, power and authority. These common understandings are available and accessible to both the ordinary citizens and political elites.<sup>15</sup>

This paper's analysis, therefore, shall be guided by this working definition and will attempt to provide insight into the contemporary political culture and recent political transitions in Africa. Using meta-analysis, this paper drew largely from secondary sources such as books, journals and publications with relevant information on the discourse. It explores research from the pool of studies on political transitions across countries in Africa, thereby categorizing them into both honorable and dishonorable exits. Data gathered was analysed using content analysis and the argument in this paper proceeds in five dimensions. The next section addresses politics and political culture. After that follows the examination of political transitions in Africa, followed by an account of the culture of term limits. The next section examines various political regimes that followed 'honorable' and 'dishonorable' departures. Following this

section is the account of regimes that successfully or unsuccessfully manipulated their national constitutions for tenure elongation as well as those who have not experienced such incidents. The succeeding section provides an argument on the dynamics of political transition and changing political culture in Africa. The final section is the concluding phase of this paper.

### **Politics and Political Culture in Africa**

There was a strong allusion to politics in Africa prior to 1960, when most African countries won independence from colonial rule. While it might not be denoted as a debatable concept within the African traditional discourse, the operationalization of politics is reflected across all spheres of indigenous ways of life, structure and social activities on the continent. The inadequate debate, therefore, renders a somewhat obscure understanding of politics in Africa. The conceptual discourse on African politics began in 1960 when Almond and Verba (1963) opened up a debate on the politics of developing countries, and this behavioral revolution led to the re-thinking and evaluating of African politics. Another contemporary view was also that of David Easton (1957), who emphasized politics as the authoritative allocation of societal values. Subsequently, the study of African politics has progressed in an exceptionally slow pace with regards to reflecting trajectories and dynamics.

Politics in Africa is as diverse as the continent itself. Relative traits can not be attributed across all constituent nation-states of Africa. A good reason for this, one might argue, is that the explanation of African politics was very normative. There was no considerable level of interest on comprehensive and empirically-driven research on African politics, thereby slowing the advancement of theoretical propositions on the subject matter. This indicates why the context of African politics is still fraught with cleavages, as the segregated elements provide inherent lessons to be (un) learned, even by democracies, on political concession and stratification for nation-building.

Irrespective of the context ascribed to African politics, what is ideal in a divergent political space such as Africa, is, according to Rotberg (1999), reciprocal trust created mostly by a combination of formal and informal institutional efforts geared towards the achievement of common goods, social capital and effective governance. The benefits are abounding if these structured politics are ensued. At the periphery, it will facilitate the formation of genuine civil societies with clear interests and feasible end results. Subject matter knowledge of African politics was never given due prominence: a major reason for this being that interests were not directed towards theoretical and empirical engagements on the subject matter. However, African politics has been widely symbolized by concepts of identity politics and ethnic politics. These conceptual frameworks were able to sail through the available discourse, owing to the cultural reactivity of the people towards these components of African politics. Elections are, most often, characterized by highly pronounced rigging, wanton killings and socio-ethnic sentiments as well as electoral malpractices as noticed in many African countries during the early years after independence. The failure of early democratic concretization led to the insurgence of military regimes within the political landscape of Africa. This trend transcends across many Africa states, with the exception of a few countries with long-standing imperialism and non-reactionary measures to political dysfunctionality.

Theoretical factors may moderately explain the framework of Africa politics. In this regard, systems analysis or structural-functionalism are considerable epistemological foundations. Scholars have contended these theoretical approaches in an attempt to provide discursive templates and to place the African context into its proper perspective, upon which Africa's politics can be better prescribed and explained. A cross-section of these theoretical appraisals maintains that the informational nature of African politics appears to be only systemic. It assumes an understanding of politics across the globe, leaving a particular gap in African political institutions and political systems. In furtherance, the study of political culture is a complementary discourse with which the understanding of African politics can be well evaluated. Every insightful detail about politics in Africa maintains this position. Formisano (2001: 405) argued that "political culture is a dominant explanatory and descriptive theme".<sup>17</sup> This contention is not without critique from historians who claim that political culture slights the issue of hegemony and power.<sup>18</sup> Yet, this concept can not be assertively underpinned as it is of colloquial use, as observed from Pye's (1968) definition that "the mere term 'political culture' is capable of evoking quick intuitive understanding, so that people often feel that, without further and explicit definition, they can appreciate its meaning and freely use it".<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, the ulterior motive of this discourse is to situate the concept within the political arena and cross-examine its influence on the trends of politics in Africa. While it had been acclaimed that the antecedent of political culture appeared vague at its conceptual inception, Almond and Verba (1963), however, annotated that to every political action is an embedded pattern of political orientation. It is the typology of political orientation that is most often used to describe political culture. Simply put, politics in Africa can not deviate from its people's orientations. The inscriptions on African politics are clearly being dotted by the political culture of the people. In subsequent analysis, there are key sociological features that were earlier rejected but later acknowledged as intrinsic factors of political culture. This includes, according to Almond and Verba (1963), attitudes to politics, national character, political values and cultural ethos. Of course, these factors are not only essential; but constitute the explanatory variables themselves.

An upswing in these debate was noticeable in the 1950s and 1960s. Culture was given a dual efficacy; which is, what can be a causal factor to other events and what can be caused by inherent factors in a given society. Berkhofer (1994) thus drew assumptions on political culture as "a matter of underlying systems about patterns of ideas and value". The conceptual discourse on political culture gained more momentum owing to its possibility in evaluating attitudinal and behavioral differences among nations, thereby leading to classifications such as 'parochial' and 'civic' cultures.<sup>20</sup> The former represents relatively low individual and group attitudes towards the political system of their societies, while the latter is a representation of higher and informed attitudes and behaviors towards the political configurations of a state.

To this end, political dynamics are a function of the political culture of individuals and groups in a given environment. Thus, what politics entails, in Africa, is a reference point to its political culture. A good picture of African politics can be taken with the lens of the political culture of said society. This explains why politics, in respective African states, has been cloned in varying degrees to the prevalent group and ethnic

attitudes. For instance, women do not easily partake in political races in Northern Africa, as a result of domineering Islamic beliefs and attitudes. This patriarchal attribute represents, according to Nadine (2006), one of the more prominent cultural factors that have a lingering effect on the politics of the region and one that has somewhat minimized the level of women's political participation.

While this could be denoted on a regional scale, the diverse trend still does not completely hold as respective countries within the same region still exhibit different political behaviors and attitudes. As political culture is different from one state to another, so is the politics. This brings about the argument on state political culture – which examines the variations among states in government activities, administrative goals, innovative capacity, popular participation in elections and party competition. State political cultures could also be important determinants of differing rates of political representation in public institutions. These variations are still borne out of the same lineage of cultural, attitudinal and societal diversities. This, to a large extent, substantiates the premise that political culture is a harbinger of politics in Africa. These concepts are, according to Pye (1968), common terms among social scientists. Of course, they appear elusive and reminiscent of other many concepts within social sciences. However, due to concerted interrogations via epistemological and methodological approaches, these concepts are much clearer now than before. Furthermore, this debate continued to late 1990s, when scholars working with the concept were either searching for a causal middle ground on which political culture could serve as an intermediate variable (lobbying for an “interactive” relationship between culture and political structure) or rejecting this approach altogether in favour of a position that emphasized the primacy of institutions, political actors, or individuals' rational choice. Scholars were also turning to the increasingly influential perspectives of anthropology, interpretivism and symbolic analysis. The underlying assertion here is that political culture is the source of political preferences across nations in Africa.

### **Undying Presidencies: Term Limits and Constitutional Manipulation in Africa**

In the first decade following decolonization, African political leaders were described as ‘Big Men’ – unrestricted by the formal rules that emphasized term limits. In this political epoch, leaders derived their authority from a permutation of military might, informal networks and intimidation. Leaders were appointed and withdrawn principally through the barrel of the gun. In this period, it was absurd for a political leader to relinquish power based on a constitutional clause. The plausibility of ignoring constitutional term limits allowed them to declare themselves ‘President for Life’ or to maneuver the legislature to make such pronouncements. Idi Amin in 1976 employed similar tactics, Kwame Nkrumah did in 1964 and Francisco Macías Nguema Jean-Bédél Bokassa did in 1972. Many other African political leaders adopted the same advancements in order to lengthen their tenures.<sup>21</sup> The trend of lengthening presidential terms beyond the legal boundary was followed by Namibia in 1998, when its national constitution was amended to provide the opportunity for Sam Nujoma to rule for a third term.<sup>22</sup> Other attempted manipulations of national constitutions took place during the political reign of Joseph Kabila of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Paul Kagame of Rwanda, Pierre Nkurunziza of Burundi, Teodoro Obiang of Equatorial Guinea, José Eduardo dos Santos of Angola, Paul Biya of Cameroon and Omar Bongo of Gabon. The attempted constitutional amendment to lift term

limit championed by President Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso in October 2014 triggered civil protest. This illustrates how African political regimes have utilized constitutional change to continue and perpetuate themselves in positions of power.<sup>23</sup>

The President of Burundi, Pierre Nkurunziza, and the South Sudanese President, Salva Kiir, were elected through constitutional curvatures, while similar anomalies were found in 2016 under President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, who was re-elected following the completion of his constitutional tenure in 2016 and the removal of legal code, allowing him to govern for a fifth term.<sup>24</sup> Seven African leaders have triumphantly amended their national constitutions so that tenure elongation could be accomplished. These include Idriss Deby of Chad, Omar Bongo of Gabon, Lansana Conte of Guinea, Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso, Sam Nujoma of Namibia, Yoweri Museveni of Uganda and Gnassingbe Eyadema of Togo. It should be recalled that these leaders have been in power before the adoption of term limits in the 1990s. Their inability to adhere to constitutional tenures was highlighted when they refused to step down following the end of their legal term limits. For instance, President Omar Bongo of Gabon rebuffed the principles enshrined in constitutional term limits, as he became president in 1967 under a one-party system and then in 1991 under a multi-party system where two-term limits were introduced. After the completion of his two terms, he championed a constitutional amendment that put an end to term limits. Correspondingly, Lansana Conte, the President of Guinea, employed a similar tactic in 2003 through a referendum that purged presidential term limits from the Guinean constitution. In the case of Burkina Faso, Blaise Compaore abolished term limits, which were later reinstated. However, a constitutional Court of Justice held that the reinstatement could only be employed in future elections and therefore could not be applied to his previous political tenures.

Despite the rampage of constitutional reforms, there are countries where this tactic has proved unsuccessful. In the Nigerian case during the political regime of President Olusegun Obasanjo, Obasanjo attempted to lure the National Assembly to abolish existing term limits, following his completion of a two-term constitutional tenure and his intention to embark on a third one. It was alleged that a large number of parliamentarians were bribed so that the needed two-third majority in the hallowed chamber could have passed the bill for assent. However, the bill suffered a setback as a result of the lack of consensual armistice among the parliamentarians. Following a similar pattern, in Zambia, term limits were stipulated in the national constitution and legal framework of the ruling party - the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD). President Fredrick Chiluba's pursuit for extension of political tenure witnessed severe retardation within his party and from outside the political arena - including from the side of civil society organizations, women's organizations, trade unions, religious organizations, senior politicians and legal practitioners. Strong condemnation by the general public was showcased when citizens mobilized for civil protest against the constitutional reform. While Fredrick Chiluba successfully achieved constitutional amendment of the party's protocols, the public resistance against the national constitution, however, forced him to stand down. Moreover, he did not relinquish power; instead he managed to outsource the seat of power to a loyal presidential candidate that he could easily maneuver. Levy Mwanawasa was handpicked as the MMD presidential candidate whose electoral victory in due course cut the ribbon of patriotic ties with Fredrick Chiluba. During the political administration of Levy Mwanawasa, political immunity for Chiluba was repealed which allowed the government to prosecute Chiluba for corruption charges.

Many constitutional reform campaigners in Africa have presented their arguments in several variations. They often underscore the necessity to sustain reforms as well as to manage the fear of instability (Vencovsky, 2008). Nevertheless, resistance to term limitation emphasizes the personalistic agenda of incumbent regimes, including fear of being prosecuted as a result of human rights abuses or corruption, fear of disconnecting with the patrimonial network, desire for continual power and the absence of future opportunities for erstwhile presidents. Conversely, the protagonists of term limits consider it as an approach to ease ethnic tension in the various regions of the continent. For instance, in Nigeria, term limits are identified as an alternative solution to ethnic political domination. It is important to observe that in an environment where divergent ethnic groups flourish, the feeling of marginalization, alienation and craving for power by an individual ethnic stratum can not be ignored. It has been suggested that power rotations among numerous ethnic groups from the various geo-political zones are capable of smothering burgeoning ethnic tensions and feelings of being marginalized. Thus, the term limit is capable of preventing habitual and lifelong presidencies in any given country. Moreover, the rationale for the implementation of term limits is the belief that the power of incumbency may garner more votes during an election, and thus, bestows the upper advantage to the political regime in power. Term limits consequently provide the prospect for democratic accountability and peaceful power transitions.

### **Term Limits: Attempted, Failed and No Attempt**

In Malawi, President Bakili Muluzi took a objectionable step on constitutional reform to promote his third term agenda. The bill, sponsored by Muluzi, was whitewashed in the Parliament. Following this futile effort, two other bills were put forward to the Parliament. This triggered a wide range of popular uprisings, protests and criticisms from traditional rulers, churches, civil society groups, media, political parties, lawyers and the general public. After the two unsuccessful attempt, Muluzi trekked the path over to Zambia by nominating an obedient successor as the presidential candidate for the next election. However, while Bingu wa Mutharika was nominated as the replacement, subsequent to his inauguration as President of Malawi, the beneficial relationship between the political godfather – Muluzi - and the new president - Bingu wa Mutharika - experienced fallout due to changes in government policies regarding the anti-corruption campaign in the country.<sup>25</sup> The implication of incumbent power in such a scenario, as suggested by Cheeseman (2010), is that in an environment where the existing president contests an election, he maintains absolute control of the state apparatus as well as party structure, or in the case where the incumbent president single-handedly nominated his successor, state power may be employed in ensuring the political triumph of such candidate.<sup>26</sup> This pattern was also seen in Togo after the demise of President Gnassingbé Eyadema in 2005. The attempt to promote his son, Faure Essozimme Gnassingbé, to the seat of power experienced dramatic resistance from the opposition party. The nomination of preferential candidates by outgoing presidents is aimed at accentuating the existing rules of the political game. A similar occurrence could also be traced to Nigeria during President Olusegun Obasanjo's regime. Following the aborted third-term bid, Obasanjo handpicked Umaru Musa Yar'Adua as the sole presidential candidate under the political auspices of People's Democratic Party [PDP]. It is believed that the nomination of Yar'Adua was underscored politically, as Yar'Adua was not a strong

man in the party and hence needed the support of Obasanjo in determining public policy and conducting the selection of candidates for political appointments. In line with this assumption, Obasanjo mobilized resources to ensure victory for his candidate in a very controversial election.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, there are several cases when opposition parties have won the elections. The case of Nigeria under President Goodluck Jonathan, when he was defeated by Muhammadu Buhari, could be used to explain the trepidation of incumbent regimes. Such circumstances give rise to probes of the previous activities of past regimes, as Nigeria is now witnessing allegations of corruption, bribery, money laundering and diversion of public funds by the political cabinet of then President Goodluck Jonathan. Hence, this scenario demonstrates that in nearly all African countries, incumbent regimes would prefer to maintain the hegemonic power of their political party, so as to escape prosecution for any corrupt activities carried out under their reign.

In a recent work of Posner and Young (2018), the duo posit that “with few exceptions, leaders who chose to seek third terms attempted to do so by working through constitutional channels rather than around them.” It presents term limits as a potent driver towards democracy.<sup>28</sup> Term limits are offered as a mechanism through which regular elections are conducted, providing a ‘glimmer of hope’ for those in opposition to challenge the incumbency of the regime in power, thus fostering democratic change – even when there is a sitting president.<sup>29</sup> Recognizing the recent shocker in Gambia, Nigeria and Ghana, it can be noted that;

Mahama’s loss in Ghana plus the recent defeats of sitting presidents in Nigeria and (despite temporary resistance) the Gambia suggest that incumbents are also facing new threats to their holds on power. In particular, recent transfers of power have been driven by deteriorating economic conditions, opposition learning, more effective and dynamic electoral processes and increasingly assertive voters.<sup>30</sup>

Contrasting the foregoing model present in different African regimes, Tanzanian President Jakaya Kikwete is one of a few distinctive African leaders who abide by constitutional term limits. After the completion of two-terms, Kikwete voluntarily stepped down from political leadership of the country. Unlike him, his Burundian counterpart President Pierre Nkurunziza initiated his third-term agenda which later degenerated into violence, and in Burkina Faso, President Blaise Compaore was forced out of power after advancing his third-term political tenure. The cause for a myriad of tenure elongations on the continent is considered to be deficiency in mobilizing strong democratic institutions. In place of strong institutions, many African nations are building strong Big Men. As Craig (2015) argues “strong men are not going to build up strong institutions, strong men are going to build weak institutions in order to remain in power”.<sup>31</sup> The tables below better articulate numerous African countries that have successfully eliminated term limits, the failed attempts and those that have not attempted any constitutional amendments regarding term limits. Tables 1-3 present respectively the countries that have attempted to extend term limits, those without any attempts and those that have had unsuccessful attempts in removing the constitutional clause for term limits. The tables indicate that between the years 2000 and 2015, the average Composite Democracy Index (CDI) in countries that have successfully removed term limits was 3.6, while countries that have attempted but failed scored 5.7 and in countries where no attempt was made at all the CDI was 7.2. Thus, this demonstrates that the prevailing quality of democracy has a greater

impact in determining whether term limits will be sustained, repealed or removed. Evidence from the tables considers countries like Senegal where the average CDI is 7.7, (stronger as compared to other countries). This suggests that public acceptance of term limits would be in conformity with levels of democracy. However, the empirical study reveals that in countries rated low in CDI, including Swaziland, Guinea, Togo, Cameroon and Côte d'Ivoire, citizens' acceptance of term limits was reasonably high. Equally, in countries rated high in CDI, such as Mauritius, Botswana and Lesotho, popular acceptance for term limits was relatively low.<sup>32</sup> Generally, in Africa, it can be argued that there is growing popular support for term limits. This could be a result of the entrenchment of democratic institutions, changing political culture and orientation of the African populace. Moreover, the map in Fig. 1 further illustrates the experience of African countries regarding term limits.

Term Limits Removed		
Country	Year	CDI*
Cameroon	2008	3.4
Chad	2005	3.1
Congo, Republic of	2015	3.2
Djibouti	2010	4.3
Equatorial Guinea	2011	2.2
Gabon	2003	3.8
Rwanda	2015	3.4
Togo	2002	4.3
Uganda	2005	5.0
<b>Average CDI</b>		<b>3.6</b>
Failed Attempts to Remove Limits		
Country	Year	CDI*
Burkina Faso	2004	4.6
Malawi	2002	7.6
Nigeria	2006	5.6
Zambia	2001	5.0
<b>Average CDI</b>		<b>5.7</b>

Table 1

Source: Reynjtjens, (2016) *The Struggle Over Term Limits in Africa: A New Look at the Evidence*

Table 2

Source: Reynjtjens, (2016) *The Struggle Over Term Limits in Africa: A New Look at the Evidence*

**Table 3**

Source:  
Reyntjens,  
(2016) *The  
Struggle Over  
Term Limits in  
Africa: A New  
Look at the  
Evidence*

Term Limits Removed	
Country	CDI*
Benin	7.7
Botswana	8.4
Cape Verde	9.2
Comoros	5.3
Ghana	7.9
Guinea-Bissau	5.5
Kenya	6.0
Mali	7.0
Mozambique	6.7
Namibia	7.8
São Tomé and Príncipe	8.9
Senegal	7.6
Seychelles	7.1
Sierra Leone	6.3
South Africa	9.0
Tanzania	5.5
<b>Average CDI</b>	<b>7.2</b>

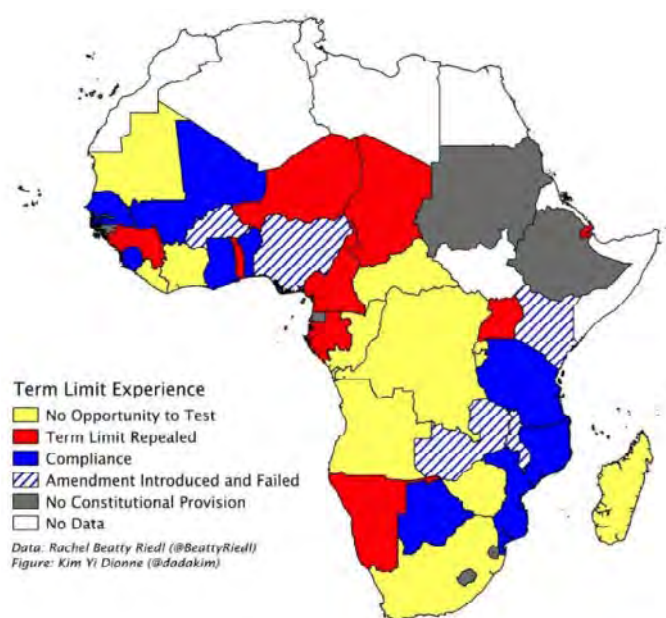


Figure 1.

Source:  
Reyntjens,  
(2016) *The  
Struggle Over  
Term Limits in  
Africa: A New  
Look at the  
Evidence*

## Between 'Honorable' Departure and 'Dishonorable' Exit

A variation of regimes has shown different approaches to political transition in Africa. Some regimes have taken the path towards constitutional adherence while others seek out more manipulative political machinery so that they can afford themselves lifelong presidencies. Those that followed honorable pathways employed peaceful transition methods and mechanisms at the end of their term limits. Some examples include Jerry Rawlings of Ghana, Mascarenhas Monteiro of Cape Verde, Joaquim Chissano of Mozambique, Mathieu Kerekou of Benin, Benjamin Mkapa of Tanzania, Alpha Konaré of Mali, Nelson Mandela of South Africa, Daniel Arap Moi of Kenya, Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria and Miguel Trovoada of São Tomé e Príncipe. There are a number of cases in which the incumbent regimes were forced out of power, while some have trekked the path towards an honorable exit after their tenure. Recently, incidences are forcing incumbent political administrations out of power in many African states. Remarkably, public sensitivity towards accountable political administration and (re)orientation of the citizenry are some newer trends believed to be responsible for this contemporary political culture against Africa's extortionists. The case of the former President of Gambia, Yahyah Jammeh, represents an example of a dishonorable departure. Yahya Jammeh was positioned as the ninth longest-serving president on the Africa continent, having ruled Gambia for 22 years.<sup>33</sup> An ever grander historic fall for Yahya Jammeh was circumvented in the last presidential election face-off between him and Adama Barrow, a property developer. Following the declaration, by the national electoral body, of Adama Barrow as the winner of the presidential election, Jammeh conceded defeat to Barrow, pledging to work alongside him for a peaceful political transition. Following this event, Jammeh made a further pronouncement that the election has been annulled as a result of 'foreign interference' and assertively pledged to stay in power until another election could be called. However, the United Nations, ECOWAS and the African Union all avowed that Jammeh would no longer be recognized as the president of Gambia.

A number of high profile delegations, constituting the Presidents of Mauritania, Guinea and Liberia, played a key role in mediating with Jammeh for him to relinquish power. Nevertheless, the mediatory measure proved unproductive and as such, the application of force was considered necessary. ECOWAS had no feasible alternative other than to mobilize regional armed forces constituting of 7,000 personnel from Nigeria, Ghana, Niger and Senegal, among other nations, to station in Senegal. Jammeh, who had initially claimed to rule The Gambia for “one billion years” was forced out of power as a result of the joint effort.<sup>34</sup>

The ironclad Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe also falls within the context of African leaders that were forcibly ousted from power. Mugabe has been the only president Zimbabweans had experienced since independence. He was a freedom fighter in the independence struggle, seen as an icon for the actualization of the Zimbabwe nation-state from the hands of the British. After 37 years of an autocratic reign, the popular uprising against his regime sprang as a result of the dismissal of Emmerson Mnangagwa - Mugabe's vice president. Following the sacking of Mnangagwa, Mugabe's intention to install his wife as his successor raised a popular rebellion against the government. This marked the beginning of the fall of Mugabe's political administration. This event triggered the urgent convention of a Zimbabwean Parliamentary session. The outcome of parliamentary votes threatened Mugabe's presidency, offering him two political alternatives; either to resign or be impeached. It should be noted that Mugabe has been the leader of the ZANU-PF party for decades. However, the polarization in the party, triggered as a result of Mnangagwa's removal, divided loyalties inside the ZANU-PF party. Following this episode, Robert Mugabe was forced out of power by the military, marking the demise of Mugabe's political leadership of Zimbabwe. The factors that produced the dishonorable exit of Robert Mugabe unfolded in two dimensions; first, the struggle over who will succeed him inside ZANU-PF and second, the divided loyalties between those loyal to former vice president Mnangagwa and those supporting Grace Mugabe. The African Union recognized that the Zimbabwean people have expressed their wishes that there should be a peaceful transfer of power in a manner that secures the democratic future of the country. President Mugabe's decision to resign, paving the way for a transition process, was owned and led by the sovereign people of Zimbabwe”.<sup>35</sup>

### **Democratic Transition in Post-Colonial Africa**

The character of political transitions varies across borders. The pathways in Latin America, Eastern Europe and Southern Europe are inevitably not identical with those taken in Africa. Political transitions in divergent environments are shaped by cultural and historical traditions. To start with, political transition implies a process of transferring power between one regime to another. A successful political transition provides a favorable environment for new governments to operate.<sup>36</sup> Still, two basic approaches to democratic transition have been considered; these include the transition from above and transition from below. The transition from above occurs when political leaders respond to looming crisis and take corrective measures by initiating democratic reforms. In contrast, the transition from below occurs when the incumbent political leadership succumbs to popular pressure from the public. While confronting it with pact formation, a national conference, a coup d'état or popular revolution, it is generically envisaged as a pathway to achieve democratic advancement. It has been argued that transitions from above have the capability to deliver democracy. This is because such transitions are habitually coordinated within

a specific time frame, procedure and strategy. On the contrary, the transition from below is often beleaguered with uncertainty, negotiation and the excessive use of force on proponents by the government in power.<sup>37</sup> Another perspective in the study of political transition argues that very few transitions to democratic regimes were made possible as a result of revolutionary bursts that surmounted the incumbent regimes through popular revolt.<sup>38</sup> The trepidation of plummeting the nation into crisis emboldened many regimes into dialogue with opposition parties to secure political transitions. As Adler and Webster (1995: 82) argues,

protagonists agree to terminate conflict...because they fear that a continuation of conflict may lead to a civil war that will be both collectively and individually threatening. The pressure to stabilize the situation is tremendous since governance must somehow continue. Chaos is the worst alternative for all.<sup>39</sup>

Huntington's (1993) explanation of the 'third wave' of democratic transitions in thirty-five countries provides a myopic relationship between the nature of incumbent authoritarian regimes and political transition. He argues that while political transitions are often prompted from the top down, such occurrences are by the same token probable in personalistic or single-party military regimes. Yet, political leaders in one-party states and military regimes are more likely than a personal dictator to engage in dialogue with the opposition in the course of transferring power. In fact, personalistic regimes are more vulnerable to capitulate when compared to other regimes, especially in the process of popular protest. He further argues that dictatorial regimes often stay long in power and are obstinate to relinquish power.<sup>40</sup>

A few prototypes of such regimes are found in the political ecology of Africa. African political regimes were incongruent with the movement for democratic multipartyism, considering examples from Kenya during the political regime of President Daniel Arap Moi, whose political philosophy thwarted political pluralism and disparaged the campaigner of multi-party democracy. A similar venture was also made by President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, who sponsored a *de jure* one-party state which was later abandoned as a result of pressure from eminent outspoken citizens and donor nations. The protagonists of a one-party system justified the structure on a number of grounds, including the traditional supremacy of an 'unchallenged chief', the recognition of a democratic majority articulated through a single-party system and the necessity for unity among divergent ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups. Thus, competitive politics was discarded as a foreign luxury neither necessary for nor logical in Africa. A similar trend was observed in Malawi, where the rationale for a nostalgic single-party system was analyzed based on the quasi-theological premise that there is no opposition in Heaven. God himself does not want opposition — that is why he chased Satan away. Why should Kamuzu [President Banda] have opposition then? <sup>41</sup>

Since 1989, several transitions from authoritarian to democratic regimes have taken place; conversely, many of these constitutionally instituted political regimes were short-lived, except in a number of cases where democracy has found to be resilient. Even though the trajectory of democratic transition has been defective, the acceptance of freedom of expression and recognition of 'legitimate opposition' are continually reinforced.<sup>42</sup> There are critical moments and dynamics in a transitory period, and such occurrences habitually compel a dictatorial or military state to

dialogue with civil society organizations or concerned citizens. Transitioning into a democratic state requires electoral competition and the acceptance of defeat by the opposition.<sup>43</sup> The acceptance of defeat makes the process of transition less troublesome. In Africa, it is well known that fraudulent elections represent one of the major challenges subjugating democratic transition; the legitimization of the de jure incoming regime becomes difficult due to electoral corruption and the inability of the opposition to concede defeat. There were a series of recent protests challenging the credibility of elections across Africa. The 1999 elections in Nigeria, and subsequent ones, were challenged by local and international election observers – the Carter Center, National Democratic Institute (NDI), International Republican Institute (IRI), Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), the European Union as well as the opposition.<sup>44</sup> More recently, Kenya's presidential election race, between President Uhuru Kenyatta and veteran opposition politician Raila Odinga, triggered protests that killed twenty-four persons, showing how the credibility of an election could obstruct peaceful political transition.<sup>45</sup> Remarkably, in a political environment where the opposition acknowledges its defeat, political transition becomes acquiescence and therefore enhances democratic stability. It is against this background that Bratton (1994: 27), argues that:

Whether a democratic regime becomes consolidated depends upon the acceptance by all political actors, especially the losers of the election, of a new and stable set of political rules including the convocation of regular subsequent elections. It may take generations to consolidate a democracy. Regime consolidation can only be said to have occurred after significant threats of regime reversal (e.g, from the military or a “disloyal” opposition) have been effectively eliminated or contained.<sup>46</sup>

In this context, political transitions have continued to change from vicious traditional nomenclature to a more peaceful and mature democratic mechanism that has come to domicile within the African political environment, therefore, driving the continent towards ideal democracy.

### **From Political Pettiness to Political Adolescence: The Shifting Paradigm in African Political Culture**

Following the ‘third wave’ of democratization in 1989, African dictators bowed to the conventional demands for political reform. The reforms considerably centered on term limits, multi-party elections and representative parliaments. The quest for institutional reforms recorded significant victories which reduced the host of African autocracies from 45 to 30. Nonetheless, since the year 2000, some elected presidents have attempted to extend their tenure by the constitutional manipulation that brought them to power.<sup>47</sup> However, starting from the 1990s, the nature of African leadership has slowly began to change; this era witnessed a paradigm shift from “coup d'états to voluntary resignations”, moving the region towards ‘institutionalized political order’.<sup>48</sup> A larger percentage of contemporary African political leaders utilize democratic order as compared to their comrades from 25 years ago.<sup>49</sup> These changes are evident in a series of socio-political metamorphosis. For instance, most African countries have political histories that are littered with civil wars, military coups and the demise of multi-party systems. This depicts the paltry nature of African politics as a result of events that were culturally, attitudinally and behaviorally driven. In an attempt to shift from this milieu, Africanisation of the polity began to strive towards

the proliferation of political authority figures, as well as organizations and networks that serve as interest groups in place of formal governmental institutions. This institutional upsurge constitutes the organic part of the African political process. Without recourse, organizations and networks have played important roles in the relative stability and continuity of democratic governance on the continent. By 1989, the winds of political change had signaled throughout Africa. Yet, at this stage, African politics was still handicapped by fundamental human rights abuses, economic mismanagement, nepotism and political repression. This makes the popular struggle for democratic consolidation not outrightly new. Remarkably, the current political transition in Africa is taking different forms. It is ensuing from various dimensions with different outcomes, depending on the inducement of external bodies as well as prevailing socio-political configurations. In this respect, existing studies have cautiously identified various typologies of political transition in Africa.

Among the Francophone countries, it can be noted that political powers were transited and government structures were formed via national conferences. According to Martin (1993), this could, however, be likened to a transitional government with a dual executive. It was evident that this type of process had already taken place in Benin, Congo, Gabon, Mali and Niger. More notably, a similar process of political transition has once manifested to a full military regime in Nigeria, led by General Sani Abacha. There are examples of such processes being truncated mid-way, as in Togo and Zaire. Transition has also been fully chanted by opposition groups in countries like Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic/CAR, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea and Madagascar.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, political transition in some African countries have been facilitated via multi-party elections. Initially, no African country (with the notable exception of Mauritius) had experienced a change of government via multi-party elections in the post-independence era. Such government change (without a national conference) has since taken place in Senegal (February 1988); Cape Verde and Sao Tome & Principe (March 1991); and Zambia (October 1991). Some countries had co-opted transitions and these include Cote d'Ivoire (October 1990); Gabon (September-October 1990); Ethiopia (June 1992); Cameroon (October 1992); Ghana (November 1992); and Kenya (December 1992). It was also the most probable outcome in the Central African Republic (1993). In Togo, President Eyadema had managed to subvert the transition process by wresting power from the prime minister, Kokou Koffigoh, who was democratically elected by the National Conference (July-August 1991). A similar scenario unfolded in 1993 to the benefit of Mobutu Sese Seko in Zaire.

Previous descriptions of African political transitions could be declared pettiness while political pubescence or adolescence can be considered in the instance of guided democratization. This was represented, most notably, by Burkina Faso, Guinea, Nigeria and, to a lesser extent, by Ghana and Mauritania, where military regimes retained virtually complete control over the transition process making it deliberately complex and prolonged. Contrary to this, the relative pettiness of political transition was observed via authoritarian action and sub-national conflict. For states in this category, the process of political restructuring has been hampered either by the stubborn refusal of the incumbent leader to open up the political system (Malawi), or by open or latent sub-national conflict (Algeria, Angola, Burundi, Chad, Kenya, Liberia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia and Tunisia). Moreover, the recent change in government in Zimbabwe, South Africa and The Gambia symbolizes how the African region is moving towards more mature political transitions. Although The Gambia and Zimbabwe experiences might look somewhat forceful, willful resignations are

seemingly uncommon in Africa and stand against the long-established tradition of African political leadership to hold on to power for life. This thus marks the changing political culture of African governance.<sup>51</sup> The tables below exemplify the progressive pace in democratization acculturation in Africa.

Table 4 illustrates the patterns of polarity and improved democratic constitutionalism between Africa and the rest of the world from 1985 to 2014. Table 5, by Freedom House, further depicts the declining rate of conflicts in the African region. Beginning from the year 1990, the region experienced a drastic reduction in the one-party system as well as the diminution in conflict, especially starting from the year 2000. This epoch also began to produce the entrenchment of multi-partyism, freedom of association and improved freedom of the press. The number of semi-authoritarian, hybrid and democratic countries climaxed in 2005. However, some countries have experienced improvements with regards to civil liberties and political rights and these include countries like Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Liberia, Burkina Faso and Cote D'Ivoire while countries like Uganda, Burundi, South Africa, Ethiopia and Gambia witnessed a decline. Hybrid regimes were considered neither dictatorial nor fully democratized. Yet, some African leaders attempted to stay in power way beyond their constitutional limits, seeking constitutional reforms in order to remain in power. Table 6 indicates the category of countries that have experienced improvement in democratic leadership, especially from the year 2006 to 2015. Surprisingly, the Republic of Benin is considered among the most rapid democratizers, while democratic regression was marked in eleven countries.

**Table 4**  
**Democratic**  
**Progress**  
**Scores**

Source: Center for Systemic Peace. Harbeson J. (2018) Democracy and the State in Sub-Saharan Africa (eds) in 'Africa In World Politics: Constructing Political And Economic Order

	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2014
<b>World</b>	-1.45	0.70	2.60	3.02	3.71	3.94	4.28
<b>Africa</b>	-5.64	-5.02	0.00	0.69	1.88	2.39	2.70

**Table 5**  
**Changes in**  
**Levels of**  
**Democratization**  
**Since 1975 in**  
**Africa**

Source: Freedom House, www.freedomhouse.org. Adapted from Tripp, A. (2008) In Pursuit of Autonomy: Civil Society and the State in Africa, (eds) in 'Africa in world Politics: Constructing Political and Economic Order

Years	Democratic Regimes	Hybrid Regimes	Authoritarian Regimes
<b>1975</b>	8%	30%	63%
<b>1985</b>	4	28	69
<b>1995</b>	19	39	42
<b>2005</b>	23	44	33
<b>2016</b>	18	41	41

Sustained Democracies		Most Rapidly Democratizing Countries		
	2015 Score		10-Year Ave Score	Change 2006-2015
<b>Cape Verde</b>	90	<b>Cote d'Ivoire</b>	40.0	30
<b>Mauritius</b>	90	<b>Togo</b>	29.2	25
<b>Ghana</b>	83	<b>Zimbabwe</b>	18.5	17
<b>Benin</b>	82	<b>Benin</b>	80.3	12
<b>São Tomé and Príncipe</b>	81	<b>Guinea</b>	46.2	8
<b>South Africa</b>	79	<b>Comoros</b>	54.0	7
<b>Namibia</b>	77	<b>Burkina Faso</b>	52.4	6
<b>Botswana</b>	73			

**Table 6**  
**Democracies and Most Rapidly Democratizing Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, 2006–2015**

Source: Freedom House, [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org). Adapted from Tripp, A. (2008) In Pursuit of Autonomy: Civil Society and the State in Africa, (eds) in 'Africa in World Politics: Constructing Political and Economic Order

## Conclusion

Gone are the days when African 'Big Men' perpetuated themselves in cycles of continued leadership and power. The contemporary African citizenry is becoming more politically enlightened and their political orientation has shifted from the long-established political culture to more mature democratic evolution. The winds of change are raging across the region and so-called 'third termers' are fading away. Today, at least 75 percent or more of presidential administrations are fused with term limits, according to the 2015 Afrobarometer report. While term limits have been scrapped in at least nine African countries such as Niger, Chad, Rwanda, Cameroon, Togo, Uganda, Guinea, Djibouti and Gabon, some insubordinate political leaders have attempted to hold on to power through the instrumentality of constitutional manipulation or unconditional disobedience to established term limits. Some of these regimes have found it easy to do so, by channeling constitutional manipulation through parliamentarians. Once their party holds the majority in parliament, it becomes easy to achieve tenure elongation. This political logic has been witnessed in a host of African countries, including Nigeria under President Olusegun Obasanjo seeking his third term after the completion of two terms. The elongation was later blockaded by the upper legislative chamber - National Assembly. In some countries, the considerable instrumentality of civil society is also being observed. In Malawi, a coalition of civil society organizations had been mobilized against the abolition of term limits fronted by President Bakili Muzuli, while similar occurrences witnessed resistance from women organizations, opposition parties, church coalitions and NGOs against President Frederick Chiluba's third term agenda in Zambia. The overview presented in this paper marked a symbolic departure from articulating the dye-hard political leadership model to a more civilized democratic practice in Africa. This transition is owing to a myriad of factors, including the changing political orientation of the citizenry, media autonomy, effective civil society organizations

as well as popular displeasure with the constitutional reform crusaders regarding tenure elongation or what some countries refer to as 'third term' political regimes. The combination of such metamorphosis leads to advancement that slowly aides the political maturity of African states. The current indication in the continent has mixed outcomes for tenure elongation and for constitutionally abiding regimes. This development has depicted the changing political culture in the region. At the same time, it should be understood that while there has been remarkable advancement in some countries, there has also been no progress or little advancement in others. Thus, it is noteworthy to recognize the fundamentalism of constitutional adherence to term limits. The rationale for this can be viewed through dual lenses; first, the mere compliance with constitutional term limits by the incumbent regimes could facilitate a constructive tradition that can, in a practical sense, advance further change. In doing so, it becomes a conventional norm for acceptable political behavior and a substantial example for the African political community. Therefore, it is necessary to make it difficult for tenure elongation seekers to attempt constitutional reform. Second, the international community should recognize the significant contribution of civil society in creating momentum against future movement by constitutional reformists. Moreover, successes recorded and lessons learnt in other countries that have scaled through the hurdles of regime elongation could serve as reference points and sources of inspiration for others yet to adopt strict constitutional adherence. The experience of a country like Nigeria, that has scaled through the web of such political leadership, could offer other African nations encouragement to consider conventional the precept of democratic routine on tenure limit, and therefore provide a congenial environment for peaceful political transitions on the African continent.

## Notes

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14. Formisano, The Concept of Political Culture
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16. Rotberg, Social Capital and Political Culture in Africa, Asia, Australasia, and Europe
17. Ibid 14
18. See Baker and Silbey,
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22. Tripp, In Pursuit of Autonomy: Civil Society and the State in Africa
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26. Cheeseman, African Elections as Vehicles for Change
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31. Craig, Term Limits in Africa: Will President-For-Life Become a Thing of the Past
32. Ibid 24
33. See Daily Monitor
34. Hunt & McCormick, The Fall of Africa's Loneliest Despot
35. CNN November 21, 2017
36. Bratton, Civil Society and Political Transition in Africa
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38. Adler & Webster, Challenging transition theory: The labor movement, radical reform, and transition to democracy in South Africa
39. Ibid 38
40. Ibid 8
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42. Ibid 6
43. Ibid 37
44. Omotola, Elections and democratic transition in Nigeria under the Fourth Republic
45. CNN August 13, 2017
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50. Martin, Democratic Transition in Africa  
 51. See Kpundeh; Adler & Webster; Brown & Kaiser; Omotola & Carter

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