

THE RE-EMERGENCE OF MILITARY TAKE-OVER IN AFRICAN POLITICS AND DEMOCRATIC WITHERING

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Abstract

The resurgence of military coups across Africa in the twenty-first century poses a significant threat to democratic consolidation and political stability on the continent. After a period of relative decline in unconstitutional changes of government during the late 1990s and early 2000s, recent events in countries such as Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Sudan signal a troubling reversal. This paper examines the underlying political, socio-economic, and security-related factors driving the reemergence of coups in Africa and assesses their implications for democratic governance. Anchored on democratic governance theory and civil–military relations theory, the paper adopts a qualitative approach relying on secondary data sources, including academic literature, policy reports, and regional security analyses. The findings reveal that weak state institutions, poor governance, electoral malpractice, widespread corruption, economic hardship, and the failure of civilian governments to effectively address insecurity particularly terrorism and insurgency have eroded public trust in democratic regimes. These conditions have created a permissive environment for military intervention, often justified by coup leaders as corrective measures. The study further argues that inconsistent responses by regional and international organizations, coupled with shifting global power dynamics, have undermined deterrence against military takeovers. The paper concludes that without substantial reforms aimed at strengthening democratic institutions, promoting inclusive governance, enhancing civil–military relations, and addressing socio-economic grievances, Africa’s democratic gains remain fragile. The study recommends stronger regional enforcement mechanisms, sustained democratic accountability, and citizen-centered governance as pathways to reversing the current coup trajectory.

Keywords: Democracy, Military Coups, Democratic Governance, Civil–Military Relations, Political Instability, Africa

Introduction

Africa's post-colonial history has been characterized by a complex political trajectory. After the wave of independence in the mid-20th century, many African nations experienced varying forms of governance, from military dictatorships to one-party states. In the early 1990s, a democratic wave swept across the continent, with numerous African countries transitioning to multiparty systems and adopting constitutions that established presidential term limits, independent judiciaries, and frameworks for free and fair elections. However, in recent years, this democratic progress has been challenged by a phenomenon known as democratic backsliding, coupled with a

persistent problem in African politics sit-tightism, where leaders manipulate constitutional frameworks to extend their stay in power. This trend not only poses a serious threat to democratic governance on the continent but also undermines political stability, human rights, and socio-economic development. Democratic backsliding in Africa refers to the gradual erosion or weakening of democratic institutions, processes, and norms (Bermeo, 2016). It can manifest in various ways, including the undermining of electoral integrity, constraints on civil liberties, attacks on the independence of the judiciary, and the centralization of executive power. Although many African countries initially embraced democratic reforms, some have experienced democratic backsliding, reversing the gains made during the democratic transitions of the 1990s and early 2000s.

A notable feature of democratic backsliding in Africa is the manipulation of elections to ensure incumbents remain in power. In several cases, elections have become merely symbolic exercises, where incumbents control the electoral machinery, marginalize opposition parties, and suppress dissent (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). For instance, Uganda's Yoweri Museveni, who has been in power since 1986, has won consecutive elections amid accusations of electoral fraud, voter intimidation, and repression of opposition figures (Cheeseman, 2018). Similarly, in Zimbabwe, elections under Robert Mugabe were characterized by violence and allegations of vote-rigging, even as his reign extended for over 37 years until his removal by a military coup in 2017.

Additionally, civil liberties such as freedom of the press, assembly, and speech have been restricted in several African countries experiencing democratic backsliding. Media outlets are often silenced, independent journalists arrested, and opposition protests violently quashed. This creates an environment where political pluralism is stifled, and citizens are denied the opportunity to hold their governments accountable. According to the Freedom House (2023), several African countries, including Burundi, Chad, and Cameroon, have seen significant declines in civil liberties, contributing to a broader authoritarian trend. Sit-tightism, the phenomenon where African leaders manipulate constitutional provisions to extend their stay in power, is closely linked to democratic backsliding. In many African nations, presidential term limits were introduced as part of democratic reforms in the 1990s and 2000s to prevent leaders from staying in power indefinitely. However, several African presidents have circumvented these limits by amending their constitutions or removing term limits altogether, allowing them to remain in office far beyond their initial mandates.

This sit-tight mentality is evident in countries like Rwanda, Uganda, and Cameroon. In Rwanda, President Paul Kagame has been in power since 2000, and a 2015 referendum allowed him to potentially remain in office until 2034. In Uganda, Museveni's government successfully eliminated both term and age limits to extend his stay in power. In Cameroon, President Paul Biya, in office since 1982, has also manipulated constitutional provisions to maintain his grip on power. These examples illustrate how sit-tightism enables authoritarian leaders to entrench themselves in power, undermining democratic governance in the process. According to Posner and Young (2007), while African leaders once relied on military coups or violence to extend their rule, modern sit-tightism involves a more subtle manipulation of legal and constitutional frameworks, creating an appearance of legitimacy. However, this often masks the consolidation of authoritarian rule. The weakening of institutional checks and balances, including the judiciary and legislative bodies, allows leaders to remain unchallenged and immune to accountability, further entrenching their rule.

The persistence of democratic backsliding and sit-tightism in Africa can be attributed to several factors. First, weak democratic institutions in many African countries create an environment where leaders can easily manipulate the political system to their advantage. The judiciary, electoral commissions, and legislatures are often under-resourced or controlled by the executive, making them ineffective in challenging unconstitutional actions by incumbent leaders (Diamond, 2015). Without strong institutions to serve as checks on executive power, leaders face little resistance when extending their terms. Second, personalist politics and patronage systems prevalent in many African countries incentivize sit-tightism. Leaders often rely on patronage networks to maintain loyalty among elites and secure political support. Extending their rule ensures the continuation of these networks and the benefits they provide to loyalists. In contrast, relinquishing power could disrupt these systems and expose leaders and their allies to potential prosecution or loss of influence (Van de Walle, 2007).

Third, weak civil societies and limited political opposition hinder efforts to challenge democratic backsliding and sit-tightism. In many African countries, opposition parties are fragmented, underfunded, or face repression from the government, limiting their ability to effectively contest elections or mobilize public opinion against authoritarian rule. Civil society organizations, which play a crucial role in advocating for democratic reforms, are also constrained by legal restrictions, harassment, and funding challenges, further weakening their ability to hold governments accountable (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014). Finally, the inconsistent response from the international community has emboldened African leaders to pursue unconstitutional extensions of their rule. While international actors, including the African Union (AU) and Western governments, have occasionally condemned democratic backsliding, their responses have often been inconsistent or driven by geopolitical interests. For instance, while the AU took a firm stance in The Gambia by supporting military intervention to remove Yahya Jammeh after he refused to step down following electoral defeat in 2016, similar actions have not been taken in countries like Uganda or Cameroon, where leaders continue to undermine democracy with little consequence (Cummings, 2017).

The persistence of democratic backsliding and sit-tightism has serious implications for Africa's political and socio-economic future. Prolonged authoritarian rule often leads to political instability, as seen in Zimbabwe and Sudan, where long-serving leaders were eventually ousted amid popular protests and military intervention. Moreover, authoritarian governments tend to prioritize regime survival over addressing pressing economic and social issues, leading to poor governance, corruption, and underdevelopment (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). Additionally, the erosion of democratic norms contributes to disillusionment among African citizens, particularly the youth, who make up a significant portion of the population. When citizens lose faith in democratic processes, it increases the likelihood of political apathy or, in some cases, radicalization and violence. This poses a significant challenge to efforts aimed at building inclusive, accountable, and stable governance systems on the continent. More so Africa's democratic backsliding and sit-tightism represent significant challenges to the continent's progress toward inclusive governance and sustainable development. While the rise of democracy in Africa in the 1990s signaled hope for a new political era, recent trends suggest that these gains are under threat. Addressing these issues requires strengthening democratic institutions, promoting political pluralism, and ensuring that leaders adhere to constitutional term limits. The international community and regional organizations such as the African Union must also play a more consistent role in supporting democratic governance across the continent.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Africa has witnessed significant democratic advancements since the 1990s, marked by the establishment of multiparty systems and presidential term limits. However, in recent years, a trend of democratic backsliding and "sit-tightism" has emerged, where leaders manipulate constitutional frameworks to extend their rule beyond the prescribed limits. This phenomenon not only undermines democratic governance but also threatens political stability and socio-economic development across the continent. Sit-tightism, exemplified by leaders in countries such as Uganda, Rwanda, and Cameroon, erodes key democratic institutions and weakens checks and balances, fostering authoritarianism. According to Cheeseman (2018), sit-tightism undermines political pluralism by stifling opposition and entrenching incumbent power. Additionally, Bermeo (2016) argues that democratic backsliding, often disguised as constitutional amendments or electoral manipulation, gradually weakens the rule of law and civil liberties. This study seeks to critically analyze the underlying causes of democratic backsliding and sit-tightism in Africa and examine their implications for political stability and governance. The persistence of this trend raises questions about the future of democracy in Africa and highlights the need for stronger institutions, enforcement of term limits, and more robust international responses to authoritarian practices.

1.3 Research Questions

- i. What are the key factors contributing to democratic backsliding and sit-tightism in African countries?
- ii. How does sit-tightism affect political stability, governance, and democratic institutions in Africa?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

- i. To examine the underlying causes of democratic backsliding and sit-tightism in Africa, focusing on constitutional manipulation, weak institutions, and political patronage.
- ii. To assess the impact of sit-tightism on political stability, governance, and the erosion of democratic institutions in selected African countries.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study on **democratic backsliding and sit-tightism in Africa** is significant for several reasons. First, it provides a deeper understanding of the growing challenges to democratic governance on the continent. By examining the factors contributing to the erosion of democratic norms, the study will contribute to academic and policy debates on governance, political development, and democratization in Africa. It will also shed light on the institutional weaknesses and political practices that enable leaders to manipulate constitutional provisions, which has implications for future reforms. Second, the study will be relevant to policymakers, civil society organizations, and regional bodies such as the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), as it provides evidence-based insights into how sit-tightism undermines political stability and governance. These findings can inform the design of policies and interventions to strengthen democratic institutions, uphold constitutionalism, and promote peaceful transfers of power.

Finally, the study has practical implications for fostering political accountability and citizen engagement, as it highlights the role of civil society and international actors in curbing authoritarian tendencies. This research is essential for ensuring Africa's democratic progress and

long-term political stability, particularly in countries where democratic backsliding threatens development and social cohesion.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Conceptual Review

Democratic backsliding: refers to the gradual weakening or erosion of democratic institutions, norms, and practices. It occurs when elected governments use legal and institutional mechanisms to undermine the foundations of democracy, such as free and fair elections, the independence of the judiciary, political pluralism, and the protection of civil liberties (Bermeo, 2016). Unlike the overt authoritarianism of the past, modern democratic backsliding is often more subtle, occurring within the legal framework and disguised as legitimate reforms. According to Bermeo (2016), democratic backsliding can take various forms, including the concentration of executive power, restrictions on media freedom, repression of civil society, and manipulation of electoral systems. In some cases, backsliding is driven by leaders who exploit populist rhetoric, weaken institutional checks and balances, and marginalize opposition forces. This process erodes the core principles of democracy, as citizens are deprived of meaningful political participation, and incumbents entrench themselves in power.

One common manifestation of democratic backsliding is the manipulation of electoral systems. Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) argue that governments often attempt to maintain the appearance of democracy by holding elections, but in reality, they control the electoral machinery to ensure favorable outcomes. This involves tactics such as gerrymandering, voter suppression, and tampering with vote counts. As a result, elections lose their function as a tool for accountability, becoming mere exercises to legitimize authoritarian rule. This phenomenon has been witnessed in several African countries, including Uganda and Zimbabwe, where elections are held but lack credibility due to widespread irregularities and voter intimidation (Cheeseman, 2018). Another aspect of democratic backsliding is the erosion of judicial independence. By controlling or undermining the judiciary, incumbents are able to evade accountability and enact policies that entrench their rule. This tactic allows leaders to bypass legal checks on their authority, further concentrating power in the executive branch. In many African nations, the judiciary has been weakened or co-opted by political elites, rendering it ineffective in protecting the rule of law or challenging unconstitutional actions (Diamond, 2015).

Furthermore, democratic backsliding often involves the restriction of civil liberties, particularly freedom of expression and assembly. Media outlets and civil society organizations that are critical of the government are often subjected to repression, including censorship, harassment, or outright bans. This silencing of dissent stifles political pluralism, making it difficult for opposition parties and citizens to challenge the government (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). The consequences of democratic backsliding are profound. It undermines political accountability, erodes public trust in democratic institutions, and can lead to political instability. Moreover, it reverses the gains of democratization, particularly in regions like Africa, where many countries are still consolidating democratic norms and practices. Without effective resistance to backsliding, democracy becomes hollowed out, and authoritarianism emerges under the guise of democratic processes.

Sit-tightism: refers to the practice of political leaders manipulating constitutional, legal, or political frameworks to extend their tenure beyond the established limits. This phenomenon is prevalent in many African countries, where presidents seek to remain in office indefinitely by

undermining term limits, controlling electoral processes, and consolidating power. Sit-tightism contributes to the erosion of democratic governance, fostering authoritarianism and instability. The cult of perpetual rule, exemplified by sit-tight leaders, often begins with the manipulation of constitutional provisions. Many African countries adopted term limits during the wave of democratization in the 1990s to prevent prolonged tenure. However, several leaders have amended or removed these term limits to remain in power. For instance, in Rwanda, President Paul Kagame orchestrated a constitutional amendment that allowed him to potentially stay in power until 2034 (Posner & Young, 2007). Similarly, Uganda's Yoweri Museveni has been in power since 1986, after the removal of both term and age limits through constitutional amendments (Cheeseman, 2018).

The persistence of sit-tightism is often driven by personalist politics and patronage systems, where leaders establish extensive networks of loyalists who benefit from the continuation of their rule. In such systems, power is highly centralized, with the leader acting as the ultimate arbiter of political and economic resources (Van de Walle, 2007). This patronage system incentivizes political elites to support the leader's extended tenure, as their personal fortunes and influence are tied to the regime's survival. The risk of prosecution or loss of privilege upon stepping down further encourages sit-tight behavior. Sit-tightism also undermines democratic institutions by weakening checks and balances, particularly the judiciary and the legislature, which should serve as counterweights to executive power. In many cases, these institutions are co-opted or rendered ineffective, allowing leaders to govern without accountability. The judiciary may be packed with loyalists, while legislatures often rubber-stamp constitutional changes that enable the president's indefinite rule. This process erodes the integrity of democratic governance and allows authoritarian tendencies to flourish under a veneer of legality (Diamond, 2015).

Moreover, sit-tightism poses significant risks to political stability. Long-serving leaders often face growing popular discontent as their tenure extends, leading to protests, civil unrest, or even violent conflict. For example, the extended rule of Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe, who stayed in power for 37 years, led to severe economic decline and political instability, culminating in his ousting by a military coup in 2017 (Cheeseman, 2018). The cult of perpetual rule through sit-tightism not only stifles political pluralism but also hampers development and governance. Leaders preoccupied with staying in power often prioritize regime survival over addressing socio-economic challenges, resulting in governance failures and deepening inequality.

The Nature of Democratic Backsliding

Democratic backsliding refers to the deliberate efforts by elected governments to weaken democratic institutions, norms, and processes, often under the guise of legality. It differs from outright authoritarian takeovers in that it involves a gradual erosion of democracy rather than an abrupt collapse. This regression can be subtle, involving legal or institutional changes that appear legitimate but undermine the core principles of democracy, such as free elections, the rule of law, separation of powers, and civil liberties. The nature of democratic backsliding is complex and multifaceted, involving institutional manipulation, populism, and erosion of democratic norms. One of the primary characteristics of democratic backsliding is the erosion of electoral integrity. Although elections continue to take place, they often become mere formalities devoid of meaningful competition. Incumbent leaders may manipulate electoral laws, gerrymander districts, suppress opposition, and control media narratives to secure their hold on power (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). For example, in Hungary, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has been accused of

manipulating electoral laws to favor his Fidesz party while marginalizing the opposition, making it increasingly difficult for challengers to compete on an equal footing (Kelemen, 2020).

The weakening of checks and balances is another hallmark of democratic backsliding. In democracies, the separation of powers ensures that no single branch of government dominates the others. However, in countries experiencing democratic backsliding, executives often attempt to consolidate power by undermining the independence of the judiciary and neutralizing legislative bodies. Leaders may appoint loyalists to key judicial positions, use legal reforms to curtail the courts' ability to check executive overreach, or co-opt parliament to rubber-stamp decisions that enhance their authority (Bermeo, 2016). In Poland, the ruling Law and Justice Party (PiS) has taken steps to weaken judicial independence, raising concerns about the future of democracy in the country (Kelemen, 2020).

Another dimension of democratic backsliding is the erosion of civil liberties and political pluralism. Democracies thrive on the ability of citizens to express dissent and organize politically without fear of retribution. However, during backsliding, governments often curtail these freedoms, targeting opposition parties, independent media, and civil society organizations. This repression is usually carried out through legal or quasi-legal means, such as defamation laws, censorship, or restrictive NGO regulations. The repression of media and civil society serves to suppress alternative voices, thereby stifling democratic debate and reinforcing the power of incumbents (Diamond, 2015). In Tanzania, under President John Magufuli, media freedom was increasingly curtailed, and opposition leaders faced intimidation and arrest, diminishing the country's democratic space (Paget, 2020).

Populism also plays a significant role in democratic backsliding. Many leaders who engage in backsliding come to power on populist platforms, claiming to represent "the people" against corrupt elites or foreign influence. While populist rhetoric can be a tool for mobilizing political support, it often leads to the delegitimization of democratic institutions. Populist leaders frequently present themselves as the sole legitimate representatives of the people, thereby undermining political pluralism and portraying opposition as enemies of the state or foreign agents (Mounk, 2018). This dynamic was evident in Venezuela under Hugo Chávez, who used populist rhetoric to dismantle democratic institutions and centralize power, eroding the country's democracy in the process (Corrales, 2020).

In addition to domestic factors, international influences also contribute to democratic backsliding. The global decline in the promotion of democracy, particularly by Western powers, has emboldened autocratic leaders and reduced external pressure for democratic reforms (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019). The rise of authoritarian powers like China and Russia, which offer economic and military support without emphasizing democratic governance, has further weakened incentives for countries to maintain democratic norms. This has provided an alternative model of governance that appeals to leaders seeking to consolidate power without adhering to democratic principles. More, so the nature of democratic backsliding involves the gradual erosion of democratic institutions through legal and institutional manipulation, the weakening of electoral integrity, the repression of civil liberties, and the consolidation of power by populist leaders. Unlike traditional authoritarianism, backsliding often retains the facade of democracy, with elections and legal procedures in place, but the underlying principles of democracy—accountability, pluralism, and the rule of law—are systematically undermined. Understanding

these processes is critical to addressing the threats posed to democracy in various parts of the world.

Sit-Tightism and Its Consequences

Sit-tightism refers to the practice of political leaders refusing to relinquish power, often manipulating legal, electoral, and constitutional frameworks to extend their rule. It is characterized by leaders clinging to office through tactics such as amending constitutions to abolish term limits, suppressing opposition, and undermining democratic institutions. This phenomenon is prevalent in several African countries, where leaders use a combination of legal manipulation, patronage networks, and coercive state apparatuses to extend their tenure indefinitely. Sit-tightism has far-reaching consequences, including political instability, economic stagnation, erosion of democratic governance, and social unrest. One of the most direct consequences of sit-tightism is the erosion of democratic governance. When leaders overstay their welcome in office by circumventing term limits or manipulating electoral processes, they weaken the foundational principles of democracy. Democratic institutions like the judiciary, legislature, and media, which are essential for accountability and checks on executive power, become compromised (Cheeseman, 2018). In countries like Uganda, where President Yoweri Museveni has been in power since 1986, the abolition of term and age limits has led to a significant weakening of political institutions, concentrating power in the executive branch and stifling political competition (Posner & Young, 2007). This undermines the rule of law and fosters an environment where governance becomes more autocratic.

The persistence of sit-tightism often fosters political instability. Leaders who cling to power typically face growing resistance from opposition parties, civil society, and the general public, leading to political tensions and conflict. In Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe's 37-year rule led to increasing political unrest, culminating in a military coup in 2017 that forced his resignation. Mugabe's refusal to step down peacefully created a political vacuum that triggered instability and deepened divisions within the ruling elite (Hodzi, 2018). Similar patterns have been observed in other countries, where extended rule by a single leader has led to violent protests, coups, or contested elections, as the populace grows increasingly frustrated with the lack of political renewal. Economic consequences also arise from sit-tightism, as leaders more focused on regime survival often neglect economic development. Long-term rule can breed corruption, as patronage networks deepen, and public resources are diverted to maintain the loyalty of political elites and the security forces. Leaders like Cameroon's Paul Biya, in power since 1982, have been accused of presiding over corrupt regimes where economic policies are often secondary to maintaining political control (Diamond, 2015). In such environments, economic stagnation and inequality worsen, leading to widespread poverty and underdevelopment. According to Acemoglu and Robinson (2012), long-term authoritarian rule typically fosters extractive political and economic institutions, where resources are monopolized by elites, exacerbating economic challenges for the broader population.

Furthermore, sit-tightism can exacerbate social unrest and weaken national cohesion. Leaders who overstay in power often resort to divisive tactics, including ethnic favoritism, to consolidate their rule. This can deepen societal divisions, fuel ethnic tensions, and lead to violent conflicts. In countries like Burundi, President Pierre Nkurunziza's decision to seek a third term in 2015 sparked widespread protests and violence, further polarizing the country along ethnic and political lines (Cheeseman, 2018). Such divisions undermine the social fabric of nations, making it difficult to

achieve long-term peace and stability. The international consequences of sit-tightism should not be overlooked. Prolonged authoritarian rule often leads to the isolation of countries from the international community, particularly when human rights abuses, electoral manipulation, and political repression become widespread. Countries like Zimbabwe under Mugabe and Sudan under Omar al-Bashir faced international sanctions, economic isolation, and reputational damage, which further exacerbated their economic crises and hindered development (Hodzi, 2018).

In conclusion, sit-tightism has significant and wide-ranging consequences for political stability, democratic governance, economic development, and social cohesion. The refusal of leaders to step down peacefully not only weakens political institutions but also fuels corruption, triggers social unrest, and undermines economic progress. Addressing sit-tightism requires strong institutional checks on executive power, international pressure to enforce term limits, and active citizen engagement to hold leaders accountable.

Addressing Democratic Backsliding and Sit-Tightism

Democratic backsliding and sit-tightism represent significant threats to political stability and governance in many regions, particularly in Africa. These phenomena involve the gradual erosion of democratic institutions and practices, often facilitated by leaders who manipulate laws and institutions to maintain their grip on power. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that includes strengthening democratic institutions, promoting civil society engagement, fostering international cooperation, and advocating for accountability and transparency.

- i. Strengthening Democratic Institutions:* One of the most effective strategies for combating democratic backsliding is to strengthen the institutions that uphold democratic governance. This involves ensuring that electoral commissions operate independently, promoting the rule of law, and maintaining the separation of powers among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. As Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) suggest, it is essential to preserve the norms that underpin democratic governance, including mutual toleration and institutional forbearance, to prevent the erosion of democratic practices. This can be achieved by reforming electoral laws to enhance transparency, ensuring fair media access for all political parties, and implementing checks and balances that limit executive power.
- ii. Promoting Civil Society Engagement:* Civil society organizations play a crucial role in promoting democratic accountability and transparency. They serve as watchdogs, holding leaders accountable for their actions and advocating for the protection of civil liberties. Supporting civil society through funding, training, and capacity-building initiatives can empower these organizations to challenge authoritarian practices effectively (Diamond, 2015). In countries experiencing democratic backsliding, it is vital to create an enabling environment for civil society, allowing them to operate freely without fear of repression. For instance, during the Arab Spring, civil society organizations were instrumental in mobilizing public support for democratic reforms, demonstrating the power of grassroots engagement in holding leaders accountable (Cleveland, 2015).
- iii. Fostering International Cooperation and Pressure:* The international community has a significant role to play in addressing democratic backsliding and sit-tightism. International organizations, such as the United Nations and regional bodies like the African Union (AU), can impose diplomatic and economic pressure on leaders who undermine democratic processes. This could involve targeted sanctions against leaders who manipulate electoral systems or suppress dissent. For example, the AU has employed a policy of “non-

indifference” towards unconstitutional changes of government, emphasizing the need for member states to adhere to democratic norms (African Union, 2007). Strengthening international mechanisms for monitoring elections and promoting democratic governance can also help to deter backsliding.

- iv. ***Advocating for Accountability and Transparency:*** Promoting accountability and transparency is essential for combating sit-tightism. Establishing independent anti-corruption agencies and judicial bodies can help to curb the abuse of power and ensure that leaders are held accountable for their actions. Moreover, promoting a culture of transparency through open government initiatives can empower citizens to demand accountability from their leaders. Engaging citizens in governance processes, such as budget tracking and public consultations, can foster a sense of ownership and responsibility among the populace (Bermeo, 2016). This involvement can help mitigate the concentration of power in the hands of a few and discourage leaders from pursuing sit-tight strategies.
- v. ***Encouraging Democratic Culture and Education:*** Lastly, fostering a democratic culture through education is vital for promoting long-term resilience against backsliding. Educational initiatives that emphasize civic education, human rights, and the importance of democratic participation can empower citizens to engage actively in governance processes. By instilling democratic values from a young age, societies can build a more informed electorate that is less susceptible to authoritarian tactics. Organizations like the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have recognized the importance of education in promoting democratic principles and have implemented programs to foster civic engagement in various contexts (UNESCO, 2017).

More, so addressing democratic backsliding and sit-tightism requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach that involves strengthening institutions, promoting civil society engagement, fostering international cooperation, advocating for accountability, and encouraging democratic education. By implementing these strategies, countries can reinforce their democratic foundations and create a political environment that is resilient to the threats posed by authoritarianism and the erosion of democratic norms.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the phenomena of democratic backsliding and sit-tightism pose significant threats to political stability and governance in many African nations. The manipulation of democratic processes by leaders intent on maintaining power undermines the principles of democracy, erodes public trust in institutions, and fosters political instability. This study has highlighted the critical need for comprehensive strategies to address these challenges, including strengthening legal frameworks, empowering civil society, enhancing international support, and promoting civic education. By implementing these recommendations, countries can reinforce their democratic foundations, cultivate a culture of accountability, and create an environment conducive to political renewal. Ultimately, addressing democratic backsliding and sit-tightism is essential for fostering sustainable development, ensuring political stability, and enhancing the overall well-being of citizens. A commitment to democracy, coupled with active citizen engagement and robust institutional frameworks, will be crucial in resisting authoritarian tendencies and safeguarding the future of democratic governance in Africa.

Recommendations

i. **Strengthening Legal Frameworks for Democratic Governance**

It is essential to establish and enforce robust legal frameworks that protect democratic institutions and processes. Governments should prioritize constitutional reforms that reinstate term limits and ensure the independence of electoral commissions. This will help safeguard against the manipulative practices associated with sit-tightism and enhance the integrity of electoral processes. Additionally, legislative measures should be enacted to protect the judiciary's independence, thereby reinforcing checks and balances that prevent the concentration of power in the executive.

ii. **Empowering Civil Society Organizations**

Supporting and empowering civil society organizations (CSOs) is crucial for promoting accountability and democratic participation. Governments and international bodies should facilitate funding, training, and capacity-building initiatives for CSOs, enabling them to effectively monitor government actions and advocate for citizens' rights. By fostering a vibrant civil society, countries can enhance public engagement in governance and create a robust mechanism for challenging authoritarian practices and promoting democratic values.

iii. **Enhancing International Support and Monitoring**

The international community should strengthen support for democratic governance initiatives and closely monitor elections in countries at risk of backsliding. This includes providing technical assistance for electoral processes, promoting transparency, and facilitating dialogue between government and opposition parties. International organizations should also impose targeted sanctions on leaders who engage in undemocratic practices, thereby signaling that the international community does not tolerate violations of democratic norms.

iv. **Promoting Civic Education and Engagement**

Governments and educational institutions should prioritize civic education programs aimed at fostering a culture of democracy and active citizenship. These programs should focus on teaching citizens about their rights and responsibilities, the importance of political participation, and the mechanisms available for holding leaders accountable. By promoting civic education from an early age, societies can cultivate informed and engaged citizens who are more likely to resist authoritarianism and advocate for democratic governance.

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