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Presidential Longevity and Development in Africa: A Comparative Analysis of Cameroon, Uganda, Equatorial Guinea, Botswana, and Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Using Cameroon, Uganda, Equatorial Guinea, Botswana, and Ghana as case studies, this article examines the impact of presidential longevity on governance and development in Africa. It investigates whether long-term presidential leadership promotes development and good governance in Africa. The Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance, World Bank GDP per capita data, and the UNDP Human Development Index were among the secondary data sources used in the study. This study was carried out using a comparative desk review methodology. The findings demonstrate that long presidential terms do not always result in effective governance and positive development outcomes. The results demonstrate that while resource-rich states with long-term presidents frequently have high GDP per capita, they fall short in terms of governance and human development. However, nations like Ghana and Botswana that experience frequent changes in leadership typically perform better in terms of development and governance. In order to promote sustainable development and sound governance, the study emphasizes the state of democratic accountability and sound leadership transitions.

INTRODUCTION

Since independence, a significant aspect of African politics has been the longevity of presidents, or the prolonged tenure of heads of state. This phenomenon occurs when leaders use strategies like constitutional amendments, electoral manipulation, or using state power to stifle opposition in order to stay in power for extended periods of time—often longer than their constitutional terms (Gyimah-Boadi, 2019). Many nations still struggle with entrenched incumbency, authoritarian resilience, and personalized politics, despite the fact that some have made the transition to democracy and implemented term limits. There are significant concerns regarding the impact of long-serving presidents on institutional development, governance, and socioeconomic progress throughout the continent.

Long-serving presidents continue to hold office in a number of African regimes despite numerous democratic and political reforms. Leaders like Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, Paul Biya of Cameroon, and Teodoro Obiang Nguema of Equatorial Guinea have held onto power for more than thirty years, frequently by manipulating elections and amending the constitution (Nugent, 2022). Concerns concerning this trend's effects on development and governance are raised. Long-term leadership does not always ensure sustainable progress, as evidenced by the fact that while some nations with long-term leaders experience economic growth, many others face stagnation, inequality, and institutional weakening (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019). There is little empirical consensus on how and why presidential longevity affects development outcomes differently in African countries,

despite growing scholarly attention.

This emphasizes the need for methodical investigation into the causal relationship between extended leadership and African developmental pathways. Acquiring this knowledge is essential for directing reforms in governance, strengthening institutional checks, and cultivating responsible leadership in the area.

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between African development and presidential tenure, with a focus on the effects of longer terms on institutional strength, economic performance, and political stability. Evaluating the chances of democratic governance and sustainable development throughout the continent requires an understanding of this relationship.

LITERATURE REVIEW

African Presidential Longevity Conceptualization

Presidential longevity, also referred to as extended incumbency or long-term rule, describes circumstances in which presidents hold office for prolonged periods, often due to coercive measures, electoral irregularities, or constitutional manipulation (Gyimah-Boadi, 2019). Since independence, leaders in Africa have continued to blur the lines between personal rule and political leadership (Cheeseman, 2018). According to Nugent (2022), presidential longevity in Africa is shaped by weak institutions, networks of patronage, and a lack of accountability, making it both a political problem and a structural aspect of governance.

This tendency has its origins in post-independence political systems that consolidated power in the presidency. Prolonged leadership was supported by

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early leaders like Jomo Kenyatta in Kenya and Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, who claimed it was necessary for stability and unity (Adebanwi, 2021). However, Chabal and Daloz (1999) argue that this kind of personalization encourages neo-patrimonial states, in which the ruler is the focus of loyalty and resource distribution rather than official institutions. As a result, long presidential terms have frequently weakened democratic governance and impeded institutional growth throughout Africa.

Governance and Presidential Longevity

In African politics, the effects of lengthy presidential terms on governance have been extensively researched. By seizing institutions, swaying electoral bodies, and stifling opposition, extended presidencies frequently erode democratic checks (Lynch & Crawford, 2019). These governments may eventually develop into competitive authoritarian systems with elections but little actual competition (Levitsky & Way, 2010). According to Gyimah-Boadi (2019), many African presidents undermine democratic progress by manipulating laws and security agencies in order to maintain their positions of authority. According to Diamond (2019), longer tenures also undermine accountability because allegiance to leaders may trump institutional integrity, fostering the growth of corruption networks.

By concentrating power in the executive branch, nations like Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea have been able to maintain control for decades. This discourages bureaucratic independence, undermines civil society, and encourages political dependency (Nugent, 2022). Nonetheless, some academics contend that long tenure can promote long-term development by bringing stability to policy under specific circumstances. Many people point to Kagame's leadership in Rwanda, where prolonged rule supported consistent economic growth and assisted in the reconstruction of a post-conflict society (Ansoms & Rostagno, 2020). However, detractors caution that such "benevolent authoritarianism" is typically unsustainable and frequently conceals more serious repression and weak institutions (Branch & Mampilly, 2015).

Economic Development and Presidential Longevity

Presidential tenure has a variety of effects on the economy. According to some research, long-term presidents initially promote growth and stability through stable policies and centralized decision-making (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019). But as regimes grow more corrupt and resistant to change, these advantages frequently diminish over time. This is consistent with the political decay hypothesis (North, Wallis, & Weingast, 2009), which contends that extended incumbency causes rent-seeking and economic stagnation. Long presidential terms are often associated with inadequate economic diversification and resource misallocation in resource-rich countries.

As long-term rulers use resource revenues to uphold patronage and stifle opposition, the "resource curse" gets worse (Ross, 2015). For example, rather than promoting

widespread development, oil wealth has supported authoritarian regimes in Equatorial Guinea and Angola (Cheeseman, 2018). On the other hand, institutions tend to be stronger and produce more equitable development outcomes in resource-poor nations like Botswana, where leadership changes occur more frequently (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019). Reduced foreign investment and poorer governance are further consequences of prolonged incumbency, as investors view long-term leaders as threats to stability because of potential succession crises (Gyimah-Boadi, 2019). As a result, nations with entrenched presidents frequently face limited institutional reform, decreased innovation, and capital flight. Excessive tenure can eventually weaken economic resilience and compromise accountability, even though some continuity can help development in the short term.

Democratic Consolidation and Political Stability

There is a complicated relationship between political stability and presidential longevity. Long-term leadership frequently impedes democratic development over time, even though it can guarantee immediate peace by stifling opposition and handling factional conflicts. According to Gyimah-Boadi (2019), leaders who hold onto power for an extended period of time undermine public confidence in democratic institutions and elections. As demonstrated in Chad and Togo, amending constitutions to remove term limits weakens state legitimacy and increases the likelihood of instability (Adebanwi, 2021). Removing term limits is one of the main threats to democracy in Africa, according to Cheeseman and Fisher (2019). As demonstrated in Zimbabwe under Mugabe and Sudan under Bashir, leaders who hold onto power frequently undermine the institutions that facilitate peaceful leadership changes, resulting in frequently violent or contentious transitions. Additionally, this impedes citizen participation in governance, innovation, and generational renewal.

The Nexus of Presidential Longevity, Democracy, and Development

Presidential longevity, democracy, and development have a complicated relationship. According to Bratton and van de Walle (1997), presidential longevity both causes and contributes to Africa's democratic problems. The concentration of power personalizes authority, which lowers voter turnout, erodes the validity of elections, and encourages authoritarian policies masquerading as democracy. Because policies frequently prioritize regime survival over the welfare of the country, this undermines democracy and impedes development (Adebanwi, 2021). According to studies by Gyimah-Boadi (2019) and Bates (2010), democracies with frequent leadership changes typically experience faster economic growth than those with long-standing leaders. Better development outcomes result from leadership renewal's promotion of creativity, accountability, and competition. On the other hand, extended presidential terms may result in institutional

deterioration and policy stagnation, which would ultimately impede progress.

Theory of Neo-Patrimonialism

The most widely used framework in African political studies to explain the persistence of personal rule and its effects on development is neo-patrimonialism theory (Bratton & van de Walle, 1997). It suggests that informal networks of patronage and personal allegiances frequently rule political life, even in the face of formal bureaucratic and democratic frameworks. These systems blur the lines between private interests and public obligations because authority is based on personal loyalty rather than rational-legal principles (Erdmann & Engel, 2007). By allocating resources to devoted supporters, controlling institutions, and centralizing decision-making, presidents maintain their authority (Van de Walle, 2007). By controlling economic opportunities, managing patronage networks, and co-opting rivals, this concentration enables leaders to extend their rule.

According to Jackson and Rosberg (1982), personal rule prioritizes loyalty over following rules or regulations, turning the state into an extension of the leader. Because it illustrates the interplay between personal rule, weak institutions, and governance dynamics, neo-patrimonialism is thought to be the most useful lens for examining presidential stability and development. It explains why many African nations continue to experience underdevelopment and protracted presidential terms in spite of independence and reforms. According to the theory, the political culture that prioritizes loyalty over institutional accountability is just as much of a problem as the length of leadership. Neo-patrimonialism also explains

why African politics are cyclical, with similar personal rule patterns frequently resurfacing after regime changes. Erdmann and Engel (2007) emphasize that leadership changes by themselves cannot guarantee advancement in the absence of institutional reform. Developing strategies to bolster democracy and accomplish sustainable development requires an understanding of how neo-patrimonial systems maintain power.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study investigates the relationship between presidential tenure and development in Africa using secondary data and a desk review methodology. Reputable sources of information include the World Bank, the UNDP's Human Development Reports, and the Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG). From 2019 to 2023, the desk review methodically gathers, examines, and synthesizes existing literature, policy documents, and datasets pertaining to governance, leadership tenure, and socioeconomic indicators. To find trends and connections between office duration and governance outcomes, the analysis makes use of both descriptive and comparative methods. Accuracy and consistency across sources are guaranteed by data validation. Since the study uses secondary data, no primary data are collected, and ethical standards are respected by properly citing and acknowledging sources. This approach provides a thorough, empirically supported understanding of how leadership length affects African governance and development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) 2019-2023

Country	HDI 2019	HDI 2020	HDI 2021	HDI 2022	HDI 2023
Cameroon	0.563	0.565	0.57	0.575	0.581
Uganda	0.544	0.545	0.543	0.544	0.544
Equatorial Guinea	0.588	0.589	0.593	0.594	0.596
Botswana	0.735	0.736	0.734	0.735	0.735
Ghana	0.611	0.613	0.62	0.626	0.632

Source UNDP, *Human Development Index 2023*

With an HDI of 0.735, Botswana leads the five countries in terms of human development, according to the data values. This indicates that the nation has made significant strides in living standards, education, and health. Ghana showed good governance with a score of 0.632. Equatorial Guinea, on the other hand, is slightly ahead of Cameroon and Uganda at 0.596 despite substantial oil earnings. At 0.544, Uganda has the lowest HDI. These differences suggest that long-term presidential terms, like those in Cameroon, Uganda, and Equatorial Guinea, do not ensure improvements in human development.

According to the data, Botswana and Equatorial Guinea both have high GDP per capita figures of \$7,737 and

\$8,462, respectively. However, Equatorial Guinea's substantial GDP does not match its HDI, indicating disparities in the distribution of wealth and insufficient funding for social services. Both Cameroon and Uganda have long-serving presidents, but their low per capita economic outputs indicate that long-term leadership does not necessarily translate into economic growth. Ghana's economic performance is reasonable and stable despite its middle-of-the-road position.

According to the data, Ghana and Botswana, ranked first and seventh, respectively, seem to be leaders in governance. This implies that there are current presidential rotations in both nations. According to the data, both countries'

Table 2: World Bank GDP per Capita (USD) 2019-2023

Country	GDP 2019	GDP 2020	GDP 2021	GDP 2022	GDP 2023
Cameroon	1550	1580	1600	1650	1665
Uganda	880	890	900	950	964
Equatorial Guinea	7300	7400	8200	8300	8462
Botswana	7600	7620	7650	7700	7737
Ghana	2200	2225	2240	2250	2271

Source: World Bank 2023

Table 3: Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) 2019-2023

Country	IIAG 2019	IIAG 2020	IIAG 2021	IIAG 2022	IIAG 2023
Cameroon	45.0	45.2	45.3	45.4	45.5
Uganda	46.5	46.8	47.0	47.1	47.1
Equatorial Guinea	33.0	33.5	33.8	34.0	34.2
Botswana	73.0	73.2	73.4	73.5	73.6
Ghana	65.0	65.5	65.7	65.9	66.0

Source: Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2023

development and good governance are positively correlated with these rotations. In contrast, despite having a high GDP, Equatorial Guinea is ranked 50th, the lowest in the group. Despite having long presidential terms, Cameroon and Uganda also have average rankings, indicating poor governance. This reaffirmed the continent's mounting worries that an extended presidential term could compromise institutional quality and not result in high-quality governance and service delivery.

Overall Trend

Ghana and Botswana demonstrated notable governance, human development, and economic performance between 2019 and 2023. Despite having a large GDP, Equatorial Guinea consistently has low governance and HDI scores. Additionally, Cameroon and Uganda demonstrated stagnant progress on all metrics, indicating that long-term leadership without institutional accountability does not guarantee good governance and development results. Because presidential longevity frequently lacks checks and balances and democratic accountability mechanisms, the data suggests that it frequently undermines governance quality and development outcomes. Evidence suggests that nations with frequent leadership changes are better positioned to guarantee responsive governance and inclusive development.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that long presidential tenure in Africa does not ensure governance and development results. According to the data, nations with presidents in office for almost three decades, like Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, and Uganda, are lagging behind in terms of development and governance. In contrast, Ghana and Botswana, which have frequented presidential changes, appear to be doing

better in terms of both. This implies that presidential term limits and leadership changes should be promoted as the best course of action for development outcomes and governance in Africa.

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